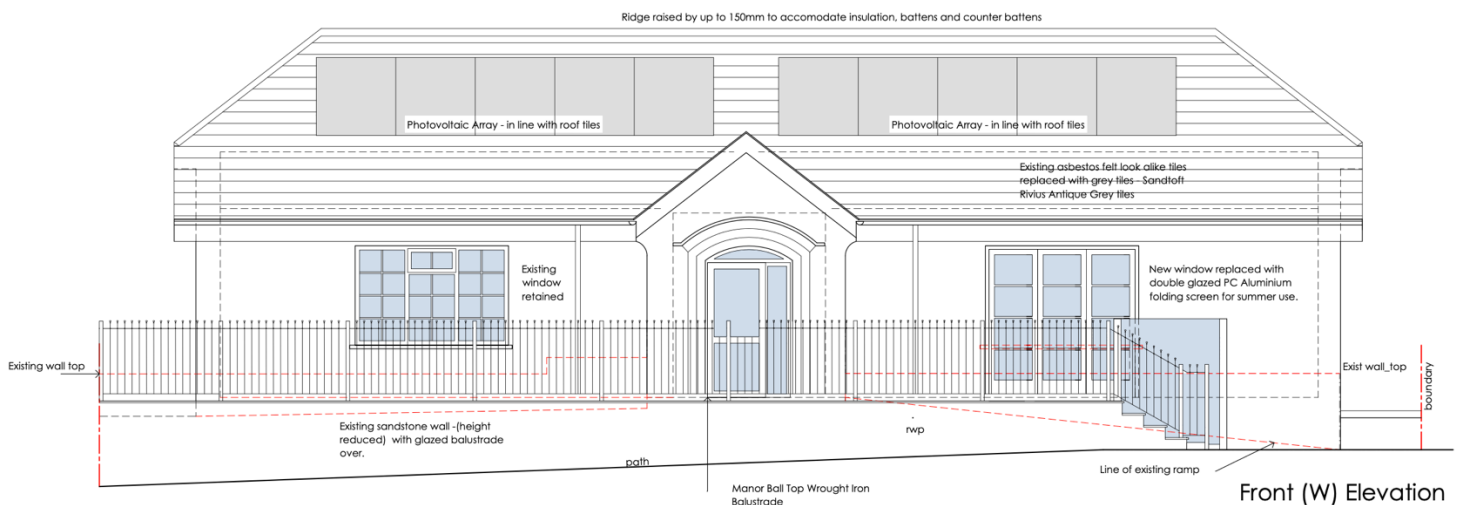


READING ROOMS PLANNING STATEMENT.

REPLACEMENT OF ROOF FINISHES INCORPORATING INSULATION & INCREASE IN EXISTING ROOF HEIGHTS; INSTALLATION OF PHOTOVOLTAICS ON FRONT ROOF SLOPE; AMENDMENTS TO EXISTING ACCESS INCLUDING WIDENING SITE ACCESS, INSTALLATION OF EQUAL ACCESS PLATFORM LIFT, & ALTERATIONS/EXTENSIONS OF EXISTING LEVELS TO CREATE AN EXTERNAL TERRACE SEATING AREA; REDUCTION TO FRONT BOUNDARY WALL & INSTALLATION OF BALUSTRADE; AND REPLACEMENT OF FRONT WINDOW WITH FOLDING DOOR.



Applicants;

Mr Geoffrey Nugent on behalf of The Reading Rooms Committee.

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APPLICATION DETAILS

The Reading Rooms are located in the centre of Beckermet and acts as a village hall which is used by different user groups within the community and as a place where locals can meet and enjoy a cup of tea and cake.



Today it is a village facility and is used for:

- Parish Council meetings
- Art and philosophy classes
- Oddfellows Society
- The Beckermet History Group
- Rainbows
- The Beckermet Village Association
- BVA Music events
- Beckermet Women's Institute
- First Responders
- NSPCC
- Coffee mornings/afternoons (a village hub)

Aim.

This application forms part of an overall business plan to increase the viability of the Reading Rooms by **increasing** foot fall/bookings and **reducing** the running costs.

This is a two pronged approach.

- Firstly a reduction in running costs via insulation and a more efficient heating system will reduce the outgoings.
- Secondly, making physical improvements to the building including better accessibility and generally make the hall and external areas more inviting to visitors and users, in turn will increase the revenue.

The changes will make it a more attractive offering to community groups while the hope is that the teas, coffees and refreshments run by volunteers can expand their operating hours and attract more users. The Reading Rooms are currently applying for funding as a 'Warm Hub' to better serve the community, providing a warm and friendly environment providing refreshments, social activity, information and advice during the current fuel crisis.

Looking to the summer months, The Reading Rooms project would also seek to bring in some passing trade, appealing to the national and local drive to encourage walking and cycling. The Coastal Path comes very close to the village and Hadrian's Cycleway passes the Reading Rooms with links to the Cycle Trail path network (hence proposed bike racks and outdoor seating). As a result, we are not proposing that the revamped venue should attract more cars into the village, but support "green" pursuits.

This makes the outside space an extremely important part of the business plan. In addition, it provides the local community with valuable outside space to enjoy a beverage with friends and other community members.

History of the Building.

The building is over 99 years old and the current front wall and ramp was created only 60 years ago to give disabled access.

This intervention was not wholly successful in providing disabled access; the ramp is of a steep gradient (1:9) and in no way compliant with current standards. This has also compromised its original aspect, giving what can only be defined as a '**wall to access**', masking its original design from the front pavement.

With new technology we can now give the disabled access required while making the building frontage more appealing and welcoming, also gaining some of the external area at the front for outdoor seating and bike racking.

The Reading Rooms recently announced their plans for internal refurbishment on their Village Facebook page, with one comment to that note being, and I quote ***'In my honest opinion, the outer wall doesn't exactly 'invite'***. This comment is echoed by all villagers they have spoken to. The recently formed Community Interest Company therefore maintains that the external refurbishment to the building including the provision of more outside seating is critical to providing a successful Community Centre going forward.

At the start of the project, the design of a 'compliant' ramp also was examined in the first instance, but this was not afforded without the removal of the front AND the entrance porch also leaving no room for any external area for seating.

DESIGN

While the arguments for insulating the existing building have been generally accepted by officers, queries were raised regarding the inclusion of the following design features which are justified below and in a discussion document with the conservation officer.

Photovoltaic panels

The yield sheet calculated by the consultant M+E Engineer taking into account the solar orientation of the building has been provided to CBC as requested by the conservation officer. The photovoltaics alone will provide for the hot water provision within the building and therefore allow the 'air to air' ASHP system proposed to cater for the space heating requirements without the two needing to be interlinked.

Air Source Heat Pump

The consultant M+E Engineer has advised that 'air to air' ASHP is the most energy efficient heating system for this type of building and occupancy. It is proposed by the engineer that the space heating will be taken care of by a couple of low level ASHP compressor units on the two gables of the building. These will directly power an air distribution system for the space heating without the need for a hot water cylinder to store any hot water for radiators. The location of there has been carefully considered and we can confirm that these cannot be placed to the rear of the building or further back due to required clearances around the unit.

Removal of the wall top and replacement with a balustrade.

Officers questioned the requirement to remove the stone wall and replace it with a balustrade.

First of all, the sandstone wall in the main is **only 60 years old** and therefore not an original part of the building. It was formed when the steep ramp was introduced.

The removal of the top of the front wall down to terrace level affords more than just a few inches. Because the wall is 425mm wide and it extended 15.5m across the frontage from proposed steps to boundary, this actually equates to **6.56m² of area**. This is a substantial amount in terms of useability and is the difference between being able to accommodate outdoor seating and not.

As described above, part of the business plan of the Reading Rooms is to further its existing offering of refreshments to the community and to passers by on the coast to coast route and therefore if the Reading Rooms were not able to gain this space, they have little to encourage / welcome passers by to stop. This is particularly important for cyclists who often don't feel comfortable with leaving a bike out of sight.

Furthermore, if the existing wall were to be retained, and the ramp omitted, we would be obliged by Building Control to add a balustrade ontop of the wall or build it up for protection from falling anyway as it is only 325mm above terrace level. Although this is largely an existing situation, the removal of the ramp constitutes an increased risk in terms of the potential of a fall from the terrace level to pavement level.

We considered a structural balustrade to be the most sympathetic solution presenting the least visual impact and showcasing the building to the greatest degree. The officers had reservations about the modernity of this solution and therefore a compromise was made and a wrought iron balustrade accepted. Although not the optimum solution for the client, this does afford the additional area which is so critical to the applicants business plan.

CMW. WKDA
27th Jan 2023