

Frequently Asked Questions – Proposed Purchase of 2 North Street, Wareham

1. Why does the Town Council want to buy 2 North Street?

We want to secure this important and prominent building to house an expanded, purpose-built museum and tourist information centre. This will preserve the building, boost tourism, and provide a cultural and educational asset for the town.

2. What will happen to the building if the Council doesn't buy it?

It may remain empty and continue to deteriorate or be used for private development, losing a key opportunity to benefit the town and community. Planning is already permitted on the site for 6 dwellings with offices on the ground floor.

3. What's wrong with the current museum?

The current museum is too small and lacks modern exhibition and educational space. This limits its ability to display the town's rich heritage or host school and community groups effectively. The museum is also not situated in the best location and is often missed by visitors. With the vast and rich Saxon heritage within the town, it is essential that a prominent position for the museum and its heritage is considered, and 2 North Street is a perfect spot in the town centre to give it pride of place.

4. Will this affect my council tax?

There will be a small increase to the precept (the portion of your council tax that goes to the Town Council) to help fund the purchase. We're asking for your views on whether you would support the purchase if that were the case. The exact figures are not known yet, but the estimated amount of borrowing to fund the purchase would result in approximately £50 increase on the Town Council's precept in 2026. This does not include any operational increases which are considered each year, but the Council always strives to keep any increases to a minimum.

5. How much will the building cost?

The purchase price is £695,000. The Council has already invested £90,350 in deposits to secure an option to purchase. The Council has also submitted an expression of interest for a grant which, if successful, would see the need for a loan reduce by up to £300,000.

6. Will the refurbishment be included in this cost?

No. This consultation is only about the purchase of the building. The refurbishment would be subject to a separate planning and budgeting process at a later stage. Positive discussions have already taken place with the National Lottery Heritage Fund in respect of the refurbishment, but a number of other grants have also been identified to cover the cost of refurbishment. So, there are lots of options available to us once we have ownership of the building.

7. Why combine a museum and a tourist information centre?

Bringing them together creates a vibrant community hub, providing a seamless experience for visitors and locals alike – learning about the town's history and accessing information on local attractions, businesses and events.

8. How will this help local businesses?

A better tourist information centre will attract more visitors to the town, encouraging longer stays and greater spending in local shops, cafes, pubs, and accommodation providers.

The current building has been neglected and sits as a dilapidated unattractive site in the very centre of the town. By taking the building on as an asset, the Town Council has an opportunity to revitalize the town centre and make it more attractive and welcoming.

9. Will the community have input into the future design?

If the purchase goes ahead, there will be further opportunities for residents and local organisations to help shape the refurbishment and use of the space.

10. Isn't buying property a bit risky for local authorities?

Investing in a town-owned asset is a long-term decision to benefit Wareham's future. The building has been vacant for years, and this is a rare opportunity to bring it into community use in a way that supports local culture and the economy, whilst turning an unattractive and unsightly building into something the town can be proud of.

11. Can we afford this?

The Council is committed to managing public finances responsibly. We will only proceed with the purchase if it is financially viable and supported by the community.

12. How can I give my views?

You can complete the public consultation survey or send your comments in writing to the Town Council office. Engagement with the community is key to the success of any project, and the Council will be meeting with as many community groups as possible to help residents understand what this purchase means to them and give them an opportunity to have their say.

13. Will this take money away from other services?

No. The Town Council will carefully balance this investment with its other responsibilities. The purchase would be funded through a mix of reserves and a Public Works Loan, funded by a small increase to the precept, but services already being undertaken will not be compromised.

14. What if the refurbishment ends up costing too much?

The refurbishment will be planned in stages with careful budgeting and grant funding options explored and obtained. No work will begin without a clear, costed plan approved by the Council, and the community will be kept informed at each stage.

15. How long will the building sit empty after purchase?

We intend to begin planning for refurbishment immediately after the purchase. While this won't be instant, having ownership of the building allows us to seek funding, plan thoroughly, and make progress in line with community priorities.

16. Couldn't this be better used for affordable housing?

While those are important needs, the building's layout and position makes it more suitable for community and visitor use than for housing. It is also ideally located for a museum and tourist centre at the heart of the town.

17. Will there be ongoing costs to maintain the building?

Yes, like any public building, there will be running and maintenance costs. These will be managed through careful budgeting and moving forward by the offset of increased visitor footfall giving donations, grants, and use of the space for events or education. Should charging entry to the museum be considered in the future, the Council would be thorough in its deliberations and consider any impact this might have to local residents.

18. Isn't this just for tourists? What do residents get out of it?

Not at all. Local residents will benefit from better access to our own heritage, improved community learning spaces, new volunteering opportunities, and the economic benefits of increased tourism. Local businesses will thrive from the additional footfall, and this will in turn provide local employment. It's an investment in Wareham for everyone.

19. Has the Town Council already made up its mind?

No. This consultation is a genuine opportunity for residents to have their say. The Council will only proceed if there is sufficient community support and a clear case for doing so. The Public Works Loan is dependent upon having the majority support from the community.

20. What happens if the public says no?

If the consultation shows that residents don't support the purchase as a majority, the Council will not proceed. The future of the building would then be uncertain and outside of local control, resulting in a loss of all the benefits which could be gained and a flagship museum that the town could be proud of.