

# HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

## Decision Report

<b>Decision Maker:</b>	Executive Lead Member for Universal Services
<b>Date:</b>	3 March 2025
<b>Title:</b>	Repairs to the Chapel Tower, Royal Victoria Country Park, Netley
<b>Report From:</b>	Director of Universal Services

**Contact name:** Toby James

**Email:** toby.james@hants.gov.uk

### Purpose of this Report

1. The purpose of this report is to seek spend approval for the proposals for the protection and repair of the Chapel tower at Royal Victoria Country Park, conditional upon listed building consent being secured.

### Recommendation

2. That the Executive Lead Member for Universal Services gives approval to spend £1.0million, funded from Cost of Change reserves, on the proposals for the protection and repair of the Grade II\* listed Chapel tower at Royal Victoria Country Park, Netley, conditional upon listed building consent being secured, and enter into necessary contractual arrangements, in consultation with the Head of Legal Services.

### Executive Summary

3. The proposals for the Grade II\* listed Chapel will provide temporary protection for the brick masonry of the tower and enable its specialist structural repair.
4. Specialist repairs are required to address the increasing structural cracking to the brick masonry of the tower, both internally and externally and arrest its deteriorating condition.
5. The Chapel tower is located within Royal Victoria Country Park, Netley, directly overlooking Southampton Water. Originally internal to the building, the south-west face of the tower has been exposed to the elements since the demolition of the former Royal Victoria Hospital in 1966. Its brick masonry is deteriorating, potentially due to the increasing rainfall intensity inherent with the changing climate.
6. Specialist structural investigation and assessment by an independent expert has confirmed that the structural issues in the Chapel tower are a serious concern and require specialist repair and strengthening, together with other remedial work, as soon as reasonably practicable.

7. An application for listed building consent was submitted in January 2025 and a decision is anticipated in March 2025. The recommendation is therefore conditional upon listed building consent being secured.

## **Background**

8. The Chapel was formerly an integral and central feature of the Royal Victoria Military Hospital, Netley, which opened in 1863. Located close to the shore of the northeastern bank of Southampton Water, the main hospital was closed in 1958 and then subsequently largely demolished in 1966, leaving only the Chapel standing.
9. The Chapel was listed Grade II\* in 1974. Grade II\* buildings are particularly important buildings of more than special interest – only around 5.8% of listed buildings in England are Grade II\*. Today the Chapel forms an important part of the visitor attraction and visitor experience to the wider Royal Victoria Country Park.
10. The 1966 demolition of the hospital resulted in the southwestern façade of the lower area of the Chapel tower being unprotected, previously an internal wall but now external and exposed to the elements.
11. Although there have been historic signs of movement that have been monitored and found to be dormant, the lower tower is now suffering from new and increasing cracking to its brickwork structure, both internally and externally. The external face of the brickwork is also deteriorating, and small fragments of face brickwork are detaching which has required protection to the main pedestrian entrance below.
12. Specialist laboratory testing has confirmed that the historic brickwork on the southwestern elevation is inferior quality, consistent with the bricks used for internal walls in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The building, particularly the southwestern elevation, is in a severe exposure zone for coastal wind driven rain. Persistent saturation, combined with freeze thaw, has had a material effect on the integrity of the bricks and the erosion of the mortar joints over time. With rainfall intensity increasing, this degradation is expected to accelerate.
13. The structural engineering report has concluded that remedial work should now be carried out as soon as reasonably practicable to prevent more significant structural distress from occurring.
14. To enable the building to remain safely open and operational in its current condition, enhanced monitoring protocols and additional regular inspections are in place, following a formal structural risk assessment, to manage the risk of further structural deterioration until the proposed repairs are completed. Ongoing regular structural inspections would continue thereafter, consistent with a building of this age and construction.

## **Finance**

15. The following table outlines the breakdown of the project costs, currently anticipated to be spent within the financial year 2025/26. This will be funded from Cost of Change reserves.

<b>Financial Provision for Total Scheme</b>	<b>Buildings £'000</b>	<b>Fees £'000</b>	<b>Total Cost £'000</b>
Phase 1 works - Scaffold and protection	129	21	150
Phase 2 works - Specialist repairs	730	120	850
<b>Total</b>	<b>859</b>	<b>141</b>	<b>1,000</b>

16. As set out in points 34 and 35 below, it would be reasonable to assume further repairs and maintenance may be required in 8-10 years' time and every five years thereafter, at a current cost of £200,000 each time, to be funded through routine repairs and maintenance budgets. Future options for enhanced tower protection from the weather will be explored that may help to reduce ongoing maintenance costs.
17. It is anticipated that there will be an impact on the park revenue income for 2025/26 as a result of temporary closures at key points through the project delivery and due to reduced demand for venue bookings through the period while the scaffold is in place. This has been estimated to be approximately £35,000 and will need to be met from the existing Country Parks budget.
18. However, the 'do nothing' option also carries significant costs, both one-off costs - primarily installing security fencing to protect the public from the deteriorating building, and on-going costs / lost income from maintaining the security and arising from the closure of a significant part of the park. These are calculated at between £320,000 - £440,000 one-off costs and £226,000 ongoing costs/lost income per annum. In addition, £1.9million Heritage Lottery Fund grant funding would be at risk of clawback should the building be allowed to decline. In this context of the cost of 'doing nothing' combined with the damage to a heritage asset should the works not proceed, the planned repairs are considered to represent the best value for money option.

## **The Proposals**

19. The proposed protection and repair works are summarised as:
- erection of scaffolding to the full height of the brick masonry of the tower
  - with a temporary protective sheeting, in place for up to 18 months to enable the structure to dry out
  - re-installation of crack-monitoring instrumentation
  - installation of specialist stainless steel structural ties and pattress plates to corner piers and at floor levels
  - repointing, repair and pinning of the outer brickwork
  - removal of modern impermeable interior finishes
  - repairs to the failed adjacent below-ground drainage.

## **Alternative Option Considered**

20. As part of the feasibility study, the option of maintaining the current monitoring protocols and doing no repair or structural strengthening work was considered as an alternative approach.

21. Given the structural advice received and the structural risk assessment, the only viable alternative course of action would have then required the imminent permanent closure of the Chapel. This would have required the establishment of a secure, fenced exclusion zone of approximately 100m radius around the Chapel to protect the public from falling masonry.
22. Besides the capital cost of fencing and the very significant loss of revenue income closure of the Chapel would have caused to the operation of the Park, such action is likely to have led to a challenge from Historic England and/or other public bodies for failure to maintain a Grade II\* listed building, with significant reputational impact.

### **Listed Building Consent**

23. An application for listed building consent was submitted in January 2025 and a decision is anticipated in March 2025.

### **Construction Management**

24. A contractor will be appointed through the County Council's Minor Works Framework, to oversee both the initial protective scaffold design and erection and the subsequent specialist repair work.
25. Access to the Chapel for the public will be restricted during the Phase 1 erection of the scaffold and its subsequent dismantling at the end of the project. Use of the Chapel will be maintained during the Phase 2 repair works, with deliveries and movement of vehicles coordinated with the management of the Chapel and wider Country Park.
26. Erection of the scaffold protection is expected to commence on site in April 2025 and be kept in place throughout to early Spring 2026, with the specialist repair works commencing in Summer 2025 and completing in early Spring 2026.

### **Professional Resources**

27. The County Council's Property Services team will oversee the design and delivery of the project. The appointed contractor will secure specialist scaffold and structural strengthening design through specialist subcontractors.

### **Consultation and Equalities**

28. The following have been consulted during the development of this project:
  - Countryside Services – supportive in undertaking the works to enable the continued operational use of the chapel
  - Executive Lead Member for Universal Services
  - Eastleigh Borough Council – Conservation Officer, is supportive of the proposals.
  - the County Council Countryside Service is developing a communication pack for key stakeholders.

29. An Equalities Impact Assessment has been carried out and concluded that the impacts are neutral for all protected characteristics due to the nature of the works being repairs to the existing building fabric with no material changes to the internal or external spaces. The project will entail short term impacts on building use during the construction, but upon completion these impacts will cease.

## **Risk and Impact Issues**

### **Fire Risk Assessment**

30. The proposals have been assessed in line with the Property Services procedures, including submission and approval by the Property Services fire safety review group. A construction phase fire management plan will be in place to ensure the ongoing safe use of the building during the project, including means of escape.

### **Health and Safety**

31. Design risk assessments, pre-construction health & safety information and the existing Health & Safety File will be updated in accordance with the Construction Design and Management Regulations for the proposed scheme.

### **Climate Change Impact Assessments**

32. Hampshire County Council utilises two decision-making tools to assess the carbon emissions and resilience of its projects and decisions. These tools provide a clear, robust, and transparent way of assessing how projects, policies and initiatives contribute towards the County Council's climate change targets of being carbon neutral and resilient to the impacts of a 2°C temperature rise by 2050. This process ensures that climate change considerations are built into everything the Authority does.

### **Climate Change Adaptation**

33. The increase in rainfall levels and intensity due to the changing climate in Hampshire over the last 50 years, since the Chapel tower was first fully exposed to the elements in 1966, is considered potentially contributory to the acceleration of the brick decay and thus causal to the structural cracking.
34. These proposed repairs and strengthening works will arrest the current deterioration and provide a degree of adaptation to the impacts of climate change. It is anticipated, however, that given the inherent low strength of the areas of exposed formerly internal brickwork, further such repair work will continue to be required with increasing frequency as the climate changes, initially decennially. The best estimate of costs for this is outlined in paragraph 16.
35. To minimise such ongoing cyclical repair costs inherent with the tower's construction, future consideration will need to be given to the permanent protection of the tower's brick masonry to provide a long-term solution to safeguard the future of this iconic Hampshire landmark. Such solutions will need

to ensure the breathability of the walls and balance the visual impact on the heritage significance of the building.

### **Carbon Mitigation**

36. Given the specific scope of this conservation project, an assessment of carbon mitigation is not applicable in this instance.

**REQUIRED CORPORATE AND LEGAL INFORMATION:**

**Links to the Strategic Plan**

<b>Hampshire maintains strong and sustainable economic growth and prosperity:</b>	yes
<b>People in Hampshire live safe, healthy and independent lives:</b>	yes
<b>People in Hampshire enjoy a rich and diverse environment:</b>	yes
<b>People in Hampshire enjoy being part of strong, inclusive communities:</b>	yes

**Section 100 D - Local Government Act 1972 - background documents**

**The following documents discuss facts or matters on which this report, or an important part of it, is based and have been relied upon to a material extent in the preparation of this report. (NB: the list excludes published works and any documents which disclose exempt or confidential information as defined in the Act.)**

Document

Location

None

## **EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT:**

### **1. Equality Duty**

The County Council has a duty under Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 ('the Act') to have due regard in the exercise of its functions to the need to:

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by or under the Act with regard to the protected characteristics as set out in section 4 of the Act (age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation);
- Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic within section 149(7) of the Act (age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation) and those who do not share it;
- Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic within section 149(7) of the Act (see above) and persons who do not share it.

Due regard in this context involves having due regard in particular to:

- The need to remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by persons sharing a relevant characteristic connected to that characteristic;
- Take steps to meet the needs of persons sharing a relevant protected characteristic different from the needs of persons who do not share it;
- Encourage persons sharing a relevant protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity which participation by such persons is disproportionately low.

### **2. Equalities Impact Assessment:**

- 2.1 An Equalities Impact Assessment has been carried out and concluded that the impacts are neutral for all protected characteristics due to the nature of the works being repairs to the existing building fabric with no material changes to the internal or external spaces. The project will entail short term impacts on building use during the construction, but upon completion these impacts will cease.