

Reading Room Project Update

The Reading Room Refurbishment is moving ahead. In recent months there have been a number of important developments which we need to share with the village because they could significantly change the structure of the project.

In October 2017 the Village gave overwhelming support to the RR Trustees' proposal to build an extension to the Reading Room housing a reception foyer and modern toilets. The old building also required substantial renovation. The roof must be repaired, new electrics are needed throughout, damp issues must be addressed, insulation is required and the internal layout must be reorganised. At that time the Village gave its overwhelming support to the prospect of a £75k Public Works Loan to help fund the project. The Parish Council would apply for the loan which would be repaid through the Parish precept.

Planning Permission was successfully obtained in March this year. The Trustees then approached 3 building companies for quotations.

We received the last quote at the beginning of October. They ranged from £250K to £300K including VAT. Unfortunately, all three builders could not guarantee their prices where the renovation work was concerned. All said the full extent of any problem, particularly with regard to the roof and damp issues, could only be quantified precisely once the work had started. This would leave the Reading Room exposed to a potentially substantial risk of financing a cost over-run.

It should be noted that the construction advice we had been originally given suggested a total project cost of around £150k.

This had been given very much as an initial estimate, without detailed specification, and since that time we are advised that building costs have risen sharply.

The Trustees believe that the current cost to deliver the project, as originally envisaged, does not represent value for money for the village. At £300k the cost of the project has already doubled and that is before any cost over-runs.

When the project cost was estimated at £150k the option to demolish and rebuild the Reading Room was not financially viable. In the light of the revised and substantially increased estimates we are now investigating the option of a new-build which could be a less expensive option. Ultimately, this would deliver a better building, properly fit for purpose, which would serve the current and future needs of the Village. Additionally, it will be easier to cost and arrive at definitive prices as well as having the major advantage of being free of VAT because it is a new-build project. A new building will offer greater design flexibility, will be more economic to operate and will be underpinned by a strong ecological imperative.

A new building will require planning permission which will be sought. There is no guarantee, of course, that this will be granted.

In parallel with the extensive work to facilitate the design and build stage of the project the Trustees have devoted considerable resource to accessing external grant funding. We put a huge amount of effort and time into an application submitted to the Garfield Weston 60th

Anniversary fund – a one off fund for capital projects which had the potential to provide up to £150k. Unfortunately it was oversubscribed 200 times and we found out in early October that our application had been unsuccessful. While we hope to be successful in a number of other grant applications that we are making, it would not be possible to raise anything close to the £300k this project may require.

A strategy is also already in place for local fundraising. A number of initiatives have already taken place and more are planned. These events provide valuable support but will clearly only scratch the surface of this sort of target.

We welcome the support expressed by the village and the whole hearted support of the Parish Council. Latterly we have held joint consultations with the Parish Council aimed at agreeing a sustainable financial solution. The Parish Council has agreed that, provided village consultation can indicate demonstrable support, it will apply for an increased Public Works Loan of up to £250k, in order to ensure the project goes ahead.

As we get closer to identifying the optimal way forward the Trustees will launch a formal consultation where all the alternative options for action are made clear.

Village support is crucial to this project's success.

Thus supported, it is hoped that by late summer the trustees will have a revised plan with all necessary planning consents in place. (We are obviously reliant upon third parties to achieve this). The projected cost will be based on three quotations from reputable builders, based on a full and comprehensive specification. All sources of funding will be clearly identified.

This would then put us in a position to move quickly to sign contracts and access the funding needed to complete the project.

We will keep the village updated from time to time with progress of our work and of significant steps affecting the Reading Room project.

Reading Room Trustees

November 2018