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Ards and
North Down
Borough Council

Reimagining Bangor Castle



Reimagining Bangor Castle

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Reimagining the Bangor Castle site is a key priority for the Council. Both Elected Members and Officers recognise that it is a cherished location for many residents in the area.

We have developed this presentation to better explain our aims, principles and direction of travel, and would ask that you take the time to look at all the information provided to fully understand the proposals being progressed.

We want to be very clear on three key issues at this early point.

- The Bangor Castle site will not be sold. It will remain in Council ownership under any option that is taken forward for its future.
- Castle Park gardens will remain accessible to all.
- The Council is seeking a future usage model that does not require long-term ratepayer subsidy.



Why are we changing how we use the Bangor Castle site?

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The Council has a large estate and we want to make the best use of it.

We have scoped out our future office needs and reviewed all our administrative buildings, including Bangor Castle.

We estimate that we only need 50% of our current office footprint moving forward.

While being an esteemed heritage building, Bangor Castle no longer meets the needs of a modern unified civic workplace, nor can it effectively house a growing modern Museum (see Current Challenges with Bangor Castle). It is also very costly to maintain in its current state.

It is in this context that the Council has agreed to move all administrative staff to a fit-for-purpose modern office building in Bangor city centre, which will deliver a range of benefits to ratepayers and a reduction in running costs.

The Bangor Castle site will remain in Council ownership, but we are reimagining its role to ensure it can continue to be enjoyed by future generations.

Reimagining the site's full potential provides a number of opportunities to secure the castle's future and align with our corporate objectives including:

- Boosting economic and community impact
- Advancing our sustainability goals
- Protecting and enhancing our built heritage
- Developing new partnership opportunities
- Improving public access
- Supporting placemaking

Current Challenges with Bangor Castle

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The Bangor Castle site is a cherished heritage landmark, admired for its striking exterior and some feature rooms such as the Chamber and Craig Room. However, there are a range of functional, accessibility and ongoing maintenance challenges within its interior environments.

Limited Accessibility

The building does not adequately support access for all users.



Cramped and Confined Spaces

Many rooms are small and segmented, restricting flexibility and use.



Unightly Fire Escape Fixtures

Emergency exits detract from the building's visual appeal.



Localised Damp Problems

Moisture issues affect parts of the interior, risking long-term damage.



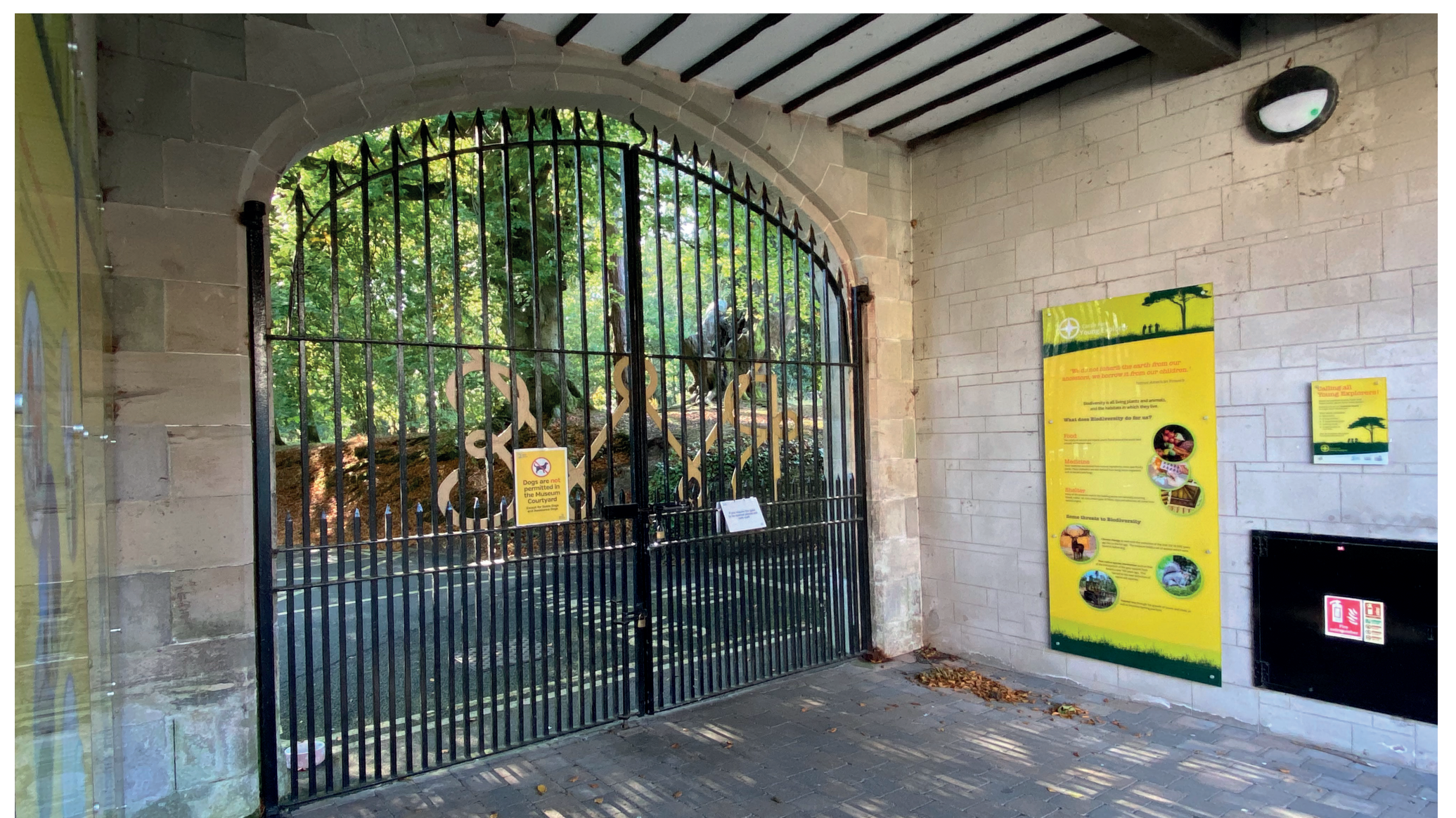
General Storage Limitations

Lack of appropriate storage affects day-to-day operations.



Inefficient Layout

The internal design does not support contemporary civic functions.



Council-Agreed Guiding Principles for Bangor Castle

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The future of the Bangor Castle site will be shaped by six key principles, agreed by Council, to ensure it remains a valued asset for generations to come:

Retained Ownership

The Council will retain ownership of the building and its surrounding grounds.

Public Access

Future plans will improve upon the current limited public access to the building.

Local Economic Impact

The site should contribute to the local economy through job creation, increased visitor spending, and by acting as a catalyst for regeneration and investment.

Placemaking

Any future use or development will respect the Castle's legacy in the community and enhance the character of the site, reinforcing Bangor's identity.

Financial Sustainability

Any future use must be viable and financially sustainable in the long term, with minimal cost to the ratepayer.

Securing Heritage

The Castle's Grade A listed status will be upheld, ensuring its historic setting is preserved and maintained for future generations.

To capitalise on these opportunities a 'long list' of possible future use options was compiled. They were scored against our Corporate Plan outcomes to produce the five 'greatest potential' shortlisted options.



Option 1

Small Business Workspace + Museum

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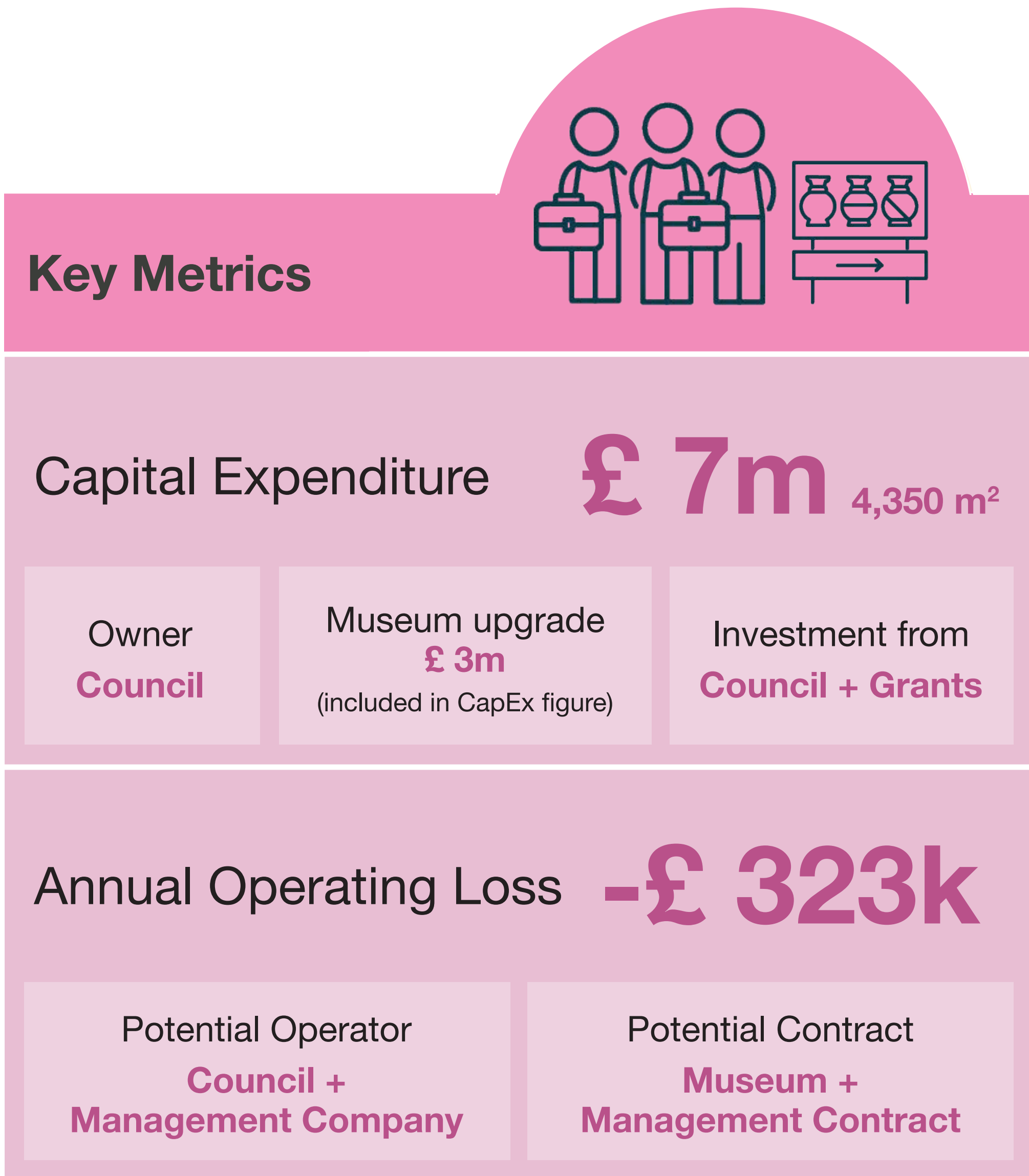
Main features

- The main Castle building would be converted into small private workspaces.
- The Museum would be upgraded to improve accessibility, environmental controls and collection management, with a new learning suite added on the lower ground floor.
- The café would remain in its current location.



Key considerations

- **Limited Public Access**
Access would be limited to the Museum, café and surrounding grounds only.
- **Financial Viability**
This option is not financially sustainable and would require ongoing Council subsidy.
- **Economic Impact**
Potential to support up to 28.8 additional direct jobs, though some may be displaced from other local facilities.
- **Minimal Change to Current Use**
The facility would largely remain as it is, with private office space and the Museum continuing to be operated by the Council.



Option 2

Small Business Workspace

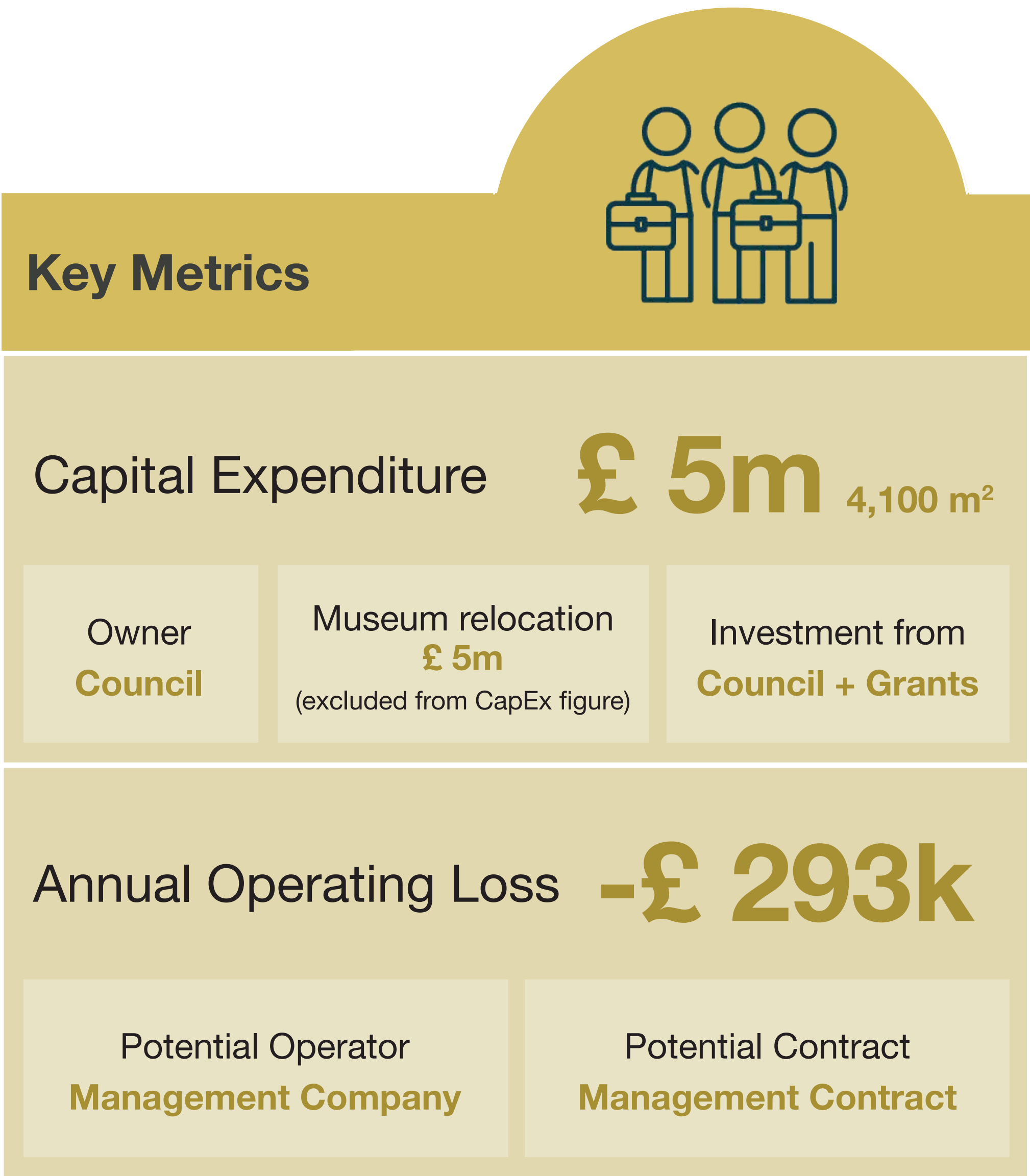
Main features

- All internal areas of Bangor Castle would be converted into workspaces for small private businesses.
- The Museum would be relocated to a new site.
- The café would remain in its current location.



Key considerations

- **Private Use**
The entire building would be used as private office space.
- **Limited Public Access**
Public access would be limited to the café and surrounding grounds only.
- **Financial Sustainability**
This option is financially unsustainable and would operate at a significant loss, requiring ongoing Council subsidy.
- **Economic Impact**
Potential to support up to 37 additional direct jobs, although some may be displaced from other local facilities.



Option 3

Cultural Arts Centre + Museum

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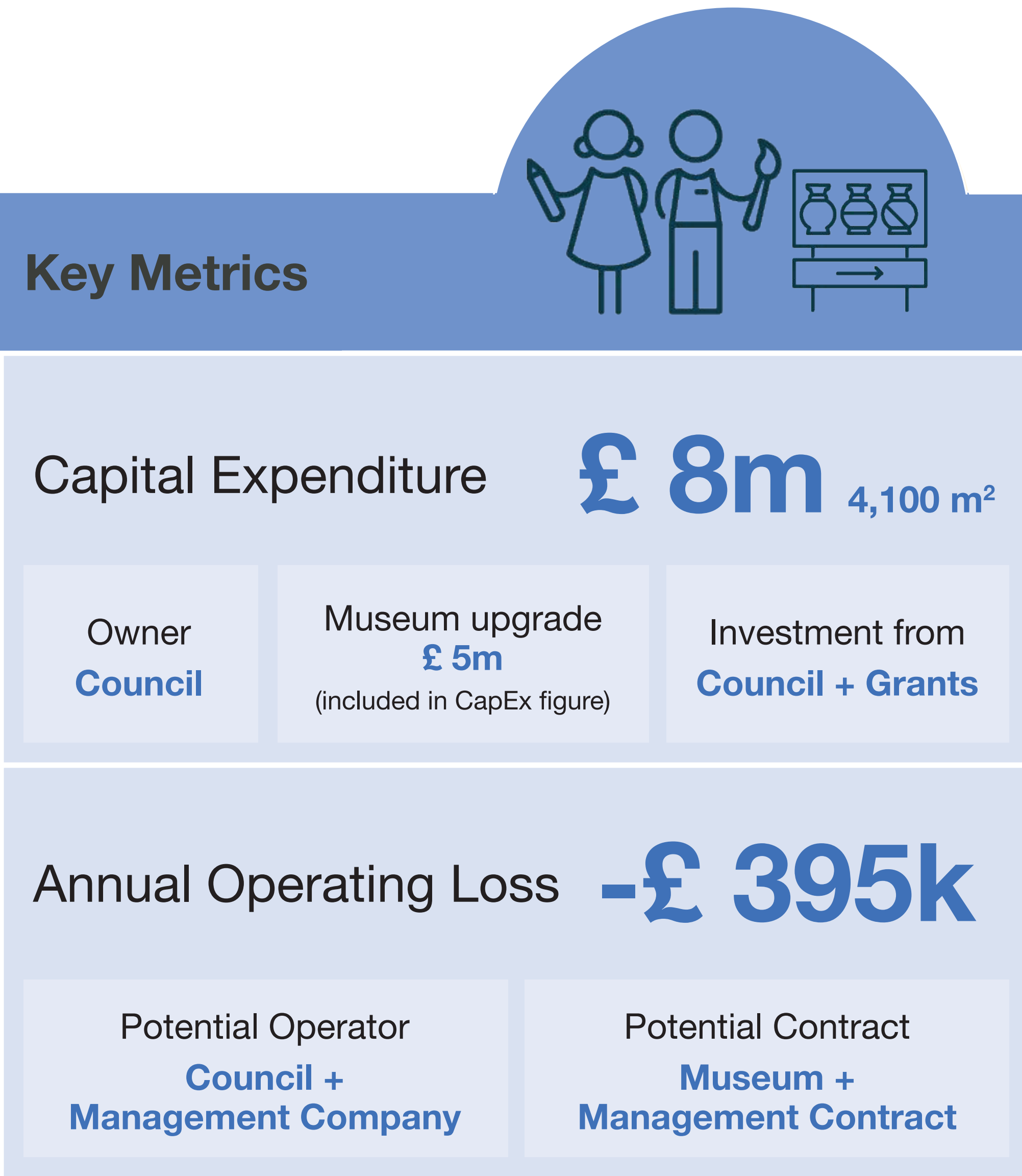
Main features

- The main Castle building would be transformed into creative spaces for artists.
- The Museum would remain on site and expand into shared galleries within the Castle, with a new learning suite created in the stable block.
- Creative and arts studios would replace the current Council offices on the first and second floors.
- The café would remain in its current location.



Key considerations

- **Public Access**
Visitors would have access to the Museum, café, ground floor galleries and surrounding grounds. All other areas would be used as private creative studios, with limited or no public access.
- **Financial Sustainability**
This option is financially unsustainable and would require ongoing Council subsidy.
- **Cultural and Visitor Impact**
Potential to increase Museum visitor numbers and cultural engagement.
- **Economic Impact**
Could support up to 6.4 additional direct jobs, though some may be displaced from other facilities.
- **Placemaking Benefits**
Strong potential to enhance Bangor’s identity as a cultural destination.



Option 4

Boutique Hotel

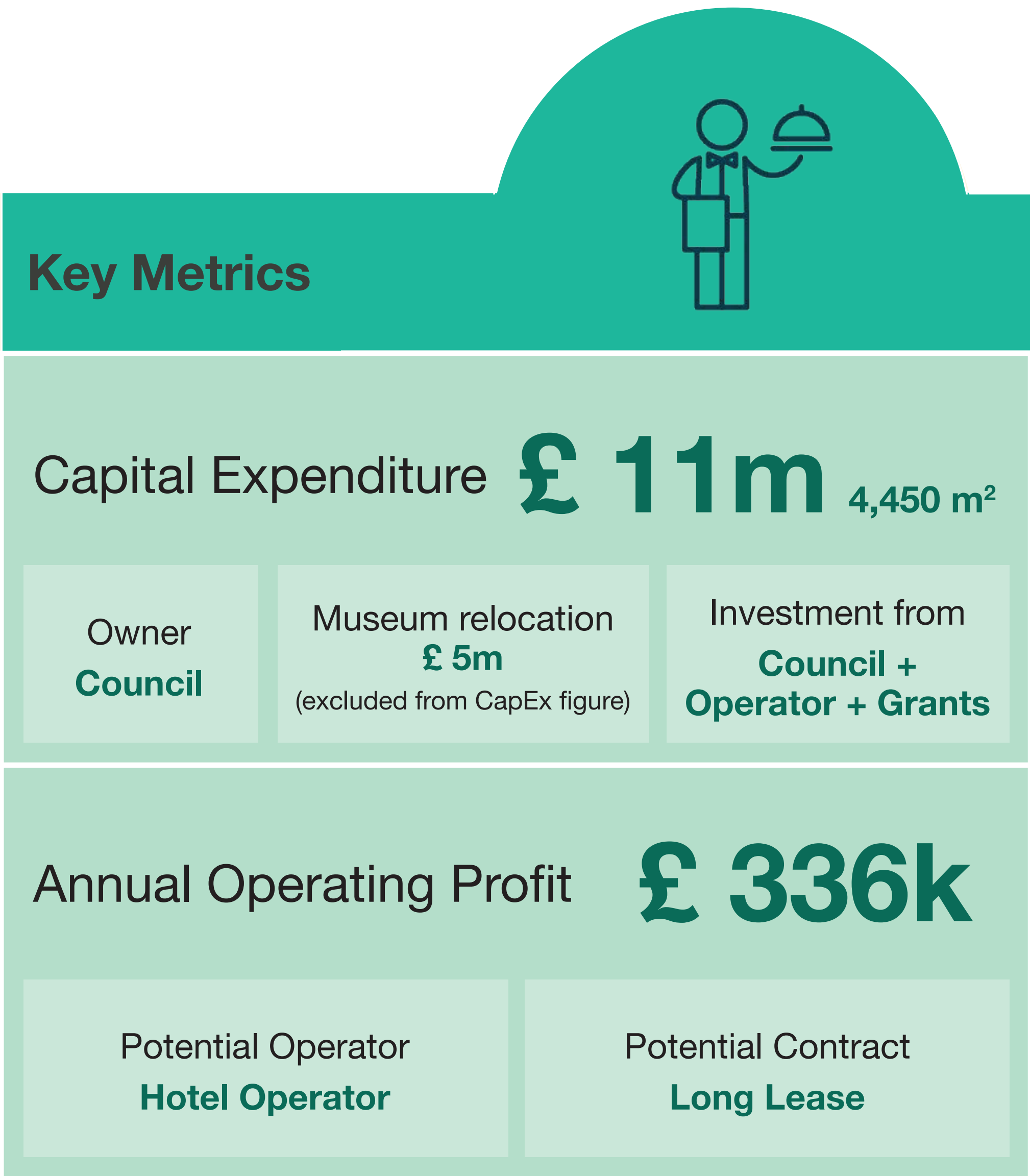
Main features

- The Castle building would be transformed into a 21-bedroom boutique hotel.
- The stable block would be converted into flexible event spaces.
- The courtyard would be covered to create a central function space.
- The Museum would be relocated to a new site.
- The hotel operator would provide café, restaurant, and bar facilities.
- Public access would be maintained to the grounds and a significant portion of the internal spaces.



Key considerations

- **Public Access**
Visitors would have access to the grounds, café, restaurant, bar and event spaces.
- **Financial Sustainability**
This option is financially sustainable and would operate at a profit, requiring no Council subsidy.
- **Economic Impact**
Strong potential to boost the local economy, with an estimated 35.5 additional direct jobs.
- **Tourism and Visitor Growth**
Likely to attract more visitors to the Borough and enhance the area’s appeal.
- **Placemaking Benefits**
Offers a high-quality landmark destination that contributes positively to Bangor’s identity.



Option 5

Larger Boutique Hotel

Main features

- The Castle site would be transformed into a 43-bedroom boutique hotel (21 rooms within the Castle and 22 in a new extension).
- The stable block would become a flexible event space, and the courtyard would be covered to create a central function area.
- The Museum would be relocated to a new site.
- The hotel operator would provide café, restaurant, and bar facilities.
- Public access would be maintained to the grounds and a substantial portion of the internal spaces.



Key considerations

- **Public Access**
Visitors would have access to the grounds, café, restaurant, bar and event spaces.
- **Financial Sustainability**
This option is financially sustainable and would operate at a profit, requiring no Council subsidy.
- **Economic Impact**
Strong potential to benefit the wider economy, with an estimated 72.7 additional direct jobs.
- **Tourism and Visitor Growth**
Likely to attract more visitors to the Borough and enhance its appeal.
- **Placemaking Benefits**
Offers a high-quality landmark destination that contributes positively to Bangor's identity.

Key Metrics



Capital Expenditure **£ 17m** 5,400 m²

Owner
Council

Museum relocation
£ 5m
(excluded from CapEx figure)

Investment from
**Council +
Operator + Grants**

Annual Operating Profit **£ 637k**

Potential Operator
Hotel Operator

Potential Contract
Long Lease

How the Options Were Scored

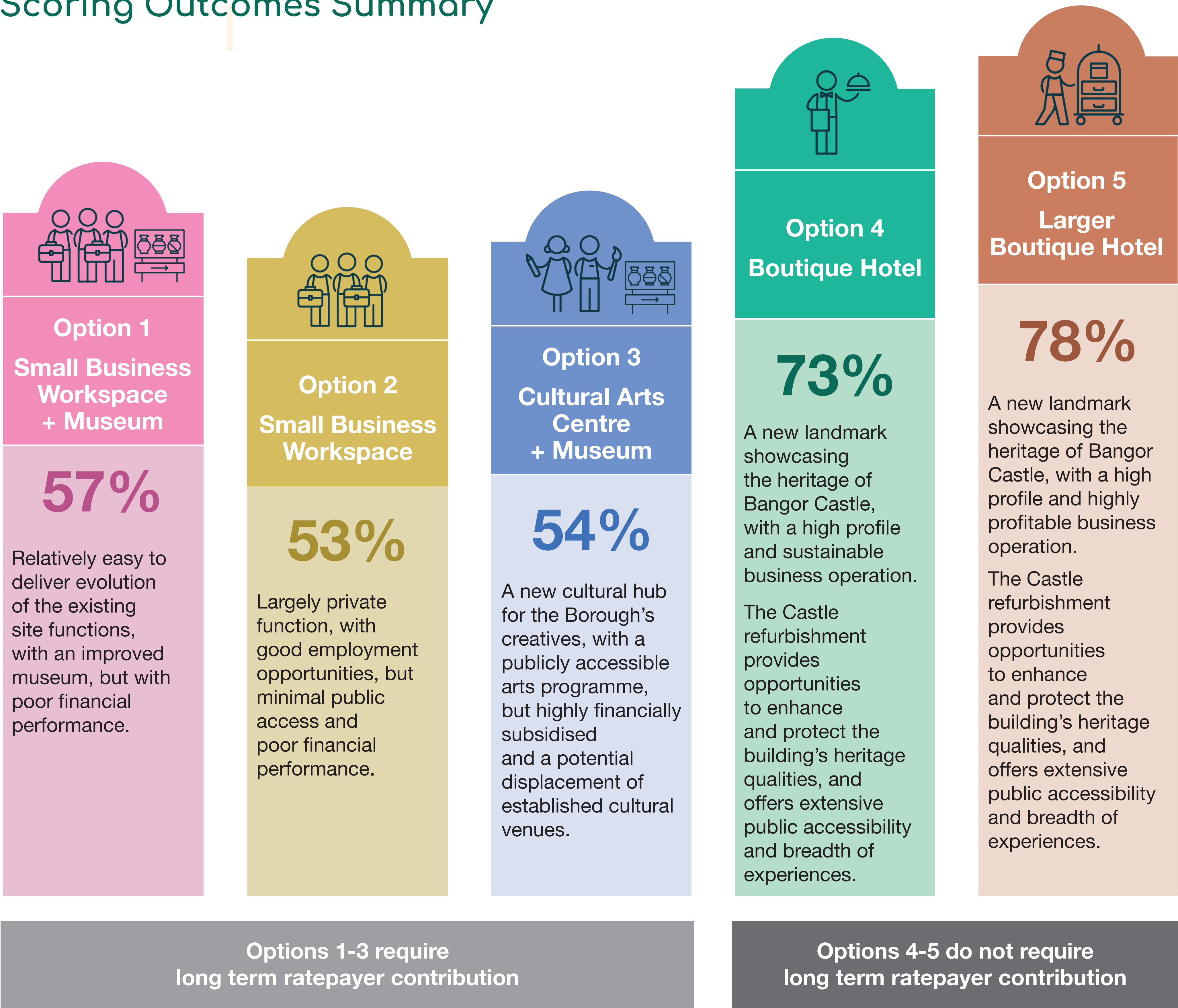
These are the weighted criteria that have been used to evaluate options, which are informed and underpinned by the Council’s Corporate Plan and strategic project objectives.

Corporate Plan

Outcomes	Actions	Evaluation Criteria	Measures	
#3. A thriving and sustainable economy	#4. Supporting the growth of key business sectors by focusing on business support, employability skills and required infrastructure	#6. Helping people maximise their lifelong potential by increasing their employability	Local Economic Benefits	10% Supporting local businesses with visitor spending 10% Increasing non-domestic business rates 10% Increasing employment opportunities
			Operational Liability and Sustainability	10% Capability of being financially independent 10% Indicating long-term sustainability
#2. An environmentally resilient Council and Borough, meeting our net zero carbon targets	#2. Promoting responsible behaviours that focus on reducing carbon emissions while enabling resilience to climate change		Environmental Sustainability	10% Demonstrating energy prudence and resource management
#4. A vibrant, attractive, sustainable Borough for citizens, visitors, businesses and investors	#8. Developing the cultural and built heritage assets of the borough	#9. Working with businesses and communities to enhance and promote the Borough as a sustainable visitor destination	Heritage and Placemaking Identity	10% Upholds the castle’s heritage value 10% Enhances public access to cultural heritage
Project-specific criteria and strategic requirements			Project Deliverability	10% Ability to deliver the project, financially and organisationally 10% Ability to secure planning and heritage permissions

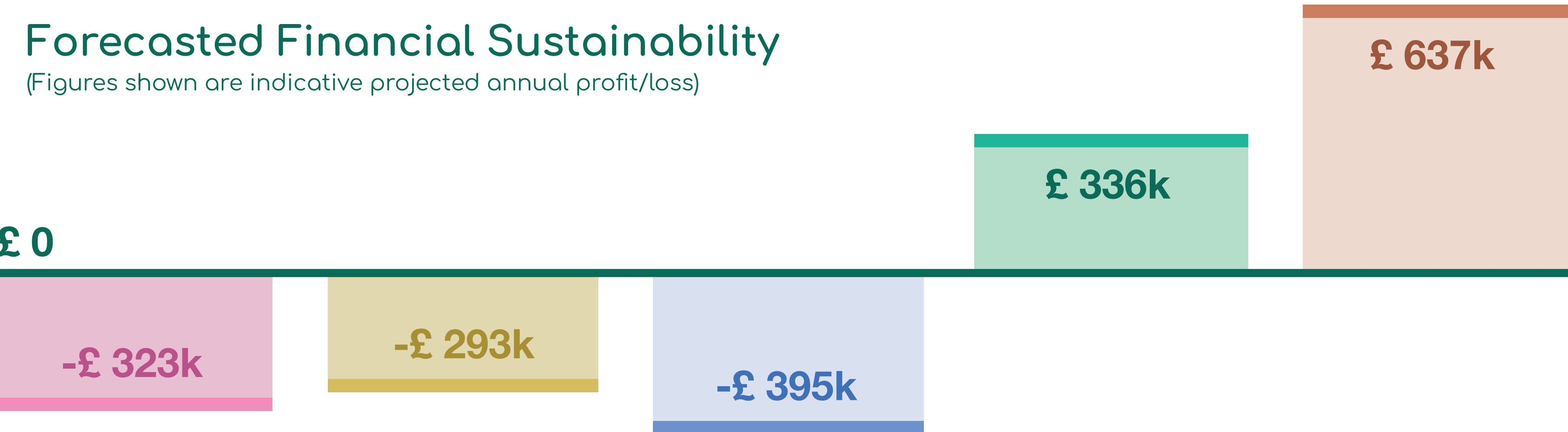
How the Options Scored

Scoring Outcomes Summary



Forecasted Financial Sustainability

(Figures shown are indicative projected annual profit/loss)



Why Did the Hotel Options Score Highest? 13

Retained Ownership

While the terms of any future commercial agreement with a hotel operator are yet to be determined, the Council would retain full ownership of Bangor Castle and its grounds.

Local Economic Impact

A hotel at Bangor Castle would support the local economy through direct and indirect employment, increased visitor spending in nearby businesses, and by encouraging further investment and regeneration.

Financial Sustainability

The hotel function offers the strongest income-generating potential of all options, making it the most financially sustainable in the long term. It would operate without requiring ongoing Council subsidy.

Public Access

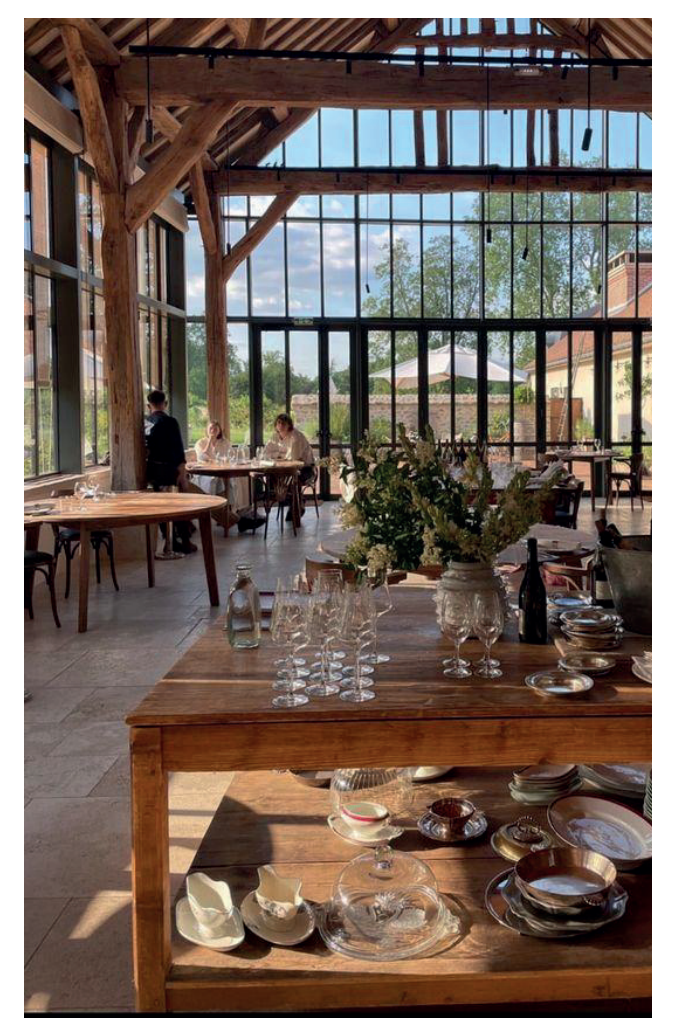
As with many heritage hotel sites, the Castle grounds will remain freely accessible to the public. Internal hotel amenities, including the café, restaurant, bar and event spaces, will also be open to visitors.

Placemaking

Transforming Bangor Castle into a high-quality hotel secures its future as a historic landmark. It enhances the city's identity and ensures that future generations can access and appreciate the site's unique character.

Securing Heritage

A well-designed hotel conversion would preserve and showcase the Castle's architectural and historic features, allowing guests and visitors to experience its heritage in meaningful and engaging ways.

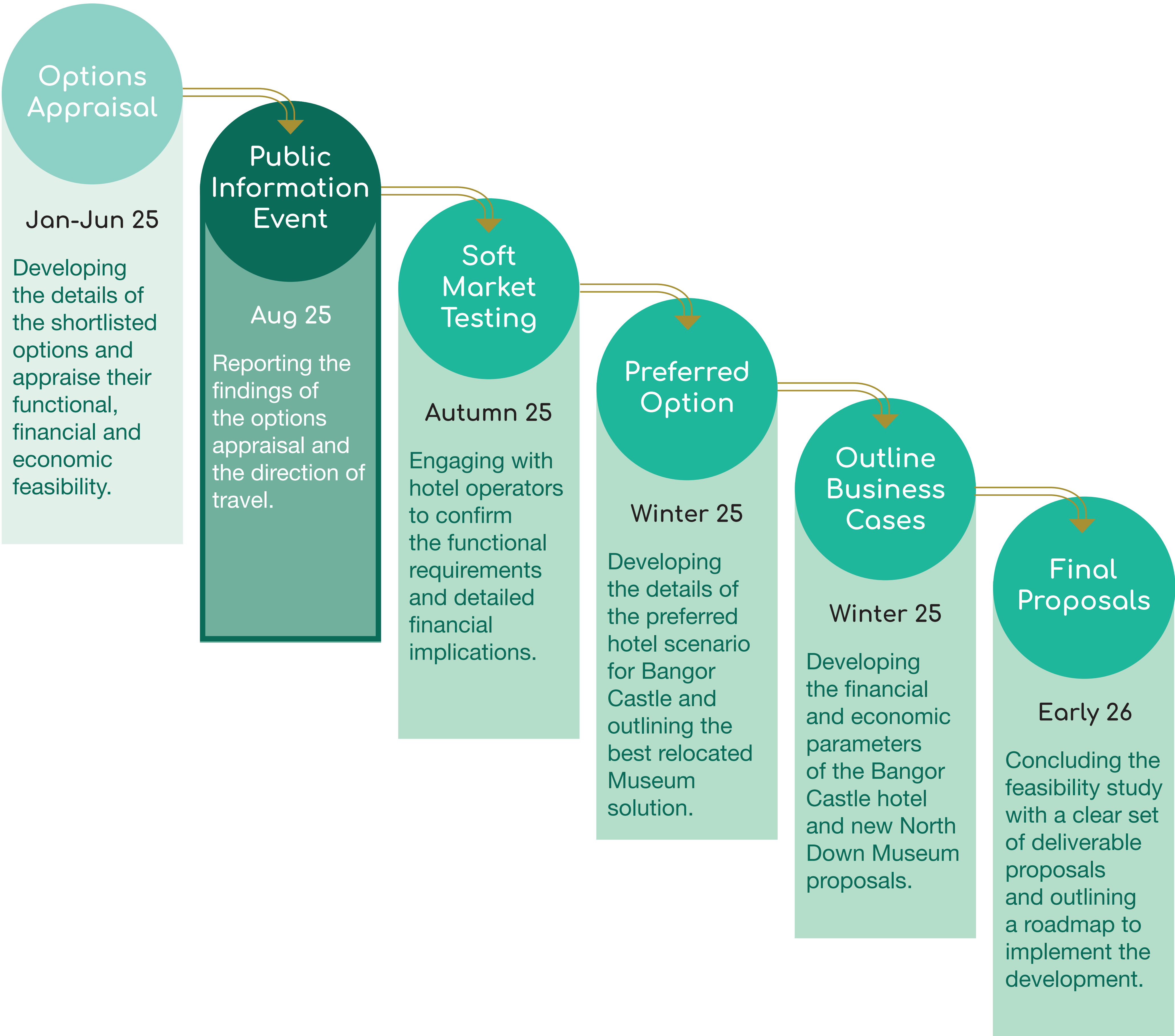


Council Members have approved the principal of the Bangor Castle site being converted into a landmark boutique hotel.

The next stage is to develop:

- An Outline Business Case (OBC) for the Castle’s redevelopment as a boutique hotel.
- A separate OBC for relocating North Down Museum to a new site.

These business cases will help shape the future of both the Castle and the Museum, ensuring they continue to serve the community and contribute to the local economy.



Relocating + Rejuvenating the Museum 15



There are significant limitations with North Down Museum's current facilities, including:

- Poor spatial cohesion and accessibility
- Limited space for displaying and developing the collection
- Unsatisfactory environmental conditions
- Lack of flexible event and programming space

Relocating North Down Museum, ideally to a purpose-built site within Bangor city centre, would address these challenges. A new location would be tailored to allow the Museum's collections, educational activities and community programmes to grow and evolve, better serving the needs of the Borough now and into the future.

The vision is to have...

Engaging exhibition spaces



Healthy collection environments



A Borough-wide collection



Flexible accessible event spaces



Capacity for group visits



Dedicated children's spaces



Flexible programming spaces



Communal social spaces



Community Museums in Urban Centres 16

There are many examples of successful museums and cultural hubs that are located in the heart of towns and cities around the UK, maximising community access and engagement.

Migration Museum, Lewisham



Located in a re-purposed retail unit within Lewisham Shopping Centre, the Migration Museum explores how migration has shaped Britain, serving as a dynamic, accessible space for inclusive storytelling and community engagement in South London.

The Story Museum, Oxford



Housed in a converted former office and telephone exchange near Oxford city centre, The Story Museum celebrates the power of stories through immersive, child-friendly exhibits, making it a beloved cultural destination for families and schools.

People's History Museum, Manchester



Situated in a converted Edwardian hydraulic pumping station and modern extension near Spinningfields, this museum champions the history of democracy and working people, acting as a vital civic space for dialogue and activism.

Carrickfergus Museum, Northern Ireland



Located in a modern civic building in the town centre, Carrickfergus Museum showcases the rich medieval and maritime heritage of the area, fostering pride and historical awareness within the local community.

Paisley Cultural Hub, Paisley



Set within a refurbished former retail unit on the High Street, the Paisley Cultural Hub combines library services and creative spaces, revitalising the town centre as a vibrant, inclusive place for learning and cultural connection.

Spring Arts & Heritage Centre, Worcestershire



Based in a converted town hall building on Havant High Street, this centre offers arts performances and heritage displays, serving as a welcoming and essential hub for creativity and community events in the region.

Landmark Hotels in Heritage Settings

Boutique hotels are often located in landmark heritage buildings, set within beautifully landscaped grounds that remain accessible for the public to enjoy.

Bishop's Gate Hotel, Derry-Londonderry



Bishop's Gate Hotel is a luxury boutique hotel located in the heart of Derry~Londonderry's Cathedral Quarter, offering 31 elegant guest rooms and suites, nine apartments and a high profile and experiential dining offer. Redeveloped with various funding sources, including national heritage and enterprise grants.

The Titanic Hotel, Belfast



The Titanic Hotel is located in the historic Harland & Wolff Drawing Offices, next to the Titanic museum, and features 119 nautical-themed rooms, a bar, restaurant, and event spaces. The listed building was meticulously restored in a major redevelopment celebrating Belfast's shipbuilding history and the Titanic story.

Harrison Chambers, Belfast



A restored 19th-century Victorian merchant's residence with 16 uniquely themed and styled rooms paying homage to notable figures from Belfast's history, offering a distinct historical ambiance. Integrated and creative programming expands the Hotel into a hub and creative platform within the artistic community.

Le Manoir aux Quat'Saisons, Oxfordshire



32 room renowned Oxfordshire manor hotel set within 38 acres of gardens and home to a two-Michelin-starred restaurant, by chef Raymond Blanc. Features a renowned cookery school and gardening courses, allowing guests to engage with the estate's culinary ethos.

No.42 by Guesthouse, Margate



Beachfront boutique hotel housed in a Victorian building with 21 rooms, offering guests stunning sea views, easy beach access, and a distinct interior that reflects the character of the town developed alongside local artists. Dynamic and flexible offering for events, ranging in size to both corporate and social occasions.

Heckfield Place, Hampshire



60 room restored Georgian country house hotel set amidst 438 acres of countryside and meticulously restored into a luxury retreat set within a biodynamic farmland with a sustainability ethos. Its Assembly Programme offers curated cultural and artistic events.

Langley Castle Hotel, Northumberland, UK



New Place Hotel, Hampshire, UK



The Belsfield Hotel, Lake District, UK



Matfen Hall Hotel, Northumberland, UK

