

Meeting Record –Summary of meeting 2026 09 2 – 11am – Council Offices

Council Offices Refurbishment Project

Present

Cllr Gary Blandford-Hull (GBH)	Comms Officer – Neil Durrant (ND)
Cllr Pete Edge (PE)	Town Clerk – (BL)
Cllr Charlotte Blackman (CB)	

Apologies

Cllr Alexandra Boyd (AB)
Cllr Phil Matthews (PM)

This meeting was held as a project group meeting. The project group is not a formal committee of the Council and has no delegated decision-making authority. Its purpose is to review the available information, consider the options and develop a recommendation on the preferred scheme for submission to Full Council. Any recommendation made by the project group is advisory only, with the final decision(s) resting with Full Council.

Summary of meeting including actions

1. **Council Building Refurbishment Strategy:** GBH, PE, CB agreed to plan the council building refurbishment by defining the desired three-to-five-year outcome first, then sequencing essential repairs, internal reconfiguration and future improvements around professional advice, funding and budget constraints.
 - 1.1. **Long-Term Vision:** The group adopted a ‘start with the end in mind’ approach: first define what the building should provide in approximately three to five years, then work backwards to determine the repairs, layout, professional input and funding required.
 - 1.2. **Phased Delivery:** The proposed approach separates essential maintenance and structural repairs from later improvements. Priority one works are intended for approximately the next 12 months, priority two works for 12–24/36 months, and priority three works are longer-term, non-essential improvements dependent on funding and opportunity.
 - 1.3. **Professional Coordination:** The group identified a need for a project manager to programme and coordinate multiple contractors so that works do not conflict. The project manager would oversee delivery, while structural engineers would remain involved throughout the works to assess newly exposed defects, confirm repairs and support building safety at completion.
 - 1.4. **Structural Engineering Scope:** [Cooper Withycombe](#) provided an indicative proposal of approximately £23,050 +VAT covering structural appraisal, defect causes and priorities, crack monitoring, drainage survey, opening-up works, floor-load assessment, structural repair designs, heritage input, planning and building-regulation support, internal reconfiguration feasibility, construction inspections and completion safety inspections. The group agreed this should inform a properly prepared scope rather than being adopted directly.
 - 1.5. **Procurement Approach:** Because of council financial regulations, the group agreed to prepare a clear scope and seek comparable proposals from other structural engineers

with heritage-building experience. The existing proposal may be used as a reference for the scope, but the council will need to follow the appropriate tender or quotation process.

2. **Internal Layout and Accessibility:** GBH, PE and CB explored a potential layout comprising a museum, public-facing reception or visitor-information area, offices for at least four people, a flexible council chamber, an accessible toilet and kitchenette, while recognising that stairs, lift access, services and conservation requirements must be tested professionally.
 - 2.1. **Preferred Uses:** The emerging preferred concept is to convert the existing council chamber into museum space, create a more public-facing entrance or visitor-information/front-desk area, provide council offices for at least four people, establish a new council meeting chamber and retain kitchenette and new accessible toilet provision.
 - 2.2. **Office Capacity:** The group considered the office space too important to reduce below the current usable area and identified a need to accommodate at least four desks, furniture, filing and equipment, with flexibility for future staff growth or temporary contractor use.
 - 2.3. **Flexible Meeting Space:** The proposed meeting room should be large enough for normal council meetings and adaptable for larger attendance, potentially through a demountable acoustic partition or movable wall. The group discussed allowing space for approximately 25 members of the public, while using another venue such as the community centre for exceptionally large or contentious meetings if necessary.
 - 2.4. **Access And Facilities:** The layout must incorporate a lift, accessible toilet, appropriate toilet reconfiguration and a kitchenette. Possible lift and toilet positions were discussed in relation to existing plumbing, landings, stairs and upper-floor access, but no final arrangement was approved.
 - 2.5. **Stairs And Conservation:** The group examined whether the staircase could be reoriented or reduced to release more space, but this depends on floor-to-floor heights, tread standards, door swings, upper-floor access and potential intrusion into museum space. Conservation restrictions and existing high-level windows must be considered before any decision.
 - 2.6. **Services And Secure Storage:** Any layout must account for the electrical, gas and water mains entering the building. The group also discussed retaining or replacing the large safe used for ceremonial items, with possible alternatives including a smaller day-to-day safe and secure museum display, subject to security requirements.
3. **Architectural Planning and Costing:** The group agreed that an architect should develop compliant layout options before the structural-engineering brief is finalised, enabling the council to understand likely costs, priorities, temporary arrangements and the scale of the multi-year project before budget decisions.
 - 3.1. **Architect Appointment:** BL agreed to contact James Cusick (JC) from Then, Now, When architecture, who prepared the condition survey and has heritage and funding-application experience, to request a fee proposal for an exploratory meeting and initial reconfiguration work covering the ground and first floors, including stairs, lift, toilets and council functions.
 - 3.2. **Layout Options:** The architect is expected to translate the group's requirements into drawings and potentially provide options, allowing the council to compare ways of using the available space while complying with accessibility, building regulations, conservation requirements and practical office needs.
 - 3.3. **Brief Development:** The intended procurement package should combine the existing condition survey, measured plans and a clearly drawn desired internal arrangement. The

group stressed that a specific brief would make returned proposals more comparable, while still inviting professionals to suggest better alternatives.

- 3.4. **Cost Information:** JC's work should provide an early, non-binding indication of costs, helping the council distinguish the project costs and establish a more informed budget plan. The group noted that the condition survey and plans had previously cost approximately £3,400, but the new architectural fee still needs confirmation.
- 3.5. **Quotation Threshold:** The group discussed the requirement to obtain three quotes if the architectural work exceeds £5,000.

- 4. **Budgeting And External Funding:** The group discussed a likely three-year or longer delivery period, substantial contingency for unforeseen defects, annual funding requirements and the opportunity to pursue National Lottery or other grants for later internal improvements without treating essential maintenance as grant dependent.

- 4.1. **Project Duration:** The works are expected to span approximately three years or more, with essential repairs potentially delivered over two to three years and later reconfiguration dependent on design development and available funding.
- 4.2. **Contingency Allowance:** Because the building is old and surveys were limited, the group expects concealed defects to emerge when ceilings, floors or walls are opened. A contingency of roughly 20–25% was discussed, compared with a more typical 15–20% allowance for building projects.
- 4.3. **Annual Provision:** The group discussed setting aside a substantial annual sum, potentially around £100,000–£150,000, while recognising that the final figure depends on the architect's and structural engineer's estimates, inflation and the wider council budget.
- 4.4. **Grant Strategy:** Essential maintenance should proceed as a separate first stage, while the council prepares applications to the National Lottery and other funders for optional internal uses, such as a museum. The group noted that grant applications can support a later phase provided the funded scope is distinct from works already undertaken.
- 4.5. **Budget Preparation:** BL identified the forthcoming budget workshop and the October full council cycle as opportunities to present the emerging priorities, indicative costs, contingency and phased programme for formal consideration.

- 5. **Shared Project Information and Governance:** The group agreed to use SharePoint and a dedicated Teams channel for the Council Building project so members can access current documents, comment collaboratively, receive updates and reduce confusion caused by duplicated email attachments and generic subject lines.

- 5.1. **Shared Documents:** BL will provide links rather than attachments, including an editable meeting summary for comments. The shared Council Building folder will contain architect tenders, the condition survey, front-door works, measured-survey information, plans, meeting notes and technical documents.
- 5.2. **Access Controls:** Published meeting agendas and related records will remain view-only, while selected working documents will receive editable access so members can add comments and update information collaboratively.
- 5.3. **Teams Channel:** A dedicated Teams channel will be established for the project group, allowing members to post updates and messages in one place. The channel will initially be used as a trial with the relevant members.
- 5.4. **Training And Trial:** The group requested a practical demonstration or approximately one-hour training session covering SharePoint and Teams, with the Council Building project used as the trial case. BL also proposed introducing the system gradually through messages and shared links.

5.5. **File And Email Naming:** The group agreed that a project number and more specific document or email subject lines are needed, rather than repeatedly using broad labels such as 'toilet project' or 'council building project'. This is intended to make records easier to search and distinguish.

6. Follow-up tasks:

7. **Meeting Transparency:** Publish the project-group agenda and meeting summary on the council website and feed the summary into full council reporting. (BL/ ND)
8. **Architectural Reconfiguration:** Contact James Cusick (see 3.1) to obtain a fee proposal for an exploratory meeting and for developing compliant ground- and first-floor reconfiguration options covering the museum, visitor information/front desk, office space for up to four people, council chamber, accessible toilet, kitchenette, lift and stairs. (BL)
9. **Structural Engineering Brief:** Use the architect's proposed layout and the condition survey to prepare a comparable brief and seek proposals from additional structural engineers with heritage-building experience. (the project group)
10. **Repair Cost Planning:** Send the prioritised repair schedule to the group and develop indicative costs, phasing and contingency allowances for priority-one, priority-two and longer-term works to inform the forthcoming budget process. (BL/ND)
11. **Property Access:** Pursue formal access arrangements with the neighbouring residents so that the restricted northeast elevations can be inspected as part of the building assessment. (BL)
12. **Project Governance:** Develop a proposal for appointing a project manager to coordinate the structural, architectural and specialist works and prevent contractor conflicts. (the project group)
13. **Shared Project Records:** Set up the Council Building project workspace and Teams channel, provide appropriate editable access, and send document links rather than attachments for collaborative comments. (BL/ RoC)
14. **SharePoint Training:** Arrange a one-hour demonstration and practice session so project-group members can use the shared documents and Teams channel confidently. (ND)
15. **Email Filing:** Adopt specific project or workstream subject lines, including a project number where appropriate, for future correspondence about the council-building works. (the team)