

WEST WICKHAM,  
Kent,

Email:

Mob:

23 August 2018

Councillors of Medway Council by email

Dear Councillors,

**Proposed sale of the Former Conservancy Building, 17, High Street, Rochester**

I am a member of the Friends of the Guildhall Museums and of the Rochester Civic Society. The views expressed below are my own, as a frequent visitor to Rochester and the Museums.

I believe the Conservancy Building should be retained as part of the Guildhall Museums for the following reasons:

1. The Conservancy Building is of importance in its own right, and is Grade 2 listed (List Entry Number 1068468). The Council's report states that, after any sale, the elaborate exterior would be preserved, but also indicates a range of uses that may be permitted that may well imply conversion and the loss forever of the internal features, including the elegant stair case with wooden handrail surmounting a metal scrollwork baluster. If sold for private use, even if these features were retained, they would not be visible to the public.
2. Moving artefacts from the Conservancy Building to Eastgate House would effectively create two museums due to the intervening distance. Also, Eastgate House charges a substantial admission fee, which the Guildhall Museums do not. Is it the Council's intention to remove the Eastgate House admission charge in such circumstances? If the Museum is restricted to the Guildhall building, it becomes a very small museum. It is the Conservancy Building that houses the exhibition concerning Charles Dickens, who is a big tourist draw to the town.
3. It is stated in the Council's report that part of the sale proceeds would be spent on repairing the Grade 1 listed Corn Exchange. However, it would seem very likely that Medway Council could obtain a Heritage Lottery Grant to pay for such repairs. This seems to have worked well in respect of Eastgate House. Surely, it would be the Council's responsibility to apply for such a grant, and see if it were granted, before applying the Council's capital funds to such repairs? Therefore, I propose that the Council defers a decision concerning the proposed sale of the Conservancy Building until such an option has been fully explored. In terms of the operating costs are concerned, could sponsors not be found, as happens elsewhere?
4. The 'Riverside Development' should soon be generating a considerable additional revenue for Medway Council, and possibly some of this could be put into retaining the Conservancy Building as part of the Museum. The new hotels will also bring more tourists to Rochester, so retaining the Conservancy Building as part of the Museum maintains the 'tourist offer' and vibrancy of Rochester High Street. The number of

visitors to the Museum should increase once the new hotels are open. The Museum is an 'all year' tourist attraction.

5. The Conservancy Building is used for educational activities by local schools and for visits from researchers using the collections.
6. The Council has received an petition with 869 signatories, which demonstrates a weight of public opinion in favour of retaining the Conservancy Building.

In the light of the above, may I propose that Councillors and officers opt to retain the Conservancy Building as part of the Guildhall Museums. Thank you.

Yours faithfully,

**Mr. Stuart Froment**