

Proposal to Sell the Old Court House and Invest in a More Accessible Community Facility

Presented to Southwell Town Council February 2026

1. Introduction

This paper proposes the sale of the Old Court House, with a view to reinvesting the proceeds into a more suitable, centrally located facility that meets the needs of all residents.

2. Background

The Old Court House has served Southwell for many years. However, the building now presents several limitations, particularly in terms of cost, accessibility, and its general condition. As our community evolves, it is imperative that our public buildings reflect our values of inclusivity, efficiency, sustainability, and long-term resilience.

3. Key Issues with the Old Court House

- **High Running Costs:** The Court House requires significant financial outlay to maintain and operate. Utilities, maintenance, and compliance with safety standards place a continued strain on council resources.
- **Accessibility Concerns:** The current building is not fully accessible to residents with mobility challenges. There are limitations to what can be done structurally to improve access without incurring substantial costs.
- **Poor Condition and Upheaval Required:** The Old Court House now requires a considerable amount of repair work to remain functional. Undertaking these repairs would involve major disruption and expense. The time, energy, and resources needed to carry out these works could be better spent on securing a more suitable, long-term solution.
- **Inefficient Use of Space:** The internal layout is no longer well-suited to the range of community activities and council functions it is expected to support.

4. Implementation and Oversight

To ensure a robust and transparent process, the following steps are recommended:

- **Instruct a Professional Body:** Engage a professional consultant or firm to conduct an independent scope of works and cost-benefit analysis. This would provide the Council with evidence-based options for both repairing the current building and relocating to a new one.
- **Form a Working Group:** Establish a dedicated Working Group comprising councillors, officers, and community representatives. This group would liaise closely with Full Council, help steer the process, evaluate potential sites, and maintain engagement with the wider public.

5. Proposed Solution

- **Sale of the Old Court House:** Place the building on the market to achieve a fair and realistic price, considering its central location and historical character.
- **Purchase of a New Facility:** Identify and acquire a centrally situated building with modern amenities and full accessibility. This could provide a more welcoming, practical, and inclusive space for meetings, community services, and civic events.
- **Improved Public Access:** A new facility should offer level access, modern facilities, and flexible internal space to meet a wider range of resident and council needs.

6. Environmental Benefits

Transitioning to a modern, energy-efficient facility will bring measurable environmental gains:

- **Reduced Carbon Footprint:** Newer buildings typically offer improved insulation, energy-efficient lighting and heating, and the opportunity for renewable energy installations such as solar panels.
- **Lower Energy Consumption:** Running costs can be reduced through better energy management systems, resulting in a more sustainable public asset.
- **Sustainable Materials and Design:** A new facility can be designed or adapted using environmentally friendly materials and sustainable building practices.
- **Support for Local Environmental Goals:** This move would align with Southwell Town Council's commitment to tackling climate change and promoting environmental responsibility in public policy and property management.

7. Benefits to the Community

- Better access for all residents, including those with disabilities, the elderly, and young families.
- Reduced ongoing costs for the Council, freeing up funds for other services and initiatives.
- A more functional and welcoming environment for community engagement and council activities.
- Avoidance of costly and disruptive repair work on an outdated building.
- Improved environmental sustainability and alignment with climate action goals.
- Transparency and public confidence through professional oversight and inclusive decision-making.
- A clear demonstration of the Council's commitment to inclusivity, responsibility, and future-focused planning.

8. Conclusion

Selling the Old Court House presents an opportunity to modernise our civic infrastructure, address accessibility shortcomings, and invest in a facility that truly serves the whole community. With the building in need of substantial repairs and investment, this is the right moment to consider a forward-looking, sustainable approach. By instructing a professional body, forming a Working Group, and prioritising accessibility and environmental responsibility, we can make a meaningful and lasting improvement to the future of Southwell's public services.

Proposal:

- 1) Commission a professional valuation of the Old Court House.
- 2) Instruct a professional body to scope the cost and feasibility of both refurbishment and relocation.
- 3) Form the Working Group to report to Full Council throughout the process.
- 4) Begin identifying potential alternative buildings in Southwell.
- 5) Conduct a community consultation to gather views and ensure transparency.
- 6) Prepare a financial and environmental impact plan to guide the sale and reinvestment process.

Proposed: Councillor Tracey Jevons-Hazzard

Seconded: Councillor Karen Roberts

February 2026