

Archbishop's Palace – Public Consultation

Final Decision-Maker	Policy and Resources Committee
Lead Head of Service	Mark Green – Director of Finance and Business Improvement
Lead Officer and Report Author	Alexa Kersting-Woods – Leisure Property Manager Deborah Turner – Corporate Property
Classification	Public
Wards affected	High Street

Executive Summary

The Archbishop's Palace is currently let to Kent County Council. Possession and responsibility will return to Maidstone Borough Council in 2022. To ensure that the property can continue to be maintained and protected in the future, new uses need to be considered that are both economically viable and are aligned with the overall development of the surrounding area, within the context of the Council's priority of Thriving Place and the emerging Town Centre Strategy.

This report sets out the results to date of a public consultation on potential future uses of the Palace.

Purpose of Report

For noting.

This report makes the following recommendations to this Committee:

1. The outcomes of the consultation are noted.
2. It is further noted that officers will incorporate the results of the consultation when inviting Expressions of Interest from developers and consultants to carry out the stage 1 project work at Archbishop Palace.

Timetable

Meeting	Date
Review of Public Consultation Results	31st October 2021
Invitations for Expression of Interest	November 2021
Analysis of EOIs and recommended use	January 2022

Policy and Resources Committee for decision to enter into Exclusivity Agreement with preferred consultant	January 2022
Exclusivity Agreement	February 2022

Archbishop's Palace

1. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
Impact on Corporate Priorities	<p><i>The four Strategic Plan objectives are:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Embracing Growth and Enabling Infrastructure</i> • <i>Safe, Clean and Green</i> • <i>Homes and Communities</i> • <i>A Thriving Place</i> <p>The project described in this report supports the Council's Strategic Plan objectives, most notably A Thriving Place.</p>	Director of Finance and Business Improvement
Cross Cutting Objectives	<p><i>The four cross-cutting objectives are:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Heritage is Respected</i> • <i>Health Inequalities are Addressed and Reduced</i> • <i>Deprivation is reduced and Social Mobility is Improved</i> • <i>Biodiversity and Environmental Sustainability is respected</i> <p>The report recommendations support the achievements of the cross-cutting objectives by respecting the heritage of the existing building with sensitive design and addressing environmental sustainability by upgrade works to improve the use and condition of the building.</p>	Director of Finance and Business Improvement
Risk Management	Already covered in the risk section.	Director of Finance and Business Improvement
Financial	The initial feasibility studies have been undertaken from the Financial Sustainability Fund PID. Once a scheme is identified the financial impact of that scheme can be fully considered. The running costs of the building are currently £250k per annum which are at present paid for by the tenant.	Director of Finance and Business Improvement

Staffing	We will need access to extra external expertise to deliver the recommendations.	Director of Finance and Business Improvement
Legal	Acting on the recommendations is within the Council's powers as set out in local authority legislation (including the general power of competence under the Localism Act 2011) and the Council's Constitution.	Team Leader Contracts and Commissioning
Privacy and Data Protection	No implications	Policy and Information Team
Equalities	An EqIA will be carried out as part of the project along with public consultation.	Senior Policy and Engagement Officer.
Public Health	No implications	Public Health Officer
Crime and Disorder	No implications	Head of Regeneration and Economic Development
Procurement	<p>The Council will follow the procurement exercises for Expressions of Interest and follow up with an Exclusivity Agreement.</p> <p>On accepting the recommendations, the Council will then follow procurement exercises to appoint the necessary Consultant to facilitate the delivery of the project. We will complete those exercises in line with financial procedure rules and applicable public contracts regulations and principles if required.</p>	Head of Service & Section 151 Officer
Biodiversity & Climate Change	The proposed developments at the Archbishop's Palace provide an opportunity to help ensure that the Council's objectives for carbon emissions from its own estate are met.	Head of Service & Section 151 Officer

2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Archbishop's Palace is one of a group of medieval buildings of great historical significance, including All Saints Church and the Archbishop's Tithe Barn and Stables (now the Carriage Museum). The Council has owned the Archbishop's Palace since 1904.
- 2.2 The Archbishop's Palace was let in November 2005 to Kent County Council (KCC) for use as a Registry Office and Coroners Court. The lease to KCC expired 31st October 2020 but KCC have held over under the existing lease and remain in occupation. The intention is for KCC to vacate the building in September 2022 at which point responsibility for the property will pass back to Maidstone Borough Council.
- 2.3 The Archbishop's Palace is a Grade 1 Listed Building and as a result of this requires sensitive and specific care and maintenance. The current annual running costs are in the region of £250,000 per annum. From September 2022 the Council will become responsible for all costs associated with holding, securing, protecting and running of the building. The Palace is a valuable property asset which will greatly contribute to create a Thriving Place for the town centre.
- 2.4 With the pending return of the building to the Council, a feasibility report to consider future uses of the building, was commissioned in 2019 with the following objectives:
- Respect the historic fabric of the building
 - Bring the building promptly back into active use
 - Any proposed use should be economically viable
 - Develop linkages to the property with the surrounding area, particularly the River Medway, Lockmeadow and the Town Centre

The scope of the report was to investigate the potential for alternative uses to suit existing internal and external spaces, to consider the existing town centre and heritage setting, to provide plans demonstrating potential layouts and a high-level scope of works from which initial costings could be developed. The outcomes were presented to Members at a briefing held on 20th February 2020 at the Town Hall and subsequently in a report to this Committee on 21st July 2021.

- 2.5 The Report identified four possible uses and provided a brief commentary on the viability of those uses, the uses being:
1. Co-Working and/or Serviced Office Space
 2. Training and Seminar Centre
 3. Wedding and Seminar Venue
 4. Boutique Hotel

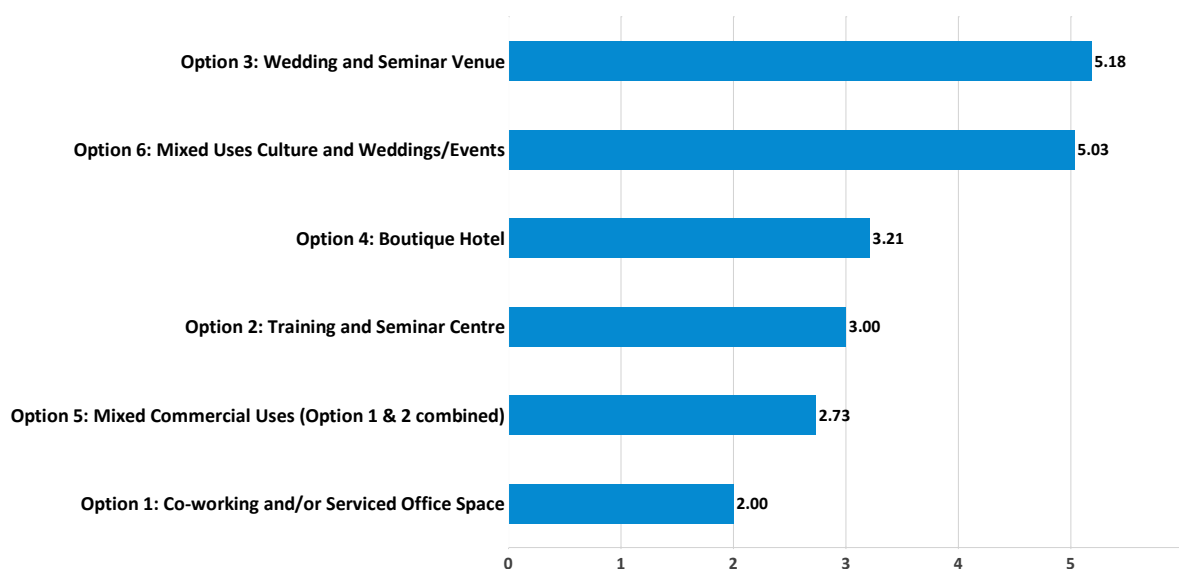
A further two options were added at the meeting of Policy & Resources Committee on 21st July 2021, as follows:

5. Commercial Mixed Use
6. Mixed Use Culture and Weddings.

2.6 An online public consultation has been carried out on these options, via the Council's website, our survey group, and social media. This has been complemented by posters and flyers containing the QR code link to the survey placed in various locations including Lockmeadow, Maidstone Market, Museum and places of worship including Maidstone Mosque. Whilst the focus of the survey has been on the options set out above, participants were given the opportunity to offer alternative proposals, as well as to comment on the options specified.

2.7 The consultation has attracted considerable interest and publicity, and 2,110 responses had been received as of 11th October 2021.

2.8 Survey results as of 7th October were as follows:



To assess the data, a weighted average has been used. The programmes placed first received five points and the programmes ranked last were given 1 point. These were then added together and divided by the number of respondents to give a weighted average.

2.9 An update on the results will be provided at the meeting.

2.10 In addition to the ranking of options, respondents were able to provide comments. Points that emerged strongly from the comments were as follows:

- A desire to maintain the Palace as a building with public access
- A general fondness for the building
- People want their children to get married where they did
- The palace should be available for a range of functions
- Issues with parking
- The building should not cost public money to run
- There are already empty offices in the town so there is no need to provide offices here
- Suggestions for alternative use include a restaurant/ coffee shop.

- 2.11 The next step is to invite Expressions of Interest from consultants who are qualified and experienced to develop a scope of works and/or change of use scheme with financial feasibility for the Palace, with reference to the Council's scope based on the previous feasibility report and guided by the consultation results.
- 2.12 The Expression of Interest (EOI) would require consultants to justify their preferred proposed use of the Palace, a financial assessment, their source of funding, their previous experience of heritage properties, evidence of similar projects/case studies, proposed timescales, methodologies and any proposed partnership arrangements.
- 2.13 Upon receipt of the EOIs, officers will evaluate responses and recommend a preferred consultant to take forward a proposed scheme for the Palace. By entering into an Exclusivity Agreement with a preferred expert consultant, the Council can obtain the best flexibility to explore options with planners and English Heritage and develop a scheme that meets the objective of being economically viable whilst protecting the heritage of the building.
- 2.14 It should be noted that, as part of the Council's wider Town Centre Strategy, the potential for the overall development of the surrounding area to form a Heritage Quarter will be considered and funding opportunities explored. Any development of the Archbishop's Palace will be aligned with the emerging Town Centre Strategy, and opportunities created by this Strategy to expand the scope of work on the Archbishop's Palace (eg by including the Norman Undercroft) will be explored.

Proposed Schedule of Events

- 2.15 The proposed schedule of events for the project is given in the table below. The dates should be regarded as indicative at this stage as the Council may need to extend and /or amend the timetable as necessary.

Activity	Finish Date
Review of Public Consultation	November 2021
Prepare EOI documentation	November 2021
EOI period	December 2021
Review of EOI Returns	January 2022
P&R Committee for Decision	January 2022
Exclusivity Period	Feb 2022 – July 2022
MBC possession	Sept/October 2022
Submit Planning	Sept/Oct 2022
Enter into Contract for Works	Nov 2022

- 2.16 Pre-application planning advice meetings will also need to be arranged in order to discuss planning policies and understand design and information requirements, and how this might affect proposals.
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3. RISKS

- 3.1 Empty Building - By commencing the consideration of alternative uses of the premises now, we are reducing the likelihood of the building standing empty when it is returned to MBC from KCC. If the building stood empty it would lead to running costs to keep it safe and secure, it would deteriorate more quickly and there is a risk of reputational damage to the Council to permit a building of its importance to stand empty.
 - 3.2 Maintenance and Management Costs - Any decisions as to the future of the building will affect the management and maintenance of the building both in terms of regime, cost and staff. There is a risk of escalating costs, of potentially increased security risk and expertise in the preservation of historic buildings.
 - 3.3 Expertise and Resources - The project is likely to require additional expertise and resource from outside of the in-house team. Historic sites require particular attention when considering any form of alteration and/or development.
 - 3.4 Communication – Engagement with stakeholders is key to ensure that the best option for the Council and its Strategic Plan Objectives are met.
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4. NEXT STEPS: COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION

- 4.1 The next step will be for the EOI to be advertised. Upon analysis of the EOI results, a recommendation for a preferred use will be brought to Policy and Resources Committee in Jan 2022 to enable an Exclusivity Agreement to be entered into.
 - 4.2 The Exclusivity Agreement would be entered into to enable steady progress with the project to ensure there is little or no period when the Palace is empty after September/October 2022.
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5. REPORT APPENDICES

None

6. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None