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# Almonry Project

Battle is about to expand, so the Council needs to expand its vision to meet the increased needs of residents and visitors. The Almonry is central to our plans to improve the quality of life for residents - not just for now, but also in the future. There are three aspects to our vision for The Almonry, based on the Council Plan that was published last summer:

## **Providing excellent services to residents**

Flexible, fully accessible space for increased Town & District Council activities, community groups and the public.

## **Supporting town development and economic growth**

A central and welcoming hub, providing help and information for our community and for tourists.

## **Preserving our heritage**

An expertly restored and 'reinstated' building with space for heritage exhibitions will ensure its continued use and enjoyment for years to come.

Between 2015 and 2019, plans were put in place to repair and refurbish the building and to rebuild the south wing that was demolished in the 1930s. It was hoped that this work, to include a Heritage facility, could be funded by a Heritage Lottery grant, but unfortunately the application was unsuccessful.

Council therefore agreed that the building work should be actioned by applying to the Public Works Loan Board for up to £600,000 to be repaid over 50 years, with any remaining costs being met

## **The Almonry is now in urgent need of restoration and preservation**

It needs to be brought up to current health & safety standards, made accessible to all residents and visitors and upgraded to comply with the Equalities Act 2010 regarding employees with physical disabilities.

through Council funds. Due to concerns raised by a group of residents, the loan application was postponed.

Costs are very important, but they need to be considered in conjunction with thought about how the Council's decisions may impact the town, its residents and its heritage assets. Some benefits do not have a monetary value. The Council needs to provide better facilities to meet the town's current needs, but also wants to future-proof The Almonry. Future needs are difficult to predict, but it is valid to consider aspirations as well as evidence. The option to pass The Almonry into the care of a trust or charity is not possible without an endowment to support the on-going maintenance and repairs. The Council is now consulting residents about other options for the building.

## 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)

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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