

READING ROOM RENOVATION PROJECT BACKGROUND

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.

At that time the Village also gave their 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 2018. Detailed specification and plans were drawn up and 3 building companies were approached for quotations.

By October 2018 we had received builder's quotes in the region of £250,000 – £300,000 compared with an original estimate of £150,000 which had been given when we only had layout plans for the project. The quotes were produced against detailed requirements which included some changes to the original plan, also a number of the elements were to a high specification. All of that, together with a substantial increase in material and labour costs, resulted in this unexpected large increase in cost.

A one-off grant from Garfield Weston's 60th Anniversary Fund had the potential to overcome the cost difference, but despite a huge effort from the Trustees in preparing the submission, the grant was oversubscribed 200 times and our application was unsuccessful.

We were then advised by one of the builders that we would be wise to consider knocking down the existing hall and do a completely new build. It would be a simpler, more definable and less risky option and allow us to have a modern fit for purpose building AND no VAT would be payable.

At around the same time the Parish Council offered to support the project with a much increased Public Works Loan (PWL) of up to £250,000 if we could demonstrate that the village supported this method of funding. This will be done through a further village consultation.

We investigated the rebuild option and applied for pre-application advice from Cotswold District Council in January this year. In April we were informed that the Conservation Officer was very much against the rebuild option because of the historic significance of the current building for Shipton.

We have further investigated the cost and likelihood of success in challenging the Conservation Officer's lack of support. To do this we would have to have an architect draw up plans for a new building and submit these as a planning application with the assistance of conservation planning consultants. This is likely to cost around £10,000 and will take several months to pursue. It would be essential that we can demonstrate the wholehearted support of the village. There is, of course, still no guarantee that we would be successful.

We are currently meeting with the builders who provided the quotes for the scheme for which we do have planning permission – i.e. the renovation and extension. We are looking at scaling back some of the highly specified elements of the build and also attempting to eliminate any risk associated with the renovation elements of an old building such as ours. We need to reach a position where the builders will be able to give us a fixed price quotation, within a budget that we will be able to afford.

We are looking to remove all provisional sums from the quotations. We will appoint a structural engineer to evaluate the plans and specify what needs to be done in terms of foundation work etc.

We are also reviewing the drains scheme and speaking with heating specialists to achieve the greenest and most cost effective way of heating and lighting the building.

Coincidentally, a new Village Hall Improvement Grant fund, announced by the government in the November budget, opened in April. This scheme, managed by ACRE (Action with Communities in Rural England), will fund up to 20% of costs which would attract VAT for capital projects costing between £50,000 and £375,000.

So, if successful, we could secure the VAT portion of the Refurbishment project. This would remove the VAT free benefit of the knockdown and rebuild option. We have submitted our stage 1 application for this grant with assistance from GRCC (Gloucestershire Rural Community Council). We believe we are in a much stronger position to be successful as this grant is specifically targeted at community buildings run by trustees (v Parish Councils) and who are in a position to start the project within the next 12 months.