



Committee

Cabinet

Date and Time

9 September 2026
10.30 am

Public

Whitchurch Civic Centre – Asset Decision

Cabinet Member:	Councillor Roger Evans – Portfolio Holder for Assets	
Lead Director:	Kassandra Polyzoides – SD for Place Shaping	
Service Area:	Place Shaping	
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Electoral Divisions Affected	Whitchurch	
Key Decision	Key Decision	
Cabinet Forward Plan	Yes – 11 th June 2026	
Report considered by	Cabinet – 9 September 2026	

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 This report seeks approval to move from a paused programme of remediation and rebuild options to a disposal-led strategy for Whitchurch Civic Centre and Library. It reflects the RAAC risk at the site, the absence of funding, and the Council's financial emergency.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 Whitchurch Civic Centre and Library has long supported civic, community, cultural, library, market and town-centre activity. The Council recognises its importance to residents, businesses and community groups, and the impact of its continuing closure.

- 2.2 Shropshire Council owns the Civic Centre and leases it to Whitchurch Town Council under a 21-year lease from 1 April 2010 to 31 March 2031. Either party may terminate the lease on at least 12 months' notice. The implications for disposal, including any termination or alternative arrangement, will be explored through ongoing discussions with the Town Council and next-stage legal and property due diligence.
- 2.3 RAAC was identified in 2023, leading to closure, decommissioning and further options work approved by Cabinet in January 2024. In February 2025, Cabinet included £4 million in the capital strategy for potential match funding or roof replacement; the then administration and cabinet did not however allocate monies prior to May 2025, and the scheme remained subject to funding, affordability and further approvals.
- 2.4 The 2026 surveys confirm continuing RAAC deterioration and wider condition and compliance liabilities. Around £4 million would be required to return the building to sustainable use, including £500,000–£600,000 of urgent and essential works and approximately £50,000 of interventions required within three to six months.
- 2.5 Under the financial emergency, Exceptional Financial Support and Best Value Notice, the Council cannot fund these works. No equivalent national RAAC programme exists for local authority civic, cultural or library buildings, and the asset continues to incur holding costs and liabilities.
- 2.6 Community submissions and specialist advice have been considered. They support retaining civic functions and identify possible remediation and governance models, but no fully costed, funded and deliverable alternative has been presented.
- 2.7 The report therefore recommends a disposal-led strategy to reduce continuing risks, liabilities and costs and secure the best consideration reasonably obtainable. Disposal would not predetermine demolition or redevelopment, and viable community-led proposals may continue to be considered during due diligence and marketing.

3. Recommendations

Cabinet is recommended to: -

- 3.1 Declare the Whitchurch Civic Centre and Library site, edged red at **Appendix A**, surplus to the Council's operational requirements, for the reasons set out in sections 4 and 5 of this report, and having regard to the capital requirement and continuing maintenance and holding liabilities set out in section 4.
- 3.2 Approve its in-principle disposal, subject to the due diligence described in section 5, the financial and policy requirements in section 9, and the legal and statutory requirements in section 10, and in accordance with the Asset Disposal Policy within the Financial Sustainability and Recovery Strategy approved by Cabinet on 8 July 2026.
- 3.3 Delegate authority to the Service Director for Place Shaping, in consultation with the Section 151 Officer and the Portfolio Holders for Finance and Assets, to determine and implement the disposal strategy and secure the best consideration reasonably obtainable.
- 3.4 Note that officers and the Portfolio Holder will continue to engage with the Members for the Whitchurch electoral divisions, Whitchurch Town Council and other interested parties as the disposal strategy progresses.

4. Background

- 4.1 Whitchurch Civic Centre and Library is located on High Street, Whitchurch. The wider complex has historically supported a range of civic, community, cultural, library, market, visitor information and town-centre uses. The site includes the Civic Centre building, Market Hall, Visitor Information Centre, Library, Registrar-related accommodation, external areas and associated car parking. The Library and Market Hall form part of the wider Civic Centre complex rather than being separately held standalone assets.
- 4.2 RAAC was identified in the roof structure of the Whitchurch Civic Centre and Library during ongoing condition, repair and maintenance work in 2023. Subsequent detailed assessment and structural engineering advice identified extensive RAAC in critical condition, leading to the closure of the most affected parts of the complex. Temporary propping and access controls were introduced to stabilise and manage risk.
- 4.3 Cabinet considered the matter in January 2024 and endorsed closure, decommissioning and further options work. The decision also reflected the need to provide interim arrangements for library and community services and to work with Whitchurch Town Council and local representatives on future options.
- 4.4 In February 2025, Cabinet agreed that the RAAC-affected areas should remain closed and included £4 million in the capital strategy for potential match funding of a replacement facility or roof replacement. This was a planning assumption, not a funded allocation or authority to proceed, and remained subject to funding, affordability, business case development and further approvals. Strategic Leisure Limited's subsequent needs analysis confirmed the centre's community importance and the value of its library, market, performance, meeting, community and cultural functions.
- 4.5 The indicative £4 million requirement comprises approximately £3 million for roof replacement, RAAC remediation and consequential works, and £1 million for wider condition liabilities identified in the 2026 surveys (**Appendix B**). It includes £500,000–£600,000 of urgent and essential works before reoccupation and approximately £50,000 within three to six months to investigate and address the High Street timber balcony façade and ongoing RAAC deterioration. These strategic estimates remain subject to investigation, design and procurement and exclude significant remodelling, service enhancement and wider refurbishment.
- 4.6 The Council's maintenance and holding costs over the past six financial years are shown below:

Year	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
Maintenance and holding cost	£6,042	£3,409	£10,196	£4,672	£19,761	£10,154

- 4.7 In January 2026, the capital project was reviewed as part of an in depth look at outstanding schemes against the Council's financial position. The 2026 condition survey and structural synthesis found no sudden or catastrophic change, but confirmed that deteriorating RAAC, water ingress, unpropped areas, life-expired roof elements, poor fabric and mechanical and electrical compliance issues are increasing risk and that continued vacancy will accelerate deterioration.

- 4.8 Community submissions, including Save Our Civic material (**Appendix C**), support retaining civic functions and propose future uses and governance models, but do not provide a funded and deliverable capital solution. At the community group's request, the Council met its nominated RAAC specialist in July 2026, who advised that localised or staged remediation could be explored. However, confirming an alternative would require intrusive testing, structural modelling, design and professional validation, potentially costing more than £100,000 before evaluation. No viable funded alternative was identified, and substantial investment would still be needed to address RAAC and wider building liabilities.
- 4.9 The Council recognises the significant level of local interest in the future of the Whitchurch Civic Centre and Library site and has worked closely with community representatives, including the Save Our Civic group, to understand potential opportunities and aspirations for its future use. This dialogue will continue as proposals are developed. Subject to approval of the recommendations within this report, any future disposal strategy will include appropriate opportunities for community groups, local organisations and other interested parties to come forward, demonstrate interest and participate in a fair and transparent process for the future redevelopment or reuse of the site.
- 4.10 Throughout the period following closure of the Civic Centre, the Council has engaged with a wide range of stakeholders regarding the future of the site, including Helen Morgan MP. The MP has actively supported discussions regarding potential funding opportunities and has sought to raise awareness of the challenges faced by local authorities affected by RAAC. Whilst no dedicated Government funding programme has been identified for local authority civic buildings of this nature, the Council acknowledges the constructive engagement and support provided in seeking potential solutions for the future of the facility.

5. Summary of Main Proposals

- 5.1 The main proposal is to move from a Council-funded repair or replacement strategy to a disposal-led strategy. This does not disregard the community importance of the building. It recognises and confirms that the Council is not able to fund the capital works required to make the building safe, compliant and suitable for reoccupation.
- 5.2 The proposed delegation will enable officers to progress a managed disposal process, supported by appropriate valuation, legal, planning, title and technical due diligence. The final disposal route may include a freehold sale, long leasehold disposal, conditional disposal, development agreement or another structure that balances best consideration, risk, control, deliverability and community outcomes.
- 5.3 Marketing will be supported by a development brief or prospectus setting out the site context, structural and planning constraints, community interest and the Council's expectations for future use. Disposal will not predetermine demolition or redevelopment; any future demolition, redevelopment or change of use will remain subject to relevant planning, conservation, building control, public protection and statutory processes, through which local impacts will be assessed and managed.

- 5.4 The delegation will allow officers to respond to market, valuation and due diligence findings and continue assessing viable community-led regeneration proposals, including a community asset transfer. Engagement with local Members, Whitchurch Town Council and community representatives will continue. Any proposal must be fully costed, funded, deliverable and legally compliant, with Section 151 Officer and relevant Portfolio Holder oversight.
- 5.5 The site incorporates the former Whitchurch Library, which closed as part of the wider response to RAAC. Library provision currently operates from temporary premises at Unit C, St Mary's Arcade. As part of the next-stage due diligence, officers will address the implications of disposal for future library provision and ensure that the Council continues to meet its statutory library duties, as set out in section 10.

6. Alternative Options

- 6.1 Four alternatives were considered and discounted: -
- Doing nothing and retaining the building would leave the Council with continuing holding, inspection, insurance, security and health and safety liabilities, and the 2026 survey confirms that delay will increase both cost and risk.
 - Funding the works required to retain the building and return it to sustainable use, estimated in the region of £4 million, is not affordable.
 - Constructing a new replacement facility has strong community support but costs substantially more, and no confirmed funding package exists.
 - Pursuing a community-led transfer or capital project remains possible in principle, but no sufficiently developed, funded and deliverable proposal has been presented which would remove the Council's immediate liabilities or allow safe reoccupation.
- 6.2 The alternatives were discounted because the Council cannot afford the required capital investment and no deliverable external funding or funded alternative has been secured. National RAAC funding is available for education and health buildings, but no equivalent programme exists for local authority civic, cultural or library buildings, and attempts to secure government funding for this site have been unsuccessful.
- 6.3 The recommended disposal-led approach provides the Council with a route to reduce risk and liability, secure the best consideration reasonably obtainable and test whether the market can bring forward a viable and deliverable outcome for the site.

7. Key Risks and Mitigations

- 7.1 The principal risks associated with the proposed disposal-led approach, together with the measures through which they will be managed, are summarised below. These risks will remain under review throughout due diligence, marketing and completion of any transaction.

Risk / Opportunity	Mitigation
Structural and safety risk	Continue closure of RAAC-affected areas, maintain access controls, inspections, vacant-property management and interim mitigation until disposal or other lawful transfer is completed.

Financial risk	Progress disposal to reduce holding liabilities and support the Council's financial sustainability position. Obtain Section 151 oversight throughout.
Best consideration and valuation risk	Obtain independent valuation advice and structure any disposal in accordance with section 123 of the Local Government Act 1972 and the Council's Constitution.
Community impact risk	Set out the Council's position clearly in the development brief and through continued engagement, and address re-provision of affected services separately from the disposal.
Reputational risk	Provide clear, factual communications explaining the RAAC history, investigations undertaken, lack of funding, financial emergency and rationale for the recommended decision.
Delivery risk	Delegate authority to enable officers to respond to market feedback and conclude due diligence, while retaining oversight through the Service Director, Section 151 Officer and Portfolio Holder.
Legal and title risk	Undertake title, lease, planning, access, covenant, statutory, procurement and legal due diligence before finalising any transaction.
Market risk	Test disposal options through appropriate market engagement and use professional advice to determine the optimum transaction structure.
Library Service and Consultation Risk	Address the implications for future library provision through the next-stage due diligence, including any consultation or separate decision required, and ensure that the disposal strategy preserves the Council's ability to meet its statutory library duties, as set out at section 10.
Redevelopment risk	The works to remediate the building in whatever form may have an impact on the high street in terms of construction logistics so any disposal strategy will need to be cognisant of this risk and plan to support the local community and mitigate the impact of any major works.

8. Council Priorities

- 8.1 The recommended approach supports the Council's financial stability and sustainability objectives by seeking to reduce unfunded capital liabilities, limit further condition-related exposure and secure an appropriate transaction outcome. The proposal also supports effective governance by providing a clear decision-making framework and delegated authority to progress a complex asset decision in a timely manner.

9. Financial Implications

- 9.1 Cabinet declared a financial emergency on 10 September 2025, and the Council now operates under Exceptional Financial Support and a Best Value Notice. These require evidence-based, financially sustainable decisions delivered at pace, making timely resolution of the asset's continuing costs, risks and liabilities necessary.
- 9.2 Retaining and upgrading the asset would leave the Council responsible for increasing maintenance, insurance, temporary structural, compliance and substantial capital

investment costs moving forward. Disposal would remove the capital requirement and reduce these continuing liabilities.

- 9.3 No formal valuation has been undertaken. An independent Red Book valuation will form part of the due diligence required by the recommendation to approve disposal in principle. The transaction structure, capital receipt, retained obligations and disposal costs will be determined through the delegated process, with Section 151 Officer oversight and compliance with section 123 of the Local Government Act 1972 and the Council's Constitution.
- 9.4 The proposed disposal applies the Asset Disposal Policy within the Financial Sustainability and Recovery Strategy approved by Cabinet on 8 July 2026. The policy seeks early disposal of redundant assets, best value, shorter timescales and reduced Council costs. Under the disposal route, demolition, remediation and associated planning costs would normally transfer to the purchaser; any departure would require a clear financial business case and further approval.
- 9.5 Officers will establish a clear timetable and governance arrangements with the Portfolio Holder and Cabinet to progress the disposal at pace and reduce continuing risks, liabilities and costs.

10. Legal and HR implications

- 10.1 Any disposal will need to comply with the Council's Constitution, section 123 of the Local Government Act 1972 and all relevant legal requirements. The Council must secure the best consideration reasonably obtainable unless a lawful exception applies and is properly approved.
- 10.2 Legal due diligence will need to consider title, leases, occupation, access, rights, covenants, planning constraints, the Conservation Area context, procurement implications, any community asset considerations, market obligations and any proposed protection or reprovision of community activity.
- 10.3 No direct HR implications are identified at this stage. Any service or staffing implications arising from future market, library, civic or operational arrangements will require separate advice and engagement.
- 10.4 The Local Member protocol applies to this decision. The Members for the Whitchurch electoral divisions will be briefed on the officer assessment and the recommendations before publication of this report. Their views will be considered in finalising the report and in developing the disposal strategy.
- 10.5 Under section 7 of the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964, the Council must provide a comprehensive and efficient library service. Provision currently operates from temporary premises at Unit C, St Mary's Arcade. Due diligence will assess the impact of disposal on future provision, including any consultation or separate decision required, while ensuring statutory duties continue to be met. This will align with the separate review of library and cultural services approved by Cabinet on 8 July 2026.
- 10.6 The final transaction structure will be determined following legal, valuation and commercial due diligence. Any disposal at less than the best consideration reasonably obtainable must rely on a lawful exception, including the General Disposal Consent 2003, or receive the consent of the Secretary of State. Such an

arrangement would require separate legal and financial advice and, where necessary, further Cabinet approval.

11. Health, Social (including “Child Friendly Shropshire”) and Economic Implications

- 11.1 Disposal and the subsequent reuse or redevelopment of the site has the potential to support investment, employment and town-centre vitality in Whitchurch. Conversely, a prolonged period during which the building remains closed, propped and unused would continue to affect the appearance, footfall and economic performance of the High Street. The recommended approach is intended to return the site to productive use at the earliest practicable point.

12. Equality and Diversity Implications

- 12.1 The closure and any future disposal may affect access to community, cultural, library, market and civic facilities. Equality implications will be considered through the disposal strategy, any service reprovion and any future planning process. Particular attention should be given to accessibility, older people, disabled residents, families, younger people and those who rely on local services and town-centre facilities.
- 12.2 The Equality, Social Inclusion and Health Impact Assessment will be finalised as the disposal strategy is developed, taking account of existing community uses, previous detailed needs assessment work and ongoing stakeholder engagement. This will inform the recommendations and support Cabinet in meeting its duty under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010.

13. Climate Change, Biodiversity and Environmental Implications

- 13.1 Refurbishment would preserve some embodied carbon but require extensive, unaffordable works to address RAAC and wider building liabilities. Future redevelopment may increase embodied carbon but could deliver a more energy-efficient and sustainable long-term solution.
- 13.2 The development brief should require proposals to address planning, sustainability, biodiversity, conservation and climate requirements through the relevant statutory processes. The Council cannot fund these benefits itself.
- 13.3 Future development will be subject to the planning, sustainability, biodiversity net gain and environmental standards applicable at the time.

14. Consultation and Engagement

- 14.1 Since RAAC was identified, the Council has undertaken Cabinet reporting, working and steering group discussions, public consultation, needs assessment, community submissions and technical surveys.
- 14.2 Community interest, particularly through the Save Our Civic, has been significant. Its submissions have been considered and will inform the disposal strategy, alongside engagement with Whitchurch Town Council, local Members, community representatives and affected services.
- 14.3 At a meeting on 5 June 2026, representatives of Whitchurch Civic Society and the associated community group discussed the Council’s assessment and disposal

option. The Council agreed to meet the group's nominated specialist to explore whether an alternative technical solution was available.

- 14.4 The subsequent specialist engagement confirmed that further intrusive investigation and testing could explore additional remediation options. However, it did not resolve the cost, funding and deliverability issues set out in paragraph 4.8.
- 14.5 The community proposals and specialist input were considered by the Asset Transaction Group, chaired by the S151 officer, which provides officer-level assurance on asset transactions. The Section 151 officer, acting under delegated authority in line with the Council's Scheme of Delegation, concluded that no fully funded and deliverable alternative to disposal has been presented. The decision for the in-principle disposal of the asset is a matter for Cabinet and is the subject of this report.
- 14.6 Throughout the options appraisal process, the Council has engaged with a range of local stakeholders to better understand community priorities and potential opportunities for the future of the site. This engagement has provided valuable local insight and has informed the considerations set out within this report. While the Council must balance community aspirations with its statutory obligations, financial constraints and wider asset management responsibilities, it remains committed to continued engagement with stakeholders as future proposals for the site are developed and considered.

15. Conclusion

- 15.1 Whitchurch Civic Centre and Library has a long-standing civic and community role. The Council has explored repair, replacement, community proposals and future needs, support by extensive technical work on the RAAC and wider condition issues.
- 15.2 However, under the financial emergency, Exceptional Financial Support and a Best Value Notice, the Council cannot fund the works required for safe reoccupation. The £4 million identified in the capital strategy was not a funded allocation, and no national RAAC funding is available for local authority civic buildings. A disposal-led strategy is therefore the only currently affordable and deliverable option consistent with the Council's financial and improvement requirements.

16. Background Papers

- Cabinet report and decision: Whitchurch Civic Centre and Library – RAAC, 17 January 2024
- Cabinet report and decision: Whitchurch Civic Centre and Library – RAAC and Future Options, February 2025
- Whitchurch Civic Centre and Library Condition Survey Report & Structural Synthesis 2026
- Whitchurch Civic Centre – Needs Assessment by Strategic Leisure Limited, 2025
- Save Our Civic submission: Resuscitating the beating heart of Whitchurch, April 2026
- Whitchurch Library & Civic Centre – RAAC remedial option discussion, July 2026
- Draft Medium Term Financial Plan 2027-2032, including Appendix A Financial Sustainability and Recovery Strategy – Cabinet, 8 July 2026

17. Appendices

- Appendix A – Red line plan and asset boundary
- Appendix B – 2026 Condition Survey and Structural Synthesis summary
- Appendix C – Summary of community interest and Save Our Civic submission