
Report for Charitable Trustee Committee

Decision Maker:	Charitable Trustee Committee
Portfolio Holder:	Cllr Arooj Shah, Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Reform and Regeneration
Date of Decision:	23rd February 2026
Subject:	Northern Roots - charitable land Plot 8.
Officer Contact:	Matthew Bulmer, Project Director Northern Roots and Sports Town
Report Author:	Chris Lewis, AD Creating a Better Place
Ward(s) Affected:	Alexandra

Reason for Report

Officers are seeking the consent from the Charitable Trust Committee (“CTC”) for authorisation to:

Delegate to Council the process of approving works for the Play Area on Plot 8 as part of the Northern Roots Project.

Request and Recommendations

It is recommended that the CTC:

1. Delegate to Council the process of approving works for the installation of a Play Area on Plot 8 as part of the Northern Roots Project.

1 Background

- 1.1 The Council owns approximately 100 acres of green space at Snipe Clough, known as ‘Northern Roots’ (“Project Site”) and the intention is for the Council working with the Northern Roots charity to regenerate the site for the benefit of people by improving their health, wellbeing and livelihoods by means of creating opportunities for learning, leisure and growing. The Northern Roots project (“the Project”) is a scheme with an ambition to develop the UK’s largest urban farm and eco-park at the Project Site, which is in the heart of Oldham. The Project presents a significant opportunity to further develop and establish Oldham as a green and growing town for the benefit of its residents.

2 Current Project Position

- 2.1 Work is well underway on the construction of the Visitor Centre and Forestry Hub on the land adjoining Plot 8 with works expected to be complete in the summer of 2026. To enhance the experience for residents and visitors the Council and Northern Roots have designed and are now in a position to approve works for a Play area at the front of the Visitor Centre which would be located on Plot 8 (see Appendix one).
- 2.2 The Northern Roots scheme has various components being delivered to realise its Vision. A key element of the offer to both local communities, Oldham residents and visitors from outside Oldham is the creation of a play area in front of the Visitor Centre. The play area will create a reason for families to regularly visit and increase dwell time and is considered to be in line with the charitable objectives which are set out in paragraph 2.11 below. Planning permission has already been secured for the play area.

The play area will enable the following objectives to be realised:

Destination Play

- An exciting destination play offer that will attract families and keep them coming back.
- Varied play type provision with challenge for all ages and abilities, including teenagers, children in wheelchairs, and neurodiverse children, who are often excluded by conventional play areas.

Natural Connections

- Landscape led design that encourages connections between children and the natural environment and engaging them through play.
- Natural material palette and playful landscape design.

Adventure and Challenge

- Encouraging children to challenge themselves, both physically and mentally. Maximum “play value”, stimulating all five senses.

Playing Together

- Making new friends - encouraging children of diverse backgrounds and abilities to play together, strengthening social connections and a sense of community.

The Visitor Centre Play area includes 3 zones:

- In the foreground an area designed for younger children and those with special needs, including wheelchair accessible see-saw.
- In the background a climbing forest, whirlwind and swing scales, which will provide challenge for older children and teens.
- To the left an area of water play, also wheelchair accessible. Very unusual in the UK and always a hit with all ages, including the grown-ups.

Plot 8

- 2.3 ‘Plot 8’, Lees Recreation Ground was gifted on the 21st February 1911 to the Corporation to use the ground exclusively for the Municipal School in Greengate Street Oldham or for any additional secondary school or schools of a like character. The Charity Commission made an Order on the 26th May 1911 that the land be used exclusively for any secondary or other school or schools, the whole of the endowment to be applied to, educational purposes. An amendment followed on the 3rd June 1938 that they would use the recreation ground for the said elementary and secondary schools or any other school or schools.
- 2.4 In respect to Plot 8, the CTC obtained a Scheme on 10 November 2020 from the Charity Commission to amend the objects of the charitable trusts relating to Plot 8 as follows:

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- “to promote for the benefit of the inhabitants of in the borough of Oldham and the surrounding area the provision of facilities for recreation or other leisure time occupation of individuals who have need of such facilities by reason of their youth, age, infirmity or disablement, financial hardship or social and economic circumstances or for the public at large in the interests of social welfare and with the object of improving the condition of life of the said inhabitants”

2.5 The Council considers the creation of a play area for use by the public and community within the area of plot 8 immediately outside the visitor centre building will enhance the use for recreational purposes.

3.0 Options

3.1 There are two options as follows.

Option 1 (Recommended)

- Agree to recommendations 1 and delegate to Council the process of approving works for the installation of the previously agreed Play Area on Plot 8 as part of the Northern Roots Project.

Option 2

- Not to agree with the recommendations. If the CTC does not agree to the recommendation, the play area scheme will not be delivered.

4 Consultation

4.1 A great deal of community consultation and engagement has been undertaken by the Northern Roots charity (“the NR Charity”). A hybrid planning application FUL/348898/22 has followed and approved for a number of initiatives including:

- Community allotment
- Visitor Centre
- Events Building with meeting pods.
- Learning Centre
- Forestry Depot and Workshops
- Ground Mounted Solar PV array.
- Cycling and pedestrian access improvements

5 Financial Implications

5.1 Dependent on the terms of the lease, any rental income from the lease to Northern Roots will be income to the charitable trust and will need to be spent in line with the charitable objectives of the trust. The Council will be required to account for any income and expenditure in relation to the trust to the Charitable Trust Committee and Charity Commission.

(James Postle)

6 Legal Services Comments

6.1 The charitable trust terms require the Charitable Trust Committee to promote Plot 8 for the benefit of the inhabitants of in the borough of Oldham and the surrounding area the provision of facilities for recreation or other leisure time occupation of individuals who have need of such facilities by reason of their youth, age, infirmity or disablement, financial hardship or social and economic circumstances or for the public at large in the

interests of social welfare and with the object of improving the condition of life of the said inhabitants.

- 6.2 The Trustees must be satisfied that the proposed use as a play area once the works are carried out will not interfere with the charitable objects and that the benefit of those works outweigh the interruption to the public whilst the works are being carried out.
- 6.3 The Trustees may wish to take independent legal advice if they consider that the recommendation is not in accordance with the charitable objectives.

(Rebecca Butterworth)

7. **Procurement Implications**

- 7.1 There are no known procurement implications for the use and transfer of land.
- 7.2 The body of the report discusses future work requirements for the Plot 8 Play Area. Any such work carried out should be in line with the Council's Contract Procedure Rules (CPRs). If this is a new sourcing requirement then rule 4.1 should be followed - where an existing contract, framework or in-house service is available to meet the Council's specific procurement requirements and offers value for money it should be used unless there is particular circumstances which justify an alternative route to market.
- 7.3 If Rule 4.1 does not apply for sourcing these works, the Council must comply with the procurement threshold table covered under rule 4.3 of the CPRs. This sets out the required procedure for different Contract Values, the minimum number of offers that must be invited, and how invitations to submit offers must be publicised.
- 7.4 The report states work is well underway on the construction of the Visitor Centre and Forestry Hub on the land adjoining Plot 8. Assuming the continuation of these works onto Plot 8 with the current supplier then CPR's Rule 17 – Modifications to the existing contract will need to be considered. (Darren Judge)

8 **Estates Implications**

- 8.1 This report sets out the details around the creation and installation of equipment to form the play area on Plot 8, as part of the wider Northern Roots Project. The play area will be open to the public for recreation and leisure use. At this time, it is anticipated that the play area will be operated and maintained by the Council. Should in the future, there be a desire to lease the play area to a third party, then a further report will be brought forward for consideration by the Committee.

(Alison Evans – Corporate Estates Manager)

9. **Oldham Equality Impact Assessment including Implications for Children and Young People Completed?**

- 9.1 Yes for the Northern Roots project – Appendix 2

10 **Key Decision**

- 10.1 No

11 **Key Decision Reference**

- 11.1 N/A

12 **Background Papers**

12.1 None

13 **Appendices**

Appendix 1 – Map of Norther Roots

Appendix 2 - Equalities Impact Assessment

Appendix 3 - Northern Roots Charitable Objectives

FOR THE PUBLIC BENEFIT, AND IN PARTICULAR, FOR THE BENEFIT OF THE INHABITANTS AND OF VISITORS TO THE BOROUGH OF OLDHAM (OLDHAM) AND THE SURROUNDING AREAS TO:

(A) PROVIDE OR ASSIST IN THE PROVISION OF FACILITIES FOR RECREATION OR OTHER LEISURE TIME OCCUPATION IN THE INTERESTS OF SOCIAL WELFARE AND WITH THE OBJECT OF IMPROVING THE CONDITIONS OF LIFE FOR THE INHABITANTS OF OLDHAM AND THE SURROUNDING AREAS, INCLUDING BY THE PROVISION, MAINTAINANCE, PROTECTION, IMPROVEMENT AND EQUIPPING OF THE GARDENS, LANDSCAPED AREAS, WOODLANDS, OPEN SPACES, PLAYING FIELDS AND RECREATIONAL AMENITY SPACES WITHIN THE NORTHERN ROOTS SITE OR OPERATING UNDER THE NORTHERN ROOTS BRAND, AND BY THE PROVISION OF ALLOTMENT FACILITIES;

(B) ADVANCE HEALTH BY PROMOTING PARTICIPATION IN HEALTHY OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES INCLUDING HORTICULTURE AND AGRICULTURE AND OTHER LAND BASED ACTIVITIES AND RECREATION AND AMATEUR SPORT.

(C) PROMOTE AND ENCOURAGE THE ARTS, IN PARTICULAR WITHIN THE PUBLIC PARKS AND OPEN SPACES, AND

(D) ANCILLARY TO THE ABOVE OBJECTS, TO ADVANCE EDUCATION IN PARTICULAR IN: (I) THE CONSERVATION, PROTECTION AND IMPROVEMENT OF THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT INCLUDING THE FLORA AND FAUNA, WILDLIFE, BIODIVERSITY AND NATURAL HABITATS IN OLDHAM AND THE SURROUNDING AREAS; (II) THE CONDUCT OF HORTICULTURE, AGRICULTURE AND OTHER LAND BASED BUSINESSES (III) THE HISTORY, CULTURE, HERITAGE AND TRADITIONS OF THE NORTH WEST.