

Policy & Resources Committee Meeting	
Meeting Date	9 th September 2026
Report Title	Security of the Undercroft at Swale House
EMT Lead	Lisa Fillery Director of Resources
Head of Service	Joanne Johnson Head of Place
Lead Officer	Debbie Hardy Building Operations and Maintenance Manager
Classification	Open
Recommendations	Members are recommended not to introduce physical measures to secure the undercroft

1 Purpose of Report and Executive Summary

- 1.1 At its July 2026 meeting, following consideration of a report on Swale House Increased Security, Economy & Property Committee members resolved:

To recommend to Policy and Resources Committee that the undercroft is secured, whilst maintaining safe vehicular and pedestrian ingress and egress, with design input from Kent Police and skilled staff and partners.

- 1.2 This report sets out the recommended design and associated costs and explains how vehicular and pedestrian access would function.

2 Background, Context and Proposals

- 2.1 At its 8th October 2025 meeting, following consideration of a report on the draft Voluntary and Community Sector Lettings Policy, Economy and Property Committee members discussed the letting of Swale House. In the ensuing discussion, concerns were raised that safety and security may impact lettings and a report addressing this was request.
- 2.2 The ensuing report was discussed at Economy and Property Committee in March 2026 and officers were asked to provide options, costs and recommendations for additional undercroft security.
- 2.3 Separately, a one-off budget of £125,000 was agreed at Full Council on 18th February 2026 for “chamber / meeting security” for the financial year 26/27. To date, £24,500 of this budget has been spent on extra internal building security measures with a further £17,400 notionally committed (for public gallery screens, access control points to Chamber doors, cameras in stairwell 1 and upgrades to the member voting system). This will leave £83,100 of that budget available.

- 2.4 A report with costed security options was discussed at Economy and Property Committee in July 2026. The meeting resolved that Policy & Resource Committee be recommended to approve the allocation of budget (c. £70,000) to secure the undercroft.
- 2.5 The resolution included seeking technical input in the design proposals, including from Kent Police and from highways engineers. Officers have engaged with Kent Police who, from a “designing out crime” perspective support the proposals. Highways engineers are content that the headline proposals (as set out in Appendix I) do not represent a risk to the highway (i.e. vehicles and pedestrians on Crown Quay Lane / East Street) provided there is no reversing and the vehicle gates are moved further up the ramp towards the car park.
- 2.6 Appendix I shows indicative designs for the installation of security fencing of the undercroft area.
- 2.7 The officer recommendation in July was that members rejected physical security measures, as the benefits were considered to be outweighed by disadvantages. These were summarised in the July Committee report as:
- likely displacement of issues to other areas of the town centre or wider borough
 - consequent negative reputational impact, and / or requests to support other buildings with similar investment, which could not be afforded
 - potential access issues for vehicles and deliveries from the main road, which could impact traffic flow / block the highway (*note, highways engineers have since indicated that the vehicle access gates can be moved up the ramp to a position that suitably mitigates this risk. This does, however, leave the basement access exposed and prohibits reversing*).
 - A requirement for staff to be available to answer an intercom (*note, it has since been agreed that this can be covered by the in-house CCTV team*).
 - the intercom system would be open to abuse, ASB and vandalism.
 - there is a risk of non-compatibility to our current access system which would increase costs
 - the risk of tailgating of users and vehicles which could result in vehicles and individuals being ‘kettled’ or trapped within the undercroft, and (feeling / being) more vulnerable than with an open perimeter (*note, this is supplemented by the need to let all vehicles in to the undercroft in order to return to the highway*).
 - People utilising the undercroft to ‘make a point’ may transfer this behaviour to the front entrance, or to the access points to the undercroft.
 - All vehicles must enter the undercroft (even if they are rejected) to avoid reversing onto highway and allowing to turn around and exit.
- 2.8 The July 2026 officer report noted that a lack of investment in physical security would mean any unauthorised use of the undercroft would continue to be dealt

with as it arises using existing services and the powers and means available to them. Economy and Property Committee members resolved at that meeting that *“there should be no tolerance to trespassers within the undercroft and that this stance (should) inform service approaches to relevant action and support.”*

- 2.8 Members in favour of physical security measures at Economy and Property Committee cited the following rationales:
- previous incidents in the undercroft had been tolerated and resulted in reputational damage to the Council
 - the Council could not and should not rely on the Police
 - the undercroft needed to be made safer for staff and commercial tenants
 - operational matters could be overcome.
- 2.9 The officer recommendation has not changed in terms of the assessment of the balance of the advantages and disadvantages.

3 Recommendations

- 3.1 Members are recommended not to introduce physical measures to secure the undercroft.

4 Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

- 4.1 Alternative options were considered by the Economy and Property Committee in July and included do nothing; temporary fencing solutions and security patrols.

5 Consultation Undertaken or Proposed

- 5.1 This report has been informed by member discussion at Economy and Property Committee.
- 5.2 The agreement to allocate £125,000 for chamber / meeting security was agreed by members at Full Council on 18th February 2026.
- 5.3 The existing spend from the £125,000 budget has been discussed and agreed by Members following an informal meeting of 10th December 2025 regarding meeting security.

6 Implications

Issue	Implications
Corporate Plan	Effective security of staff and premises supports two actions under the ‘Running the Council’ objective of the Corporate Plan 2023-2027. • Support and develop staff. • Ensure well managed assets

Financial, Resource and Property	Security measures already in place are all funded within the base budget 26/27. Full Council agreed during the 26/27 budget setting in February to allocate funds for chamber / meeting security at Swale House and these measures could be funded from that allocation The costed security option would have ongoing financial implications which would need to be addressed during budget setting for future years. A budget of c. £4,500 per year would be required for the servicing of the gates / ANPR and access control points. There is a risk of cost increase if the current access control system is not compatible those available for a new installation. There would likely be a saving in officer time in dealing with issues in the undercroft.
Legal, Statutory and Procurement	Built solutions would be procured via the Council's usual processes. Central government has recently indicated it will find all rough sleepers a home by the end of the year. Therefore, there is an expectation of more funds to directly offer accommodation and mitigate associated problems (noting the interrelations between homelessness and ASB experienced on occasions in the undercroft).
Crime and Disorder	The measures outlined above seek to reduce and mitigate the impact of potential crime and disorder concerns at Swale House, although would impact on the location of the behaviours, not the behaviours themselves. By installing security fencing, we will be displacing the issue elsewhere which may impact on reputational risk.
Environment and Climate/Ecological Emergency	No specific implications identified
Health and Wellbeing	Member and officer safety and perceptions of safety are a foundation of health and wellbeing. As set out above, tailgating through the pedestrian access could be an issue as staff/members could be stuck in the secure area with unknown persons. The need to allow all vehicles access through the vehicle gates, to avoid unsafe reversing on to the highway is a similar concern.

Safeguarding of Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adults	The rough sleeping outreach team consider safeguarding needs and make appropriate referrals when working with individuals rough sleeping.
Risk Management and Health and Safety	Homelessness is an emotive subject, with sometimes polarised views about how it should be addressed. There may be a reputational impact for the Council if it is perceived that the situation has been mismanaged. The health and safety of, and risks to members, staff and building users are considered in the report.
Equality and Diversity	The impact of the options on those who require disabled parking and access to the building has been considered and has informed this recommendation.
Privacy and Data Protection	The implications of increased CCTV and body-worn cameras which have been invested in from the £125,000 budget have been considered from this perspective.
Local Government Reorganisation	If the building continues to be used by the new unitary authority, any measures enacted will continue to have an impact. If the building is disposed of, any physical measures may be viewed as an asset or disbenefit by a new occupier / tenant.

7 Appendices

- 7.1 The following documents are to be published with this report and form part of the report:
- Swale House Access & Design Walkthrough.

8 Background Papers

- 8.1 [Minutes for Economy and Property Committee on Wednesday, 8 October 2025, 7.00 pm](#)
- 8.2 [Minutes for Economy and Property Committee on Thursday 19th March 2026, 7:00pm](#)
- 8.3 [Minutes for Economy and Property Committee on Tuesday, 7 July 2026, 7.00 pm](#)