



## To the Members of the Borough Council

Dear Sir/Madam

You are hereby summoned to attend an Extraordinary Meeting of the Ashford Borough Council, to be held in the Council Chamber - Ashford Borough Council on **Thursday, 23rd November, 2023 at 7.00 pm.**

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'T W Mortimer'.

T W Mortimer  
Solicitor to the Council and Monitoring Officer

### Agenda

5. Tabled Paper

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## Tabled Paper

<b>Report To:</b>	<b>Extraordinary Council Meeting</b>
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	<b>23 November 2023</b>
<b>Report Title:</b>	<b>Minute No. 146/9/23 – Civic Centre Relocation</b>
<b>Report Author</b>	<b>Maria Stevens – Corporate Director (Housing, Customer, Technology &amp; Finance)</b>

## Introduction

1. This paper has been drafted to update members on questions that have come in to Officers from Members regarding the relocation to International House and to provide some initial feedback from the Autumn Statement by the Chief Executive. The presentation sent to Members earlier this week is also attached in **Appendix A**.

## Member Questions

2. **Question:** Can the move to International House accommodate Officers if they are required to come back to the office 3 days per week.

**Answer:** We looking to provide 204 desks (please note that this does include an increase in space standards. Initial plans based on minimum space standards per person could accommodate around 235 desks within the current desk space). This is over the three floors, two open plan floors and one retaining the office spaces.

Based on current full time equivalent posts, with a reduction for annual leave (not enhanced/not including flexi) and sickness we would require 232 desks to meet 60% capacity based on today's establishment. Therefore we would need to incorporate a further 28 desks however, many officers do not work from a desk as they are often working within the borough, such as Neighbourhood Housing Officers, Surveyors and Building Control Officers.

The capacity over our three floors, including the meeting room space is for 308 people so overall just across the 3 floors we can accommodate closer to 80%, at desks and in meeting spaces. This is excluding the DWP floor 4 footprint. I have included this to demonstrate that meeting space can be reconfigured as well to provide additional desks should this need to happen, moving above 60%.

In summary, on capacity we are confident that we can meet 3 days per week within the current space and costs.

3. **Question:** Information on performance and how hybrid working has affected this.

**Answer:** Performance of the organisation has been reported to Cabinet and Overview & Scrutiny through the quarterly performance report for a number of years and currently there are no concerns. We are however looking to review how we work, ensuring that we recognise performance, collaboration, technology and how we use this, learning/mentoring and the culture of our organisation including professional and social. We are working on a report that will come forward to Overview & Scrutiny early next year which will incorporate this.

This will however, be an ongoing process and even after the O&S report we will still be monitoring and reviewing any new proposals to ensure they are fit for our organisation.

The Hybrid discussion needs to be decoupled from this decision, as highlighted previously if a decision is made to stay at the Civic Centre we would need to consider renting out the 3rd floor so decisions on expanding days in the office would be constrained here as well.

4. **Question:** What is the plan for the Civic Centre. Are there mixed messages as a decision has not yet been made.

**Answer:** The original Cabinet report stated: *The 3rd phase of the project will be looking at the Civic Centre future plans. These are still in discussion and some of the options include redevelopment of the Civic Centre, sale of the Civic Centre, master planning the whole Woolgrower and Civic site. Reports will come forward in due course.*

At the presentation we did cover all options. Our (officers) preference is to develop master planning the combination of the two sites, the Civic Centre and the KWG site however, the decision is subject to Member and planning approval. Officers will be looking to bring forward this preferred option as soon as possible to Members. Other options will also be explored, as it is a Member decision. A full report will come forward to Members to make an informed decision.

### **Autumn Statement Response**

5. The autumn statement was announced yesterday and there were a few areas linked to the delivery in the Public Sector in relation to capitalising on using technology such as AI to generating efficiencies and reduce the costs of those services to the public.
6. The Chief Executive, Tracey Kerly agrees with the spirit of the announcement ensuring that the Council is a modern workforce using technological solutions, reviewing our structures and teams, which we have been doing regularly to ensure the relevance of what is expected of them with improved technology.
7. Reducing admin from front line workers is essential so having technological solutions that integrate immediately with back office systems and not double handling is an imperative and we should continue to make that a priority and streamline.

8. Artificial Intelligence (AI) for routine work is also a necessity and we have embraced this through some transactional services already however, as a front facing public sector we body we have to deal with very mixed communities, often from the aging and most deprived sectors of our communities. Members continue to expect the human intervention across our service delivery. We do understand though that using AI to target and ensure services are being delivered is appropriate in a Public Sector today that has many financial restraints.
9. We are supportive of the approach from the Chancellor as we have to think creatively about making sure our income meets the demands of our communities. We need to ensure we work in the most productive ways and this includes office space. When working in a 'hybrid' way we can ensure we are not financing unnecessary office space however, this needs to be balanced and we need to consider how teams and individuals should be working, ensure performance is not failing through monitoring and review, collaboration for teams and cross services projects, technology and how we use this for learning/mentoring.
10. The Chancellors planned reforms that aim to get more long term unemployed people into work includes supporting people with disabilities to work from home provides insight that a central government push to get people back into offices is unlikely, and as an organisation we need to ensure that we are fit for purpose, and can operate in an efficient and effective way to support all staff to deliver excellent services to our communities.

# CONFIDENTIAL

# CIVIC CENTRE – HIGH LEVEL INFORMATION



## PHASE 3

- Redevelopment of the Civic Centre
- Concept designs – retaining the Civic Centre
- Carbon consideration
- Nutrient Neutrality (Stodmarsh)

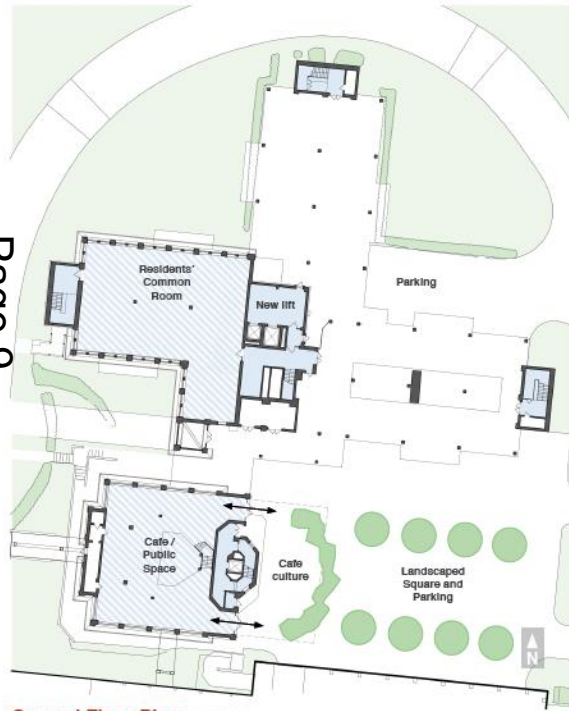
# Concept designs





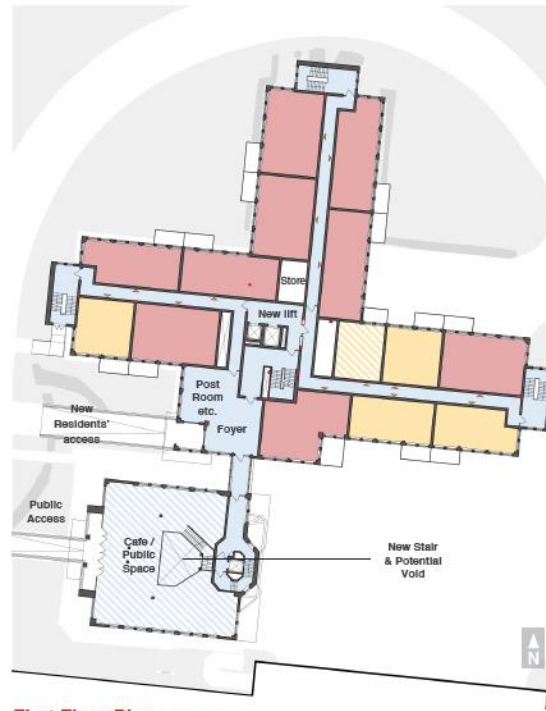
Civic Centre Conversion to Apartments

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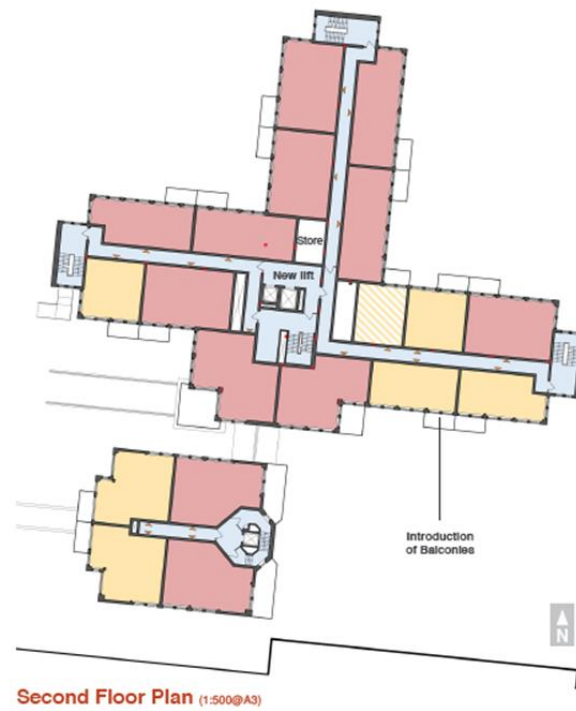
Ground Floor Plan (1:500@A3)

-  Public / Communal Space
-  Circulation Space



First Floor Plan (1:500@A3)

-  Public / Communal Space
-  Circulation Space
-  1-Bed Studio
-  1-Bedroom Flat
-  2-Bedroom Flat
-  Existing Structural



Second Floor Plan (1:500@A3)

-  Circulation Space
-  1-Bedroom Flat
-  Existing Structural Column
-  1-Bed Studio
-  2-Bedroom Flat
-  Flat Access



Third Floor Plan (1:500@A3)

-  Circulation Space
-  1-Bedroom Flat
-  2-Bedroom Flat
-  Existing Structural Column
-  Flat Access

## Carbon Considerations – Benefits of Reuse

- Reduced waste and emissions from material production and construction
- Reduced waste going to landfill – Civic waste unlikely to be recyclable
- By adapting our own stock we champion sustainable practices

## Nutrient Neutrality (Stodmarsh)

- The Council is working on a solution currently (The Appropriate Assessment being completed now)
- 1,000 credits
- Enables us to deliver all current schemes
- Enables Civic Centre development

