



**REPORT BY THE NTC COMMUNITY SPACE INITIATIVES
TASK AND FINISH GROUP**

SEPTEMBER 2026

To be considered by the C&E Committee on 06.10.26

NTC COMMUNITY SPACE INITIATIVES 2026/27

Background

In December 2025, the C&E Committee reopened the internal area at the front of the Town Hall on a temporary basis to create a community Christmas tree festival. The aim was twofold: firstly, to celebrate the work of local community organisations and, secondly, to assess public reaction to this area of the building being utilised once more. The response was overwhelmingly positive on both fronts, with many visitors making special mention of the fact that the Town Hall was being used for a community-focused Christmas tree festival and comparing it favourably to other similar festivals with a more commercial orientation. A significant number of visitors also took the time to comment positively about the Town Hall being open again: whilst the main hall is in daily use, the fact that the front area stands empty gives the impression of a closed and unused building.

Building on these reactions from residents, in early 2026 the C&E Committee embarked on a civic pride project to restore Neston Town Hall's main entrances, ground floor front windows and associated metalwork. Again, all reactions to this project were positive and the restoration work was well received by residents.

C&E Committee members recently took the time to consider the reactions to these projects, which appeared to indicate that many residents value the Town Hall as a public building and that community focus remains important to the town. A task and finish group was subsequently established with a remit to investigate options for a further project for 26/27 which would focus on improving usability of the Town Hall and to consider how these options might align with longer-term objectives for the development of an accessible civic building with public purpose at its core. This paper is the result of the group's work and considers development opportunities both in terms of discrete individual projects and longer-term objectives.

Neston Town Hall

Neston Town Hall has been an important local civic building since its construction in 1889. For nearly 140 years, the building has provided a central focal point for the town and it remains a well-loved asset to this day. Although not without challenges in its current configuration, it is entirely possible to reimagine the building and realise its potential as a modern public resource, whilst simultaneously respecting and enhancing its Victorian architectural heritage.

Value of Civic Buildings

Before considering specifics, it is perhaps worthwhile to pause and reflect on the potential contribution that a civic building can make to a town.

In essence, civic buildings exist to serve their local communities and act as a centre for local government. They can be important local landmarks and symbolise civic pride as well as potentially playing a part in encouraging community cohesion.

Civic buildings must be adaptable and retain a significant public purpose in order to maintain their relevance and usefulness. By so doing they will remain integral to a town's identity and be a positive focal point for the community.

These are the principles that underpin both the work of the task and finish group and the resulting recommendations contained within this report.

The Overall Goal

To create accessible, multi-use and flexible spaces across the whole ground floor that improve usability whilst respecting the building's heritage.

Ways to Achieve the Goal

The task and finish group took a pragmatic approach that focused on a series of improvements that could be implemented in phases, with each incremental phase achieving a notable difference as an independent element whilst also helping to achieve the overall goal.

Many ideas were considered and the focus was very much evolution rather than revolution. The potential of each idea was measured against the five criteria detailed below.

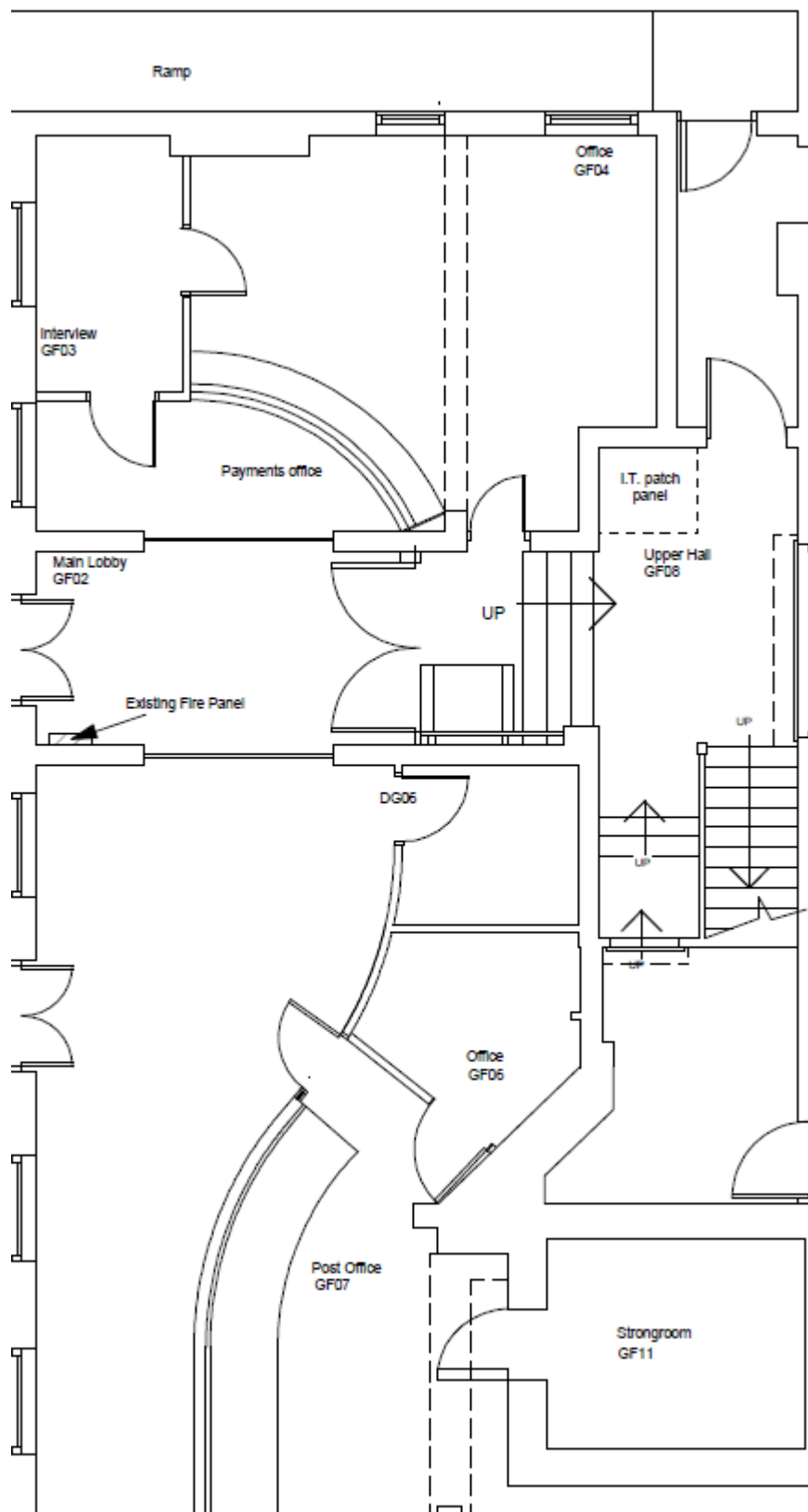
1. The idea increases ground floor accessibility.
2. The idea improves the flow of the ground floor (ie removes obstacles and makes it easier to move around the space).
3. The idea maximises use of the ground floor and increases the number of multi-use spaces.
4. The idea increases/improves Town Hall facilities.
5. The idea respects the architectural heritage of the building.

The result of this process is a suggested phased approach that aims to improve the flow and usability of the ground floor.

Phase One: Foyer, Former Post Office and Reception

Objective: create an open and welcoming entrance area that is configured to encourage multiple uses and also provides the potential for level access to toilets.

The current configuration is below. The foyer is narrow, and the spaces either side disjointed and under used. With a modest amount of reconfiguration, there is the potential to create far more flexibility and usability and to begin the process of creating level access to an accessible toilet.



Recommendation

- Remove the shutters to the two spaces either side of the foyer and remove the internal partition wall within the larger room.

- Push back the entrance to the larger room and create an opening to the rear lobby. This will be the first step in creating level access to ground floor toilets.
- Remove stairs and door to the rear lobby and replace with low-rise platform lift. The lift on the foyer steps will then become redundant and can be removed.
- Install hinged panel walls with pass doors in place of the shutters to allow spaces to be used for separate purposes or opened up to create one large area as required.
- Remove false ceilings, revealing the original Victorian ceiling height and restoring other Victorian features where possible.
- Plaster, redecorate and also add flooring to complement the original tiling in the foyer.



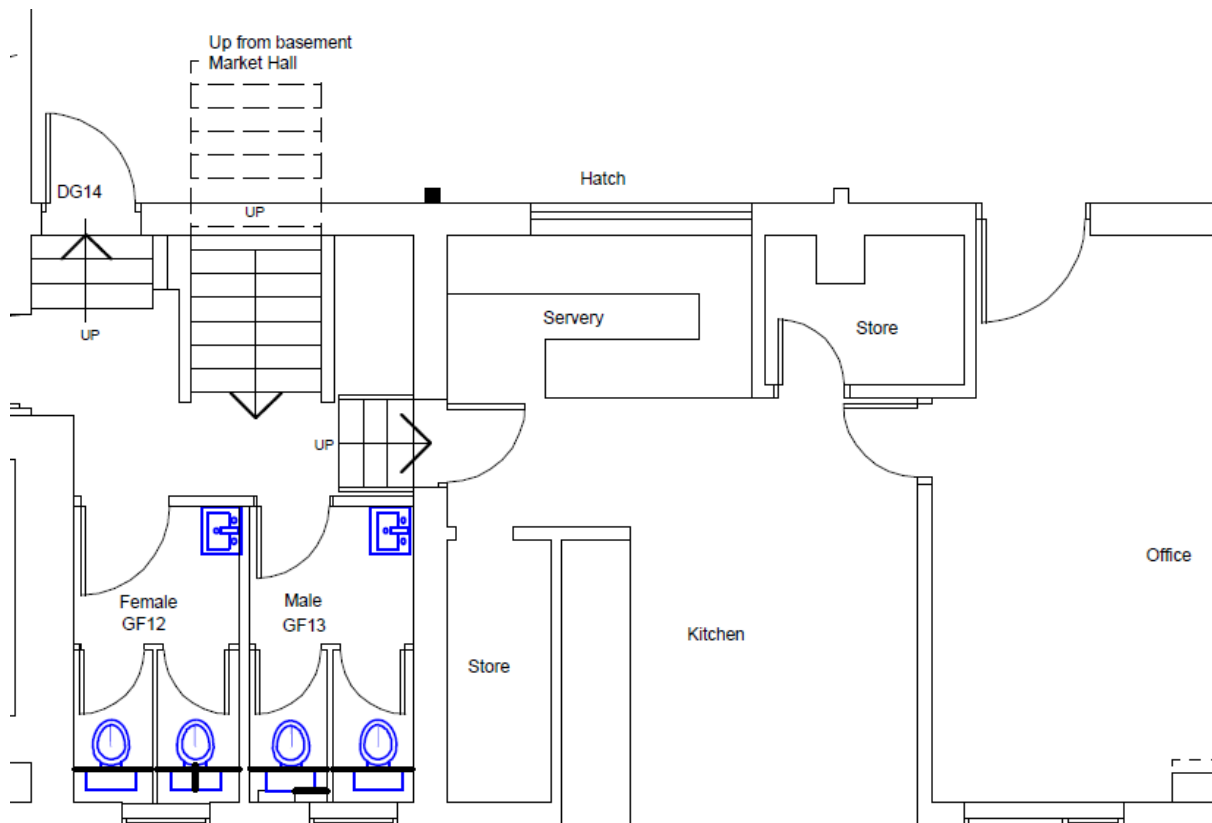
EXAMPLE OF A LOW-RISE PLATFORM LIFT WITH A HALF-HEIGHT GATE AND OPEN STRUCTURE

Phase Two: The Central Access Space

Objectives

- Link the front and back of the building, increase accessibility and flow and create direct access to the side rooms without the need to pass through the main hall.
- Step-free access to an accessible toilet.
- User-friendly access from reception to hall level and to the kitchen and side rooms.
- A practical user-friendly kitchen space.
- Simplify access to small meeting rooms.

This area is currently dark, narrow and difficult to navigate. It is, however, the most logical route to improve flow and provide independently accessible spaces that avoid having to walk through the main hall. The group, therefore, gave this area a good deal of thought and attention to find solutions that achieve the stated objectives.



Recommendation

- Remove access to basement and main hall to improve safety and create sufficient space for wheelchair access to the toilets.
- Refurbish toilets and create two individual toilets, one of which will be accessible. Following the work in phase one, users will now have direct access to toilets from the front of the building.
- Remove kitchen door, add a partition wall across what is labelled as “store” and “kitchen” on the plan, and refit kitchen with improved storage and more manageable user-friendly appliances.
- The newly created corridor to be accessed via stairs and the addition of a second low-level platform lift and the door into the larger side room (labelled “office”) to be replaced by an automatic sliding door.
- Replaster, redecorate and improve lighting and heating.

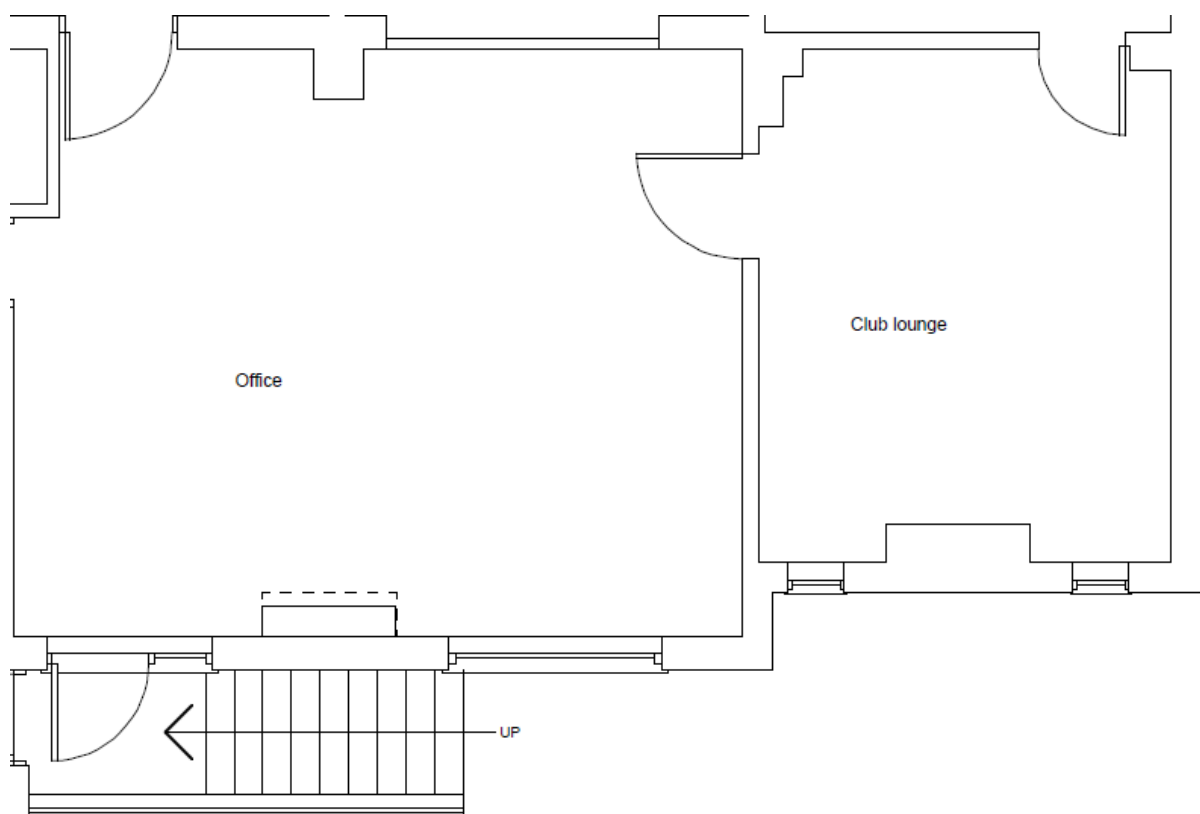
These changes will dramatically improve the flow of the ground floor.

Phase Three: The Side Rooms

Objective: increase usability and accessibility.

The current configuration is below. The larger of the two rooms (“office” on the plan) can currently be accessed from the kitchen and the main hall, while the smaller room (“club

lounge”) can be accessed via the larger room and the rear corridor. The larger room contains a fire escape.



Currently, if the main hall is in use then the side rooms can only be accessed from the back door which is inaccessible to wheelchair users, or by going up steps from the foyer then down steps and through a door to the cleaner’s lobby, through another door to the narrow area between the toilets and steep basement steps, up more steps and through another door to the kitchen and then through yet another door to the larger of the two rooms. That is a total of 10 steps and four doors to get from reception to a ground floor meeting room, which makes it challenging for people with mobility issues or parents with prams/pushchairs, and it is inconvenient for everyone.

Despite the current issues, however, these spaces have untapped potential as meeting rooms, break-out rooms and for community activities.

Recommendation

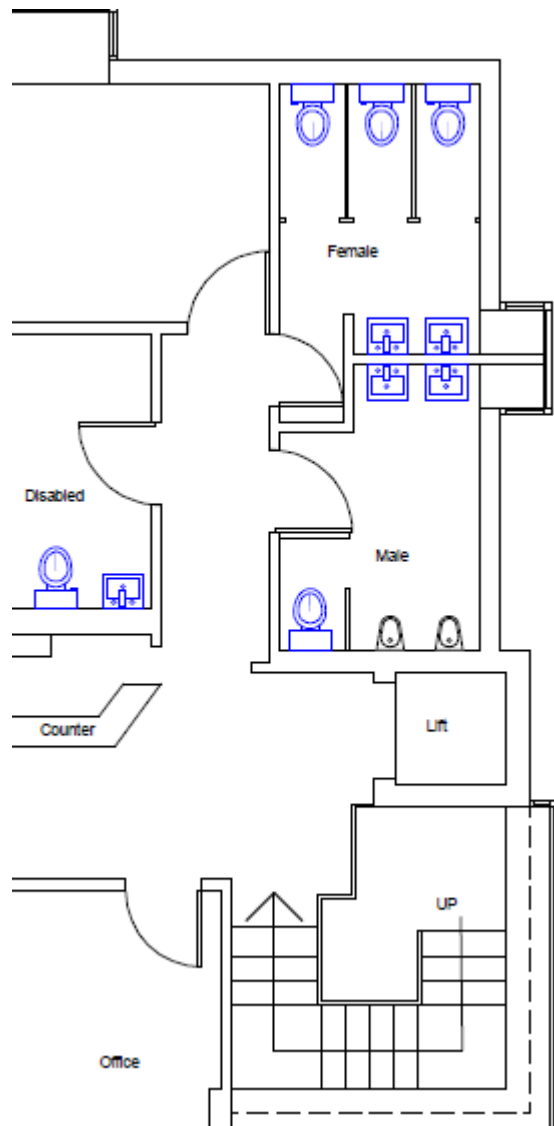
- Open up the space between the two rooms and install a retractable acoustic screen.
- Replace current door in smaller room with an automatic sliding door to improve accessibility to the rear lift and toilet.
- Replace heating and lighting, replaster, redecorate and install new floor coverings to both rooms.

This improvement has the advantage of still retaining two separate rooms while also creating the potential to easily convert them into one larger space, thus providing greater

flexibility. The addition of a second automatic sliding door will ensure side room accessibility from both the front and rear of the building.

Phase Four – Accessibility and Functionality at the Rear of the Building

Objective: to make the back door more accessible, increase reliability of the lift and refurbish toilets.



Recommendation:

- Back door onto Market Square – replace current double doors with one single automatic door, opening outwards and with a button for opening at the top of the ramp.
- Convert toilets at the back of building into modern individual rooms.
- Install a more reliable lift from market to ground floor level.

Next Steps

The task and finish group appreciates that implementing all the above recommendations will take time, and even the phases themselves will need to be divided into a series of projects. The intention was not to overwhelm with a lengthy “to do” list, but the group feels strongly that it is important to have an overall goal and understand the route required to attain that goal. This will help to maintain focus and ensure wise investment of resources.

Following its investigations and liaison with the Chair of the Market and Town Hall Committee, the task and finish group is of the opinion that the most logical place to begin is with some aspects of phase one and recommends that the C&E Committee commits its 26/27 budget (account code 4217) and associated EMR (343) to this project. If the committee accepts this recommendation, more detailed work will begin on obtaining the necessary advice/permissions and costings.

This report was produced by Cllr Carol Braithwaite and Cllr Geoff Swaffer in liaison with Cllr Sion Jones and with the support of the Community & Environment Manager and Community Engagement Officer.