

Report Title:	Petition for Debate – Town Hall
Contains Confidential or Exempt Information	No - Part I
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Andrew Johnson Cabinet Member for Business, Economic Development and Property
Meeting and Date:	Full Council – 25 January 2022
Responsible Officer(s):	Duncan Sharkey, Chief Executive Adele Taylor Executive Director of Resources
Wards affected:	St Mary's

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REPORT SUMMARY

A petition has been received and has secured 1581 signatures so will be debated at Full Council.

The [petition](#) says 'We the undersigned petition RBWM to retain the world famous Maidenhead Town Hall, to use it as its primary civic building, and waste no further council tax on plans to sell or relocate the civic and community heart of Maidenhead.'

This paper explains the current work underway and reinforces the point that the Council makes decisions once it has the facts to hand. It is recognised that the petitioners are making an emotive argument, as they have no factual basis on which to base their views, but this is not a valid position for the Council nor is it a basis for good decision making in public bodies.

1. DETAILS OF RECOMMENDATION(S)

RECOMMENDATION: That full Council notes the Petition and:

- i) **Agrees to continue to investigate the situation and report back to Members when appropriate for decision**

2. REASON(S) FOR RECOMMENDATION(S) AND OPTIONS CONSIDERED

Options

Table 1: Options arising from this report

Option	Comments
To continue to investigate the situation and report back to Members when appropriate for decision This is the recommended option	The current Town Hall building was purpose built and opened in 1962. The current building is an issue for the Council in meeting our climate change targets, needs significant expenditure (not currently in budgets) to bring the fabric and mechanical and electrical installations to an acceptable standard, is in need of a major refurbishment if the building is to remain as the Council's

Option	Comments
	main operational base over the next twenty years and must be reassessed once an understanding of the organisation's current space needs is collated. The Council has a duty to properly steward public assets and stopping any work to understand how these complicated matters come together and might be resolved would not be delivering value for money for the taxpayer nor meeting our statutory duties. The Council also has a duty of care to its employees and should ensure they are based in suitable accommodation that performs appropriately.
To stop work and continue with the status quo regardless of the implications.	This option would not be in line with the Council's statutory duty to deliver value for money nor with our legal responsibility to look after our staff and visitors.

- 2.1 The Town Hall is an ageing asset that has been underinvested for a number of years. The Council now has a detailed Asset Management Strategy that identifies the Town Hall as a key operational asset however we are still building our planned maintenance programme and without such a programme previously investment in the Town Hall has been responsive, dealing with issues as they arise. At present the fabric of the building requires an estimated £377k spend over the next five years above and beyond existing maintenance budgets just to bring the fabric to an acceptable standard. This does not represent any improvement to the building. There is a further need to undertake a full mechanical and electrical survey which it would be expected would require further investment outside of existing budgets. There has not been a full survey since the main systems were installed and it is important to ensure critical systems are safe, appropriate for the needs of the occupiers and operate on a value for money basis.
- 2.2 The building remains on the original footprint which is inflexible and does not support modern office-based working although some effort was made to cosmetically remodel internally to create more open spaces early last decade. The services in the building could not cope with the pre-pandemic use and caused regular issues and problems for the occupants. If the building is going to remain an office location for the next twenty to twenty-five years, there is a need to undertake a major refurbishment to bring the space up to a modern standard and ensure services can cope with demand. There was very limited public use of the building pre-pandemic as face-to-face Customer Service functions were handled at Maidenhead Library and with the exception of some scheduled customer interviews, public meetings (which are also held elsewhere) and registry functions, the public were not able to access the building.
- 2.3 In its current configuration the Town Hall would stop the council achieving our climate change target of carbon zero because the energy and thermal

performance is that of a 1960's building. The Energy Performance Certificate is rated as D/99. All public owned office buildings must meet EPC rating E and this standard will be increased over coming years meaning that the building would fail to meet the legal requirement without remedial works which needs to be scoped. No funding is allocated for such works.

- 2.4 The Town Hall was not fully utilised prior to the pandemic but clearly with changing working habits there is likely to be considerable 'spare' space. An assessment needs to be prepared to map out the Council's space requirements to ascertain how much of the building could be considered surplus to requirements. Once that has been established work would then need to be undertaken to understand if that surplus space could be used and accessed independently of the rest of the building.
- 2.5 Consideration must be given to the Desborough Suite as well. Although not covered in the petition, the Suite is physically attached to the Town Hall. Any decisions about the long-term use of the Town Hall must be informed by, and inform, the future use of the Desborough Suite. Currently the Desborough Suite is being used as a vaccine centre has been closed to the public for 'normal' use since March 2020. The Desborough Suite can be used as a theatre and has a maximum capacity of just under 300 (layout depending). There are no immediate plans to reopen the space as the use as a vaccine centre is likely to continue for some time. A replacement space for both theatre and concerts, the Baylis Theatre, has been provided as part of the Braywick Leisure Centre. This has approximately 600 maximum capacity. Pre-pandemic the Desborough Suite, whilst popular with those who did use it, was poorly used and has never made a commercial return meaning it is subsidised through Council Tax. There is also a need to create a planned maintenance programme for the Desborough Suite (if retained) as the facility, like the Town Hall, has been underinvested in and there would be a one-off maintenance and servicing cost to reopen the Suite as a theatre, which is not within current budgets. Cox Green and Desborough Schools also have theatre space.
- 2.6 All existing buildings have an amount of 'embedded carbon' and if any proposals for significant structural remodelling or demolition were to be brought forward this would be something that requires further investigation and understanding.
- 2.7 Turning more directly to the petition itself, it is noted that the petitioners believe the building to be 'world famous.' However, it is more accurate to say the building is well known in Maidenhead, but is not listed, nor is it in the [conservation area](#). The building has been referred to as a non-designated heritage asset but there is no evidence of the building being special or unique that the Council is aware of.
- 2.8 The petition also suggests the Council should stop work considering the future of the Town Hall, which would clearly be inappropriate. The Council as the owner of the asset, employer of staff based in the building and the guardian of the public purse – with a duty of achieving best value - will at some point over the next few years need to come to a conclusion about the Town Hall's future and make the substantial investments that would follow any decision. It is vital that any such decisions are as well informed by evidence as possible.
- 2.9 All these elements must come together with the best information to enable decision makers to conclude the future of the building.

3. KEY IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 Work has started, but has been considerably delayed, in pulling together the disparate elements of information and shaping some conclusions.
- 3.2 The high-level timeline that is being worked to is:
- Q1 2022-23 maintenance costs and high-level refurbishment costs to be presented to Cabinet seeking a steer as to the way forward.
 - Q2 2022-23 options appraisal pulled together and work to assess each option commenced.
 - Late Q4 2022-23 or Q1 2023-24 results of optional appraisal completed, and Cabinet asked to make final decision about the investments to be made.
- 3.3 Under all options the end result must be a sustainable low or no carbon civic centre and operational base for the Council for at least the next twenty-five years. It should go without saying that the preferred option must be fit for purpose, affordable and represent long term value for the taxpayer.

4. FINANCIAL DETAILS / VALUE FOR MONEY

- 4.1 There are no financial implications of this report. However, there will be some considerable costs in pulling together all the information required to make a final decision about the future use of the Town Hall. There will be project management, consultancy work across a spectrum of specialisms including environmental, mechanical and electrical, space planning, market assessment and legal, and internal consultations about future operational requirements. All of this work will need to be funded and only limited costs will be able to be met by existing budgets. Decision making reports in the future must identify how such costs will be covered.
- 4.2 There will also be considerable time invested from Council Officers and PropCo colleagues.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 There are no legal implications of this report specifically, but it is worth noting that:
- Local Authorities are under a duty of Best Value - Section 3 of the Local Government Act 1999 (as amended by s137 of the Local Government & Public Involvement in Health Act 2007).
 - The Councils statutory duty to have a petition scheme was repealed by s46 of the Localism Act 2011. Although no longer a duty, the Council has retained its petition scheme in the interests of promoting democracy.

6. RISK MANAGEMENT

- 6.1 There are no risks directly as a result of this report but before reaching any final decision all the risks of each option must be assessed and weighed.

7. POTENTIAL IMPACTS

- 7.1 Equalities. Equality Impact Assessments are published on the council's website. None as a result of this report
- 7.2 Climate change/sustainability.
Climate action and sustainability in its widest sense must be at the heart of the decisions that are finally reached. One of the drivers for this work is the fact that the building as it currently operates is a significant impediment to the Council achieving its long-term climate targets. Pulling together all the relevant assessments and information about how these objectives can be delivered will be complicated and expensive but must be done to inform decision making.
- 7.3 Data Protection/GDPR.
None as a result of this report.

8. CONSULTATION

This is not a decision-making report but a report that responds to a petition. No consultation has been undertaken.

9. APPENDICES

- 9.1 This report is supported by one appendix:
- Appendix A – Equality Impact Assessment

10. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

- 10.1 None

11. CONSULTATION

Name of consultee	Post held	Date sent	Date returned
<i>Mandatory:</i> Statutory Officers (or deputies)			
Adele Taylor	Executive Director of Resources/S151 Officer	23/12/21	23/12/2021
Emma Duncan	Deputy Director of Law and Strategy / Monitoring Officer	23/12/21	01/01/22
<i>Deputies:</i>			
Andrew Vallance	Head of Finance (Deputy S151 Officer)	-	-

Elaine Browne	Head of Law (Deputy Monitoring Officer)	10/01/2022	10/01/2022
Karen Shepherd	Head of Governance (Deputy Monitoring Officer)	23/12/21	4/1/22
<i>Directors (where relevant)</i>			
Duncan Sharkey	Chief Executive	N/A	N/A
Andrew Durrant	Executive Director of Place	23/12/21	04/01/22
Kevin McDaniel	Executive Director of Children's Services	23/12/21	23/12/21
Hilary Hall	Executive Director of Adults, Health and Housing	23/12/21	23/12/21

Confirmation relevant Cabinet Member(s) consulted	Cabinet Member for Business, Economic Development and Property	Yes
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ROYAL BOROUGH OF WINDSOR AND MAIDENHEAD

EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

EqlA : Petition for Debate – Town Hall

Essential information

Items to be assessed: (please mark 'x')

Strategy		Policy		Plan		Project	X	Service/Procedure	
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Responsible officer	Duncan Sharkey	Service area	N/A	Directorate	Chief Executive
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Stage 1: EqlA Screening (mandatory)	Date created: 10/01/2022	Stage 2 : Full assessment (if applicable)	Date created : N/A
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Approved by Head of Service / Overseeing group/body / Project Sponsor:

I am satisfied that an equality impact has been undertaken adequately.

Signed by (print): Duncan Sharkey

Dated: 10/01/2022

ROYAL BOROUGH OF WINDSOR AND MAIDENHEAD

EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

EqIA : Petition for Debate – Town Hall

Stage 1 : Screening (Mandatory)

1.1 What is the overall aim of your proposed strategy/policy/project etc and what are its key objectives?

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This paper explains the current work underway and reinforces the point that the Council makes decisions once it has the facts to hand. It is recognised that the petitioners are making an emotive argument, as they have no factual basis on which to base their views, but this is not a valid position for the Council nor is it a basis for good decision making in public bodies.

The Council has a general Duty of Best Value to “make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness.” This means we must diligently manage the assets we own. To do this it is necessary to undertake studies or analysis, investigate options and come to considered decisions, after consideration of the available evidence.

1.2 What evidence is available to suggest that your proposal could have an impact on people (including staff and customers) with protected characteristics? Consider each of the protected characteristics in turn and identify whether your proposal is Relevant or Not Relevant to that characteristic. If Relevant, please assess the level of impact as either High / Medium / Low and whether the impact is Positive (i.e. contributes to promoting equality or improving relations within an equality group) or Negative (i.e. could disadvantage them). Please document your evidence for each assessment you make, including a justification of why you may have identified the proposal as “Not Relevant”.

ROYAL BOROUGH OF WINDSOR AND MAIDENHEAD

EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

EqIA : Petition for Debate – Town Hall

Protected characteristics	Relevance	Level	Positive/negative	Evidence
Age	Not Relevant			
Disability	Relevant	Low	Positive	Any consideration of the current operation of the Town Hall will consider how well the building meets current accessibility standards. Any refurbishment or alternative provision would be judged against the most recent standards and would certainly represent improved accessibility.
Gender re-assignment	Not Relevant			
Marriage/civil partnership	Not Relevant			
Pregnancy and maternity	Not Relevant			
Race	Not Relevant			

ROYAL BOROUGH OF WINDSOR AND MAIDENHEAD

EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

EqIA : Petition for Debate – Town Hall

Religion and belief	Relevant	Low	Positive	<p>Any refurbishment or alternative provision would need to make sure sufficient and appropriate space was available to support the personal reflections of colleagues. Currently the Town Hall has very limited space for this purpose.</p> <p><i>Key data: The 2011 Census indicates that 62.3% of the local population is Christian, 21.7% no religion, 3.9% Muslim, 2% Sikh, 1.8% Hindu, 0.5% Buddhist, 0.4% other religion, and 0.3% Jewish. [Source: 2011 Census, taken from Berkshire Observatory]</i></p> <p><i>For the Council the figures are 38.1% Christian, 26.6% no religion, 3.1% Muslim, 2.7% Sikh, 2.6% Hindu, 0.5% Buddhist, 1.3 % other religion, and 0.5% Jewish. 24.5% of colleagues choose not to disclose the religion or belief. (Source RBWM Workforce Profile June 2021)</i></p>
Sex	Not Relevant			
Sexual orientation	Not Relevant			

ROYAL BOROUGH OF WINDSOR AND MAIDENHEAD

EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

EqlA : Petition for Debate – Town Hall

Outcome, Action, and Public Reporting

Screening Assessment Outcome	Yes / No / Not at this stage	Further Action Required / Action to be taken	Responsible Officer and / or Lead Strategic Group	Timescale for Resolution of negative impact / Delivery of positive impact
Was a significant level of negative impact identified?	No	None	N/A	N/A
Does the strategy, policy, plan etc. require amendment to have a positive impact?	No	None	N/A	N/A