

FAQs Proposed office move

Why does Walmer Parish Council need an office? Most people are working from home now.

Although the current pandemic means that many people – including our own staff - are working from home, Walmer Parish Council needs a base. We have a large quantity of paper documents which need to be safely archived but which can be accessed by the public at certain times. We also act as a hub for reporting of all kinds of issues and concerns as well as payment of allotment fees and Brocante bookings, tourist information and advice on a variety of issues. If there was no prominent location, many people would struggle to access their local council.

Why does an office need to be on The Strand?

The office needs to be highly visible and accessible by as many people as possible. That is why we currently rent on The Strand. It is the commercial centre of Walmer and the most visited street by both residents and visitors.

This process feels rushed; what is the hurry?

The process has been brought about by a suitable suite of offices in good order becoming available at the right price and in the right location. The Council has not been hasty but has had to be proactive and move decisively in order to protect the Council's interest in the property.

What is wrong with the current office?

The fact that there is only one room means there is no quiet space for officers to work on complicated reports, for members of the public to meet their councillors or for councillors to hold small meetings. It serves well for most committee meetings, but it is already too small for the planning committee or full council meetings and the Council will be looking for a larger hall to hire once current social distancing restrictions ease.

Why are you considering purchasing an office?

It has always been the Council's intention to purchase a permanent base and that is why it has already built up significant sums. Councillors feel that purchasing rather than renting offers better long-term value to the taxpayer. A valuable asset will be held by the community.

The proposed property is a small cottage and not suitable for council meetings

The property has already been converted and until recently was used as a suite of five small offices which together provide a flexible work and meeting space. Small committee meetings can be accommodated there. Larger meetings will take place elsewhere once social distancing restrictions ease whether the Council moves or not.

If the Council purchases a property it will be responsible for its ongoing maintenance which could prove a burden on the taxpayer.

The property is in need of some minor refurbishment, but the Council sees this as an excellent opportunity to implement some energy efficiency measures and create an example of best practice within our community.

The council is only halfway through the fifteen year lease on its current rented accommodation. How can it afford to pay rent and loan repayments?

There is a clause in the lease which would allow it to be reassigned. In any interim period the draft budget has accommodated payment of both rent and loan repayments with only a small increase in precept.

What is meant by Community Hub?

Our current office already operates as community hub, tourist information, reporting and signposting to DDC or KCC, councillors' and police surgeries. We have extended our opening hours to reflect the demand we have for visitors to the office enquiring about a wide range of issues with which our staff are happy to assist. The new premises offers a more flexible layout in which a range of services could be provided at the same time so allowing several activities at once.

I didn't receive a consultation leaflet

We employed a reputable local company who assured us all addresses were visited and provided tracker maps to support this. Upon analysis we could see some streets had been omitted and we sought to rectify this as soon as possible. Staff delivered leaflets and also accepted comments via email. These were all counted as valid if a Walmer address was also provided.

The leaflets were not delivered with other junk mail, but singly.

The Council chose to leaflet every house but was not obliged to do so. The aim was to inform as many people as possible about the proposal and receive feedback. It was a consultation not a referendum.