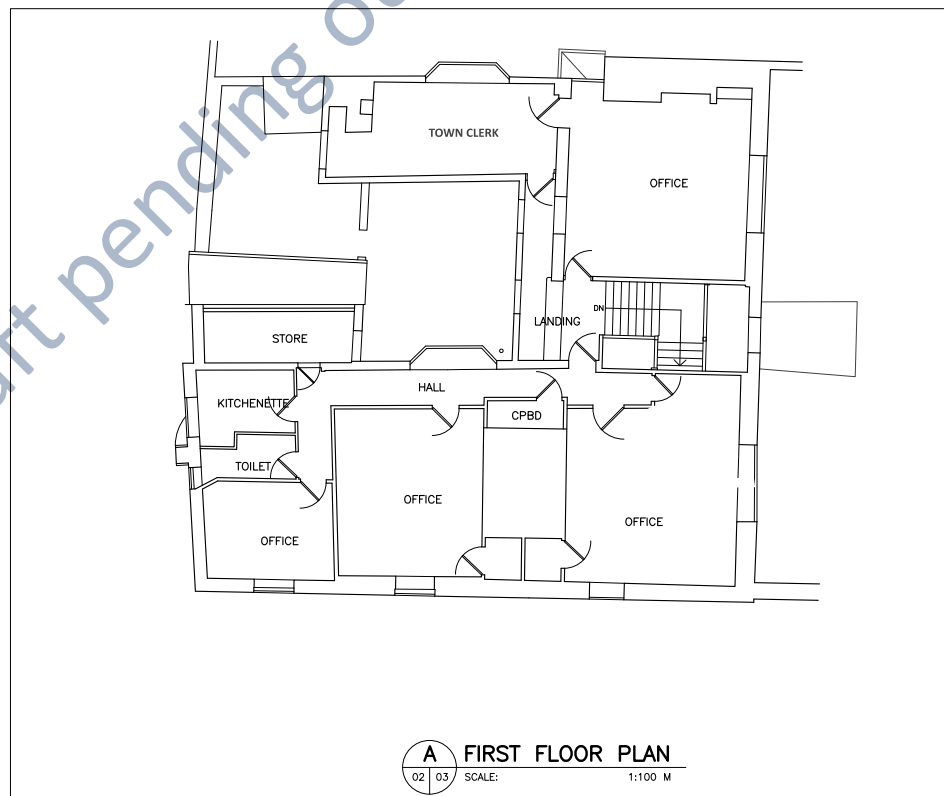
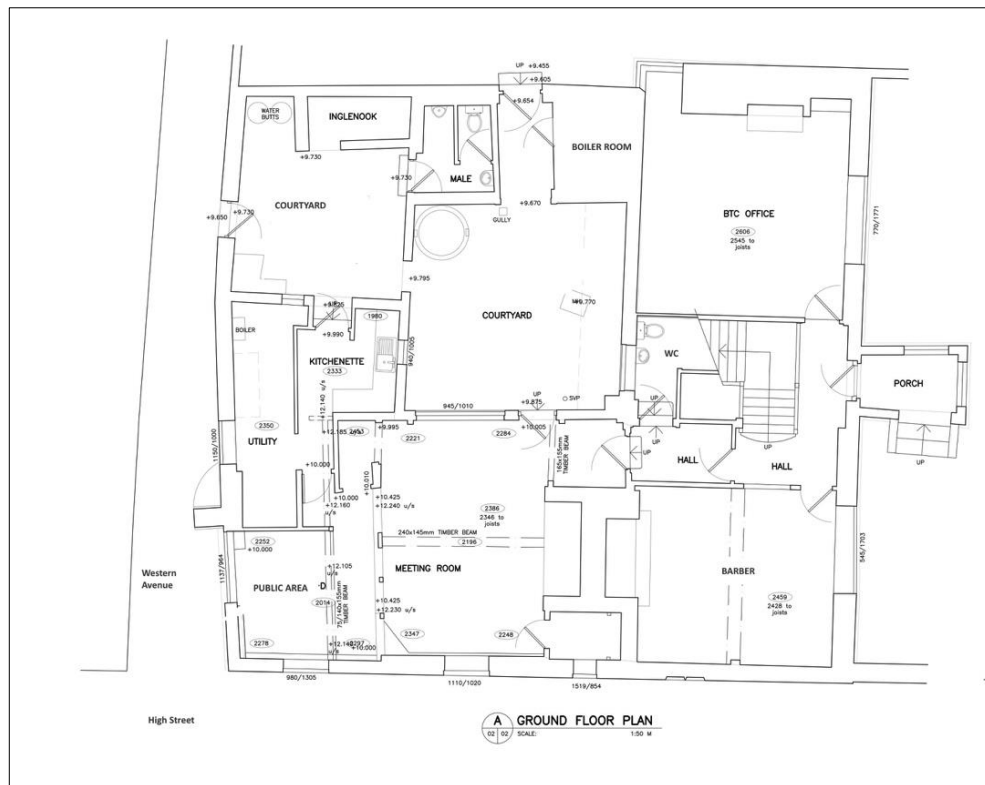


# STRATEGIC PLAN FOR THE ALMONRY

ABRIDGED



## Plan of the Almonry - current layout



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## **1. Introduction**

### **1.1 The Almonry**

The Almonry, 69 & 70 High Street, Battle, is a Grade II\* listed oak framed timber house, built in the C15. It has since been partially rebuilt, added to and some parts even demolished over the centuries. The Almonry was part of the Battle Abbey estate until 1926, when it was sold into private hands. In the 1970s, the property was sold to East Sussex County Council to enable the garden to be incorporated into the redevelopment of the adjacent market site. In 1987, Battle Town Council purchased the Almonry House and Gardens for £110,000 with a Public Works Loan Board loan, as it was felt that the house should be secured as part of Battle's heritage.

### **1.2 The Vision for the Almonry**

- To improve the facilities at the Almonry to better serve the Town Council and the community
- To preserve and promote the heritage of the Almonry building in accordance with Battle Town Council's Heritage Charter
- To boost the local economy by serving as a centre that will support and promote the heritage offering in the town for residents, businesses, and tourists

## **2. The Facility**

### **2.1 Current use**

Since the purchase of the Almonry in 1987 various attempts have been made to make it financially viable (as a heritage centre, café and shop) but its lasting use has been as Town Council Offices. The Council currently has use of a general office, shared with a Rother District Council Customer Services Officer, a large meeting room, used for Town Council and other meetings, and a Town Clerk's office. A further five rooms - one on the ground floor and four on the first floor - are let to tenants, and the Arts Council Accredited Battle Museum of Local History is housed in the Almonry grounds. The meeting room and the 'arbour' in the award winning gardens are currently licensed as a wedding venue. (The Licence is valid until 17<sup>th</sup> July 2021 and renewal will be considered after the building works are completed.)

### **2.2 Condition**

A building condition survey undertaken in 2019 reported that "the building appears to be in reasonable condition however, there are several repair and maintenance works which are required in the short-term and longer-term. Where past repairs have been undertaken some have been carried out using inappropriate materials that have caused further decay, such as hard cement mortars for repointing or short-term fixes such as uPVC rainwater goods and single-ply roofing systems painted over the original defective material."

### **2.3 Accessibility**

Residents with reduced mobility, such as wheelchair/mobility scooter users, must currently access the building by ringing a bell on the outside wall. They then have to be redirected to the side gate on Western Avenue and helped into the Almonry through the kitchen by way of a portable ramp. The meeting room has no hearing loop and it is accessed from the hallway by a steep ramp. There are no toilet facilities suitable for visitors or staff with reduced mobility. Different internal levels and steps down to the one internal toilet make negotiating the building difficult for those with impaired sight.

### **3. Needs Analysis**

Any proposals for the future use of the Almonry need to meet the needs of potential users and support the development of the town as a whole.

#### **3.1 Battle Town Council**

At the 2011 Census, the population in Battle numbered 6673, with a slightly higher percentage of females to males. The working age population was only slightly higher than the 'dependent' population, with relatively low numbers of young adults (15-44) but much higher numbers of older age groups. There were high numbers of one parent households, probably reflecting the relatively elderly population, living alone following the death of a spouse. The housing requirement for Battle up to 2028 was 475 dwellings in Battle and 48 dwellings in Netherfield, as allocated by Rother District Council Core Strategy 2014. This includes the housing requirement that will be met by the Blackfriars site (BA11)/ Tollgates & Lillybank developments and other smaller developments given Planning Permission since 2011. This development will significantly increase the population, thus increasing the need not only for social and leisure facilities, but also support services.

##### **3.1.1 Services**

The Town Council is responsible for four allotment sites, a cemetery and the closed churchyard at the Parish Church of St Mary, local street lighting, bus shelters and playing fields. The Council's responsibility for tourism is met through close relationships with other organisations. Since 2011 it has proactively expanded its services, developing the 'new' cemetery, increasing its management of woodland and wildlife areas and starting a development programme for the Recreation Ground with new sports and play facilities. Further improvements are included in the Council's Action Plan, including the replacement of the Pavilion with modern day changing facilities and a clubroom/refreshment area. The Council has collaborated with the Battle Health Pathway project team to build all-weather pathways within the Rec, together with a cycle skills track and nature garden.

### 3.1.2 Council needs

- The Town Council office is proportionately understaffed compared with other councils in the area. It is likely that additional office staff will need to be accommodated within the next three to five years in order to support the growing population and the ambitions of the Council to better serve residents, workers and visitors and also develop the town. Additional office space will therefore be required.
- A large, welcoming Reception area is needed to accommodate a one-stop-shop for BTC and RDC enquiries and information.
- A formal Council meeting room, to be used for both formal and informal meetings needs to accommodate a table large enough to seat 14 plus sufficient space for the viewing public.
- Rooms on the first floor are required for letting in order to provide an income for the Council. In October 2019, a survey was undertaken that showed a need for improvements to the heating, toilet facilities, kitchen facilities and security (Appendix A). It is clear that the heating system, water system, kitchen and toilet facilities need to be repaired and that lighting and fire safety need to be improved.

### 3.2 Services providing social support

Residents from Battle and surrounding villages in need of specialist advice about Rother District Council services often find it difficult to travel to the Town Hall in Bexhill due to time, finances or lack of suitable transport options. One to one and small group meetings to provide specialist RDC help and advice could be arranged for residents of Battle and villages such as Ashburnham, Mountfield, Netherfield, Robertsbridge, Salehurst and Sedlescombe at The Almonry who could travel on the Community Bus service, which accepts bus passes. Small rooms are also required for the local MP's surgeries and for help and advice sessions by specialist providers such as the Citizens' Advice Bureau, Age UK, mental health groups and veterans associations (in line with the town's obligations under Armed Forces Covenant signed by Battle Town Council).

### 3.3 Community groups and organisations

Community meeting rooms are available at the Memorial Halls and Emmanuel Centre but there is a shortage of small meeting rooms in the town. Several small community groups meet at The Almonry, but verbal reports have been received that other groups are put off by the standard of the facilities. Key requirements are acceptable kitchen and toilet facilities, good lighting and heating and security for those using the building at night.

There is also a need for a centre that organisations can call their own. One very interesting recommendation from the community is the formation of a Civic Society group in Battle, based at The Almonry, which would provide a drop-in hub for the town. Staffed by volunteers, this would act as an extremely useful independent link between the Town Council and community groups. Information about current issues and Council projects could be displayed so that views can be collected and analysed where local clubs and organisations would be encouraged to display details of their activities, meeting times and contact details. The President of the Chamber of Commerce might also find desk space useful within the civic hub in order to provide a presence for local businesses.

### **3.4. Tourism and Heritage**

#### **3.4.1 Heritage of the Almonry**

Although the Almonry garden is open, public access to the building is limited to the Council office for enquiries etc and to the meeting room to attend Council meetings. Visitors cannot access these rooms to just look around them. When residents do have a reason to visit The Almonry for the first time, they invariably mention how wonderful the building is. This is a sad reflection on how the building is not being seen, let alone used, by the residents who own it.

In 2017, a series of open days were held at The Almonry, to solicit opinions and comment from the community on a grant funded project. They also published an online community opinion survey via Survey Monkey. The top heritage project that respondents wanted Battle Town Council to pursue was the restoration and conversion of the Almonry and Gardens into a Town Heritage centre, linking with the museum to explain the architectural heritage of the building and the valuable local heritage located in the development of the town, trade and Industry, including Iron working and gunpowder, war and conflict, the tradition of non-conformism, radicalism and suffrage.

#### **3.4.2 The needs of tourism in Battle**

In January 2020, Battle Town Council agreed unanimously to support the Battle UNESCO World Heritage status bid. This could give Battle a new global identity and raise its profile around the world, resulting in increased international tourism. If the bid is successful, Battle would be able to access funds from a global body to protect and conserve the site.

#### **3.4.3 The economic benefit of tourism**

The centre of Battle is a conservation area with over 50 listed buildings, providing a rare showcase of historically important buildings, laid out in their original planned configuration, mainly opening onto open countryside and, as such, providing significant value and interest to both visitors, academics, architectural historians and town planners. Despite this value however, the High Street and its environs, including Upper Lake, are currently at critical risk due to modern day issues related to traffic, pollution, planning pressure and changing consumer-spending habits. Coupled with recent economic austerity following the financial crisis of 2007-08, this has resulted in the town's increasing reliance on tourism, evidenced by the high propensity of cafes, coffee shops and small gift shops in the town. Anecdotal accounts from traders, the Chamber of Commerce and major venues such as St. Mary's Church, support this evidence, with the majority identifying the difficulties they are facing attracting sufficient paying clientele as a major constraint to their opportunity to adequately maintain their property, grow their businesses or simply remain financially viable.



### 3.4.4 The need for a Tourist Information Point

Research by 1066 Marketing between 2009 and 2016 indicated that 70% of people visiting Battle stated History and Heritage as their primary influence, but the town has no Tourist Information Centre to widen their interest and length of stay in the town. The majority of visitors who come to Battle, do so to visit Battle Abbey and are predominantly unaware of the breadth and depth of Battle town's stand alone architectural, social, economic and cultural history. This is also the case for tour operators who usually do not allow sufficient time for visitors to explore the town, focusing only on the Abbey site and Battlefield or who just use Battle for a 'comfort stop'.

Within the large amount of research which was undertaken for the Heritage Lottery application, it was found that: 'for those visitors who do arrive specifically to explore the town's history and environment, the research and anecdotal evidence from social media suggests that they find the town inaccessible and difficult to navigate and the heritage difficult to access or interpret. The outcome of these issues is a sense of disappointment and frustration, resulting in complaints to those they encounter and on social media. They leave early and fail to return or promote the town in a positive light to their friends and family.'

There is an urgent need for a centrally located Tourist Information Point providing leaflets, advice, exhibitions and information videos to inspire visitors to explore areas of the town that they may be unaware of. Basing such a service in the Almonry would meet this need and be of great benefit to the town.

## 4. Options

### 4.1 Overview:

The refurbishment and redevelopment of the Almonry had been integral to the Finance and General Purposes Committee's Action Plan since 2015. A Working Group, set up under the then Deputy Mayor, proposed that the Town Council should apply for a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund to enable the extension of the Almonry by reinstating the original wing over the rear courtyard and the removal of partitions so as to enable the internal space to be reconfigured. A conservation architect was appointed and planning permission was obtained.

In August 2018 a proposal was submitted to the Heritage Lottery Fund for the creation of a Heritage Education and Tourist Information Centre at The Almonry. The application was unsuccessful. Council agreed that the building work to renovate and extend The Almonry should be actioned by applying to the Public Works Loan Board(PWLB) for up to £600,000 to be repaid over 50 years, with any remaining costs being met through the Almonry Repairs Earmarked Reserve, Community Infrastructure Levy monies and possibly grant funding from Rother District Council. It was acknowledged that it would be necessary to increase the precept to cover these costs, but the loan would be at a fixed rate and, if applied for immediately, the Council would benefit from current low interest rates. It was thought that if there was a delay until after Brexit, interest rates were likely to be higher.

In response to a request seeking public opinion regarding the Council's proposal to apply for up to £600,000 from the Public Works Loan Board, only 11 responses were received. All supported refurbishment of the Almonry, with four varied recommendations to restrict the works to urgent



repairs initially. Due to concerns raised by this group of residents and a suggestion to undertake a further consultation, the application was delayed.

In May 2019, a new Council was elected and a new Working Group was formed to take the 'Almonry Development Project' forward. Battle Town Council considered many options and offered all the viable possibilities for comment by residents in a questionnaire circulated in the Annual Report (Appendix B). These options ranged from selling The Almonry and re-siting the Council offices to repairing and refurbishing the building and rebuilding the south wing to provide a Town Hall encompassing Council offices with space for a wide range of social, tourist and heritage services, together with a community facility, that has full public access. Transfer of heritage responsibilities to the National Trust or English Heritage was explored but found not to be feasible since neither body was willing or able to take this on.

The main options and the cost of associated works (using the lowest tender received and not taking into account reductions which were under negotiation) were as follows:

- Option 1 Repair and refurbishment, removing partition walls and reconfiguring existing space, rebuilding of the south wing to add new space at ground and first floor levels £685,248
- Option 2 Repair and refurbishment, removing partition walls and reconfiguring existing space £535,127
- Option 3 Repair only, to include works to make the building safe and replacement of failing services £340,805
- Option 4 Sell The Almonry

103 residents completed the questionnaire and 23 people did not complete the questionnaire, but responded 'no to all options'.

The repair only option would necessitate relocating the Council to other premises and selling the property would necessitate relocating the Council and the Museum. Within the 103 responses, there was a clear message to the Council - there was little support (11%) for moving the Council from The Almonry - Options 3 and 4.

Together, the responses to all the questions provided evidence that the Council must now find a way to bring The Almonry up to an acceptable standard and keep it as a Council office.

The responses to Options 1 and 2 did not offer a decisive result, but, given that there was no appetite within Council to increase the precept, Members could not dismiss the responses to Question 1a - *Do you want a Battle Civic Centre (the name of which has been revised to Battle Town Hall), which is future proofed and accessible by disabled people, if the Parish precept does not have to be increased?* which was supported by 54% of respondents.

Battle Town Council considered the recommendations from the Working Group, together with the results of the questionnaire and comments from residents in its deliberations in order to come to a decision regarding the future of The Almonry.

#### 4.2 Revised option:

The Working Group felt that the combined responses required Council to agree a way to bring The Almonry up to an acceptable standard and keep it as Council offices without an increase in the precept. The group noted that the post-COVID-19 economic climate would inevitably affect the grant funding that may be available, as well as income from Community Infrastructure Levy payments.

The Finance & General Purposes Committee agreed the recommendation from the Working Group for a compromise option for works to ensure the heritage building is a safe, efficient working environment that fulfils the Council's statutory and moral obligations, and which meets the Council's desire to support the town's post-COVID-19 recovery through tourism.

##### 4.2.1 Works agreed:

Repairs and renovations included in original tender specification plus roof/chimney repairs etc consequent to the decision not to rebuild the south wing:

- roof (internal and external, including insulation)
- fascia (tiles and masonry)
- windows
- internal and external woodwork (including doors, panelling, repairs to main staircase)
- internal walls and ceilings (removal of artex paper not to be undertaken)
- services included in original tender specification including heating, wiring (including fire and intruder alarms, lighting, small power) and induction loop

Improvements to WC provision to include:

- installation of a wheelchair accessible toilet within the building
- refurbishment of under-stairs WC as an ambulant accessible WC
- new sanitary ware and water heater in upstairs WC
- refurbishment of outside WC as two unisex cubicles with new sanitary ware and water heater

Improvements to kitchen provision to include:

- installation of downstairs kitchenette with new units, water heater, refrigerator, dishwasher and folding door
- refurbishment of upstairs kitchen

Provision of disabled access:

- installation of lift to rear of porch
- removal of partition at foot of the staircase to provide better light and space at entrance
- re-grading of driveway

Provision of a low cost Tourist Information Point:

- removal of the partition wall to barber's shop

#### **4.2.3 Benefits:**

- Public, fully accessible Council offices
- Formal Council meeting room;
- Town and District Councils information hub in a customised space;
- Battle's only publicly owned heritage building will remain in public ownership;
- Tourist Information Point for visitors;

#### **4.2.4 Projected Project Costs:**

Council agreed that costs for the works should be sought through retendering.

Item	Amount	Comments
Repairs and renovations included in original tender specification <b>plus</b> roof/chimney repairs etc consequent to change of plans, <b>minus</b> removal of artex paper	£163,560.24	roof (internal and external, including insulation) fascia (tiles and masonry) windows internal and external woodwork (including doors, paneling, repairs to main staircase) internal walls and ceilings (minus removal of artex) other
Services included in original tender specification including heating	£137,409.97	wiring (including fire and intruder alarms, lighting, small power) induction loop  New services eg water and sewerage for wheelchair WC are included in those separate costs
WCs	£10,998.58	Installation of wheelchair accessible WC: making good floors and ceilings: removal of non-historic partitions to facilitate access to the WC and kitchenette area new doors non-structural partitions sanitary ware wall and floor finishes waste, water and electrical services external extract ventilation water heater  Refurbishment of under-stairs WC: raising the floor in under-stairs WC & making good renewing sanitary ware replacing water heater  New sanitary ware and water heater for upstairs WC  Refurbishment of outside WC as two unisex cubicles: new sanitaryware, partitions doors decoration water heater
Kitchens	£8,832.47	Installation of downstairs kitchenette: new units new water heater white goods (refrigerator and dishwasher) folding door  Refurbishment of upstairs kitchen

Item	Amount	Comments
Disabled access	£31,842.12	Installation of exterior platform lift to main entrance: building work proprietary lift to rear of porch (power from cellar) re-level porch floor and brick steps extend rear window opening from new ground level to suitable height hi-contrast signage for visually impaired people remove partition at foot of the staircase to provide better light and space at entrance Re-grading driveway
Tourist Information Point	£2,619.16	remove partition wall to barber's shop make good walls and ceiling level floor
Shared items into above headings but not specific to any one	£31,089.47	Items that cannot be identified in the above items
Main Contractor Prelims	£69,881.31	
Main Contractor Overheads and Profits	£38,635.20	
Provisional Sums	£28,100.00	
Dayworks	£10,225.00	
Contingency	£40,000.00	
<b>Tender Sum to Form of Tender</b>	<b>£573,193.52</b>	Overall tender sum
Temporary relocation costs	£15,000	This takes into account that remaining tenants have been working from home and may be willing to do so again for an agreed period.
Professional fees	TBC	Architect, quantity surveyor, M&E engineer and structural engineer.
<b>Total</b>	<b>TBC</b>	

**4.2.5 Projected Project Funding**

Source	Amount	Date Applied	Confirmed	Comments
BTC Earmarked Reserve - Tourist Information Point	£2,620	N/A	EMR	
Almonry Project budget	£21,000	N/A	Budget	Transferred to an EMR at the end of 2019/20
Almonry Maintenance budget	£12,000	N/A	Budget	Transferred to an EMR at the end of 2019/20
Public Works Loan Board	£600,000			Oct 2020 - Council agreed to apply to PWLB for a borrowing facility of up to £600,000.
BTC Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funds	TBA			Available when work starts on housing development(s) e.g. Oct 2019/Mar 20 £42,660 received
RDC Strategic CIL funds	£43,000 TBA			Not available until after Dec 2020  Facilities for disabled
Covid-19 Emergency - Heritage At Risk Response Fund	£25,000			Towards repairs  Closing date - end of Nov 2020
RDC Community Fund	£30,000			Towards a discrete item within the project
RDC Capital funding	£5,000 TBA			Approach RDC for capital funding contribution towards accommodation for services provision

**4.2.6 Projected Annual Income:**

Source	Amount	Comments
Rent from tenants	£15,500	Rents reviewed per agreements
Room hire	£3,000	Should increase further when improved facilities can be seen
Weddings	£1,000	Subject to re-licensing. May increase further when improved facilities can be seen and building work is completed. Small venues in demand due to ongoing COVID-19 restrictions.

**4.2.7 Financial Risk Assessment**

Without funding in place, the project cannot go ahead.

The cost of borrowing from the Public Works Loan Board increased between the decision in December 2018 to apply for a loan of up to £600,000 and present day. When the decision was made, the fixed annual repayments over a 50 year period were £21,000. The annual budget has an allowance to meet repayments at that level. Due to inflation, the purchasing power of the annual repayments is likely to diminish quite considerably over a period of 50 years. The Council had not applied for the loan because of public concerns. In the meantime the interest rate increased. Annual repayments for the full amount would now be approximately £29,000. The current annual budget of £21,000 for repayments would enable borrowing of only £450,000 at current rates (31<sup>st</sup> October 2020). The Council has an additional £21k in Ear Marked Reserve for this project due to the delay in the application for the agreed loan facility.

The value of the property is projected to be £527,000 if repairs and refurbishment are undertaken, £480,000 if only the repairs are undertaken and £445,000 in its current condition.



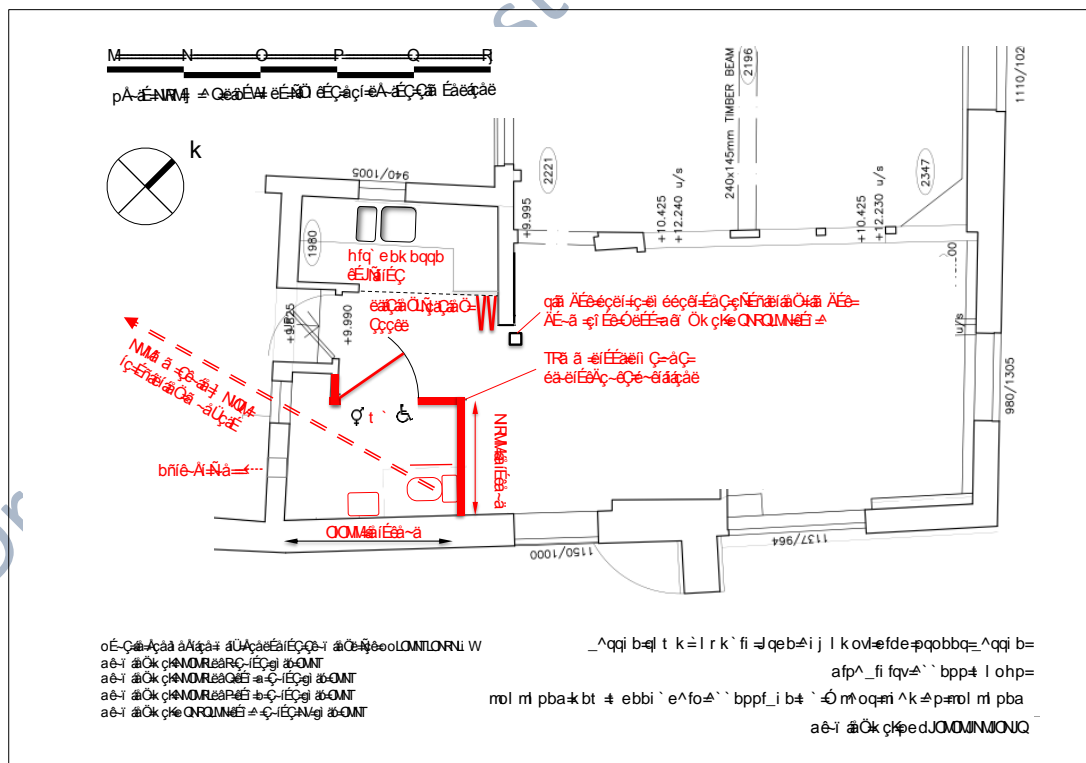
#### 4.2.8 Timetable

Action	Date	Comments
Agree intended provider	17 March 2020	
Begin consultation	19 March 2020	
Conclude consultation	19 June 2020	
Agree action	30 June 2020	
Re-tender		
Agree intended provider	19 Oct 2020	Vulcan- Ellis
Apply for additional permissions and building regulations		
Secure funding	30 Nov 2020	TBC
Commence work	01 Jan 2021	TBC

#### 4.2.9 Sustainability of the Project

The repair and renovation of The Almonry will provide a fully accessible public building.

##### Accessible WC and Kitchenette



## 5. Conclusion

Battle Town Council agreed works to ensure that the heritage Almonry building is a safe, efficient working environment that fulfils the Council's statutory and moral obligations, and which meets the Council's desire to support the town's post-COVID-19 recovery through tourism at a total cost of £\_\_\_\_\_.

The Almonry and its architectural heritage, together with the high street townscape and rural setting, will be conserved, restored and preserved for future generations.

**Appendices** A and B attached.

**Questionnaire regarding the Almonry Working Environment - Responses**

Responses from staff and tenants:

**1 On a scale of 1 (very satisfied) - 5 (very dissatisfied) how satisfied are you with:**

Current heating system	3	4	1	4	5	<b>3.4</b>
Current lighting system	5	4	1	1	5	<b>3.2</b>
Current office furniture	N/A	N/A	N/A	2	3	<b>2.5</b>
Toilet facilities	5	5	1	3 / 4	3	<b>3.5</b>
Kitchen facilities	4	4	2	4	5	<b>3.8</b>
Level of security	4	4	1	3	5	<b>3.4</b>
Ease of access	1	4	1	3	5	<b>2.8</b>

**2 Heating - suggestions for improvements:**

Replace cast iron radiators

Individual thermostatic controls

The current heating has little control, building is cold, office is hot.

Heating needs to be 'zoned' and more controllable so different areas can be adjusted as required (this would potentially save money too)

Complete replacement. Some radiators work very efficiently; others to no effect.

Individual thermostats would be beneficial.

Only two of the three radiators work. Replace all with thermostatically controlled units?

**3 Lighting - suggestions for improvements:**

Replace all with LED fittings

Head height of lighting too low

Recessed lighting would be a better option

New Cat 2 lighting installed in my office 2 years which is perfectly adequate.

Main office lighting is good. Hallway lighting creates shadows.

Clerks office lighting is poor and needs reviewing for most suitable option.

Meeting room and kitchen have confusing switches if you don't know them.

Lighting outside in the porch needs to light the door and should be motion controlled (if it's not already)

Lighting in main office is now adequate.

Town Clerk's office is extremely poor for written and PC work.

Existing meeting room is not acceptable for reading or note taking.

**4. Furniture - suggestions for improvements:**

Existing office tables do not lock.

Furniture in meeting room is old and not fitting for Chamber meetings

I need a lockable option for my workspace. Generally I think the main office furniture is OK.

For the meeting room it would be nice to have nicer looking tables but the flexible option needs to be maintained.

Folding chairs for garden events/functions would be good.

**5 Toilet facilities - suggestions for improvements:**

Both toilet facilities require replacement: cracked basins, old WC.

Water heaters are unreliable - scalding water temperature.

First floor also has poor flooring.

Normal hot & cold taps would be nice.

The floor upstairs feels as though it needs serious attention.

If the hiring/wedding interest increases, a full length mirror would be nice.

Modernised.

The first floor WC should be completely refitted with new WC and basin, mixer taps to prevent scalding and extract fan to building regulations.

**6 Kitchen facilities - suggestions for improvements:**

First floor kitchen needs a refit - possibly less base units and worktop, but a double sink bowl.

<Name> has her lunch in there to be away from <the> room, so maybe a small round table and two chairs positioned beneath the window.

Hot water tap (higher flow rate required.)

Better lighting

More electrical sockets

The central wall needs to come out and suitable storage for the area arranged.

Might be nice to have a table and chair option in the area.

Proper hot tap rather than a water heater would be appreciated.

A larger fridge is needed for Council event catering.

Small counter top oven would be appreciated - with hob top.

Do not need dishwasher on first floor.

With only mugs to wash, a dishwasher would only be used if catering options were considered.

Preference for	separate kitchen	2	or
	office tea/coffee station?	1	
Preference for	sink & drainer	5	or
	dishwasher	0	
(1 x prefer both)			

## 7 Security - suggestions for improvements:

Better control on who has access to building in evening if (staff) not in.

I often have to answer the door to people wanting access to booked meeting room and do not have a key. I also find that evening users do not put the front door on the latch until they leave: I have found tourists in the lobby 6.30-7.00 pm.

I think the main users (Councillors?) should recognise that it is predominantly an office building and not just their meeting room -and we are concerned about security.

Proper locks on doors.

The existing arrangement with 24 hour easy access works well for me, but I appreciate others may require tighter security.

With regard to personal safety, I don't know what could be done, but current office only has one entrance/exit (same applies for fire safety)

If the rear of the building needed to be made an access, this could make security more difficult to monitor.

I like that my desk has visibility to the main entrance.

There is no current security: either as fire precautions or physical. This will be alleviated by the proposal to be in an open plan area that will have two exits available.

## 8 Ease of access - suggestions for improvements:

This will be difficult to remedy in its current form and all attempts to ensure accessibility should be made - particularly for toilet facilities once inside the building.

For less able persons all the steps through doorways are a challenge not sure how this can easily be addressed though.

Current arrangements work very well for me.

Too many steps.

Meeting room on ground floor for disabled use.

It is an historic building and providing access facilities (ie ramps/platform lift) should be discouraged and an access statement provided.

I visit many historical office buildings for meetings all over the UK and if an attendee requires access (wheelchair) an alternative venue is sought.

## 9 Climate emergency - suggestions for improvements:

There is currently no provision for recycling. This needs to be resolved.

New boilers will assist as will modern electrical fixings

Possibly more energy efficient heating system?

Ban single use plastics from the building?

Closing building down (no energy use) for one day every week! All to work from home - including office users.

Common sense should prevail! The Council should not spend excessively on making changes that would have minor impact on the climate, given that the Almonry is a listed characterful building.

Improved energy efficiency I suppose, but would be worried if this is at the expense of the character of the building.

#### 10 Do you have any other suggestions?

I really like the timeless character of the building. It could easily be a scene location for a Dad's episode circa 1940 at Warmington-on-Sea. I can imagine the ghost of Captain Mainwaring walking the first floor corridor and hope this is not completely lost with the proposed refurbishment.

If the main office does not move, the flooring need to be replaced to remove the carpet joining bar as this creates a really awkward 'lip' to get our chairs over.

More electrical sockets.

Some windows can't open.

Better sound proofing.

General office condition is poor (dust falls from ceiling).

We love the building, but it's a shame seeing it fall to a state of disrepair.

I did think once that moving the ground floor users to the museum building - and the museum into ground floor Almonry would make sense. We have all met visitors coming into the Almonry thinking it is the museum! And it should be really.

Escape from the first floor onto a timber staircase (without fire doors as all have to be timber) and without a secondary means of escape has always been a concern as jumping from the windows is not an option. The stairway is essentially the only means of escape and locating a reception/office at ground directly onto the stair is a significant risk.

I think Jane and Carol do a great job in looking after us all - always friendly and helpful. Thank you!

## Questionnaire in Annual Report April 2020

**Option 1 - Battle Civic Centre**

Provide a future proofed facility, accessible by disabled people, for Battle with: sufficient Council office space to enable expansion; a formal Council meeting room; a spacious information centre for Town and District Council services; a welcoming Tourist & Heritage information area and flexible meeting spaces for Council and Community use.

Repair & refurbishment of The Almonry and rebuilding of the south wing would cost in the region of £895,770.49. Savings are still being explored (indicated to be in excess of £100,000 at the time of going to press).

Main benefits - Flexible space to meet current and future needs of the town providing:

- Council offices accessible by disabled people;
- Space for an expanding Town Council staff;
- Town and District Councils information hub in a customised space;
- Formal Council meeting room;
- Indoor toilet, accessible by disabled people, for staff, Councillors and visitors to comply with the Equality Act;
- Tourist & Heritage Information Area to encourage visitors to spend time and money in Battle;
- Battle's only publicly owned heritage building open to the public (ground floor) to learn about and appreciate Battle's heritage;
- Interview/meeting areas for Town and District Councils to provide private or specialist support and also for social service providers, MP etc;
- Flexible community space and display space;
- Small meeting area/desk space for public hire;
- Administration/temporary archiving space for the Town Council;
- Focus for the UNESCO World Heritage bid.

To deliver this facility, the Council will work to raise sufficient funds to provide it without raising the precept. We will also continue to explore ways to reduce project costs. There are currently funds in: Maintenance budget (£12,000); Almonry Project budget (£21,000) and an Earmarked Reserve for a Tourist Information Area (£12,000). The professional fees to deliver the project to completion of the tender stage (£50,537.10) have been paid from the Almonry Repairs budget and General Reserves. Town and District Council Community Infrastructure Levy funds could also be used. Applications for support would be made to the Architectural Heritage Fund, Heritage Lottery Fund, Arts Council, Rother District Council and various charities. We have been advised that to undertake the work in stages will significantly increase costs.

**Q 1A Do you want a Battle Civic Centre, which is future proofed and accessible by disabled people, if the Parish precept does not have to be increased?**

(NO) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 (YES)

**Q 1B Do you want a Battle Civic Centre, which is future proofed and accessible by disabled people, if the Parish precept had to be increased by 3p per month (Band D)?**

(NO) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 (YES)



**Q 1C Do you want a Battle Civic Centre, which is future proofed and accessible by disabled people, if the Parish precept had to be increased by 5p per month (Band D)?**

(NO) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 (YES)

### Option 2 - A refurbished Almonry

Provide Council office space for current staffing; a formal Council meeting room; a hub for Town and District Council information and a Tourist Information Point.

Repairs & refurbishment of the Almonry would cost in the region of £739,523.87. Savings are still being explored (indicated to be in excess of £100,000 at the time of going to press).

NB. Without suitable facilities for staff, Councillors and visitors with mobility difficulties, this option may not be viable. Alternatives to ensure full accessibility for wheelchair users will continue to be sought.

#### Main benefits

- Space to meet current needs of the Council;
- A tourist information point;
- Council office and Council meeting room accessible by disabled people;
- Battle's only publicly owned heritage building will be preserved and available for public access to the same extent as now (ground floor);
- Town and District Councils information hub in a more suitable space;

#### but, which would:

- Not meet future Council needs;
- Not provide private areas for use by Councils, social service providers, MP etc;
- Not comply with the Equality Act 2010 as the accessible toilet would be outside.

**Q 2A Do you want the Almonry only to be repaired and refurbished to include an outside accessible toilet, even if it does not comply with the Equality Act 2010, if the Parish precept does not have to be increased?**

(NO) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 (YES)

**Q 2B Do you want the Almonry only to be repaired and refurbished to include an outside accessible toilet, even if it does not comply with the Equality Act 2010, if the Parish precept had to be increased by 3p per month (Band D)?**

(NO) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 (YES)

**Q 2C Do you want the Almonry only to be repaired and refurbished to include an outside accessible toilet, even if it does not comply with the Equality Act 2010, if the Parish precept had to be increased by 5p per month (Band D)?**

(NO) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 (YES)

### Option 3 - The relocation of the Council offices

The Council would rent fully accessible premises that meet current needs. The Almonry would be repaired to rent as offices. The Council would be responsible for ongoing repairs and maintenance. Repairs would cost in the region of £517,231.27. Savings are still being explored (indicated to be in excess of £100,000 at the time of going to press).

Main benefits:

- Space to meet current needs of the Council;
- Council office and Council meeting room accessible by disabled people;
- Town and District Councils information hub;
- Indoor toilet, accessible by disabled people, for staff, Councillors and visitors to comply with the Equality Act;
- The Battle Museum of Local History would remain in situ;

but,

- It may not be possible to find a suitable building in the town centre to fully meet the current needs of the Council, let alone its future needs;
- A suitable meeting room would need to be hired for Council/Committee meetings;
- Battle's only publicly owned heritage building would not be open to the public;
- There would be no space to meet the future needs of the Council and the community;
- The current low-cost meeting space for community use would be lost;
- The focus for the UNESCO World Heritage bid would be lost;
- There would be no Tourist & Heritage Information Area.

**Q 3A Do you want The Almonry to be repaired and the Council offices relocated to rented premises, accessible by disabled people, if the Parish precept does not have to be increased?**  
(NO) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 (YES)

**Q 3B Do you want The Almonry to be repaired and the Council offices relocated to rented premises, accessible by disabled people, if the Parish precept had to be increased by 3p per month (Band D)?**  
(NO) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 (YES)

**Q 3C Do you want The Almonry to be repaired and the Council offices relocated to rented premises, accessible by disabled people, if the Parish precept had to be increased by 5p per month (Band D)?**

### Option 4 - The sale of The Almonry

Relocation of Council offices to fully accessible premises, either rented or purchased. The sale could raise in the region of £445,000 less professional fees and relocation costs.

(NO) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 (YES)

Main benefits:

- Council office, accessible by disabled people, with space to meet current needs;
- Accessible Town and District Councils information hub;

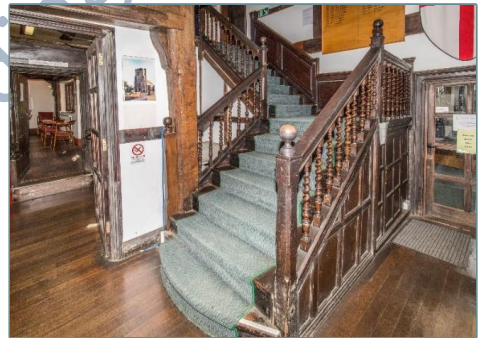
but,

- It may not be possible to find a suitable building in the town centre to fully meet the current needs of the Council, let alone its future needs;
- The Museum would also need to be relocated;
- Loss of rental income;
- A suitable meeting room would need to be hired on most Tuesdays for Council meetings;
- The grade II\* listed heritage building and gardens would no longer be publicly owned and available to visit;
- There would be no control over The Almonry's future use;
- There may not be a suitable interview/meeting room;
- The current low-cost meeting space for community use would be lost;
- The focus for the UNESCO World Heritage bid would be lost;
- There would be no Tourist & Heritage Information Area.

**Q 4 Do you want The Almonry to be sold and the Council offices relocated to purchased or rented premises, accessible by disabled people?**

(NO)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	(YES)
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**Comments:**



**The Council wants to hear from residents before deciding how to proceed**

We want views from a wide range of people, so it is important that YOU HAVE YOUR SAY

Please complete and return to: The Almonry, High Street, Battle, TN33 0EA  
or [enquiries@battletowncouncil.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@battletowncouncil.gov.uk) by **19<sup>th</sup> June 2020** (new date)

Please include the first line of your address for monitoring purposes:

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