

Cannock Chase Conservative Group General Fund Alternative Budget

An 'Alternative Budget' in respect of both the General Fund and the General Fund Capital Programme, as proposed by the Conservative Group, is detailed below.

It is our recommendation that Full Council refer this 'Alternative Budget' back to Cabinet for further consideration.

General Fund Revenue Alternative Budget

The Conservative Group believe it is imperative that we continue to have a Museum in Cannock Chase that can house our fantastic local collection and tell the wonderful story of the local area and people.

At this juncture and with the current financial backdrop, it is vital that careful consideration is given to what the future of the museum may look like. We are keen to preserve our local history and improve how the collections are housed and displayed to make our story even more accessible and attractive to local people, we would also like to ensure that the local museum collection plays a key role for local schools in educating local children, such as creating an addition of mobile exhibitions.

In addition to preserving the amazing mining collection, we would also like to expand the focus of the museum to highlight the role our local area played during other periods in history, such as the two World Wars and the importance of Castle Ring.

The current location of Cannock Chase Museum in the aging, former Valley Colliery buildings is not energy efficient. We would like to therefore explore moving the museum collection into a more energy efficient space, with a lower carbon footprint, and a long-term affordable maintenance plan.

We therefore propose to modernise the museum, in a more energy efficient and accessible space where full collections can be safely displayed and enjoyed. To do this, we propose maximising opportunities to attract additional support from organisations such as the Arts Council and the Heritage Lottery Fund.

- **Reversing the reinstatement of the £100,000 budget allocated to towards the building at the current museum location.**

We propose allocating the £100,000 saving identified from relocating the museum to undertake a full evaluation in view of creating a space for small, affordable incubator units to help nurture and support small, local businesses starting up.

	2025/2026
Reverse the reinstated funds towards the building at the current museum location	£100,000
Allocate funds to look at the feasibility of creating a space for small, affordable incubator units for local start-up businesses	(£100,000)

We also propose a full review of all 'Earmarked Reserves' retained within the General Fund Budget at Appendix 6 given that such a task has not been undertaken for some time (similar to the previous Capital Review undertaken in respect of the 'Earmarked Reserves' within the Capital Programme Budget which was undertaken in 2022/2023 and enabled funds that were unused or related to outdated projects released). The current total of 'Earmarked Reserves' within the General Fund equates to £13,664,000 as forecast at 31/03/2024.

Following a full review of ‘Earmarked Reserves,’ we wish for individual, specific reviews to be undertaken in relation to the following priorities and growth proposals from monies released by the earmarked reserves review. These reviews will be prepared as business cases which are fully costed to ensure that the release of funds from the review is sufficient:

- A fundamental review to enable the development of a new car parking strategy looking at, amongst other options, discounted season tickets.
- A review into the Council’s current processes and what software improvements are required to assist with Human Resource matters, such as tracking absenteeism and, in light of the forecast deficit in forthcoming years, reducing the Council’s current spend on agency staff; and
- An assessment of how and where Artificial Intelligence could safely and appropriately be used by Cannock Chase District Council to identify patterns that can help the Council to better understand the needs of our local communities and provide more targeted support, in the long-term increasing efficiency and reducing the burden on staff.

It is felt that reviews, as outlined above, on a case-by-case basis could lead to Cannock Chase District Council working in a more streamlined resilient manner and could identify where investment to support longer-term savings could be implemented to ensure we are operating in a fiscal, prudent, and sustainable manner.

General Fund Capital Programme Alternative Budget

These proposals will be funded from unallocated resources, available capital receipts and underspends on projects which are no longer required for project delivery within the current capital programme:

	2024/2025
Increase to amending Allocation	
Increase to Play Areas Developments & Refurbishments Fund.	(£100,000)
Additional Schemes	
Contribution to Rugeley Town Council towards the Rugeley Boardwalk Project.	(£35,000)
Investment Fund for Mill Green and Hawks Green Valleys Nature Reserve (Deavalls Farm) (for improvements and pilot projects to improve the local environment).	(£31,000)
Investment Fund for Hednesford Hills Nature Reserve (for improvements and pilot projects to improve the local environment).	(£31,000)
Investment Fund for Hazelslade Nature Reserve (for improvements and pilot projects to improve the local environment).	(£31,000)

£101,000 will remain unallocated as a contingency budget.