

Committee	Assets & Services / Agenda item 13
Month	December 2022
Report Title	Update on refurbishment works at Nos 3 and 5 Market Place (former Nat West building)
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Attachments	None



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Summary

This report offers a general overview and update on works at the former Nat West building which will now be referred to as:

No 3 Market Place: being the separate, smaller building which sits underneath the kitchen of the town hall

No 5 Market Place: the larger part of the former Nat West Bank, set across 5 floors

Recommendation

To receive and note the contents of this report

Financial Implications

None. All works are carried out according to the budget as already set and established by Council at its Full Council meeting in May 2022 and recorded under Min Ref FC086-22.

Situation (summary of historic details and current situation)

This report provides Committee with an update on the status of the repair, refurbishment and remedial works being carried out at Nos 3 and 5 Market Place.

Works carried out to date:

Purchase Details

The building was purchased, and all legal transfers completed on 12.09.22 in accordance with the instructions of Council. The building was insured from this date, recognising it is currently an empty unit.

Plans

The Working Group (WG) met to establish some parameters and priorities for the future refurbishment works, quickly identifying the need for detailed and specific site plans; Wilby & Burnett (W & B) were commissioned to complete these works and the Council now possess a set of combined plans for the Town Hall and Nos 3/5 Market Place. These plans show the relationship between all buildings, including levels, and the square footage of each room.

W & B were further requested to consider draft, indicative plans for proposed use and development of the site. In order to best evaluate future usage, a structural report has been commissioned; this has been completed for No 3 Market Place which is now a separate, independent space and the report for No 5 will be compiled once other works are completed.

Asbestos

An asbestos survey of the site was completed, identifying some small presence of asbestos which has subsequently been removed. Council now has an asbestos free, clean building.

Future Letting Opportunities

Using the new plans and maps as per W & B, local commercial letting agents were contacted with a view to acting as agents on behalf of SWTC in the letting of Nos 3 and 5 Market Place. These were useful meetings, and each agent submitted their own thoughts and ideas for future commercial/retail usage of the units along with recommended rental figures. These meetings provided indicative rental income along with recommendations from the agents as to the best use of the space, be it to either let as one large unit or break into smaller retail/office space.

Given the known refurbishment works required to bring both units to an acceptable level of hiring, the letting opportunities have not progressed at this juncture and the agents have been temporarily paused. No preference or contract has been awarded to any agent at this stage.

Officers are in regular contact with interested parties (a number of local companies/organisations have expressed an interest in a leasing the rooms/floors), and these contacts and relationships will be maintained, without prejudice, enabling Council to form a fair and equitable consideration of any future tenants.

Opportunities for No 3 Market Place

This is the smaller unit which sits underneath the Town Hall kitchen, with one entrance/exit, incorporating a basement underneath. There are numerous opportunities for this site and there is much local interest in renting the unit. At the present time, the following items are in hand:

Planning application being submitted to UDC for the installation of a toilet/kitchen facility and change of front windows back to original (as a mirror image of the TIC). The proposed changes to the window will create a larger window space, much required by retail/service units. This planning application also covers any structural works as identified from the structural engineer's report

Building control must also be obtained for the relevant fire-proofing works (it is a legal requirement to fire-proof each individual unit if let to a 3rd party).

Opportunities for No 5 Market Place

This is a 5-storey building consisting of:

- Basement
- Ground floor
- 1st floor
- 2nd floor
- Attic

Early discussions with the working group and staff identified a desire and opportunity to relocate Town Council office staff to the 2nd floor with a welfare room in the attic space, making good use of all available space. This will further free up the existing rooms used as office accommodation in the Town Hall, thus recognising further potential income from hiring opportunities.

The basement, ground floor and first floor units (either let separately, as a whole or as a combination) will recognise the highest financial return to SWTC.

There is a need to complete some roof works at No 5 and quotes are currently being obtained for this, along with planning permission. Proposed works will make the roof watertight as well as adding good, modern insulation. These works will come within the set budget for refurbishment works.

Priority of Works

The primary focus is on No 3 Market Place so that this can be let at the earliest opportunity. Some works here can progress without planning permission, but others must wait until planning permission is obtained from UDC. This does result in a fluctuation of works, requiring staff to work flexibly across all areas of the refurbishment programme.

Whilst planning permission is pending for No 3 Market Place, attention is given to No 5 Market Place, with a top-down approach given the need to create a watertight space before carrying out other works. Again, the nature of these works will fluctuate given the need to await various permissions and reports and fitting these works into the schedule of other operational works.

A new employee in the operations team will support the refurbishment works, allowing other staff to be redeployed in Nos 3 and 5 Market Place. Inevitably, there will always be situations requiring staff to work across many and varied levels, for example we have seen some burst pipes over the past few days in other assets which required immediate attention, detracting from works at Nos 3 and 5.

Operationally, the works are being carried out largely by SWTC's own staff and contractors are being used on an ad-hoc basis for specific or detailed work. These costs are within the allocated budget works as agreed by Council in May 2022.

Notably these works are creating additional pressure and strain on a small team with the Operations Manager and Town Clerk further managing and directing this refurbishment programme. Inevitably other pressures also sometimes result in other work taking priority which at times proves difficult and cumbersome. Again, these staff are required to work flexibly and creatively to ensure the project remains on schedule.

Until all reports are completed (to recognise all and any works required), and works carried out, it is difficult to predict a timescale for letting opportunities. The structural report (awaited) from No 5 Market Place will inform further works and prioritise the refurbishment programme, which in turn will drive the availability dates for lettings and rental.

Officer Recommendation

To note and receive this report and to recognise the impact of this project on a number of staff, both operationally and management.

To note an indicative timetable will be provided to Council upon receipt of the structural report(s) and planning permissions, which will largely drive and dictate the schedule of works and letting opportunities.