# Manchester considers relocating iconic Strangeways prison to aid urban regeneration



The iconic Strangeways prison, officially known as HMP Manchester, which has stood over Bury New Road for 157 years, faces the prospect of relocation as part of a significant redevelopment initiative in Manchester. Discussions between Manchester city leaders and the Ministry of Justice are underway regarding the possible closure and move of the longstanding Victorian-built prison, a move viewed by local officials as crucial to urban regeneration.

Andy Burnham, Manchester’s mayor, recently described the current site as outdated, stating, “It’s out of date to have a prison where it is.” He highlighted the city’s “clear preference” to relocate the prison in the long term, a position supported by local MP and Cabinet minister Lucy Powell. Powell emphasised the importance of securing alternative prison spaces, noting, “Finding an alternative will be important.” She further added that she plans to collaborate closely with the council to support regeneration efforts and identify long-term options for the prison's future.

Strangeways has long been a challenging facility, with inspections highlighting its troubled conditions. A 2024 report declared the prison as “fundamentally not safe,” citing issues including high levels of violence, a rat infestation, and widespread drug use. These problems add to the prison’s historically controversial reputation, which includes the infamous 1990 riots—the longest and deadliest in British penal history—as well as notable rooftop protests in 2015 and 2023.

The 1990 riot began amid severe overcrowding, with 1,647 inmates crammed into a space designed for 970, compounded by poor living conditions such as the continued practice of “slopping out,” the manual disposal of human waste in shared cells. An inmate named Paul Taylor famously instigated the riot during a chapel service, leading to a 25-day stalemate during which prisoners held the facility’s roof. The riot resulted in two fatalities, 194 injuries, and extensive media attention. Following the disturbances, the prison underwent redevelopment and reopened in 1994, with reforms including the cessation of slopping out.

Despite improvements, unrest has continued intermittently. In 2015, prisoner Stuart Horner staged a 60-hour rooftop protest over the frequency of lockdowns and limited time outside cells. In 2023, Joe Outlaw conducted a similar demonstration, drawing public attention and social media coverage.

Strangeways’ presence is seen by city leaders as a significant obstacle to Manchester’s broader urban renewal plans. The prison’s commanding structure is said to “define the character and tone of the surrounding area and acts as a brake on development,” according to a council report. Its location contrasts sharply with the transformation seen just across Trinity Way, where the city centre has witnessed the rise of skyscrapers, residential developments, and major entertainment venues. In contrast, the Bury New Road area, adjacent to the prison, had become associated with criminal enterprises and counterfeit trade until the recent efforts of Greater Manchester Police’s Operation Vulcan in 2022 significantly reduced illegal activity.

The redevelopment plan unveiled jointly by Manchester and Salford councils envisages constructing 7,000 homes, workspace supporting 4,500 jobs, and a new public park designed partly as a flood defence. Council leader Bev Craig identified the prison as “a key barrier to the regeneration of the area.” While early plans indicate that light industry development could continue near the existing jail if it remains, relocation is seen as vital to unlocking the area’s full potential.

Architectural experts have also weighed in on the debate. Jaimie Johnstone MBE, director at Bryden Wood—who was involved in a government initiative to create 10,000 new prison places—described Strangeways as “basically the opposite” of a modern rehabilitative prison environment. He emphasised that rehabilitative features include contact with family and friends, access to green spaces, and some degree of prisoner autonomy. By contrast, Strangeways is located in a densely packed urban environment with few views of greenery. Johnstone cited HMP Five Wells in Northamptonshire, which opened in 2022, as a preferred example, describing its proximity to transport links, urban edges, and green spaces as beneficial for rehabilitation.

The costs and challenges of running Strangeways, built in the 19th century primarily for punishment rather than rehabilitation, are significant. Closure of the prison, however, presents challenges for the prison system nationally. With prison occupancies in England and Wales at 98.9%, losing the 744 places at Strangeways will require replacement elsewhere to maintain capacity. Greater Manchester currently has three other prisons—Hindley in Wigan, Forest Bank in Salford, and Buckley Hall in Rochdale—but no public information confirms whether expansions or new builds are planned to compensate.

At present, the discussions on Strangeways’ future are early stage and focus on principle rather than detailed plans. The timeline for any changes is long, with local authorities expecting the process to take between 10 to 15 years. An update may emerge in June during the government’s spending review, when major project funding decisions are announced amid ongoing debates about prison capacity.

A spokesperson for the Prison Service stressed the importance of public protection, affirming that “HMP Manchester is essential to locking up dangerous offenders – keeping locals safe” and committing to continued collaboration with local councils on its future.

For now, the towering presence of Strangeways remains a lasting emblem of Manchester’s penal history set against the backdrop of plans for urban renewal and a changing city landscape.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

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