



**EAST SUSSEX COUNTY HALL**  
Place Scrutiny Committee 23 September 2024



County Hall  
constructed  
1968 and civic  
facilities  
provided in  
2003

Site area -4.13  
hectares whole  
campus

Former St  
Anne's School  
vacant since  
2005

What were the options considered?

**Retain & Maintain**

**Option 1 - Stay**

Adapt County Hall to maintain it in operational condition for the Council to function as is. Invest in replacing failing plant and equipment to maintain BAU. Without some minimum investment there is a risk to Council operations



**Council Led Site Development**

**Option 2:**

Adapt County Hall building with reduced office usage, lease / co-locate other uses in the building + develop surrounding land.

**Option 3:**

Re-purpose the County Hall building entirely for new uses, develop surrounding land and include a smaller, purpose-built Council building

**Option 4:**

Demolish existing CH building, develop the site to include a smaller, purpose-built Council building and other uses



OPTION 2 – indicative site plan



OPTION 4 – indicative site plan

**Sell Site & Relocate**

**Options 5&6:**

Option 5 - Sell County Hall site and relocate Council services and activities to other location(s) in Lewes. Overall space c. 3500 sqm required.

Option 6 – Sell County Hall site and relocate Council Services to Sackville House in 2030-2032 as new County Hall



## Reviewing development options



- **There is no clear re-development option that stands out at this moment in time**
- The whole site has complex constraints – topography, archaeological matters, natural environment and ecological matters, bio-diversity, accessibility to the wider site
- The Council’s earlier office rationalisation was straightforward - Phase 1 and Phase 2 – Hastings and Eastbourne office solutions focused on reducing space requirements and these didn’t concentrate on wider re-development opportunities with a freehold asset in the South Downs National Park.
- Wider property re-development market is volatile. Sensitivity analysis of key inputs to a development model shows high risk at present.
- Size of County Hall future accommodation needs more analysis as increased office usage at CH in 2024 compared to 2023.
- The overall Council’s financial budget position for 2025/2026 and beyond require significant organisational focus
- Technical experts have challenged assumptions in the modelling though options remain financially borderline with significant risks. The future potential risks could reduce in a more stable operational context.

East Sussex  
County Hall  
(now)



£914k  
Annual  
operational  
costs

22%  
occupancy  
levels -2023

25-27%  
2024

£8.4M  
additional  
repairs  
required in the  
next 10 years



SITE POTENTIAL



Modern  
efficient  
office

£500k-  
£840k  
Annual Rev  
Saving

240+  
Homes

New  
3500<sub>sqm</sub>  
County Hall  
space req.



### **Staying at CH**

*It costs about £1m per annum to operate the CH building just in its current condition which is reaching end of life. There are risks of plant and machinery failing in the next few years impacting the ability of part or all of the building to function which would be a risk to business continuity in the next few years.*

*Up to £8.4 million over next 10 years required from the Council's corporate maintenance programme and reactive repairs needed.*

## Areas for further review under Options 2-4

## GRANT FUNDING

Testing the potential for leveraging grant funding for the site through a fund similar to the Brownfield Land Release Fund and other potential central government affordable grant provisions

## COUNTY HALL SIZE REQUIREMENT

Testing the feasibility with a further reduced Council footprint that could accommodate 1400-1600 Council staff plus civic meeting spaces to drive efficiency and minimise cost

## DENSITY AND MIX CHALLENGE

Exploring a more ambitious density on the site and a refined housing mix, with appropriate benchmarking for similar developments in Lewes

## SUSTAINABLE SPECIFICATION

Establishing a suitable design specification that supports the environmental ambitions of the project but is commensurate with public building investment and assessing embedded carbon

## AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Testing the viability against lower affordable housing targets, supported by a clear rationale for how this argument could be supported in planning terms

## What are the key commercial considerations?

**Key Objectives**

- To provide a workspace that aligns to modern ways of working - flexible and adaptable to future needs;
- To reduce the Council's running and maintenance costs for the County Hall building and surrounding assets on the site;
- To closely align with the Council's climate targets and net zero ambitions;
- To create a more rational layout that improves the connection of the site with its natural surroundings and community;
- To achieve a more efficient use of the site, creating financial value for the Council;
- To support East Sussex's economic growth ambitions for Lewes.

# County Hall Requirements

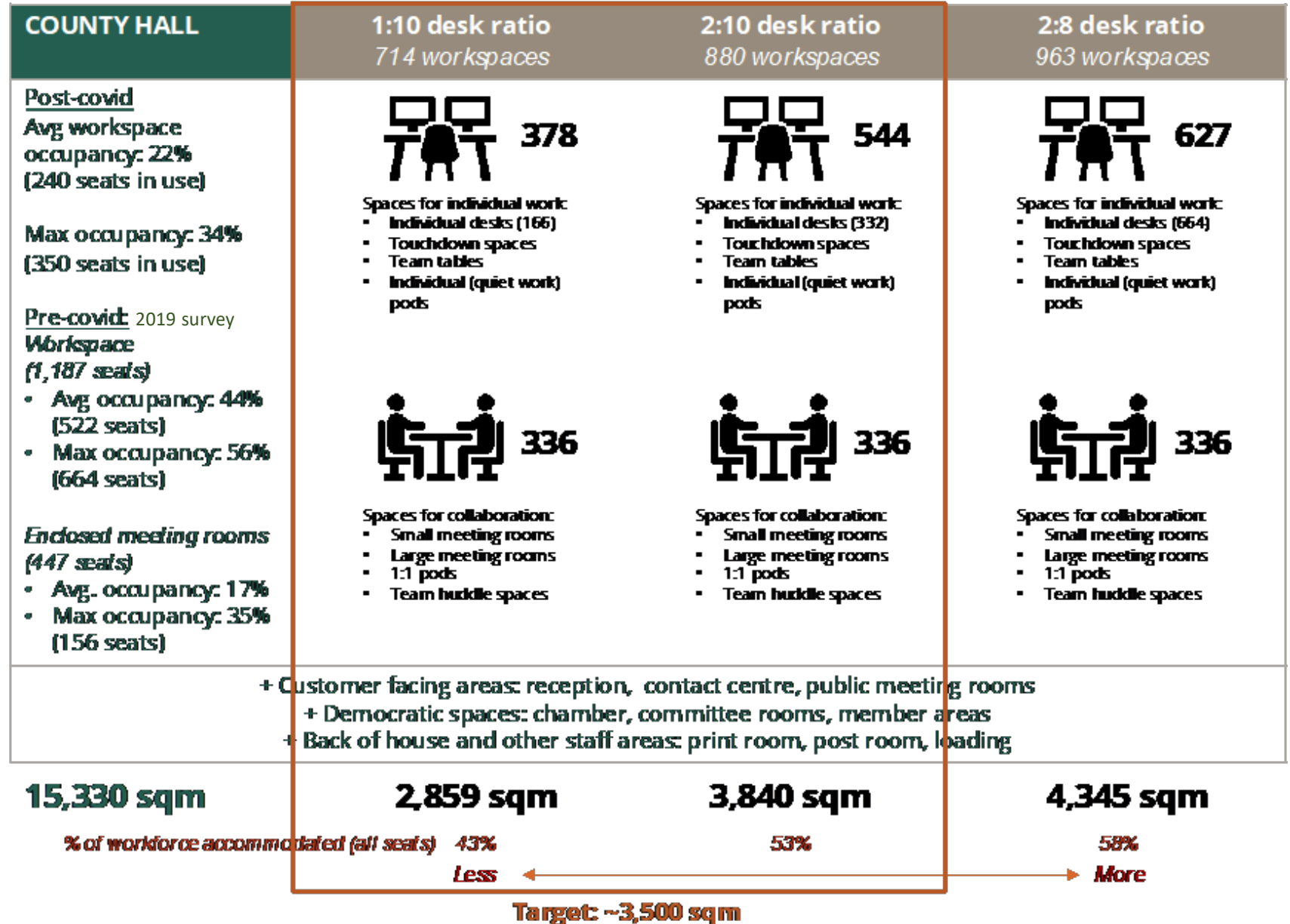
An assessment of reasonable reduction in size.



How much space does the Council need?

Informed by Hastings office move  
(Note: current observed occupancy is 50%)

- There is an opportunity to reduce the Council's current footprint and modernise its workspace.
- A number of scenarios were tested to indicate the potential size of the Council office. These were benchmarked against:
- Observed occupancy
  - Learning from recent rationalisation of other Council accommodation (i.e. Hastings offices)
  - Benchmarking against other civic offices across the UK
  - ESCC's specific functional and team requirements and where they need to be based



# South Downs National Planning Authority - emerging Local Plan proposals

Actions	Progress
Work on Local Plan Review started	2022 ✓
Call for sites (various uses)	Summer 2022 ✓
Evidence gathering	In progress <
Land Availability Assessment & Local Green Space Assessment	In progress <
Early engagement (scope & ways to consult)	In progress <
Drafting policies and site allocations	Autumn 2024
Public Consultation on draft Local Plan Review (Reg 18)	Early 2025
Review consultation feedback and refine policies/allocations	2025
Public Consultation on submission Local Plan Review (Reg 19)	Early 2026
Submit Local Plan Review for Examination	2026

Interim next steps to increase utilisation and boost income?

- Interim measures on County Hall to make better use of the space being explored:
  - Other public sector partners shown active interest in using some of the space
  - Reducing some running costs by mothballing part of the building
  - Alternative operational use such as more meeting rooms, more conference style facilities
  - Exploring local business interest in use