

## Priory House, Dunstable Brief for Commissioned Work: Evaluation Consultant



Heritage  
Fund



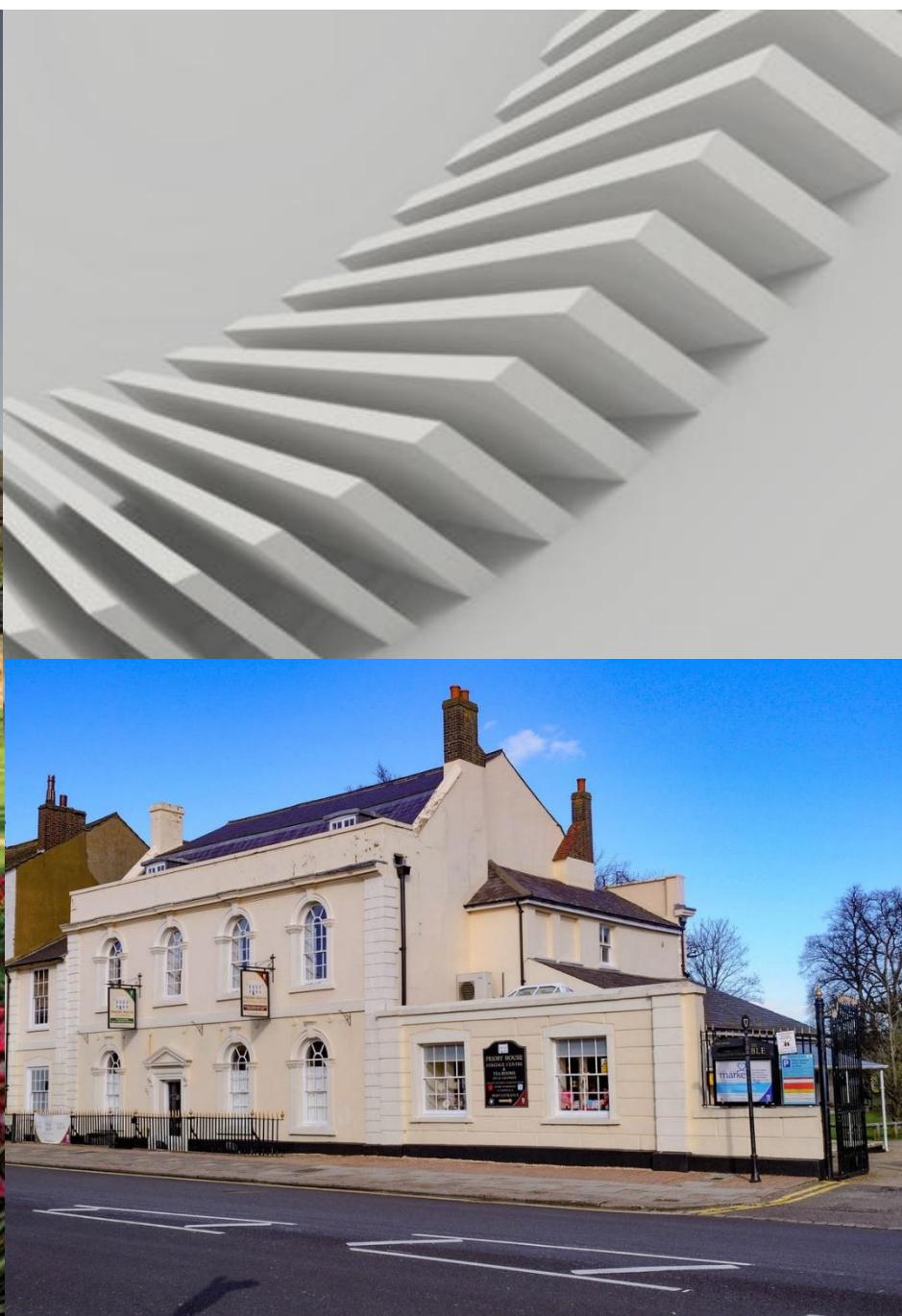
Historic England



DUNSTABLE  
TOWN COUNCIL



October 2025



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## 1.0 Introducing the Project

### 1.1 Summary

This Brief sets out the requirements for the commissioning of Evaluation Consultant for the Delivery Phase of the Grade II\* listed Priory House in Dunstable.

Dunstable Town Council is currently undertaking a sensitive conservation project to address structural and architectural elements impacted by previous substandard repair works.

The project has successfully secured funding from the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) and Historic England (HE), which is being used to support the delivery of works and to strengthen confidence in Dunstable Town Council and its partners' ability to manage the project effectively. Independent evaluation and construction-related assessments will be key in demonstrating this capability.

### 1.2 Background

Priory House is a Grade II\* listed building, located in the Dunstable Conservation Area and adjoining Priory Gardens, a schedule monument. It is listed under List Entry Number 1114593. It is an exceptional example of a 13th Century vaulted building with strong links to the Dunstable Priory.

Since 2003, the building has been in the ownership of Dunstable Town Council and been open to the public as a heritage centre with shop, tea rooms, exhibition space and meeting/function room.

Over the last 15 years, deterioration of the stonework of the vaults has been observed and has led to the building being placed on Historic England's Heritage at Risk Register. It is noted to be in "Very Bad" condition and Priority B with "Immediate risk of further rapid deterioration or loss of fabric; solution agreed but not yet implemented".

A detailed development phase of work has taken place in order to carry out research and investigations to establish a better understanding of the building structure, fabric and in particular the stonework, alongside the environmental conditions. This identified issues with low level and high-level water ingress, impermeable render and the addition of localised areas of concrete in the vault cones above that had resulted in deterioration of the stonework to the vaults, walls and external façade.

Subsequent to the above, during the course of the works it was found that the Exhibition Space partitions, which were due to be partially dismantled to facilitate works to Bay 2 and 3, were heavily loaded.

Targeted opening-up was carried out to the second floor and at the heads of the first-floor timbers to lift boards and locally remove finishes. It was clear that significant intervention had been carried out to the second floor, with multiple layers of historic floors and ceilings overlain by modern structure. Full opening up was carried out to lift floors to the west side of the building and remove plaster from the partitions and modern plasterwork to the ceiling of the central bay below.

The following was noted:

- Recent alterations to the form of the historic roof structure, with the addition of new purlins onto a series of posts that now support the roof from the second floor.

- Recent alteration to the second floor to include a new layer of flooring, directly supported from the historic layers of the second floor below.
- Strengthening of the historic primary timber beams at second floor, with the use of site-fixed timber planks, resin and coach screws to strengthen them. Works were noted to be of poor-quality workmanship and not executed in accordance with the drawings.
- Poor quality workmanship of secondary connection details between other members, which gave rise to further concern regarding workmanship and supervision of these works.
- Decay of primary timbers that not been repaired, which with the effect that the partition was now fully loaded with the weight of the second floor.
- Heavy display boards in the Exhibition Space, that have been suspended from the partitions and external walls.
- The above alterations were noted to result in fundamental changes to the load paths through the building, with significant additional load from the roof and second floor being transferred onto the Exhibition Space partitions and then directly onto the medieval vaults. This appears to have resulted in cracking of the vaults, which is noted to align directly at the partition locations.

It is not possible to undertake works to repair Bay 2 and 3 of the medieval undercrofts without carrying out further additional works to address the concerns arising with the structural arrangement of the second floor and remove the load from the partitions.

Similar methods of strengthening and localised timber decay were noted to the east side of the building, but it is considered that these areas may be suitable for localised remedial works and load testing to establish the capacity of the “timber plank beams”.

In altering the second floor structure, it will be necessary to comply with Building Regulations and therefore the issues relating to the entire floor including connections of secondary members and to the east side of the building must also be addressed.

In addition, the following has been noted:

- Historic movement and cracking to the southwest corner of the building, which has been inadequately repaired with BAT straps and small diameter screws, that have subsequently failed.
- Repairs to this corner necessitate a combination of localised dismantling and rebuilding of the Totternhoe stone to the corner, consolidation of loose brickwork, pinning and grouting.

We have now received listed building consent and planning permission for structural repairs to the second floor, which are currently underway. Prior to this, repair works were completed on the first floor and the undercroft. The second-floor repairs are a critical step, as they will enable further works to progress in the undercroft.

During extensive works on the first floor, 17th-century wall paintings were uncovered. Conservation efforts were immediately undertaken to preserve their historic integrity.

Once the structural repairs are complete, we will proceed with the first and second fix of mechanical, electrical, and plumbing (MEP) systems, followed by the installation of internal finishes.

As part of the wider project – outside the scope of NLHF funding – we will also deliver a newly refurbished café and exhibition space on the first floor.

The project was initially launched as a £700,000 restoration of the historic Undercroft, jointly funded by the High Street Heritage Action Zone (HSHAZ) Government programme and match funding from Dunstable Town Council. However, early investigations revealed that structural issues extended beyond the Undercroft, and the original budget was insufficient to make the building safe and remove it from the Heritage At Risk Register. Historic England, having been involved in the project for several years, agreed to support additional works and facilitated engagement with the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NHLF). The NHLF subsequently provided further funding to enable a more comprehensive restoration.

The evaluation referenced in this report pertains specifically to the NHLF-funded elements of the project.

### 1.3 Dunstable Town Council

Dunstable Town Council, established in 1985, is one of the largest town councils in England. It operates independently of Central Bedfordshire Council and is funded through a portion of local council tax and income from commercial activities. The Council is committed to enhancing the quality of life for residents, businesses, and visitors by delivering a wide range of services including parks and green spaces, community events, youth and older people's services, public amenities, and heritage sites such as Priory House Heritage Centre.

Led by elected councillors representing various wards, the Council is supported by a professional team of approximately 50 staff members. It has received numerous accolades, including Green Flag Awards for its parks, Gold in the Anglia in Bloom competition, and the ICCM Charter for the Bereaved for its cemetery services.

In 2025, the Council marked its 40th anniversary, celebrating four decades of civic service and community engagement. It continues to play a vital role in shaping Dunstable as a vibrant, inclusive, and historically rich town.

The project is being managed by three key representatives in Dunstable Town Council, these consist of:

- Becky Wisbey – Head of Community Services
- Paul Hobson – Town Clerk and Chief Executive
- Lisa Stephens – Cultural Services Manager

### 1.4 Project Objectives

The key objectives as set out in the project brief are as follows:

- Repair and conserve the vaulted stonework of the undercroft;
- Develop a better understanding of the environmental conditions alongside the building structure, fabric and the nature of clunch, to allow the current uses to continue but to control the building environment to significantly reduce the rate of deterioration;
- Provide detailed guidance to Dunstable Town Council on how to manage the building's environment and maintain the fabric, as custodians for its future;
- Remove the building from the Heritage at Risk Register.

## 1.5 Project Team

Dunstable Town Council have procured the following Consultants to comprise the Project Team:

- Project Manager – Focus Consultants
- Conservation Structural Engineer and Contract Administrator – The Morton Partnership
- Conservation Architect – Caroe
- MEP Engineer – Martin Thomas Associates
- Quantity Surveyor – Focus Consultants
- Archaeologist – HB Archaeology and Conservation Ltd
- Environmental Conditions Specialist – Tobit Curteis
- Main Contractor – Messenger

## 1.6 Summary of the Role

The appointed Consultant is required to provide Evaluation services for the full £3.7m Project, reviewing across the capital works.

## 2.0 Site Visits

Should you wish to visit site then please contact Franki Webb at [franki.webb@focus-consultants.com](mailto:franki.webb@focus-consultants.com) to arrange.

## 3.0 Scope of Service

### 3.1 Introduction

The brief is for an Evaluation Consultant for the Priory House during the delivery phase.

### 3.2 Basis of Appointment

The employer will be Dunstable Town Council. The Consultant appointment will be as detailed at Appendix B of this document.

The Contract will run from appointment to the end of the Project, predicted to be around January 2027.

### 3.3 Professional Fees

This work has a budget fee of £10,000 for the Delivery Phase, both including travel and expenses but excluding VAT. Payment stages to be agreed with the chosen consultant. The consultant(s) is expected to tailor their work to the demands of the programme and some occasional evening working may be required.

### 3.4 Scope of Service

#### 3.4.1 Delivery Phase

- Develop and agree an evaluation methodology for the project. This will need to be agreed with NLHF.
- We anticipate requiring a series of qualitative interviews with members of the key stakeholders, Project Team including Design team, consultant and staff involved in the capital restoration to feed into interim report.
- Support stakeholders and the client team on their approach to gathering data around public engagement activities being undertaken as part of the project.
- Prepare a final NLHF compliant evaluation report of the Project, under the direction of Dunstable Town Council that focused on the extent to which the project met its intended outcomes.
- We anticipate one interim report during the Delivery Phase with final report to be prepared at the end of the Delivery Phase.
- Attend occasional catch ups with the Project Manager to report on progress. Regularity to be agreed but anticipate quarterly.

#### 3.4.2 Skills, Experience and Knowledge

Dunstable Town Council is looking to appoint a consultant or small consultancy which can demonstrate the following:

- Experience of evaluating NLHF capital projects (value of at least £2m) through to completion.
- Experience of evaluating a range of programmes using different methodologies.
- Practical experience of, and access to, tools such as Survey Monkey.
- Commitment to evaluation that encourages a reflective approach to activity.
- Strong report writing and presentation delivery skills.
- Ability to be flexible and work collaboratively with Dunstable Town Council and the rest of consultant team.

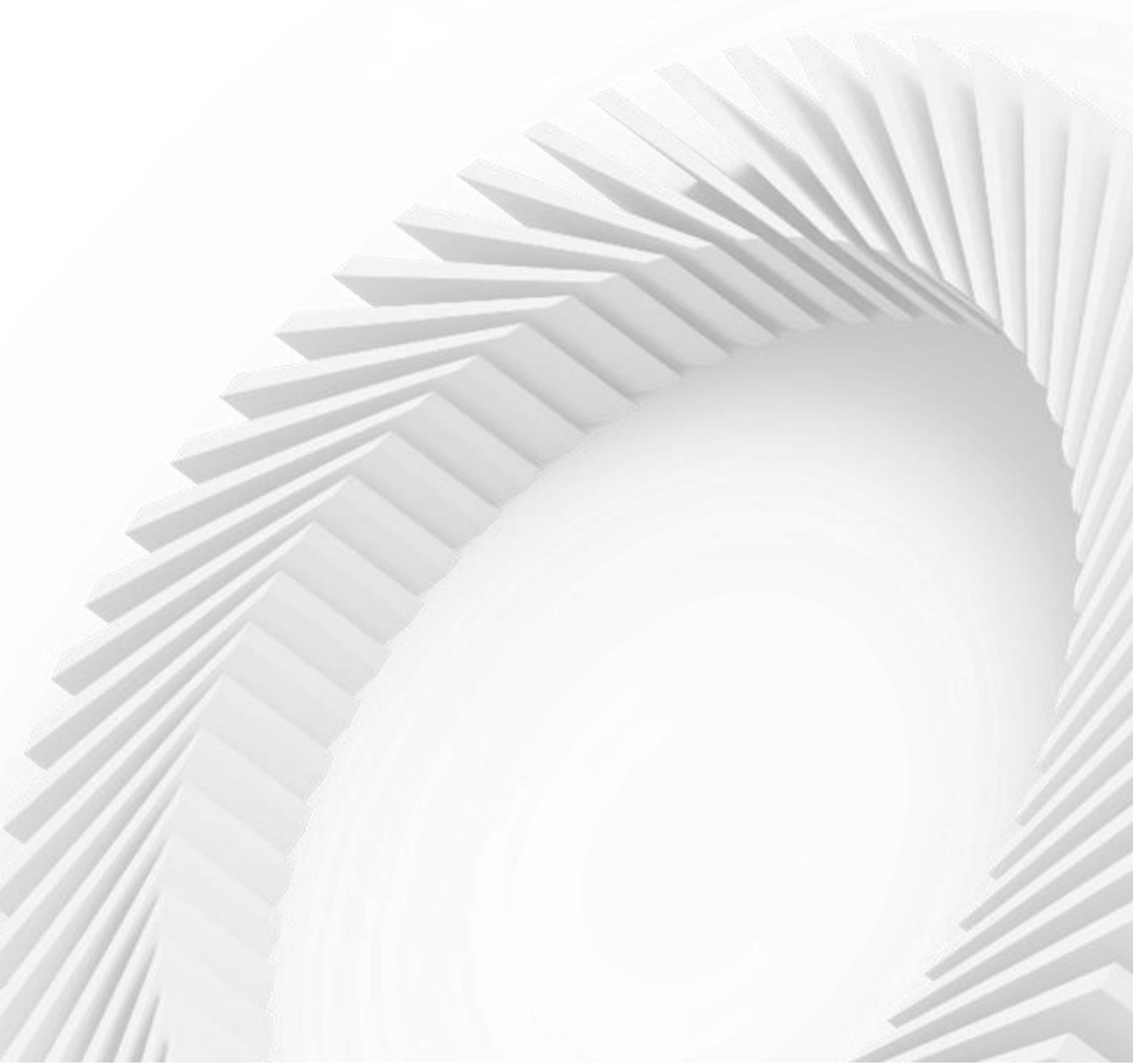


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## Appendix A

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### Case for Support



# Grant Increase Request – Capital and Activity Projects

## Section 1

Please send the following documents to your Senior/Investment Manager to request a grant increase for your capital and activity project.

1. Answers to the questions in **Section 2** below.
2. A spreadsheet showing your original approved project budget and your new budget, clearly showing the grant increase request.
3. Updated Programme/Project timetable (from now to Project Completion).
4. Updated Cash Flow.
5. Updated Risk Register.

## Section 2

Grant Increase Request Questions for capital and activity projects.

1. How much additional funding are you requesting (£)?

£2,150,748

2. Please provide a narrative explaining your need for a Grant Increase from The National Lottery Heritage Fund.

### Why Costs have Increased

The project team has become aware of some significant issues relating to the structural integrity of the building. These were discovered during the works to the second floor (funded by HSHAZ and HAR1) and in advance of the works due to be funded by the September 2023 NLHF grant. . This required immediate attention and, seeking agreement from NLHF and Historic England, allocated funds were re-purposed to open up and investigate further. This enabled us to understand the full extent of the issues, largely affecting the internal east wall and north gable, and to determine the most effective course of action.

The process of completing the opening up works and developing remedial measures has necessarily been a step by step process due to the nature of the building.

- For the walls, this has necessitated removal of historic finishes by layer, which required the project team to obtain Listed Building Consent (via the pre-agreement process), undertake archaeological recording by layer and engage specialists such as Dr Andrea Kirkham to record the wall paintings observed.
- Opening up to internal components was carried out in a piecemeal fashion that was largely dictated by the sensitivity of the historic medieval fabric and inconsistency of previous repair approaches, the poor quality of which could not have been predicted.
- Continual discovery of poor quality workmanship and ill-advised interventions to the building (in particular those undertaken in 2003/04) has led to the need for a thorough approach, with regular inspections by and discussions between the conservation engineer, conservation architect, conservation contractor, Historic England, and the Conservation Officer to ascertain the most appropriate methods to address the issues uncovered.
- The structure was continually found to be in very poor condition, necessitating the contractor and consultant team to work together to agree temporary stabilisation requirements before the next round of opening up could be completed and thus reduce the very real risk of potential collapse in certain areas.
- Continuous site presence throughout the period by the Messenger team has allowed the fabric to be opened up and supported through critical temporary works, during a period of partial occupation initially.

Please see supporting letter from The Morton Partnership that sets out the findings in more detail.

The conclusions of the opening up has been that significant works are required to stabilise the building if it is to be reopened to the public. In summary, these include:

- Repairs/rebuild to the internal east wall
- Conservation of previously unknown wall paintings
- Strengthening and reinstatement works to the upper floors
- Consequential fire safety review and improvements due to the impact on escape routes by necessary strengthening of the internal east wall, flood alleviation works around the west door of the Undercroft and duties under the Building Safety Act (coming into force October 2023).
- Repairs and conservation work to the north gable which has been identified as in a vulnerable state of repair which fundamentally impacts on the building's structural integrity.

Only once the loads have been redistributed at the upper levels, can attention return to the Undercroft and the vaults be repaired, the original intention of the project. Without this it simply will not be possible to complete the works due to the complex loading arrangements within the building.

The increase in the scope of the works is having a wider impact on the overall costs of the project in a number of ways, such as increase in professional fees, site time/management, archaeological recording, planning and Building Control consents now required. Finally, the redirecting of funds to complete the opening up and investigation works has resulted in a shortfall for the core Undercroft repairs and backfill of funds into this budget is now required.

As a result a Grant Uplift is now required to enable us to deliver the intention of the project.

### **Mitigating measures that have been explored to manage the cost increase**

#### ***1. Re-scoping the project/value engineering***

A whole project re-scoping exercise has been undertaken to prioritise the works required to bring Priory House back into use. The items identified broadly fell into twelve categories:

- A. Contract Works
- B. Mechanical and Electrical Works
- C. Additional Works – Discovery items revealed through the opening up and trials
- D. Items arising from Condition Survey
- E. Internal reinstatement consequent to the repair and conservation works
- F. Fire protection measures
- G. Interpretation
- H. Miscellaneous Variations Instructed through the contract – “normal” contingency draws
- I. Preliminaries and management costs associated with the above
- J. Risk allowances based on costed risk register
- K. Fees and Other Development Costs
- L. Inflation

These have been costed by the QS with input from the conservation specialist contractor, and the project team. They have also been reviewed by an independent PM/QS.

Items were then scored against a set of criteria driven by the original NLHF Approved Purposes and intent of the High Street Heritage Action Zone funded project. Consideration was also given to:

- Status – whether the works were complete, ongoing, or not yet started
- Interdependency and other implications
- Specific risks regarding risk of consent – Listed Building, risk of consent – Building Control, and risk of escalation in the cost and programme allocations.

The scope was then prioritised into essential, high, medium, and low priority. The estimated cost of the full scope was in the region of £4.260m. The team considered progressing with the essential works only, at a cost of £2.569m. However, this would only address the structural issues to prevent risk of collapse. It would not see the completion of works to the floors, the implementation of flood alleviation methods, and the reinstatement of the rooms into useable spaces, leaving the building extremely vulnerable. The building would effectively be structurally sound, but essentially mothballed and closed to public use.

Including the high priority items, at a cost of £3.659m (compared to the original NLHF funded project costs of £1.269m), enables the building to be fully open to the community once again, after 3 years of closure. It will provide a level of income generation that will support long term maintenance of the building, and fully meet the Approved Purposes.

whilst it will effectively provide a “white box” space, it will not achieve the reinstatement of the exhibition and interpretation, address the less critical front façade, walls, and gate works required, nor remedy the water ingress issues associated with the Gift Shop roof.

The original exhibition had to be removed to access the walls and the partitions for the Undercroft repairs. Whilst great care was taken, unfortunately only a couple of the panels could be removed without damage which means there is no exhibition to reinstate even if we wanted to. Additionally, it has been identified that the panels have contributed to the deterioration of the Undercroft – they were too heavy to hang on the walls and partitions and . there are corresponding cracks and damage in the Undercroft to evidence this. As the aim of the project has always been to repair the Undercroft it would be unacceptable to reinstate such a heavy exhibition in any way.

If interpretation isn’t going to be funded, then the room will be white boxed ready for a future exhibition to be installed once the funding has been secured. The Town Council does have electronic/digital copies of previous exhibitions that have gone on display, so once funding is secured these could be repurposed in a format that works with the fragility of the room e.g. projected exhibition rather than hung. The use of the room is limited in the short term due to the layout and the need to retain the partitions, although Priory House staff will continue to explore community uses such as workshops and activities.

The client team at Priory House have considerable experience in delivering community activity (commercial and subsidised) as evidenced through the engagement and outreach that took place as part of the High Street Heritage Action Zone programme of work. They will seek to maximise the use of Priory House once re-opened, whilst further funding is obtained by Dunstable Town Council to complete the visitor experience, develop the business case and ensure the long term sustainability of Priory House for generations to come.

## ***2. Using contingencies***

Due to the extent of deterioration and failings within the building, the contingencies associated with the original NLHF funding (£142k) are quickly eroded by the escalated costs. As such, use of contingency would not be sufficient to offset the increased costs.

As part of the re-scoping and costing exercise, the team have undertaken a risk review and costed the risk register to reset an appropriate level of contingency for the project going forwards.

## ***3. Re-profiling the Project Programme***

As the issues on site have revealed themselves, there have been numerous discussions as to whether to stand down the contractor and/or parts of the professional team, whilst a way forward is found to minimise costs.

At each juncture, the decision has been taken that, whilst having a cost attached, it is to the benefit of the project overall to have all parties contributing to finding solutions, and maintaining continuity of personnel on the project.

We also discussed closing the site and stopping prelims until a revised design/price had been prepared but this was also rejected:

(a) because the building could not be left unattended for any period of time – given the internal state and risk of collapse, there was a strong health and safety need to retain a Principal Contractor with overall responsibility for the building, and facilitate safe access for the inspections.

(b) there was an ongoing need for opening up/investigation work to uncover the defects and inform design (which required a contractor to be present) and, as it turned out, a great deal of temporary propping as further defects were discovered. Had we closed the site when the original structural defects were discovered (to the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor structure) and tried to develop a design from there, with no further opening up, the defects in the spine wall would not have been revealed until works had recommenced and then we would be faced with stopping again.

- (c) there was a significant risk of losing key members of the team as resources were allocated elsewhere during any hiatus period.
- (d) works to areas of the building that could sensibly proceed, were progressed, albeit at a pace that was at times dictated by weather events as they were largely external. The internal building situation prevented ability to resequence programmed items to allow working under more favourable conditions. This has largely been façade repairs, roof works, rainwater goods, and flood alleviation, to counter the impacts of climate change and increasing rainfall and flooding events.
- (e) the deliverability of the revised proposals has been sense checked with the main contractor and trades which gives a further degree of robustness to the proposed way forward, and has meant costs and programme can be developed with accuracy, allowing us to hit the ground running once funding has been secured.

The Contractor has been reasonable in their approach to costs claimed for the prolongation, limiting charges to the essentials only of site manager, cabins, scaffold, and limited reclaim for management input in resolving the issues.

This decision to keep the full team going was supported by Historic England:

*“...it is absolutely vital that the current works and new work [which will effectively be book-ended by the original contact works] needs to remain the responsibility of the same professional team and the same contractor to ensure that the golden thread of potential legal liability remains in-tact.*

*This is of vital importance given the past history of alterations to the building carried out mainly but not exclusively as part of the 2003-4 works much of which has proven to be faulty some nineteen years hence.”*

#### **4. Reallocating money**

As discussed elsewhere, funds were already re-allocated to enable the opening up and investigative works. Due to the originally limited scope of works intended for the project, there is nowhere else in the project budgets to go to re-allocate any other funding.

#### **5. Additional match-funding/fundraising**

Concurrently with this application to NLHF, we are also seeking match funding to the increased costs of 10% from Historic England in the form of a further Heritage At Risk grant.

3. Please provide a narrative on how any changes will affect your to the Approved Purposes and Project Outcomes.

The changes that will be funded by this Grant Uplift are an expansion of the original Approved Purposes, necessitated by the condition of the building. They do not change the Approved Purposes, nor the Project Outcomes, they simply readjust how the project will deliver on these.

The works are not a 'new' standalone element but are intrinsically linked to the delivery of all the Approved Purposes. We outline the impacts below.

The profiling of spend against the approved purposes will change with some elements having more of the percentage of funding assigned to them, but again this will not amend the project outcome.

In summary:

1. *Internal flood resilience works* – will be completed in entirety
2. *External works relating to flood alleviation, drainage, landscaping, rainwater goods etc.* – will be completed in entirety with some additionality to ensure the work done now is not compromised in the future by deterioration of the building in other areas. This addresses the impact of the environment and increased rainfall from Climate Change.
3. *Preliminary works costs, over 35 weeks alongside costs of scaffolding etc.* will now sit at an additional 96 weeks (130 total) to reflect the expansion of the works and contributes to saving heritage.
4. *Professional fees for design team in relation to structural repairs and flood resilience/alleviation work.* – increased as outlined to reflect the expansion of the works and ensure appropriate skills retained to deliver the revised scope. This includes addition of a Building Regulations Principal Designer to meet the increased requirements of the Building Safety Act, and Registered Building Control Approver to mitigate risk of delays associated with Building Control Approval. We have also included for a Project Manager to support the increased scope of the project.
5. *Conservation works including delayed contract works to include stone vault repairs, works to elevations and reinstatements following additional repairs at second and first floors.* – increased due to

discovery, creating robust platform for future use of the building and ensuring the heritage is saved, and future organisational sustainability.

6. *Project evaluation.* – will be delivered as intended, including lessons learned that can be shared with other organisations embarking on similar project, along with a photographic record of the work that has been undertaken to share in the interpretation of the building to explain to the public the complexities of this historic building and tell its story, providing access and participation to the heritage.
7. *High visibility acknowledgement of the National Lottery Heritage Fund on site, online and in all activities as well as using your project to acknowledge and thank National Lottery Players.* – delivered in entirety. In addition, the opportunity to share the project learnings with other NLHF funded projects, in terms of how discoveries have been dealt with, the collaborative workings of the team to address the issues presented, and respond to a changing regulatory environment could allow this to become a teaching project.
8. *Take proactive measures to be inclusive, remove barriers to access and reach new and diverse audiences through the delivery of this project.* The reinstatement of the ancillary rooms provides access for the community to use Priory House to its full potential including events such as weddings, workshops, historical talks, community fun days etc. whilst funding is sought to develop new interpretation. However, meeting the original intent is going to be a challenge due to the impact the opening up has had on the exhibition space on the first floor. Budgets were never assigned to improve this space as it was due to remain largely untouched (except for flooring). However, the opening up has identified that the 2004 NLHF funded exhibition is too heavy for the walls and cannot be re-installed. Therefore, currently at the end of the works the exhibition will simply be a blank space with no way of delivering an exhibition. This is a missed opportunity to tell the story of Priory House and the works, and also will make reaching new and diverse audiences even harder. We intend to address this through community use of the spaces in the short term and will concurrently seek separate funding for the development of a new interpretation strategy for Priory House to update its story to reflect the findings, including the discovery of significant wall paintings found behind the interpretation boards. This provides us with an excellent opportunity to build upon the much loved but somewhat dated exhibition previously installed with Priory House and provide a fresh take for visitors.

9.

4. Please provide a statement from your construction contact regarding the known and anticipated impacts on construction programme and costs, plus a narrative on future potential risk.

## Impact on Construction Programme

The Project Team, including the Conservation Engineer, Conservation Architect, Conservation Contractor, the client team, and external support from an independent PM/QS, has undertaken a review of the programme associated with the revised scope of works and is now forecasting a completion date of June 2026.

The team has interrogated the timescales to see where workstreams might be run in parallel or be accelerated. However, a deep dive of the programme revealed that there are limited opportunities to bring it forward.

1. The structural work has to be completed in sequence. Strengthening and repair to the internal east wall will enable the upper floor and roof loads to be transferred on to this wall, before works to the second and first floor can be completed. Only once these works are completed will the load be sufficiently redistributed to enable the works to the vaults to commence.
2. There is limited space within the building in which to work.
3. Even if more labour could work on the site, there is restricted space for welfare facilities, limiting the site labour to a maximum of 6-8 people under CDM Regs with current provision, including staggering breaks and working areas, potentially increasing to c. 10-12 people by using the facilities within the building.
4. The activities are reliant on a number of subcontracted trades. The Main Contractor is seeking to complete the stone work, flood alleviation, and some of the carpentry work with internal labour. Other key packages including blacksmith, M&E, limecrete, groundworks, and scaffold, are all dependent on the availability of specialists, of which there is a limited number available. Time periods built into the programme for the works factors in an element of lead-in time and float for availability.
5. We do not yet have full consents for all the works. We are working to put in place a Planning Performance Agreement with the Planning Authority to ease the consent process. We have also been engaging with Building Control but to date they have been slow to respond. The programme is predicated on the consents being in place to enable a full run at the works as soon as the funding is confirmed.
6. Access for materials into the upper levels of the building is through the first floor window via scaffold access. Bringing materials up the internal staircase risks damage to the historic fabric and also further restricts internal access. However, until internal works are sufficiently progressed to remove the scaffold, works to the externals, including the flood alleviation measures, such as the raising of plinth and the reinstatement of railings, cannot be undertaken.
7. The use of brick as the primary material to complete the works has de-risked some of the supply chain issues, as it is more readily

available than the stone previously being sourced but no longer available.

Overall, the team have sought to put forward a realistic programme that all will seek to improve upon should trades become available sooner, and assuming consents can be granted in timely fashion.

A 15% risk allowance has been included for programme risk (preliminaries costs and fees).

### **Impact on Construction Costs**

In undertaking the rescoping exercise, we are confident that we have taken a balanced risk approach to completing the works at Priory House and achieving the intent that the project set out to achieve. We have the buy in of the full design team and the contractor that this revised scope can deliver the requirements.

We have included additional months of prelims in the forecast costs to reflect the programme anticipated for the works identified, following discussion and programming exercise with our conservation contractor.

The revised costs for the works have been prepared by our QS in conjunction with the contractor and input from the project team. Where possible, contract rates have been applied.

### **Future Potential Risk**

Risk allowances have been assessed for each element of the works to reflect the different levels of risk in each case. For example, a 10% allowance has been included for residual contract works where the scope and nature of work is well defined; whereas 20% has been allowed in the fire protection measures as this remains subject to ongoing design and uncertainties with regard to the exact routing of pipework for the misting system and application of design principles in specific locations (e.g. specific doors).

It should be noted that the team have identified significant structural concerns with the North Gable which will require repair and conservation of wall paintings. Given the nature of this work that will not be fully ascertained until the works commence, these costs have a greater element of risk attached to them compared to works that have been able to be worked through in greater detail already.

The risk register has been reviewed and updated to reflect the current status of the project, and the contingency allocations have been profiled against the risk profile to provide a further degree of sense check.

Key risks that remain, aside from not securing the funding to progress:

1. Securing the necessary consents to allow the work to progress in a timely manner – use of a PPA for planning and an Approved Inspector for Building Control will help us manage this risk.
2. Capacity of the team to deliver the project – including budget for an external project manager to help support the project and meet the requirements of funders; keeping the project rolling during the opening up and investigations has also kept the knowledgeable personnel with the project.
3. Availability of materials – risk reduced by agreeing to use brick as opposed the extinct supply of Clunch stone.
4. Further discovery on site – as far as possible, the building has been opened up and inspected so the complexities are far better understood. The majority of the works now are reconstruction, conservation, and repair.
5. Public perception – opening the building without the exhibition may cause negative publicity given the length of time that the building has been closed. DTC will seek alternative funding to develop an interpretation strategy and business case for the next 10 years with aim to have this delivered by the time Priory House re-opens, or shortly thereafter.

5. Please explain why you feel that the level of contingency and inflation is adequate and aligned to the remaining risks detailed in your Risk Register.

### **Contingency**

The project team have worked hard to get designs to RIBA stage level IV, and in doing so reduces the risk of costs being significantly out.

Contingency has also been weighted where we have been unable to get this level of detail in time for the grant uplift submissions and for these elements there will be a higher level of contingency to address the increased level of risk.

There has also been additional time allocations factored in and preliminaries costs associated with this.

The costs have been prepared by the QS with input from the contractor and their trades. Sequencing of the works has been considered and allowed for within the programming exercise, along with availability of materials and specifications aligned to suit this.

Whilst we cannot identify every “unknown unknown”, we have cast the net as wide as possible in the scoping exercise to put figures against all potential items arising, and then refine this back down to the essential works and interdependent works, to avoid any later scope creep or forgotten costs.

## **Inflation**

Given the extended length of the programme, allowances for varying degrees of inflation have been factored in against the different packages to reflect the sequencing of the works. There are several considerations that have been accounted for:

1. the extended period of working will result in some activities being undertaken beyond the original programmed date. An inflationary adjustment is included for these activities based on the Costmodelling.com building cost index.
2. Although the additional works have been priced by the contractor, pricing was undertaken as the revised programme was being developed. There is a risk, therefore, that some activities will be subject to inflationary costs before they are carried out – some perhaps as much as 18 months after pricing. Inflation risk allowances have been included for these activities.
3. Most of the works are being undertaken by specialist sub-contractors who tend to have a greater level of pricing power compared to the overall construction market. For example, the repairs to the railings will be undertaken by a specialist blacksmith and such specialists have the ability to pick and choose their work and dictate pricing. There is a risk, therefore, that inflationary adjustments based on a general building cost index will not cover such market vagaries and so an additional extra-over inflationary risk allowance is included.

## **6. What will happen if additional funding is not available?**

It should be noted that as an organisation Dunstable Town Council does not have any non-committed budgets (above the expected appropriate level of unallocated reserves for our size and wage bill). Likewise, the Priory House Project does not have any non-committed budget except contingencies, which will only be drawn upon if costs exceed value of works. The non-committed budget of contingencies from existing funding will therefore only be used as a last resort for works funded by said grants and not for any new works associated with this grant uplift.

Dunstable Town Council is in the impossible position of urgently needing to secure funding from yourselves and is faced with the only alternative being that the project be mothballed. Should this happen, this would have numerous impacts including:

- The original scope of repair work planned as part of the HSHAZ project would not be completed.
- The Undercroft, tearoom, exhibition space and Jacobean Room would remain closed to the public.
- DTC defaults on the 2003 NLHF 80-year grant contract (due to having the exhibition space closed to the public) with the possibility of triggering clawback.
- The project team will be disbanded, and it is possible that the contractors and specialists currently working on the job (with a wealth of now localised knowledge) will be unable to return even if the project was resurrected.
- Jobs at DTC will be put at risk because the full capacity of the service cannot be realised.
- The Town Council will have to continue to subsidise the service/building without realising the benefit of the projected income should the whole house be open to the public once again; this includes the paying back of two public works loans.
- Long term storage costs will be incurred as items from the second floor that have gone into storage would have to remain in storage.
- Loss of community space.
- Loss of space which local groups including Dunstable Town Guides, Dunstable and District History Society and Friends of Priory House and Gardens can use.
- Loss of interlink between Priory House and Priory Gardens for example for DTC events, croquet, the physic border etc.
- Priory House would not be removed from the Heritage At Risk register and with no foreseeable way of addressing this.

As you can see the magnitude of the ramifications and impact of not receiving additional funding through the NLHF uplift is vast and is something the whole project team are working hard to avoid. The project team have been very accommodating and have re-programmed the order of works to be able to continue working on site whilst this funding application is considered, but it is imperative a decision is made during September 2024 to avoid mothballing.

The project team who have worked on this uplift request have provided the best details known to date to enable NLHF to make a qualified decision on any future funding arrangements, but it cannot be expressed strongly enough that this request presents the last chance to ensure that the originally planned repairs (as part of HSHAZ) are delivered, and that Priory House not only reopens to the public, but also continues to deliver what it set out to do in its 2003 NLHF bid, and thus removing all risk of clawback.