

Report to CABINET

Oldham Town Centre Built Heritage Project

Portfolio Holder:

Councillor Arooj Shah, Cabinet Member for Building a Better Oldham

Officer Contact: Paul Clifford, Director of Economy

Report Author: Jennifer Penn, Town Centre Business Manager

Ext. 6582

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Reason for Decision

Oldham town centre benefits from a wealth of important heritage buildings thanks to the town's rich economic and cultural history. Several of these buildings have in recent times become vacant or underutilised. The Council has engaged with key partners to set out a clear pathway to understand what is required to bring the buildings back into viable and sustainable uses. The successful delivery of the project would protect the assets and enhance the economic and social value the buildings can bring to the local economy.

As part of the engagement with partners, the Council has been awarded, subject to approval of this Cabinet report, revenue grants by Historic England (£200,000) and Greater Manchester Combined Authority (£100,000) to deliver a project to support the heritage assets within the town centre.

The project described in this report is to develop a clear vision and delivery plan incorporating surveys and appraisals of a minimum of five heritage buildings. The aim is to increase the understanding of at-risk heritage buildings with the objective of enabling their restoration and repurposing back into viable uses.

The delivery of the project aligns with the Creating a Better Place framework to regenerate and enhance Oldham town centre and the wider borough.

Recommendations

Cabinet members are requested to approve:

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1. Delivery of a project to survey a minimum of five heritage buildings in Oldham town centre and generate a new strategic vision and delivery plan for these assets by 31st March 2026.
 2. Acceptance of a revenue grant worth £200,000 from Historic England.
 3. Acceptance of a revenue grant worth £100,000 from Greater Manchester Combined Authority.
 4. The Council providing match funding towards the external grants at a ratio of 25% subject to a maximum Council commitment of £100,000.
 5. Delegating approval to the Cabinet Member for Building a Better Oldham in consultation with the Director of Economy, the Borough Solicitor and Monitoring Officer, the Director of Finance (or their nominees) to
 - (i) appoint external advisors (for the provision of professional services) up to contract value of £400,000 in accordance with the Council's procurement procedures and
 - (ii) select the buildings which are to be part of the project.
 6. Authorising the Borough Solicitor and Monitoring Officer or their nominated representative to sign and/or affix the Common Seal of the Council to all the documents and associated or ancillary documents referred to above and/or required to give effect to the recommendations in this report.

Oldham Town Centre Built Heritage Project
ESR-27-24

1.0 Background

- 1.1 The listed and heritage buildings in Oldham town centre make a positive contribution to the town's character. However, the historic nature of the buildings and associated high costs to repurpose has discouraged their renovation and occupation leading to their declining use and creating a heritage deficit. The recommendations contained in this report seek to unlock these obstacles by setting out a clear pathway to understand the costs to refurbish, repurpose and align future uses to provide a sustainable economic and social value.
- 1.2 The proposed Heritage Vision and Asset Delivery Plan responds to the concerns of the local community about the deterioration of Oldham town centre heritage assets, obtained during public conversations and consultations including Oldham's Big Conversation; the Oldham Town Centre Vision linked to the Creating a Better Place strategic regeneration framework; and meetings of the Oldham High Street Partnership (since February 2024) and Oldham Town Centre Board (since February 2020).
- 1.3 In the draft Local Plan (2023), Oldham's heritage assets are referenced as an "irreplaceable resource that should be conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance so they can be enjoyed for their contribution to quality of life."
- 1.4 The Council has already demonstrated its significant commitment to the heritage of its buildings including:
 - The restoration of the Grade II listed Old Town Hall to create a cinema and restaurant complex (opened 2016) and Egyptian Room (opened November 2024)
 - The renovation of the Grade II listed former Oldham Library and associated public realm improvements (commenced January 2022)
 - Refurbishment and restoration of Royton Town Hall (opened September 2024)
- 1.5 This next phase of the Council supporting Oldham's heritage assets builds upon the refurbishments listed above, complements our draft local plan and aligns with ongoing public consultation and is described in detail below.

2.0 Current Position

Proposal

- 2.1 Oldham Council with the support of Historic England and GMCA will deliver a Vision and Asset Delivery Plan for selected heritage assets within the town centre. Developing this vision will require detailed surveys, development appraisals and analysis of potential future uses and needs.

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- 2.2 The delivery of the project will provide the Council with a clear pathway to bring these assets back into viable and sustainable uses. The proposal and grant awards are the result of engagement with Historic England, GMCA and Oldham Civic Society.

Priority Heritage Properties

- 2.3 The proposal will focus initially on the five buildings described below, although the proposed grant agreements will allow flexibility to bring in other heritage assets.

Lyceum, 95 Union Street: a Grade II listed asset owned by Oldham Council and comprising three buildings. This building is in part occupied by Music Services and part is vacant.

Masonic Hall, Union Street: a Grade II listed building dating back to the 1830s that has been vacant for several years. This property will be included in the project if the Council secures formal consent from the owner (requested December 2024).

Old Museum and Friends Meeting House, Greaves Street: the building was constructed between 1867-69, as a Friends Meeting House for Oldham's Quakers. It is owned by Oldham Council and the occupiers are Oldham Theatre Workshop, who will vacate the property upon completion of the restoration of the Old Library.

Old Post Office, 84 Union Street: this Grade II listed building was purpose-built as a post and telegraph office in 1875. It is owned by Oldham Council and is vacant.

Prudential Assurance Building, 79 Union Street: this Grade II listed building from 1889 has recently been acquired by Oldham Council.

Other heritage assets can be brought in to replace the assets described above or as an addition to the project.

Project Objectives

- 2.4 The project will increase knowledge and understanding of heritage assets and include:
- The development of a heritage vision for the Cultural Quarter with and for local stakeholders, to establish local ambitions and priorities for the historic environment.
 - The procurement of building surveys/heritage studies, so that the Council and its partners can develop and own a comprehensive suite of heritage information for the purpose of better understanding and identifying possible uses for the historic environment.
 - The development of a delivery plan presenting each of the assets as investment propositions, with potential end uses to be informed by the results of the building condition surveys and associated studies, and an assessment of supply and demand for different commercial/non-commercial uses. The investment propositions will enable the Council to pursue funding opportunities to look at bringing the building back into active use.

Indicative Timescales

2.5 Indicative timescales for the project are set out below:

Up to 31 March 2025

- Formalise grant awards with funders.
- Progress procurement for all project stages.
- Arrange appointments, manage project, and undertake or commission surveys, appraisals and drawings.
- Appoint cost consultant.
- Appoint consultant to report on market demand, supply and detailed gap analysis.

1 April 2025 - 31 March 2026

- Architect and heritage consultants to draft up proposals for re-use.
- Architect/surveyor or other to bring together the overarching strategic heritage vision and report presenting recommendations.
- Architect/surveyor to produce asset delivery plan to include different funding options for end use(s) proposed for each asset in recommendations, in line with the overarching vision for the town's heritage.

Funding summary

2.6 Below is a summary of the funding resource:

Funder	Max Amounts
Historic England	£200,000
GMCA	£100,000
Council – internal funding	£100,000
Total	£400,000

3 Options/Alternatives

3.1 There are two options:

Option 1 (preferred option): accept the external revenue grants offered by Historic England and Greater Manchester Combined Authority. This will commit the Council to providing revenue funding to the maximum value of £100,000 for spend by 31 March 2026.

Option 2: decline the offer of external grants from Historic England and Greater Manchester Combined Authority. This would lead to there being insufficient budget to proceed with the project and increase hurdles to the future use and occupation of the heritage buildings in the town centre.

4 Preferred Option

- 4.1 The preferred option is to formally accept the revenue grants offered by Historic England and Greater Manchester Combined Authority totalling £300,000 and commit internal resource of up to £100,000 to give an overall project budget of £400,000.

5 Consultation

- 5.1 Historic England and Oldham Civic Society were consulted during the development of the funding application to Historic England.
- 5.2 Comments on this report have been received from colleagues within Finance, Legal and Procurement and the responses are recorded below.

6 Financial Implications

- 6.1 The approval to accept the Historic England grant of £200,000 and a further grant from Greater Manchester Combined Authority of £100,000 will provide the Council with an additional £300,000 financial resource.
- 6.2 As per the report the Council will have to match this grant with £100,000 of its own funding.
- 6.3 This matched funding will be provided from some or all of the following funding resources: the base budget within the Regeneration cost centre 24080, the Creating a Better Place reserve, or funding received from profit share arrangements linked to the Foxdenton/Broadway Green development.
- 6.4 There is sufficient Council financial resource to provide the match funding, thus enabling the acceptance of the grant allocation.
(John Hoskins, Finance Manager)

7 Legal Implications

- 7.1 The Service should ensure it can meet the objectives, milestones, and terms and conditions of the funding agreements with Historic England and GMCA, including providing match funding and submitting required monitoring reports and returns. Officers should verify that these terms do not conflict with existing funding arrangements for the buildings or related projects.
- 7.2 All works, services, and goods procured using grant funding or Council resources should comply with the Council's Contract Procedure Rules, the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 (or the Procurement Act 2023, for procurements after its implementation), and the Council's Financial Procedure Rules. Officers are encouraged to liaise with the Procurement Team to ensure compliance with procurement processes.
- 7.3 The Service is advised to arrange with Legal Services to review and approve the terms of the grant agreements and agreements with consultants, contractors, and third parties, ensuring that any risks or key provisions are flagged for consideration.

As the funding may constitute a subsidy under the Subsidy Control Act 2022, the Service should also liaise with Legal Services to analyse and ensure compliance with the Subsidy Control Act as necessary.

7.4 Ownership and maintenance responsibilities for the heritage assets should be documented, and it would be prudent to conduct a risk assessment addressing delays, cost overruns, or compliance issues before the project begins. Officers should also ensure compliance with the Public Sector Equality Duty and secure any necessary Environmental Assessments.

7.5 Subject to a subsidy control analysis, compliance with procurement regulations, and confirmation that the Council can meet the grant terms, there are no known legal barriers to accepting the grants and proceeding with the project. The Service is encouraged to arrange for Legal Services to remain engaged throughout to address any emerging issues, as needed.

(Pamela Nsofor, Solicitor)

8 **Procurement Implications**

8.1 The acceptance and allocation of grant funding does not have any procurement implications, however, the manner of how it is spent does. Once grant funding has been approved to be used for the options in the report, the expenditure of the grant funding in order to deliver the expected outcomes will need to be spent following the most appropriate and compliant procurement route/s in accordance with the Council's Contract Procedure Rules and the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 (or the Procurement Act 23 should the works be conducted after February 2025).

(Emma Wall, Category Manager)

9 **Equality Impact, including implications for Children and Young People**

9.1 No

10 **Key Decision**

10.1 Yes

11 **Key Decision Reference Number**

11.1 ESR-02-25

12 **Background Papers**

12.1 None

13 **Appendices**

13.1 None