

Waldridge Parish Council

Agenda Item – Future of Waldridge Parish Rooms

Potential Options for the Parish Council to Explore

Option 1

- Maintain the status quo and continue to fund and use the Parish Rooms as now.

Option 2

- Invest in a full repair/refurbishment of the Parish Rooms, alongside a strategy to increase the community use of this facility and secure a return (financial or non-tangible) on any investment

Option 3

- Put the Parish Rooms up for sale.

Let's explore first the current status of the Parish Rooms, to inform the potential impact of these options.

Current Status of the Parish Rooms – Costs & Usage

	Annual Cost	Annual Usage	Annual Income
2024/25	£5,858.42 (Increased cost covered roof repair)	80 Hours (6.7 hours per month)	£452.00
2025/26	£3,567.78	123 Hours (10 hours per month)	£1028.00
2026/27 YTD 30/06	£1081.98	45 Hours (15 hours per month)	£310.00

- Typical monthly utility costs include gas, electricity, water, buildings insurance, boiler maintenance contract etc.

	Usage	Hourly Rate
Fitness Group	1 hour booking on a Monday & Thursday	£10.00
Singing Group	2 hour booking per month	£10:00
Scout Group	2 hour booking per quarter	£10.00

- These three groups are the only main users that hire the Parish Rooms on a regular basis, demonstrating extremely limited use of the Parish Rooms by the Waldrige Parish community over a sustained period.

Current Status of Parish Rooms – Building Condition

A recent cursory view of the building by an external provider provided the following feedback:

- *“Rising Damp*
- *Penetrating Damp on staircase (black)*
- *Roof was leaking upstairs - patched but previous roofer in 2024/25 said whole roof coming towards end of life*
- *Can't inspect roof joists but good chance some if not all may need replacing*
- *Cracks in the walls upstairs, suggesting some kind of movement, possibly historic*
- *Wiring doesn't look the best*
- *Boiler, was noted to be at the end of its life when last serviced*
- *Staircase will no doubt be non complaint with current building and fire regulation standards*
- *Floor upstairs is uneven, maybe just as it's old, maybe signs of joist issue. Floor in main room isn't great & everything looks 'botched’*
- *Kitchen/white goods past their best”*

“If you were to address all issues, initial estimate suggests £40-50k, likely more given rising materials & trade costs.

In addition, the possibility of uncovering 'hidden' work - old properties, particularly those not constantly occupied are a money pit. Given that the Parish Rooms is a 'public' for hire building, I'm sure there'd be additional works you'd have to do for building, fire and health and safety regs compliance etc – the staircase being a clear example.”

Current Building Status



Current Building Status



Current Building Status



Current Building Status



Current Building Status



Bullion Hall, Chester-le-Street Parish Centre etc

- Some of the limited feedback comments received suggest we should invest to refurbish the Waldrige Parish Rooms to maintain a central hub for the community and create a strategy to secure more use of the building.
- But with only two relatively small rooms, kitchen/toilet facilities and limited access for car parking or public transport, it's very unlikely we could create and maintain, with additional funded staff, a modern space at a reasonable cost that would generate daily usage on the scale required (ie Bullion Hall, Chester-le-Street Parish Centre etc) to secure a return on investment.



Option 1 - Maintain the status quo and continue to use and fund the Parish Rooms as now

Pros

- Maintains a central hub for the Waldrige Parish community.
- Enables the current limited users of the building to continue with their activities.

Cons

- Day-to-day utility costs will need to be maintained and continue to rise with inflation etc.
- Cost v monthly use of the building is not financially viable.
- Urgent unplanned essential repairs will need to be funded on a regular basis.
- Potential that the Council will not be able to secure future buildings insurance due to the unsafe state of the building.
- Likely to reach a point when the state of the building does not satisfy building regs etc, requiring either the building to be closed and/or a major investment to refurbish the building. Are we just 'kicking the can down the road'?
- Major risk to Parish Council budget reserves if unplanned major future investment required, questioning whether this is a rationale/feasible option.
- Limited access to parking or public transport is unlikely to encourage any significant increase in Waldrige Parish community use of the building.

Option 2 - Invest in a full repair/refurbishment of the Parish Rooms, alongside a strategy to increase the community use of this facility and secure a return (financial or non-tangible) on any investment.

Pros

- Maintains a central hub for the Waldrige Parish community.
- Enables the current limited users of the building to continue with their activities.
- Provides a modern facility to then create a parallel strategy to increase the use of the building by new users.
- Enables the Parish Council to have a modern building that can satisfy more up to date building regs.
- Ensures the Parish Council can secure buildings insurance.

Cons

- Day-to-day utility costs will need to be maintained and continue to rise with inflation etc.
- Will require a Parish Council investment in excess of £50k, with the risk of very limited return on investment (£26k was spent on the building 6 years ago to improve the main room and toilets. This did not result in increased usage)
- Major risk that the cost of any repair and refurbishment could wipe out all council budget reserves, questioning whether this is a rationale/feasible option.
- A major increase in the use of a fully refurbished building or indeed, as per recent limited feedback received, of creating a digital hub, would by default require funding to 'fit out' a digital hub and staff to maintain the facility. Parish Councillors conduct their current role on a voluntary basis.
- Limited access to parking or public transport is unlikely to encourage any significant increase in Waldrige Parish community use of the building.
- Rental costs would likely increase, would existing users be happy to pay more?

Option 3 – Put the Parish Rooms up for Sale

Pros

- Limits the liability for the Parish Council for any ongoing costs to maintain the building or complete future major repairs/refurbishment (planned or unplanned), to ensure the building is complaint with building regs etc.
- Negates the risk of not being able to secure buildings insurance, if in the future it does not satisfy current building regs etc.
- Mitigates the major risk that the cost of any repair and refurbishment (planned or unplanned) could wipe out all council budget reserves.
- Provides a cash boost and ongoing future cost savings for the Parish Council, which it can use to invest further into community improvement opportunities across the Parish.

Cons

- No longer a central hub for the Waldrige Parish community
- The small number of current regular users of the building will need to identify a new location to continue with their activities