

## Report to Policy & Finance Committee

### Proposal to Relocate the Visitor Information Centre to 12 Market Place

#### 1. Background

Following an approach from the Faversham Society (FS), it was agreed to set up a small working party to consider the options for the relocation of the Visitor Information Centre into a section of the front space of 12 Market Place.

Members are referred to the previous report to the Policy & Finance Committee of 18<sup>th</sup> February 2021 for more background details (Appendix A).

#### 2. Summary

At the Faversham Town Council (FTC) Meeting of 1<sup>st</sup> March 2021 it was agreed that Cllrs Reynolds, T Martin and Barker would form a working group with members of the Faversham Society to further explore the proposal. Cllr Barker withdrew from the process before the first meeting. The Working Group met on 10<sup>th</sup> March, where it was agreed that the Town Clerk for FTC and Andrew Holden for the FS would continue discussions.

#### 3. General Considerations

The following areas were examined:

##### 3.1 **Area**

The proposed area of the Visitor Information Centre is shown in Appendix B.

##### 3.2 **Lease**

Length of the lease to be at least 14 years, to ensure security of tenure following a large financial commitment from the FS. A longer lease will make funding applications more accessible.

##### 3.3 **Rent**

As noted in Paragraph 4 below, the partnership with the FS has mutual benefits to both parties and FTC looks to make financial savings from the agreement. It is therefore suggested that a peppercorn rent of £1 per annum should be applied.

##### 3.4 **Utilities**

As the downstairs is separately metered it is suggested that the FS refund FTC for full use of electricity.

##### 3.5 **Business Rates**

The following table shows the rateable value of £22,500 for 12 Market Place. The areas highlighted in green would be leased to the FS.

Floor	Description	Area m2	Price per m2	Value
Ground	Retail Zone A	46.68	300.00	14,004
Ground	Retail Zone B	35.21	150.00	5,282
Ground	Toilets	5.87	30.00	176
Ground	Rear Retail	29.47	37.50	1,105
First	Reading Room	19.3	18.75	362
First	Office	66.3	18.75	1,243
First	Secure Store	3.51	15.00	53
First	Kitchen	4.9	15.00	74
First	Toilets	3.55	-	-
First	Rear Storage	11.49	15.00	172
		226.28		22,471
				20,929
				1,542

### 3.6 Insurance

The FS to be responsible for their own contents and volunteers insurance. FTC's insurance policy is not affected and will continue to be responsible for buildings insurance.

### 3.7 Planning Permission

Permission for exhibition space with ancillary retail use on the ground floor was granted under reference 16/501352/FULL. Confirmation will be sought to ensure the VIC does not contravene this permission.

### 3.8 Financial Regulations

Our Financial Regulations do not impede FTC from sub-letting property. Paragraph 13.3 notes that:

*No real property (interests in land) shall be sold, leased or otherwise disposed of without the authority of the council, together with any other consents required by law. In each case a report in writing shall be provided to council in respect of valuation and surveyed condition of the property (including matters such as planning permissions and covenants) together with a proper business case (including an adequate level of consultation with the electorate).*

Members are reminded of the consultation undertaken late 2019 and the subsequent report to Council (Appendix C).

### 3.9 Risk Management and Assessment

Risk management is an essential feature of good governance, contributing to improved decision making and the achieving of objectives. A risk assessment, which considers the key features of FTC's Risk Assessment and Management Strategy is attached (Appendix D).

### 3.10 Commercial Relationship

FTC should negotiate a percentage share of profits from the FS shop sales over a specified figure. For example if the electricity bill is £1,300pa the suggestion is for 5% on sales on profits above £1,300.

### 3.11 Exhibition Space

FTC should maintain responsibility of bookings for the Exhibition Space with support from FTC staff and facilities management (ie redecoration of walls). FS should have oversight of the Exhibition Space.

### 3.12 Magna Carta Exhibition

FTC should maintain responsibility for the Magna Carta Exhibition. FS to have oversight and encourage visitors to undertake the self-guided tour. FTC and FS should work in partnership on funding opportunities.

## 4. Financial Considerations in Brief

		ONE OFF EXPENDITURE
<b>Legal Fees</b>	Assigning the lease	£1,500
<b>Capital Costs</b>	Fit out of front space (VIC and exhibition space)	TBC
<b>Capital Costs</b>	Conversion of small toilet to kitchenette	Quote awaited
<b>Capital Costs</b>	External signage and planning consent costs	TBC
<b>Capital Costs</b>	Changes to internal door	Quote awaited
<b>Capital Costs</b>	Additional security to first floor office door	£800

		OTHER ANNUAL EXPENDITURE
<b>Insurance</b>	Buildings Insurance – no adjustment	-
<b>Insurance</b>	VIC contents insurance – responsibility of The Faversham Society	-
<b>Utilities</b>	Water Rates – due to leak we can't be accurate with last year's cost, figure based on 2019	£800

		<b>FUNDS AVAILABLE FOR VIREMENT</b>
<b>295/4308</b>	External Lighting (no longer proceeding due to difficulties with planning permission)	£2,400
<b>290/4305</b>	Maintenance	£4,333

		<b>ANNUAL SAVINGS</b>
<b>Utilities</b>	Separate electricity meter	£1,295
<b>Business Rates</b>	Reduction in business rates for the area leased to the FS, which as a charity is exempt from payment.	£10,464
<b>Staffing</b>	Volunteers for the FS/VIC working weekends and having responsibility for Magna Carta Exhibition. FTE (no pension, holiday or sick pay liability)	£19,240

## 5. Recommendations

The Policy & Finance Committee to consider the following recommendations to Full Council:

- To agree to enter into a lease with the Faversham Society
  - To agree the period of the lease
  - To agree the area to be leased
  
- To agree the terms of the lease
  - To agree a peppercorn rent
  - To propose the establishment of a commercial relationship

Louise Bareham  
Town Clerk  
19<sup>th</sup> March 2021

Report to Policy & Finance Committee

Proposal

To consider the relocation of the Faversham Visitor Information Centre (VIC) and associated shop to the ground floor of 12 Market Place.

Background

The Faversham Society Board authorised the Board's Standing Committee to explore with FTC whether there might be an opportunity to relocate their VIC and shop to the ground floor of 12 Market Place and to facilitate the use of the remainder of the space for community exhibitions and meetings. Giving more prominence to Swale Heritage and Faversham Museums Together. This would promote the town's tourism offer.

It was agreed at the Heritage Working Group on 8<sup>th</sup> February for the Town Clerk and Harold Goodwin to put together a proposal for Policy & Finance Committee to consider.

We are requesting authority from Policy and Finance Committee to explore the Faversham Society's proposal

There would be value for the town in being Swale's main VIC and entrance for many to tourism in the Borough.

Summary

Following the 2019 elections further community engagement was undertaken by the Town Council, which resulted in the agreed motion on 9<sup>th</sup> December 2019 *to take forward options of a Heritage Hub and Magna Carta Exhibition and Community Exhibition Space.*

Unfortunately Covid-19 has left the ground floor empty, despite interest from local groups to use the space. Although, we have also found that the recent charges imposed on groups and individuals has seen a decline in bookings. Fellow Cinque Port Towns of Sandwich, Tenterden, Ramsgate, Folkestone, Broadstairs, Deal and Hastings all have VICs located within the town halls. Sandwich and Folkestone also have museums.

General Considerations

1. Pre-Covid the VIC opened to the public 7 days a week
2. Already has volunteers, or should be able to attract more when appropriate
3. When open, the building's location leads people to ask general questions, advice and directions.
4. The Doddington Library is already located within 12 Market Place.
5. The Magna Carta Exhibition could be overseen by the FS volunteers and therefore be open 7 days a week, without the need for paying additional staff.

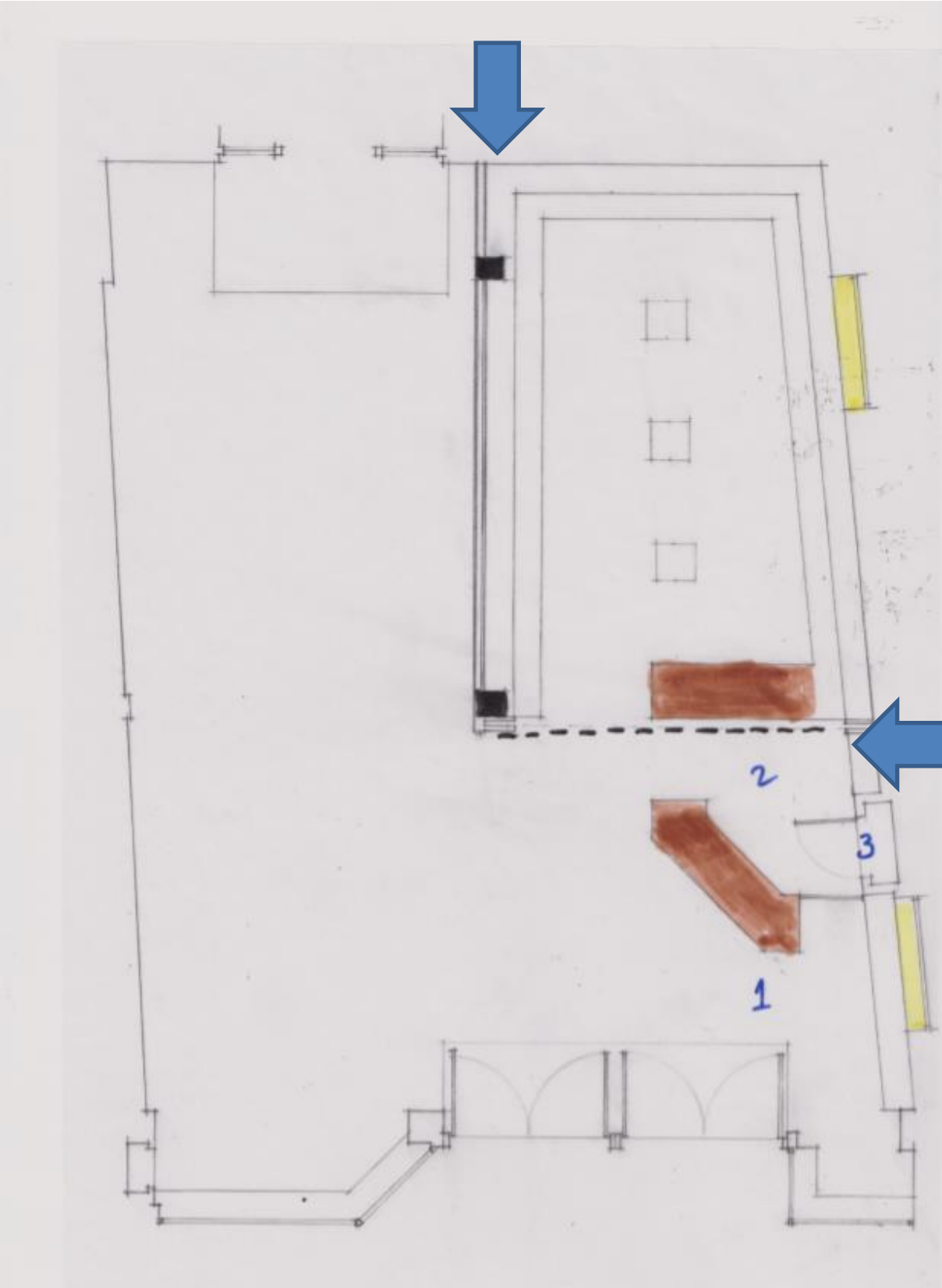
6. If FS were to use between a quarter and third of the front room, this would allow sufficient area for exhibitions and other events to take place. Often the space has been too much for most groups to fill, movable screens would add additional space, when required.
7. FTC should retain oversight of hiring of the exhibition space in liaison with the FS.
8. The VIC should be lockable when not in use, so the space could be used out of usual opening hours.
9. VIC would require storage space, there is potential for *some* space in the first floor archive room.

### Financial Considerations

<b>SAVINGS</b>	
Utilities	There is a separate electricity meter, which would allow for the electricity bill to be split accordingly.
Business Rates	Reduction in business rates for the area leased to the FS, which as a charity is exempt from payment.
Staffing	Volunteers for the FS/VIC would lessen the need for additional staff to cover Magna Carta Exhibition and weekend events/opening
Magna Carta	Partnering with FS
<b>COSTS</b>	
Capital Costs	FS would need to meet the costs, or acquire grants, to fit out the VIC

### Recommendation

A small working group is formed to further explore the proposal.



## Summary Recommendation

The Town Hall, at 12 Market Place, was purchased in June 2016 by the previous [redacted ..] council. The Public Works Loan has a current redeemable value of £1.5m; whilst recent valuations of the property estimate the resale price between £520,000 - £860,000. As a consequence, the current council has ruled out the sale of the Town Hall. The previous [redacted ..] council were unable to deliver against the second phase of their ambition to deliver a museum on the ground floor. The failure of the £1m grant application (to the Heritage Lottery Fund) put paid the extensive renovations proposed. The current council has sought, through consultation with the residents of Faversham, to define a plan to deliver value for the community from the purchase. The results of the online consultation were equivocal, with broadly similar survey results for each of the initial options put forward. However, the potential to combine the option for a small Heritage Hub museum at the rear of the ground floor with a community exhibition space at the front was frequently raised within the verbatim responses. The recommendation proposed below will begin a second phase of work to provide more detailed delivery plans. This will cover estimates for cost and time against renovations where required, and consider any other needs such as human resources, contracts, etc. As such the Policy & Finance committee recommends a budget allocation of £25,000 to cover this next phase.

The council proposes to discount the following options:

1. Letting the ground floor for retail (Option 1). This option would most likely introduce competition with local business, which the council are keen to avoid, there is already a significant amount of retail space available for let throughout the town.
2. Use of the ground floor as a 'one stop shop' for services including Citizen Advice, Job Centre+, Swale Borough council etc. (option 3). The space is unsuitable for this use in its current



configuration and would require substantial and costly remodelling, there is little appetite from the agencies in relocating from their current sites within the town or to locate office staff in the town.

The council proposes to develop delivery plans:

1. To continue to use the front of the ground floor space as a community space (Option 4.) In addition, the council will explore the improvements that could be made to support a wider range of community needs, how to evolve the management of the space to increase the occupancy rate.

2. To explore the development of the room at the rear of the building as a heritage space (Option 2). The delivery of this option would be subject to successful grant applications. The budget allocation described above would support and design, planning and other third-party activities required to support grant applications. Central to this plan would be the display of the Faversham Charters including the Magna Carta.

## RISK ASSESSMENT

PROPOSAL TO RELOCATE THE VISITOR INFORMATION CENTRE  
TO 12 MARKET PLACE

Risk	Comment	Level	Control
<b>Strategic Risk</b> – long term adverse impacts from poor decision making or poor implementation. Risks damage to the reputation of the Council, loss of public confidence		LOW	Decision to be made by Full Council, following recommendations made through a Working Group and Committee; providing 3 levels of decision making
<b>Compliance Risk</b> - failure to comply with legislation, laid down procedures; the lack of documentation to prove compliance. Risks exposure to prosecution, judicial review, employment tribunals, inability to enforce contracts	No redundancies applicable	MEDIUM	Legal advice to be sought where necessary
<b>Financial Risk</b> – fraud and corruption, waste, excess demand for services, bad debts. Risk of additional audit investigation, objection to accounts, reduced service delivery, dramatically increased Council tax levels/impact on Councils reserves	No impact on Precept or Reserves	LOW	Legal advice Openness and transparency with finances
<b>Operating Risk</b> – failure to deliver services effectively; malfunctioning equipment; hazards to service users; the general public or staff; damage to	FS to be responsible for insurance for volunteers	LOW	Evidence of insurance policy

property. Risk of insurance claims; higher insurance premiums; lengthy recovery processes	FTC responsible for general public and staff		
<b>Financial Commitments Risk</b> - Those affecting the ability of the Council to meet its financial commitments; failure of major projects; internal and external audit requirements; failure to prioritise and allocate resources affectively; poor contract management; initiative overload	To date the Council has failed provide an effective use for the downstairs space in 12 Market Place, this proposal will aid social and economic development of the town as it begins to recover from the pandemic	LOW	No impact to the Precept
<b>Social Risk</b> – Those relating to the effects of changes in demographic, residential or socio-economic trends on the Council’s ability to deliver its corporate priorities		LOW	Additional volunteering opportunities will be provided
<b>Technological Risks</b> – Those associated with the capacity of the Council to deal with the pace/scale of technological change, or its ability to use technology to address changing demands. It would also include the consequences of internal failures on the Council’s ability to deliver its objectives.	The Council has already proven its ability to address technological changes during COVID-19 and the change to remote working and meetings	LOW	As evidenced by current practice
<b>Legal Risks</b> - The ability of the Council to meet legislative demands affecting breaches of legislation		LOW	Qualified Clerk
<b>Environmental Risks</b> – Those relating to the environment consequences of progressing the Council’s strategic objectives in terms of energy, efficiency, pollution, recycling, emissions etc	The Council will continue to use Bulb for electricity supply and follow its recycling regime	LOW	The Climate and Biodiversity Emergency Action Plan
<b>Partnership/Contractual</b> - Those associated with the failure of partners/contractors to deliver services		MEDIUM	Regular meetings between the Town Clerk and VIC

to an agreed cost and specification and similarly failure of the Town Council to deliver services to an agreed cost and specification, compliance with procurement policies (internal/external) ensuring open and fair competition			Manager
<b>Human Resources</b> - Those associated with the professional competence of staff, lack of training and development, over reliance on key personnel, ineffective project management, recruitment and selection issues	FS fails to engage volunteers to cover core opening hours for 7 days a week  FS fails to provide appropriate training	LOW	Volunteer Agreement and Training Plan in place  FTC staff to cover volunteer shortages during core working hours
<b>Organisational</b> - Those associated with the review of services and delivering continuous improvement		LOW	Regular meetings between the Town Clerk and VIC Manager
<b>Health and Safety/Physical</b> - Those related to fire, safety, accident prevention and health & safety which pose a risk to both staff and the public; safeguarding and accounting of physical assets	Annual fire safety report, testing of fire alarms and fire extinguishers Weekly fire alarm test	LOW	Facilities Manager to ensure regular health and safety and fire safety assessments are carried out
<b>Reputational</b> - Those associated with the changing needs of customers and the electorate; ensuring appropriate consultation; avoiding bad public and media relations.	Second public consultation on the use of 12 Market Place was undertaken at the end of 2019	LOW	Ensure decisions made in public with documentary evidence

18<sup>th</sup> March 2021 – Town Clerk