

# **Castle Community Rooms Business Case**

***To replace the current St Michael's Rooms with a modern building to meet the needs of the Framlingham Community in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century***



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# **New Castle Community Rooms for Framlingham - St Michael's Rooms Redevelopment**

## **1 Purpose of this Business Case**

This document sets out the case for the investment of an estimated £1.2m to demolish St Michael's Rooms and to build a new purpose designed Castle Community Rooms (CCR) for Framlingham on the same site together with the laying out of associated land for access, car parking and landscaping the area immediately surrounding the Rooms. It also sets out how the re-development of St Michael's Rooms (SMR) into Castle Community Rooms would be accomplished and managed together with anticipated project timescales.

## **2 Overview and Background**

St Michael's Rooms was constructed nearly 130 years ago and for most of those years it served primarily as a community centre in the heart of Framlingham. It was used almost exclusively by the Framlingham local community for a wide range of activities from mother and toddler groups, dancing classes and many other local activity groups, blood donor sessions and as a polling station. It played a pivotal role in the community life of Framlingham and a large proportion of the people who have lived in and around the town for a number of years will have directly benefitted from the facilities offered by the hall. A key attraction is that it was the only building that offered a relatively large main hall in the town centre that could be hired during the day by local people and organisations.

Until the adverse effect of the COVID pandemic on social activities, St Michael's Rooms was hired on a regular basis on weekdays by 11 local groups and organisations, 4 of which hired it twice or more times per week, in all totalling 30 hours per week. This equates to 50% usage of 12 hours per day available time on weekdays. In addition, there were frequent week-end bookings for family parties, craft and other sales. However, as the area of St Michael's Rooms that could be hired was limited to the whole main hall and, where needed, the kitchen, all the hirers were those that needed the space of the main hall.

The new Castle Community Rooms will provide facilities not only for the range of social services and community uses that St Michael's Rooms offered but it will respond to the needs of smaller groups by offering a meeting room with IT facilities. This will be a valuable resource for smaller groups, counselling or committee meetings of other organisations. It is vital that the facilities offered by St Michael's Rooms is not lost as, not only have many hireable venues closed in Framlingham, but the local population has grown considerably in the last 2-3 years as a result of several large housing developments in the town. Further developments are expected to take place in the next few years.

St Michael's Rooms was a 130-year-old building and, despite having had the benefit of a significant investment on improvements over the years, it was built to 130 year old standards. To secure the continued viability of this facility into the foreseeable future the only real option considered was for it to be replaced with a purpose designed community centre, built to meet the current needs of the local community and designed to modern standards. Representatives of Framlingham Town Council (FTC) and St Michael's PCC (PCC) have been in discussion since March 2018 to realise this as a project. Framlingham Town Council approached East Suffolk Council which agreed to provide £700,000 from the District Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) fund. In addition, Framlingham Town Council agreed to contribute £126,000, with the Framlingham PCC match funding the £126,000 FTC contribution, raising the balance from their members and from fund-raising activities, including by making applications to third party grant making bodies.

### **3 Project aims**

The aim of this project is to greatly improve the facilities offered to the Framlingham local community by re-developing the site on which the present St Michael's Rooms stands, together with its associated land, to provide a new building with facilities that are better suited for modern-day use by the community. The new Castle Community Rooms (the Rooms) will offer:

- A main hall of similar size to the existing St Michael's Rooms (SMR) for active classes or for other events when up to 120 people can be seated theatre style or 90 to 100 people seated at tables;
- A kitchen of sufficient size to enable catering for this number of people (with on or off-site food preparation as appropriate);
- A meeting room accommodating up to 16 people seated either for meetings or presentations;
- Modern wheelchair accessible toilets, baby changing facilities;
- Appropriate provision of audio-visual and Information Technology capability;
- Sufficient storage to support the various uses of the new Rooms;
- A small administration office for the administrator for Rooms booking and records and also some general PCC business;
- A minimum of 17 parking spaces, including 3 for disabled people.
- A building built to or exceeding current energy efficiency standards and therefore many times more ecologically compliant than SMR.

A key objective is to provide the opportunity for increased usage of the Rooms both to meet a wider range of current community needs than SMR presently does and also to meet the increased needs arising from the recent and future population growth of the town. The project and subsequent operation of the Rooms will seek to maximise the use of the Rooms for a comprehensive range of local community activities assisted by sensitive booking and competitive charging policies within the context of being

financially sustainable. The project will have the added benefit of helping to enhance the town's economy by providing an event centre for local people.

## **4 The need for a new building**

The current SMR has fundamental problems relating to its structure that would be difficult, expensive and in some cases totally uneconomic to rectify in a way that would ensure its benefit to the community for the next 50 to 100 years. A recent structural survey identified almost all as being in need of attention in the immediate and short term

A key issue is the progressive subsidence of parts of the building (such as the kitchen), that are giving rise to structural issues to both the exterior and interior. Another important issue is its poor thermal performance as, commensurate with its age, SMR is of twin leaf wooden construction with little or no thermal insulation. In addition, there are significant areas of defect, particularly extensive rot in the timbers around the windows. Heating is essentially limited to the main hall, the toilets are primitive and do not meet current standards of accessibility. The cost of renovation to overcome all of this would be considerable and there would still be significant recurring maintenance costs. It is also not the most attractive building externally in an historic area of Framlingham.

By contrast, the new building will meet current legislation in terms of thermal efficiency, accessibility, hygiene and be designed to meet the needs of the local community in the 21<sup>st</sup>, not the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It has been designed to have low maintenance costs, so helping to keep overall costs, and hence hire charges, to acceptable levels.

The design of the new Community Rooms takes into account the current needs of local organisations, for example by providing a meeting room which will accommodate 16 people for either meetings or presentations.

The new Community Rooms has also been designed to be an aesthetic asset to the local area. Situated in the Conservation Area between St Michael's church and the Castle, the site for the new Rooms is in the heritage centre of Framlingham. Depending on other developments in the immediate vicinity, this may become the cultural centre of Framlingham. SMR as a building contributed little in this regard.

In recent years the population of Framlingham has grown substantially and has increased by 40% in the 10 years between 2011 and 2021. The population of the surrounding area has grown substantially also and further population increases beyond 2021 are inevitable. This will undoubtedly create significant additional need for facilities such as the new Castle Community Rooms in which to hold community activities.

## **5 Car parking**

Although SMR had adequate car parking to the side and rear, it was mainly on a dirt and hardcore surface. Part of the proposed project to build a new Community Rooms is to provide better car parking facilities. There will be 17 car parking spaces close to the

Rooms and these, together with car parking spaces on adjacent land under the control of the PCC, will be managed by or on behalf of the PCC.

## 6 Timescales

Planning permission was granted in February 2021 and Building Regulations approval was received on 10 December 2021. On the advice of the Quantity Surveyor a two stage tender process was undertaken. Very detailed design and specification information was issued to 4 prospective contractors. On the basis of their submissions and an interview process in June 2021 one was chosen to work up detailed costs and to enter into a contract to execute the project.

At the end of 2021, £1m of the 1.2m required to complete the project had been raised. The PCC took the decision to instruct the contractors to commence work in the middle of January 2022 as to defer the decision to proceed by 6 months, causing a 9 month later start would have resulted in an estimated increase of 17% in build cost. To have delayed the decision by this amount of time would have increased the fundraising burden from £200,000 to an estimated £365,000, a target difficult to achieve. Completion of the construction of Castle Community Rooms is scheduled for the end of November 2022.

## 7 Financial viability

Excluding major works that would be needed in the near future, but including internal renovations and general maintenance, St Michael's Rooms was financially viable and had been for at least the last 35 years (discounting the period of a few years when it was closed), despite the existence of a significant number of other halls in the town which were available for hire. Key reasons for its viability were that it offered for hire a relatively large hall during daytime in a location central to the town where people that live in and around the town can attend events without the need to drive. Although local schools have large halls available for hire, these are more expensive, are not available during times when many of the organisations that hire St Michael's Rooms wish to use them and are not located in the town centre.

The new Community Rooms will increase the attraction to hirers as it will offer more facilities at an improved up-to-date level whilst retaining the same location advantages of St Michael's Rooms. **Annex 2** contains a list of users of SMR and other organisations which have, in recent years, expressed an interest in hiring a more modern hall or a medium sized meeting room. The PCC has already received enquiries from both organisations and individuals about hiring Castle Community Rooms when it is completed.

The ongoing increase in population of Framlingham and the surrounding area referred to earlier will create additional demand for facilities such as the new Community Rooms in which to hold community activities.

The philosophy of promoting use of the new Rooms to local organisations will be by offering them advantageous rates and, in particular, to charitable organisations serving the local community. This will not prejudice the viability of the Rooms as this approach will be offset by higher charges to the commercial organisations that are frequently seeking to hire facilities such as those that the new Community Rooms will offer in the town centre.

## 8 Rooms Design and Costs

In 2018, after assessing alternative approaches including modular construction, FTC in conjunction with the PCC commissioned James Gorst Architects to produce an initial design for a building to replace SMR. This has formed the basis of subsequent iterations up to and including the final design. Although the modular option was less costly, the design offered did not meet the requirements of the FTC, PCC and those expressed by users, was significantly less attractive externally and internally and the quoted cost did not include necessary work such as piled foundations and drainage.

Initial costs provided pro bono by a London based Quantity Surveyor to FTC via the architect indicated, in 2018, a project cost of just under £900,000. However, the costs developed by this QS also did not take account of the need for piled, not strip foundations, drainage and other constraints of the site together with facilities regarded as highly desirable by users, such as a springy floor suitable for dancing. A costing by a local QS, working in conjunction with a Structural Engineer and the Architect indicated a true build cost, in 2020, of £1.1m.

After both FTC and the PCC had taken legal advice, to avoid the legal complications of FTC owning a building on land leased from the PCC, the PCC agreed to take over management of the project from FTC. The PCC has subsequently worked, in consultation with other interested parties and professional experts, to achieve a cost-effective, fit-for-purpose energy efficient design that is an asset to its location in a conservation area close to the centre of Framlingham. The final design is shown in **Annex I**. Although the building will be owned by the PCC, the PCC has undertaken in a written agreement with FTC that it will be available for community use for a minimum of 85% of available hiring hours. In order to comply with the legal basis on which the PCC holds the land on which the new Community Rooms will be built, St Michael's Church must retain some use of the new Community Rooms for itself.

Since 2020 the pandemic has created pressure on building costs. Although every effort has been taken to manage increases, at the date of signing the construction contract in December 2021, the agreed contract cost of construction was £1.05m plus £150k for professional and other fees, making the project total £1.2m.

## 9 Current Status and Funding

Following the authority of the PCC to proceed with the project, the site was handed over to the contractor on 17 January 2022. At the time of drafting this Business Case, SMR has been demolished and the piles have been installed which will support the new

building. Archaeological consultants have been employed to monitor works for artefacts that would require further investigation and an archaeologist was present during the groundwork phase but no such artefacts were found. We have been informed that they will only need to return to site if the contractors find anything that might be of interest during the remainder of the works.

Early in the project FTC sought and obtained an offer of funding from East Suffolk Council (ESC) for £700,000 to which FTC have offered £126k local CIL funding matched by funds of £126k from the PCC together with donations from present or past individuals connected with the church. In addition, grants have been obtained from a number of third party grant making bodies to make a total of current funding of £1m.

The financial contribution by the PCC, its continuing work to raise the remaining funds, its commitment to the project for the use of its land on which CCR will stand for the lifetime of the building and the countless manhours contributed to the project by PCC members is a tangible demonstration of its commitment to providing and maintaining an important facility to the community of Framlingham.

Offers of funding continue to be received, other grant bodies have been and are being approached and a professionally conducted auction of 'relics' salvaged from SMR during its demolition will be held at the end of March. As SMR was used as the Danebury Metal Detecting Club HQ in the BBC series "Detectorists", which has a sizeable cult following, interest in the relics has been high and the auction is expected to make a useful contribution to project funds.

The PCC has established a keen, hardworking fundraising group, a member of which is a professional fundraiser with a proven track record. In addition to the auction and approaches to grant making bodies, other sources of funding are being pursued, including a GoFundMe donations page and establishing a 'friends of CCR' scheme whereby people can make a monthly contribution equivalent to a number of coffees per month.

## **10 Community Involvement**

The need for a Community Rooms near to the centre of Framlingham has been identified in the Framlingham Neighbourhood Plan for several years and it formed the basis of the approach by FTC to the PCC to discuss the feasibility of establishing such a facility on the SMR site. It is explicitly contained within the recent revision of the Neighbourhood Plan.

The suitability of the current design for hire by the local community has been assured by the PCC. Information contained in returned questionnaires from current and, potential future users has been taken into account and other members of the local community have been consulted. A consultation exhibition was held in SMR in February 2019. Community participation in the ongoing management of the Community Rooms will be encouraged.

## **11 Management**

Under the proposed arrangement management divides into three distinct aspects, all ultimately the responsibility of the PCC:

1. Management of the work leading up to commencement of work on the project. This was undertaken by key nominated representatives from the PCC. These key representatives have either a critical role in the PCC or have experience and skills directly relevant to the project;
2. Project Delivery. The main contractor will be responsible, under a signed contract with the PCC, for delivering the project. This will be monitored by the Architect and Quantity Surveyor, overseen by the PCC nominated representatives;
3. Ongoing management of the completed facility. This will be by a committee comprising PCC members with volunteers sought from the local community to ensure representation of the interests of users and the PCC as owner of the building.

## **12 Project Management**

A Work Breakdown Structure (WBS) has been carried out to identify all significant tasks in detail and resource and a Gantt chart, that shows timescales for each activity and activity inter-dependencies has been produced by the contractor. The Gantt chart will be updated during the build phase. A schedule of anticipated expenditure has been produced to enable funding bodies to be informed and to enable cash flow to be effectively managed.

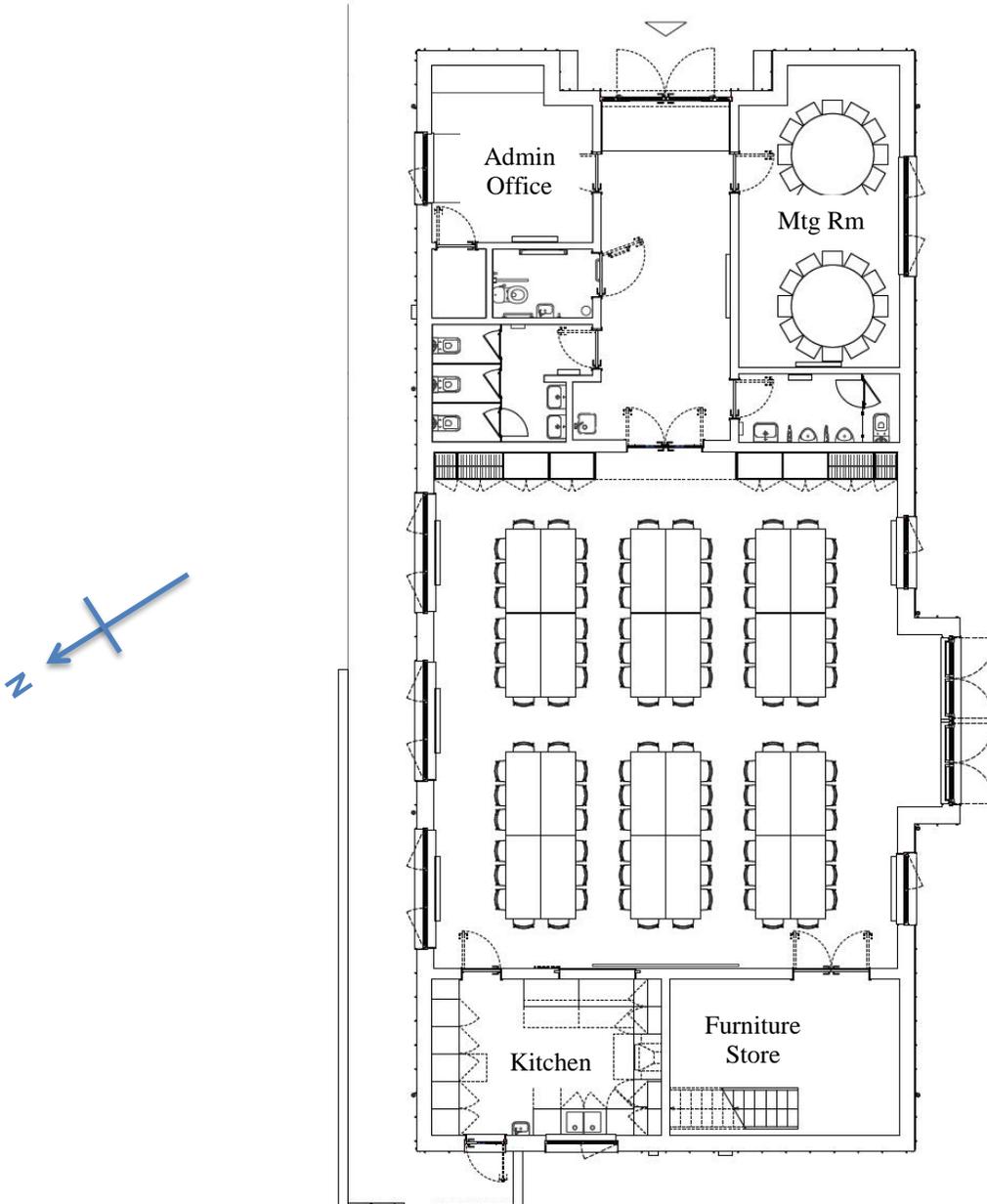
4 weekly project review meetings are being held between the PCC project team, the contractor, architect and QS at which progress against plan is assessed, issues raised and the 4-weekly valuations, on which each invoice is based, are agreed.

Funds are held in a separate account and used solely for the realisation of the project. Progress and cash flow are being regularly monitored by the project management team.

## **13 Project Risks**

During the project a risk log will be kept and updated to ensure effective risk management.

# Annex I – Castle Community Rooms Floor Plan



## **Annex 2 – User groups for the New Rooms**

### **St Michael's Rooms user groups prior to COVID – large hall only**

- Dancing classes (*several organisations*)
- Local clubs/societies
- Singing groups
- Keep fit (*several organisations*)
- Yoga (*several organisations*)
- Young people's activities
- Family parties,
- Funeral receptions
- Wedding receptions
- Dinners, other events for local groups and private events
- Commercial sales
- Entertainment eg pantomimes and productions
- St Michael's church

### **Anticipated additional user groups – including option to hire meeting room**

- Low impact sports activities eg table tennis
- Film Club
- Carpet bowls
- Age related support groups and charities
- Health clinics
- Wellbeing and social support
- Community development and support (low income groups)
- Citizen's Advice
- Disability discussion groups
- Young parents
- Social groups
- Outreach and adult training and education classes
- Mental health support
- Family planning
- One-to-one support
- Pre-school and after-school clubs

In addition, FTC receives requests from commercial and other organisations that wish to hold events, seminars and exhibitions in Framlingham. It is anticipated that many of these organisations will find the facilities offered by the new hall attractive for their purposes.