

# Report

Report to:	<b>Executive Committee</b>
Date of Meeting:	<b>21 February 2024</b>
Report by:	<b>Executive Director (Housing and Technical Resources)</b>

Subject:	<b>Former Larkfield Hall and Stonefield Road Pitches, Blantyre – Community Asset Transfer to Blantyre Soccer Academy</b>
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## 1. Purpose of Report

1.1. The purpose of the report is to:-

- ◆ advise of a request for Community Asset Transfer of the former Larkfield Hall and Stonefield Road pitches, Blantyre
- ◆ seek approval to the sale to Blantyre Soccer Academy

## 2. Recommendation(s)

2.1. The Committee is asked to approve the following recommendation(s):-

- (1) that the sale of the former Larkfield Hall and Stonefield Road pitches, Blantyre, to Blantyre Soccer Academy, subject to the terms and conditions set out in section 5 of this report, be approved; and
- (2) that the Executive Director (Housing and Technical Resources), in conjunction with the Head of Administration and Legal Services, be authorised to conclude all matters in respect of the sale and enter into the necessary legal agreements on terms which are in the best interests of the Council.

## 3. Background

- 3.1. In 2019 and 2021, the Council transferred ownership of the former Rowan Hall and then the adjoining open space to Blantyre Soccer Academy, from which they now operate a community hub and garden.
- 3.2. Blantyre Soccer Academy are seeking to expand their activity and to create a home base for their community football club and develop a synthetic pitch to accommodate both training and competitive matches.
- 3.3. The organisation's application for the sports facility at Jock Stein, Hillhouse, Hamilton was unsuccessful in 2021 and a fresh approach has been made to the Council under the terms of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 for purchase of the former Larkfield Hall and adjoining Stonefield Road pitches.
- 3.4. The validation date for the request was 22 September 2023. In addition to placing the application and supporting documentation on the Council's Planning Portal, notices were placed on the property advising that the Council was considering an asset transfer. The closing date for responses was 19 October 2023 at which time 479 representations were received, all of which were in support of the proposal.

3.5. The request was placed before the Community Asset Transfer Assessment Panel on 4 and 12 December 2023 when the following matters were taken into consideration.

3.6. Property

3.6.1. The land requested, as shown on the attached plan, is the former Larkfield Hall and the adjoining pitches at Stonefield Road, Blantyre.

3.6.2. The hall and pitches are owned by the Council and not operationally required, with the hall having closed several years ago and the pitches rarely used for sport. The costs associated with the vacant hall are circa £5,000 per annum and it is estimated that around £30,000 is required for immediate repairs. Subject to the proposed disposal, Blantyre Soccer Academy will have full responsibility for all maintenance costs for all land and buildings within the boundary from the date of entry.

3.6.3. Whilst the hall and the pitches are potentially marketable, the pitches are formed on the site of a former bing, and it is anticipated that any development of the site would be constrained by ground conditions (refer to section 4.6).

3.6.4. Planning and Building Standards have indicated that planning consent will be required for change for some aspects of the proposed refurbishment of the pitches.

3.6.5. The Council and Blantyre Soccer Academy have jointly appointed the District Valuer to place a value on the property, with both parties sharing the fee. The District Valuer has placed a value of £95,000 on the property, reflecting current use as the land is categorised as Green Network and Priority Greenspace in the SLC Local Development Plan 2 and would not be supported for residential development.

3.7. Organisation

3.7.1. Blantyre Soccer Academy is a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation (SCIO), Scottish Charity No. SCO43613, and has been established since 2014.

3.7.2. The organisation has an established board of trustees, more than the required 20 members, 3 employees who carry out the day-to-day management of the organisation and circa 75 accredited team coaches. They currently operate 25 teams with young people from the age of 10 up to 20 being supported. Their competitive teams include both female and disabled teams.

3.7.3. The objectives of the organisation are:-

- ◆ to advance public participation in amateur sport of football by promoting the game of football through the provision of recreational facilities and activities and improve the fitness and health of the persons for whom the facilities/activities are primarily intended
- ◆ to advance community development by providing a safe environment to encourage and promote the development of football, health, self-esteem, health and friendship within the community of Blantyre and its environs
- ◆ to provide facilities and equipment and it will be available to anyone irrespective of race, colour, religion, sex, sexuality or disabilities, promoting a respect for diversity and encourage people to take pride in themselves and their team mates through the game of football

3.7.4. The organisation has experience in managing property, has been successful in obtaining funding and delivering a range of community-based projects that go beyond

football such as a community hub and garden, community laundry and Blantyre Bikes Better.

3.7.5. The organisation is financially stable and the latest accounts show unrestricted funds in excess of £100,000.

### 3.8. Project

3.8.1. The proposal is to transfer the ownership of the hall and pitches through outright sale and thereafter Blantyre Soccer Academy will reopen the hall for local community use and upgrade the pitch to synthetic level to accommodate both training and competitive matches. There are also proposals to create a five a side pitch and changing facilities.

3.8.2. The cost of the initial pitch upgrade is estimated at £1.029 million. Blantyre Soccer Academy are in discussions with a number of funders and to date have secured an offer of £700,000 towards this investment from the Scottish FA, as part of the Grassroots Football Facilities Fund provided by Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport.

3.8.3. The business model is based upon the pitches generating the majority of the regular income and the hall being managed on a “break even” basis.

3.8.4. Consideration has been given to the potential consequences for SLLC arising from Blantyre Soccer Academy reducing its lets of other facilities. Whilst there may be a short-term interruption to income, it is believed that there is sufficient demand from other organisations to take up the released availability.

## 4. **Assessment**

4.1. The property is suitable for the proposed use and whilst the hall could potentially be sold on the open market, demand is most likely to be restricted to the immediate locality. The proposal delivers around £1 million of investment in local facilities and the reopening of the hall for community use.

4.2. The organisation is well established and has capacity. Blantyre Soccer Academy has a track record of securing funding and delivering projects. Whilst this is the largest scale project undertaken, the risk of failure is considered low.

4.3. The Community Benefit has been assessed at a score of 120 which would equate to 86% discount on market value. The request is to purchase at £1, however, Blantyre Soccer Academy are aware that, if the asset transfer is approved, the Council expects a capital receipt.

4.4. Whilst the request is for ownership of a large area of land, the continued use of the area for community activity is protected by its status as priority greenspace in the current development plan, the context of the latest planning policies such as the recent NPF4 and the fact that if Blantyre Soccer Academy were to propose to develop the site for alternative purposes, they would require to repay grant funding that they receive through the SFA. The Grassroots Football Facilities Fund grant conditions last for 25 years.

4.5. Therefore, it is considered highly unlikely that consent to redevelop the site for residential purposes would be permitted in the foreseeable future. To mitigate any remaining risk, the sale should be conditional upon planning consent being granted for the project and evidence of the funding package prior to settlement.

- 4.6. Whilst no intrusive site investigations have taken place, a previous Desktop study of the ground conditions based on a search of available published information noted that the site is part of a former colliery and the potential for contamination on the site from its historic use was regarded as High. The ground, which is raised from road level, is made ground of soft clay and silt with stronger clay at a depth of 5 metres while rock is believed to be at considerable depth. It is, therefore, anticipated that complex foundation solutions would be required for any development. In light of these factors, it is considered that the viability of development of the site would be very challenging.
- 4.7 The statutory guidance on asset transfer highlights that condition can be imposed to return any increase in value to the authority where the price was based on a lower valuation for a particular use, if the use of the property is changed. It is recommended, therefore, that a condition of this nature is included in the sale.

## **5. Proposal**

- 5.1. It is proposed to dispose of the former Larkfield Hall and Stonefield Road pitches along with all future maintenance responsibilities, as shown on the attached plan, to Blantyre Soccer Academy, on the following principal terms and conditions;
1. The purchase price £13,300 i.e.14% of District Valuers valuation (exclusive of VAT)
  2. The sale to be conditional upon
    - a. Planning consent for the pitch upgrade
    - b. Evidence of the availability of funding to deliver the pitch upgrade, including a robust strategy for the financial gap between the Grant and the projected cost.
    - c. Protection in the title for the value of any change of use
  3. The date of entry to be mutually agreed
  4. Each party to bear their own legal fees and expenses

## **6. Employee Implications**

- 6.1. There are no employee implications.

## **7. Financial Implications**

- 7.1. The proposed asset transfer removes the future liability for the maintenance of the hall, currently estimated at £5,000 per annum.
- 7.2. Although the disposal is at less than the assessment of market value, there is no guarantee of a purchaser for the hall and pitches should it be placed on the open market.
- 7.3. The proposed asset transfer will deliver circa £1 million of investment in the community facilities.

## **8. Climate Change, Sustainability and Environmental Implications**

- 8.1. There are no implications for climate change, sustainability or the environment in terms of the information contained within the report.

## **9. Other Implications**

- 9.1 The proposal will see a reduction in the requirement for Blantyre Soccer Academy to book other facilities and consideration has been given to the potential impact on SLLC income resulting from the loss of these bookings. Whilst there may be a temporary interruption of income, SLLC are confident that other local clubs will take up the opportunity for additional bookings and, therefore, the proposal has minimal long term impact.

- 9.2. In terms of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015, the Council has until 22 March 2024 to provide a notice of its decision whether to agree to or refuse the asset transfer request.
- 9.3. The organisation has a right to appeal to Scottish Ministers should a decision not be made in that timescale or the asset transfer request be refused or they consider any condition imposed to be disproportionate.
- 10. Equality Impact Assessment and Consultation Arrangements**
- 10.1 Consultation has taken place with the SLLC, Land Services, Planning, Legal, and Finance Services as well as having been published for public consultation.
- 10.2. This report does not introduce a new policy, function or strategy or recommend a change to an existing policy, function or strategy and, therefore, no impact assessment is required.

**Stephen Gibson**  
**Executive Director (Housing and Technical Resources)**

8 February 2024

**Link(s) to Council Values/Priorities /Outcomes**

- ◆ Accountable, effective, efficient and transparent
- ◆ Focused on people and their needs
- ◆ Working with and respecting others

**Previous References**

- ◆ None

**List of Background Papers**

- ◆ CAT reference CAT/23/0009

**Contact for Further Information**

If you would like to inspect the background papers or want further information, please contact:-

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