

<b>Economy and Property Committee</b>	
<b>Meeting Date</b>	30 January 2025
<b>Report Title</b>	44 Trinity Road, Sheerness – the Old Library
<b>EMT Lead</b>	Emma Wiggins, Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods
<b>Head of Service</b>	Joanne Johnson, Head of Place
<b>Lead Officer</b>	Kieren Mansfield, Strategic Programme and Assets Manager
<b>Classification</b>	<b>PART EXEMPT</b>
<b>Recommendations</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. That the Council retains and maintains the building in its current condition, to be reviewed after a period of no more than 18 months.</li> <li>2. That officers explore opportunities to bring the building back to a useable standard during this period.</li> </ol>

## **1 Purpose of Report and Executive Summary**

- 1.1 44 Trinity Road, Sheerness (known as the Old Library) is owned by Swale Borough Council. Having been vacant for several years and not currently in a lettable condition, the position is such that the building could be considered for disposal. The report considers the options available to the Council in terms of the next steps in managing the property.
- 1.2 The report recommends that the property is retained and maintained for at least a further 18 months (given considerations set out in the report and at exempt appendix I) and to give an opportunity to identify any future funding or proposals that could bring the property back into beneficial use.
- 1.3 The information at appendix II is exempt as it contains information relating to the financial or business affairs of particular persons, including the authority holding that information (Swale Borough Council). This seeks to ensure the Council is able to contemplate financial or business affairs in relation to the property, without prejudice.

## **2 Background**

- 2.1 44 Trinity Road, Sheerness (known as the Old Library, see attached plan at appendix I) was historically used for a range of community uses but has now remained vacant for several years. More recently the building has been subject to vandalism, including significant internal fire damage, with an adverse visual impact in a prominent town centre location.

- 2.2 The property was advertised inviting Expressions of Interest alongside Masters House in 2022. There were no substantive offers at that stage. There has been some interest in the building since for community/learning use but its condition means that it is currently unable to be occupied and would require investment, that to date has not been forthcoming.
- 2.3 The property has been secured and asbestos removed, to permit access to undertake cost surveys. These indicate that there are substantial costs involved to bring forward a refurbishment of the building.
- 2.4 If a suitable source of external funding were available to support the refurbishment this would positively impact on the Council's ability to undertake such works. This possibility has been promoted to external partners as a potential 'quick win' project, in the event that resources become available.
- 2.4 There are options available to the Council in terms of this property asset including:
- **Dispose** of the building as it is. A third party may have an interest based on the site's value, involving demolition of the building, with this cost likely to reduce the achievable receipt.
  - **Demolition.** This may render the site more saleable or create a future development opportunity.
  - **Fund the refurbishment,** although this would be a capital cost to the Council's limited resources.
  - **Retain and maintain** the building, in its current condition for a period to see whether external funding opportunities come forward to support refurbishment for occupation. Retention also provides the Council with a greater stake and potential influence in relation to the future of surrounding land holdings, including the Water Tower site, which is not owned by the Council, but is currently understood to be for sale. The land to the rear of the property is also vacant and undeveloped.

### 3 Proposals

- 3.1 It is recommended that the Council retains and maintains the building in its current condition, to be reviewed after a period of no more than 18 months.
- 3.2 It is also recommended that officers explore opportunities to bring the building back to a useable standard during this period.
- 3.3 This retains the possibility of bringing forward the building for beneficial use, with associated potential revenue to the Council. This is set against an evolving external funding landscape. This possibility, in a priority community, has been promoted to external partners as a potential 'quick win' project, in the event that

resources become available. Retaining the property also provides the Council with a greater stake and potential influence in relation to the future of surrounding land holdings, including the Water Tower site.

## 4. Alternative Options

- 4.1 Potential options are set out in the main body of the report, with the recommendation to retain and maintain the property for a further period.
- 4.2 Disposal is not recommended. There would be a potential opportunity cost should we be able to take advantage of a changing external funding environment to generate more financial and community value from the property. The Council would potentially also reduce its influence on how surrounding land holdings might come forward.
- 4.3 Demolition is not recommended at this stage, given that this would involve an upfront cost to the Council and would also present a potential opportunity cost, should we be able to take advantage of a changing external funding environment.
- 4.4 Funding the refurbishment is not recommended given the capital cost to the Council's limited resources. The options for re-use of the existing building are also limited by its location within the flood zone (with much of it being single storey) and the absence of outdoor space and parking.

## 5 Consultation Undertaken or Proposed

- 5.1 The property has not been actively marketed since 2022. Some interest has been expressed in the building since but to date no proposals which would satisfactorily address the building's condition have been received to date.

## 6 Implications

Issue	Implications
Corporate Plan	The building is identified within the asset management priorities within the Annual Delivery Plan. The recommendation leaves the door open to it potentially being bought into beneficial use to support either the community or economy priority
Financial, Resource and Property	The building's current annual cost to the revenue budget is estimated at c.£4,000, based on business rates payable and a limited provision for any remedial works to the security measures in place should there be further attempted break ins. This currently comes from within the service budget. Further implications are set out at exempt appendix II
Legal, Statutory and Procurement	The information at appendix II is exempt as it contains information relating to the financial or business affairs of particular persons,

	<p>including the authority holding that information (Swale Borough Council). This seeks to ensure the Council is able to contemplate financial or business affairs in relation to the site, without prejudice.</p> <p>Any future proposals which require Council led expenditure would need to be considered in light of the relevant procurement policies. Any future development of the site will be subject to all necessary consents being secured.</p> <p>If to be disposed of or let, the Head of Place will need to complete the necessary negotiation, due diligence and agree draft contracts as applicable and undertake the work required in consultation with the Head of Mid-Kent Legal Partnership.</p>
Crime and Disorder	None identified at this stage.
Environment and Climate/Ecological Emergency	None identified at this stage
Health and Wellbeing	None identified at this stage
Safeguarding of Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adults	None identified at this stage
Risk Management and Health and Safety	<p>As a vacant building that the has been the subject to unlawful entry and vandalism, there remains a risk that this could be repeated. Any further instances may generate costs for the council to resecure the building. The building has been secured and is subject to a regular monitoring as vacant property asset.</p>
Equality and Diversity	Any future disposal(s) relating to the site would be subject to community impact assessment.
Privacy and Data Protection	None identified at this stage.

## 7 Appendices

7.1 The following documents are to be published with this report and form part of the report:

- **Appendix I** – Property location plan
- **Appendix II** – Cost estimates and implications - exempt

## 8 Background Papers

None

# Appendix I

