

Committee Name and Date of Committee Meeting

Cabinet – 15 September 2025

Report Title

Investment in Community Facilities

Is this a Key Decision and has it been included on the Forward Plan?

No, but it has been included on the Forward Plan

Strategic Director Approving Submission of the Report

Judith Badger, Strategic Director of Finance and Customer Services

Report Author(s)

Kevin Fisher, Assistant Director Property and Facilities Services

kevin.fisher@rotherham.gov.uk

Ward(s) Affected

Borough-Wide

Report Summary

The report sets out the Council's commitment to invest in several community buildings, initially over the next two years, through the investment of £600,000, already approved as part of the Budget and Council Tax report at Council in March 2025.

The £600,000 investment will be targeted at buildings with the greatest need, with a focus on health, safety, compliance, and structural integrity. Officers from Property and Facilities Services, in collaboration with the Council's Neighbourhood Teams and community groups, will define the scope of works and ensure that any investment is aligned with sustainable occupancy and governance arrangements.

Where possible, other forms of funding, whether internal or external, will be sought to complement the already allocated £600,000.

Officers request delegated authority to progress the programme, including procurement, contract award, and lease negotiations. Community engagement will be embedded throughout the process to ensure that improvements reflect local needs and priorities.

Recommendations

That Cabinet:

1. Approve the works set out in section 1.7 in relation to:
 - (a) The Black Hut;
 - (b) Oaklea Retreat;
 - (c) Clifton Learning Centre;
 - (d) The Meeting Place (Wingfield); and
 - (e) Artworks, Brook Hill
2. Delegate authority to the Assistant Director for Property and Facilities Services in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Finance and Community Safety to amend the works as required within budget.

List of Appendices Included

Appendix 1 Budget and Council Tax 2025/26 and Medium-Term Financial Strategy - Extract from Appendix 3B Capital Investment Proposals (Investment in Community Facilities)

Appendix 2 Equality Initial Equality Screening Assessment

Appendix 3 Climate Impact Assessment – Investing in our Community Facilities

Consideration by any other Council Committee, Scrutiny or Advisory Panel

No

Council Approval Required

No

Exempt from the Press and Public

No

Investing in Community Facilities

1. Background

- 1.1 The Council currently owns several community facilities across the Borough that are either operated by Council teams or operated by the Third Sector. These facilities support a range of community activities which include, but are not limited to, youth clubs, healthy eating clubs, community meetings, sports and recreation activities for various groups, centres for adults with learning disabilities and Autism, Friends Groups and Local History Groups.
- 1.2 Through working with the Council's Neighbourhood Teams, it has been advised that demand in the use of these facilities has grown over the last few years, specifically after the Covid-19 pandemic, and this is having an impact on the general wear and tear of the buildings beyond that of their anticipated lifespan.
- 1.3 Where a community group are leasing and running the facilities, they are often working to identify 3rd party funding to continue to keep the buildings in a manageable state so that they continue to support a wide range of activities in support of the communities in which they are based.
- 1.4 Funding has been more challenging to come by, and the growing demand has now left some of these facilities in need of investment to ensure they continue to support the delivery of those activities listed in 1.1.
- 1.5 As part of the Budget and Council Tax Report 2025/26 approval was given to provide capital funding of up to £600,000 to invest in community facilities across the Borough to ensure that they remain open, safe and sustainable for the future. Future investment beyond this will be identified through the Council's future condition surveys and as part of the Council's move to be more planned and less reactive in lifecycle planning with its assets.
- 1.6 Although some current work has been carried out in assessing one of the community facilities, The Black Hut, further work is required to survey a further four buildings, as a priority, that are already in use but have been indicated to require investment. Next stages will be to carry out detailed surveys on these to determine scope and then priority.

2. Key Issues

- 2.1 There are several community facilities across the Borough, that are heavily used but are in need investment to bring them up to a good standard, in terms of compliance, sustainability and ability to support a range of community activities and events.
- 2.2 Some community groups who manage the facilities have diminished over the years, and whilst there are a large number of volunteers, the understanding of roles and responsibilities in managing some buildings has lessened. There is now a need to address this, strengthening governance and the understanding of roles and responsibilities. This will be further

supported with regards to embedding new leases and management agreements as part of the Council investment.

2.3 The investment of £600,000 is based on a programme spanning two years. Although several buildings have been identified, more in depth due diligence and scoping of works will be required. Where there is a significant compliance or structural risk, this will always be prioritised and could lead to no additional buildings being invested in over the period.

2.4 The following are the community facilities that have been identified jointly by Property & Facilities Services and the Neighbourhood Teams:

2.4.1 **The Black Hut** – The Black Hut was closed in May 2024 following a series of health and safety inspections that identified significant compliance failures. These included structural concerns, accessibility issues, and the absence of a formal lease or maintenance records. The closure was executed swiftly to protect users, with alternative venues arranged for displaced groups. The building had been a well-used community asset, hosting a range of activities including youth clubs, martial arts, Slimming World, and local meetings. Its closure prompted media interest and local concerns but was closed in the short term to protect the users. Alternative spaces were found for the activities on a temporary basis, but there is a need to replace these back at The Black Hut.

Initial survey assessments indicated that £160,000 would be required, subject to invasive surveys being undertaken. Those surveys are now completed with more definite costs of £200,000 estimated from the approved £600,000, noting that some roof spaces were not accessible due to structure issues.

Works identified include:

- Structural repairs and compliance upgrades, including work to floors, roof and rafter repairs, electrical rewire, and work to external walls that have failed and are impacting on the roof structure and are allowing vermin and water ingress.
- Accessibility improvements (DDA compliance).
- Energy efficiency measures (e.g., LED lighting, insulation).

Surveys are now complete, and final scope has been provided, work is being assessed for the best route to market with a view of starting prior to the end of Autumn 2025 with a completion date of March 2026.

The aim is to reopen the facility under a sustainable management model, ensuring it continues to serve the Kimberworth Park community safely and effectively.

2.4.2 **Oaklea Retreat** – Oaklea Retreat was previously earmarked for closure in 2018/19, but in 2020 underwent a £10,000 transformation due to a partnership between the Council's Housing Service and local businesses.

At that time, many of the upgrades were in relation to heating and associated equipment, floor coverings, chairs and furniture. The initiative

was supported by local councillors, who saw the building as a valuable community asset. Oaklea Retreat has a history of hosting a diverse range of activities, welcoming people from across the community to participate in everything from parent and toddler gatherings to creative workshops and social events.

The building has had a high-level survey and will be formally surveyed and then scoped over the summer period. Costs identified for the works will be determined once surveys are completed and within the window of the funding allocated for the overall project. Initially the works that have been identified are:

- Structural repairs to roof area, including guttering and drainage systems.
- Accessibility improvements (DDA compliance).
- Energy efficiency measures (e.g., LED lighting, insulation).
- Establishing a formal lease and governance structure.

As the works are not as significant as the Black Hut, it is envisaged that work will be procured and commissioned over the winter months and completed through spring, no later than the end of March 2026.

2.4.3 Clifton Learning Partnership – Work will be undertaken to provide replacement windows, signage and decorations, repairs paths and carparking areas, and carry out improvements to access to ensure DDA (Equality Act) compliance.

Clifton Learning Partnership is a well-established community-based charity that supports several established communities in Eastwood and across Rotherham. In addition, its reach extends to Roma communities, EU citizens, asylum seekers, and refugees throughout the Borough.

The Partnership runs a vibrant Universal Youth Work Programme, offering open access youth sessions four times per week, activities for age groups 8–10, 10–13, and 14+, outdoor play and gym equipment and enrichment sessions with external providers (e.g. art, music, boxing)

In addition, they facilitate and support activities such as advice and support for families and individuals, Eastwood Pantry – a community food initiative and are currently supporting community engagement projects linked to Rotherham’s Children’s Capital of Culture.

The works to Clifton are currently programmed for the next phase from March 2026 onwards. Detailed surveys will be carried out over Winter and into early Spring. Once completed this will determine a more accurate timescale to carry out the works identified. Again, costs of the works will be determined once surveys are complete and will fall within the budget allocation for the overall project.

Works identified for the Partnership are:

- Structural repairs to the roof area, including guttering and drainage systems.
- Windows (replacement) and work to lintels and surrounds.

- Accessibility improvements (DDA compliance) to pathways around the site, increasing access and inclusivity for a wider range of participants.
- Energy efficiency measures (e.g., LED lighting, insulation).
- Establishing a formal lease and governance structure.

2.4.4 The Meeting Place – The Meeting Place is a community run drop-in facility that provides a safe, inclusive, and welcoming environment for adults with learning disabilities and difficulties. It serves as a vital social hub for individuals who may otherwise be isolated or lack access to structured support.

They offer regular drop-in sessions to provide advice and support on several financial, health and welfare matters, provide affordable meals and drinks to vulnerable persons, and organise several social events such as supported holidays, discos and day trips.

They play a key role in being a first point of contact for individuals with limited social networks, building long term relationships with families and users and provide continuity of care and emotional support during life challenges. The Meeting Place operate as a social enterprise, reinvesting profits back into the service and community.

Aligned with the Clifton Learning Partnership, the buildings and surrounding assets will need a full survey to determine costs and timescales. Works will align with the surveys being carried out beyond March 2026 and works completed no later than March 2027.

Works will include, as a minimum:

- Painting and decoration.
- Signage upgrades.
- Energy efficiency measures (e.g. LED lighting, insulation).
- Establishing a formal lease and governance structure.

2.4.5 Artworks, Brook Hill – Artworks is a not-for-profit creative arts organisation that operates across Rotherham and Sheffield. The Brook Hill site is one of its key locations, offering a vibrant and inclusive space for adults with learning disabilities and autism to explore their creativity, build life skills, and engage with the wider community.

They offer a wide range of creative and life-enriching activities including workshops in screen printing, sculpture, photography, textiles, animation, drama, and dance. In addition to creative arts, the centre supports life skills development through cooking, fitness sessions, and social outings. Participants also benefit from volunteer placements with organisations such as Sheffield DocFest and Wentworth Woodhouse and regularly showcase their work through exhibitions and collaborations with local cultural venues including Clifton Park Museum, Site Gallery and The Millennium Gallery.

The proposed investment at the Brook Hill site will include essential external improvements, including rainwater goods, soundproofing, and energy efficiency upgrades such as insulation and lighting.

- External structural Improvements to the building.
- Soundproofing to support activities and compliance with planning requirements.
- Energy efficiency measures (e.g., LED lighting, insulation).
- Establishing a formal lease and governance structure.

These enhancements will ensure the building remains safe, accessible, and welcoming for its users. Strategically, the investment aligns with Rotherham Council's priorities around inclusion, wellbeing, and sustainability. It reinforces the Borough's commitment to supporting vulnerable adults through creative engagement, while also contributing to Net Zero goals and strengthening the local voluntary and community sector.

A more detailed survey will take place in Spring 2026, developing the scope and a final list of works required. All works will then be completed no later than the end of March 2027.

- 2.5 All schemes will include energy improvements that will support the Council's Carbon Net Zero targets, through the provision of LED lighting and roof and wall insulation amongst broader provision, such as Solar or Air Source Heat Pumps. Where required, the Councils current Decarbonation Capital Budget will be used, or external funding will be identified and applied for through other Net Zero/Climate/Energy related schemes, such as Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme (PSDS).
- 2.6 As part of the work and investment the Council will look to ensure formal lease arrangements are in place, alongside good governance and management of the building. This will ensure that once the investment is completed, the building will continue to be managed effectively for all users.
- 2.7 The project will deliver against several outcomes including specific ward priorities, advised through the work undertaken by the Councils Neighbourhood Teams in supporting and setting Ward Priorities with Elected Members:
- *Improvements to community facilities and expansion of activities for local residents.*
 - *Addressing Environmental Issues and Making Good Use of Green Spaces/Community Assets for Everyone.*
 - *Support Opportunities for Bringing People Together.*
 - *Enhancing Community Spirit and Support the Communities and its Groups to Thrive.*
 - *Supporting your community.*
 - *Improve facilities for young people and their quality of life.*
 - *Improving the environment and enhancing community facilities.*
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- 2.8 By improving the community facilities, it will ensure that the buildings are fit for purpose and compliant as well as delivering key services to residents across the Borough. The planned work will also include a series of Net Zero improvements which will assist the Council in meeting its Net Zero targets.
- 2.9 Whilst work is focused on the initial buildings, condition surveys will be carried out on the wider estate, which will include other community facilities. The aim will be to plan future investment in a range of buildings. A more formal “Lifecycle” plan will be produced over 2026/27, and consideration will be given to further investment in community facilities.
- 2.10 Energy or NetZero surveys will be carried on all the community facilities and, where possible, buildings will be put forward for a range of energy or NetZero improvements. This will aid the Council in meeting its commitment to achieve NetZero by 2030/2040. Energy and Climate Officers will also look to meet and support community groups and provide advice on Energy Management and identify any funding which they may be eligible to apply directly for.

3. Options considered and recommended proposal

- 3.1 Consideration was given not to invest in community facilities, but the impact of this would be significant. The impact would be across all users but would also impact on some of the Borough's most vulnerable people in local communities, as well as reducing the ability for individuals and groups to meet and engage with a range of support services.
- 3.2 The Council has a duty to ensure that its buildings are safe and compliant, whether this is directly, such as Operational Buildings, or those leased, even where the responsibility lies with the tenants. With the latter the Council should audit and inspect and ensure that there are adequate regimes in place to ensure safety and compliance. In all cases the structure of the building, would always fall to the Council to maintain and manage, ensuring the asset is fit for purpose and at a lettable state.
- 3.3
1. Approve the works set out in section 1.7 in relation to:
 - (a) The Black Hut;
 - (b) Oaklea Retreat;
 - (c) Clifton Learning Centre;
 - (d) The Meeting Place (Wingfield); and
 - (e) Artworks, Brook Hill
 2. Delegate authority to the AD Property and Facilities Services in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Finance and Community Safety to amend the works as required within budget.

4. Consultation on proposal

- 4.1 Consultation has taken place with the Council's Neighbourhood Teams as well as some community groups. Consultation will be ongoing throughout the programme of works and will assist in defining final scope of works.

- 4.2 Consultation has taken place with some Elected Members, but this will now extend to all Elected Members where a community facility is located.

5. Timetable and Accountability for Implementing this Decision

- 5.1 The timetable for investing in the Council's community facilities is currently being finalised, and will be better advised once all due diligence, scoping and any procurements are carried out. At this stage the estimated timetable is as follows:

- **The Black Hut and Oaklea Retreat** – scoping of works through the Autumn of 2025, works to be completed no later than the end of March 2026.
- **Clifton Learning Centre, The Meeting Place and Artworks** – Detailed surveys and scoping of works to be completed from March 2026 and works to be completed no later than the end of March 2027.

- 5.2 Through the commissioning of surveys across the Council estate, other buildings may be identified and prioritised, if a significant compliance or structural matter comes to light.

6. Financial and Procurement Advice and Implications

- 6.1 As part of the 2025/26 Budget, a capital investment for £600,000 was approved for investment in community facilities. This investment will fund schemes at the properties detailed in this report and further properties should the budget allow it, once additional reviews have been completed. For any buildings that are leased, once works are complete, tenants will manage the buildings at their own cost, on a formal full insuring and repairing lease. For Council operated buildings, costs are likely to decrease as a result of net zero measures, for example, through decreased utility costs.
- 6.2 The buildings identified (community buildings) are either owned and operated by the Council or leased out to charity or community groups. In both cases there is no rental income generated.
- 6.3 Once completed, the buildings that are leased will require the tenants to continue to maintain and manage those buildings at their own cost. Where those buildings are operated by the Council, the operating costs will not increase but are likely to reduce where Net Zero Measures are completed.
- 6.4 Where there is a requirement to engage third party Contractors to deliver the works required, these must be procured in accordance with relevant legislation; either the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 or the Procurement Act 2023 (dependent on the route to market selected) as well as the Council's own Financial and Procurement Procedure Rules.

7. Legal Advice and Implications

- 7.1 As referred to within the body of the report, new leases and management agreements need to be put in place in respect of the community facilities referred to, which will strengthen governance and set out clearly the obligations and responsibilities of the relevant community groups and the Council.
- 7.2 The project as set out within the body of the report and recommendations is consistent with previously stated Council policies, priorities and budget setting, therefore is considered reasonable in terms of public law principles.

8. Human Resources Advice and Implications

- 8.1 There are no Human Resources Implications arising from this report.

9. Implications for Children and Young People and Vulnerable Adults

- 9.1 The community facilities are often used by a wide range of young persons and vulnerable adults. The investment in these buildings will allow for activities to continue and will form part of our wider support to those groups.

10. Equalities and Human Rights Advice and Implications

- 10.1 The proposed investment in community facilities is underpinned by the Council's commitment to advancing equality of opportunity, fostering good community relations, and eliminating discrimination. The programme targets buildings that serve diverse communities, including vulnerable groups such as adults with learning disabilities, young people, and minority ethnic communities. Improvements to accessibility (e.g. DDA-compliant entrances, pathways, and internal layouts) are embedded throughout the programme to ensure that all residents can access services and participate fully in community life.
- 10.2 An initial Equalities Screening has been completed and is appended to this report. Where required, full Equality Impact Assessments will be undertaken for individual schemes as they progress. These assessments will ensure that the design and delivery of works consider the needs of protected characteristic groups under the Equality Act 2010. The Council will continue to engage with community groups and service users to identify and mitigate any potential adverse impacts, and to promote inclusive use of the facilities.

11. Implications for CO2 Emissions and Climate Change

- 11.1 The Community Facilities form part of the Council Portfolio of Buildings and therefore play a key role in reducing our carbon emissions to Net Zero. Work will be carried out to support the programme in identifying Energy Conservation (insulation, LED lighting, etc) to reduce energy usage and, in turn, reducing carbon.

- 11.2 In addition, funding streams will be identified, such as Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme (PSDS), that will enhance the already approved funding. Where possible where more substantial measures, such as solar, can be provided, this will also be reviewed as part of the programme, and again funding.
- 11.3 Consultation and engagement will be undertaken with Community Groups, as part of the Council Behavioural Change programme, working with groups to enhance and support their knowledge of better energy management and carbon reduction. In addition, as part of this, any funding opportunities where the groups can apply directly will be advised and supported.

12. Implications for Partners

- 12.1 There are no known implications for partners as they are not users of the buildings concerned.

13. Risks and Mitigation

- 13.1 As part of the development of the project a full risk matrix will be prepared for individual scheme/project.
- 13.2 The main risk, at this stage, is that there will be insufficient funds to carry out all work across all buildings, once due diligence and surveying work is complete. An open dialogue will be maintained with all stakeholders and internal services as the programme proceeds, which will look to ensure that all parties are aware of the works and that it is prioritised effectively.

14. Accountable Officers

Kevin Fisher, Assistant Director Property and Facilities Services

Approvals obtained on behalf of Statutory Officers: -

	Named Officer	Date
Chief Executive	John Edwards	26/08/25
Strategic Director of Finance & Customer Services (S.151 Officer)	Judith Badger	14/08/25
Assistant Director of Legal Services (Monitoring Officer)	Phil Horsfield	18/08/25

Report Author:

*Kevin Fisher, Assistant Director Property and Facilities Services
kevin.fisher@roterham.gov.uk*

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