

ANDOVER TOWN COUNCIL

Andover Town Council



To the Members of Andover Town Council:

You are hereby summoned to attend an Extraordinary meeting of full **COUNCIL** to be held at **The Upper Guildhall, Andover on Thursday 17 March 2016 at 6.00 pm** when it is proposed to transact the following business:-



Wendy R Coulter

Town Clerk – 11 March 2016

MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC ARE WELCOME TO ALL MEETINGS

1 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

To receive and accept apologies for absence.

2 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

To receive and note any declarations of interest relevant to the agenda.

3 **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

There is an opportunity for members of the public to make statements or ask questions on items on the agenda or on other items relevant to the Town to which an answer will be given, or if necessary a written reply will follow or the questioner will be informed of the appropriate contact details. Each person is limited to 3 minutes and the total amount of time set aside will be 15 minutes.

4 **OFFICE ACCOMMODATION**

To consider whether the Town Council offices at 66C High Street are adequate.

To consider the purchase of an office building for the use of the Town Council.

To consider whether the Town Council should apply to the Public Loans Board for a loan to purchase a building.

To put in place an action plan to fulfil the criteria for a Public Loans Board application.

Report attached at **Appendix A**.

5 **DATE OF NEXT COUNCIL MEETING**

To note the date of the next Council meeting Thursday 31st March 2016 in the Upper Guildhall, starting at 7pm.

The Chairman will close the meeting.



ANDOVER TOWN COUNCIL

A

Office Accommodation

Purpose of the Report

To consider whether the Town Council offices at 66C High Street are adequate.
To consider the purchase of an office building for the use of the Town Council.
To consider whether the Town Council should apply to the Public Loans Board for a loan to purchase a building.
To put in place an action plan to fulfil the criteria for a Public Loans Board application.

Background

The Town Council has leased the offices at 66C High Street since June 2011. The Town Council has an agreement to lease the offices until 2020.
The Town Council offices are located off the High Street in Blackswan Yard. They are access by a small awkward doorway and up a steep flight of stairs.
The building is Listed Grade 11 and dates back to the 1400's. There is very little that can be done to the building to adapt it to modern day office requirements.

Current Situation

Currently the Town Council Employs two members of staff who are accommodated in the offices. The Town Council also holds its public Committee meetings in the offices.
During 2015/2016 the Town Council has hired the Guildhall and Rendezvous for its public Council meetings.

The Town Council as a public body is required to keep various paperwork and documents for a prescribed number of years. This means that storage space is required for the documents.

The Town Council is about to recruit a 3rd Member of staff and the offices will have to be reorganised to accommodate the extra person.

The Town Council receives on average 4 members of public during the mornings it is open to the public. Some members of the public find it difficult to find the offices and have difficulty in climbing the stairs.

The Town Council office is not accessible to wheelchair users or people with mobility difficulties.

Following a recent incident concern has been raised over the fire exit for the offices and that it may not be adequate for modern fire safety regulations.

The office does not have emergency releases on the doors, and these cannot be installed as it is a Listed Building.

Should the Town Council Purchase a Building?

The Town Council currently spends £6,000 per year on the lease for the Offices at 66C High Street.

During 2015/2016 the Town Council has spent £562 on hiring the Guildhall and Rendezvous for its Council meetings.

The Town Council is quickly 'outgrowing' the offices it currently occupies. The Offices are difficult for the public to access and cannot be adapted to meet modern needs and requirements.

There are very few offices available in the Town Centre for rent. There are more offices coming onto the market to purchase.

If the Town Council were to purchase its own building, it would be able to determine what the building was used for, what alternations to make to suit its needs and to provide a community hub in Andover.

If the Town Council continues to rent property, it is limited in what the building can be used for and if the Town Council were to make any alterations to the building, the building ultimately would need to be returned to the owner. Would that be a sensible use of public funds?

Public Loans Board

If the Town Council wishes to purchase a building for office and meeting accommodation the only available funding for this is from the Public Loans Board. This is because the Town Council is a public body and any spending of public funds from a loan must be approved by the Secretary of State. (Local Government Act 2003 (as in force from 1 April 2015)).

There are specific criteria that the Town Council must meet in order to be able to apply for a Public Loans Board Loan. They are as follows:

1. Copy of full minute of the Full Council Meeting with the resolution to seek the Secretary of State's approval for the proposed borrowing;
2. Copy of the Council's budget for the current year , and next year (if available), showing the provision made to meet the loan costs;
3. Full report to the Council or business case. This should include a breakdown of the proposed works, estimated costs, financial planning to fund the loan repayments and the steps/options the Council has in place to mitigate the risk for not being able to afford the loan repayments;
4. Provide information on how the Council will afford the loan repayments, breakdown of funding resources, amounts to be used from reserves , and any increase of precept to fund the borrowing;
5. If the Council precept is to be increased to cover the loan repayment, confirm the amount and percentage of the planned increase related to the loan only (if possible how much increase for house holders at Band D);
6. If applicable provide evidence of public support to increase the precept to cover the loan repayment (e.g. the result of any consultation).
7. The Council will still need to provide details of how local residents were consulted on the project and associated borrowing even if the Council is not increasing its precept to fund the loan (e.g. newsletter/website/in the agenda of public meeting).

Action Plan for Apply for a Loan from the Public Loans Board

If the Town Council is minded to buy a building in Andover for the use of Offices and meeting space it will need to apply for a loan from the Public Loans Board and as part of the criteria it will need to demonstrate that it has monies set aside in the Budget to repay the loan, a full business plan with costings and evidence of public consultation to show public support for the Project.

- Currently the Town Council does have provision in its Budget to repay a loan, however there is no specific Budget Head for this. The Town Council will be required to approve an AMENDMENT to the Budget to show the repayment provision.
- The Council may wish to appoint a small group of Councillors (2 or 3) to work with the Town Clerk to draw up a Business Plan for the purchase of a building and its use.
- The Business Plan will need to be approved by full Council prior to consultation with the Public
- Once approved by full Council the public will need to be consulted, the minimum for this should be over 6 weeks. The Town Council could hold a public meeting, launch a poll on its website, provide a newsletter
- Following initial consultation, if amendments are required to the business plan, these must be agreed by Full Council
- The Council must approve the building to be purchased
- The Council must approve the application to the Public Loans Board and the Secretary of State
- The application and a covering letter must be sent to the Hampshire Association of Local Council to be endorsed
- If HALC have any amendments, the amendments must be approved by full Council
- The application will then be endorsed by HALC and sent to Secretary of State for approval
- The decision will take approximately 15 days.

Financial Implications

The financial implications are outlined in the report above.

The Town Council may apply for a maximum of £500,000 from the Public Loans Board.

Legal & Policy Implications

Under the Local Government Act 2003 the Town Council may only borrow money (public funds) from the Public Loans Board, approved by the Secretary of State.

10 March 2016

Note: The person to contact about this report is Wendy Coulter (Town Clerk), Andover Town Council, 66C High Street, Andover, Hampshire. SP10 1NG

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Distribution: To all Members of the Policy and Resources Committee.