

## ALMONRY USE WORKING GROUP REPORT JULY 2022

The main use of the Almonry is as Battle's Town Hall. A typical town hall provides facilities for the exercise of local government, houses a council's administrative offices, and is a focal point for civic events and local services. The Almonry does all of this but in addition it is an important heritage asset which the Council is committed to preserving, making an object of civic pride, and using for the public good.

As a heritage building originating in the fifteenth century the Almonry does not naturally lend itself to modern use. The recent renovation aimed to make the council offices fit for purpose, futureproof the building, improve access, and provide up-to-date facilities to encourage community use and enhance the town's tourist offering. The phased re-opening of the Almonry has given the opportunity to test the delivery of these objectives. The next step is to review Almonry use in the light of this experience, re-assessing the designation of space, operation of shared-use areas and income generation capacity of the building.

### **Primary Use**

The primary use of the Almonry is to house the Council's offices and to provide meeting space for the Council and its committees. Following the refurbishment, the Council's main office moved from the ground floor to the first floor and the Council Chamber was relocated to the former Council Office. The first-floor office is for the exclusive use of the Council and is currently shared by the Town Clerk and the Deputy Town Clerk. The Parlour is shared between the Council, Rother District Council and the Tourist Information Point and the Council Chamber is shared between the Council, the TIP and private hire.

### Functionality:

Although the Almonry has been partially open for several months, circumstances are still abnormal and it is difficult to assess the functionality of the new arrangements.

*The Council Offices* Whereas the Council previously had the use of one large office (shared with Rother District Council) and one small office, for the use of the Town Clerk, it now has one large office upstairs and one office downstairs shared with Rother District Council and the TIP. In the absence of the Deputy Town Clerk it has not been possible to judge the functionality of the Town Clerk sharing with the Deputy and as the TIP is not yet open it has not been possible to judge what impact this will have on the Council's use of the Parlour. Some problems with shared use of the Parlour with Rother District Council have been reported to the working group and we recommend that this is reviewed by the Town Clerk.

*The Council Chamber* is still in the process of being equipped for shared use. Despite earlier doubts it appears that the furnishings and space are adequate for use by Full Council and other meetings, although there have been some problems with the WiFi which may need attention. As the TIP is not yet open it has not been possible to judge how the use of the room for showing the Almonry film and as part of the self-guided tour might impinge on its primary use, but the working group is confident that the shared use can be successfully managed.

## Secondary Use

The secondary uses of the Almonry are community use, tourist information and income generation. Community use is catered for by room hire, community events and the free use of the gardens. The Tourist Information Point will be located in the Parlour and there will be a film, shown in the Council Chamber, and a self-guided tour of the ground floor and gardens. Income generation will come from letting offices on the first floor, private hire of the Chamber and Old Hall and (potentially) use of the Almonry as a wedding venue.

### Functionality

*Community use* has already begun again community events, reopening of the side garden and groups hiring both the Old Hall and the Chamber. Because of the layout of the Almonry the hire of the Old Hall will always cause problems for other users who may want to use the kitchen and wheelchair accessible toilet. It may also undermine the viability of the self-guided tour, but the working group believes that both of these situations are manageable.

*The TIP* has yet to open. Proposals are expected from the TIP Working Group regarding the operation of the self-guided tour and shared use of the Parlour and the Chamber.

*Income generation* is an important function but must be balanced against other secondary functions and the primary function of providing adequate accommodation for the Council's offices. Please see the separate proposal from the working group on the marketing of the Almonry.

MK 25.07.22

