

MELKSHAM TOWN COUNCIL

MEETING OF THE Assets and Amenities COMMITTEE

5/ June / 2023

Public Owned Assets in and around the Town Hall

Proposed by: Councillor Graham Ellis

Seconded by: Councillor Colin Goodhind

Dated: 29th May 2023

1. Purpose of the motion

I request that we take an urgent, visionary joined-up look to the future of publicly owned assets in and around the Town Hall and Assembly Hall with a view to setting a strategy for Melksham Town Council assets and the amenities they provide for the next ten years. I further request that we then follow that vision before potential opportunities are lost.

2. Background (Including previous resolution/s made and date/s if applicable)

We are here as a Town Council to provide services (directly or indirectly) for the enrichment of our community now and into the future out of a communal funding pot predominantly funded by the Council Tax precept. Those services require infrastructure and staff to support them, of which we also provide or assist with the provision.

Planning for this provision is often long term, and our Visioning Day in the summer of 2021 should have helped set the strategy so that longer term plans are reflected in shorter term decisions.

3. Current Situation

We have a number of potential risks and opportunities at present, relating to the future of the infrastructure of Melksham House, The Blue Pool, The Assembly Hall, and the Town Hall. We also have a number of desires or requirements on the service provision by the Town Council, such as council offices, a council chamber and meeting rooms, a community venue, a museum, parking, and a maintenance depot for our parks and gardens team.

** On town Aspirations or requirements

1. Offices for Town Council Staff

2. Public reception desk for the Town Council

3. An events venue to meet current needs, and as appropriate, those identified by the needs analysis survey of last November and December

4. A Council chamber or equivalent for Town Council meetings

5. A Museum for Melksham

6. A maintenance shed / depot for our amenities team

7. Parking for staff and visitors

There may be other requirements within our community that can also be usefully included, such as the Melksham Independent News, The Good News Church and Wiltshire Council's SEMH department / centre. This list is not exclusive - there may be other opportunities

** On existing buildings

1. The Town Hall

2. The Assembly Hall

3. The Cheese Store

4. The Blue Pool (*)

5. Melksham House (*)

6. The Old Fire Station

7. 31 Market Place

* - Also in public ownership / not necessarily Town Council

Question from resident Howard Jones to full council on 22nd May

Howard asked us whether we would consider his proposal at the next appropriate committee meeting and the mayor promised him and all other public questioners a written response. In view of time being of the essence, I am putting his proposal to the Assets and Amenities Committee on 5th June 2023.

Note - this committee is not scheduled to meet again after 5th June for another 9 weeks after than date, and if anything is referred at that point to full council it would not reach them on current schedule until 25th September.

Howard's proposal was circulated in print to all present on 22nd May, and is attached, and is online at <http://melksham.town/Blue>. As a councillor I believe it merits further immediate consideration with a view to its adoption as our vision for our town centre assets. In summary:

* Town Council take on the old Blue Pool building which becomes the new maintenance depot, (pool area), museum (Gym area) and Assembly Hall reception area. Also Town Council's "front desk" for public enquiries

* Assembly Hall Bar area improved and expanded

* Water tanks removed from Cheese Store

* Restore the caretaker's flat

* Town Hall to remain as is, as our iconic offices and council chamber

* Current tenants of the Art House Cafe and 31, Market Place to be unaffected

* Melksham House to be available to SEMH rather than the Town Council entering into any form of bidding war to purchase it.

4. What financial implications are there?

1. There are many questions to be answered (starting with Howard's FOI) and our officers tell us they are overloaded at present. On jobs as routine as fixing leaks in the Assembly Hall we hear "I think numerous roofers have looked at it, got sick of the messing about and heel dragging and some quite rightly now don't want to waste their precious time looking again when it hasn't come to anything" - not sure how true that is, but working within the council structure can be frustrating

2. Funding streams for both museum and event venue / Assembly Hall are limited to a town / parish council - far more so that to other organisations

3. There is a pool of people happy to volunteer / help (one or two with running the thing at the Friends of Melksham Assembly Hall if and when that pool can be harnessed.

4. The Assembly Hall working group has been struggling. Meetings in members' diaries have not been called, accounting information has been limited, and recommendations with regard fees for this year were "anecdotal" which for a business turning over around £130,000 per annum concerns me. The group's rules of engagement have been bounced back several times, and perhaps it's time to reset.

5. If implemented, the council will no longer need to spend higher figures on the purchase, hire or building of new facilities such as a maintenance shed in the park, at Bowerhill or elsewhere or elsewhere on the Melksham House property.

Suggestion - taking a leaf out of organisation in towns such as Frome and Devizes, move to a structure such as a CIC (Community Interest Company) for the museum and Assembly Hall, relieving council officers of the pressures, and accessing new funding streams and volunteer helpers.

5. How does the motion link to Town Council policies and core values?

The proposal will provide excellent facilities to meet the core objectives of the council to meet the need assessment of last December, the provision of an efficient maintenance shed, a future set of assets and amenities that can be sustained making use of current infrastructure within the town and with the environmental including climate and biodiversity consideration.

6. What risks are there? (Provide a risk assessment)

- The risk of us doing nothing - progressive degradation of the Assembly Hall and officers' time that's not available being called on
- The risk of losing an opportunity with the Blue Pool then having to spend a lot of money elsewhere
- Further risk assessment will be provided within the next phase prior to any further decisions at full councillor

7. What crime and disorder implications are there?

- Removal of the wall between the Blue Pool and Melksham Campus (dating from outdoor swimming pool days) would remove dark corners and opportunities for antisocial behaviour;
- Provision of a less cramped reception area and one which covers multiple disparate facilities allows for more efficient crowd control.

8. What environmental and biodiversity considerations are there?

Depending on works needed, the works would be environmentally considerate - for example any reroof could be open to solar panel roof which would also cut the energy running costs of all the buildings.

9. What safeguarding concerns are there?

- no new issues?

10. Motion

It is resolved that the council staff with volunteer assistance from members of the Assembly Hall Working Group and friends of the Assembly Hall bring a researched proposal to full council prior to any irreversible actions or decisions on the public domain properties.

11. Does the motion impact/ support any previous decisions of council?

It impacts the decision on 28th March to offer not less than £2.1 million for Melksham House now that we are aware that Wiltshire Council's SEMH decision of February to place their SEMH as the favoured bidder has come to light.

It supports the outcome of the needs assessment consultation of last December in the provision for our electorate.

It supports the decision to demolish rather than replace the maintenance shed

12. Confirmation that the item under consideration has not been discussed by Council within the preceding six months. If it has, has there been a material change and what is this?

This item has not been discussed by the council within the last six months.

13. Please summarise any specific recommendations you have in relation to next steps

The next step is to fill in the overview outline for full council.

We should set up a team (AHWG, FoMAH) to progress this with time likely to be of the essence. It is anticipated that most of the activity will be by volunteers (councillors and community) at this stage rather than adding significantly to staff loading.

We should approach Wiltshire Council to ask about their willingness to discuss the transfer of the Blue Pool to the Town Council and for us to gain access for our overview team and experts to survey the works involved.

V 1.0 GE

Office Use:

Date of receipt by Proper Officer:

Date of proposed council meeting for motion:

Date/s of relevant resolutions:

(record full resolution/s here)

Motion accepted by Proper Officer:

Motion rejected by Proper Officer:

Reasons for rejection:

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The Acquisition of Melksham Blue Pool for the Purpose of Combining it with the Melksham Assembly Hall

Wiltshire Council, in their planning application for the building of Melksham Campus, plan to demolish the Blue Pool building, infill the pool, and sell the land for private ownership.

However, there remains an open question as to who actually owns the land where the Blue Pool resides. This needs to be resolved before a full decision as to the next step.

HISTORY

Melksham and Urban District Council bought the land from Avon Indian Rubber Co in 1959 for use as a swimming pool. It then opened under the operation of MUDC.

In 1984, West Wiltshire District Council built the leisure centre in Trowbridge, but the Castle Place site was owned by Norwich Union Group and the property was then leased for 25 years for the sports centre.

In 1988, WWDC ran several advertisements in various newspapers announcing: "Indoor pools at Warminster, Westbury, Bradford-on-Avon, and this summer the new blue pool opening in Melksham." Renovations had been made by WWDC to the Blue Pool; however, the grand opening had been delayed due to a number of failures.

From these reports, it is apparent that WWDC paid for the renovation and/or building of Wiltshire leisure centres. But it is not clear if the Melksham Blue Pool land was actually purchased or leased from MUDC, or, if, in the 1970s, there was simply an asset transfer.

PROPOSAL TO ACQUIRE BLUE POOL

Would it be practical for Melksham Town Council to obtain the Blue Pool and combine it with the Assembly Hall for a vast improvement, at a sensible cost? This could be either by an asset transfer from Wiltshire Council, or claiming its rightful ownership.

Wiltshire Council would not incur the added and costly expense of demolishing the building and removing the large water tanks that are currently within the Assembly

Hall. In view of this cost savings, they might be persuaded to accept an asset transfer agreement or peppercorn purchase price.

COMBINE THE BLUE POOL AND ASSEMBLY HALL

The building of the Blue Pool could then be incorporated into the Assembly Hall to offer several benefits such as:

- A new public entrance with reception desk and reception area
- An easier entrance point into the main hall that does not conflict with the flow of people as it does in the existing Assembly Hall Bar area (this would be achieved by opening a hole in the wall to the right of the entrance)
- Repurposing the existing Blue Pool men's locker room to make male, female and accessible toilets, which would be larger than the existing ones in the Assembly Hall
- Removing the women's locker room and storage area to create a large space that, when combined with the gym, can house a museum that includes an exhibition space and lecture area
- Infilling the pool area could add parking spaces that would be dedicated to the Assembly Hall and relieve the parking at Melksham Campus and provide parking for Melksham Town Council purposes

STAFFING

Staffing for this would solve an existing issue.

The area behind the reception desk in the Blue Pool is an office of ample size for staff. Hire a full-time person to work as Office Manager, Monday through Friday, 9-5. The responsibilities would include:

- Greeting the public in person and on the phone for the purpose of buying event tickets, booking an event, answering general questions, etc
- Managing the Assembly Hall accounts
- Arranging staff hours and volunteers for events and bar
- Co-ordinating working group meetings and taking minutes
- Overseeing advertising and marketing

As this method would isolate the Assembly Hall as its own entity, this would free up work responsibilities of managers

currently feeling overworked, with this person reporting to and working directly under the Town Clerk.

The Assembly Hall would benefit from having museum volunteers who could, in turn cover for this officer's lunch breaks, etc. Likewise, the reverse.

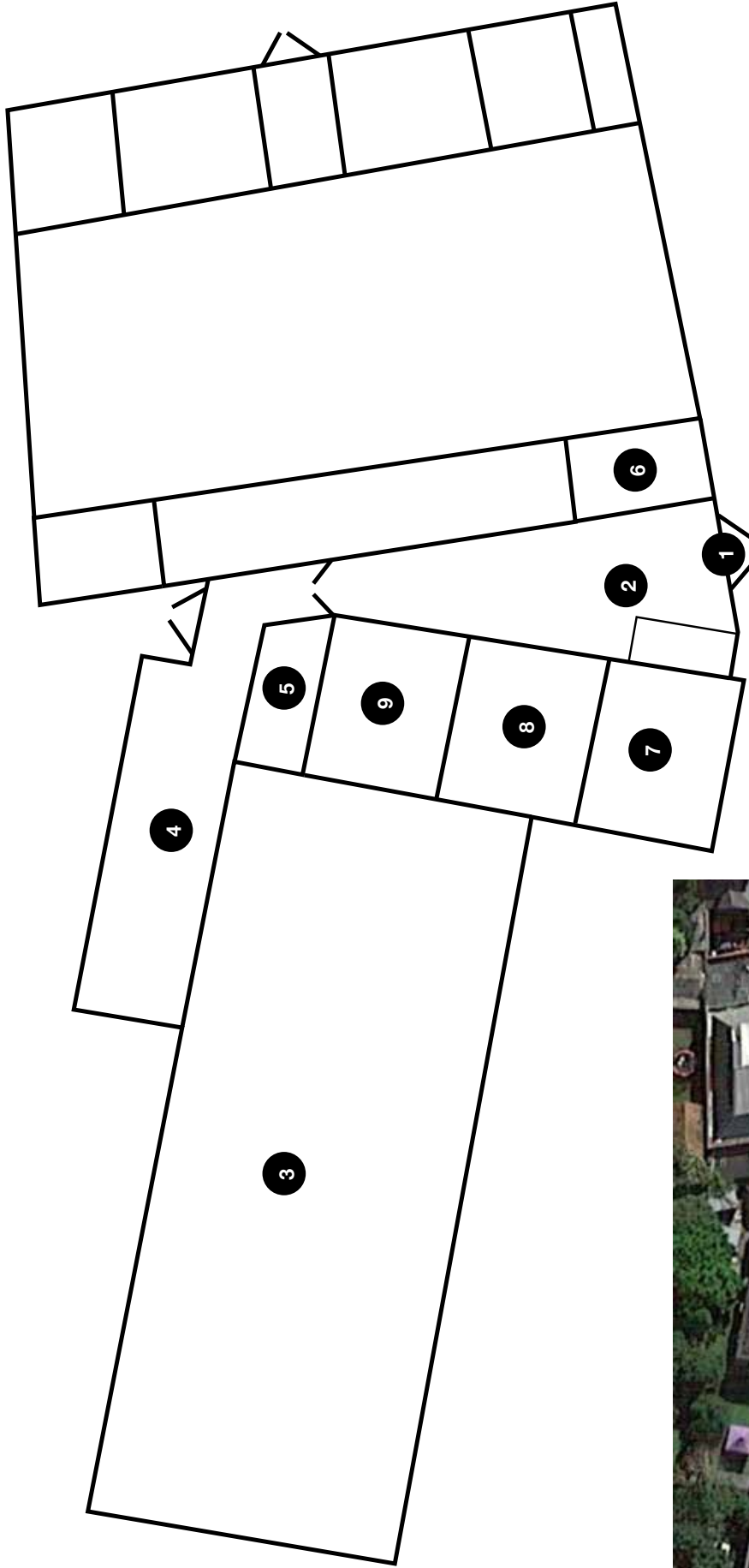


This document can be found at:
<http://Melksham.Town/BluePool>

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EXISTING: Blue Pool (numbered areas) and Assembly Hall



- 1 Blue Pool Entrance
- 2 Reception
- 3 Swimming Pool
- 4 Gym
- 5 Storage
- 6 Water Tanks
- 7 Staff Office
- 8 Mens Locker
- 9 Womens Locker



1 FRONT ENTRANCE



2 RECEPTION AREA



3 SWIMMING POOL



Blue Pool as it existed
when still operating

4 GYM AREA



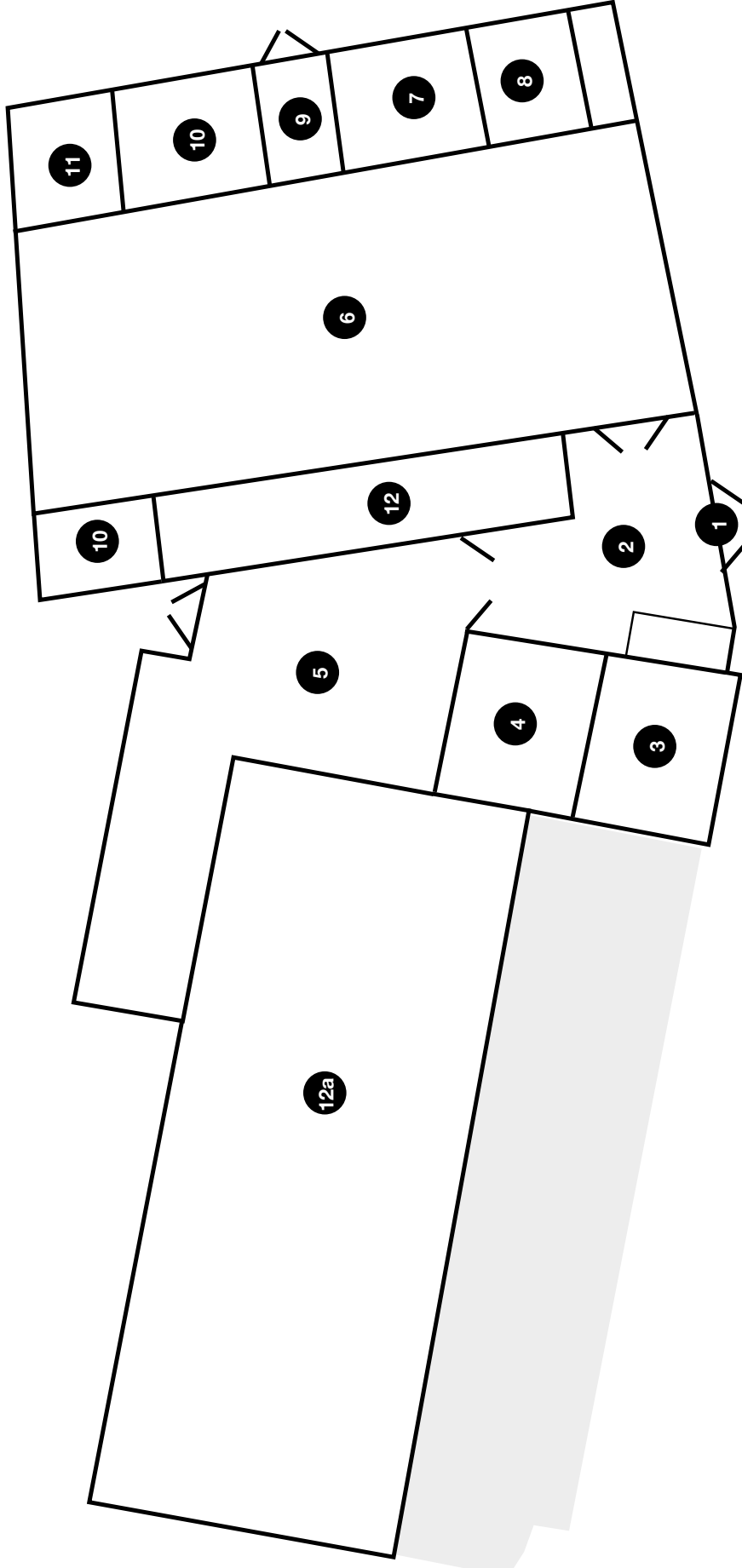
This view is facing the entrance door of the gym, down small hallway on the left. Behind the blue doors is **storage**.



View down the hallway looking toward front entrance doors



PROPOSED: Revised Assembly Hall plus Museum



- 1 New Main Entrance
- 2 Reception
- 3 Staff Office
- 4 M/F/Universal Loos
- 5 Museum
- 6 Assembly Hall (existing)
- 7 Lounge (existing)
- 8 Bar (existing)
- 9 Emergency Exit/Staff Entrance
- 10 Storage
- 11 Dressing Rooms (existing)
- 12 Kitchen/storage (existing)
- 12a Dedicated car parking for Assembly Hall Storage

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