

Victoria Hall Is Changing



Victoria Hall: The Case for Reopening

An Executive Summary of Strategic, Cultural and Community Implications

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This summary is provided to support councillors' understanding of the wider implications of the decision regarding Victoria Hall. It accompanies the technical papers, surveys and financial information.

Victoria Hall is currently closed. Trustees may be held accountable if they fail to manage the building responsibly, although they are generally protected where they have acted honestly, reasonably and in the charity's best interests.

Without investment, Oakham risks losing its only major community venue, weakening its cultural infrastructure and reducing the credibility of its UK Town of Culture 2028 ambitions. The risks of inaction are significant, predictable and increasingly costly. The benefits of refurbishment are strategic, long term and directly aligned with the Council's priorities.

1. Consequences of Not Investing

1.1 Permanent Loss of Community Use

- The hall could remain closed indefinitely, removing Oakham's only large, flexible, non-commercial community venue.
- Local groups would lose a central space for events, performances, exhibitions and civic gatherings.
- Trustees would be unable to generate income or restore financial stability while the building remains shut.

1.2 Escalating Deterioration and Costs

- Prolonged closure accelerates structural decline and increases future repair costs.
- Insurability and liability risks rise over time.
- If the trust becomes unable to maintain the building, emergency responsibility may fall to the Council.

1.3 Impact on the Town Centre

- Loss of a key anchor venue reduces footfall and activity on the high street.
- Businesses lose event-driven trade and visitor dwell time.
- Oakham's cultural and heritage offer becomes visibly diminished.

1.4 Trustees' Legal Position

If no rescue funding is secured, trustees must consider all lawful options, including:

- seeking alternative public or charitable funding
- exploring long-term leases or partnerships
- asset transfer
- potential disposal of the building as a last resort

1.5 Reputational Considerations

- Non-investment may be viewed as withdrawing support from a long-standing community institution.
- Allowing a central heritage asset to remain closed risks perceptions of neglect.
- CIL funding exists specifically for community infrastructure. Not using it for Victoria Hall may invite scrutiny of priorities.
- Long-term closure or loss of the hall could shape public perceptions of the Council's stewardship.

2. Risk and Benefit Overview

Key Risks (Typical for a Victorian Building)

- Age-related deterioration, including roof, masonry and drainage issues.
- Potential hidden defects that may emerge once refurbishment begins.
- Required upgrades to meet modern fire safety, accessibility and energy-efficiency standards.
- Ongoing maintenance responsibilities associated with a heritage building.
- Public scrutiny if issues arise after investment.
- Greater reputational risk if the Council does not invest, given the building's visibility and the availability of CIL funding for community infrastructure.

Safeguards Already in Place

- Full structural surveys and professional advice have informed the proposed works.
- A 15 per cent contingency is included within the project budget.
- Works are funded through the Community Infrastructure Levy rather than the precept.
- The refurbishment programme addresses all safety-critical issues required for reopening.
- Proposed governance arrangements include a sinking fund to support future maintenance.
- In-house expertise is available through the hall's former manager, now employed by Oakham Town Council.
- Corporate trusteeship provides clear governance, accountability and oversight.

Key Benefits to Oakham Town Council

- Reduction in ongoing costs by ending rental payments and consolidating council activity within a single, modernised civic venue.

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- A safe, compliant and accessible public building in the town centre, suitable for council use, community hire and civic events.
- A strengthened base for community engagement, providing a visible and approachable location for council services.
- Protection of a landmark heritage asset for continued public use, avoiding the risk of private disposal if the trustees are unable to sustain the building.
- A clear demonstration of responsible stewardship, using CIL funding for its intended purpose of supporting community facilities.
- Direct support for Oakham's cultural development, including its UK Town of Culture 2028 ambitions.
- A long-term community asset that contributes to Oakham's cultural, civic and economic life.

3. Summary

The risks associated with taking responsibility for a Victorian building are understood, manageable and mitigated through professional advice, contingency planning and strengthened governance. The risks of not investing are significantly greater, including long-term closure, escalating deterioration, loss of community infrastructure and potential reputational impact. Refurbishing Victoria Hall secures a central heritage asset, restores a key community venue and provides a long-term civic resource that supports Oakham's cultural, social and economic life.

Addendum: Implications for Oakham's UK Town of Culture (2028) Bid



A. Cultural Capacity

- Victoria Hall is one of Oakham's most significant cultural venues.
- Continued closure limits the scale and variety of activity required for a Town of Culture programme.
- Without it, Oakham lacks sufficient accessible indoor space for a year-long cultural programme.

B. Deliverability

- A Town of Culture year depends on reliable, bookable venues.
- Closure restricts programming options and increases pressure on smaller venues.
- Delivering an inclusive, accessible offer becomes more challenging.

C. Bid Credibility

- National programmes expect visible commitment to cultural infrastructure.
- A closed or deteriorating hall signals reduced local investment.
- Funders and partners look for secure, supported venues ready to host activity.

D. Community Participation

- The hall has long been a hub for local groups, artists, schools and volunteers.
- Closure reduces opportunities for residents to participate in the cultural year.
- A community-led programme requires a major community venue.

E. Strategic Positioning

- Reopening the hall demonstrates readiness, ambition and cultural confidence.
- Keeping it closed weakens Oakham's competitive position and risks losing momentum.
- The hall's future is directly tied to Oakham's ability to deliver a credible, vibrant cultural year.