

Tru Valu's five supermarkets up for sale

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THE Tru Valu chain, which includes five supermarkets- among them the largest in the countryhas now been added to the list of CL Financial investments currently on the local market and seeking a buyer.

Also on the market are Trincity Mall and Long Circular Mall, both CL Financial investments where Tru Valu supermarkets are also located.

The search for the buyer of the supermarket chain comes just over three months after the High Court approved the sale process on September 11 last year.

In their latest report released in October, the joint liquidators at Grant Thornton indicated that the path had been cleared for the sale of Tru Valu.

'Similarly, the Jls are pleased to advise that further to preparatory works in relation to a potential sale of the Tru Valu supermarket chain, an application has been made to the Court for sanction of the proposed sale process. The Court approved the proposed sale process on 11 September 2024, it stated.

'The Tru Valu chain has faced difficult trading conditions, and the Jls' staff have been actively assisting management in efforts to manage costs, increase sales, and address historical industrial relations issues,' the report stated.

The report stated that other operational matters being addressed include monitoring stock management and purchasing within the Tru Valu supermarkets, developing and growing a customer loyalty programme to boost sales, and handling trade union negotiations and staffing needs.

'Tru Valu operates as a supermarket chain with five stores conveniently situated throughout Trinidad in Diego Martin, Long Circular Mall, San Juan, Trincity and Valpark Plaza. Since its establishment in 1978, it has emerged as one of the largest supermarket brands in Trinidad and Tobago continuing to assert its dominance in the Caribbean grocery market,' it stated.

Tru Valu operates five large supermarket stores with the total square footage reaching 133,000 square feet.

'Notably the Trincity Mall branch at Tru Valu has undergone expansion, now spanning 65,000 square feet and holding the distinction of being the largest supermarket in Trinidad and Tobago,' it stated.

'The prime locations are well-established properties in high-traffic areas across Trinidad and Tobago, ensuring maximum visibility and accessibility. Each supermarket is fully equipped and maintained to a high standard, including spacious retail areas, storage warehouses and administrative offices. Facilities in the Tru Valu stores include bakeries, cafes, delis, pharmacies, seafood marts, and wine cellars, catering to a wide demographic,' it stated.

Long Circular for sale

Long Circular Mall which was also given the all clear to be sold on September 11 is on the market now.

Long Circular Mall is said to have 82% occupancy.

'Plaza Development Ltd owns and operates the Long Circular Mall. Established in the early 1980s, the mall stands on over five acres of prime real estate and has solidified its

position as a long-standing icon in the retail landscape of Trinidad and Tobago. The mall consists of 130 commercial units with an approximate gross leasable area of 173,000 square feet spread across five levels,' the advertisement stated.

'As of November 2024, the GLA occupancy rate is 82%, highlighting its established tenant base. The property offers 455 car parking spaces, distributed across the perimeter and a three-level multi- storey car park. The car park is fully gated and secured with a solid perimeter fence and four access gates. LCM is a landmark commercial property located in the bustling heart of Trinidad and Tobago, strategically situated in St James, Port of Spain, with high visibility and easy accessibility from major roadways,' it stated.

According to the advertisement, Long Circular Mall has been established as a 'community- focused shopping destination' especially popular with residents of Maraval, St James and other nearby neighbourhoods.

'LCM is home to established local and international brands, ensuring a diverse tenant mix, creating a vibrant and steady flow of foot traffic. LCM is well-maintained with updated utilities, air conditioning systems, elevators, and escalators. This ensures that there is the versatility to accommodate retail, office spaces, or entertainment venues, catering to a wide array of commercial needs,' it stated.

Trincity Mall back on the market Last year ANSA McAL, the conglomerate named in 2023 as the preferred bidder to acquire Trincity Mall, withdrew from the transaction. As a result, the process to find a new buyer has returned to the drawing board.

However, the Joint Liquidators at Grant Thornton, have identified the sale of Trincity Mall as their top priority for the next six months.

In May 2023, ANSA McAL was informed by Ernst & Young that it was the preferred bidder to acquire Trincity Mall.

However, according to the 13th report of the Joint Liquidators by Grant Thornton stated that the High Court on Thursday, the preferred bidder had withdrawn.

'The preferred bidder, who was selected as part of the initial bid process, has withdrawn from the sale prior to executing the SPA (Sale and Purchase Agreement),' it stated. 'In light of this development, Ernst and Young (EY) (in its capacity as broker), has facilitated a new bid process, with the deadline for submission of indicative bids having been September 16, 2024. The JLS (Joint Liquidators) have considered the indicative bids and further due diligence by the prospective purchasers is ongoing with the final binding bids to be provided by November 22, 2024,' the report stated.

In its previous report to the High Court dated October 2023, the liquidators noted that, in April 2023, they had received a total of four offers-two for the shares in Trincity Commercial Centre Ltd and two for the property assets of Trincity Mall.

'None of the offers received were equal to or higher than the approved, minimum sale value(s) ascribed to the asset via the order made by the Court on November 11, 2021 which, inter alia, permits the joint liquidators to sell the shares in TCCL or Trincity Mall,' the 12th report stated.

While liquidators were granted approval by the High Court for the sale of Trincity Mall in 2021, it was only put on the market in September 2022.

'As previously reported, any offers received which are lower than the minimum sale value approved by the Court, will require the JLS to apply to the Court for approval to complete the sale,' the latest report stated.

'An issue that has emerged during the sales process is that certain lands on which Trincity Mall was constructed are owned by different entities within the CLF Group, necessitating the consolidation of the lands into a single entity on a tax-efficient basis. Progress is being made in collaboration with the companies, the JLS, and attorneys working with the Board of Inland Revenue ('BIR') to consolidate the lands,' it stated. 'Furthermore, the JLS have maintained their participation in the bi-weekly meetings of an HCL project team, as mentioned previously, to oversee Trincity Mall's divestment strategy, manage operations, and advance the sales process,' it stated. The CLF Group had earlier sold HCL's Valpark and Atlantic Plaza malls.

