

Shirehall Strategic Review: A Critical Report on Process Failings and the Case for Preservation and Regeneration

April 2026 marks 60 years since staff moved into the new Shirehall. This iconic development was celebrated in the architectural press and local newspapers. It symbolised modernity and aspiration after severe post-war austerity. Designed by Ralph Crowe a respected London architect, it put Shropshire on the map. Built for £1.8m, the equivalent of approximately £56m today, Shirehall is a fully paid for, publicly owned asset. But this figure of £56m fails to take account of the quality and materials of the original build nor the above inflation build costs of today's world. To recreate something of this scale and quality today would cost many millions more. The Shirehall has an impressive and specially commissioned cast-iron mural in reception, Portland stone facing on the civic dome and self-cleaning blue/green tiles banding the office accommodation. It also includes 2 impressive courtrooms and cell block. Of particular note are the beautiful iridescent white mosaic tiles under the Council chamber covering the convex dome. These special touches are unaffordable in current times. It should be noted that Shirehall remained fully functional until the Covid pandemic in 2019 aside from a maintenance backlog. Shirehall was also still partially tenanted until mid-2025. Meanwhile we are advised by the most recent iteration of the Nation Planning Policy Framework, (NPPF) to 'take advantage of opportunities to reuse existing structures and materials....'

Executive Summary

This report sets out substantial concerns regarding the Council's current approach to the future of Shirehall and the decision—taken without sufficient scrutiny—to pursue demolition.

The Task and Finish Group concludes that Shropshire Council risks both financial and reputational harm if it proceeds with demolition before fully evaluating viable, high value alternatives including joint ventures, partial retention, civic reuse, and mixed-use economic development incorporating health, education, housing, business space, and community facilities that retain and develop the existing building.

This report concludes that the Council's post covid decision making process regarding the future of Shirehall was incomplete, inadequately evidenced, and insufficiently transparent. The Council's 2023 decision to demolish Shirehall and develop the site for housing was based on a report that did not properly evaluate the Shirehall as an asset that could be retained and developed. In December 2025 Members were not given the information or time needed to scrutinise the 11 options referenced in the report, stakeholder engagement was minimal, and major factors such as environmental impact, economic potential, and real-world redevelopment alternatives were not fully evaluated.

The report also concludes that the long-term accommodation needs of Shropshire Council, both as a service delivery organisation, the centre for local democracy, are not well served by the Guildhall. The move there was rushed and the site feels temporary to many at best.

The Rapid Task & Finish Group undertook extensive work to fill these evidential gaps. Their findings show that Shirehall is not a redundant building, but a strategic public asset likely to be capable of delivering:

- **Significant economic uplift**, in line with Shropshire’s £910.5m tourism economy and 10.5 million annual visitors, and aligns with economic strategy, especially around heritage-led regeneration.
- **Environmental benefits**, including avoiding the release of approximately £2.5m worth of embedded carbon through demolition.
- **Civic and democratic value**, particularly through the retention of the Council Chamber.
- **Opportunities for mixed use regeneration opportunity** integrating health, business, education, housing and community services.
- **Reuse supports local SMEs and local supply chains.** This helps retention of jobs and money in the local economy – reuse supports the “Shropshire Pound”.

The report sets out clear recommendations and next steps to ensure the Council makes a fully informed, evidence-based decision about Shirehall’s future. This decision must consider the real possibility of securing Shirehall’s refurbishment and future life at no extra net cost to the Council through a joint venture or private sale.

Rather than being a liability, Shirehall may well present an opportunity for economic regeneration, environmental sustainability, and civic renewal. Immediate demolition would prematurely destroy an asset whose value has not yet been fully assessed. Demolition carries significant financial, environmental, planning and reputational risks, and is not supported by a complete evidence base.

With imagination, creativity and determination Shirehall could become a flagship regeneration project reinvigorating Shropshire’s place on the map.

This work needs to be completed **at pace and with the right attitude**. As the saying goes *“if you think you can or you think you can’t then you are probably right”*

2. Work of the Task & Finish Group

2.1 Purpose and Cross-Party Composition

Following concerns about the lack of transparency, stakeholder engagement and scrutiny underpinning the December 2025 demolition proposal, a cross-party Rapid Task & Finish Group was convened. The Task and Finish Group Members were Councillor Dawn Husemann, Councillor Chris Naylor, Councillor Rosemary Dartnell, Councillor Julian Dean and Councillor Susan Coleman, these were drawn from each of the five political groups of the Council - Reform UK, the Liberal Democrats, Labour, the Greens and the Conservatives, ensuring balanced scrutiny and strengthening public confidence in the process.

2.2 Comprehensive Evidence Review

From December onwards the Group undertook a thorough review of all available documents relating to Shirehall, including:

- historic reports and earlier options appraisals
- structural, engineering and environmental information
- financial information and cost projections
- market-testing and regeneration analysis
- staff experience and workplace suitability data

Where evidence was missing, contradictory, or unclear, the Group undertook additional research and submitted follow-up questions to officers to ensure assumptions could be tested.

2.3 Site Visits and Direct Inspection

To ensure that decisions were informed by first hand, current information and observations rather than secondary, past information Members conducted several site visits to Shirehall to assess for themselves:

- mechanical and heating plant and air conditioning systems
- emergency bunker, courts and disused cells
- reception, foyer and public areas
- committee rooms and the Council Chamber
- external spaces and upper-floor offices

A key stakeholder site visit held on 23 January 2026 brought together around 30 representatives from preservation societies, community groups, developers, unions, Council officers and professional bodies.

A separate session was held for all Members, in particular new members to ensure that they all had first-hand knowledge of the current condition of Shirehall before making a final decision about its fate. Not all new members attended.

These visits provided an opportunity to develop a practical understand of the building's current condition and adaptability, through on-site discussion informed by the specialists present. Operational challenges, refurbishment potential and the breadth of spaces available for alternative uses were reviewed and considered.

2.4 Stakeholder and Expert Engagement

Recognising that the earlier decision-making had lacked depth of engagement, the Group held a structured witness session on 9 February, hearing from:

- Save Our Shirehall
- Shrewsbury Civic Society
- Cornovii Developments
- Joint Venture developers
- Shropshire Council planning, estates, technical and economic development officers
- Don't Waste Buildings
- C20 Society

- other expert witnesses

Each session included a presentation by the witnesses followed by member questioning. The sessions focused questions on the current plans to demolish and redevelop the site, refurbishment feasibility, Joint Venture (JV) models, environmental issues, redevelopment opportunities, constraints and issues with future development and timelines. Further detail of the discussions at each session is available at Appendix A.

Witnesses included qualified professionals such as Architects, Structural Engineers, Mechanical Engineers and Surveyors. The Group would like to extend its thanks to all of the dedicated professionals who gave their time for free to provide rigour to the findings and to enable the Group to present robust conclusions.

In addition to the 9th February witness session the Task and Finish group also met separately with UNISON, Shropshire Council finance officers, and Shropshire Council planning officers to close further gaps in understanding. The link to the UNISON staff members survey, is at Appendix C.

This evidence gathering process corrected earlier failures of engagement and ensured that professional, community and workforce perspectives shaped the findings.

2.5 Focus on Practical Deliverability

The Group focused not only on theoretical options but also practical deliverability, including:

- Exploring Joint Venture feasibility, whether JV partnerships could deliver cost neutral redevelopment revenue models, and examples of successful refurbishments elsewhere in the UK. Witnesses were specifically questioned on timelines, “abnormals” construction conditions and economic return potential.
- The timeline and potential phasing for demolition vs refurbishment and site build out including a review of revenue costs and how long these will remain for each option.
- Challenged demolition vs. refurbishment costs, including environmental impact, abnormal ground conditions and their implications on any future land sale value. Demolition is not yet legally authorised: no planning permission has been granted, there is no prior approval or discharge of conditions. It’s currently at the pre-planning stage. Option 11 in the Dec 2025 report suggests an outline application will be submitted in early 2026, but this does not override planning law. Demolition costs estimated to be over £3m run the risk of being even more expensive in reality and this is not a risk the Council should expose itself to. These costs together with monies already spent on reports and surveys and any further land value reductions resulting from ‘abnormals’ on the site risk reducing land value considerably. A significant **net** capital receipt is unlikely once all Shropshire Council costs are taken into account.
- Potential for public service partners colocation improving joined up service provision

- Market demand for hotel, conference, business, health, leisure and community facilities

2.6 Impact of the Group's Work

The Task & Finish Group's structured, intensive and evidence driven work strengthened the overall review by:

1. filling evidential gaps left by previous decision making. The original December 2025 report lacked stakeholder engagement or Member scrutiny, environmental analysis or an evaluation of all alternatives. The Group worked to gather missing data, consulted experts and tested previous assumptions to fill evidential gaps.
2. ensuring broad democratic legitimacy and visibility. By involving cross party members and a broad spectrum of external voices – from professional bodies to community organisations – the process restored transparency and we hope public trust.
3. replacing earlier reliance on secondary reporting with onsite first-hand assessment. Direct site visits exposed inaccuracies and assumptions in earlier assessments and revealed real opportunities for reuse and improvement.-site
4. engaging qualified experts across multiple fields the Group were able to challenge both technical and financial assumptions. Some of these qualified professionals have offered their time free of charge to Shropshire Council to review the technical information that the Council would not allow the Group to share with them directly.
5. the volume quality and breadth of additional evidence collected, highlights weaknesses in information held previously and provides a clear direction to help Shropshire Council ensure it makes a defensible well-informed choice that is grounded in fact and not incomplete, predetermined information.

3. Failures in the Initial Decision-Making Process

3.1 Inadequate Transparency and Scrutiny

In December 2025, Members received the report referencing the 11 'possible' options too late (less than 24 hours before the Full Council meeting) to assess or question underlying evidence. No full comparison of these options was provided, environmental impacts were not assessed in detail, and the financial modelling failed to highlight risks or assumptions.

3.2 Failure to Consider Viable Alternatives

No serious analysis was undertaken of:

- refurbishment or adaptive reuse
- partial retention
- Civic centre renewal-centre renewal
- mixed use redevelopment

- JV or partnership delivery models
- public service colocation with health, education or business sectors, service colocation with health, education or business sectors-service co-location with health, education or business sectors

These omissions significantly weakened the original recommendation for demolition.

3.3 Lack of Stakeholder Engagement

Recognising that the earlier Council decision had lacked adequate engagement the Group made stakeholder involvement a central pillar of its work. Refer to Section 2.4 for more detail. The group heard from experts on planning, construction, building systems, workplace conditions and staff experience, including a focused session with UNISON after the Witness session to understand the staff's position.

The Group thanks UNISON who in a very short space of time, created and conducted a detailed staff survey to ensure that staffs voices are heard in this process – see Appendix C

3.4 Weak Environmental Assessment

An estimated **£2.5 million of embedded carbon value** would be lost through demolition.

- No lifecycle carbon comparison was provided, despite Shropshire's environmental commitments.
- No clear environmental comparison was presented between demolition and refurbishment.
- The new National Planning Policy Framework 2025 has now been published. This indicates a preference towards the circular economy and Policy CC2 (Pg28) Para 1d advises planning authorities to 'take advantage of opportunities to reuse existing structures and materials....'
- Potential exists to exploit the carbon credit market and this area needs to be explored during the evaluation phase. Insufficient time was available to explore this area fully during the Groups work.

3.5 Absence of Economic Impact Assessment

Despite a strong local visitor economy—worth **£910.5m annually**, with **10.5m visitors**—the Council did not assess the potential for Shirehall to contribute to

- local economic development,
- expansion of hotel and conference capacity in the county town and the impact of this on the wider regeneration and development area
- tourism development and civic identity,
- business growth, incubation and collaboration space provision, or regeneration opportunities.
- Apprenticeship and higher education partnerships
- Opportunities for integrated health, education, business and community hubs, and improved public service co-location

- Potential to create an ‘urban village ‘delivering homes, health, leisure, work and economic opportunities all within a short walk of the town centre.

By not conducting a wider economic impact assessment incorporating a full imaginative regeneration of the Shirehall site before recommending demolition Shropshire Council risks discarding valuable regeneration potential.

3.6 Absence of long-term Council Accommodation Strategy.

The group heard that the decision to decant to the Guildhall did not flow from a considered accommodation strategy but was rather a rushed response to the financial crisis. Based on our own experiences and the findings from the UNISON survey it seems clear that the Guildhall looks and feels like the centre for managed decline rather than a rejuvenation for the council as an institution.

4. Key Findings

4.1 Structural Strength and Adaptability

Expert evidence shows that Shirehall:

- has a solid, adaptable structural frame and floor space which needs some repairs as any building of this age would need but it is repairable and various options to conduct these repairs were provided in the commissioned reports.
- contains mechanical and ventilation systems suitable for cost effective upgrades. A qualified mechanical engineer who is very familiar with the current systems and was a witness told the Group that the current system is still functional, is in fact more reliable, longer lasting and more flexible than modern systems. Individual elements can be repaired or replaced with new parts rather than the whole unit needing to be removed and replaced as is often the case with modern alternatives. The current system can be straightforwardly updated to use heat pump technology.
- benefits from natural lighting and very flexible floorplates allowing easy adaptation to multiple different contemporary uses. Built on a 1.2 m grid pattern throughout making the building flexible and adaptable
- has lower long-term maintenance costs than many newer buildings and the December report showed that newbuild costs would be double those of refurbishment costs.-term maintenance costs than many newer buildings

During the very short window available the Task and Finish Group identified qualified independent professionals willing to review, scrutinise and challenge the information presented and to inspect key cost drivers within the building. Permission to inspect the sprinkler system by an expert in the field was refused. Permission for reports to be reviewed in confidence by qualified professionals was refused.

4.2 Civic and Community Importance

Shirehall offers:

- a purpose-built Council Chamber of a quality unaffordable today that is perfectly suited to modern day democratic and civic engagement.
- large, flexible interior spaces well suited for conferences, public events and shared services
- adaptable space to enable community events, public-service hubs and cultural use. As well as being hired out for weddings and other events
- strong road and public transport connectivity and within a 20-minute walk of the town centre and has plenty of parking spaces
- opportunities for new housing on surrounding land without losing civic space.

Demolition would remove Shropshire’s primary civic centre without a clear replacement. Guildhall wasn’t previously and isn’t now fit for purpose, it was originally designed for residential use and is inflexible for conversion to office space.

4.3 Regeneration and Economic Potential

Many witnesses asked us to consider innovative new uses for the Shirehall site as evidenced by other successful regeneration projects that have been undertaken in the UK many involving modernist civic buildings. The Shirehall site has potential to deliver integrated services and alternative uses including:

- hotel and conference space
- business incubation and flexible workspace
- GP and health services
- housing
- community, leisure and cultural facilities
- education and skills provision

The Task and Finish Group obtained evidence from a variety of witnesses that strongly suggests the best value for the Shirehall site will be achieved through retention, creative refurbishment and reuse of the building with additional development on site, that retains all parking space.

The latest version of the National Planning Policy Framework expresses a preference for the retention and reuse of existing buildings over demolition and allows for development into the airspace above, in other words, adding more floors to increase density and enhance economic viability. It must be noted that **the most sustainable building is the one that already exists.**

5. Recommendations

5.1 Immediate Pause on Demolition

A minimum six month pause on work developing current plans is essential for completion of missing assessments, and a full options appraisal. Further internal damage caused by ongoing stripping out must stop during this period. No demolition,

nor progress towards it in terms of planning and other permissions should proceed until all alternatives are fully tested

5.2 Start work towards a ‘twin track’ approach.

Use the six month hiatus to bring to market a preliminary prospectus for Shirehall refurbishment alongside the existing proposals. This will allow appropriate economic development, JV and other interested parties the opportunity to consider Shirehall’s potential. Planning should adopt a twin track approach that evaluates the real opportunities of retention and refurbishment compared to demolition and site development.

Don’t Waste Buildings, the C20 Society and Shrewsbury Civic Society have offered to assist the Council in terms of technical guidance and offered the opportunity to utilise their extensive networks of expertise to identify and properly evaluate the options.

We recommend halting all spend around consultants and reports relating to the demolition because it may not happen and money will have been wasted. Spend should be delayed until absolutely necessary.

5.3 Undertake Comprehensive Engagement

The Council should develop a structured engagement plan including:

- Developers, housing associations and JV specialists
- Health, education police, fire and other public service partners
- Business and economic development partners
- Staff and unions
- Community organisations

5.4 Define Red Lines

Establish non-negotiable requirements including:

- civic access,
- environmental responsibility,
- financial viability and
- social value.
- historical value and architectural status

This also needs to include Shropshire Councils aspirations and priorities for the site and must clearly evidence how these fit into the Destination Management Strategy. It’s vital that the case for Shirehall is examined in conjunction with the overall development strategy, corporate plan and the ‘Local Plan’ to ensure that ‘ripple effects’ and the potential value upgrading effect on other sites in and around Shrewsbury is taken into account. Consider the regeneration and transformation of the site in conjunction with the possible Shrewsbury Parkway station. It’s also vital that regeneration and transformation of the site and the opportunities presented fit within and support other Shropshire Council policies such as the Partnership Plan, Health in all Policies and the Big Town Plan.

5.5 Define a co-ordinated Shropshire Council workplace and staffing strategy.

A 'strategic workplace strategy' covering workplace needs for the Council over the next 10 year needs to be created and must inform the decision regarding Shirehall. This should include the potential rationalisation of satellite offices and the sale or disposal of these assets. This strategy also needs to include partner working opportunities and requirements over this time frame in line with national and local 'partnership working' policies and frameworks.

The Task and Finish group considers the relocation to the Guildhall to have been at best rushed. The significance of a civic and administrative centre to the future of the council did not seem feature in the decision to move. This is proving costly in terms of morale, pride and hope amongst staff.

5.6 Issue Two Market Prospectuses

One for refurbish/retain, one for demolition/new build—tested equally to provide real world evidence of costs, timelines, and deliverability. A draft prospectus for refurbish and retain option has already been produced by one of the witnesses. This is not a recommendation but is something that the Council could investigate with the author to save time.

5.5 Commission Full Economic and Environmental Assessments

Include financial modelling, carbon analysis, economic impact modelling, and demand studies for health, education, business uses, mixed housing opportunities including 1–2 bed flats, assisted living, temporary accommodation including new housing on stilts/ground floor parking to minimise the loss of parking space and potentially increased densification to maximise number of units and enhance site viability.

5.6 Set a Realistic Development Timeline

No option—refurbishment or demolition—can realistically begin major construction before 2028. Rushing demolition brings no strategic or financial gain.

5.7 Fully Evaluate Joint Venture & Private Sale Approaches

JVs offer opportunities to share costs, bring in investment, and reduce risk, while delivering revenue and regeneration benefits. Private sale options may also provide many of these benefits.

5.8 Maintain momentum.

This work needs to be completed **at pace and with the right attitude**. As the saying goes *“if you think you can or you think you can’t then you are probably right”*

The current Certificate of Immunity (COI) expires on 16 September 2025, a new one has already been applied for. Feasibility evaluation of the JV and private sale option, in line with these recommendations should be complete before that date. That said it should be recognised that Listing could unlock National Heritage Lottery Fund grants up to £10m and provide immediate relief from business rates.

The Group has shown how much can be achieved in a matter of a few weeks. Given the financial situation the Council is in and to maintain the support of MHCLG we need to work quickly and diligently so as not to hold things up. It will be important to evidence

the transformational opportunities that are possible, along with how an exemplar regeneration scheme can help Shropshire Council on our journey to becoming a sustainable Council.

6. Next Steps

1. Announce a six-month pause of demolition related activities.
2. Form a cross-party steering group.
3. Complete missing assessments.
4. Publish clear red lines.
5. Release two market prospectuses.
6. Evaluate responses and JV/private sale interest.
7. Produce a comparative Business Case.
8. Present final recommendations to Council.

7. Conclusion

Shirehall is a strategically important asset whose potential was not assessed in the previous demolition recommendations. Shirehall can support economic growth, environmental responsibility, civic identity and community wellbeing—if its future is decided following genuine scrutiny and with strategic ambition. In the words of one Task and Finish witness *“It is very unusual to kill an asset without first having understood its value.”*

The evidence is clear, the initial decision to demolish Shirehall was made without the comprehensive evaluation, engagement and due diligence required for an asset of this scale and strategic and historic importance. Once gone it’s lost forever, and Shropshire will never have a civic centre worthy of our great county again.

The snap decision at the end of 2024 to decant staff rapidly from Shirehall into Guildhall was made while there were active plans to build a new council hub within the Riverside development. The move was made in the light of this, knowing Guildhall was not an appropriate long-term base for Shropshire Council. The new council hub plan is no longer in place, and the council has need of an appropriate base for the medium to long term, with no money available to spend on it and no site other than Shirehall likely to accommodate the council’s requirements. Guildhall is not fit for purpose in the medium or long term. To even contemplate borrowing more money to build a new centre is irresponsible and unacceptable. The Task and Finish Group believe that it is now a binary decision to either stay at Guildhall indefinitely or seek to work with private sector partners to provide Shropshire Council with a suitable, functional, and worthy civic headquarters at a refurbished Shirehall.

The Council now has a unique opportunity to reset the process, restore public trust, and deliver a future-proof solution that maximises value for Shropshire’s residents, economy and environment.

The case for pausing demolition is overwhelming. Previous decisions were taken without adequate evidence, proper scrutiny, or transparent engagement. Shirehall is not a financial burden to be cleared—it is a **strategic asset** capable of driving economic growth, supporting public service delivery, retaining embedded carbon, and strengthening Shropshire’s civic identity.

By following the recommendations in this report, the Council can make a decision that is:

- financially sound,
- environmentally responsible,
- economically ambitious and sensible
- socially grounded
- democratically legitimate.
- historically innovative

The Council risks destroying a major asset without understanding its full value—historic, financial, social, environmental, or civic. Exploration will allow the Council to make an informed, futureproof decision before committing to an irreversible course of action.

We are transforming the way we work to deliver better services and happy staff, lets seize this opportunity to transform **where** we work.

Shirehall’s best days can still be ahead—if the Council chooses to understand its value before destroying it. In the 1960s the construction of Shirehall put Shropshire on the map. A contemporary regeneration of the building and wider site could light Shropshire up again.

Appendix A

Summary of evidence shared by witnesses that the Task and Finish Group heard from -

Morrow and Lorraine Architects and Don't Waste Buildings

The members of the Task and Finish Group heard first from Don't Waste Buildings about several examples of regeneration schemes relating to buildings similar to Shirehall as seen below -



Don't Waste Buildings also expressed the hope that a short pause now in deciding the future of Shirehall would allow time for a fully informed decision to be made. In their opening remarks the group said the following -

“We are a voluntary, non-political network of more than two and a half thousand individuals drawn from across the built-environment sector. Our members include developers, financiers, engineers, architects, sustainability specialists, planners and public-policy professionals. We are deliberately broad-church, because the future of our existing buildings is not a niche issue – it cuts across climate, economics, skills, place-making and community identity.

We originally came together out of concern about the huge amount of carbon embedded in existing buildings that is lost through demolition. But our work has evolved well beyond carbon alone. As part of that work, we have travelled the length and breadth of the country and have been continually amazed by what can be achieved with existing buildings. We have seen the beautiful – and the frankly quite ugly – transformed into fantastic, profitable and much-loved community assets. What these projects have in common is not the age or typology of the building, but a team of visionary people who understand that outcomes depend on how the question is framed. When the question is how can we reuse this asset, innovation follows. When the question becomes what evidence do we need to justify getting rid of this problem?, the outcome is often predetermined. The same project can produce very different answers – and it is the responsibility of groups like this one to ensure the right questions are being asked.

We also believe very strongly that refurbishment and reuse bring real economic benefits. Reuse is a different type of construction to new build. It is more labour-intensive, it supports local supply chains, it creates opportunities for apprenticeships,

and it provides sustained work for SMEs rather than concentrating value in a small number of large contractors. In short, reuse keeps skills, jobs and money local.

However, as the Shropshire case demonstrates, the biggest barrier to reuse is its financial viability. For the past two years we have been working to influence national policy precisely so councils like yours, who care about their heritage and understand the value of reuse, are not forced into demolition simply because it appears to be the least risky financial option.

There is a persistent misconception that the reuse debate only applies to historic or pre-war buildings. That simply isn't true. Buildings constructed in the last 20 or 30 years are already becoming obsolete and are being reused at scale.

To illustrate that, I want to give three very high-profile examples from London.

City Hall, opened in 2002 as a flagship civic building, is already closed and undergoing major refurbishment and reuse. The former GlaxoSmithKline headquarters in west London, also opened in 2002 and celebrated at the time as a building ahead of its era, has since been purchased and is being reused rather than demolished. And Broadgate Tower, completed in 2009 and one of the most recognisable office buildings in the City, is currently undergoing substantial refurbishment.

It is important to say this clearly and fairly: the people who designed and built these buildings did so in good faith and with the future firmly in mind. They were ambitious, well-resourced projects, designed to be flexible and long-lasting. And yet, despite their best efforts, the useful life of buildings cannot be guaranteed.

That matters, because it challenges the assumption that demolition followed by rebuild will automatically produce a better or more resilient long-term outcome.

The Shirehall tells a very different story. It has been an outstanding success. It has served Shropshire effectively for decades and, until 2024, was still fully operational. With a new approach to reuse – one that reflects modern expectations around adaptability, mixed use and intensification – there is no reason why the Shirehall could not still be here, serving the county, in another 50 or even 60 years.

We are fully understanding of the position the Council finds itself in. We recognise the pressure to realise a capital receipt or generate income at a time of acute financial stress. And we recognise that everyone in this room wants the best outcome for Shrewsbury.

Our request today is therefore a very specific and pragmatic one.

We ask that this Group recommends a six-month stay of execution – a pause that allows the Council to put the pin back in the grenade and properly test whether viable

alternatives exist, before a decision is taken that would permanently remove an important piece of Shrewsbury's civic history.

Since being invited to participate in this meeting, we have spent the last week examining the Shirehall proposals. We have found it extremely difficult to develop credible alternative financial scenarios, not because they do not exist, but because there is very limited information in the public domain to allow proper assessment.

That is not a criticism – it is simply the reality of trying to test viability at arm's length.

However, if demolition is paused, Don't Waste Buildings is ready to use our networks and expertise to help the Council explore options properly. That includes engaging developers, funders, operators and technical specialists who can assess what might genuinely work.

While we were unable, due to diary constraints, to have a developer present today, Tim Heatley of Capital & Centric has shared reflections with us which we hope will help stimulate thinking around alternative approaches to viability. I am also joined by JJ Lorraine, co-founder of Morrow + Lorraine Architects, a practice with deep experience in complex refurbishment and retrofit projects, who will be happy to answer questions during the Q&A.

Finally, we would note that several potential drivers of viability appear not yet to have been fully explored. These include density across the wider site, residential or mixed-use approaches, building above the existing structure, joint ventures with experienced development partners, and alternative uses such as later-living or retirement accommodation, which can be particularly well suited to robust civic buildings.

In closing, everyone around this table wants the best outcome for Shrewsbury. Our belief is simply that once the Shirehall is gone, it is gone forever. A short pause now creates the opportunity to make a better-informed decision – because, ultimately, the answer you get depends on the question you choose to ask.”

The Task and Finish group also heard from Morrow and Lorraine Architects that the demolition and remediation of the site could take as long or longer than finding a joint venture solution. The members of the Task and Finish Group understood that it could take up to 2 years to demolish and clear the site, in which time no income from the site would be achievable. It would cause huge disruption – dust, noise, damage to roads, to residents in the immediate vicinity

Both witnesses articulated the potential Shirehall could achieve in terms of economic benefits, community benefits, financial benefits, health reuse and service cohesion particularly citing the flexible nature of its interior walls which could be easily moved to change as need dictates.

The Managing Director of STAR Housing & Cornovii Developments

On hearing from the Managing Director of STAR Housing & Cornovii Developments the Task and Finish members heard that no plans had yet been confirmed to commence demolition of the Shirehall. Whilst structural integrity reports had been undertaken a dilapidation schedule had not yet happened. The Group heard that a number of requirements such as engagement with planners, risk assessments, a method statement and local consultation would need to be undertaken first.

The Managing Director of STAR Housing & Cornovii Developments explained that the site is a complex brownfield one with factors such as asbestos, rights of way, electrical cable convergence, proximity of the courts and Column all needing to be factored in whether the decision was made-to-demolish or rebuild.

The Task and Finish Group heard that a likely timescale for planning application, possible judicial review, site prep and demolition would be 2 years or more, and a further year following clearance of the site until first occupation of a new home would be possible. It is not unrealistic to assume that it could be 5 years before any return or social benefits such as housing accrue

The Task and Finish Group asked about the asbestos and whether this was only of concern if moved or interfered with and heard that it was common practise to remove it in any building, as well as replacing windows, improving all services such as heating, water etc, and making concrete/structural repairs as necessary. Further documentation regarding asbestos can be found at Appendix B.

Shropshire Council Head of Property and Development and the Estates Manager for Acquisitions & Disposals

On talking with the Head of Property and Development and the Estates Manager for Acquisitions & Disposals at Shropshire Council, the task and Finish Group heard that a thorough reassessment of property needs across Shrewsbury is taking place to understand requirements necessary to properly support the delivery of public services, including the financial impact, environmental performance and broader economic benefits. Due to the fact that Shirehall had already been allocated for demolition it had not/is not included in the assessment

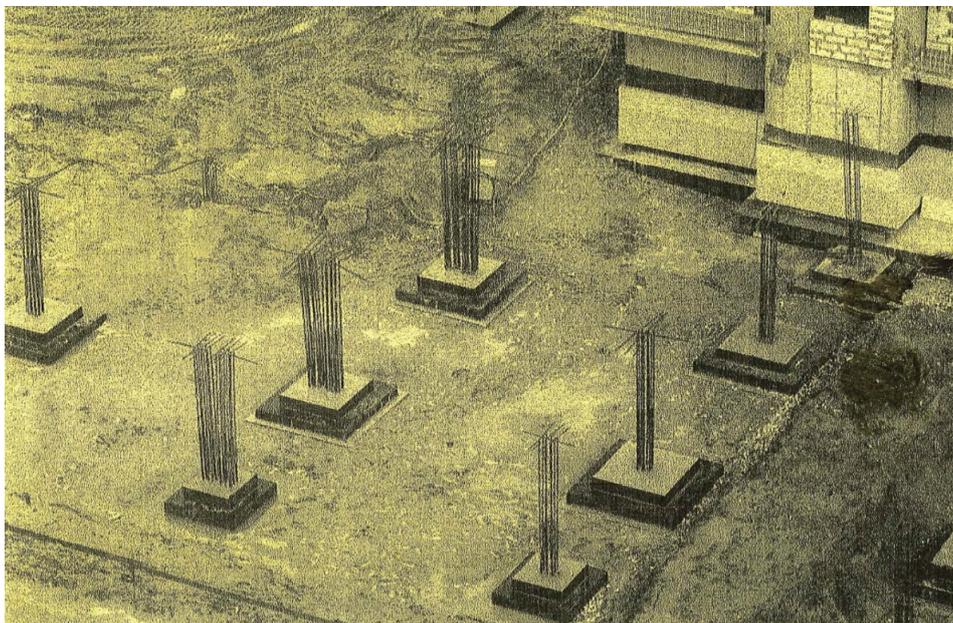
A range of scenarios have been explored for the Shirehall with the implications, running costs, timescales, and carbon factors of each taken into consideration. Retention and retrofit offer major carbon, environmental, social and financial benefits vs demolition which triggers large embodied carbon costs. Retrofit can reduce energy demand dramatically and older buildings do not necessarily have higher running costs. Reuse is typically **half the cost** of demolition + rebuild. Aligns with net-zero 2030 policy and circular economy principles. Demolition results in large embodied-carbon loss. There will be a need to relocate telecoms. Shirehall is adaptable has vacant possession and is in reasonable condition. The carbon cost of demolition is significant and irreversible.

The Task and Finish Group heard that the Shirehall was declared surplus in 2022, by the previous administration, and since that time the focus has been upon preparing the Shirehall for disposal to achieve the maximum capital receipt, in order to achieve this planning permission needs to be in place. The Estates Manager added that with the certificate of immunity due to expire on 16.09.2026 there is a looming risk to redevelopment, and on market disposal, and clarified that Cornovii would be required to bid on the open market alongside other potential buyers.

The Task and Finish Group acknowledged the potential for the site as Shrewsbury is the county town and the Shirehall site is well placed, being easily accessible with good road networks onto the A5 and M54 to the West Midlands. However the working world has changed considerably over recent years, and the move to hybrid working has meant that there is not the same demand for office space as in the past. Any future model for reuse of Shirehall should be a mixed model with a range of services, businesses, community groups, or leisure services all utilising the site.

Shirehall Architect

During their discussions with one of the original architects of the Shirehall in the 1960's the Task and Finish Group heard about the grid layout of piles underground on site, which are substantial groundworks created to support the upper structure, as shown in the following site illustration –



The architect explained how, in his opinion, the location of these could impact and potentially restrict future development. These piles are classed as 'abnormals' and the cost to working around these will decrease the land value. It was his conclusion that there is no open ground larger than 16 feet by 16 feet (the size of a double garage) under all of the office blocks. Original drawings evidence this. Due to the fact that conventional foundations would be difficult and therefore laying foundations more

expensive and drainage runs made complex and expensive the site is less attractive for residential development.

Feedback from the architect included *“I have located all the main piles from the columns and have concluded that there is such a concentration of piles under the office blocks that there are only small areas on the outer edge of the blocks that can be excavated for a foundation. I estimate 16 feet 16 feet, less than a small house. Also to excavate a straight run for drainage without hitting piles is almost impossible. This is my research and mine alone and has not been shared with the other groups. If you decide to use it I would appreciate my name being brought forward as the author as I have enough technical information to counter any challenges that may arise.”*

Shropshire Council Senior Mechanical Design Engineer

The Group heard next from a Senior Mechanical Design Engineer, within Property Services at Shropshire Council who explained that the Shirehall air conditioning was designed so that every square metre of every floor gets an appropriate amount of fresh air, preheated by air handling units in the plant room. 70% of the heating delivered is tempered air, suited for humidity as well. There is continuous heating in all the wings around the windows, and this can be tweaked to ensure a comfortable heating level to suit one side of the building to another.

However, the reconfiguration of many of the rooms over time, with moveable partitions, has meant that rooms are rearranged without the sensors or controls being reconfigured appropriately. These controls and sensors would need attention as would the perimeter heating, but in his opinion, this would be easy managed with regular cleaning and desludging of the pipes.

He added that the opening windows would need non opening secondary glazing to improve the thermal performance of the building appreciably, whilst there is already some secondary glazing on upper floors, completion of this throughout the building would address most issues of temperature. He confirmed that the fenestration was sound, and that double glazing would be a very expensive option, but with secondary glazing and attention to the heating system the mechanical and heating engineer felt that the building would be efficient, functional and comfortable, adding that there is a lot of natural light making it a pleasant bright working environment.

In his evidence to the Group the Senior Mechanical Design Engineer explained that Shirehall was a very advanced building for its time, and its maintenance costs over 60 years per square metre have been less than modern buildings.

When questioned on the heating system he confirmed that it is still functional but due to being switched off it would require recommissioning. The boilers only installed in 2012 are considered efficient.

When asked specifically about its functionality he said that it is more reliable than modern systems, longer lasting, more easily repairable and more flexible.

Subsequent to the witness session the Senior Mechanical Design Engineer sent through the following statement -

“The bulk of the options that are being discussed revolve around demolition and redevelopment of the site, or some kind of joint venture redevelopment. For a council facing financial difficulties I, and many other staff, are astonished that the simplest, quickest and most long term cost effective solution of simply moving back to Shirehall is not being pursued. It is not too big even with homeworking because it would allow many scattered leased and maintained properties to be disposed of, or let to other organisations, while council staff are under one roof – the most efficient way of working. The message I would hope to get across is that Shirehall has been judged viable, for its original purpose, by technically qualified officers familiar with maintaining it, in the fairly recent past. Up until Covid 2021 Shirehall was a fully functioning building, albeit tired in places through neglect of maintenance. I’d like to bring up the quoted costs of refurbishing Shirehall which are very misleading and confusing. There has been confusion over what is meant by refurbishment and the conflicting costs quoted. This all goes back to 2015 when we were moving back into Shirehall from Guildhall The two main options being considered by the new leader Malcolm Pate at that time were a modest refurbishment and catch-up (which was investigated by surveyors in PSG, people who knew the building and could target only what needed to be done) which was costed at £3.8M and also a major refurb. I was involved in both which I guess is how my name came up here. The major total strip out refurbishment feasibility study was done by external architects and initially costed at £14m, then £25m then more - totally unnecessary but is still the basis of the current refurbishment cost quoted in December’s Strategic review of £54M. It wouldn’t cost this much in central London !. (The 2025 edition of Spon’s Architects and Builders price book shows a total strip out and refurb of a civic office building the size of Shirehall in central London would cost on average £2900 per m2 or £35M in total and in Shrewsbury very much less). But it doesn’t have to be so. In 2020 we internally produced a revised modest refurb schedule. Some work had been done by then (from the 2015 report) , and more priorities were added to address criticisms of comfort and safety and energy efficiency. There had been a critical fire safety report adding £900K and we addressed the single glazing and roof so the overall figure had gone up to about £4.7M but this report was not put forward because councillors had voted in July to vacate Shirehall regardless. Obviously another up-to-date review would be needed but importantly the works identified can be done progressively as finances allow without the delays and risks attached to redevelopment. We hear scare words like “asbestos” - yes, Shirehall contains asbestos, just like most of our schools, but like them it is managed. Shirehall was a very advanced building for it’s day designed specifically for the sort of use and transport accessibility we need. It’s

maintenance costs over 60 years per square metre have been less than modern buildings. We would then have a wholly owned and paid for centre for the future, easily accessible from all over the county, with ongoing savings from re-lets and disposals.”

Shropshire Council Service Manager for Economic Development

When the Task and Finish Group called the Service Manager for Economic Development to speak with them, they discussed mixed use opportunities for Shirehall, both as a spacious offices with a hotel, conference centre, leisure facilities and general promotion of broader economic development benefits. They heard that there could be huge potential here, and a valuable economic opportunity, reflecting upon the existing 730,000 to 800,000 bed nights per year already in the Shrewsbury area, and the towns footfall of 10.5million visitors a year equating to the fact that two thirds of visitors only come for one day. Recruit a Destination Management Officer (2-year post) to promote Shirehall and Shrewsbury.

The Group also discussed further education and apprenticeship opportunities, business support programmes, and small business assistance.

It was felt that a full market assessment would help provide the insights required to fully understand the economic value and opportunities that could be realised, taking into consideration economic impact, what the market need is and what interest is out there.

The Twentieth Century Society

The Task and Finish Group also heard from the Twentieth Century Society who aim to protect post 1940's heritage, maintaining that the greenest and most sustainable buildings are those that already exist. In their discussions the Task and Finish Group heard how a joint venture partner might reimagine the Shirehall and bring it back into use, through creative reuse and retrofit. It was suggested that with appropriate upkeep, maintenance and repair, the design, craft, beauty, materials and history of the building could be reflected.

They showed a number of other projects that have been successfully completed and evidenced how Modernist structures can be attractively repurposed for contemporary uses bring economic and social benefits to their areas.

They also highlighted a number of far newer buildings that are already considered unfit for purpose and needing to undergo refit. They stressed that new is not always better, and made their case as follows -

“The Shirehall was built between 1963 and 1966 to the designs of the County Architects’ Department, led by County Architect Ralph Crowe, and working with the structural engineers Ove Arup and Partners. The Shirehall was described by the architectural

historian Nikolaus Pevsner in his guide to Shropshire as ‘The major monument to post-war Modernism in the county’.

As you all know the building is still subject to a COI which is about to expire later this year. And we have just been consulted on another COI for the building, if granted this would give immunity from listing until 2030. However, we strongly believe that, while unlisted, the Shirehall still has clear and strong heritage value and that this will only increase over time. The bar for listing Twentieth Century Buildings, and particularly post war buildings, is very high. The number of listed buildings in England is estimated to be somewhere between 400-500,000 – approximately 2% of all building stock. The entire Twentieth Century accounts for just 3.2% of all listed buildings and about 0.2% relates to buildings built after 1945.

The Shirehall was built as one of several civic centres built in England in the post-war period. More civic offices were needed in the second half of the Twentieth Century as local authorities increased their share of the workforce from 6% to 10% between 1952 and 1972. They were often grand and imposing buildings and played an important role in conveying the identity and centrality of the local government.

But Post-war county halls and civic centres are now a threatened typology. In many cases, councils have decided that the buildings no longer meet their operational requirements—and, for many councils, their working habits have changed post-Covid—and/or the costs of necessary upgrades and maintenance are considered too high, making demolition and redevelopment an attractive option. This has resulted in the loss of several important post-war civic buildings. “

Quarterbridge Project Management Ltd

The Task and Finish Group also met with a joint venture specialist who had previously sent in a report to the members of the Task and Finish Group with an impartial commercial assessment of considered opportunities for a joint venture approach.

“A JV refurbishment offers the financial advantages of refurbishing and re-using the Shirehall building and delivering refurbished offices for the Council. This is preferable to the current proposal of demolition for residential redevelopment. It would also offer other benefits to the balance sheet from follow-on actions and support for wider policy objectives. A development agreement with a private sector would deliver development capital without the Council increasing its indebtedness to the Public Works Loans Board. It would help overcome the wider financial challenges faced by the Council and support it’s application for Extraordinary Financial Assistance when presented to the MHCLG. JV’s are often used to deliver regeneration projects where the partner provides the development finance, delivers the project to an agreed specification and bears any cost overruns. In this case the design would include refurbished offices for Council use. The partner would hold a legal interest which enables it to retain income from space not

required by Council and after moving into the refurbished offices the Council can rationalise its surplus offices to further benefit the balance sheet. Avoiding further indebtedness to the PWLB is a priority for Shropshire Council. It would demonstrate to MHCLG how it is adopting innovative strategies to resolve its challenges and can be used to support the Council's application for Extraordinary Financial Support. It would enable the Council to retain the freehold and release value from an existing asset protected by step-in rights as head landlord and through the agreement to safeguard the Council's interests and keep open options to dispose of or borrow against its interest in the future. It would deliver four key strategic objectives:

- Release value from an existing asset by attracting private sector finance*
- Enable rationalisation of the Council's landholdings to boost the balance sheet*
- Support the Council's application for Extraordinary Financial Support*
- Provide refurbished offices for Council use at modest cost"*

Mindful of the financial crisis at Shropshire Council, and supportive of the endeavour to review assets the report advised that the building was well designed when conceived but doesn't meet modern standards, however, it stated a belief that Shirehall can be adapted. The joint venture specialist proposed that the Task and Finish Group should consider the joint venture route, setting a timetable for formal appraisal, but added that it could be a time consuming process likely to need external specialist assistance. This might include a dedicated project group, a project manager, and a quantity surveyor for length of project to approve on behalf of the Council what the partner is doing and keep very much on top of the very intense process.

Adding that with a well negotiated joint venture scheme the usual practice is that the costs would be subsumed by the private sector partner.

The Task and Finish Group heard that there was likely to be a good return both financially and socially to a joint venture scheme, and learned that in the first instance an offer prospectus would need to be prepared for soft market testing to get a shortlist of developers / interested parties for evaluation and narrowing down to shortlist. The Group heard that this was usual practice and would involve no commitment at this stage, as part of standard procurement practise.

There was some debate as to how a joint venture arrangement differed from a PFI one, whilst similar they are not the same and have evolved a lot over the years. He said that the Council could be a tenant and even act as landlord to other users. At point of income return in some arrangements income splits between Council as freeholder and the JV partner.

Save Our Shirehall

The Task and Finish Group asked whether Save Our Shirehall would be open to the joint venture approach as a way to save the building and were told that Save Our Shirehall believe it is critical to see the building refurbished, reused, and bought back to life, restoring the value of the building to the community as intended. The Save Our Shirehall witnesses understood that with a move towards hybrid working the building would not reach potential without partners but acknowledged that it has a wide range of uses including upward extension following its original stepped design.

The Task and Finish Group discussed how value of the Shirehall is showcased in the architectural features ahead of its time, good design, specialist materials, clear design aesthetic and spacious work areas.

By comparison Guildhall lacks desk space and no place for private meetings incurs travel inefficiencies, risks of car park flooding and lost parking revenue of £375k per year.

Save Our Shirehall believe that from a community engagement point of view the Shirehall is the better suited building in that it allows for public interaction with the democratic process.

Save Our Shirehall felt that a lack of vision had hindered Shirehall's future use,

“Demolition of Shirehall is divestment of a free asset which some in leadership team may see as a liability. We suggest this lacks vision and evidence based assessment of Shirehall cost/benefits compared with Guildhall particularly and new build.”

However, they added that the flexibility of construction in the original design and its adaptability would be an asset in bringing together disparate council functions into one unit and allow disposal of scattered leased offices on numerous sites. Adding that stilted housing on the rear of the site could be developed at no cost to parking space

“Shirehall should be considered in the context of the example in Shrewsbury of the recovery of the Market Hall into a vibrant civic facility for Shrewsbury and visitors which supports many small businesses.

For the Shirehall a presumption of exciting potential should replace the present presumption of negative ‘not fit for purpose’ clearly demonstrated by similar examples across the UK.”

Shrewsbury Civic Society

The Task and Finish Group members heard about the history and ethos of the Shrewsbury Civic Society and that in terms of heritage value and carbon cost it makes sense to reuse the building that the greenest building – is the one already in existence. Adding that if Shropshire Council truly believed Shirehall to be beyond

economic repair, they would have taken the step to have the rates removed and save money, not doing so suggests that the Council believe the building is salvageable.

Shrewsbury Civic Society expressed the professional belief that current fire safety issues at Shirehall are manageable in their experience. The presence of asbestos in a building of this age is only to be expected and we haven't demolished every building containing it. The costs of asbestos removal were discussed in light of the briefing paper from Shropshire Council. This paper stated that removal of asbestos for demolition can be 2 to 4 times more expensive than works to deal with asbestos for refurbishment. Asbestos is only dangerous when it is disturbed. There will of course be some structural repairs to a building this age as expected. Their structural engineer offered to read the technical reports in confidence at no cost to Shropshire Council to give his opinion. They explained that there is an assumption that new build is cheaper than retrofit, but without costings for either option it is difficult to make that assertion. They did highlight that costings included in the December Report to Council stated that the costs to refurbish Shirehall were calculated on £2,500m² compared to £5,000m² to build new. The Civic Society urged the Task and Finish Group to recognise the building as an asset rather than a liability, suggesting that market advice is sought in the form of an Architectural Competition, a bid for involvement, ensuring that the best professional people have input towards saving the site. This would involve little cost to the Council. They added that by looking after and valuing the building and asking for ideas, the market will come forward. Allowing the Council to design the brief and set the value. They suggested the concept of an 'urban village' encompassing economic and social value benefits and seeing its regeneration in the wider context of opening up the potential of Shrewsbury and wider Shropshire. They highlighted how the Market Hall was once derided but is now a much loved and award-winning part of the town.

Some of their suggested illustrations for the potential for the Shirehall were as follows -





The Shirehall, Shrewsbury: A future built on the past

Building a Vibrant Neighbourhood

The existing Shirehall buildings and spaces in between have the potential to become a vibrant neighbourhood that can be well integrated into the wider area. Our vision is to transform the site into a cohesive, sustainable, and thriving community space that respects the architectural legacy of The Shirehall.



Internal courtyard with community café



Heritage

Retaining the existing buildings will enhance any development. The Shirehall is a non-designated heritage asset. Retention and sympathetic reuse will assist with the site's transition, avoid the cost of demolition, and add continuity and maturity to the development.

"There is nothing else quite like it in the county...this is an excellent civic building, well-made and individual"
Owen Hatherley, Modern Buildings in Britain: A Gazetteer (2022)

Masterplan

Retaining the existing structures on the site offers significant environmental, social and financial benefits, as well as generating a future income stream.

A well considered masterplan for the site could incorporate the following brief whilst retaining the existing building:

- Medical practice
- Community café
- Council facilities
- Residential care facility
- Residential units
- Other uses (gym, nursery, pub)

This could be achieved in partnership with private companies looking to create a unique and characterful development.

NO DEMOLITION



Public square reimagined

Subsequent to the meeting on the 9th February the Task and Finish Group members have held a number of individual meetings to close gaps in evidence, these were with Shropshire Council Planning officers, Finance officers, Economic Development officers, and Unison.

Appendix B

Shirehall Asbestos – Demolition vs Refurbishment Cost Implications

This briefing note summarises the asbestos implications of demolishing versus refurbishing Shirehall, based on the 1081-page Asbestos Re-inspection Report (S24-00161 – January 2024). The report contains no cost figures but identifies the full extent of ACMs (asbestos-containing materials) across all floors, basements, heater systems, ducting, storage areas and risers. Cost ranges below are industry-standard benchmarks for buildings of comparable scale.

1. Demolition Scenario – Required Asbestos Actions

If Shirehall were demolished, asbestos law requires ALL asbestos-containing materials to be removed in full before any demolition activity can begin. This includes:

- All ACM wall and heater panels across all floors
- All AIB and cement board in risers, plant rooms and voids
- All asbestos floor tiles and adhesives
- All boiler room insulation residues and duct debris
- All strongly presumed ACMs and inaccessible areas once opened

This constitutes a whole-building asbestos strip-out and environmental clean.

Estimated Cost Range for Demolition-Phase Asbestos Removal

- £4 million – £10 million (industry benchmark for full asbestos removal in a multi-storey 1960s civic complex with basements and extensive ACM distribution).

2. Refurbishment Scenario – Required Asbestos Actions

Under refurbishment, only the ACMs directly affected by the works must be removed. Remaining ACMs that are undisturbed can legally remain in situ and be encapsulated or monitored. Typical refurbishment-affected ACMs include:

- Heater cabinet panels in rooms where works occur
- Damaged ACM panels identified in the survey
- Floor tiles in zones being reconfigured
- Panels or ductwork ACMs in M&E upgrade areas

Estimated Cost Range for Refurbishment-Phase Asbestos Removal

- £1.5 million – £3 million (partial removal based on project scope; encapsulation used where compliant).

3. Comparison Summary

Scenario	Implication
Demolition	All ACMs must be removed before demolition; highest possible compliance burden.
Refurbishment	Only ACMs affected by works removed; large proportion can remain and be managed.
Cost Difference	Demolition asbestos cost is typically 2–4× higher than refurbishment-linked removal.

4. Conclusion

The asbestos survey demonstrates extensive ACM presence throughout Shirehall. Demolition would require complete removal of all ACMs—driving significantly higher cost, risk, and programme impact. Refurbishment limits removal to intervention areas, reducing cost exposure and enabling safer phasing of works.