

OLD TOWN WAREHOUSE

Strategy Summary 25/09/2025 up-date

When acquisition was debated, it will be recalled by members that I stated that our legal obligation was to make the building weather tight and ensure no deterioration would occur or worsen. Implicit in that is that any faults or issues with the structure would be remedied. Irrespective of longer-term aspiration with respect to use the immediate priority is to repair the building to prevent further deterioration. Failure to do so would put us in breach of our legal obligations and could lead to the building being put on the Buildings at Risk register and so lead to notice of repair being served on the Council. Failure to take action could result in the work being carried out and us billed for it. That would be an expensive route.

Our total budget is currently £50,000 which was to be spent over a five year period, at £10,000 per annum, although we have the opportunity to spend £20,000 as it is two years since the grant was made available. That £20,000 includes the topographical survey and so reduces the money left to be expended to circa £16,000.

It is immediately obvious that the building is in danger of failing due to rotten timber plates and posts to the corners such that there is little material left to take the loads imposed. Urgent action is required to those areas. This being obvious a price was obtained from a specialist carpenter who has a Masters in medieval timber frame repair. The specialist lives in Faversham which is a bonus. It was discussed with Conservation Officers.

Apart from that I determined that the building needed to be cleared out and cleaned such that its structure is visible and can then be both examined in detail and recorded by way of measured survey. Action has commenced on clearing out but that is taking rather longer than initially expected due to the fact that it is being done by the Facilities Team in order to reduce costs. As the summer period is a busy time for the Team and there has been the acquisition of Perry Court areas which has exacerbated this, there has been an impact on the OTW work. I would stress that until the building is cleared and cleaned, and which clearing includes the temporary removal of the feather edged weatherboarding, it is not possible to fully access and record the physical structure and condition.

Clearing out of the building will include removal of kitchen fittings which needs to be done to facilitate access for recording and for work.

For security the featheredged weatherboard will require replacing once inspection and recording takes place.

Once we have the survey drawings and know the state of the building hidden by the weather board we can determine the extent of the urgent works. We can then also engage the services of an architect to make a listed building application to the Borough Council.

We have agreed certain exploratory works with Swale Conservation Officers, and these include creating exploratory holes in the concrete slab (which appears to have been possibly laid in two layers, not necessarily during the same period). There are two reasons for this. Firstly, we need to know the depth and make-up of the slab such that we can go out to tender for its removal. We also need to know whether there is original floor beneath it which we might wish to preserve, if possible. Secondly, we need information we can give to a structural engineer. See below.

The quasi cabin walls built circa seventy years ago are a nuisance. At some stage these need to go to open up the building for future use and to restore original volume. However, I anticipate taking them down at a very early stage as it can be done by the Facilities Team and so not impact budget. This is necessary to allow freer access for measurement and inspection and to facilitate works. However, I should make it clear that this does not involve taking down the block walls built to support the main beams supporting the first floor. There is a strong possibility that the block walls are merely mounted on the concrete floor slab. Therefore, when we carry our exploratory holes we will try to see what may be there. At present I am assuming that at least in the short term of the first stage that the walls will remain on a residue strip of the floor, subject of course to what advice we may get from a structural engineer. I am assuming based on my extensive experience, that Building Control will require proof by way of calculation that the structure can be supported in that way. However, that may not be possible and we may then need to make a decision as to whether we keep the concrete floor for the time being or dig a new foundation. More on that below.

Any new structure by way of oak studs or posts is unlikely to be allowed by Building Control to be supported by the floor unless a structural engineer proves that it can be. I doubt that is the case. Timber studs are more likely to pass than posts because the former will be dressed into a new oak plate which would spread the load, rather as the current wall loading is spread. A post creates a point load which exerts greater pressure immediately beneath it.

A new foundation if required is likely to be deep because of the location and ground make up. If we proceed we will need a soil investigation such that the foundations can be designed. At least we have no near-by trees as would influence foundation depth. Because the foundation is internal it would need to be excavated by hand. This would be expensive. I am thinking possibly a five figure sum. So, at present I am assuming the block wall will stay if a structural engineer agrees, but if not acceptable then we will go with oak studs and a new foundation.

Keeping the block wall may be desirable depending on use and design going forward. However, we need an architect to advise and produce schematics but that is not something within the critical path.

The final thing that needs to be looked at as a matter of urgency is the external works and flood proofing. At present I am assuming the western façade will have the most damage to studs and posts and this is because they have been covered as in hidden, suggesting what is beneath is not good, and because there is not the reduced ground level to this area and so the timber has been sitting within moisture. There needs to be excavation along this elevation for inspection of the plate and plinth or stone foundation and to ensure a better environment for the timber such that it can dry out. It is presumed that the brick plinth was inserted in the early sixties.

The whole needs to be proofed against flooding. I have briefly discussed this with Conservation. The cheapest and easiest way would be to form a protective bund, but this would have to be contoured in to reduce impact on the setting of the building. Otherwise, we would be looking at a waterproof structure, or wall, but that would be expensive and create problems unless it could be limited to an area say two metres from the building. Access would need to be ramped. We need to see some designs for the options and discuss these with Conservation. However, to protect the building, flood proofing is an early requirement.

So to repair the more urgent items to safeguard the building and to conform to legal imperative we need to do the following:-

Clear the building and clean it.

Appoint surveyors for a measured survey which will record all elements of structure by size and position and show them in section and plan, and also show elevations.

Appoint architects to submit a listed building application and illustrate areas of concern where scarfing etc will be proposed. Also, to sketch proposals for a bund or similar.

Appoint a structural engineer to advise on propping part of the structure as an enabling work to facilitate scarfing to the corner post on the South East corner. And to advise on viability of using a remnant of the concrete floor to support the existing block walls or stud work.

We have agreed timber repair with Jamie Ryan.

Dig four exploratory holes in the concrete floor. Positions to be marked out by me.

Record the condition of the timbers to the southern façade, on opening up, and invite Conservation to inspect. Close up after for security reasons.

We will have a panel to repair after timber repairs and this should be wattle and daub to be agreed with Conservation. Most panels are cementitious materials dating back to the sixties.

Full design, structural and condition surveys are not required at this time. We are merely opening up the structure and making good the most egregious and obvious problems at this time. We do not have the money for appointments or further works that are not critical path and we will struggle to do the above within budget. We may decide to borrow from General Reserves against the Queenborough Grant in order to expedite matters.

Within the longer term we will need to decide and seek approval for new doors, windows etc; for designs for use of the existing including stairs; we will need to decide of stairs and a disability lift will be internal or external; we will need to decide if toilets and kitchens go within or if we extend or if we use the old pumphouse assuming the boxing club move to more suitable premises but that I think is unlikely. I was thinking extension but now think internal may be better, but no decision can be made without sketch proposals to consider.

With a new use we will need to consider services and insulation and decorative finishes. At present our efforts are based upon a first stage which is all about repair and safeguarding of the building. The structure will remain open and visible for examination etc for a year or more. Hence why surveys are not on my critical path. We do not need them at present (apart from a measured survey which gives us plans that can be provided to other professionals for design and record purposes), and we certainly do not have the circa £3000/4000 it would cost, given our £16/20,000 budget, but it remains viable to do them and get professional sign off later, when more monies are available.

Conclusion

We have limited funds and our most urgent priority is to repair and make watertight the building and obtain listed building consent. Other works or commissions that are not required or essential to the urgent repairs are simply not affordable in the current budget.

Peter Cook

Liberal Democrat Councillor

Priory Ward, Faversham Town Council.

24/09/2025.

Up-date.

Just to clarify. The building is a six bay structure which means there are five main beams crossing it from side to side, that is running East to West. These all need supporting. Originally there were stud or post supports and cross bracing. The need for support may have given rise to the thickness of the concrete as I have stated above.

Some of the repair work is urgent because decay is such that structural support has

been lost. This means that the structural integrity of the building is compromised. hence

the need for further work. We are also aware of opened up joints due to movement, and

other issues. Once the building is cleaned then more detailed surveillance can be made

and structural advice can be sought. However we do not have the money to carry out a

total overhaul of the building at this stage. Works of repair will need to be phased. I am

specifically avoiding drawing any conclusions until the building has been cleared,

cleaned and more lighting introduced which will allow more detailed inspection. At that

time I may make recommendation regarding further immediate professional advice and

we may need to seek funds to allow that. However we have the two Antony Swaine

Architecture Ltd reports of 2018 and 2019 and so we have knowledge already of some of

the issues. Cleaning may expose others. But I am not putting the cart before the horse.

This will be a staged process. We will also need to consider whether we strengthen with

temporary steel or timber supports or whether we go for more permanent ones. I am not

inclined to try to jack the building back together. As Anthony Swaine once remarked to a

client re the absence of a cross brace and whether it should be replaced, "history has

left its little mark, we will not replace it." To what extent we accept history and to what

extent we try to restore, we will have to consider and agree with Conservation. No-one

wants to jack up the Kings School shop, nor the Leaning Tower of Pisa. Stabilisation is

the approach there. I suspect it will be our approach here. We are not the Downland

Museum and have no obligation to restore the building to its original state. But we do

have an obligation to repair and stabilise it to stop its further deterioration. That is my focus.

I hope this clarifies my approach.