



Beckernet Reading Rooms CLC Business Plan

2022 - 2027

Introduction

Beckermeth Reading and Recreation Rooms is situated in the village of Beckermeth in West Cumbria was established in 1923 through public subscription and is the “de facto” Village Hall. The Reading Rooms have recently converted from a “friendly society” to a Community Interest Company (CIC) and this Business Plan relates to the operations of Beckermeth Reading Rooms Community Interest Company.

Society in general and the demographics of the village residents have significantly changed from that of 50 years ago when the Friendly Societies Act was established and the business model shown at that time is now unsuitable and unsustainable for the demands of the society of today.

This business model has meant that over recent years the Reading Rooms has been on a path of managed decline, operating at a loss which would have ultimately led to financial distress and failure. Significant community re-energisation in recent years have provided an important opportunity to implement a new business model to enable the Reading Rooms to thrive financially and become a focal point for the village of Beckermeth.

This Business Plan undertakes a fundamental review of the Reading Rooms in relation to the community it serves, the current operating model, the facilities themselves and the available opportunities. The document firstly considers the current position then examines options and subsequently makes recommendations for the next 5 years to be accepted and agreed by the Reading Rooms committee.

Beckermets village is positioned between the A595 and the Coastline of West Cumbria, with Whitehaven to the north and Seascale to the south. This location gives easy access to the beauty of the western side of the Lake District National Park and, as it is within a mile of the coast, walking and cycling can be enjoyed with sea views.

The population is estimated to be 667 with around 300 households. There is a Church, School, Nursery, two Children's play parks and two public houses. The centre of the village is picturesque and has a quiet ambience, due to the park, and bridge across the KirkBeck which is accessed by narrow lanes. The Beckermets Reading Room building now acts as the village social hub. The present Reading Rooms were opened in 1923 and had facilities for reading newspapers, playing cards and billiards.

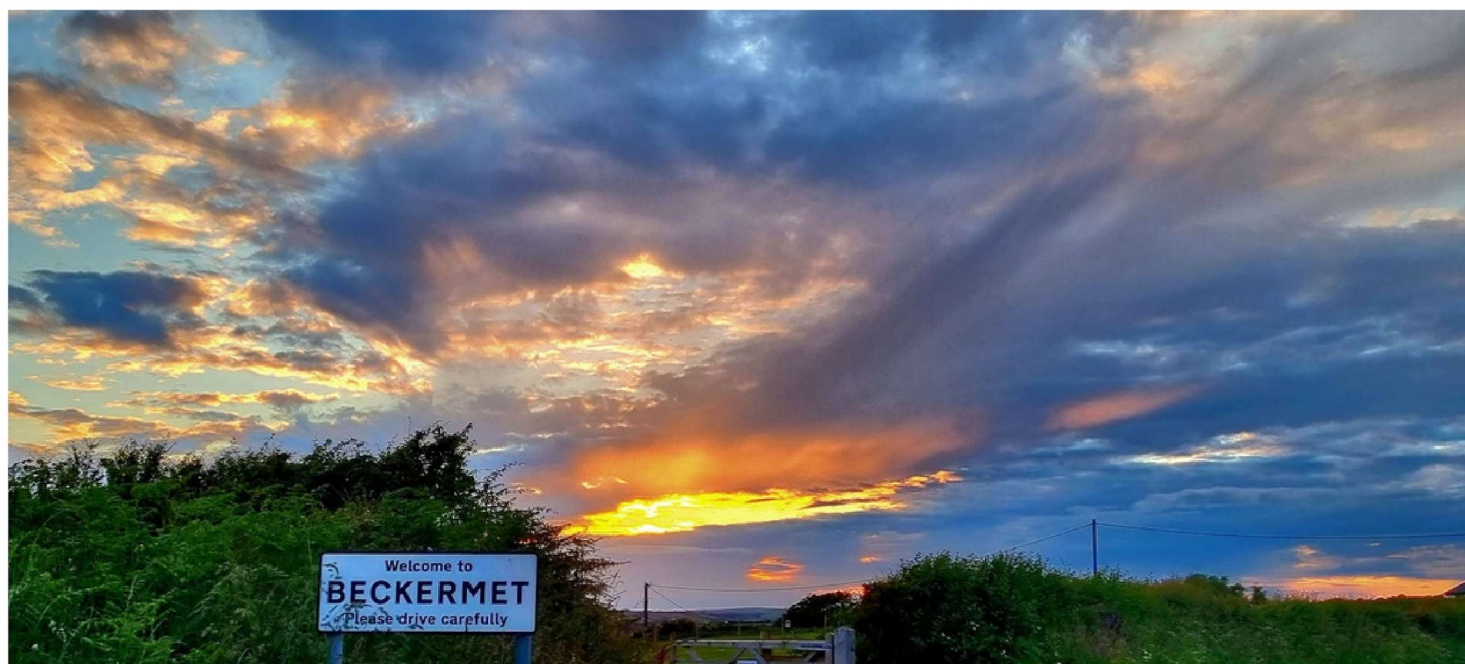


Photo credits: Stuart Tyson

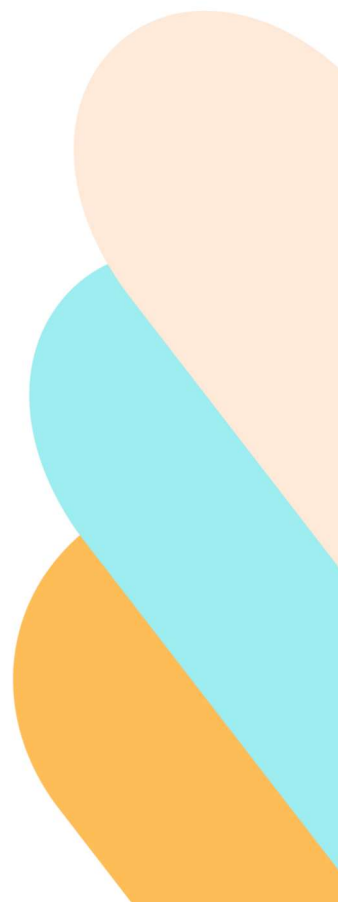
Community Needs



The Reading Rooms is the only fully inclusive community building that is available to all community groups within the village of Beckermeth. The School and Church also serve elements of the community, but these are not fully inclusive institutions and have limited facilities for community activities. Therefore most of the demand for activities and events must be fulfilled by the Reading Rooms and with the planned major Green Energy' development on our doorstep these needs will continue to grow and grow.

Our Constitution requires all users to be treated fairly and equally regardless of gender, sexual orientation, nationality, ethnic or national origin, religion, age, or disability.

Furthermore, we ensure that no requirement or condition is imposed upon an event which could disadvantage individuals purely upon any of these grounds.



Financial Stability and Sustainability

The Reading Rooms historically ran at a surplus for many years due to its continuous use by the village nursery, until the nursery relocated to new facilities in 2008 during which the reading Rooms have generally run at a deficit.

Grants provided by the Government as part of the COVID relief payments have provided financial stability in the short term, but the objective of this business plan is that the the organisation runs at a small profit and operating costs are met entirely through operational activities.

Facilities

The building falls way short of satisfying all the community needs of the village. We now need a better layout for events and still have serious deficiencies in storage, toilet facilities, kitchen equipment, furniture, and general accessibility. The thin tiled roof, solid wall construction and poorly insulated fabric make it a high maintenance liability. Thus, it is damp and cold in the winter causing the building fabric to rapidly deteriorate. The heating issue affects our ability to attract new groups, especially in the winter months and therefore this issue must be given due priority in our plans. Externally the appearance specifically at the front of the building has a negative tone. Due to poor access and no way of using the outside space, the building is not immediately aesthetically pleasing.



Product of wreath-making event held at the Reading and Recreational Room.

Governance

The change from a friendly society to a Community Interest Company was prompted by some shortfalls in the existing arrangements, including a small and increasingly ageing committee and a single trustee following the resignation of one of the trustees in 2022. The mutual society status was also perceived to be a barrier to accessing sources of funding and the decision was made in early 2022 to convert to a CIC. The fledgling company has a Board of Directors and a listed set of subscribers (members). The Articles of Association are established and will develop as the new CIC matures.

The stated objects of the CIC are to carry on activities which benefit the community and in particular (without limitation) to :

- Provide a community hub for the village of Beckermet and surrounding communities including a cafe and licensed premises
- Provide a centre for arts and entertainment for the village of Beckermet and surrounding communities.
- Provide a facility for local community groups to pursue their interests.



Sustainability



Sustainability is a key consideration for any business and the accepted benchmark is the UN sustainable development objectives. The Reading Rooms do in some part satisfy a number of the objectives, but there are significant actions that could be taken to improve on our current performance. In particular reducing energy consumption through better insulation, the use of sustainable energy and using local suppliers to increase responsible consumption.

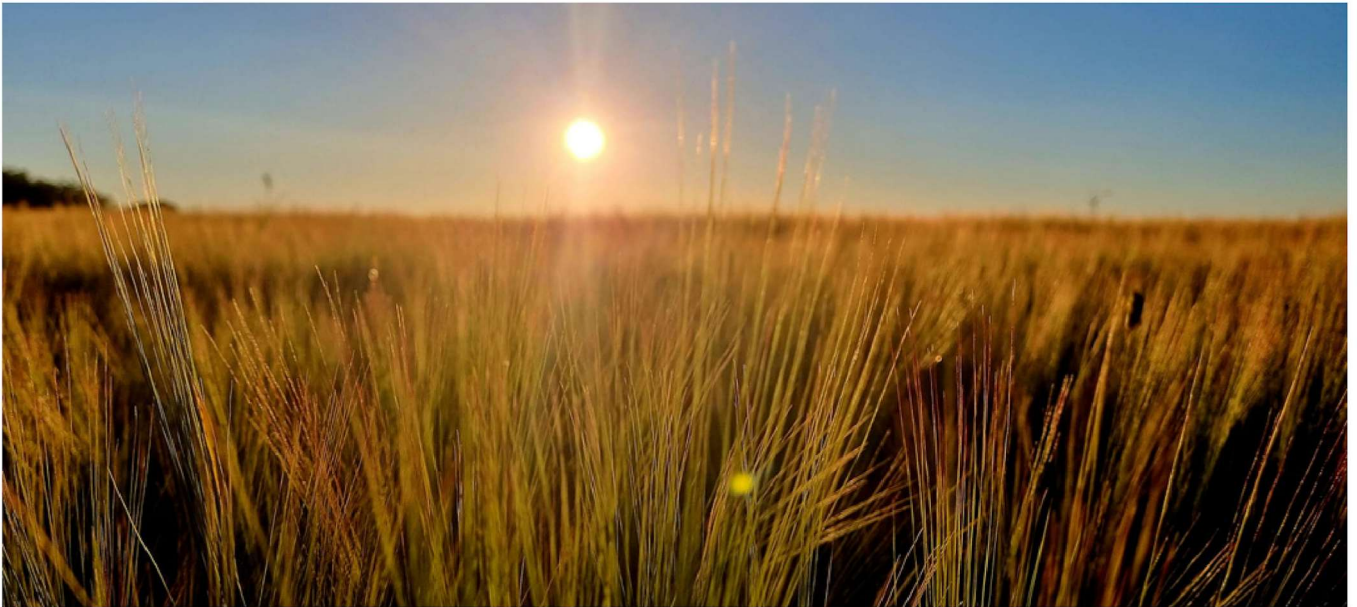



Photo credits: Stuart Tyson




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Vision & Objective



A Community Led Plan (CLP) was developed for Beckermat and the vision of the CLP is that the Reading Rooms acts as a hub for the village to promote social cohesion and social engagement through all demographics and to help in mitigating the effects of social isolation. The Reading Rooms are seen as an essential element in allowing Beckermat to be a thriving community in modern times.



We will meet the CLP vision and the above objects through the following objectives:

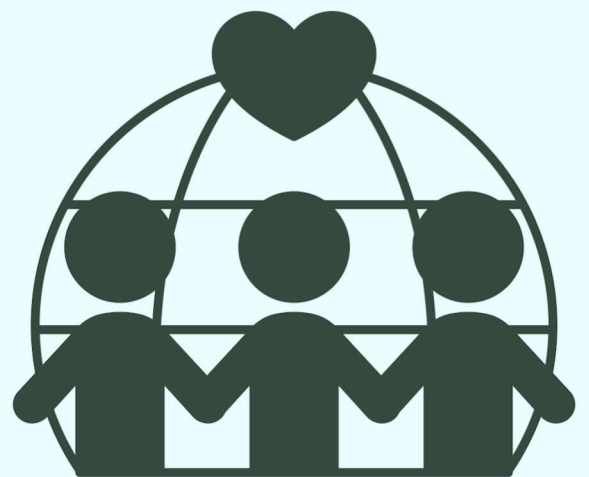
- Carry out activities to support the need of the community
- Be financially stable and sustainable
- Investing in the facilities to meet the needs of existing and future users and the wider community
- Providing sound governance
- Delivering sustainable operations and facilities

Supporting Community Needs



The outlook for supporting our community is generally positive and a quick glance at our website calendar will confirm that there are now many daily activities with the rooms being regularly used and the demand for our facilities gradually increasing. The regular user groups have doubled after Covid lockdown and now include a wide range of users.

Beckermet is however a geographically isolated community with non-existent transport links and entertainment and social engagement limited to the two pubs and intermittent village events. The need to travel to reach other social and entertainment venues impacts on social isolation and incurs carbon miles. A more diverse and regular series of events would go some way to increasing social engagement and reducing carbon miles. An enabler for this is through building better functionality and upgrading existing poor facilities by undertaking further major improvement works.



Financial Stability

Existing position

The current operating model (written into the constitution) allows members to use the facilities for a fee of £10 per hour of use and requires members to pay a subscription of £1 a year (only a handful of people currently pay this subscription).

The facilities are in reality used by a much wider range of individuals and groups than the subscribed members and is open for use by the wider community, with the vast majority of the use by-the-hour income generated from groups and organisations. The Reading Rooms are used approximately 4.5% of the available time and there is a clear need to increase the use to a level exceeding 10%.

Other events and fundraising opportunities that have been run by the Reading Rooms members on an occasional basis as fund-raising opportunities to provide additional income. This includes a Christmas party, annual Christmas raffle, Bingo night and various talks.

The Reading Rooms has a drinks and entertainments license and was previously involved in the Arts Out West scheme from 2010 to 2016 and hosted approximately 40 events, most of which were partly subsidised by the scheme, but several of which was fully underwritten by the Reading Rooms, with only a single event making a small loss. The Arts Out West scheme had most of its funding withdrawn in 2016 and the Reading Room a licensee that organised the events was unable to commit at the time to any further support due to personal commitments.



Options:

The Reading Rooms need to be self-sufficient and sustainable and need to generate an annual operating surplus both to cover outgoings and to provide funding for repairs and other incidental expenses. A range of options is available to increase the annual income of the Reading Rooms to generate an annual operating surplus, which include:

Increasing the hourly charge rate for the rooms from the current £9 /hour to one that is consistent with other similar facilities. The current rate is significantly below the market rate for a facility of its size and based on the relative affluence of the community, could easily sustain an increase to £12 /hour.



Increase income from community events – the committee members have re-invigorated the number of miscellaneous events which is expected to provide turnover of £1500 in 2022. Continuation and growth of these events would provide a secure revenue stream.

Increase the usage by more groups – the CLP identified a number of activities that residents would like to see on a weekly basis including Tai Chi, Pilates and Yoga, talks and film clubs. Recent discussions held with the local Scout group indicated an interest in the use of the facilities, but cost was an issue. A youth club is a desirable amenity to have but would need a dedicated group of people to run it.



Meeting rooms for businesses – business meetings were previously held in the Reading Rooms, but due to the lack of a suitable billing (credit card) facility, this was unable to continue. Food was provided where required through a local caterer, with income of approximately £100 for a full day rental. The use of the rooms for business meetings may not be compatible with other aims (i.e. cafe) as the potential for noise and lack of privacy may disrupt the meeting.





Annualised subscription per household

– charging a flat rate per household of £25 for unlimited use within a set limit would potentially increase income, although it is expected that this may initially only generate subscription from 30 households.

Annualised subscription for organisations

– charging a flat rate per organisation of £100, would provide savings for the organisation, hence potentially increasing the number of organisations and reduce the administrative burden of collecting revenues.



Entertainment events – the Reading Rooms had success previously in running entertainment events through the Arts Out West scheme and the CLP have recently run a number of well attended events, with substantial interest in further events. Initial revenue of £200 per event is a reasonable assumption and assuming 8 events a year would make a substantial contribution to revenue. The provision of a drinks cooler will increase revenue considerably.

Providing a cafe – A free drop-in cafe has been run as part of the CLP kick-starter activities and has proven to be a success and meets the aims of social engagement and reducing social isolation. The Reading rooms are situated on the route of the Hadrian's cycleway and cyclists have stopped and partook of refreshments. A longer term redevelopment of the facilities to include cafe facilities would provide substantial income and is a key amenity identified in the CLP.



Loyalty scheme – a number of loyalty schemes exist (e.g. www.easyfundraising.org.uk) which can be used to generate a source of funding for organisations and charities. People willing to subscribe to the scheme would nominate the Reading Rooms and a very small percentage of their everyday purchases would be donated to the Reading Rooms. The cumulative effect of multiple people subscribing can generate a reasonable source of income.



Investing in the Facilities

Substantial investment in the facilities is required to address the following:

Replace roof tiles that are damaged and have allowed water ingress on multiple occasions, causing damage to internal ceilings, fixtures and fittings

Replace the heating systems to reduce energy consumption

Modify the internal layout to improve capacity and make the space more amenable, welcoming and able to satisfy the needs of the users

Improve the thermal efficiency of the building by installing insulation in the roof space internally to reduce energy consumption

Improve the outside space to give better access and usability

Investment Strategy

It is planned that the vast majority of this investment will come from external grant bodies, in particular the GDF Community Partnership which is providing grants of up to £1M per year to the local community. Further grant initiatives may be forthcoming with the potential new nuclear reactor to be constructed adjacent to Beckermat.

An initial grant was provided by GDF Community Partnership to look at the feasibility of completely refurbishing the facilities and an initial scheme was developed in conjunction with an architectural consultancy. The scheme was costed at approximately £580k+VAT, which gave concern over the level of available funding and the need to match and grant with self-funding. The priorities for 2022/23 are to replace the roof, install insulation and replace the heating systems, with funding being sought in late 2022 to address these priorities.

Further funding will be sought in 2023 to address some of the constraints of the internal layout to improve usability. Seating arrangements are sub-optimal and will be also be considered in the same funding application.

It is proposed to internally fund the procurement of a drinks chiller cabinet and coffee-making machine to assist in generating revenue from alcohol and soft drinks sales and modification of the kitchen area with the installation of a bar. It has been suggested that an increase in occupancy may increase revenue by increasing the number of people who can attend an event. The maximum occupancy of the Reading Rooms is 60 people as dictated by the Fire Safety Risk Assessment and from experience, this would appear to be a limit from a comfort perspective. Increasing the available number of exits would not give any significant increase in permissible numbers.



Sound Governance

The CIC is run by a group of unpaid volunteers, with the only honoraria being a cleaner. The future financial success of the Reading Rooms will primarily be through increasing the usage of the facilities, thereby increasing the demand on volunteers. It is therefore considered necessary to employ a manager to run the facilities on a day-to-day basis and any budget will need to include the cost of employment / honorarium for this person.

A Health and Safety manager has been appointed to help the Reading Rooms maintain its legal obligations and minimise risk to the public. This has now been filled. The Reading Rooms has historically had a relatively small, ageing active membership who acted as the committee, but were not in a position to undertake increased involvement to deliver on the proposed activities and recommendations.

The formation of the CIC and the recent recruitment of Directors and Subscribers has gone some way to strengthening the governance of the new company and developing credible plans for the future. However, an increase in the number of active committee members is required to make the long-term operation of the Reading Rooms sustainable.



Sustainable Operations

Sustainability and the protection of our environment is important for all village residents, present and for future generations, and it is, therefore, a major consideration for this business plan. The UK government has stated its ambition to reach carbon neutrality by 2050 and everyone will be expected to play their part, including Beckermat residents, and their Reading Rooms facility. The current accepted benchmark is the UN sustainable development objectives. The Reading Rooms do in some part satisfy a number of the objectives, but there are significant further actions that we can take to improve on our current performance. In particular reducing energy consumption through better insulation, the use of sustainable energy, proper and safe access to recycling facilities, as well as using local suppliers to increase responsible consumption.

Other Considerations...

There are a number of forums for Village Halls to engage with other similar organisations and work together to promote the wider groups. It is recommended that we join the Cumbria Village Halls group and actively promote the events beyond the immediate environs of Beckermat.

On a wider note, there are a number of organisations within Beckermat which undertake activities for the benefit of the community and consideration needs to be given to the amalgamation of these into a single governance structure to maximise the benefits of collaborative endeavour.

Close links exist with both Calderbridge Village Hall and Ennerdale village "The Gather" and it is proposed to enter into a partnering arrangement that would benefit all three facilities working together to promote and host events.



Appendix A – Financial Model

| | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 | 2024 | 2025 | 2026 |
|--|--------------|---------------|---------------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|
| Income | | | | | | |
| Routine operational activities (lettings) ^[1] | 1361 | 2100 | 2800 | 3500 | 4300 | 5503 |
| Beverage food and alcohol sales ^[2] | | | 400 | 600 | 900 | 1200 |
| Fundraising efforts ^[4] | 352 | 1500 | 1600 | 1700 | 1800 | 2000 |
| Arts and Entertainment events ^[5] | | 600 | 1600 | 1900 | 2200 | 2400 |
| Loyalty scheme ^[3] | | 300 | 600 | 900 | 1200 | 1500 |
| CBC Business Support Relief | 9302 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| RWM grant | | 10000 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Events | | | | | | |
| Raffles | | 400 | 450 | 500 | 550 | 600 |
| Total Income | 11016 | 14900 | 7450 | 7900 | 10950 | 13203 |
| Expenditure | | | | | | |
| Electricity | 877 | 3200 | 3500 ^[6] | 3500 | 3500 | 3500 |
| Insurance | 554 | 592 | 616 | 640 | 666 | 693 |
| Cleaning | 320 | 960 | 998 | 1038 | 1080 | 1123 |
| Facilities Manager | | | 1000 | 1500 | 2500 | 3000 |
| Water Rates | 181 | 186 | 193 | 201 | 209 | 218 |
| Premises licences | 413 | 391 | 407 | 423 | 440 | 458 |
| Repairs / equipment | 409 | 750 | 780 | 811 | 844 | 877 |
| Wi-fi | | 75 | 300 | 312 | 324 | 337 |
| Investment expenditure from grants | | 10000 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Total expenditure | 2754 | 16,154 | 7,544 | 7,926 | 9,563 | 10,206 |
| Net surplus | 8,262 | -1,254 | -94 | -26 | 1,387 | 2,997 |

It is also proposed to take another £500 per year from reserves to invest in various amenities

Notes:

1. Assumes a gradual increase in lettings from current occupancy of approximately 4.5% to 12% occupancy over 5 years.
Previous years 2017 = £2728. Incorporates business meetings
2. Assumes coolers are purchased and installed in 2022/ early 2023
3. Assumes average member earnings of £50 per annum rising from 15 people in 2022 to 50 people in 2026



Appendix B – Sustainable Development Objectives

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015, provides a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future. At its heart are the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which are an urgent call for action by all countries – developed and developing – in a global partnership. They recognize that ending poverty and other deprivations must go hand-in-hand with strategies that improve health and education, reduce inequality, and spur economic growth. The Reading Rooms can realistically focus on and provide the greatest contribution against goals 3, 7, 11 and 12.



Goal 3 Health and Well Being – through providing modern facilities that allow residents to pursue fitness, recreation and social activities.

Goal 7 Affordable and Clean Energy – by improving the insulation in the building, improving the means of heating the building and by installing photovoltaic panels.

Goal 11 Sustainable Cities and Communities – through hosting more diverse and regular events will reduce the need for residents to travel for entertainment and social engagement.

Goal 12 Responsible Consumption and Production – use of local firms i.e. Ennerdale Brewery as suppliers for alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages.

Appendix C – Plan and Targets per financial year

2022 /23 Plan

- Consolidate conversion to a Community Interest Company
- Action this Business Plan
- Obtain funding for first phase of development covering:
 - Roof replacement
 - Insulation
 - Solar panels
 - New heating
- Decorate the internals Interview and employ a facilities manager



Photo credits: Stuart Tyson

2023/24 Plan

- Deliver the first phase of developments / upgrades
- Procure chiller cabinets and coffee machine to generate increased revenue from events and miscellaneous sales (from reserves)
- Implement a bar area adjacent to the kitchen (from reserves)
- Obtain funding for the second phase of development covering internal enhancements
- Provide new seating and tables in main room (from reserves)
- Host a regular series of entertainment events
- Deliver second phase of development / upgrades – internal upgrades:
 - Reconfigure the toilets
 - Provide storage in second room
 - Provide flexible partitioning
- Increase occupancy to 6.5% on a rolling basis
- Partner with other village halls

2024/25 Plan

- Obtain funding for third phase of development – external enhancements
- Partner with other local village halls to co-ordinate entertainment events
- Deliver third phase of development – external enhancements
- Host business meetings on a regular basis as an income generator
- Increase occupancy to 8% on a rolling basis