



Shropshire Council

Whitchurch Civic Centre - Assessment of Need

A Report by Strategic Leisure Limited

July 2025



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1. Executive Summary

- 1.1. Since the closure of the Whitchurch Civic Centre in 2023, Shropshire Council has been working to identify options for its future. In March 2025 Strategic Leisure Limited (SLL) was appointed to undertake an independent needs analysis to inform the future development options for the Civic Centre.
- 1.2. The audit of the local community facilities beyond the Civic Centre and Market Hall highlights the lack of large space to accommodate larger audiences for events. Some of the spaces such as the Watergate Centre and Town Hall and Community Hub have been able to accommodate some of the community information events and activities previously hosted at the Civic Centre, however these are now at locations outside of the convenience of the high street. Theatre and culture provision have been able to access alternative space at the local secondary school, however this is restricted and located on the outskirts of the town
- 1.3. Consultation meetings took place with multiple stakeholders including, Shropshire Council (including newly elected councillors) and Whitchurch Town Council representatives, (newly elected Liberal Democrats), the Shropshire North MP, local community groups and businesses. Discussions focussed on existing uses of the Civic Centre prior to closing, which activities have been maintained and lost, other community facilities available within the town and what should be included if a new Civic Centre was developed.
- 1.4. A key theme from all of the consultation meetings is the importance of the Civic Centre to the community. Described as a “focal point for the town”, the stakeholders highlighted how the centre’s closure had a broader impact on the wider high street, leaving a hole and leaving the town lacking momentum. This applies to the events, groups and activities it hosted, in addition to the services which have been displaced or no longer operate in the area.
- 1.5. The Civic Centre had an extensive range of uses by a broad audience, considering their thoughts and options highlights this further as shown in Table 1:

Table 1: Summary of Activities previously provided at Whitchurch Civic Centre

Whitchurch Civic Centre Space	Provision for community meetings	Provision for community groups	Activities previously provided							
			Sport	Arts and cultural Events	Library Services	Offices	Tourist Information	Public Toilets	Capacity	Usage Frequency
Library	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	-	45,181 visits during 2022-2023, prior to closure
Market Hall	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	400	Weekly usage and one off events

Whitchurch Civic Centre Space	Provision for community meetings	Provision for community groups	Activities previously provided							
			Sport	Arts and cultural Events	Library Services	Offices	Tourist Information	Public Toilets	Capacity	Usage Frequency
Edward German	Yes	Yes	Yes – Zumba/Yoga	No	No	No	Unsure	Yes	650 across all three spaces	Weekly bookings for sports/exercise classes and meetings
Bar Lounge	Yes	Yes	Yes – Keep Fit	No	No	No	Unsure	Yes		
Main Hall	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Unsure	Unsure	Yes		Ad hoc bookings for theatre performances

- 1.6. The theatre and Market Hall both have a capacity of 400 people based on fire safety, when set up with theatre style seating. This reduces with the set-up of tables for other events or stalls for the market. Prior to the closure of the Civic Centre, there used to be a frequent flow of people through the building accessing the tourist information, library and public toilets. Many of the bookings for the Market Hall were weekly including the sports and exercise classes and market. Other community groups used the Bar Lounge and Edward German Room on a weekly basis for coffee morning, community meetings and support sessions. The Main Hall was utilised on an ad hoc basis for theatre performances, usually once or twice a month following the Covid pandemic. Prior to this there would be performances and events utilising the Main Hall occurred more frequently.
- 1.7. Attendance numbers for the weekly market and one-off events such as the Blackberry Fair are transient. Approximate attendance for the market would be 100 people, with the Blackberry Fair attracting 3000 – 4000 people across the course of the day. The Blackberry Fair gig which takes place within the Market Hall during the evening attracts approximately 400-500 people. Additional one-off events which attract people to the centre of town include the Christmas light switch on, where the Market Hall is used for lantern workshops usually attended by 60-80 people. There is also a crowd of 1000-2000 people at the front of the Civic Centre for the switch on.

Key Findings

- 1.8. Local stakeholders would like to see a new building replace the existing Civic Centre because they believe this would be a better long-term option. Simply replacing the roof does not change the nature or capacity of the Civic Centre, making it challenging to provide activities relevant to today's needs in the town, not just those previously serviced.
- 1.9. Although it is possible, and safe, to simply replace the structural roof of the Civic Centre, this could potentially cost more than the £4m estimated; this approach would result in a new roof on an old building. The ageing building will need ongoing maintenance.
- 1.10. Several stakeholders, although acknowledging the benefits a new building would offer, are cautious around the costs and timescales of such a project. Although the existing Civic Centre was fit for purpose for users, a new build would provide further opportunities to re-model the space and offer greater benefits. The option of a new roof for the building would be accepted by some of the stakeholders, however potential concerns surrounding the long-term safety of the building and site restrictions present further concerns.
- 1.11. Stakeholder consultation considers two main options for the future of the Civic Centre, including: roof replacement and total redevelopment of a new building. Shropshire Council conducted a SWOT analysis of the high-level options, highlighted in Table 2:

Table 2: Summary of Feasibility of Remediation and Rebuild Options SWOT Analysis ¹

	Estimated Outline Cost	Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
Option: Replacement of structural roof and associated essential items	£2.8m - £2.9m Subject to further costs associated with surveys and roof panelling	Possible to undertake and offers reduced capital costs compared to alternative options	Carries greatest construction risk, would not address layout issues or reduce operating costs	Could allow the building to reopen in the short term, would allow upgrade of some elements, potential for Solar Panels reducing carbon footprint and energy usage	Limited size of site access could limit efficiency of the re-roofing, high operating costs and inherent general property defects remain.
Option: Demolition and Redevelopment of the site	£8.5m - £9m	Functions of building prior to closure would be retained with Library functions improved.	Highest capital costs of all options Release of embedded carbon	Improves the internal environment, adaption of space size to accommodate needs	Planning permission required

- 1.12. Consensus from stakeholders is the need for a newly developed Civic Centre to sustain existing spaces/uses. The importance of a large space like the Market Hall, kitchen area, meeting rooms, library and public toilets were all identified. The large space was referenced by many as multi-purpose and flexible allowing for existing activities such as sports to continue operating but also providing opportunities for theatre performances, music events and private functions along with an appropriate and adequate space for the Youth Club. The large space could also serve new events such as cinema film showings and exhibitions. The kitchen area would be beneficial in serving the Youth Club but also providing refreshment opportunities

¹ Source: Feasibility of RAAC Remediation & Rebuild Options Cabinet Report November 2024

for public and private events held at the centre. Meeting rooms are highlighted as a useful resource for library, council and other services which once utilised the Civic Centre, such as Public Health, Citizen's Advice or Council/MP meetings.

- 1.13. The need for a large space was highlighted by both stakeholders but also the audit of other community spaces in the town. There are no other large community spaces available locally. This has impacted the youth club, deliverers of sport/exercise classes and the library service. All the organisations have been displaced into smaller, impractical spaces which are impacting the services and activities they are able to deliver to the local community. One example referenced was the salsa dance group which no longer operates because it was unable to find an alternative suitable space within the local area.
- 1.14. The need for the building to have an arts and culture focus is key. Due to the lack of a host venue, many such events have been unable to operate in Whitchurch since the closure of the Civic Centre. Groups such as the Amateur Dramatics groups utilised the centre for performances where they had access to the necessary specialised equipment. Since the Civic Centre's closure, events have transferred to the performance space or sports hall at the local secondary school Sir John Talbot School. This space does not offer the same specialised equipment, has access restrictions to term time only and is located on the outskirts of the town, which is less accessible for many. Return of an arts and culture focussed building at the centre of the town would be welcomed by many stakeholders to improve the vibrancy of the area.
- 1.15. In addition to an arts and culture focus, stakeholders would support the inclusion of a café or kitchen area. There is a difference in opinion with some believing that a café would be more beneficial than a kitchen space. There is a clear need for a space within a new Civic centre which can deliver catering - somewhere for post-show refreshments to be served, a bar area for use during private functions, and a space that could be used to develop youth club members life skills. In providing some form of kitchen/catering area it is also important to recognise that there are 15 cafes and restaurants in Whitchurch High Street, all offering food and varying times throughout the day. Most cafes operate from morning until 3pm, restaurant opening times start around 5pm.
- 1.16. Stakeholders from the local area and Shropshire Council representatives highlighted the importance of the library provision within the town. Shropshire Council has a statutory duty to provide library services, and these have further potential to benefit the community. Shropshire Council is setting up Family Hubs within the library provision, across the county, offering not only the loan of books and access to PC's but support with council services, breast feeding groups and Early Help support. In addition, Community Hub provision is providing opportunities for other services to engage with the local community including Shropshire Public Health, utilising library spaces to offer blood pressure checks and hearing aid support, alongside many others. Community Hubs are being set up in market towns across the county; Shropshire Public Health highlights Whitchurch as a key area of "high deprivation and health and wellbeing needs".
- 1.17. The identified activities would be in addition to the baby and toddler Rhymetime sessions and dementia cafes, which took place in the Civic centre, prior to the library closure. Within the limited space in which the library is currently operating, the only provision available is the loan of books. Additional space is being considered in the neighbouring unit however the activities on offer will remain restricted. The library's current location could be considered as unsustainable due to the lease and cost implications. Additional spaces which would be welcomed in a new library include, meetings rooms, smaller confidential spaces and a more relaxed area. Provision of these types of space were further supported by Shropshire Public Health who highlighted that spaces would need to facilitate privacy and meet Infection Prevention Control measures. Multiple references from stakeholders acknowledged the large space the library previously occupied in the Civic Centre, however alluded to the impracticalities of its layout. Future library provision would benefit from a simpler layout, similar in scale to that at Oswestry library or the slightly smaller Bridgnorth library.

- 1.18. Comments from stakeholders and the Save Our Civic public consultation have informed identification of essential and desirable spaces (Must have, Should Have, Could Have), considering restrictions around the project in terms of the site size, costs, funding opportunities and long-term sustainability and management of the facility post completion.
- 1.19. Table 3 illustrates the essential and desirable community spaces in a future Civic Centre and what the needs analysis is highlighting as priorities:

Table 3: Summary of essential and desirable Civic Centre elements

MoSCoW Heading	Approx area m2	Comments
Must Have		
Multi-Function space	690	Arts, cultural, sports, Theatre Performance
Kitchen facility	15	What level - Preparation area only; need to be able to make and serve hot drinks, and heat up not cook food; minimal storage
Bar	0	Pop up bar, consider storage
Meeting room 1	140	for up to 60 people (potentially a replacement for both the Edward German and Bar Lounge)
Meeting room 2	Circa 15	Need additional daytime office space for 121 consultations (this would provide for those 121s that could not be undertaken within the library space)
Toilets Public		Capacity governed by occupancy other facilities and type. Public facing in use/management. For events with circa 400 people: 2 Male WCs and at least 5 urinals assuming 50:50 M/F split. 3 Washbasins 11 Female WCs, 6 Washbasins 1 Changing Places toilet to be provided to serve staff and users. Baby changing facilities in two toilets., plus STOMA provision – to serve events with a maximum capacity of 400 people
Library & Community Hub	475 - 500	Existing Whitchurch Library GIA 304 m2. Area of Bridgnorth GIA 570 m2 - which includes main library space and staff workroom, 4 small offices used by Registrar, Barclays and other partners. The space used by just the Library and TIC, excluding plant, is approximately 475m2. Oswestry Library GIA 925 m2. Based on population comparison = Bridgnorth 11,853 people, Oswestry = 17,509 people with Whitchurch 9,855 people. Therefore, Whitchurch closely aligns to size per population of Bridgnorth rather than Oswestry with provision ratio.
FM room	3	Provision of FM function and equipment
Plant	20	To be determined
Toilets Staff/welfare		To be proportionate for staff ratio i.e. Facilities catering for unisex and accessible toilets, baby changing, STOMA provision
Performance Storage	Circa 100	Storage for materials, sets/equipment needs to be provided. Existing external garage is 185 m2 This is a lot of storage for the number of events delivered.
Market Hall - Storage	Circa 40	What needs to be included i.e. tables, chairs for market provision existing store 15 m2

MoSCoW Heading	Approx area m2	Comments
		If this space is multi-use there may be a need for more storage to enable equipment to be set up and removed more frequently. The Youth Club would also need storage space if they were to operate from this multi-purpose space.
General storage	Circa 15	Cleaning materials; pop up bar
Should Have		
Office Space	8 - 12 per person. Assuming 4 people 48	requirement of WTC/running of facility
Stage area	Up to 48	What capacity and provision of stage - based on performance type i.e. basic to amateur dramatics to larger professional performances. What facilities lighting rig, sound? (Note, priority changed after meeting with members 16.07.2025)
Changing rooms	Usually calculated on 1 sq. m per person - say 12 sq. m	Use for sports/performance; allow for 2 rooms, male and female, up to total of 24 people (Note, priority changed after meeting with members 16.07.2025)
Could Have		
Gallery	Calculated on 15- 20% of overall GIFA?	Use of provided internal walkways/circulation spaces to have multifunction use existing space in a constructive way without dedicated spaces
Children's Soft Play	80-140	Internal children's soft play and activity area; could generate income, but ability to also sell tea/coffee and cold drinks is recommended as will generate secondary spend. Up to 20 children U8
Seating	0	Consider raked seating. How much, how is it stored and where? Concealed within structure or in the open?
Cinema	0	This could be a pop-up i.e. projector set up in main hall; use moveable seating; would need licence to show films (typically these are granted now to many rural venues for temporary cinemas; no additional space just some storage
Tourist Info	0	Provision of information within the library no separate space required.
Sensory Room	18m2	Added after meeting with Members 16.07.2025.
Won't Have		
Café		Is there a proven need and Business Case? Highstreet has many existing independent cafes
Roof terrace		No attributable function need

- 1.20. Moving forward, to optimise the use of a new Civic Centre provision needs to be designed to be as multi-functional and flexible as possible, given the range of uses the building has the potential to sustain. This will enable day to day activities to be accommodated as well as annual events.
- 1.21. Accommodating all requirements on the existing site will be both a construction and delivery challenge and is likely to impact capital costs. It is also inevitable that there will be disruption to both the site, the existing market hall and that area of the town during construction.

Potential Funding Sources

- 1.22. There are four realistic funding sources in addition to the £4m ear-marked by Shropshire Council given the lack of funding sources currently available for projects of this nature:
- **Prudential Borrowing** – Shropshire Council would need to borrow funding which together with the interest on the loan is then repaid through the operation of the building. Clearly the building would need to operate at a surplus to enable this to happen. Whilst this is possible the approach to operation and hires needs to change to ensure this is achieved. Prudential Borrowing is the most cost-effective way of borrowing funding.
 - **Community Fund-Raising** – Go Fund Me/’buy a brick’ type schemes – there is potential for this, and fundraising could be co-ordinated by a group such as Save our Civic, particularly if they become a CIC
 - **Private Donations** – this was raised as an option during consultation
 - **Development of the whole or part of the existing Civic site for other uses** e.g. residential. This would be limited if built into a construction scheme on the existing site for a new Civic centre, simply due to site scale. Note that this option is not being progressed at this time.
- 1.23. The critical issue is for a decision to be taken on the way forward for the Civic and an overall re-development scheme; once this is known, identifying specific funding sources will be more straight-forward.

2. Introduction and Background Context

2.1. In September 2023 Shropshire Council began surveying council buildings to identify those which featured the reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete (RAAC). The RAAC originally utilised for its durability has in recent years shown signs of cracking and corrosion, making them susceptible to collapse. <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-9917/> . RAAC was identified within the roof structure of the Whitchurch Civic Centre and Library leading to the closure of parts of the building impacted by the most serious examples of RAAC. <https://newsroom.shropshire.gov.uk/2023/09/parts-of-whitchurch-civic-centre-to-close-until-raac-inspection-is-carried-out/>

2.2. Since the closure of the Whitchurch Civic Centre, Shropshire Council has been working to identify options for its future. In March 2025 Strategic Leisure Limited (SLL) was appointed to undertake an independent needs analysis to inform the future development options for the Civic Centre.

Scope of the Needs Analysis

2.3. Shropshire Council wants to understand the need for a Civic Centre space in the town, including assessment of previous and current usage to support a decision surrounding the best course of action for the building's future. This includes:

- Identification and audit of existing community spaces in Whitchurch
- Consultation with key stakeholders, including Whitchurch Town Council, existing Civic Centre users and local trades people to gather information on their views on the existing space and future needs of the building
- Based on consultation, assess the current and future needs of the Civic Centre
- Make recommendations based on these needs to cover the scale and elements included in the building
- Exploration of external funding options with relevance where the organisation is seeking an additional £4m

2.4. This scope of work has been undertaken through:

- A review of the background context for the study
- A review of the public survey undertaken (2024)
- Stakeholder consultations (See Appendix 1)
- Attendance at a 'Save our Civic' public consultation town centre event (10 May 2025)
- Site visits to other identified community spaces in Whitchurch
- Site visit to the Civic Centre
- Site visit to the temporary Whitchurch Library
- Site visits to Oswestry and Bridgnorth Libraries
- Analysis of all available feedback and information

Background Context

2.5. Following the discovery of the RAAC, in March 2024, a working group was set up consisting of local officers from Shropshire Council and Whitchurch Town Council, to discuss future possibilities for the Civic Centre site followings its closure. The options considered included:

- Do nothing and close the building permanently.
- RAAC to remain in place but be mitigated through internal structural framework, repairs to spalled concrete and full replacement of roof membranes.
- Replacement of structural roof and associated essential items.
- Demolition and clearing of site.
- Demolition and rebuild as existing provision.
- Demolition and redevelopment of the site.

<https://newsroom.shropshire.gov.uk/2024/03/whitchurch-civic-centre-working-group-meeting/>

- 2.6. Following the closure of Whitchurch Civic Centre Shropshire Council launched a public consultation survey to gauge the public's opinion on the above options and their usage of the Civic Centre both pre and post closure. The survey received 1130 responses both online and in person, forming 10% of the Whitchurch population, a high response rate for Shropshire Council surveys of this nature.
- 2.7. In February 2025 it was announced that the library services would be relocated to St Mary's Arcade within the town following reduced services operating from the town's Market Hall, located at the rear of the Civic Centre.
- 2.8. Shropshire Council's cabinet allocated £4m from their capital strategy towards either:
- A complete rebuild or redevelopment, based on the findings of a needs analysis and finding of additional government or external funding for £4m
 - Installation of a new roof and additional repairs, should other funding not be secured
- <http://newsroom.shropshire.gov.uk/2025/02/cabinet-agrees-funding-repair-rebuild-whitchurch-civic-centre/>
- 2.9. Whitchurch, located in the North of Shropshire, has a population of 10,100 people. The town is one of the main areas for businesses and jobs in the North of the county, recorded as the sixth largest employment centre in Shropshire. Whitchurch's amenities service both its own residents and those located in the smaller villages surrounding the town. Tourism is a key sector, offering employment for 600 people, 100 of which operate within the arts, entertainment and recreation sector.
- <https://next.shropshire.gov.uk/media/b5mlgkjj/whitchurch-profile.pdf>
<https://www.ons.gov.uk/visualisations/customprofiles/build/#E04011388>
- 2.10. The Civic Centre was reopened in 2014 following the renovation of the interior and external landscaping of the building. This included creation of a more welcoming foyer area, along with improvements to heating, water and electrical systems. The building is owned by Shropshire Council and leased to Whitchurch Town Council. <https://newsroom.shropshire.gov.uk/2014/05/whitchurch-civic-centre-to-reopen-to-the-public-after-revamp/>
- 2.11. Whitchurch Civic Centre featured three main spaces including the Main Hall/Theatre, Edward German room, Bar Lounge, Sports Hall and Committee Rooms, and public toilets. In addition, there is a reception area/foyer in addition to a separate library area. Only the market hall is currently operational. The theatre activities have been relocated to the hall at Sir John Talbot School on a temporary basis.

3. Civic Centre Pre Closure

- 3.1. Prior to its complete closure in September 2023, Whitchurch Civic Centre hosted the Whitchurch Town Council offices, library and tourist information. It was also a place where meetings were held with the local community. The theatre facilities were used to hold plays and events and the market hall was used for sports sessions and other activities.
- 3.2. Civic Centre attendees surveyed as part of the Shropshire Council 'The Future of the Civic Centre Survey' Report (2024) reported attending the Civic Centre mainly to visit the market and library services, prior to its closure. Many also attended to vote, attend sport related activities and meetings and non-sporting club/society events and meetings. Others also commented on utilising the building's toilet facilities and to access information and advice from the centre and for events such as concerts, fairs and private functions.
- 3.3. Most respondents mainly attended the Civic Centre either several times or once per week. Most suggested that the day of the week they visit varies, however Friday and Saturday proved most popular.
- 3.4. Prior to the coronavirus pandemic bookings within the Civic Centre included martial arts, line and country dancing and church groups within the main hall, community weight loss groups, yoga and dance groups in the Edward German space. The Bar Lounge and Committee Rooms were utilised for community group meetings and support and advice sessions. The Market Hall functioned as a large sports hall enabling activities such as badminton, indoor bowls and dog training.
- 3.5. Following the pandemic, many of the activities remained at the Civic Centre. A similar mix of physical activity, community support and advice sessions and community meeting opportunities remained on offer.
- 3.6. In addition to the regular events, one off events took place including Whitchurch Little Theatre company twice yearly shows, the Blackberry Fair and artisan and monthly farmers' markets.

Civic Centre – Displaced Activity

- 3.7. Since the closure of the Civic Centre many activities have been required to relocate or stop entirely. As the Market Hall has been able to remain open activities such as, weekly Friday Market and many of the regular bookings including taekwondo, roller disco and dog training, as well as other sports activities have continued. Despite remaining open, RAAC has also been identified within the roofing above the Market Hall toilets and the roof structure covering the path outside.
- 3.8. Other community events such as the monthly markets and Blackberry Fair have been able to operate utilising the Market Hall space and within the high street itself.
- 3.9. The closure of the main Civic Centre building led to the relocation of the Library services. Initially the Library was temporarily relocated to the Market Hall where a book pick-up and drop off stall was set up. Multiple longer-term locations were discussed, in February 2025, the library was relocated to Unit C, St Mary's Arcade, remaining in the high street. Initially opening just two days a week, increased hours have been in operation since March 2025. There are currently plans to extend the library offer into Unit B.

- 3.10. Other provision such as Theatre shows have moved to the theatre space at Sir John Talbot School (secondary school). Local theatre company, Whitchurch Little Theatre Group has relocated, however as the school performance space is only available during school holidays, this has restricted when the group is able to run performances.
- 3.11. The Shropshire Council Survey on 'The Future of Whitchurch Civic Centre', found that following the closure of the Civic Centre respondents reported only attending either once a week or only once in a while. Most respondents visit the remaining facilities on a Friday, coinciding with the Market. However, attendance on all other days of the week, proved lower than pre closure. This is consistent with respondents' reason for attending being the market, all other options scored lower, than prior to the Civic Centre closure. Shropshire Council's review of the survey responses highlights that reduction in attendance to the Civic Centre and Market Hall may also have led to a decrease in footfall to the town and surrounding businesses.

4. Needs Analysis

Community Spaces Audit

- 4.1. Following consultation with key stakeholders and desktop research of other facilities within the town, analysis took place to begin to draw conclusions surrounding the Civic Centre and potential offers for the future.
- 4.2. Initial research and analysis of local community buildings included: Bargates Hall, Hall next to Brownlow, Brownlow, Watergate Centre, Whitchurch Town Council, Whitchurch Swimming & Fitness Centre (WSFC), Whitchurch Rugby Club (WRC), Whitchurch Senior Citizen Club (WSCC) and The Archibald Worthington Club (The Archie).
- 4.3. The audit of local spaces highlighted both recently renovated and older facilities within the area, varying in quality and size. All the facilities that were audited were smaller than the Civic Centre and Market Hall, and all are unable to accommodate as many people. The highest quality facilities include the WSFC, Watergate Centre, Whitchurch Town Council, Bargates Hall, WRC and Brownlow. Least suitable facilities based on age and ancillary facilities provision include Hall next to Brownlow and WSCC.
- 4.4. Despite being a brand-new facility the WSFC, does not offer space to host large events; it does not have a sports hall. The facility offers two fitness studio spaces as well as a gym, which may not be suitable for all the activities which had previously taken place at the Civic Centre. The Watergate Centre, a recently refurbished retail unit, plays host to the Beacon Church and other larger community spaces, the largest outside of the Market Hall. It currently offers a space for community groups including Men in Sheds, a Youth Club and support for those where English is a second language. It also offers provision previously provided by the Civic Centre including a Welcome Warm space during winter months and Citizen Advice Bureau appointments. Whilst the Watergate Centre offers community provision, it is unable to cater for the sport and theatre events, previously accommodated by the Civic Centre.
- 4.5. Brownlow located in an old primary school building and Bargates Hall, located behind St Alkmunds Church offer recently refurbished venues, but are smaller than the Civic Centre and Market Hall provision. The Brownlow offers a main hall (a larger space for private functions, including an adjoining kitchen), Clayton Hall and Old Headteacher's Office more suitable for smaller meetings accommodating 20 and 8 people respectively. The centre is located outside of the town's main high street, with limited onsite parking. Bargates Hall, located at the top of the high street, hosts activities and events such as Tai Chi, Yoga and is the home for the Whitchurch Foodbank, who also utilise the Watergate Centre. Bargates Hall offers two spaces a larger hall and smaller meeting room, both accessible with some parking. Another recently refurbished space, Whitchurch Town Hall and Community Hub, home to the Whitchurch Town Council offices. Located in the former police station on Station Road, just outside of the town, opening at the end of February the space has hosted Citizens Advice, and other community groups.
- 4.6. The Archie, a social club, located on the outskirts of the high street offers capacity for one hundred people, hosts private functions and music related events throughout the year. The Archie has recently had a refurbishment of its main function room space, however parking at the facility is limited. Similar space includes Whitchurch Rugby Club function room, capacity for one hundred and twenty people featuring a large parking area, mainly used for meetings and private functions. The Rugby Club and Sir John Talbot School Leisure centre offer function room provision for the town theatre and sports hall space, however they are located on the outskirts of the town making accessibility more of a challenge compared to the Civic Centre.

- 4.7. The least suitable facilities include the hall next to The Brownlow, a small hall with limited parking located outside of the high street. The WSCC a venue used to host weekly events for older people within the community such as bingo and coffee mornings, is a small building in need of refurbishment with no/limited on site parking.
- 4.8. The audit of the local community facilities beyond the Civic Centre and Market Hall highlights the lack of large space to accommodate larger audiences for events. Some of the spaces such as the Watergate Centre and Town Hall and Community Hub have been able to accommodate some of the community information events and activities previously hosted at the Civic Centre, however these are now at locations outside of the convenience of the high street. Theatre and culture provision have been able to access alternative space at the local secondary school, however this is restricted and located on the outskirts of the town.
- 4.9. The findings of the audit are summarised in Table 4.

Table 4: Summary of Audit of Community Spaces in Whitchurch

Name	Quality/ Condition	Smaller than the Whitchurch Civic Centre	Provision for community meetings	Provision for community groups	Space for large events/ performances	Space for sports activities	Public Toilets	Office Space	Provision of Tourist Information
Bargates Hall	Good	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	No
Brownlow Community Centre	Good	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Hall next to Brownlow Community Centre	Average	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Unsure	No	No
Watergate Centre	Good	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Unsure	No
Market Hall	Good	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Some
Whitchurch Town Council & Community Hub Old Police Station	Good	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Unsure	Yes	Yes
Whitchurch Swimming and Fitness Centre	Good	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No
Whitchurch Rugby Club Function Room	Good	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	No

Name	Quality/ Condition	Smaller than the Whitchurch Civic Centre	Provision for community meetings	Provision for community groups	Space for large events/ performances	Space for sports activities	Public Toilets	Office Space	Provision of Tourist Information
Whitchurch Senior Citizen Club	Poor	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
The Archie – Archibald Worthington Club	Good	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
Whitchurch Alport Football Club Bar46	Good	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
Whitchurch Cricket Club	Good	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
Sir John Talbot School – Performance space and Sports hall	Good	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
Annex at Sainsbury's Whitchurch	Unsure	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	No

Consultation Findings

- 4.10. Shropshire Council conducted a public survey during May and June 2024. 1,130 responses were recorded, the highest percentage of a targeted population for a Shropshire Council survey.
- 4.11. Most respondents live less than a mile from the Civic Centre (48%), however responses were recorded from participants who live 11 or more miles away (7%). Many of the respondents access the centre on foot or by car/taxi (63%) and are aged between 60 and 84 (49%).
- 4.12. Respondents were asked to rank from one to six the six options presented to them regarding the future of the Civic Centre. These options include:
1. Do nothing and close the building permanently.
 2. RAAC to remain in place and mitigated through internal structural framework,
 3. repairs to spalled concrete and full replacement of roof membranes.
 4. Replacement of structural roof and associated essential items.

5. Demolition and clearing of site.
 6. Demolition and rebuild as existing facilities provision.
 7. Demolition and redevelopment of the site.
- 4.13. Respondents' rankings were then averaged with replacement of the roof (2.03) and mitigation through internal structure frameworks (2.43) proving the highest-ranking options, whilst do nothing and closure of the building (5.36) ranked the least popular.
- 4.14. When asked about what facilities they would like to see in a new Civic Centre most would agree with existing facilities remaining. Others referenced the inclusion of additional facilities such as: concert/cinema space (21%), DVLA centre (17%), toilets (12%), café (8%) and community information hub (12%). Frequent reference was also made to ensure the facility is accessible, and a key addition to the preservation of existing facilities, opportunity for the facility to be improved and provide a more inclusive experience.
- 4.15. Although not directly addressed in this survey, the questionnaire respondents referenced the impact the closure of the Civic Centre has had on the wider town, discussing the lack of alternative venues in the area, as highlighted in the community spaces audit and the impact the closure has already had on footfall to the high street. One respondent referenced events moving to the local secondary school, however this further impacts the opportunities for local sports clubs to access the facility, which is restricted due to its location on the outskirts of Whitchurch.
- 4.16. Other key takeaways include respondents' further comments. Summarised themes from this included how vital the Civic Centre is for the community and how much it is needed (47%), along with any new development being modern yet sympathetic to the town (9%).

Stakeholder Consultation Findings

- 4.17. Consultation meetings took place with multiple stakeholders including, Shropshire and Town Council representatives, (newly elected Liberal Democrats), the Shropshire North MP, local community groups and businesses. Discussions focussed on existing uses of the Civic Centre prior to closing, which activities have been maintained and lost, other community facilities available within the town and what should be included if a new Civic Centre was developed.
- 4.18. A key theme from all of the consultation meetings is the importance of the Civic Centre to the community. Described as a "focal point for the town", the stakeholders highlighted how the centre's closure had a broader impact on the wider high street, leaving a hole and leaving the town lacking momentum. This applies to the events, groups and activities it hosted, in addition to the services which have been displaced or no longer operate in the area.
- 4.19. The Civic Centre had an extensive range of uses by a broad audience; considering their thoughts and options highlights this further.

Table 5: Summary of Activities previously provided at Whitchurch Civic Centre

Whitchurch Civic Centre Space	Provision for community meetings	Provision for community groups	Activities previously provided							
			Sport	Arts and cultural Events	Library Services	Offices	Tourist Information	Public Toilets	Capacity	Usage Frequency
Library	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	-	45,181 visits during 2022-2023, prior to closure
Market Hall	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	400	Weekly usage and one off events
Edward German	Yes	Yes	Yes – Zumba/Yoga	No	No	No	Unsure	Yes	650 across all three spaces	Weekly bookings for sports/exercise classes and meetings
Bar Lounge	Yes	Yes	Yes – Keep Fit	No	No	No	Unsure	Yes		
Main Hall	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Unsure	Unsure	Yes		Ad hoc bookings for theatre performances

- 4.20. The theatre and Market Hall both have a capacity of 400 people based on fire safety, when set up with theatre style seating. This reduces with the set-up of tables for other events or stalls for the market. Prior to the closure of the Civic Centre, there used to be a frequent flow of people through the building accessing the tourist information, library and public toilets. Many of the bookings for the Market Hall were weekly including the sports and exercise classes and market. Other community groups used the Bar Lounge and Edward German Room on a weekly basis for coffee morning, community meetings and support sessions. The Main Hall was utilised on an ad hoc basis for theatre performances, usually once or twice a month following the Covid pandemic. Prior to this there would be performances and events utilising the Main Hall occurred more frequently.
- 4.21. Attendance numbers for the weekly market and one-off events such as the Blackberry Fair are transient. Approximate attendance for the market would be 100 people, with the Blackberry Fair attracting 3000 – 4000 people across the course of the day. The Blackberry Fair gig which takes place within the Market Hall during the evening attracts approximately 400-500 people. Additional one-off events which attract people to the centre of town include the Christmas light switch on, where the Market Hall is used for lantern workshops usually attended by 60-80 people. There is also a crowd of 1000-2000 people at the front of the Civic Centre for the switch on.

Key Findings

- 4.22. Local stakeholders would like to see a new building replace the existing Civic Centre because they believe this would be a better long-term option. Simply replacing the roof does not change the nature or capacity of the Civic Centre, making it challenging to provide activities relevant to today's needs in the town, not just those previously serviced.
- 4.23. Although it is possible, and safe, to simply replace the roof of the Civic Centre, this is likely to cost more than the estimated £4m estimated; this approach would result in a new roof on an old building. The aging building will need ongoing maintenance.
- 4.24. Several stakeholders, although acknowledging the benefits a new building would offer, are cautious around the costs and timescales of such a project. Although the existing Civic Centre was fit for purpose for users, a new build would provide further opportunities to re-model the space and offer greater benefits. The option of a new roof for the building would be accepted by some of the stakeholders, however potential concerns surrounding the long-term safety of the building and site restrictions present further concerns.
- 4.25. Stakeholder consultation considers two main options for the future of the Civic Centre, including: roof replacement and total redevelopment of a new building. Shropshire Council conducted a SWOT analysis of the high-level options, highlighted in the table below:

Table 6: Summary of Feasibility of Remediation and Rebuild Options SWOT Analysis ²

	Estimated Outline Cost	Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
Option: Replacement of structural roof and associated essential items	£2.8m - £2.9m Subject to further costs associated with surveys and roof panelling	Possible to undertake and offers reduced capital costs compared to alternative options	Carries greatest construction risk, would not address layout issues or reduce operating costs	Could allow the building to reopen in the short term, would allow upgrade of some elements, potential for Solar Panels reducing carbon footprint and energy usage	Limited size of site access could limit efficiency of the re-roofing, high operating costs and inherent general property defects remain.
Option: Demolition and Redevelopment of the site	£8.5m - £9m	Functions of building prior to closure would be retained with Library functions improved.	Highest capital costs of all options Release of embedded carbon	Improves the internal environment, adaption of space size to accommodate needs	Planning permission required

- 4.26. Consensus from stakeholders is the need for a newly developed Civic Centre to sustain existing spaces/uses. The importance of a large space like the Market Hall, kitchen area, meeting rooms, library and public toilets were all identified. The large space was referenced by many as multi-purpose and flexible allowing for existing activities such as sports to continue operating but also providing opportunities for theatre performances, music events and private functions along with an appropriate and adequate space for the Youth Club. The large space could also serve new events such as cinema film showings and exhibitions. The kitchen area would be beneficial in serving the Youth Club but also providing refreshment opportunities

² Source: Feasibility of RAAC Remediation & Rebuild Options Cabinet Report November 2024

for public and private events held at the centre. Meeting rooms are highlighted as a useful resource for library, council and other services which once utilised the Civic Centre, such as Public Health, Citizen's Advice or Council/MP meetings.

- 4.27. The need for a large space was highlighted by both stakeholders but also the audit of other community spaces in the town. There are no other large community spaces available locally. This has impacted the youth club, deliverers of sport/exercise classes and the library service. All the organisations have been displaced into smaller, impractical spaces which are impacting the services and activities they are able to deliver to the local community. One example referenced was the salsa dance group which no longer operates because it was unable to find an alternative suitable space within the local area.
- 4.28. The need for the building to have an arts and culture focus is key. Due to the lack of a host venue, many such events have been unable to operate in Whitchurch since the closure of the Civic Centre. Groups such as the Amateur Dramatics groups utilised the centre for performances where they had access to the necessary specialised equipment. Since the Civic Centre's closure, events have transferred to the performance space or sports hall at the local secondary school Sir John Talbot School. This space does not offer the same specialised equipment, has access restrictions to term time only and is located on the outskirts of the town, which is less accessible for many. Return of an arts and culture focussed building at the centre of the town would be welcomed by many stakeholders to improve the vibrancy of the area.
- 4.29. In addition to an arts and culture focus, stakeholders would support the inclusion of a café or kitchen area. There is a difference in opinion with some believing that a café would be more beneficial than a kitchen space. There is a clear need for a space within a new Civic centre which can deliver catering - somewhere for post-show refreshments to be served, a bar area for use during private functions, and a space that could be used to develop youth club members life skills. In providing some form of kitchen/catering area it is also important to recognise that there are 15 cafes and restaurants in Whitchurch High Street, all offering food and varying times throughout the day. Most cafes operate from morning until 3pm, restaurant opening times start around 5pm.
- 4.30. Stakeholders from the local area and Shropshire Council representatives highlighted the importance of the library provision within the town. Shropshire Council has a statutory duty to provide library services, and these have further potential to benefit the community. Shropshire Council is setting up Family Hubs within the library provision, across the county, offering not only the loan of books and access to PCs but support with council services, breast feeding groups and Early Help support. In addition, Community Hub provision is providing opportunities for other services to engage with the local community including Shropshire Public Health, utilising library spaces to offer blood pressure checks and hearing aid support, alongside many others. Community Hubs are being set up in market towns across the county; Shropshire Public Health highlights Whitchurch as a key area of "high deprivation and health and wellbeing needs".
- 4.31. The identified activities would be in addition to the baby and toddler Rhymetime sessions and dementia cafes, which took place in the Civic centre, prior to the library closure. Within the limited space in which the library is currently operating, the only provision available is the loan of books. Additional space is being considered in the neighbouring unit however the activities on offer will remain restricted. The library's current location could be considered as unsustainable due to the lease and cost implications. Additional spaces which would be welcomed in a new library include, meetings rooms, smaller confidential spaces and a more relaxed area. Provision of these types of space were further supported by Shropshire Public Health who highlighted that spaces would need to facilitate privacy and meet Infection Prevention Control measures. Multiple references from stakeholders acknowledged the large space the library previously occupied in the Civic Centre, however alluded to the impracticalities of its layout. Future library provision would benefit from a simpler layout, similar in scale to that at Oswestry library or the slightly smaller Bridgnorth library.

- 4.32. To properly gain an understanding of what a new library space in Whitchurch should look like, both Oswestry and Bridgnorth libraries were visited.

Oswestry Library

At Oswestry Library, the entrance to the library opens into an opening meeting space (90.52 m²), registrar office and waiting area along with meeting areas and two small private meeting spaces.

The next level offers a larger space (699.27 m²) with PC's and books available to loan and reference.

There are multiple areas within the main library space including children's area, space for local group meetings, along with private meeting rooms, larger meeting room, toilets and staff area. The private meeting spaces offer a small space for either two or four people to meet in a more confidential space. The larger meeting room at the back of the library (46.20 m²) could accommodate both formal and informal meetings, the space remained separate also accommodating confidential meetings.

The children's area featured all the children's books, posters and offers a space for reading group and author visits. There is also a comfortable space with sofas, board games and jigsaw puzzle available for people to complete or borrow. Books available to loan are available throughout the space on shelving which is able to be moved around. The library hosts many events including Themed craft activities, children's rhymetime and story time, board games, scrabble and chess clubs.

Other organisations utilise the library for children's health advice drop-in clinics, Carer support groups, housing support, physical activity classes, hearing loss support and cancer support services. There are places for people to utilise the library to study or complete their own work, as well as spaces to relax.

- 4.33. Consultation surrounding the option of developing a new Civic Centre building highlights multiple activities and offers a new building could include. In identifying core and desirable elements of future provision, it is important to address the main need which is to have a Civic Centre space open again in the town. This would immediately address multiple concerns about library provision, space for arts, events and cultural activities, sports sessions (which cannot be accommodated elsewhere in the town) and a focal point for the local community.
- 4.34. Comments from stakeholders and the Save Our Civic public consultation have informed identification of essential and desirable spaces, considering restrictions around the project in terms of the site size, costs, funding opportunities and long-term sustainability and management of the facility post completion.

Table 7: Summary of essential and desirable Civic Centre elements

Essential	Desirable
Large multi-functional space, providing for arts, cultural and event space, sports sessions etc	Gallery
Kitchen	Cinema (could be staged in the large multi-functional space)
Meeting Rooms	Café
Public Toilets	Children's Soft Play
Theatre/performance space	Roof top terrace
Library	
Smaller rooms capable of providing for meetings/one to one or group sessions covering a range of disciplines e.g. health, wellbeing, local interests etc	
Office Space – building management as a minimum	

- 4.35. Many of the essential aspects have been discussed in detail for example: large multi-use space, library, kitchen space, meeting rooms and public toilets. Other desirable aspects raised at the public consultation include gallery, cinema, play area/soft play and roof terrace. Although the desirable facilities would add social value to the building and encourage more people from the local area to attend, there are broader implications of their inclusion. Unique aspects such as a roof terrace would support the venue as an arts and culture base, however installation of a roof terrace is likely to require further funding for not only the roof itself, but additional works to ensure it is accessible, through the installation of a lift, which would be difficult to achieve in the restricted space of the Civic Centre footprint. Provision of a roof-top terrace also has implications for staffing i.e. increase resources due to supervision requirements, and risk management.
- 4.36. Beyond the physical aspects of the building key references were also made to the management of the Civic Centre. Most acknowledged both from the local people and council, councillor and MP perspectives that the sustainability and economic viability of the building are important considerations. If a new building is to be developed the sustainability of the space and what activities and events it is able to offer are critical. Effective and efficient utilisation of the available space is key and points towards multi-use wherever possible. The Town Council has a key role to play in this but the overall operational management of future provision needs to be better administered. To maintain and retain good quality space there will need to be a charge for its use; activities should be planned and booked to optimise available capacity etc.
- 4.37. Provision of a new Civic Centre will require designation of its future operator; there should be clear governance developed and a protocol for the operation of the space. Shropshire Council may want to consider a long-term lease arrangement to the Town Council. The Town Council could consider commissioning an operator to deal with programming and booking of the space.
- 4.38. There will need to be a very clear business plan for the Civic Centre, setting out its income and expenditure over a 10 year period; charging and booking policies would then be needed to underpin this, so that a good-quality building can be sustained.

- 4.39. Ensuring as much use as possible of the building to serve the local community and support as many people as possible through its operation, is important. The economic viability of the building is something most stakeholders acknowledged, however there are differences in their opinions. The local community groups who have been campaigning to save the Civic focus on the desirable facilities the building should incorporate. Stakeholders with a greater knowledge of the broader financial status of Shropshire Council, were more considered in their responses, expressing concerns surrounding the allocated funding being unlikely to cover much of the initial costs involved in a potential development project of this scale.
- 4.40. Table 8 illustrates the community spaces in the former Civic Centre and what the needs analysis is highlighting as current and future revised and enhanced values:

Table 8: Community Spaces in the former Civic Centre

Facilities in former Civic Centre	Activities pre closure	Core facilities	Future activities
Library	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children's reading and rhymetime sessions IT & Printer usage and digital support Advice and support sessions Author visits Knit and natter sessions Reading groups Tea and chat 	Library (existing 350m2, proposed circa 475 sq. m-)	<p>Improved layout to allow for all previous activities and new Community & Family Hub provision as evidenced in other areas of the county. Space to allow for the provision of other council services. Health and information consultations, supported through the inclusion of small confidential meeting spaces. A reconfigured space which benefits both library staff and Whitchurch residents.</p> <p>Provision of a local information point for residents and visitors to the area.</p>
Market Hall/Main Hall	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Weekly market Artisan and Farmers market Community events: Blackberry Fair, Christmas Lights Sport and Exercise classes: Martial arts, pickle ball, indoor bowls Community group meetings Private functions: parties and weddings Amateur dramatic performances Community events Pantomimes 	Large multi-functional space, to include theatre & performance space (circa 690 sq. m)	<p>Retaining the existing space, to continue to be able to operate weekly markets, one off markets and community events. Sports hall space is required to provide an additional offer for the town, due to the limited availability and location of Sir John Talbot School sports hall. Provision for Youth Club services, as current location at Watergate Centre limits the activities on offer.</p> <p>Focus on arts and cultural events such as amateur dramatic performances and external performances. Facilities at Sir John Talbot school do not fully address the demands met at the Civic Centre prior to closure. Such space would allow for new community events such as cinema screenings and showcasing local artists' work.</p>

Facilities in former Civic Centre	Activities pre closure	Core facilities	Future activities
Bar Lounge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community meetings Small exercise classes 	Kitchen area (10-15 sq. m)	<p>Instead of a Bar Lounge area, a kitchen area would better suit the needs of Civic Centre users. A Kitchen area could be used informally by community groups to provide refreshments for meetings and support Youth Club Leaders in developing young people's life skills through teaching cooking basics.</p> <p>Additional bar facilities (pop up) could be hired in to support community and private hire events (a bar facility a similar scale to that at Ludlow Assembly rooms could be brought in to support events).</p>
Edward German Room	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community group meetings Exercise classes 	Storage space	Utilise Edward German room as storage space for Theatre/performance space, Library or multi-functional space elements such as tables and chairs which can be moved to better utilise the available space.
Offices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Whitchurch Town Council staff Shropshire Council staff Support services 	Office space (typically 9.3 sq. m per person)	<p>Offices could be reinstated although Whitchurch Town Council has now relocated within the town. It is understood they would like to be in the Civic Centre if they are managing the building.</p> <p>Shropshire Council now has minimal need for office space and could utilise space within Library provision, should it be required. Offices would provide space for organisations which could offer support for the local community such as Citizens Advice, Public Health and Shropshire Council service advice sessions. They would provide space for local community group meetings and could be hired to the local community as workspace or meeting areas.</p>
Public Toilets		<p>Reinstate Public Toilet provision including disabled and baby change</p> <p>(Standard cubicle size 1.58 sq. m. Accessible toilets will require more sq. m)</p>	Limited options within the main high street for toilet access, beneficial for provision to return to the centre of town to support local people and those attending community events or the market.

4.41. Moving forward, to optimise the use of a new Civic Centre provision needs to be designed to be as multi-functional and flexible as possible, given the range of uses the building has the potential to sustain. This will enable day to day activities to be accommodated as well as annual events.

- 4.42. Accommodating all requirements on the existing site will be both a construction and delivery challenge and is likely to impact capital costs. It is also inevitable that there will be disruption to both the site, the existing market hall and that area of the town during construction.
- 4.43. An alternative could be to develop a new Civic Centre out of the town on another site - if land is available in the area near e.g. the Leisure Centre. Although this is unlikely to be a popular choice in terms of location and retaining activity in the town centre, such an option is likely to result in a far more cost-effective building (in capital terms) and faster construction. Pursuing this option would also enable sale of the existing site and its development for alternative uses e.g. residential, which would realise capital towards the cost of a new Civic Centre.

Potential Funding Sources

- 4.44. Appendix 2 sets out potential funding sources that could be considered for a new Civic Centre. Unfortunately none of those listed appear to offer very realistic prospects for capital funding – the Former Civic is not a listed building although the Market Hall has some heritage value and interest. The former civic is also not simply an arts/cultural building.
- 4.45. There are four realistic funding sources in addition to the £4m ear-marked by Shropshire Council:
- **Prudential Borrowing** – Shropshire Council would need to borrow funding which together with the interest on the loan is then repaid through the operation of the building. Clearly the building would need to operate at a surplus to enable this to happen. Prudential Borrowing is the most cost-effective way of borrowing funding.
 - **Community Fund-Raising** – Go Fund Me/'buy a brick' type schemes – there is potential for this and fundraising could be co-ordinated by a group such as Save our Civic, particularly if they become a CIC
 - **Private Donations** – this was raised as an option during consultation
 - **Development of the whole or part of the existing Civic site for other uses** e.g. residential. This would be limited if built into a construction scheme on the existing site for a new Civic centre, simply due to site scale.
- 4.46. The 2025 Government Comprehensive Spending Review identifies £2.9bn of funding allocated to the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) for capital projects covering sport, arts, community, heritage etc. Although there are very scant details available on this funding to date it is understood that projects which align to the National Youth Strategy (under development) and the new NHS 10-Year Plan will be prioritised, as well as those providing young people with a better start in life in more deprived areas. There could be some potential from this funding in relation to young people and the Youth Centre, based on rural deprivation. It is understood that details of criteria, funding distribution etc are likely to be available autumn 2025.
- 4.47. The critical issue is for a decision to be taken on the way forward for the Civic and an overall re-development scheme; once this is known, identifying specific funding sources will be more straight-forward.

5. Conclusions

- 5.1. Since the discovery of RAAC at Whitchurch Civic Centre in 2023 and its subsequent closure there has been discussion at Shropshire Council, local authority and public level surrounding the plans for the existing building. Shropshire Council formed a working group to discuss the matter and capital funding was allocated. At a local level, Whitchurch Town Council has been working to sustain activity in the Market Hall which remains open and to support groups and organisations displaced by the venue closure. Local group Save Our Civic has been campaigning to raise awareness of the need for the Civic Centre to remain within the town.
- 5.2. Following closure of the Civic Centre, Shropshire Council circulated a survey asking respondents to outline their Civic Centre usage prior to closure and post closure. In addition, respondents were asked to rank potential options for the Civic Centre including roof replacement, new development and no development at all. There was a high response rate mainly from older people within the community; the highest ranked option was replacement of the roof however there were only slight differences between this and other identified development options.
- 5.3. An assessment of other community spaces within Whitchurch highlights the existence of a small number of spaces, many of which are providing an alternative venue for activities and events previously based at the Civic Centre. Quality of the available facilities varies, but most are located within the main town centre; several many are linked with religious organisations which restricts access to activities. A key takeaway from the audit highlights a lack of large community accessible spaces in the town.
- 5.4. Consultation with key stakeholders highlights a number of views on the Civic Centre building and future needs. Key findings include the importance of the Civic Centre as a focal community point in the heart of the town, the need for a large venue within the town and the building's focus as an arts and culture venue.
- 5.5. Based on survey responses, the audit of alternative venues and stakeholder consultation, it is clear there is a need for a multi-purpose building in the town, offering the range of spaces provided in the former Civic Centre as a minimum. This is predominantly what will address the needs identified through various consultations.

Table 9: Summary of essential and desirable Civic Centre elements

MoSCoW Heading	Approx area m2	Comments
Must Have		
Multi-Function space	690	Arts, cultural, sports, Theatre Performance
Kitchen facility	15	What level - Preparation area only; need to be able to make and serve hot drinks, and heat up not cook food; minimal storage
Bar	0	Pop up bar, consider storage
Meeting room 1	140	for up to 60 people (potentially a replacement for both the Edward German and Bar Lounge)
Meeting room 2	Circa 15	Need additional daytime office space for 121 consultations (this would provide for those 121s that could not be undertaken within the library space)
Toilets Public		Capacity governed by occupancy other facilities and type. Public facing in use/management. For events with circa 400 people: 2 Male WCs and at least 5 urinals assuming 50:50 M/F split. 3 Washbasins 11 Female WCs, 6 Washbasins 1 Changing Places toilet to be provided to serve staff and users. Baby changing facilities in two toilets., plus STOMA provision – to serve events with a maximum capacity of 400 people
Library & Community Hub	475 - 500	Existing Whitchurch Library GIA 304 m2. Area of Bridgnorth GIA 570 m2 - which includes main library space and staff workroom, 4 small offices used by Registrar, Barclays and other partners. The space used by just the Library and TIC, excluding plant, is approximately 475m2. Oswestry Library GIA 925 m2. Based on population comparison = Bridgnorth 11,853 people, Oswestry = 17,509 people with Whitchurch 9,855 people. Therefore, Whitchurch closely aligns to size per population of Bridgnorth rather than Oswestry with provision ratio.
FM room	3	Provision of FM function and equipment
Plant	20	To be determined
Toilets Staff/welfare		To be proportionate for staff ratio i.e. Facilities catering for unisex and accessible toilets, baby changing, STOMA provision
Performance Storage	Circa 100	Storage for materials, sets/equipment needs to be provided. Existing external garage is 185 m2 This is a lot of storage for the number of events delivered.

MoSCoW Heading	Approx area m2	Comments
Market Hall - Storage	Circa 40	What needs to be included i.e. tables, chairs for market provision existing store 15 m2 If this space is multi-use there may be a need for more storage to enable equipment to be set up and removed more frequently. The Youth Club would also need storage space if they were to operate from this multi-purpose space.
General storage	Circa 15	Cleaning materials; pop up bar
Should Have		
Office Space	8 - 12 per person. Assuming 4 people 48	requirement of WTC/running of facility
Stage area	Up to 48	What capacity and provision of stage - based on performance type i.e. basic to amateur dramatics to larger professional performances. What facilities lighting rig, sound? (Note, priority changed after meeting with members 16.07.2025)
Changing rooms	Usually calculated on 1 sq. m per person - say 12 sq. m	Use for sports/performances; allow for 2 rooms, male and female, up to total of 24 people (Note, priority changed after meeting with members 16.07.2025)
Could Have		
Gallery	Calculated on 15-20% of overall GIFA?	Use of provided internal walkways/circulation spaces to have multifunction use existing space in a constructive way without dedicated spaces
Children's Soft Play	80-140	Internal children's soft play and activity area; could generate income, but ability to also sell tea/coffee and cold drinks is recommended as will generate secondary spend. Up to 20 children U8
Seating	0	Consider raked seating. How much, how is it stored and where? Concealed within structure or in the open?
Cinema	0	This could be a pop-up i.e. projector set up in main hall; use moveable seating; would need licence to show films (typically these are granted now to many rural venues for temporary cinemas; no additional space just some storage
Tourist Info	0	Provision of information within the library no separate space required.
Sensory Room	18m2	Added after meeting with Members 16.07.2025.
Won't Have		

MoSCoW Heading	Approx area m2	Comments
Café		Is there a proven need and Business Case? Highstreet has many existing independent cafes
Roof terrace		No attributable function need

5.6. High level indicative income that could be generated through the Civic is:

Table 10: High level indicative income

Space	Assumptions	Cost to book per hour £000s	Number of hours booked per week	Annual Hours booked	Number of Users	Indicative Income
Market Hall						
Sports Use	Payment per person badminton/bowls etc; assume 2 hours per day x 5 days per week x 42 weeks per annum; assume 4 people per hour	£5.00	10	420	1680	8,400
Performances	6 per annum	150				900
Events	6 per annum (community)	150				1,500
	6 per annum (commercial)	400				2,400
Rehearsals	10 x 2 hour per performance	50		120		6,000
Cinema	Payment per person; assume 24 screenings per annum; 75 per screening	£6			1800	10,800
Soft Play		6	20	840	Av 6 per hour	5,040
Meeting Rooms						
Large		30	4	168		5,040
Small		20	4	168		3,360
121		15	6	252		3,780
Secondary Spend	Assumed £1.50 per head using the Civic Centre				10000	15,000
	Assume 10,000 visits per annum					
					Total	62,220

5.7. The recommendation is for the Civic Centre building to remain within the town. Although the replacement of the roof would be accepted by stakeholders, a further long term sustainable consideration would involve redeveloping the whole building. This would allow for a large function space to be included and essential facilities including the library, public toilets and kitchen area to be considered within the development.

- 5.8. There are several desirable facilities the local community would like to see included; the cost and operation of such facilities would need to be considered prior to their inclusion. It is understandable that the local community would like to see more provision in a Civic Centre, but the priority has to be the re-provision of the core elements lost to the town
- 5.9. In addition to the inclusion of essential and desirable facilities, the long-term management and operations of the Civic Centre will need to be considered. Ensuring the management and operational running of the building is cost effective and sustainable is an important consideration in maintaining the buildings long term future. The Town Council has a key role to play in this but the overall operational management of future provision needs to be better administered. To maintain and retain good quality space there will need to be a charge for its use; activities should be planned and booked to optimise available capacity etc. This will be particularly important in relation to the capital cost of a new building – any loan will need to be repaid through the revenue operation of a new building.
- 5.10. The report highlights the need for the Civic Centre and the key role the building plays in Whitchurch and surrounding community. The restoration and development of the Civic Centre is a significant discussion point for many stakeholders all working to ensure the building remains as the focal point for the local community. Consultation highlights the positive impact the building could have to local people and beyond, as the town continues to grow, and more people are attracted to visit the area.

Disclaimer

Forecasts and recommendations in any proposal, report or letter are made in good faith and on the basis of the information before the Company at the time. Their achievement must depend, among other things, on effective co-operation of the Client and the Client's staff. In any consequence, no statement in any proposal, report or letter is to be deemed to be in any circumstances a representation, undertaking, warranty or contractual condition.

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Appendix 1: Whitchurch Consultees

Stakeholder sector	Role
SC – Property & Development	Team Leader - Minor Works
SC – Property & Development	Head of Property
SC – Property & Development	Asset Manager
Save Our Civic Group	SOC member
Save Our Civic Group	SOC member
Save Our Civic Group	SOC member
Trader	Key Trader in Whitchurch
Liberal Democrat MP	North Shropshire MP
Whitchurch Town Council	Whitchurch Mayor
Whitchurch Town Council	Clerk
Liberal Democrat MP	Councillor – West Whitchurch
SC Library Service	Head of Service
SC – Public Health	Public Health Principal

Appendix 2: Whitchurch Civic Centre Potential Funding Sources¹

Source	Description
Arts Council²	<p>Government capital investment funding Arts Council England provides financial assistance to museums, libraries and arts organisations to invest in buildings, equipment, digital infrastructure and technology with a view to securing their longer-term viability and sustainability.</p> <p>For the financial year 2025/2026 the following programmes will run:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Creative Foundations Fund (CFF) – Funding for equipment and buildings for arts organisations – Strand 1 up to £1m and Strand 2 Over £1m and up to £10m (Total available £85m) – launching soon• Libraries Improvement Fund (LIF) – Funding for public libraries of up to £500,000 (Total available £5.5m)
Rural England Prosperity Fund: prospectus updates for 2025 to 2026³	<p>The UK government is committed to delivering 5 missions to secure long-term prosperity for the country. The Rural Fund will support the government's mission in rural areas to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• kickstart economic growth• break down barriers to opportunity• build an NHS fit for the future <p>The UKSPF has mapped interventions into mission-led themes across priority areas. The REPF will support 2 of the 3 UKSPF investment priorities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• communities and place• supporting local business <p>Communities and place</p> <p>There are 2 themes under the priority of Communities and place. These are Healthy, safe and inclusive communities, and Thriving places.</p> <p>Thriving places supports:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mission 1: Kickstart the economy• Mission 4: Break down barriers to opportunity

¹ [Potential funding sources | Shropshire Council](#)

² [Capital | Arts Council England](#)

³ [Rural England Prosperity Fund: prospectus updates for 2025 to 2026 - GOV.UK](#)

Shropshire Council

Whitchurch Assessment of need

Source	Description
	<p>Its scope includes development of the visitor economy. This includes the following interventions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• the development and promotion of the visitor economy• existing cultural, historic and heritage institutions that make up the local heritage offer• local arts, cultural, heritage and creative activities <p>Healthy, safe and inclusive communities supports:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mission 1: Kickstart the economy• Mission 4: Break down barriers to opportunity• Mission 5: Build and NHS fit for the future <p>Its scope includes improving health and wellbeing, bringing communities together and tackling homelessness. This includes the following interventions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• local arts, cultural, heritage and creative activities• investment in capacity building and infrastructure support for local civil society and community groups• rural circular economy projects• impactful volunteering and social action projects to develop social and human capital• investment and support for digital infrastructure for local community facilities• creation of and improvements to local rural green spaces• active travel enhancements in the local area
The National Lottery Heritage Fund⁴ National Lottery Grants for Heritage	<p>Funding for large projects that connect people and communities to the national, regional and local heritage of the UK. From historic buildings, our industrial legacy and the natural environment, to collections, traditions, stories and more – heritage can be anything from the past that you value and want to pass on to future generations. This programme is open to not-for-profit organisations and partnerships led by a not-for-profit organisation. Projects must take into account four investment principles: saving heritage; protecting the environment; inclusion, access and participation; and organisational sustainability.</p>

⁴ [Find funding for your project - National Lottery Good Causes](#)

Shropshire Council

Whitchurch Assessment of need

Source	Description
The Architectural Heritage Fund ⁵	<p>Capital Grants Grant size: Up to £350,000 Length: Up to one year Location: Priority will be given to historic buildings in towns across England Organisation type: Charities and not-for-profit organisations, including social enterprises Funding covers: Project costs and overheads Project stage: RIBA Plan of Work stage 5 - 6 Match-funding: Minimum 20% match funding is required</p> <p>Please note: Further information and guidance specific to Heritage Revival Fund Capital Grants will be issued 12 May 2025. Please wait until this guidance is issued before contacting us about these grants or submitting an EOI.</p> <p>The deadline for expressions of interest will be 27 June 2025. The deadline for Capital Grant applications will be 29 September 2025, for a decision in December 2025.</p> <p>Project Viability Grants Grant size: Up to £15,000 Length: Up to one year Location: Priority will be given to historic buildings in towns across England Organisation type: Charities and not-for-profit organisations, including social enterprises Funding covers: Project costs and overheads Project stage: RIBA Plan of Work stage 0 - 2 Match-funding: Preferred, but not essential</p> <p>We are currently offering grants of up to £15,000 to support early-stage work on historic building projects. These grants should help you to establish whether a project is viable. Work will probably focus on understanding the condition of the building, how it might be used, and whether that intended use is appropriate for the building and likely to be sustainable.</p>
Sport England ⁶ Movement Fund	<p>The Movement Fund replaces our previous Small Grants and the Active Together funds.</p> <p>A new funding service offering crowdfunding pledges, grants and resources to enhance physical activity opportunities for individuals and communities in need.</p> <p>The main target of this fund is to help organisations – from small grassroots clubs to larger groups – with projects that align with our objectives.</p>

⁵ [England | The Architectural Heritage Fund](#)

⁶ [Movement Fund - terms and conditions | Sport England](#)

Shropshire Council

Whitchurch Assessment of need

Source	Description
	<p>Successful organisations will receive support of up to £15,000 to cover a wide array of costs and items to deliver positive change in local communities.</p> <p>In line with our long-term strategy Uniting The Movement, which sets out our commitment to tackling inequalities in sport and physical activity, we're particularly interested in projects that provide opportunities for people and communities facing the biggest barriers to being physically active.</p>

List of general sources

- Arts Council
- Community Infrastructure Levy – Local Fund
- Community Infrastructure Levy – Neighbourhood Fund
- Developer Contributions (e.g. Section 106 Agreements)
- Historic England
- National Lottery
- Shropshire Voluntary & Community Sector Assembly
- Sport England
- UK Shared Prosperity Fund