Report to Cabinet (Part A)

Prudential Building Stabilisation Options Report

	Details
Subject	Prudential Building Stabilisation Works
Decision maker: Senior Officer	To be confirmed.
Decision maker: Cabinet Member	To be confirmed / N/A depending on delegation route.
Decision date	To be completed.
Report author	Chris Lewis – Strategic Lead for Creating a Better Place Nigel Fraser - Capital Projects Team Leader
Ward(s)	Coldhurst

Reason for decision

Oldham's town centre benefits from a wealth of important heritage buildings thanks to the town's rich economic and cultural history. A number of these buildings have become vacant, underutilised and require investment to protect the buildings and seek to ensure their future sustainability whilst enhancing economic and social value these buildings can bring to the local economy

The Prudential building has seen considerable deterioration over that last decade, with the Council stepping in to carry out urgent health and safety interventions, together with an asbestos and environmental clean in mid 2025.The building remains a target for anti-social behaviour in the Town Centre.

The condition however remains poor and very bad in some places, with ongoing vulnerability to the elements. Further stabilisation works are required to prevent against further deterioration so that potential options for future use may be appraised.

This report summarises the current and ongoing defects and condition challenges faced by the Prudential building, with a series of options set out with outline budget costs, please be aware these are subject to a procurement process and receiving final contractor costings. This is to inform the scope of the stabilisation works to be agreed and taken forward to technical design in order to tender suitable contractors

Recommendation(s)

1. Approve the initial funding budget estimate, subject to contractor procurement process for finalised cost, to undertake a schedule of stabilisation works to the Prudential Building.

2. Note that the recommended stabilisation works package (option 4) is intended to halt further decay, secure the building, and preserve its heritage fabric while future reuse options are considered, utilizing the principles of permanent, external, like for like conservation principles. This potentially allows limited “meanwhile” use or public access before a full redevelopment, thereby improving the building’s attractiveness for future investment.

3. Delegation of authority to the Director of Growth, in consultation with Finance, Procurement and Legal to finalise scopes, confirm affordability, and procure / instruct the additional works within the approved funding envelope using a Procurement compliant framework.

4. Delegation of authority to the Director of Legal Services or his nominees to formalise any necessary legal requirements including signing` and/or sealing any documentation required to give effect to the recommendations and/or delegations in this report.

1.0 Background

1.1 The Prudential Assurance Building is a prominent Grade II listed Victorian landmark occupying a key gateway location on Union Street, directly opposite Oldham Central Metrolink stop. Constructed in 1889 and designed by the renowned architect Alfred Waterhouse, the building is recognised as one of the most architecturally significant commercial buildings of its period. Its highly detailed design, distinctive elevations and surviving historic fabric represent an exceptional example of late Victorian architecture, incorporating an extensive palette of red brick, terracotta, timber and decorative tiling.

1.2 As one of Waterhouse's most accomplished works, the building makes a substantial contribution to the character and historic significance of Oldham, providing a strong sense of place and local identity.

1.3 Despite its significance, the building has reached a critical stage in its decline. It is included on Historic England's Heritage at Risk Register and has previously been identified by the Victorian Society as one of the most endangered buildings of its type in the country. Prolonged vacancy, a lack of investment and ongoing exposure to the elements have resulted in extensive deterioration of the building fabric, including roof collapses, significant water ingress, structural instability, severe damage to windows and repeated incidents of vandalism and trespass. Please see Appendix One for photographs of the current condition.

1.4 The building occupies a highly visible location and forms the first impression of Oldham for many residents and visitors arriving via the Metrolink network. Its current condition has a significant adverse impact on perceptions of the town centre and detracts from the wider regeneration activity taking place across Oldham.

1.5 For many years, the building remained in private ownership with very limited maintenance or investment. During this period the structure continued to deteriorate, resulting in increasing risks to public safety. The Council was required to intervene on several occasions to undertake urgent health and safety works, including securing the

building against unauthorised access after the owner failed to respond adequately to requests for action. These interventions were necessary to prevent entry by trespassers, including school children, and to mitigate immediate safety concerns also highlighted by Oldham Councils Community Safety Team.

1.6 The building has suffered substantial damage as a result of long-term neglect, previous lead thefts, vandalism and prolonged exposure to weather. The roof has collapsed in several areas and there remains a risk of further structural failure. The condition of the building has necessitated the closure of part of the adjacent walkway due to concerns regarding falling masonry and debris.

1.7 During periods of severe weather, sections of the roof structure have collapsed internally, and pieces of masonry and other building fabric have fallen externally, creating an immediate risk to public safety. Whilst temporary security measures have been implemented where practicable, the building remains highly vulnerable to further deterioration, unauthorised access and structural failure.

1.8 Given the continuing decline of the building, the escalating risks to public safety and the need to safeguard this iconic heritage asset, the Council pursued a lengthy Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO) to secure its future, the Prudential Building is now under Oldham Council ownership.

1.9 Following acquisition, the Council undertook a series of assessments to identify immediate health and safety risks and determine the works required to facilitate safe access for further surveys and investigations. This included asbestos inspections and comprehensive site assessments undertaken by specialist consultants and Council officers.

1.10 The Council subsequently commissioned an extensive environmental clean-up operation involving the removal of large quantities of debris and asbestos-containing materials. These works were essential to create safe conditions for detailed structural, engineering and heritage assessments and to better understand the scale of repair requirements.

1.11 Recognising both the heritage significance of the building and the risks arising from its current condition, the Prudential Building has been incorporated within the Union Street Heritage Buildings Options Appraisal Programme, supported by Historic England. This work is intended to explore sustainable long-term uses for key heritage assets along Union Street and support their contribution to the regeneration of the town centre.

2.0 Current Position

2.1 To inform future intervention works, the Council commissioned Buttress Architects to undertake detailed condition inspections and prepare an initial scope of stabilisation and urgent repair works. Their assessment identified the immediate measures required to arrest further decay, address structural failures, make watertight, secure the building and ensure the long-term future of the building.

2.2 The findings of the condition assessment identified the deteriorating parapet wall on the north-east corner of the building overlooking Printer Street at risk of collapse, where masonry has been lost and sections of the wall are leaning outward due to vegetation

growth and the decay of supporting structural timber. Whilst the area below has been cordoned off, the condition of the wall will continue to worsen without remedial action.

2.3 Extensive water ingress resulting from roof failures has caused widespread decay and loss of structural timber elements throughout the building. In some locations, structural intervention is required to prevent further collapse and maintain the integrity of the building. All windows have suffered varying degrees of damage or failure, leaving the interior exposed to rainwater penetration, bird ingress, and continued deterioration.

2.4 The stabilisation, weatherproofing and security works now proposed represent an essential first phase in rescuing the building. These measures will prevent further deterioration, reduce risks to public safety, and protect the historic fabric from irreversible loss while longer-term plans for its sustainable reuse are developed.

2.5 The proposed works will deliver significant public benefits. They will provide an immediate and highly visible improvement to the quality of the historic environment, enhancing the appearance of a prominent town centre gateway seen by thousands of residents, visitors, and Metrolink passengers each year. They will also improve perceptions of safety, civic pride, and confidence in the area.

2.6 Investment in the repair and stabilisation of the Prudential Building will demonstrate a clear commitment to safeguarding Oldham's heritage assets and will support wider regeneration objectives. By addressing one of the town centre's most visible heritage buildings, the Council can help encourage further private investment and reinforce confidence in the future of Union Street and the surrounding area.

2.7 Recognising both the heritage significance of the building and the risks arising from its current condition, the Prudential Building has been incorporated within the Union Street Heritage Buildings Options Appraisal Programme, supported by Historic England. This work is intended to explore sustainable long-term uses for key heritage assets along Union Street and support their contribution to the regeneration of the town centre.

2.8 The proposed intervention represents an urgent and necessary response to the condition of a nationally significant heritage asset. It will reduce substantial risks to public safety, mitigate potential impacts on adjacent public infrastructure including the Metrolink network, prevent the further loss of historic fabric, and support the ongoing regeneration of Union Street and the wider town centre. Most importantly, it will secure the future of one of Oldham's most important historic buildings for future generations.

3.0 Budget Position

3.1 The recommended stabilisation works package (option 4) is intended to halt further decay, secure the building, and preserve its heritage fabric while future reuse options are considered, utilizing the principles of permanent, external, like for like conservation principles. This potentially allows limited “meanwhile” use or public access before a full redevelopment, thereby improving the building’s attractiveness for future investment. A permanent approach to the conservation works means that on-going property maintenance

obligations will be minimised and the work undertaken will be carried out to maximise efficient working practices. This approach is supported by Historic England.

4.0 Alternative option(s) to be considered

4.1 Option 1 – Do Nothing

Given the current poor condition of the building, the do-nothing option would result in the continued exposure of the structure to the elements, leading to ongoing deterioration of the building fabric and increasing the likelihood of structural failure, including the potential for partial collapse.

The risks associated with this option are heightened by the building's prominent location adjacent to Oldham's main Metrolink stop. Any falling debris from the structure could damage the tramway infrastructure, posing a safety risk and potentially disrupting the operation of Transport for Greater Manchester's (TfGM) tram services.

Although measures have been implemented to secure the building, without more permanent interventions it remains vulnerable to further anti-social behaviour. The Community Safety Team has raised concerns regarding reports of children and urban explorers gaining access to the site, including the unstable remnants of the roof structure, creating a significant risk to public safety.

In addition to the ongoing risk of vandalism, there remains the potential for deliberate fire-setting within the building. Any such incident could have serious consequences for neighbouring properties and critical transport infrastructure, including disruption to Metrolink services. The deteriorating condition of the building therefore presents escalating risks to public safety, adjacent assets, and the wider town centre environment.

The do-nothing option is not considered viable due to the escalating risks associated with the continued deterioration of the building. These include threats to public safety, potential damage to adjacent transport infrastructure, ongoing anti-social behaviour and vandalism, and the risk of fire affecting neighbouring properties and the operation of the Metrolink network. Without timely intervention, the Council's exposure to health and safety, operational and reputational risks is likely to increase.

.4.2 Option 2 - Do Minimum

The option comprises the baseline works that are required to stabilise the Prudential's existing construction, and to provide a minimum level of protection against the elements. Fundamentally, the option seeks to prevent water entering the building, while remedying precarious structural issues and reducing the risk to people within the building and the wider public.

This option comprises

- Repair/reinstatement of brickwork and terracotta parapets and copings where these have been de-stabilised.

- Reinstatement of parapet gutters where lead linings have been stolen.
- Removal of vegetation/buddleia growth from all elevations.
- Clearance and repair/reinstatement of rainwater pipes and gutters.
- Installation of protective perforated sheeting to all window openings (to external elevations) to protect against bird/vermin infestations while maintaining ventilation to protect against dampness and decay.
- Repair of failed and severely decayed timber roof structures.
- Removal of external fire escape stair to the rear of the building to prevent easy access for trespassers.
- Installation of temporary sheeting over areas of missing roof covering to enable dispersal of rainwater and protection against ingress.
- Temporary roof structure over central atrium.

Advantages:

- Lowest cost option.
- Prevents/mitigates against further
- deterioration.
- Does not preclude future proposals.

Disadvantages:

- Works are temporary in nature.
- Works address deterioration but do not enhance the heritage asset.
- Future proposals would require the removal of temporary work alongside further access/scaffold costs.

4.3 Option 3 – Repair/Reinstatement

The option goes further than the temporary nature of Option 1 by repairing and reinstating damaged/lost fabric in a longer-term/permanent manner. The works within Option 2 would focus on the stabilisation and conservation of the external building envelope but would not comprise any internal repair works. The option would achieve the same outcomes as Option 1 but would be done in a more permanent manner incorporating traditional methods and materials.

The option comprises:

- Repair/reinstatement of brickwork and terracotta parapets and copings where these have been de-stabilised.
- Reinstatement of parapet gutters where lead linings have been stolen.
- Removal of vegetation/buddleia growth from all elevations.
- Clearance and repair/reinstatement of rainwater pipes and gutters in matching cast-iron.
- Replacement of all missing/lost windows on a like for like basis, with hardwood sliding sash and casement configurations.

- Repair of failed and severely decayed timber roof structures.
- Removal of external fire escape stair to the rear of the building to prevent easy access for trespassers.
- Relaying of roof coverings in slate and clay tile to match existing.

The option proposals will stabilise the building's condition to allow for future reuse opportunities to be considered.

Advantages:

- Prevents against further deterioration.
- Negates the need for future revisiting of works and access/scaffolding.
- Presents a visible enhancement to a prominent heritage asset.

Disadvantages:

- Increased cost in relation to Option 1.
- While addressing ongoing deterioration, internal defects will remain unrepaired, precluding potential occupation or meanwhile use.

4.4 Option 4 – Renewal/Betterment (Recommended Option)

The option essentially comprises the envelope repairs of Option 2 but goes further than this by carrying out targeted internal repairs and enhancements. It is likely that irrespective of future use proposals certain elements will likely be retained and repaired. In addition to fully repairing roofs, windows, and masonry, Option 3 includes restoring significant interior elements (e.g. the historic tiled banking hall and selected plasterwork) to a stable condition. This fully secures the building inside and out, potentially allowing limited "meanwhile" use or public access before a full redevelopment, thereby improving the building's attractiveness for future investment.

The option comprises:

As option 2, plus

- Cleaning and repair to historic tiling/faience.
- Localised/targeted repair/renewal of internal plaster.

Advantages:

- Prevents/mitigates against further deterioration.
- Negates the need for future revisiting of works and access/scaffolding.
- Presents a visible enhancement to a prominent heritage asset and enables engagement/meanwhile occupation.
    - Enables the potential for limited/temporary occupations and/or pop-up usage

Disadvantages:

- Most expensive option.
- Potential for some elements of work to be replaced in any future scheme.

5.0 Consultation

5.1 Historic England has expressed support for a permanent works conservation approach and has part funded the Union Street Heritage Buildings options appraisal programme, which includes the Prudential Building.

6.0 Risks

Risk	Impact	Mitigation
Additional funding is not approved	Current funding will only support temporary works and therefore benefits of completing permanent works would not be deliverable	Approve initial funding envelope for permanent conservation works.
Costs increase beyond estimates	Additional budget pressure.	Final scope and procurement exercise to be completed before instruction.
Project delays during decision making process	The building remains a target for anti-social behavior and fabric conditions continue to deteriorate	Property services maintain H&S assessments for public safety

Implications

Financial implications

All financial implications are contained within the Part B report.

James Postle (Senior Finance Manager)

Legal implications

All legal implications are contained within the Part B report.

Pamela Nsofor (Solicitor)

Procurement implications

All procurement implications are contained within the Part B report.

Tom Pyne (Head of Procurement)

Property implications

All property implications are contained within the Part B report.

(John Winterbottom - Divisional Manager – Technical Delivery)

Equality impact including implications for children and young people

There has been a detailed Equality Impact Assessment completed for the Creating a Better Place programme for which this project forms a part.

Report Author Sign-off:	
Nigel Fraser – Capital Projects Team Leader	**Date:** 24/08/26
Chris Lewis – Strategic Lead for creating a Better Place	**Date:** 01/09/26

In consultation with Director of Growth

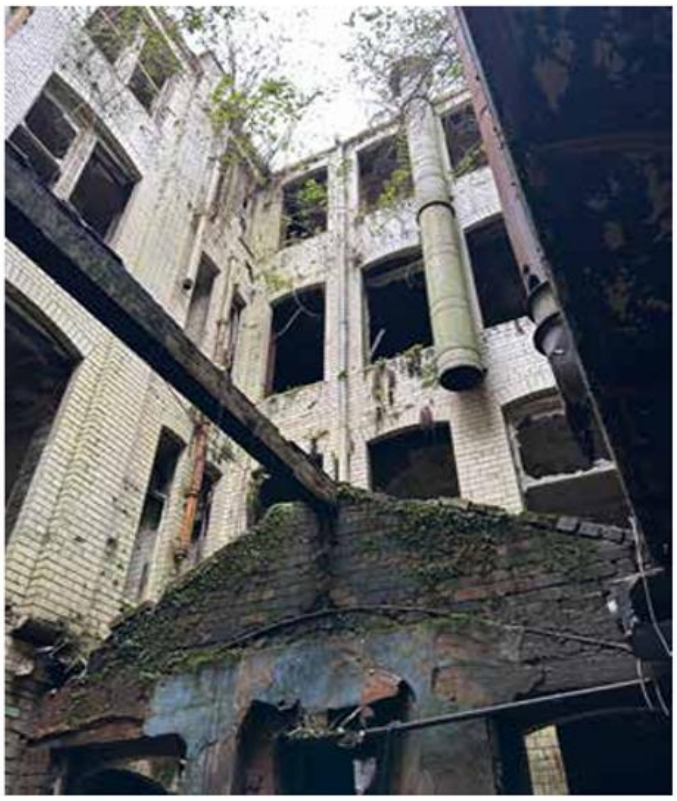
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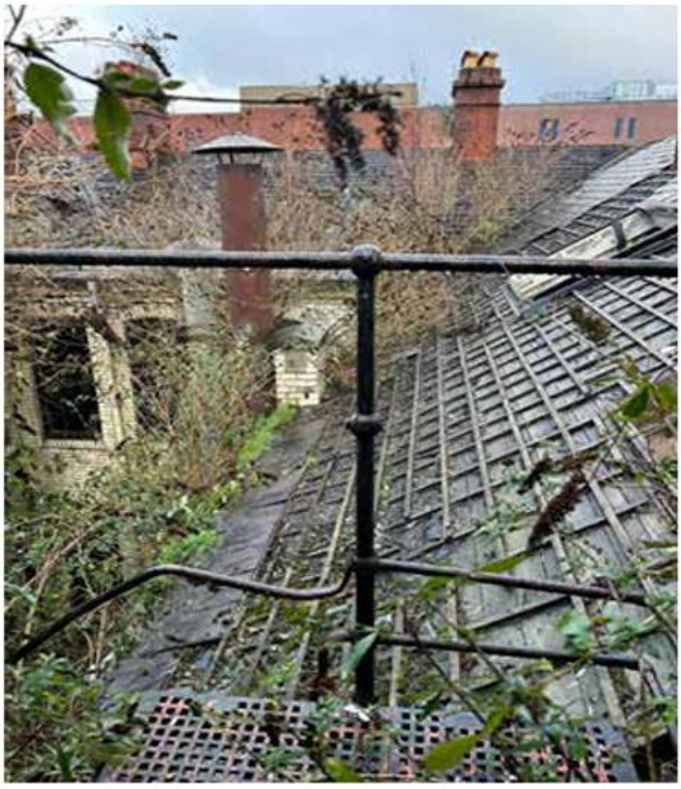
James Kington, Director of Growth

APPENDIX ONE – Prudential Building Condition photos









End.