



# THE CITY OF ROCHESTER SOCIETY

PRESERVING THE PAST AND CELEBRATING THE  
FUTURE OF ROCHESTER SINCE 1967



Medway Council Business Support Overview and Scrutiny Committee  
c/o Michael Turner – Democratic Services Officer

23<sup>rd</sup> August 2018

Dear Mr. Turner

I am writing on behalf of the City of Rochester Society to register our strong objection to the sale of the Conservancy Board Building, half of the Guildhall Museum, which is undoubtedly one of the best local history museums in Kent, if not the UK.

The City of Rochester Society (CoRS) was established in 1967. It is one of the largest civic groups in the UK, a member of Civic Voice, represents 500 members, and is a completely apolitical organisation. One of our key aims – then as now – has been to protect the heritage and built environment of Rochester.

The Guildhall Museum consistently attracts large numbers of visitors and receives plaudits from those visitors. We understand from the staff at the museum that in excess of 80% of the visitors to the museum go to the Medway Conservancy Board Building, where they can appreciate the Charles Dickens and Victorian exhibits in an authentic environment.

Indeed the building is an artefact with significant architectural value in its own right and the former City Council should be applauded for their decision to purchase the building to add to the museum's offer in the 1980s. Spending an additional £250,000 at the time to create the bespoke interior and display cabinets was also inspired. This created a unique space within the local heritage offer and preserved a stunning example of the work of local architect George Bond.

As well as providing a space where the museum's collection of local art can be displayed, it also provides the only fully accessible space within the museum. The Heritage Lottery Fund awarded Medway Council a grant in 2012 under the 'Opening the Doors to Access and Learning' project which allowed for the creation of the Discovery Zone space in the Conservancy Board Building, a step-free accessible learning space for the museum.



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In addition, the building contains the only strongroom in the whole museum. The Conservancy Board Building securely holds the Medway Civic gilt as well as the Williamsonian collection and the Rochester Cathedral silverware along with many invaluable documents. This will be lost if the CBB is sold.

It has been reported that former Guildhall manager (and now Cathedral Clerk) Simon Lace proposed the potential sale of the CBB. We believe this has been taken out of its original context and that Simon was merely proposing the sale of the CBB as part of a wider scheme to re-invest any monies raised back into the Guildhall Museum to improve and increase its offer. We understand that the Council proposes to sell the CBB and use the money to restore the Corn Exchange. CoRS agrees that the Corn Exchange is in need of considerable funding for its restoration but fear that should the CBB be sold to fund this restoration, the Council will then go on to sell the Corn Exchange as well.

The Conservancy Board Building is a much loved and used part of the Guildhall Museum and we wholeheartedly object to any proposal to sell it.

Yours sincerely

Robert Flood  
Vice-Chairman, CoRS