

## TRAFFORD COUNCIL

**Report to:** Executive  
**Date:** 27 September 2021  
**Report for:** Decision  
**Report of:** Executive Member for Housing and Regeneration

### Report Title

**Proposed lease of the former Partington Youth Centre, Moss Lane, Partington to the Boys and Girls Clubs of Greater Manchester**

### Summary

This report seeks approval from the Executive, for the Council to proceed with granting a 99 year lease to the Boys and Girls Clubs of Greater Manchester (at an undervalue) to enable them to invest in the building and reinstate the asset as a Youth Facility to benefit the children in the Locality of Partington.

### Recommendation(s)

It is recommended that the Executive :-

- (i) Approves in principle the grant of a 99 year lease of the former Partington Youth Centre on similar terms to the draft heads of terms included in this report and
- (ii) Delegates authority to the Corporate Director for Place to finalise and agree the heads of terms in order to facilitate the grant of a lease.
- (iii) Authorises the Corporate Director of Governance and Community Strategy to enter into any legal documents required to finalise the transaction.

Contact person for access to background papers and further information:

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Background Papers: none

### **List of appendices:**

Appendix A: Youth Engagement Service position statement  
Appendix B: Moss Lane Youth Centre Building Condition Report  
Appendix C: Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Manchester (BGCGM) survey results summary  
Appendix D: Partington Youth Partnership report  
Appendix E: draft heads of terms

*Implications:*

Relationship to Policy Framework/Corporate Priorities	<p>The preferred option links to corporate objectives to ensure a fair start for all children and young people, to develop successful, inclusive and thriving places, and improve our use of available resources.</p> <p>The preferred option also supports core principles of the operational estate strategy, namely improving utilisation, and reducing maintenance and running costs.</p>
Relationship to GM Policy or Strategy Framework	The proposal supports GM strategic estates work as part of a wider One Public Estate approach.
Financial	<p>Should the Council proceed with the lease, then £2,500 of running costs per annum can be avoided, in addition to an estimated capital outlay of £250,000 required to reinstate the building to an appropriate condition.</p> <p>A lease of this length is classified as a disposal, and the nature of the peppercorn rent means this would be a disposal of an asset under its value.</p>
Legal Implications:	The grant of the lease is a disposal at undervalue which would normally require the consent of the Secretary of State, however a blanket consent has been provided where the undervalue is less than £2m and provides an economic, environmental or social benefit
Equality/Diversity Implications	An equality impact assessment has been undertaken, with no major implications anticipated. Given the intentions of the prospective lessee, the recommendation is ultimately expected to have a positive impact for younger people.
Sustainability Implications	No major implications
Carbon Reduction	The building is currently vacant. Extensive capital works resulting from long lease should improve energy efficiency.
Resource Implications e.g. Staffing / ICT / Assets	In the short term, the recommendation will require some staffing resource from legal and estates during negotiations. Longer term, resource requirements (especially facilities management) will decrease.
Risk Management Implications	Over time corporate risk will be reduced via disposal of a dilapidated and vacant asset.
Health & Wellbeing Implications	The recommendation reinstates significant youth provision in Partington, for the health and wellbeing benefit of local young people and the wider community.
Health and Safety Implications	None

## **1.0 Background**

- 1.1 The former Partington Youth Centre (hereafter referred to as Moss Lane) is a building at the corner of Moss Lane Road and Cross Lane East, M31 4FA, in the north east corner of Cross Lane Park, Partington.
- 1.2 Until recently, the building was used by Ear 4 U, a local furniture recycling Community Interest Company, and local foodbanks for the collection and distribution of food parcels. Both of these users have now vacated the premises. The Council still uses some of the rooms for the archiving and storage of documentation.
- 1.3 The Council has been approached by the Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Manchester (BGCGM) who have submitted a proposal to take over Moss Lane on a long lease.
- 1.4 This paper will outline the BGCGM proposal and consider alternative options for the site. The view of the Council's Strategic Estates Team is that leasing the site to BGCGM represents a preferred option, given the following benefits:
  - capital investment in Moss Lane
  - a new amenity for children and young people in Partington
  - a secure home for Screamin' Wheels, a longstanding local voluntary youth service provider
  - activities being run at Moss Lane by an independent, respected charity, with a strong record of building links and ownership within the local community.

## **2.0 Current situation**

### **2.1 Demographics & health**

- 2.1.1 Bucklow-St Martins is the most deprived ward in the borough, and this is true for the majority of indices of multiple deprivation.
- 2.1.2 The ward has the highest rate of children living in income-deprived families, and is the highest ranked ward for health deprivation and disability.
- 2.1.3 The ward has the highest proportion of young people in the borough, with over a quarter of the population aged 0-15.
- 2.1.4 The most recent data from the National Child Measurement Programme show that just under 40 % of Year 6 children are obese and overweight, the highest rate in the borough.
- 2.1.5 The ward has the lowest life expectancy, as well as the highest rate of death from respiratory diseases.

2.1.6 The Council's preferred approach is to work with and develop the assets and strengths of its communities, such as those in Partington.

## **2.2 Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Manchester (BGCGM)**

2.2.1 The Boys and Girls Clubs of Greater Manchester is the working name for the Greater Manchester Trust for Recreation, a registered charity (charity number 521234) with charitable objectives to provide sport and recreational facilities for young people.

2.2.2 BGCGM is a well-respected umbrella organisation. It represents over 40 affiliated clubs across Greater Manchester, the most famous being Salford Lad's Club.

2.2.3 It is a volunteer-led, community-based organisation, with a strong track record of enabling and involving local people in improving local youth provision.

2.2.4 Screamin' Wheels is an affiliate member of BGCGM. Screamin' Wheels used to operate out of Moss Lane until it closed in 2015. Since then, they have had an alternative base at Moss View. However, they have not been able to meet during the pandemic.

## **3.0 Current Condition of the Moss Lane Building**

3.1 The Moss Lane building was constructed in 1970 and whilst it may broadly be fit for purpose, the general appearance and plant require updating.

3.2 Recent condition surveys for the property have highlighted the need to invest in the building sooner rather than later to be able to continue to use the building for community use. At least £250k of capital investment will be required. As a minimum, investment is required in a new heating system, a full electrical rewire and a new fire alarm system.

3.3 BGCGM commissioned their own condition report from an external surveying company. Their report also highlighted that the plumbing and electrical systems in particular would benefit from a full overhaul to meet modern requirements.

3.4 The Condition Survey has confirmed that remedial works are required. However, it needs to be noted that the condition report does not distinguish between works that are essential for compliance, those needed to make the building fit for purpose, and those that would be nice to have, but not essential.

3.5 Amey's Estates Team has estimated that the value of the building, in its existing use and condition, would be around £170,000.

3.6 In the 2020/21 financial year, the council spent £2,500 on the maintenance of the building. This is a minimum baseline. It was during the COVID pandemic, as an effectively vacant building, so the figure excludes any utility or security costs incurred.

3.7 Given that it is currently unoccupied, spend on utilities is negligible, other than standing charges.

3.8 The site historically operated as a youth centre up until 2015 when the decision was made to close all Council-owned Youth Centres in the Trafford Borough. The site is not actively being used.

3.9 The longer that the asset remains vacant, the greater the risks of trespass, vandalism, or the building falling into disrepair.

3.10 As it is not currently being actively used, Moss Lane is not an active community amenity, and is therefore not generating income. In October 2020, the Council was approached by a number of interested parties regarding the future of Moss Lane, who had learnt that the building might become available.

- 3.11 Aside from BGCGM mentioned above, interest was also received from Partington Parish Council, the M31 Boxing Club, and Fairfield Residential, a small independent care and education organisation.

#### **4.0 Methodology**

- 4.1 Prior to submitting their proposal, BGCGM conducted stakeholder interviews with a range of local interests, including the neighbourhood policing team, Trafford Housing Trust, local schools, and Trafford Council's Youth Engagement Service. This was primarily to gauge how their proposal might be received in the area.
- 4.2 Since then, BGCGM has presented the proposal to officers in the strategic estates team, and to the Corporate Director for Place. Officers then briefed ward members on 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2021, and spoke to other relevant council officers.
- 4.3 A letter of support from the Youth Engagement Service is included at appendix A.
- 4.4 BGCGM commissioned a building condition survey (appendix B). This found the property to be in fair condition, given its age and type, but acknowledged the need for repairs and refurbishment to bring the property up to modern standards.
- 4.5 BGCGM also conducted a survey of young people in the local area, promoted online with support from local schools. They gathered 223 responses over 9 days. The survey results are included at appendix C.
- 4.6 Independently, Partington's Youth Partnership conducted some project work reviewing youth provision in the area. The reporting from this project is included at appendix D.

#### **5.0 Key Findings**

- 5.1 The results from both the BGCGM survey and the Youth Partnership survey demonstrate considerable demand for more youth provision in the area, with some comments explicitly requesting the reinstatement of the Moss Lane building.
- 5.2 There is an existing network of providers across the area, including the Hideaway, schools, dance and sports clubs, and Redeeming Our Communities (ROC) at the Fuse. Prior to the pandemic, Screamin' Wheels were attracting around 150 young people to their activities each week.
- 5.3 In particular, the gap analysis from the Youth Partnership identifies trips, projects and outdoor education as areas where the local offer could be enhanced. These are all areas where BGCGM have considerable expertise, and are well-placed to be able to contribute.
- 5.4 BGCGM are considering including providing Duke of Edinburgh awards. One of their affiliate members is a residential outdoor education centre in the Lake District, and they have expressed the intention to deliver trips there from Partington.
- 5.5 Strategic Planning determined that the building does not fall within the designated area of the park, meaning it would not be subject to planning constraints, other than landscape protection to ensure any development was sympathetic to the park.
- 5.6 Given that the site is bounded on two sides by roads, and on two sides by the park itself, alternative options for commercial disposal or development would be extremely limited.
- 5.7 The other interested parties (see 3.11 above) did not produce developed proposals beyond initial enquiries. A meeting was held with the Parish Council on site, and

Councillors subsequently discussed it at their own meetings. A consensus was established that it would not be of interest given the scale of requirements.

- 5.8 M31 Boxing Club have discussed the possibility of partnership work with BGCGM, but would not be looking to take on the site independently.
- 5.9 In the case of Fairfield Residential, the enquiry did not progress beyond initial emails. Officers understand that they were looking to expand, but not in the short term. They have been advised that other more formulated proposals are being considered.

## **6.0 Opportunity**

- 6.1 BGCGM are proposing to invest significant capital of up to £0.5 million into the building, and restore the youth centre to community use.
- 6.2 This includes the remedial works which they deem necessary to reinstate the building. As such the actual costs to Trafford Council, beyond the Estates and Legal departments' working time required to agree the proposal, would be minimal.
- 6.3 £250k of this funding would be provided from BGCGM themselves, and is guaranteed (proof of funding will be requested as part of continued negotiations). As the Council are proposing not to charge a rent for the first 25 years of the lease in return for the investment that BGCGM are making to the building, there will be an expectation for the tenant to complete a minimum amount of refurbishment works to reflect this.
- 6.4 BGCGM intend to fundraise an additional £250k from external sources.
- 6.5 The opportunity cost to the Council is believed to be minimal. Given the supply of other public estate across Partington for other purposes, there are no other immediate suggestions for alternative use, other than disposal.
- 6.6 BGCGM would move their head office to be based at Moss Lane, and employ a member of staff to manage the operation of the building.
- 6.7 BGCGM propose to manage the building to make it available primarily for youth provision during evenings and weekends, as well as making it available for wider community usage during weekday daytimes.
- 6.8 As observed in the letter of support from Youth Engagement Services at Appendix A, young people in Partington often struggle to afford alternative activities. Take-up of youth work activities and clubs is high in the area, and higher than other parts of the borough.
- 6.9 Over the longer term, whilst feasibility has not been established, reinstating Moss Lane in this way may enable some community usage to migrate from other parts of the estate, such as the Partington Community Centre, freeing up capacity for other purposes.
- 6.10 The Council would normally offer a lease of an asset for 25 years. However, given the amount of investment that is required in the asset and the type of use that is proposed for the site, a longer term is requested by BGCGM in order to provide further security of tenure.
- 6.11 A market rent of the asset is not being charged for the asset due to the amount of investment that is being made. Given this, it is deemed that the proposed transaction will be a disposal at undervalue.
- 6.12 The draft heads of terms proposed are included at appendix E.

## 7.0 Benefits

- 7.1 The proposal from BGCGM links to corporate objectives to ensure a fair start for all children and young people, to develop successful, inclusive and thriving places, and to improve our use of available resources.
- 7.2 It also supports the Council's Operational Estate Strategy, via a reduction in running costs, as well as improving utilisation and energy efficiency.
- 7.3 The current building is vacant and prominently located in the corner of Cross Lane Park. Whilst not immediately at risk, it does require refurbishment to protect its long term viability. It would also reduce the risks and costs associated with vacant buildings, such as graffiti or other vandalism.
- 7.4 The council would avoid any maintenance and running costs.
- 7.5 The building would benefit from significant necessary investment, provided from external sources. BGCGM are proposing to invest £250k of their own funding, and to fundraise a further £250k fundraised from external sources.
- 7.6 The research conducted to date demonstrates a demand for such provision in the local area. The local community has been consulted sensitively, and all those who have given views to date support the proposal. This lease would enable a significant increase in provision of youth activities for children and young people in Partington.
- 7.7 Whilst not quantifiable, the approach suggested by BGCGM is community-led, and should increase local (non-financial) investment in the future of the site. A greater sense of ownership, and community empowerment, is expected to result.
- 7.8 Anecdotally, a number of officers have observed that BGCGM is probably in a better position to engender this sense of community ownership than the Council itself.
- 7.9 Regarding current usage (section 1.2 above), some stored documents and archived material will have to be relocated. These can be addressed as a project dependency.
- 7.10 The Strategic Estates team is confident of finding storage solutions for these within the existing estate footprint of the Council, and will pursue these via Corporate Landlord Strategic and Operational groups.

Table 1: comparison of options considered

	Benefit				
	Increased youth provision	Capital investment	Community-led regeneration	Improve utilisation/occupy vacant building	Council income
<b>Recommendation – BGCGM lease</b>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗
Option A – do nothing	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Option B – commercial rental	✗	✗	?	✓	?
Option C – commercial sale	✗	?	✗	✓	✓
Option D – redevelop site	✗	?	✓	✓	?

A question mark denotes where it is unclear whether a benefit would derive from an option.

## 8.0 Other Options

- A. **Do nothing and leave the site vacant.** This would create a higher risk for the Council with the exposure for the liability for maintenance repair and running costs. It would not deliver income to the Council, investment in the building, or increase youth provision.
- B. **Commercial rental.** The Council invests in the property and rents out the facility. This is not considered to be an option given the amount of capital investment required and period of time that would be required to recoup that investment. It would also not guarantee any continuing community use. It could ultimately deliver Council income, although this would have to be balanced against the investment required.
- C. **Commercial sale.** The Council sells the property on the open market. This option is not felt to be feasible as the condition of the asset would significantly reduce the amount a purchaser might pay for it. Furthermore it wouldn't guarantee any continuing community use, or increase youth provision.
- D. **Redevelop the site.** Whilst the asset is located on a prominent corner plot, the redevelopment of the site is quite constrained due to the asset backing onto Public Open Space and the use of the adjacent buildings by Partington Parish Council. Given the constraints on the available land, and compared to the housing growth (such as Future Carrington) elsewhere in the community, the total site area would be a very small contribution to housing need. The Council would not be in a position to deliver a similar level of youth services from the building as BGCGM.

## 9.0 Consultation

- 9.1 As this report concerns a disposal, there is no statutory duty to consult.
- 9.2 BGCGM are very keen that this venture is strongly linked with the local community and meets their needs as much as possible. As such, they have already performed considerable local consultation to establish need for the reinstatement of the youth centre, and to understand local perspectives.
- 9.3 BGCGM conducted a survey of young people in the area, with findings reported in appendix C. Together with this, they have also consulted professional local stakeholders including the police, the Youth Engagement Service, and other local youth providers.

10.0 **Reasons for Recommendation**

- 10.1 It is recommended that the Council enter into a long lease with BGCGM to protect the long term future of the building, and to reinstate a much-needed youth and community facility for the people of Partington.
- 10.2 The undervalue is less than £2 million, and will be providing substantial social benefit. Therefore the Council is not required to seek approval from the secretary of state.
- 10.3 The lease would give BGCGM (and partners Screamin' Wheels) an opportunity for a long standing and fit for purpose location, from which to deliver services to local young people.
- 10.4 It would give sufficient guarantee of tenure to enable BGCGM to invest considerable capital in the fabric of the building, for its operation for the benefit of the young people and other residents of Partington, in perpetuity.
- 10.5 The proposal links to the corporate objective of ensuring a fair start for all children and young people. The BGCGM survey and other research demonstrates the need for greater youth provision, particularly with regard to outdoor activities.
- 10.6 Whilst difficult to quantify, the approach suggested by BGCGM is community-led, and should increase local (non-financial) investment in, and identification with, the site. A greater sense of ownership and community empowerment is expected to result.

**Key Decision** (as defined in the Constitution): No

**If Key Decision, has 28-day notice been given?** Not applicable

*Reports will not be accepted without completion of the following section - THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER AND DIRECTOR MUST CLEAR ALL REPORTS before they are sent to Democratic Services.*

**Finance Officer Clearance** (type in initials)..... FF .....

**Legal Officer Clearance** (type in initials).....TR.....

**[CORPORATE] DIRECTOR'S SIGNATURE** (electronic) 

To confirm that the Financial and Legal Implications have been considered and the Executive Member has cleared the report.