

2 - 30 June 2023



THE FUTURE OF THE SHIRE HALL

HAVE YOUR SAY



THE HISTORY OF THE SHIRE HALL

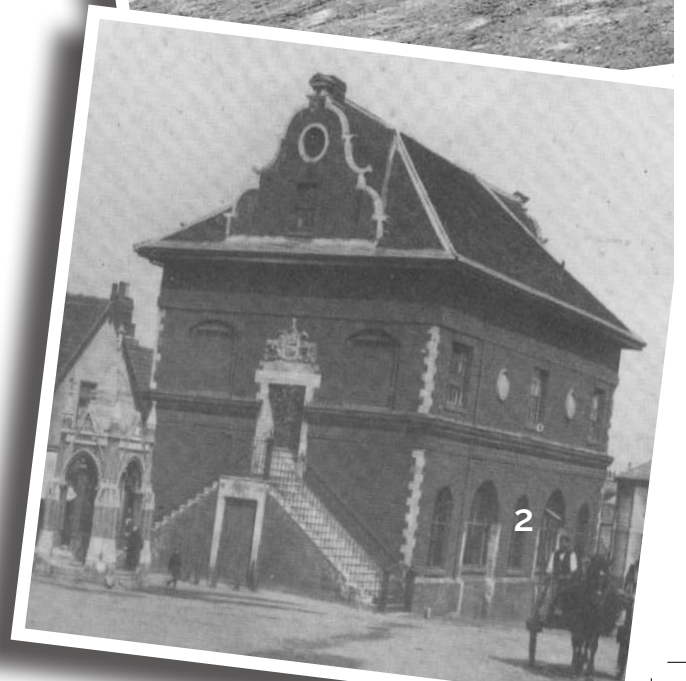
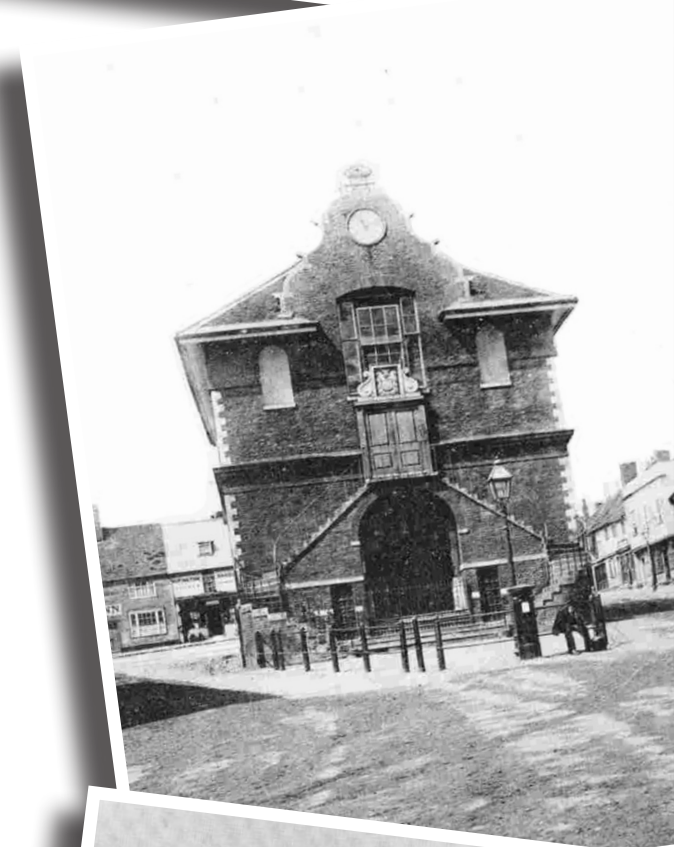
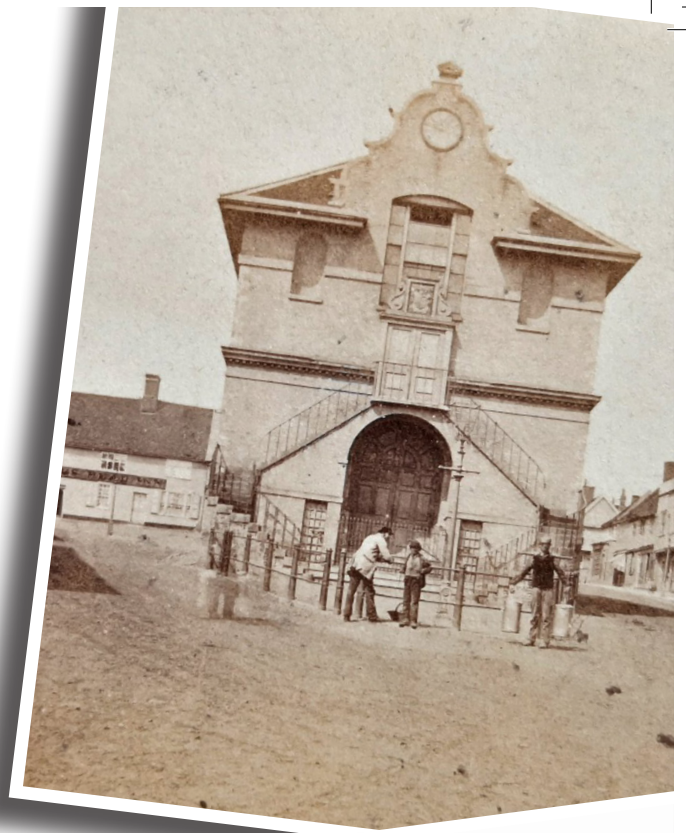
The Grade I-listed Shire Hall was built in 1575 and is approaching its 450th birthday in 2025. Woodbridge Town Council is the freehold owner of the hall, which it purchased from Suffolk County Council in 1987 alongside the adjoining land.

It is in significant need of repair, expected to cost a minimum of £500,000 for work to the exterior of the building and the ground floor.

The ground floor of the building is currently home to the Town Council. It is also a popular venue for weddings and private hire.

The first floor is currently let to the Seckford Foundation for storage. Significant extra costs would be incurred if this floor were updated for community use.

The Town Council would like to have your views and is therefore launching a public consultation on three possible options. Each of the three options has financial implications for the town and its residents.





THE SITUATION

Major repairs to the building and roof structure took place in 2010. A fall of masonry from the archway over the front end of the building in 2019 however showed more work was required to secure its long-term future.

A structural condition report and proposed schedule of works were received from structural engineers, The Morton Partnership, in late 2021. At the time, the cost of the work was estimated at a minimum of £500,000. That figure represents a restoration of the exterior and the ground floor of the building.

The Town Council estimates that the cost of renovating of the exterior, the ground floor, the first floor and the installation of a lift would be in the region of £1.5m to £2m.

An application was submitted to the Heritage Lottery Fund to finance the project, but this was rejected as plans did not meet the relevant criteria. The Town Council will continue to seek further grant funding opportunities.

The Town Council has assessed its options and believes it is important for the local community to have its say on the future of the building. The results of the public consultation, involving both parishioners and interested parties from outside of the town, will form an important part of the Town Council's decision-making process.



THE OPTIONS AVAILABLE

Option 1: Restoration

In option 1, the work identified by The Morton Partnership in 2021 would be carried out. This would involve repairs and improvements to the exterior of the building and to the interior of the ground floor.

These works would aim to ensure The Shire Hall is structurally sound and would help secure its future as a base for the Town Council, avoiding the need for it to relocate.

Work would also revitalise the interior and ensure it would be fit for the needs of the Town Council and those who rely on the space.

The ground floor could continue to be used for public and community events, including weddings.

Please note that the estimated costs of £500,000 obtained in 2021 have increased with inflation.



Option 2: Renovation

A renovation of the building would involve all of the steps in Option 1, with the addition of the installation of a lift and improvement works to the first floor.

Making the first floor accessible would allow the space to be used for community events – or the Town Council could explore more permanent options such as a café or art gallery.

This would be the most expensive option of the three, with rough estimates standing at between £1.5m and £2m. The work would however open extensive new opportunities for the building, and provide the town with a new community space - and the Town Council additional sources of revenue.



Option 3: Sale of the building

The Shire Hall could be sold on the open market.

Selling the building would require the Town Council to relocate its office. Moving to a smaller, more economically run premises could reduce running costs.

However, legal fees and relocation costs would have to be considered, as would the ongoing rent or purchase price of a new office. Another implication would be the loss of income opportunities through weddings and other hire.

Any change of use of The Shire Hall would be subject to usual planning permissions.

HOW WOULD WORKS BE FUNDED?

Like most town and parish councils, Woodbridge Town Council receives the majority of its income via its precept – a proportion of the overall Council Tax levied on residents by East Suffolk Council.

For example, the owner of a Band D property in Woodbridge pays £2065.62 in Council Tax to East Suffolk Council for the 2023-24 financial year. Of that sum, £125.40 is allocated to Woodbridge Town Council.

The Town Council has set aside £90,000 to contribute towards this project.

The Town Council has the opportunity to apply to borrow money from the Public Works Loan Board (PWLB) at a reduced interest rate.

A loan would require repayment over a number of years. This could, using Option 1 as an example, see the Town Council borrow £500,000 to be repaid over 20 years at a cost of £38,000 annually. Option 2 would cost £102,000 annually.

Such borrowing could potentially lead to an increase in the Council Tax precept required by Woodbridge Town Council. This could be equivalent to around £11-12 per band D household per year for Option 1, or £30 per year for Option 2, above the usual annual increase. Please consider this when making your choices.

The Town Council will be transparent about the future costs of any scenario, which will form a major part of our discussions throughout the consultation process. There will be an opportunity to discuss the financial implications at our public event.

THE NEXT STEPS

The consultation period will be launched on Friday, 2 June. A public event will be held at The Shire Hall on 9 June, where residents will be able to gather more information and share their thoughts. The consultation will last for four weeks until Friday, 30 June.

A summary of responses will be published.



HOW TO HAVE YOUR SAY?

Find the survey questions by scanning the QR code below:



Or, fill out a printed version of the questions which can be found at:

Woodbridge Town Council
Shire Hall
Market Hill
Woodbridge
Suffolk
IP12 4LP

If you would like a printed copy of the questions to be delivered to your address, please phone Woodbridge Town Council on 01394 383599.