



Whitchurch Civic Centre & Library Reinforced Autoclave Aerated Concrete (RAAC)

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1. Synopsis

1.1 The purpose of this report is to update on the current position in relation to the assessment of the presence of Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete in Whitchurch Civic Centre and Library. It sets out next steps and recommendations for potential redevelopment and interim measures.

2. Executive Summary

2.1 The report updates on the actions taken to deal with the identified Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC) and cease the use of the building on the grounds of safety and recommends further work on the potential redevelopment of the site. It also recommends interim measures for the library service and community use provision.

2.2 RAAC is a lightweight form of concrete used in roof, floor, cladding and wall construction in the UK from the mid 1950s to the mid 1980s. The initial durability of RAAC roofs and other RAAC structures has long been recognised; however recent experience suggests the problem maybe more serious than previously appreciated. The Local Government Association has advised its members to check as a matter of urgency whether any buildings in their estates have roofs, floors or walls made from RAAC.

- 2.3 RAAC was identified in Whitchurch Civic Centre and Library during ongoing condition repair and maintenance works. Following an assessment and detailed investigations the assessment has deemed the building to be in a critical condition and has therefore been secured and closed.
- 2.4 This report recommends the closure of the Whitchurch Civic Centre & Library and acknowledging that the cost of repair is significant and to effect works to remedy the current critical condition would be uneconomic and not viable for the Council. It also recommends further work for redevelopment of the site.
- 2.5 It is therefore recommended that further work is done to conclude the options appraisal and progress more detailed work on the options to redevelop the site with the potential to have a potential return on investment and bring forward a more viable business case.
- 2.6 The report also seeks to recommend a vacant possession strategy together with the proposal to bring forward an interim solution for the library service.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1 Cabinet notes the key surveys, investigations and report relating to the condition of the Civic Centre and the presence of RAAC, confirming that the building is beyond economic repair and delegates authority to the Assistant Director Commercial Services to
 - I. To arrange for the building to be decommissioned and to remain permanently closed due to its critical condition.
 - II. To finalise the options appraisal for the future of the site and bring forward a business case for a future redevelopment in paragraph 7.12 to include appropriate surveys, appraisals, assessments and design, subject to further approval by Cabinet/Council.
 - III. Serve notice on Whitchurch Town Council to bring their tenancy to an end to allow vacant possession of the site in support of Recommendation ii above.
 - IV. Provide and deliver an interim solution to library and community service provision. Continue to develop the options appraisal and business cases to progress next steps library and customer transformation in Whitchurch.
 - V. Work with Whitchurch Town Council in their identification of new civic accommodation.

Report

4. Risk Assessment and Opportunities Appraisal

4.1 The current risks have been identified and addressed in respect of the presence of RAAC and are set out in the following Table

<i>Risk</i>	<i>Mitigation</i>
<i>Risk of failure and imminent collapse</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Building propped and secured.</i> <i>Closed building to public.</i> <i>Chaperone system in place for access to the building for the tenants, stakeholders and staff.</i>
<i>Loss of continuity of library provision in the market town</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Interim solutions for the library form part of the recommendations of this report.</i>
<i>Reputational damage.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Effective comms with stakeholders and members of the public.</i> <i>Liaison with Town Council and library services has been undertaken</i>
<i>Loss of community provision through the closure of the civic centre</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Offering support to the Town Council identifying alternative venues for their civic function.</i>
<i>Financial impact of unplanned remediation work and potential redevelopment</i>	<i>The repairs and maintenance budget will meet the cost of temporary works to ensure the building is safe and secured. Opportunity for capitalising any costs will be considered as the further feasibility work is progressed.</i>
<i>Cost of redevelopment is unbudgeted and unforeseen</i>	<i>Further work will be undertaken to consider viability and the potential capital funding required to bring forward a redevelopment of the site.</i>
<i>Opportunity to consider future of the site and consider alternative uses and more efficient use of the site.</i>	<i>This will be considered in the future appraisal of redevelopment options</i>

5. Financial Implications

5.1 Works undertaken with regard to structural surveys and propping to stabilise the building to date have incurred costs of £50,000

5.2 Interim provision for library service and community provision at a cost of circa £100k per annum including rent, rates and utility costs. There will also be an assessment of fit out and refurbishment costs dependant on the nature of any potential property identified. This would be additional to the rental costs identified above. All options and opportunities for interim accommodation will be appraised to limit as far as practical additional financial revenue burden whilst maintaining service provision.

5.3 Work to support the finalisation of the option appraisal and provide a more detailed assessment and feasibility study for a redevelopment option is estimated to cost 50k. This will include the detailed surveys, assessment and outline design options for the site fully exploring the constraints and opportunities on the site. The recommendation sets out the need to develop the business case for a preferred option with a fully costed proposal to be brought forward to Cabinet and Council for approval.

5.4 The current budgets being drawn on to support the unplanned expenditure in terms of the MTFS are as follows:-

- I. Repairs and maintenance budget to respond to immediate propping and stabilisation work and associated surveys which have taken place to date reflective of 5.1
- II. Feasibility support fund for capital to fund redevelopment feasibility work as set out in 5.3, subject to the outline business case approval.
- III. The existing service budgets for libraries, together with transformation activity to support the strategic needs assessment for Whitchurch will be considered once the most economic cost for interim accommodation is confirmed, aligned to 5.2 above. The cost will be offset by the reduction of spend on the current premises relating to running costs, eg energy, rates, maintenance etc. This will be subject to further work and consultation.

5.5 Financial implications for the different site options have been set out in section 7 and are based on the findings of the report detailed in Appendix A and initial development appraisal work.

5.6 Funding to support a redevelopment or remediation option would need to be supported either by capital receipts or borrowing and are not currently factored into the capital strategy or programme. External funding could also be pursued through appropriate funding bids should opportunities arise to mitigate the costs.

5.7 Liaison with insurers has been undertaken to pursue potential claims for the interim accommodation for the library service. If successful, this will be limited to a relatively small claim.

*The budget estimate cost utilises the current insurance valuation for rebuild and formal construction cost estimating information to formulate a cost range for replacement of facilities on a like for like basis

Please note that none of the above options include costs for the temporary relocation or provision of a Library and Civic Centre facilities.

See Appendix A technical overview section 7 for more information on the options appraisal.

6. Climate Change Appraisal

6.1 In recommending further work to explore the redevelopment option due consideration must be given to the embodied carbon within the existing building which would be displaced through demolition compared to the potential benefit of providing new development meeting current standards and significantly reducing energy consumption and providing modern highly sustainable development.

6.2 The option to redevelop the site is also likely to provide opportunities to incorporate measures to generate renewable energy, capture and store carbon or mitigate climate adaptation risks through building design and landscaping of any associated public realm. The further work to explore these opportunities is aligned to the recommendation in 3.1.

6.3 The existing solar PV located on the one area of the existing roof (the sports hall) would be considered for reuse retaining any current benefit from the feed in tariff whilst preserving the use of the panels for their remaining usable life.

7. Background

7.1 Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC), was introduced largely in the UK in the 1950s, and halted in 1982 due to durability concerns. The Standing Committee on Structural Safety (SCOSS) 12th report confirmed its 30-year life expectancy in 1999, indicating a relatively short life span..

7.2 First created in Sweden in the 1920's as AAC, a lighter alternative to traditional concrete, steel reinforcement was introduced in the 1930's to provide larger structural panels building components.

7.3 Whilst RAAC is a lightweight form of concrete. It is noted that: 'Although called "concrete", RAAC is very different from traditional concrete. This form of concrete is less dense with a lack of stone aggregate than traditional concrete.

7.4 Shropshire Council has been assessing the existing property asset portfolio to identify any presence of RAAC, following the emerging and urgent Department for Education (DfE), Local Government Association (LGA) and Government guidance.

7.5 Whitchurch Civic Centre, including the Library and Registrar provision, has been identified as having RAAC roof structure construction, to the vast majority of the property.

7.6 Following initial identification and a limited access visual assessment, a further destructive and intrusive external structural engineer inspection has been carried out. This inspection has determined the condition of the RAAC installation to be of poor condition (Red Critical in accordance with the definitions set out by the Institution of Structural Engineers), requiring immediate mitigation by temporary propping and closure of the building to all staff and visitors for general day to day use.

7.7 The report in Appendix A provides a technical overview and options appraisal in consideration and to inform the medium to long-term options required to mitigate the RAAC installation and future of the property.

7.8 The Library and Registrar Services operating from the building have been significantly impacted by the presence of RAAC in the complex and are currently closed.

7.9 The assessment of condition was rated as D and both buildings were closed and have been temporarily propped to maintain the integrity of the structure. It has

been confirmed that the offices and town council area on the ground floor do not have RAAC but the roof above does

7.10 A Motion was passed at full Council on 21 September 2023 agreeing to: Publish a list of SC properties and RAAC assessments when complete. Identify any grade D buildings as well as identify any grade Cs for preventative investment as soon as possible. Confirm plans for mitigation and repairs.

7.11 The RAAC condition assessments are being benchmarked against Industry Standard Data Collection methodology set out in the Table 1 below. With a condition rating from A-D, where Grade D requires immediate remedial action to be taken and Grade C requiring remedial action within 1-2 yrs.

Condition grades and priority ratings

The surveyors will assign condition grades and priority ratings to form the assessment of "condition need" for each element of each block during the site visit. Elements are the components that make up each block, such as roofs, windows, walls and so on. The condition grade will reflect the physical condition of the block element, and the priority rating describes when that element is likely to require remedial action. The condition grades and priority ratings are outlined in the table below.

A complete list of the construction elements is contained in the [CDC Technical Reference Manual Part 1](#).

Condition Grade	Priority Grade
A Good – Performing as intended.	4 More than 5 years before remedial action required (default priority for Condition Grade A).
B Satisfactory – Performing as intended, but exhibiting minor deterioration.	3 Remedial action required within 3-5 years.
C Poor – Exhibiting major defects and/or not operating as intended.	2 Remedial action required within 1-2 years.
D Bad – Life expired and/or serious risk of imminent failure.	1 Immediate remedial action or replacement required (default priority for Condition Grade D).
X Supplementary grading assigned in addition to 'B' and 'C' to indicate where repair is impossible and complete replacement will be required.	

The surveyors will consider whether a single condition grade is appropriate for each element, or if there is evidence of a range of different condition grades. If a range of Condition Grades is appropriate, the element will be recorded with a % proportion for each relevant grade (A, B, C or D). For example, surveyors may assess the condition of the 'windows' element in a block to be 20% "C" and 80% "B".

In addition, the 'X' condition grade will be added to a 'B' or 'C' grade where the surveyors are of the view that it will not be possible to repair the assessed building element and a complete replacement is required. For example, a boiler may be assessed as "C-X" if the surveyor judges it to be in poor condition but is aware that it is obsolete and that it will no longer be possible to get the necessary spare parts due to its age.

7.12 Following the findings of the structural engineer's report, an options appraisal with outline budget estimate costs has been provided in consideration of meeting the medium-term and long-term function of the property in providing public services. The options include semi-permanent mitigation to allow retention of the existing building by replacement of structural elements and associated remedial work, through to demolition and redevelopment. Based on the economic, social, and environmental factors and aligning to the Shropshire Plan, Climate Strategy and buildability factors, demolition and rebuilding or redevelopment of the site would be considered favourable options to consider.

The primary options have been summarised below with key considerations included. These are high level estimates based on the information currently available and are focused more on the uses of the site and not necessarily assessing the full benefits of alternative and innovative ways of delivering services in the future. This will be encompassed in the more detailed work as per the recommendations in section 3.

Option	Option Description	High Level Estimate £	Considerations
Option 1	Do nothing and close the building permanently	£60,000 - £100,000	Liability concerns and responsibilities. Risk of roof structure collapse. Ongoing inspection and contractor costs. Additional propping to first and ground floor front locations
Option 2	RAAC to remain in place and mitigated through internal structural framework, repairs to spalled concrete and full replacement of roof membranes	Unknown	RAAC exceeded design life and mitigation could not be guaranteed. Replacement ceilings to allow for regular inspection/surveys Ongoing revenue cost burden for regular inspections. Lack of confidence/risk in use of building. Dependent on further structural calculations if viable.
Option 3	Replacement of structural roof and associated essential items	£2,360,000 to £2,450,000*	Replacement to current Building Regulations. Cost consideration to include replacement suspended ceilings, services i.e. lighting/fire alarm. Minor internal decoration/flooring of essential affected areas only. *In removing the roof, there is likely to be significant damage to the steel work which would be a further significant cost risk
Option 4	Demolition and clearing of site	£510,000 - £600,000	Conservation Area. Party Walls of neighbouring properties.
Option 5	Demolition and rebuild as existing facilities provision.	*£6,035,000 - £7,635,00	Demolition budget outline estimate provided in Option 4 and rebuild based on the existing like for like provision* Any change variance of requirement would need an outline scope and feasibility of redevelopment requirement be established to inform outline budget cost.
Option 6	Demolition and redevelopment of the site	£1,250,000	Initial work on a development appraisal suggests a viability gap of approx £1.25 million, to bring forward a mixed use development scheme

			incorporating community uses and residential and under a new masterplan for the site.
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- 7.13 Option 6 is considered to be the most appropriate option to pursue as it provides the opportunity to deliver community services within the heart of the town centre as part of a mixed use scheme. Officers will progress more detailed work to consider development options and a master plan which fulfil community needs and which mitigate as far as possible burden on the public purse. Working to a more efficient use of the site and provide a mixed use in the future could present an option providing a return on the potential investment. The long-term cost of this option providing for the potential for return on investment would be lowest compared with other options to either undertake extensive repairs or to re-provide a facility to the same layout as exists currently. Subject to the approval of the recommendations of this report further work will be undertaken to develop this business case. This will also consider a range of possible redevelopment options such as parking provision or other uses to test and close out possible alternatives, taking into account the assessment of economic benefit/development and viability
- 7.14 In terms of schools the Department of Education have committed to fund the removal of RAAC from our schools, either through grants or through the School Rebuilding Programme. They have adopted a similar approach to the preferred option within this report, where it is uneconomic to repair government will step in to rebuild schools.
- 7.15 Consultation with Local Members has taken place to keep them apprised of the position and the potential to undertake more detailed work with the aim of endorsing a final option.
- 7.16 Consultation with Whitchurch Town Council has taken place in respect of the closure of the building taking into account their position as the tenant of Shropshire Council and Town Council. The Town Council have the benefit of a lease for nominal consideration to occupy the building. This lease was an interim arrangement and is capable of being brought to an end by either party with twelve months' notice. It would be Shropshire Council's intention to serve notice to allow vacant possession to progress a preferred option once finalised. This would allow sufficient time for an alternative venue to be identified. In the immediate short-term limited use of the Sports Hall element of the building can continue under a risk assessment but ultimately this area would also be compromised in bringing forward a future option once finalised. Shropshire Council would work with Whitchurch Town Council to help them identify a new civic venue but wouldn't be in a position to provide financial support.
- 7.17 Previously the intention was to transfer the building to the Town Council on a long lease basis passing over full maintaining and insuring liabilities and responsibilities to the Town Council. It would now likely not be financially

viable for the Town Council to take on the burden and cost associated with the critical condition of the building.

- 7.18 Due to the nature of building and its civic uses further public consultation maybe required as part of the next stage of progressing the recommendations set out within this report. This is particularly pertinent should there be any further impact on library services moving forward.

8. Additional Information

8.1 See Appendix A for the detailed assessment and technical report.

8.2 Due consideration will be given to the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment for Whitchurch when working up a final option. Utilising the data and information from this assessment can help inform and align any future consultation around the future of any displaced services from the Civic Centre site to deliver place, need and demand led solutions with local engagement through the library and customer transformation programmes.

9. Conclusions

9.1 This report seeks to agree the further work to consider the redevelopment of the site as the most economic option to pursue at this stage coupled with the agreement to progress a temporary provision for library and community services in the town centre.

List of Background Papers (This MUST be completed for all reports, but does not include items containing exempt or confidential information)

Local Member: Cllr Thomas Biggins; Cllr Peggy Mullock Cllr Gerald Dakin

Appendices

Appendix A Technical Overview and Recommendations