

Report to Cabinet

15 February 2023

Subject:	Asset transfer of The Bridge, Tipton to Murray Hall Community Trust
Cabinet Member:	Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Growth, Cllr Peter Hughes
Director:	Director of Regeneration and Growth Tony McGovern
Key Decision:	Yes
Contact Officer:	Stefan Hemming Strategic Lead – Assets and Land (Commercial) Stefan_hemming@sandwell.gov.uk Heather Chinner Strategic Policy Officer Heather_chinner@sandwell.gov.uk

1 Recommendations

- 1.1 That approval be given to the asset transfer of The Bridge, Tipton, to Murray Hall Community Trust on the basis of a full repairing lease for 99 years with a rental of £1 pa for the purpose of a multi purpose community facility and office space.
- 1.2 That the Director Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer be authorised to enter into or execute under seal if necessary, a formal lease for The Bridge Tipton.



2 Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.1 [Murray Hall Community Trust](#) (MHCT) is a well established anchor organisation, with a presence in Sandwell since 1994. They are locally-led and deeply rooted in the community. They have strong partnerships with the council and with other voluntary and community groups and take a community development approach to all aspects of their work (responding to service users views, enabling people to do more for themselves). They have already demonstrated their ability to attract capital funding and manage complex refurbishment projects in the initial phases of transformation of the building.

The asset transfer would enable MHCT to progress with confidence and source the finance required for the refurbishment the rest of the building.

- 2.2 MHCT took on the derelict building during 2013 and have since demonstrated vision and ambition, as well as an awareness of the risks involved and how to mitigate them. They currently lease the premises on a full repairing, rent free basis and the lease expires in October 2043. MHCT have submitted an application for an asset transfer on the basis of a 99 year full repairing rent free lease.

- 2.3 MHCT receive the following grants from the council:

£280,000 pa grant for Community Offer (Better Care Fund)
£85,642 pa grant for play activities (main programme voluntary sector support budget Go Play Programme)
£5,868 pa grant to run Brickhouse Centre (main programme community centre budget).

These grants are unrelated to the management of the building. MHCT will continue to use the rent saving to deliver services and will also continue to seek external grants to improve the facilities and develop new initiatives to meet local need and diversify their income.




- 2.4 The Council's Asset Management Strategy sets the strategic framework within which the property asset portfolio will be managed. It is intended to guide future decisions concerning the acquisition, use and disposal of property assets. It is intended to respond to the corporate planning process, providing property solutions that support each of the Council's service areas in the delivery of their service plans.




- 2.5 The proposed asset transfer accords with the principles set out in the strategy where Strategic Assets & Land will proactively lead discussions with community groups about the possibility of undertaking Community Asset Transfers. Transfers will be undertaken in accordance with the Council's policy on Community Asset Transfers. They will only happen if officers are satisfied that a clear sustainable plan is in place to maintain the asset and that further calls on the Council for support are unlikely.
- 2.6 The application has been considered by the council's Investing in the Voluntary and Community Sector Strategic Group. The group considered a detailed report about MHCT and agreed to support MHCT's application for asset transfer of the premises

A copy of the report is appended for information.

3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

	<p>The Best Start in Life for Children and Young People</p> <p>MHCT provide a very wide range of support for children and young people: Services and activities for young people with life limiting illnesses, the Starting Well Programme, autism support group.</p>
	<p>People Live Well and Age Well</p> <p>MHCT provide: Community Offer, parent support, mental health counselling, the Tipton food pantry and community garden.</p>
	<p>Strong Resilient Communities</p> <p>The Bridge acts as a hub for wellbeing activities and complements the provision at the nearby Glebefields Library, MHCT takes a community development approach to all aspects of its work and provides a wide range of opportunities to volunteer.</p>



	<h2>A Strong and Inclusive Economy</h2> <p>As a community anchor organisation, MHCT employ's many local people. They provide staff and volunteers with opportunities to develop their skills and knowledge and build their confidence. Many of their volunteers go onto paid employment including with MHCT.</p> <p>Attracting funding from external sources helps to support Sandwell's local economy.</p>
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4 Context and Key Issues

4.1 MHCT has a track record of responding to local needs with innovative solutions.

Examples include:

- Work with children includes providing access to physical play activities and social interactions to improve their own health and mental wellbeing and develop a healthy lifestyle.
- The Starting Well Programme delivered with 8 other community organisations, employing local people to build local capacity in the community. They provide support for pregnant women within ethnic minority communities to ensure they have timely access to healthcare and support to enable them to have a safe pregnancy and birth. They also provide access to family support, parenting course, and early language development support, to empower families and children to have the best start in life, to be safe and enable children to be school ready.
- Counselling and therapeutic programmes work with children, young people and adults.
- Volunteer transport, which enables people to access life -saving treatment .
- Building community capacity supported Tipton food bank to be set up as an independent charity, young stokes support groups to be established.
- Transition support for young people with life limiting illnesses.
- Working with 7 other community organisations to support people and their carers/families living with memory loss and dementia.
- Post pandemic established a community digital hub
- Employ many local people and provide staff and volunteers with opportunities to develop their skills and knowledge and build their



confidence. Many volunteers go onto paid employment including with MHCT.

4.2 Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, The Bridge was being used for a very wide range of activities:

- Cancer support group.
- Younger adults stroke support group.
- ITI (Inspire to Independence) group for young people with life limiting illnesses.
- Autism support group for parents.
- Arts and craft sessions.
- Individual counselling and therapy sessions for children and young (MHCT).
- Black Country Mental Health Trust for adult counselling sessions.
- Saturday day care provision for children and adults with learning disabilities- the space is hired to Multicare (community organisation) to deliver day care provision Black Country transition action group.
- Training events.
- Group therapy sessions.
- Contact centre.
- Food pantry (dedicated shop space with its own storeroom and waiting area).
- Coffee and chat opportunities.
- Community gardening.
- Community Christmas fayre.
- Art exhibition event.
- Community music lessons.
- Local choir events.
- Local support sessions i.e., benefit advice, debt advice, domestic violence support etc.

While some essential activities continued throughout the pandemic, such as the food pantry, other activities re-started back earlier in 2022. The building is also the main office base for Murray Hall Community Trust.



Refurbishment work done to date:

MHCT has already carried out a very significant refurbishment of parts of the building, investing over £1 million.

Hospice day care design of part of the ground floor, using Department of Health capital grant of £640,000 to provide a unique space for young people with life limiting/ threatening illnesses.

The first floor has been refurbished as office space using MHCT reserves (£125,000).

More recently part of the rear of the building was adapted to become a food pantry, opened in December 2020.

Future plans for the building:

- Establish a digital creative centre on the ground floor - £50,000 secured to date.
- Catering kitchen on the ground floor to complement the food pantry.
- Bring the derelict part of the building back into use. MHCT are submitting an expression of interest to the Government Community Ownership Fund round 2 with a view to securing some of the funding for this.

5 Alternative Options

- 5.1 Do nothing – MHCT has a 30 year rent free, full repairing voluntary body lease, expiring in 2043.

This would not signal to the wider voluntary and community sector that we value their contribution as partners and want to use asset transfer as a positive tool for enabling the development of enterprising and sustainable organisations with a long term stake in the area.

Furthermore, it would undermine the business case that MHCT need to develop in order to complete the refurbishment.



6 Implications

Resources:	<p>The current market rental is £34,000pa. MHCT have occupied the premises since 2013 on a rent free basis because of the work that they do.</p> <p>The building was a former health centre and MHCT have invested over £1 million in the building from a wide range of sources including a Department of Health grant of £640,000.</p>
Legal and Governance:	<p>Section 123 of the Local Government Act 1972 permits a principal Council to dispose of land in any way it wishes, except that it shall not (without the Secretary of State's consent) dispose of land for a consideration less than the best that can reasonably be obtained.</p> <p>The Secretary of State has issued a General Disposal Consent in 2003 (Circular 06/03) which states that specific consent is not required for the disposal of any interest in land which the authority considers will help it to secure the promotion or improvement of the economic, social or environmental well-being of its area. Where applicable, authorities should also have regard to their community strategy. Any disposal must not have an undervalue of more than £2M</p> <p>Section 5 of the council's policy on Land and Premises for the Voluntary and Community Sector (2012) sets out the council's approach will usually be through a 99 year lease at a reduced rental.</p>
Risk:	<p>MHCT has a proven track record in securing significant funding for capital and revenue projects. They understand the costs of running the building and its income generating potential. When they took on the derelict building prior to 2014 they demonstrated vision and ambition, as well as an awareness of the risks involved and how to mitigate them. They will continue to plan a phased approach to completion of the refurbishment.</p>
Equality:	<p>A particular focus of the work of MHCT is support for people with disability.</p>



Health and Wellbeing:	Many of the services provided by MHCT improve the health and wellbeing of vulnerable residents – from counselling and therapy sessions to the food pantry for people on low incomes.
Social Value:	As a community anchor organisation, MHCT employ's many local people. They provide staff and volunteers with opportunities to develop their skills and knowledge and build their confidence. Many of their volunteers go onto paid employment including with MHCT. Attracting funding from external sources helps to support Sandwell's local economy.
Climate Change:	MHCT is committed to being part of the solution for a cleaner environment. In relation to The Bridge building they are aiming to work towards a cleaner energy source and reducing their carbon emissions and they made the extra investment when renewing the flat roof to include insulation. MHCT's plans for the future will involve some radical changes and serious investment. They intend to seek professional support to help them to achieve this.

7. Appendices

- MHCT's application form for an asset transfer lease 17th December 2021;
- Investing in the Voluntary and Community Sector Strategic Group report;
- Location plan.

8. Background Papers

List source/background documents

