

1. Executive Summary

- **Background:** To help mitigate Somerset Council's financial difficulties, Somerset Council (SC) are disposing of several properties in Williton, including the old library building in Killick Way, Williton with a guide price of £150,000. Williton Parish Council (WPC) raised concerns with SC about the manner of disposal of the library and the Children's Centre in Killick Way and potentially the land between the two buildings, which includes a building housing the Public Toilets. WPC were contacted by Somerset Council and advised that both the Children's Centre and the old Library were going to be placed on the open market shortly.
- **Project Overview:** WPC considered acquiring both or either building with the scope of relocating the public toilets. WPC did not consider the Children's Centre as being a suitable building to be acquired by the Parish Council, however, it was felt that there was potential to acquire the old library building and incorporate public toilets into a redesign of the interior of the building. WPC expressed an interest to SC to acquire the building and enter negotiations to purchase the building, with the hope that public toilet facilities could be incorporated into any redesign.
- The building will need to be redesigned to include these facilities, office space, a larger council chamber and a community room that can be rented. This project aims to create a multifunctional, community-oriented space that will serve both administrative needs and the wider public, contributing to the community's social and cultural infrastructure. The Parish Council is committed to engaging residents through a public consultation process, which will include feedback from the community via the bi-monthly newsletter and public meetings.
- **Objectives:** The primary objective of this project is to purchase the old library building in Killick Way, Williton, ensuring that it remains a public asset for the benefit of the community. By acquiring this building, the Parish Council will preserve a key space that can continue to serve as a hub for local services and activities.
 - The following objectives are central to the project:
 - **Maintain Public Access to a Community Space:** The purchase of the building guarantees that it remains a public asset, accessible to parishioners for a variety of community services and events.
 - **Provide Improved Facilities for Parish Council Services:** The renovation will allow for the creation of more office space for the Parish Council, helping to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of local governance.
 - **Create a Flexible Community Space:** A new, larger council chamber will offer more opportunities for public meetings, events, and activities, supporting the community.

- **Ensure the Growth and Sustainability of Parish Services:** With the possible requirement for expansion of services the Parish Council provides, the larger premises will accommodate additional resources and services.
 - **Guarantee that Public Toilets are provided in Williton:** The existing toilet facilities are in a building that is leased to WPC from SC on a short-term lease with a very short break clause.
 - **Key Benefits:** The building will ensure that community services will have the room to expand, for the benefit of the local area. It will secure the public toilets, which will continue to serve not only parishioners, but visitors to the village, which in turn will benefit local businesses and job opportunities. The library is in a central position, providing accessibility for all.
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2. Context

- **Current Situation:** The library has only recently closed and moved into West Somerset House; therefore, the building is perceived to be in good condition. This building is considered an important asset to the community, offering the opportunity to provide much-needed public amenities. The larger space within the building can be repurposed to meet a variety of needs, such as additional room for community hire and the installation of public toilets - both of which would greatly benefit parishioners. It represents a key opportunity to ensure that a valuable public space remains accessible and functional for the benefit of local residents and the wider community.
 - **Need for the Project:** The building would provide larger space for the Parish Council and enable growth, future proofing against possible need to take on more public services, due to the financial issues faced by Somerset Council. The current public toilets are not secure, and Somerset Council could break the lease at any time, having the public toilets within a building in the ownership of the Parish Council would ensure this vital service is maintained. It would provide a larger council chamber, which could facilitate public meetings, without having the cost of hiring rooms elsewhere.
 - **Public Consultation:** Consultation will be undertaken via the Parish Newsletter, and a public meeting will be held.
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3. Project Scope

- **Project Goals:**
 - Renovating the library building to meet community needs.
 - Relocating public toilets to improve local amenities.
 - Providing the capacity for parish council growth, to maintain public services

- **Key Deliverables:**
 - Purchase of the old library building
 - Renovation plans, to include, expansion of office space, document storage, ability to rent rooms, larger council chamber and public toilet facilities.
 - All renovations will be compliant with health, safety, and accessibility standards.
 - **Timeline:**
 - **Marketing Timeline:** 12 weeks from 13th August 2025
 - **Planning and approvals:** 3 months
 - **Renovation:** 2-3 months
 - **Opening and operational setup:** 3-4 months
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4. Financial Plan

- **Project Cost Estimate:** Provide a detailed breakdown of the estimated costs, covering:
 - **Building Acquisition:** estimated purchase price - £150,000
 - **Renovation Costs:** To include any necessary changes, such as, structural changes, plumbing, electrical work, and the installation of public toilets.
 - **Contingency Fund:** Given that costs can vary, a contingency of 10% of the total cost might be necessary.
 - **Ongoing Costs:** It may be anticipated that due to the additional floor space, utility costs may see a slight increase, however, with better insulation of the old library, this may not be the case.
 - **Funding Sources:** the parish council are looking to apply for a Public Works Loan Board (PWLB) loan.
- **Revenue Generation and Expenditure Reduction:** Currently, the Parish Council operates out of a small office at 2 Killick Way, which is limited in its capacity to serve the growing needs of the community. The office space available for council meetings and community use is deemed at capacity, particularly as more services are anticipated to be managed by the Parish Council.

The acquisition of the old library building offers a significant opportunity to provide larger, more flexible facilities. The rooms within the building can be renovated and made available for community hire. The larger council chamber and additional office space will also enable the Parish Council to operate more efficiently and effectively.

Furthermore, the current office at 2 Killick Way will be marketed for rental. The income generated from renting this office space is expected to cover the ongoing repayments of the existing loan, supporting the financial sustainability of the project.

Currently, WPC pays Business Rates on both the Parish Office and the storage annex in the existing public toilets (Public Toilets are exempt from Business Rates). If the existing office is leased on a basis that ensures that the tenant is responsible for paying business rates on that property, WPC will only be liable to pay Business Rates on the new office element of the building and may be eligible for small business rate relief. This will reduce the tax burden on Parish Council and in turn the burden on Council Taxpayers in Williton.

5. Benefits & Impact

- **Community Benefits:**
 - Access to new community spaces.
 - Enhanced local infrastructure (e.g., the new public toilets).
 - Opportunities for hiring rooms, for local events or activities.
 - Growth of parish council, to provide more public services
 - **Social Impact:** The building could become a hub for local services or community meetings, fostering social cohesion.
 - **Environmental Benefits:** The roof could potentially lend itself to installation of solar panels
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6. Risk Assessment & Mitigation

- **Identified Risks:**
 - **Budget Overruns:** Other than the Public Toilet provision, the renovations would be minor, with costings known before commencement, therefore, deemed as a low risk
 - **Delays:** Obtaining planning for change of use from that of a library to offices and public toilets, may cause a delay, due to issues at Somerset Council planning department.
 - **Refusal of planning permissions:** SC which to dispose of the old library building without any conditions. This may cause issues in the long term if permission is not granted to change the use to provide public toilets in Williton.
 - **Public Engagement:** There could be resistance to the project, due to the need for extra funding, which would be paid for by public money, via the precept.
- **Mitigation Strategies:**
 - **Contingency Fund:** Costings will be known before an offer is made to Somerset Council, but it is suggested a 10% contingency may be budgeted for within the loan request.
 - **Savings:** The Parish Council have identified savings on business rates payable, e.g. currently business rates are paid on the public toilet store and offices.

- **Clear Communication:** The Parish Council will ensure that all views are listened to and are considered during the final decision. There will be regular updates to the community within the newsletter and on the Parish Council website, ensuring transparency.
 - **Expert Consultation:** The Parish Council will work with a project manager to ensure the project runs smoothly and on time.
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7. Governance & Project Management

- **Project Team:** Project manager, property development specialists, contractors, Parish councillors.
 - **Project Governance:** The Parish Council will make all decisions; the project manager will be responsible for overseeing different stages of the project.
 - **Stakeholder Engagement:** Survey through newsletter and public meeting to be held
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8. Conclusion & Next Steps

- **Summary:** The purchase of the old library building will ensure the Parish Council can future proof, to continue to provide public services for the community. It will be a far more useable venue for both council business and community use.
 - **Next Steps:**
 - Obtain drawings and costings for conversion, including the addition of public toilets
 - Engage with the community, detailing plans and obtain feedback, clearly documenting the process. This will form part of the funding application
 - Work with SALC (Somerset Association of Local Councils) to submit an application to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) for approval
 - Apply to PWLB (Public Works Loans Board) for funding, attaching required documents that support the application, such as the building survey, quotes from contractors, or letters of support from local residents or organisations.
 - Consider all costings and decide of a final bid for submission to Somerset Council.
 - Engage solicitors to complete purchase of property.
 - Instruct project manager to deliver redesign on building.
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