

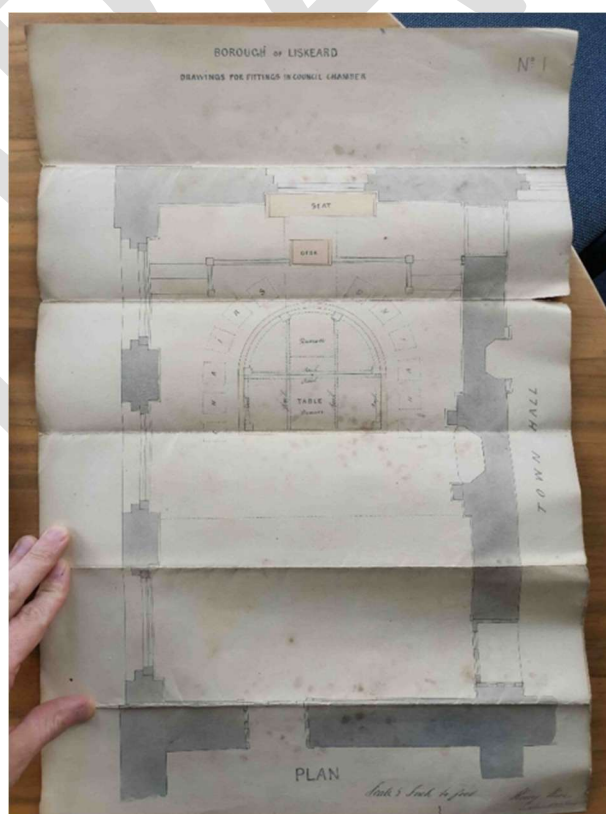
Item 13 - Report on the next steps for the Council Chamber

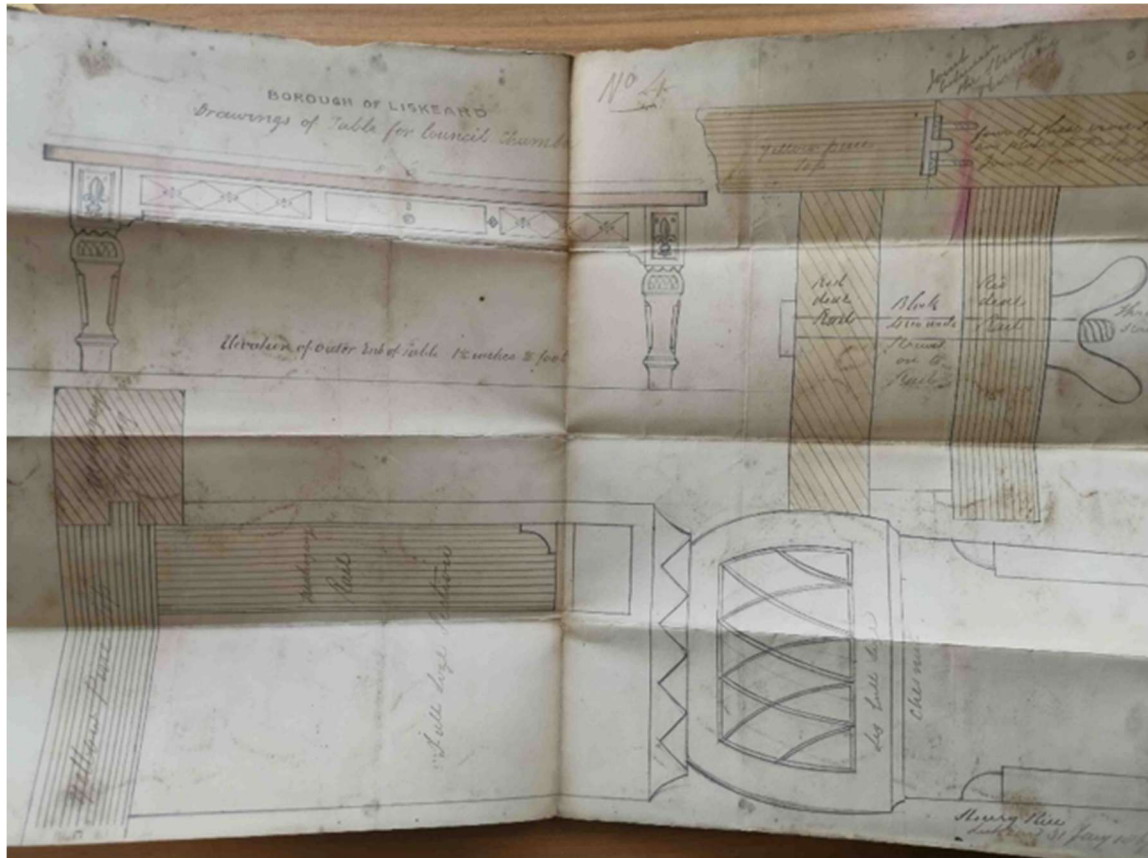
Now that the external walls have been repaired and redecorated, and the windows have been replaced, the Council Chamber requires redecoration before it can be brought back into use. The Council Chamber was last redecorated in 1994. Since then, the walls have been damaged by water ingress and, more recently, by the works undertaken as part of the building repairs.

It is proposed that this opportunity be taken to refurbish the Council Chamber so that it can accommodate a wider range of functions (see Council Chamber Refurbishment Proposals AD60). As part of the refurbishment, it is also proposed that the existing toilet be converted into a kitchenette, providing basic catering facilities and enhancing the room's flexibility for a wider range of uses.

As part of the refurbishment, consideration should also be given to the future use of the existing Chamber furniture, including the tables and chairs.

We have not been able to trace any information regarding the provenance of the chairs and rectangular tables. However, we believe the semi-circular pine table was purpose-designed for use as a courtroom bench or magistrates' table. Originally located in the courtroom at the Guildhall, we believe it would have been positioned in front of the dais for use by clerks and lawyers. The original drawings below are by Henry Rice:





The table remains an important and tangible link to the town's civic heritage. However, it presents challenges in meeting modern requirements. The need to accommodate modern technology, including microphones and laptops, together with the provision of comfortable, accessible seating and flexible room layouts for different types of meetings, means that the existing table no longer meets the Council's operational requirements.

Of the chairs, the Chairman's Chair, Clerk's Chair and Clergy's Chair are listed on the asset register and must therefore be retained. Several of the remaining chairs are showing clear signs of wear and deterioration. Some are damaged or broken, with loose joints affecting their stability.

It is also worth noting that the semi-circular table and accompanying chairs do not appear to be a matched set. This may indicate that they were not originally designed for use together or, alternatively, that the table has been modified, potentially through the shortening of its legs.

Assuming the Chamber is redecorated as planned, the options for the furniture are as follows:

1. Restore and adapt the table (for example, by incorporating it into a new item of furniture).
2. Relocate the table to another public building in the town, such as the library.

3. Return the table to its original location in the Guildhall.
4. Sell the table by public auction.

It should be noted that it is not possible to remove the table from the Chamber without modification, as the improvements undertaken to the Public Hall in 2018 have effectively enclosed it. Alternatively, the door and frame to the Chamber could be removed but this has not been fully investigated.

Redecoration of the Emily Hobhouse Room is scheduled for 4th to 14th August to include damp proofing walls, replastering and decoration. We are investigating refurbishing and/or replacing the parquet floor, installing acoustic panels, and refurbishing the kitchen area. The aim is to create a more formal environment so that the room can function more effectively as a meeting room.