

Blacon Sports and Community Hub

Feasibility Study

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1.0 introduction

This feasibility study initially considered two sites (**Fig. 1**) in Blacon to assess their capacity and suitability to provide sports and community facilities through:

1. An overview of the site and the planning and technical constraints.
2. A building brief to establish the approximate gross floor area, uses and ancillary space requirements, car parking and landscaping requirements.
3. Options for the location of the facility within the site and access provisions.
4. Providing information for Cheshire Community Action (CCA) to prepare an operational and financial assessment
5. Agreeing documentation requirements to support a Neighbourhood Development Order (NDO) to be agreed with the LPA.

The sites were assessed individually for the Draft Report as set out in Sections 3.0 and 4.0. with planning matters addressed in Section 5.0. The Draft Report was then reviewed by the client and issued for informal consultation with CWaC, Sport England and Blacon High School. Based on the findings from this consultation the Blacon High School site was set aside due to the concerns of Sport England and the requirement for Secretary of State consent. Section 6.0. sets out the resultant proposals for a single facility, located at the Cairns Crescent which will form the basis for the NDO.



Fig. 1: Location plan

2.0 the sites

The Cairns Crescent site **Fig. 2** is a sports facility of around 7.4 hectares in a residential setting with rear garden boundaries on three sides. It is L shaped with a football pitch on each leg and a smaller pitch in the corner .

There are two single storey buildings on the south western corner of the site used by the football club, and a children's play space accessed from Cairns Crescent. The site has two frontages onto Cairns Crescent with an existing vehicle and pedestrian access adjacent to the play space. And an area for parking and garages along the cul de sac end of the road with the potential for a second vehicle access into the site.



Fig. 2: Cairns Crescent: Sports Hub Site

The Blacon High School site **Fig. 3.** is located on the northern side of the Blacon High School grounds. It is an undeveloped open space of around 9,200m² with landscape features including a pond and some mature trees. To the north is the school boundary to Melbourne road, to the south an area parking and of hard surfaced sports courts, to the east an existing access off Melbourne Road to a school parking area, and to the west the main access and parking area to the school also off Melbourne Road.

The area proposed for considering options for the development is shown within the blue line below. The land level ground adjacent to the southern boundary of the school with an existing access road to a parking area running along its eastern boundary.



Fig. 3: Blacon High School: Community Hub Site

3.0 Cairns Crescent

3.1 technical constraints

A desktop review of the site's constraints has been carried out to identify any issues that might prevent development.

3.1.1 Access

It is proposed to use the existing access off Cairns Crescent as the main point of entry with the option and to form an additional new vehicle access off the southern arm of the Cairns Crescent cul de sac. The NDO will include a condition requiring any access to be designed to comply with highways standards.

3.1.2 Parking

The Parking standards SPD sets out a maximum but provides for assessment on a case by case basis taking into account the location of the development and the range of transport modes by which it can easily be accessed. The maximum parking standard for this building type (E(d)) is 1 space/23m² of gross external floor area. Based on this, a building of 1,315m² (as proposed in the brief below) would require 58 spaces, and a building of 1,500m² (to give some design headroom) would require 66 spaces.

3.1.3 Flood

The site is within Flood zone 1 and acceptable for development as proposed. Surface water mapping indicates three areas of low risk on the perimeter and one of medium on the existing hardstanding. These will be addressed through a drainage strategy which will be required through a condition in the NDO. A SuDS note on the preferred option is included in Section 6.0.

3.1.4 Services

Services including water, drainage, electricity and comms are believed to be available at sufficient capacity to serve the new development. A full services search will be carried out as part of the detailed design proposals.

3.1.5 Abnormals

A geotechnical survey has not been carried out, but there are no indications of abnormal ground conditions or contamination that would prevent development.

3.1.6 Landscape

The site is not subject to any landscape designations that would prevent development.

3.1.7 Archaeology

The site is not within an archaeological notification area and any archaeological matters will be dealt with by a Condition to be agreed through the Regulation 21 statutory consultation.

3.2 the brief

The following brief has been prepared to test the site's capacity. It uses information from the previously consented Boxing Club scheme on the Blacon school site, information from existing and potential users, and use space standards.

3.2.1 sports halls

The majority of sports halls in the UK are known as "4 court halls" which refers to the number of badminton courts in the hall and 4 court halls are mostly constructed to 33m x 18m dimensions (594m²), although Sport England changed its guidance in 2011 to 4 court halls being 34.5m x 20m.

The Boxing Club scheme by Cassidy & Ashton and a schedule of other uses and activities identified through a questionnaire have been used to develop the brief.

The Boxing Club scheme with a footprint of 24.5m x 43.5m and gross floor area of 1,065m² set is set out as two elements:

- Around 750m² of open plan sports hall uses including two boxing rings, a bags area and two 'gym' areas, all separated by over-run/circulation spaces to their perimeter.
- Around 250m² (25%) of service/support areas including shower/changing and WC provision. It is assumed that this has been designed to meet the FA's specification.

The building has an external eaves height of around 5.400m agl, a ridge height of 6.450m agl, and internal heights of around 5.250m to eaves and 6.000m to ridge.

Construction is portal frame with brick and metal panel cladding, and a low pitch profiled sheet roof. Doors and windows are kept to a minimum for access, escape and lighting/ventilation to wet areas.

External works are limited to a parking area in front of the building with 28 parking spaces.

3.2.2 users

The questionnaire provided information on the number of users, frequency of use and special requirements. The main users will be the Blacon Boxing Club, Blacon Dance Troupe, Blacon Football Club and Youth Football Club (8 teams), the Waggon and Horses football teams (5 teams), Active in Recovery and Friends of the Waggon (80 plus users.) Inspiring your Futures CIC, Healthbox CIC, Platform for Life Koala NW and Local Schools.

The brief assumes:

- The Blacon Boxing Club needs can be met by the Cassidy & Ashton scheme and will be used 5 days a week.

- The Football Training sessions which are 7 days a week will use the shower/changing and refreshment facilities of the Cassidy & Ashton scheme, but otherwise will be outside.
- The two dance troupes which each have 60 to 80 users will use the hub 2 days a week requiring a studio type space of around 160m² based on 2m/person for 80 users.
- The studio could also accommodate other exercise disciplines including the majority of martial arts.
- The requirements of other users including the Army Cadets and Autism Group with between 8 – 16 users and 2 hourly weekly use can be programmed in to be accommodated in the proposed brief spaces.

3.2.3 areas

A high level schedule of accommodation as below has been used to test the options. It includes the Boxing Club scheme activity areas and a studio space as the 'sports hall' element, plus 'support' spaces including changing rooms and WCs based on a per person allowance, the FA specific facilities and an area for 'services' including plant.

Sports hall: 910m²

Support: 330m²

Services: 75m²

1,315m²

3.2.4 analysis

The Hall area assumes the dance groups would not need to use the space simultaneously so only one studio has been included. The support element has increased proportionately to the activities area with the inclusion of 80m² of storage for clubs, and a plant/maintenance space of 75m² has also been added, although some plant may be able to be located at high level.

The constraints on minimum building width will be the Boxing Club bags area which requires minimum depth of around 17m including circulation and the changing facilities which require a minimum depth of around 7.5m including circulation. The 18m standard and Sport England 20m standard may also be considerations for funding and cost efficiency.

Building width and layout will need to provide flexibility for different users to be accommodated at the same time which will affect the planning of the spaces, circulation and means of separation.

Building height may also be considerations for funding. The 5.4m Boxing Club scheme eaves height will not accommodate badminton or volleyball which requires 7.5m of clear height for club/premier level play.

The construction proposals for the Boxing Club scheme are a sensible approach as they utilize relatively inexpensive building elements and can use off the peg solutions. However, the Boxing Club is a 'sealed box' with minimal visual connection to the outside and there is an opportunity to Improve the relationship of the building to exterior spaces and sports events and create a more unique character.

3.2.5 parking

The CWCC Parking Standards Supplementary Planning Document February 2022 sets a standard of 1 space per 23 sqm for building class Ed in a the Rest of Borough Zone, although LP Policy STRAT 10 does make provision for the accessibility and use of the development to be taken into account.

3.2.6 external works

The external works are limited to the relocation of the play space and provision of parking. No works to the pitches have been included.

3.2.7 costs

Building costs for a building of this type which including sports halls, sports pavilions and changing rooms range between £1,840 to £2,720m2 excluding land purchase, external works, fees, client F&F, and VAT.

Project cost based on a gross floor area of 1,315m2 and building cost at current rates adjusted for the North West national index of 0.98 would be £2.37m to £3.51m plus:

- Allowance for landscaping works to include formation of parking area, access gates and entrance lighting @ £300k.
- Contingency @10 % £267k to £381k
- Contractor's overheads and profit @ 5.5%. £147k to £209k
- Professional fees 12% @ £320k to £457k

Giving a cost range of **£3.30m to £4.86m** excluding VAT, demolition and site clearance, work to pitches, and client FF&E.

3.3 Options

For the following options are based on a building footprint of **1,315m²**. The purpose of the options is to test capacity of the site. They are not design proposals for the layout of the building.

3.3.1 Option 1: south west boundary



Fig. 4: Cairns Crescent option 1

- Existing access as main entrance
- New parking access off Cairns Crescent cul de sac
- Building area 1,315m² with 18m x 73m footprint
- Relocated children's play area along frontage
- Parking capacity 32 spaces

3.3.2 Option 2: two wings



Fig. 5: Cairns Crescent option 2

- Existing pedestrian only access as main entrance
- New parking access off Cairns Crescent cul de sac
- Potential parking capacity outside site along cul de sac (next to garages)
- Building area 1,315m² in two wings
- Relocated children's play area to rear of site
- Parking capacity 12 spaces on site + 20 spaces off site

3.3.3 Option 3: on corner pitch



Fig. 6: Cairns Crescent option 3

- Main pitch moved to free up larger site area
- Existing access retained
- New parking access off Cairns Crescent cul de sac
- Main parking area along southwestern boundary
- Building area 1,315m² in a block
- Restricted access
- Relocated children's play area along frontage
- Parking capacity 68 spaces

3.3.4 Option 4: re planning main pitches



Fig. 7: Cairns crescent option 4

- Existing pedestrian only access as main entrance
- Main parking area along southwestern boundary
- Potential additional frontage parking
- Building area 1,315m² in a block
- Space to south east for compensatory informal recreation use
- Relocated children's play area along frontage
- Parking capacity 54 + spaces

3.4 summary and recommendations

Options 1 and 2 will not meet the maximum parking standard and both require a new vehicle access off the Cairns Crescent cul de sac to maximise parking.

Option 3 requires all parking to be off site which would need third party agreement and is heavily constrained for pedestrian and service access. Option 3 would also mean the loss of the corner recreation space between the two pitches, and the building would have limited street presence.

Although it creates the most flexible space for the Sports Hub, Option 4 was initially discounted in the draft feasibility study because it was believed that the two main pitches could not be satisfactorily relocated on the site. However, the site was subsequently surveyed and it has been demonstrated that two 11 a side pitches can be accommodated within the area provided by this option.

It should be noted that these options were assessed on a brief area for the building of 1,315m² which would require 57 spaces to be provided to meet the maximum parking standard.

In terms of parking, options 1 and 2 would require a parking standard below the maximum which was considered to be acceptable given the accessible location of the site, but option 3 was discounted as it would require off-site parking. Option 4 was the only option capable of meeting the maximum parking standard.

In terms of recreation space, Sport England objected to options 3 and 4 as they would result in a loss.

Recommendation

Following feedback from the consultation on the draft feasibility study, a review by the working group and the decision to discount development on the Blacon High School site, as set out in Section 5.0 (paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3), it was decided to proceed with a scheme based on Option 4 on the Cairns Crescent site but to increase the size of the building as set out in the Option 5 proposals in Section 6 of this report.

It is recommended that the NDO is drafted based on a single facility on the Cairns Crescent site based on the Option 5 proposals set out in Section 6.0.

4.0 Blacon High School

4.1 technical constraints

A desktop review of the site's constraints has been carried out to identify any issues that might prevent development.

4.1.1 Access

It is proposed to use the existing access off Melbourne Road. The NDO will include a condition requiring its layout complies with highways standards.

4.1.2 Parking

The Parking standards SPD sets out a maximum but provides for assessment on a case by case basis taking into account the location of the development and the range of transport modes by which it can easily be accessed.

The maximum parking standard for this building type (F2b) is 1 space/7m² of gross external floor area, A building of 900m² which has been used to assess the options would require 128 spaces at the maximum standard, which based on 23 sqm per space for open parking would need 2,944m².

4.1.3 Flood

Environment Agency mapping shows the site to be within a zone 1 flood area and acceptable for the development as proposed. Surface water mapping indicates some areas of low to medium risk across the site which will be addressed through a drainage strategy which will be required through a condition in the NDO.

4.1.4 Services

Services including water, drainage, electricity and comms are believed to be available at sufficient capacity to serve the new development. A full services search will be carried out as part of the detailed design proposals.

4.1.5 Abnormals

A geotechnical survey has not been carried out, but there are no indications of abnormal ground conditions or contamination that would prevent development.

4.1.6 Landscape

The site is not subject to any landscape designations that would prevent development.

4.1.7 Archaeology

The site is not within an archaeological notification area and given the recent development of the school It is believed there are no archaeological constraints on the site and this will be confirmed through the Regulation 21 statutory consultation.

4.2 Brief

The following high level brief is for the purpose of testing options for the layout of a building on the site. It assumes a single storey structure with sufficient height to create a hall with a sense of place, and the opportunity for mezzanines above the lower headroom spaces to maximise the use of the building volume. To achieve this an eaves height of 6.0m.

The functional spaces in the community hub will need to be of two types: a large flexible hall space that is suitable for community events, functions and commercial hire, and smaller spaces for meetings, local groups and smaller scale functions.

4.2.1 the hall

The hall space should have sufficient height and character to create a presence and be a community focus, and have a connection to the outside to give it visibility, create an inviting entrance and street presence.

4.2.2 support

The smaller spaces might include dedicated area for activities which require storage such as community cupboard, library of things etc. and confidential meeting spaces for 1-2-1.

The hall and smaller spaces should be designed to be flexible and capable of being used together in different configurations, and provide support for local social enterprises and community businesses.

Support spaces should include a reception/management area, kitchen (for use by occupants of the building, for hire and for cookery classes), storage areas for seating, tables and equipment.

A café space with seating that is accessible from the hall should be included with the option for it to have an external seating area. The café area could also be used as a warm hub.

4.2.3 services

Services should include toilets/accessible changing area, a plant/services area, and building maintenance and management facilities.

4.2.4 external space

The community hub should have an external landscape element which could include an outdoor area for play and creative activities, community garden etc. It may also benefit from a covered outdoor space for some activities where a heated environment is not required, such as community fridge, summer drop-in sessions, gardening club etc.

4.2.5 building areas

Based on the above, a high level schedule of accommodation has been used to test the options comprising the following:

Hall:	510m ²
Support:	190m ²
<u>Services:</u>	<u>115m²</u>

815m²

External works should include, a 60m² covered area attached to the building, a terrace of 150m², parking and landscaping.

NOTE: A gross floor area of **900m²** has been used for the building costs and option studies to allow some headroom for the design.

The school

Provision is to be made in the options for the addition of a second phase building that could be used independently by Blacon High School. The size, specification and relationship of this second phase to the community hub have not been decided.

It has been assumed that it could be either a standalone structure or an extension of the community hub. In either case it will need to have the capacity to operate independently.

4.2.6 Costs

Building costs for this building type including community centres and youth clubs range between £2,140 to £2,850m² excluding land purchase, external works, fees, VAT, fittings, furnishings and equipment.

Based on a gross floor external floor area of around 900m² building costs at current rates, adjusted for the North West national index of 0.98 would be £1.93m to £2.57m plus:

- Allowance for landscaping works to include formation of parking area, access gates and external lighting @ £350k.
- Contingency @10 % £228k to £292k
- Contractor's overheads and profit @ 5.5%. £106k to £141k
- Professional fees 12% @ £232k to £308k

Giving a cost range of **£2.90m to £3.66m** excluding VAT, demolition and site clearance, work to pitches, and client FF&E.

4.3 Options

The following options are based on a building footprint of **900m²**. The purpose of the options is to test the capacity of the site. They are not design proposals for the layout of the building.

The options include an area of the site for a second phase building for the school. A brief and size for this has not been agreed and it has yet to be decided on how it will form part of the NDO.

4.3.1 Option 1: maximum parking standard

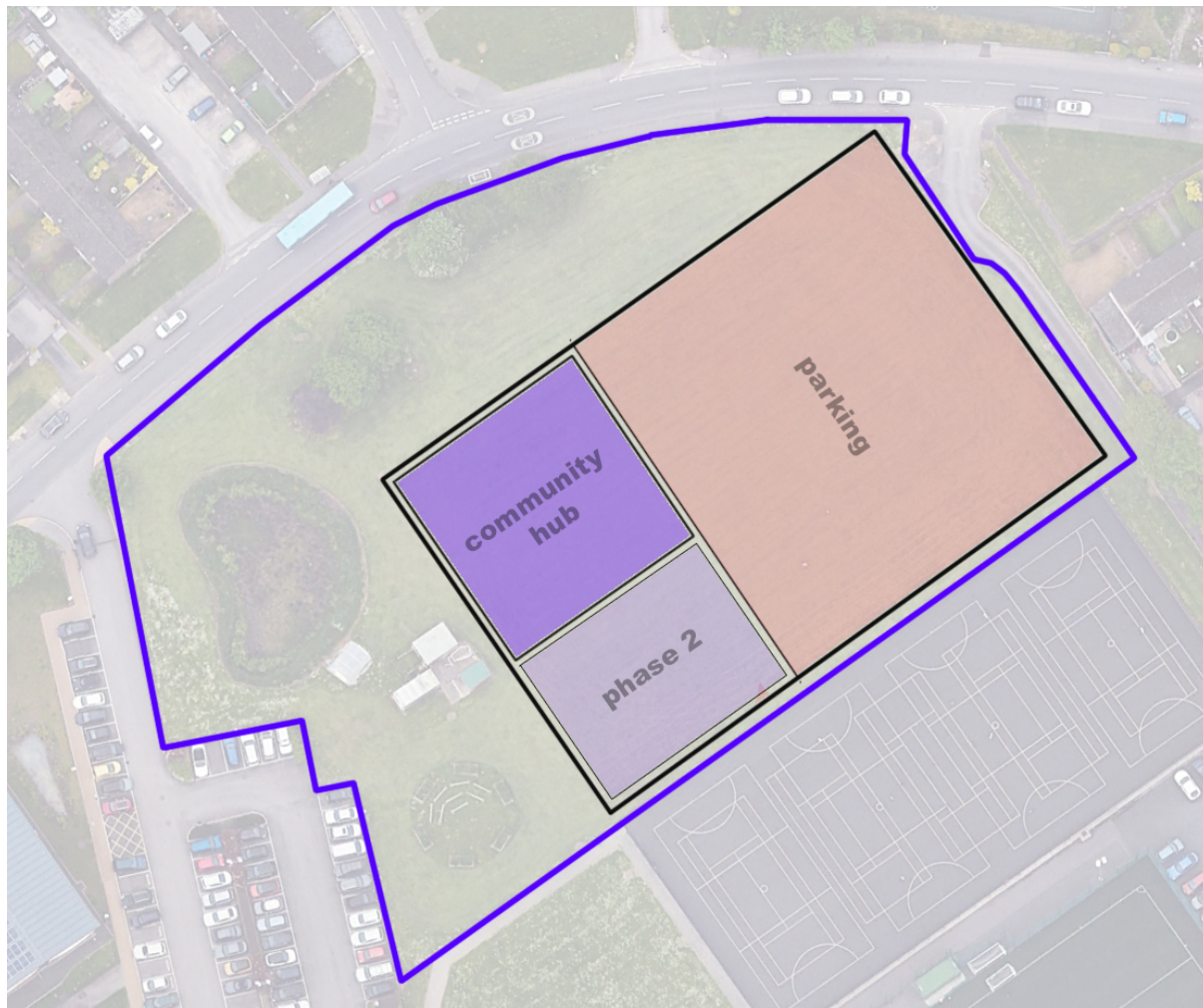


Fig. 8: Blacon High School option 1

- Vehicle access off Melbourne Road using existing access
- Community Hub facing onto Melbourne Road
- Community Hub of 900m² with a 30m x 30m footprint
- Parking area of 2,900m² to provide 128 spaces @ 1 space/7m² GFA
- Phase 2 site area of 750m²

4.3.2 Option 2: reduced parking standard

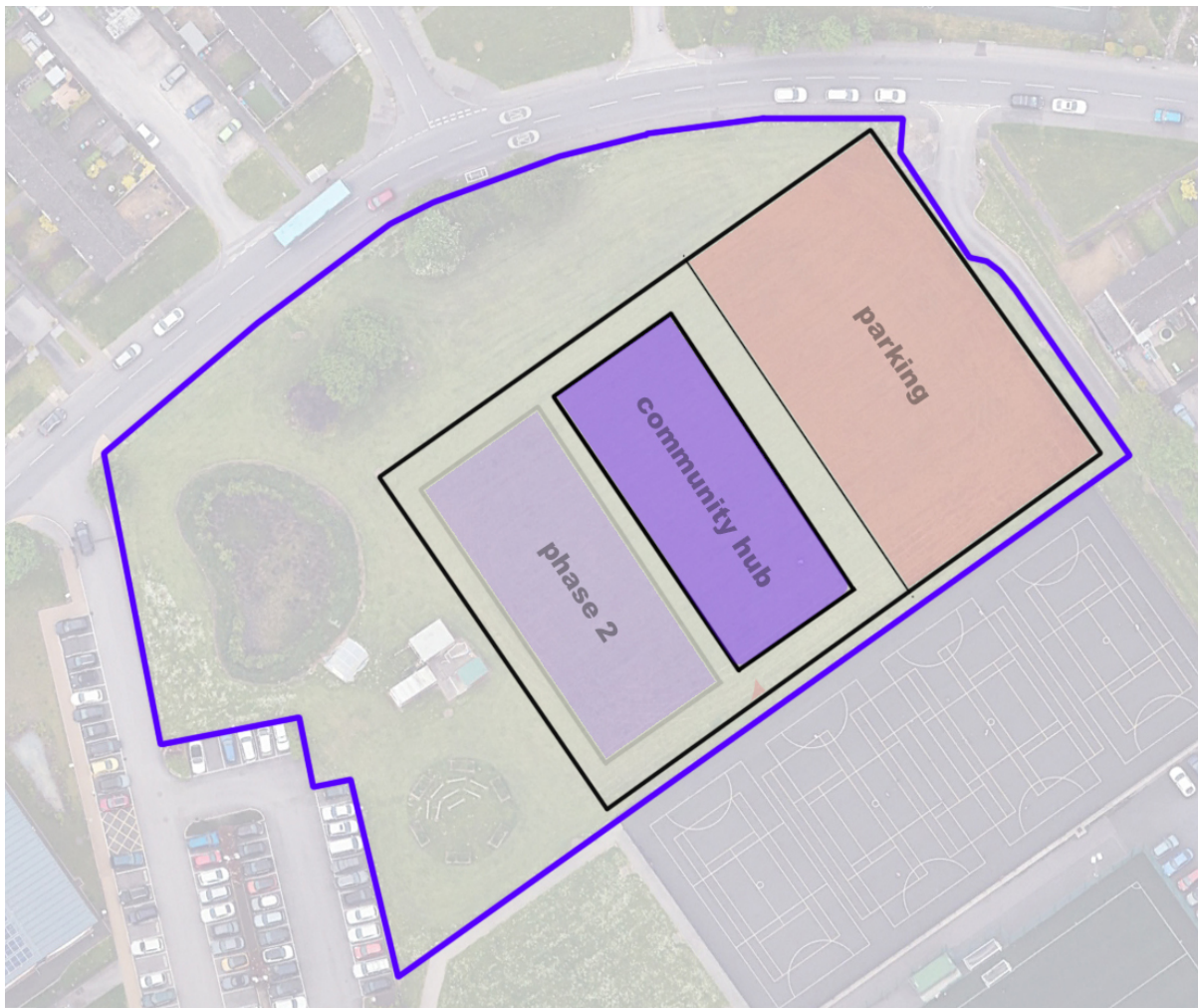


Fig. 9: Blacon High School option 2

- Vehicle access off Melbourne Road using existing access
- Community Hub on north south orientation adjacent to parking
- Community Hub of 900m² with a 20m x 45m footprint
- Parking area of 1,650m² to provide 65 spaces @ 1 space/14m² GFA
- Phase 2 building of 900m² with a 20m x 45m footprint
- Perimeter space available on site for landscape etc.

4.3.3 Option 3: reduced parking standard

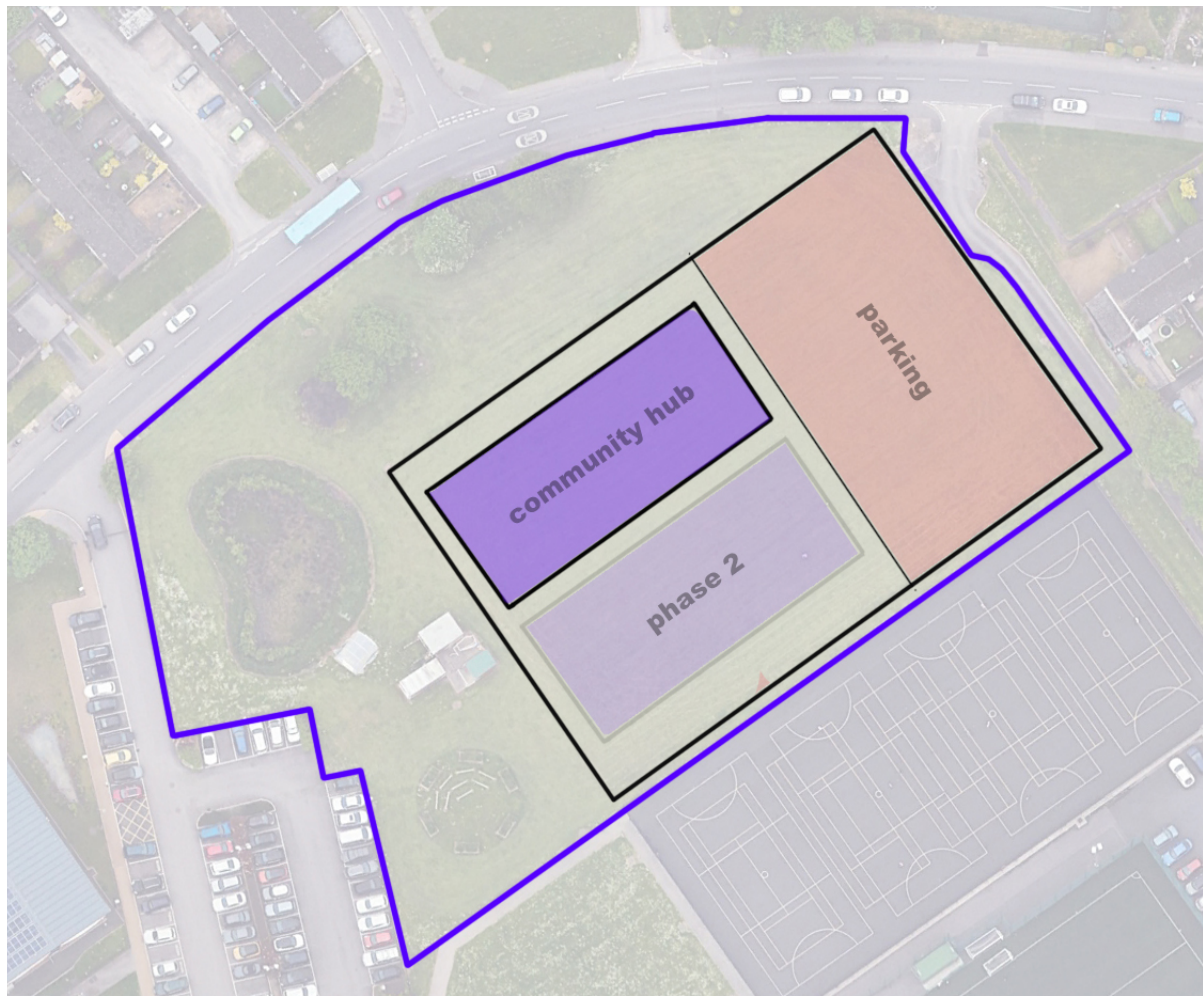


Fig. 10: Blacon High School option 3

- Vehicle access off Melbourne Road using existing access
- Community Hub on east west orientation facing Melbourne Road
- Community Hub of 900m² with a 20m x 45m footprint
- Parking area of 1,650m² to provide 65 spaces @ 1 space/14m² GFA
- Phase 2 building of 900m² with a 20m x 45m footprint
- Perimeter space available on site for landscape etc.

4.4 summary and recommendations

For all options the parking does **not** include provision for a phase 2 building and it is assumed the school will be able make use of its existing parking if required.

In meeting the maximum parking standards option 1 has minimal space for external activities or landscape, and the residual space available for a phase 2 building is limited. Option 1 also constrains the layout and building format of the community hub and a phase 2 building.

Both of these issues could be addressed by Increasing the development area but this would increase the impact of the development, potentially to the detriment of existing landscape features.

By reducing the parking standard, Option 2 creates a more flexible area for the layout of the community hub and a phase 2 building, with the potential for a phase 2 building of a similar size to the community hub. Option 3 has been included to illustrate how different layouts could be accommodated on the site within this footprint with a lower parking standard.

Any development will result in the loss of recreation space which may be an issue for CWCC and Sport England. The provision of improved facilities through the Sports Hub may provide some compensation for this, and how the two projects are linked through the NDO needs to be considered so as not to create an unnecessary constraint on the development of either.

Recommendations

Following feedback from the consultation on the draft feasibility study, a review by the working group and the issues relating to the release of the land for development as set out in Section 5.0 (paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3) it was decided to discount development on the Blacon High School site and proceed with a single development on the Cairns Crescent site as a basis for the NDO.

5.0 Planning matters.

The following sets out the national and local plan policies relevant to the proposed development which have been used to assess the likely policy compliance of the facilities. The supporting documents include guidance and design principles from Sport England who have been consulted, along with Chester West and Chester Council as part of this study.

5.1 National Planning Policy.

The following [National Planning Policy Framework \(NPPF\)](#) 2024 paragraphs are considered to be of greatest relevance in the assessment of both sites.

§96, §98 and §104.

The proposals will be able to illustrate compliance with §96 and §98 as they seek to provide local people with accessible spaces for sport and other community uses to build social capital in an inclusive environment which aims to improve both physical and mental wellbeing. This feasibility study has identified a number of local groups and organisations that will be able to offer support at these facilities, principally through sport, to meet local community need.

The proposals also support the CWaC Place Plan vision to:

“To reduce inequality, increase years of healthy life and promote improved mental and physical health and wellbeing for everyone in Cheshire West”

Case Study example - one of the proposed users, Blacon Boxing Club, will benefit from having a dedicated permanent facility to meet their existing needs and provide an expanded offering. In discussion with England Boxing, such facilities can enable a wider range of the community to become involved in programmes such as the Activator Programme, which gives staff at schools, community groups and multi-sports providers the skills to introduce young people to the sport's basics. Other programmes to provide volunteering opportunities, help tackle mental health issues and physical conditions such as Parkinson's Disease can also be delivered during the daytime an evening to create better occupancy of space. Some examples of community-based boxing projects are included below.

<https://www.englandboxing.org/clubs/community-projects/>

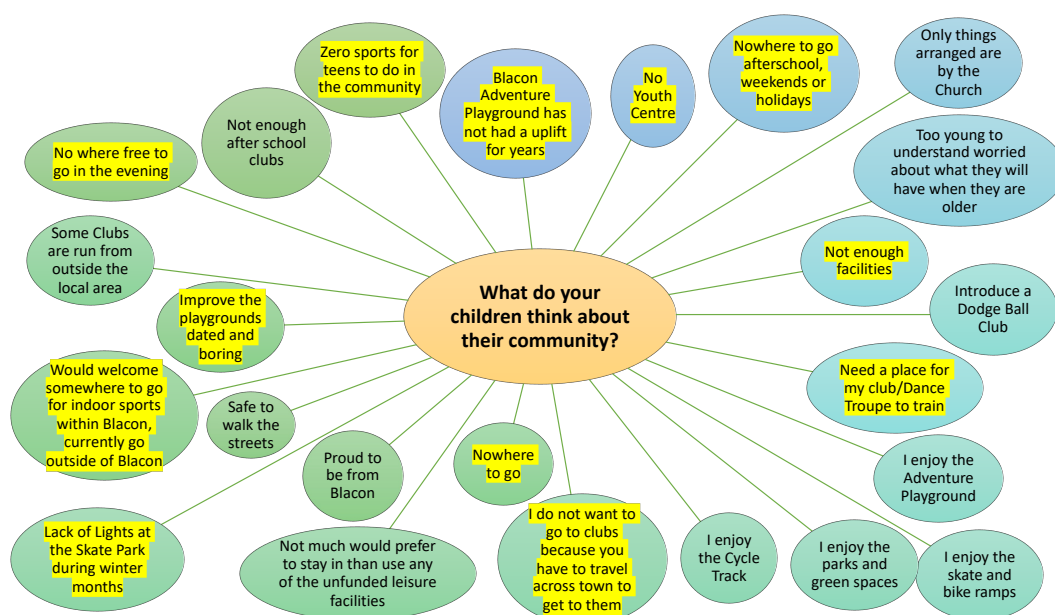
<https://www.englandboxing.org/courses/boxingactivator/>

<https://www.englandboxing.org/case-studies/>

Whilst Blacon has an established number of strategic facilities, (including schools, healthcare centre and a family centre), the strong sense of community, evidenced by a local survey conducted in 2023, identified a community passion for wanting to improve the local area through the provision of locally owned and run, placed based solutions to bring people together in non-institutional settings.

Respondents highlighted a lack of facilities and spaces for community and sports groups and in particular a lack of places for children to go after school at weekends and holidays.

Responses from young people also illustrated a lack of places to go.



Paragraph §104 NPPF states:

Existing open space, sports and recreational buildings and land, including playing fields and formal play spaces, should not be built on unless:

- a) an assessment has been undertaken which has clearly shown the open space, buildings or land to be surplus to requirements; or*
- b) the loss resulting from the proposed development would be replaced by equivalent or better provision in terms of quantity and quality in a suitable location; or*
- c) the development is for alternative sports and recreational provision, the benefits of which clearly outweigh the loss of the current or former use.*

a) is not relevant for the purposes of this feasibility study. Following pre-application engagement with Sport England, b) and/or c) will need to be evidenced.

With both proposed locations initially including use of land identified as sports pitches, options which include the loss of either open space or playing pitch space will need to demonstrate that the new facilities will principally be used for sports and recreational use, which benefit either a wider demographic or meet a more urgent community need or that the loss resulting from the proposals would be replaced.

5.2 Complying with the NPPF and Sport England - Blacon High School Site

At the High School site, the current location designated as a junior football pitch has never been used as such.

Whilst consented as part of the planning permission for the relocation of the school (14/04462/FUL approved 19th January 2015) with a subsequent discharge of condition (17/01335/DIS - Discharge of conditions 19 (Sports field spec) of planning permission 14/04462/FUL) the junior pitch has never been installed and despite the

condition noting an implementation period to be agreed as part of the discharge notice, this was never actioned or included.

As such the scheme is no longer enforceable and therefore the site should not be considered as an active playing pitch location. The site is also excluded from the current Local Plan designated open space, sport and recreation policy (SOC6- see below,) which is consistent with this position.

The initial options study looked to locate a principally community use building in this location (with ancillary sports use) however, it is clear that this would result in an objection from Sport England with the predominant use of the building not being sport:

“Sport England would be likely to object to any forthcoming planning application as the proposal does not accord with any of the Policy Exceptions contained within Sport England’s Playing Fields Policy and Guidance document, Local Plan Policy SOC6 or paragraph 104 of the National Planning Policy Framework”.

Notwithstanding this, the proposed location would result in the need for Secretary of State prior consent for any subsequent disposal of any school playing field land¹ whether or not it is considered to be a football pitch.

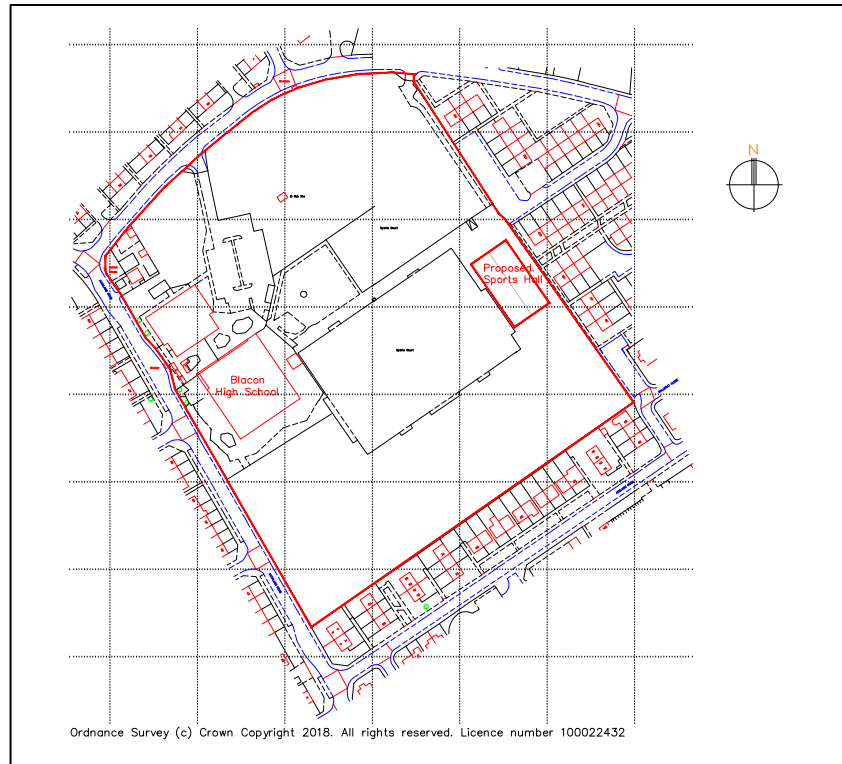
The Department for Education (DfE) has a presumption against the disposal of publicly funded school land, particularly playing field land which is defined as playing field land means land in the open air which is provided for the purposes of physical education or recreation. *Any loss of such land should be mitigated by other improvements to sports provision.*

It is therefore considered that in order to demonstrate a proposal which would satisfy Sport England, the Secretary of State and achieving NPPF objective §104, the preferred solution would be set aside any proposal to build on the land set out in the options study and to use the NDO process to bring back into being a lapsed planning consent (18/04259) approved in 2018 for a Sports Hall, also within the school grounds, on a former hard court/play space. This would also need to demonstrate that it is principally to be used for Boxing and Dance, with co-located community and recreational uses ancillary to this. A recent application to the SoS for a similar proposal by [The Dean Trust at Broadoak School, to Trafford Council](#), to replace a hard play area/tennis court with indoor leisure centre and parking provision (September 2024) shows this to be an acceptable use of the proposed location, in principle.

This would also have the benefit of keeping the area originally approved as a junior grass football pitch, available to be brought into use at Blacon High School, to mitigate for the loss of any pitch space on the Cairns Crescent site, if required.

1

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a804592ed915d74e622d7c0/Disposal_or_change_of_use_of_playing_field_and_school_land.pdf



Location of previous consented scheme at Blacon High School for Sports Hub
Fig. 11: Consented scheme location plan

5.3 Complying with the NPPF and Sport England - Cairns Crescent

In respect of the Cairns Crescent Sports Grounds, the proposal seeks to improve the facilities at the existing site, increasing the opportunities for all ages to engage with sports both recreationally and competitively, with a key focus on football, boxing and dance as well as providing co-located ancillary leisure community uses during the daytime.

As such, there may be an acceptable loss of existing open space on the basis that:

The Option 4 proposal is not considered acceptable in its current form. However, the proposed development as a whole has potential to satisfy the requirements of exception 5 of Sport England's Playing Field Guidance (PFIG) and para 104 of the NPPF.

The enquirer is advised to further consider Options 1 and 2, as both will potentially allow the existing pitch layout to be retained and will utilise areas of playing field that are currently unable to form a playing pitch. However, both Options 1 and 2 will also result in a loss of playing field land. Whilst Sport England does not wish to discourage new sport facilities, where they result in the loss of playing field, it is essential that there are sufficient benefits to the development of sport as to outweigh the detriment caused by the loss of the playing field.

As such, there are two potential options available on this site.

1) Further consider options 1 and 2, demonstrating that the loss of any area of playing field will not have an unacceptable impact on the current and potential playing pitch provision on the site, including the requirement for a Ball Strike Risk Assessment and should that assessment determine a ball strike risk, the mitigation which will be put in place for this along with details of its management and maintenance. (see Sport England pre-application response)

2) If continuing to favour option 4, (indicated by the SG as their preferred choice) to consider the imposition of condition of the NDO which seeks to re-provide any loss of pitch space through the reconfiguration of the remaining site to demonstrate no overall deficit to playing pitch provision, or illustrate that the lost pitch space can be re-provided for within the build facility (i.e an indoor hall for football) or should that not be achievable to utilise the land at Blacon High School to create a junior football pitch on the High School site to demonstrate that the proposals would not displace current users without equivalent replacement provision elsewhere (in this case, within 400m)

5.4 Parking

As set out in the technical constraints sections above, the CWaC [Supplementary Parking Standards SPD \(2022\)](#) sets out the maximum standards for car parking and cycle parking provision within development sites. For E(d) and F2 use this maximum requirement is set out at 1 space/23m² of gross external floor area.

"In accordance with national and local policy, when assessing parking provision the range of transport modes by which the location can easily be accessed will be taken into account and the proposed level of parking provision will be assessed on a case by case basis, however, where a proposal does not meet the guidelines, this should not compromise highway safety." (Parking SPD)

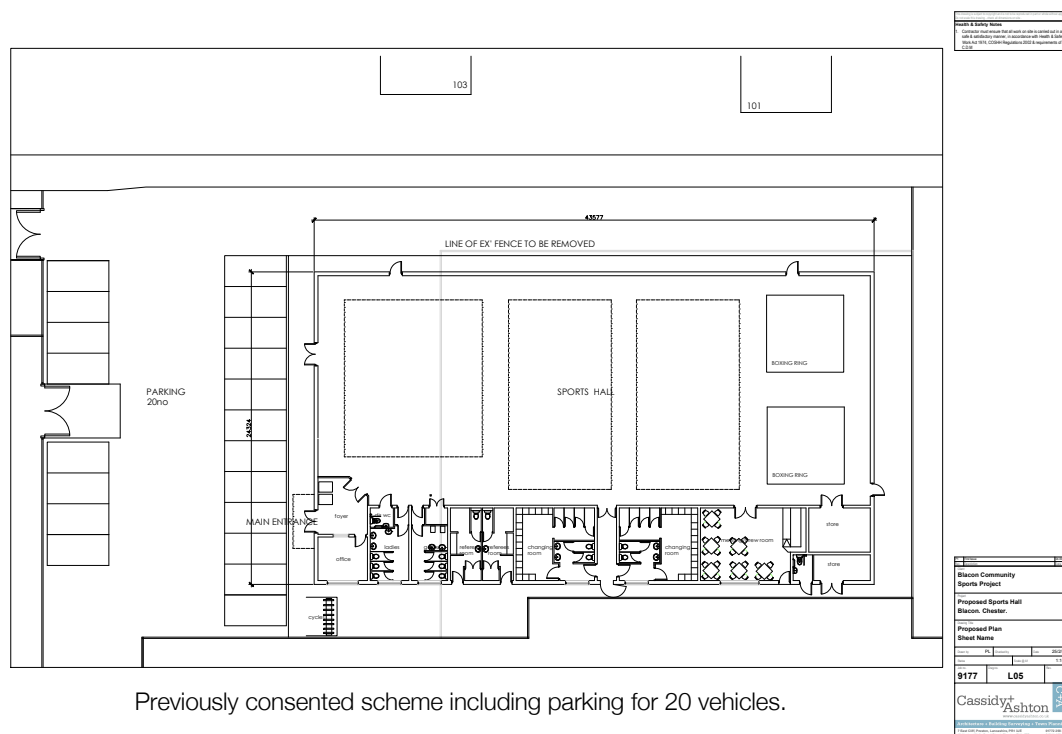
Both proposed locations are highly accessible for active travel with regular and frequent buses serving each site. In addition, their location in residential areas with good footways and quiet routes for cycling means reliance on a private car to travel to both locations is reduced. For the majority of Blacon residents the site is within a maximum 10-minute cycle or 30-minute walk. for residents to the south of the Millennium Greenway it is a 5-minute cycle or 15-minute walk.

In responding to comments raised at the informal consultation stage, both CWaC and Sport England, noted that they would be concerned if the multiple sporting activities were being accessed on the same site at the same time, restricting the ability for all users coming by car to access the location. However, given it can be demonstrated that the site is highly assessable, it is expected that the parking standard set for each location would be set well below the maximum stated within the SPD.

It is noted that the previously consented scheme on the Blacon High School site for the Sports Hub in 2018 approved parking at 20 spaces, significantly below the maximum standard currently set. The consented building was 1,060sq/m which would have set the maximum parking at 46 spaces.



Bus Stops along Melbourne Road by the entrance to Cairns Crescent and Blacon High School
Fig. 12: Bus Stops



Previously consented scheme including parking for 20 vehicles.

Fig. 13: Consented scheme layout plan

For the proposed facility at Cairns Crescent, the CWaC Travel Planning Guidance (2016) - states notes the requirement for a travel plan where development requires extending existing parking provision on a site. Therefore, this would need to be included with the NDO to be conditioned.

5.5 Local Planning Policy

The following Local Plan policies are considered to be of greatest relevance in the assessment of this proposal.

Policy DM36 Provision for Sport and Recreation and DM 39 Cultural and Community Facilities. [Local Plan \(Part Two\) Land Allocations and Detailed Policies](#)

Policy SOC 5 (Health and well-being) and Policy SOC 6 (Open space, sport and recreation) [Cheshire West and Chester Local Plan \(Part One\) Strategic Policies \(2015\)](#)

DM36 states: Provision of new sport and recreation facilities will be supported in line with the priorities of the Draft Sports Facilities Strategy, subject to relevant development plan policies.

[Chester West and Chester Playing Pitch Strategy](#) (2021) identifies two pitches at Blacon High School (site 14 in the strategy) for auditing purposes. This does not include the land allocated for junior grass football as part of the school application in 2014, despite the discharge of condition in 2017.

Blacon High School is described as:

One adult and one 9v9 pitch assessed as standard. The adult pitch is overplayed by 2.5 match equivalent sessions (MES) per week whilst the youth 9v9 pitch have 0.5 MES of actual spare capacity. Improve pitch quality through enhanced maintenance regime to reduce overplay.

Reconfigure adult pitch to better accommodate youth 11v11 demand. Reallocate some demand to an alternate site with actual spare capacity to alleviate overplay.

There is currently spare capacity on the existing youth pitch and a desire to reallocate adult demand elsewhere (unspecified but assumed off site) The land is also excluded from Policy SO6. It would therefore be a valid assessment that there is and has been no need nor intention of bringing this location into use. Therefore, should any replacement football provision be required as a result of the proposals on the Cairns Crescent site, the land at the High School, previously identified but never implemented for junior football, could be brought into use as mitigation.

In contrast, the Cairns Crescent Site (site 16 in the strategy) is described as:

One adult, one youth 11v11 and one mini 5v5 pitch. The adult pitch is of standard quality whilst the youth and mini pitches are of poor quality. The adult pitch has actual spare capacity of 0.5 MES per week whilst the youth 11v11 is overplayed by 0.5 MES per week. The mini 5v5 pitch is played to capacity at peak time. Improve pitch quality through enhanced maintenance regime to alleviate overplay.

This description would suggest that through a reconfiguration of provision at the Cairns Crescent site an overall a qualitative improvement of overall playing pitch provision, in line with the strategy objectives. There could also be a quantitative improvement through the introduction of a new mini 5 v 5 within the proposed sports facility, which would provide an all year-round facility as well as providing space for other teams to train to avoid overplaying of grass pitches.

DM39 states: *Proposals for new or improved community facilities and local services within urban areas, key service centres and local service centres will be supported where they are of an appropriate scale to serve the local community.*

The policy also states that *“The Council will support neighbourhood plans and Neighbourhood Development Orders that seek to plan for new community facilities”*.

Through the Blacon Neighbourhood Plan and the Neighbourhood Development Order for these facilities, there is a clear intention is that these will be community facilities in the truest sense of the definition. Whilst principally providing permanent homes to various sporting organisations, they will provide co-located supporting community uses which will ensure the buildings can be self-sufficient in terms of funding, generating adequate income from supplementary community, recreation and leisure activities, commonplace in many sports venues which require a multifunctional approach to be sustainable.

In addition, the Play area at Cairns Crescent will be upgraded as part of the project and the new facilities will enhance the uses of both sites, attracting new and existing users. The flexible nature of both locations means that occupiers can choose the most appropriate and convenient building to facilitate maximum occupancy of both sites given their physical proximity.

Policy SOC 6 specifically supports this approach stating:

The Council will seek to protect, manage and enhance existing open spaces, sport and recreation facilities to provide a network of diverse, multi-functional open spaces.

The proposed facilities will also accord with policy S06 though improving both the quality and quantity of accessible open space, sport and recreation facilities in the local area, providing better quality.

5.6 Corporate Strategy.

The feasibility study for these new facilities has also sought to respond to the main challenges identified in the Council's Recovery and Renewal Place (2020) Place Plan (updated 2024) and Our People Plan (2020) by scoping an opportunity for investment in the local economy through the creation of new, low carbon, sustainable facilities, which will support children, young people and adults , providing opportunities to lead healthier, happier lives and most importantly, making the neighbourhood of Blacon an even better place to call home, providing two focal points for the community to come together.

The resulting new hubs will also be able to demonstrate benefits for the economy coming from the reduction in costs on healthcare, education and child and adult services which results from providing inclusive, sport led, community facilities which enable local people to meet, learn, socialise, exercise and improve mental and physical wellbeing. They will also enable difference sectors of the community to join in, and in particular encouraging those from low socioeconomic households to view

the facilities as an opportunity to help improve their mental and physical wellbeing at very little cost through activities such as a community gym and a youth club.

The creation of these facilities should also lead to reduction in entrenched inequalities and enable early intervention to help build a more resilient and healthy community, engendering a sense of local pride in the creation of spaces which will help strength social ties, reduce isolation and create a sense of togetherness and belonging. By its very definition a neighbourhood development order empowers the community who will lead on and endorse the project which seeks to improve local community infrastructure. The investment in low carbon, high quality facilities will make Blacon an even more attractive neighbourhood and provide spaces which will create employment and volunteering opportunities as well as providing local hubs for sport, exercise, leisure pursuits and learning.

5.7 Other development related matters.

Community Infrastructure Levy

The proposed NDO is not subject to Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) as in accordance with the CWaC Charging Schedule, the development is categorised as “other” with a rate set at £0 per sq/m. This is due to the development being one which is defined “insufficiently viable” to afford a CIL charge at any level.

Biodiversity Net Gain

Biodiversity net gain has not been commenced yet for planning permissions which have been granted through certain routes. This includes where permission is gained through [Neighbourhood Development Orders](#)

Supporting Documents used as part of this study.

[Sport England - Planning for Sport Guidance](#)

[Sport England - Active Design Principles](#)

[Disposal or Change of use of Playing Field and School Land \(2015\)](#)

[Football Foundation Plan for Chester West and Chester](#)

[Cheshire Football Association Business Strategy](#)

[Chester West and Chester CIL Charging Schedule.](#)

[CW&C Recovery and Renewal Plan “Stronger Futures”](#)

[Cheshire West and Chester Place Plan](#)

[Cheshire West and Chester Our People Plan \(2020-2024\)](#)

6.0 review and recommendation

The Steering Group reviewed the outputs of the draft feasibility study. Their feedback concluded that given the constraints of the Blacon High School site in respect of the use of the land, the requirement for Secretary of State consent for the lease, the concerns of Sport England and the expectation that the location would be used for community rather than predominantly sporting use, this site, would, with reluctance, be set aside.

As such the NDO would comprise of a single facility, located at the Cairns Crescent site. This would be a Sports Hub with ancillary community uses in order to accommodate local groups and organisations outside of the main hours of operation for the predominant users of Football, Boxing and Dance.

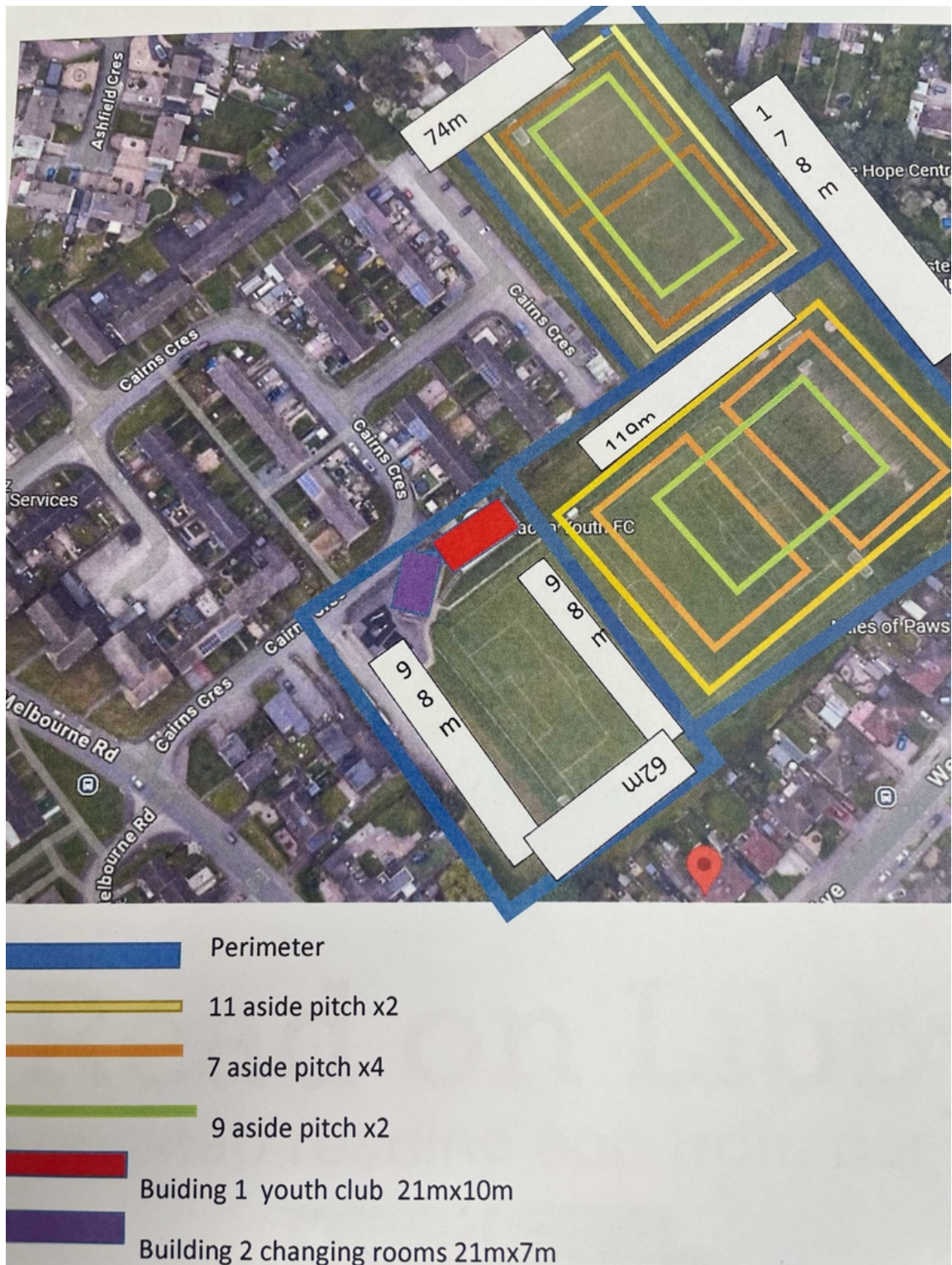
The Group confirmed their preference remained for the approach outlined in Option 4, which maximised the site in terms of built development, particularly in view that only one hub facility was now to be taken forward. The group confirmed that the proposal would be able to address the comments raised by Sport England in terms of demonstrating that a reconfiguration of sports pitches would not result in qualitative or quantitative loss of playing pitch facilities and with the larger footprint of the building, the additional indoor space for football as well as for dance and dedicated space for boxing would result in an improvement in the overall sporting provision offered by the Cairns Crescent Site. Option 5 below illustrates the development principles for a single facility on the Cairns Crescent site based on Option 4.

As a reminder the current CWaC Playing pitch strategy indicates “One adult, one youth 11v11 and one mini 5v5 pitch. The adult pitch is of standard quality whilst the youth and mini pitches are of poor quality. The adult pitch has actual spare capacity of 0.5 MES per week whilst the youth 11v11 is overplayed by 0.5 MES per week. The mini 5v5 pitch is played to capacity at peak time. Improve pitch quality through enhanced maintenance regime to alleviate overplay.

The SG have confirmed that a reconfiguration of the existing pitch layout will result in the retention of two 11v11 pitches and allow for 2 x 7v7 to be created within each adult pitch as well as 1 x 9v9 pitch. The creation of a mini pitch within the hub will result in an overall increase in pitch capacity and reduce overplaying.

The FA Recommended Pitch Sizes					
Age grouping	Type	Recommended size without runoff (safety area around pitch)		Recommended size including runoff (safety area around pitch)	
		Length x width (yards)		Length x width (yards)	
Mini-Soccer U7/U8	5 v 5	40	30	46	36
Mini-Soccer U9/U10	7 v 7	60	40	66	46
Youth U11/U12	9 v 9	80	50	86	56
Youth U13/U14	11 v 11	90	55	96	61
Youth U15/U16	11 v 11	100	60	106	66
Youth U17/U18	11 v 11	110	70	116	76
Over 18 (senior ages)	11 v 11	110	70	116	76

Table 1 - extract from FA Guide to Pitch and Goalpost Dimensions



Illustrative drawing from SG to show proposed reconfiguration of pitches within the site.
(note measurements shown in meters, FA table is shown in yards)

Fig. 14: reconfiguration of pitches

Option 5

Option 5 (**Fig. 15**) locates all the facilities on the Cairns crescent site. A survey of the site has confirmed that the existing pitches can be re-arranged to create two 11v11 pitches that will also allow for 2 x 7v7 to be created within each adult pitch as well as 1 x 9v9 pitch leaving the same development area as option 4 for the building and its supporting facilities of around 6,300m² (65m x 97m).

This layout uses the existing vehicle and pedestrian access off Cairns Crescent and provides an improved children's play space that is around 50% larger than the existing within a more secure setting overlooked by the building.

A SuDS strategy for Option 5



Fig. 15: Cairns Crescent option 5

Parameters plan

A parameters plan will be included in the NDO based on the principles set out in the draft parameters plan (**Fig. 16**) below.

The development area created by the reconfiguration of the sports pitches is zoned as following:

An area for parking of 1,764m² (18m x 98m) along the south western boundary in an 18m strip as an extension to the existing parking and hardstanding area and an offset from the residential back gardens.

An area for the new children's play space of 450m² (15m x 30m) with the building line set back 15m from the back of the pavement boundary to Cains Crescent.

An area for development of 3,652m² (44m x 83m) within which is a building zone for up to 3,000m² of building footprint. An offset to the south eastern boundary for residential back garden amenity, access and maintenance has been allowed for.

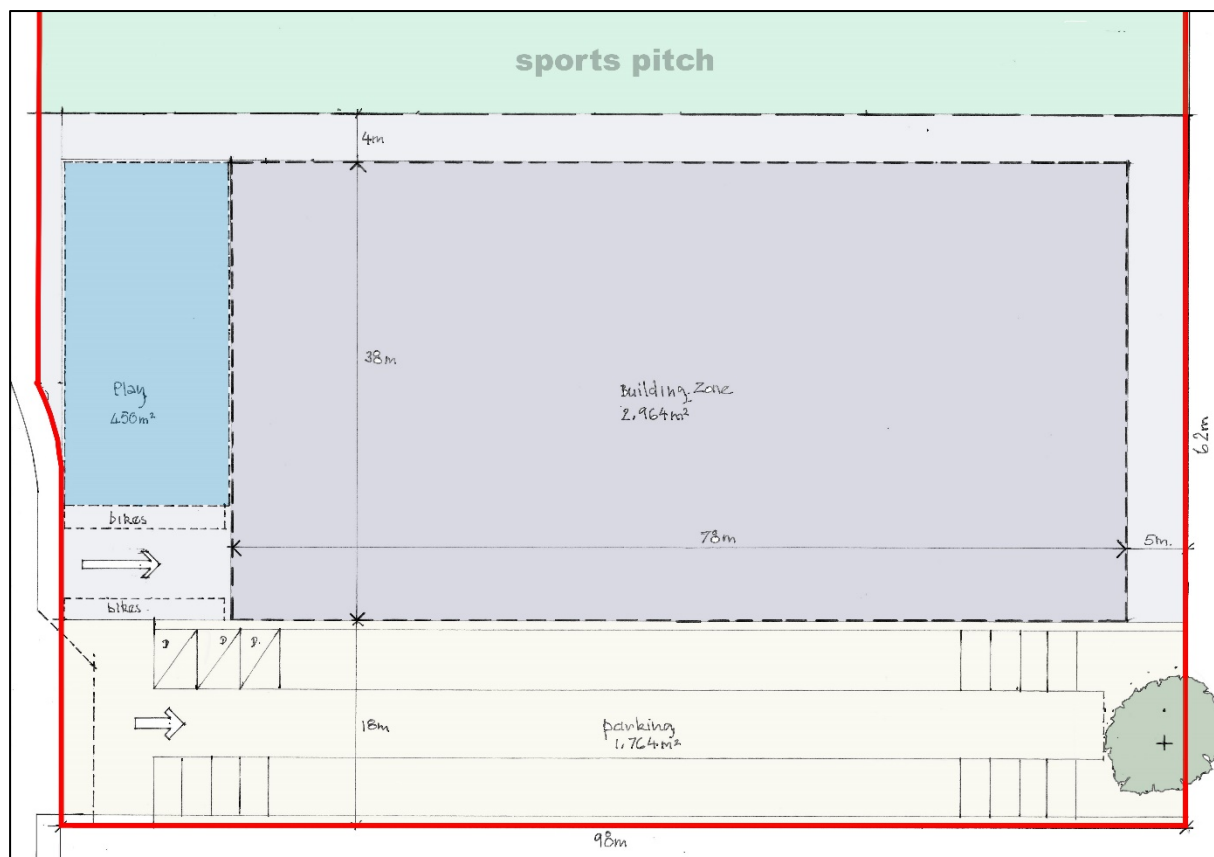


Fig. 16: draft parameters plan

Sketch plan

The sketch plan (**Fig. 17**) below illustrates how a building could be laid out within the parameters set out in the draft parameters plan (**Fig. 16**). The building line has a 4–5m set back from the sports pitch area in addition to the run off which can be used by spectators.

The building is in two parts designed so they can be used independently:

A flexible Hall area of 38-40m x 48m capable of accommodating a range of sports and community uses including the youth club and an indoor mini soccer 5 x 5 pitch which will be all weather use.

A dedicated Sports area of 38-40m x 28m with fixed provision for boxing including two rings, football changing facilities and a flexible sports activity area. A services strip along the end elevation provides changing facilities for football players and officials with direct access to the pitches, changing facilities for indoor activities and a café area.

The Parking area has capacity for 64 spaces allowing for the retention of an existing tree and disabled spaces. This achieves 50% of the maximum standard set out in the [Parking Standards SPD](#) for a building of 3,000m² which is the maximum set out in the parameters. The layout provides for cycle spaces set out in proximity to the entrance to meet the minimum standard.

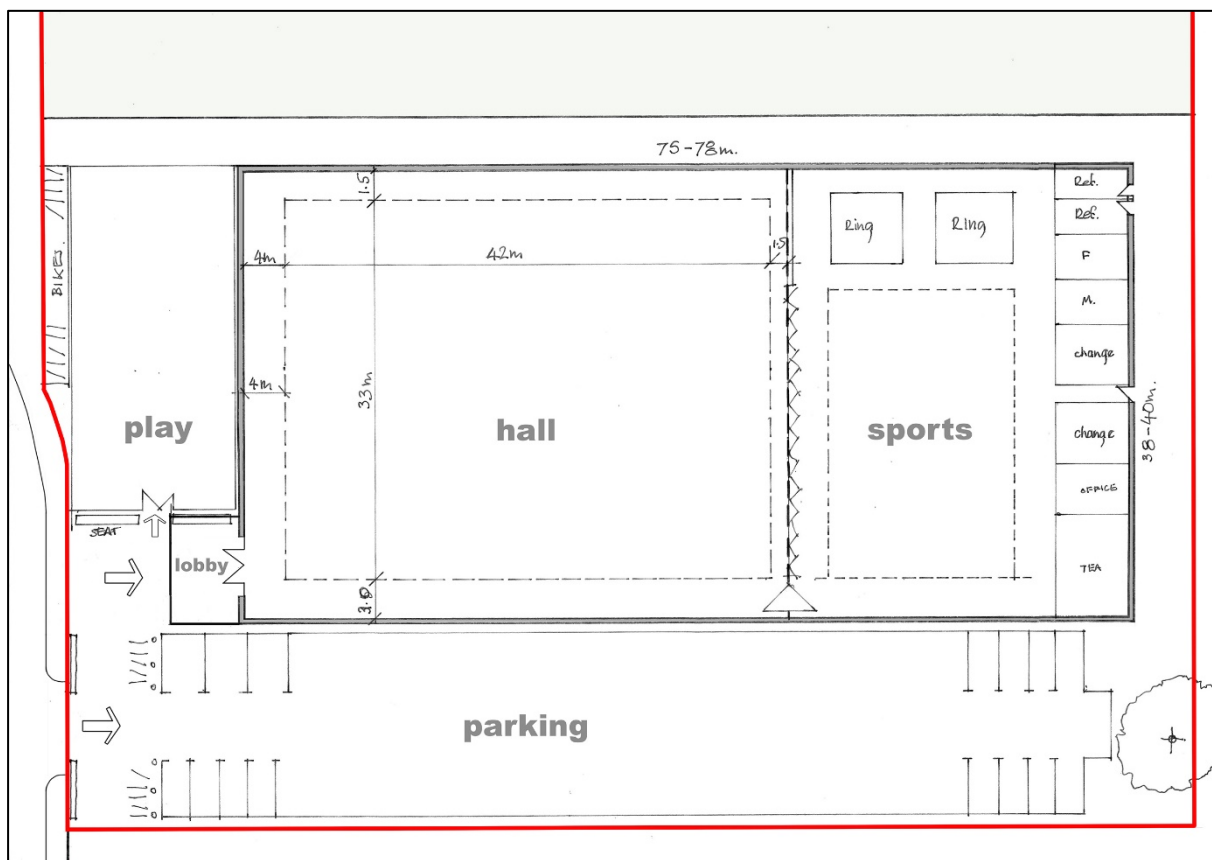


Fig. 17: sketch building layout

Appendix A: SuDS strategy

The proposals

The scheme includes the re-arrangement of two existing football pitches and the construction of a sports pavilion building of up to 3,000m² with associated parking and external children's play space.

The scheme will be brought forward through a Neighbourhood Development Order (NDO) which will grant permission in principle for the development. The NDO will include a set of development parameters which will fix the location, maximum area and height of the building and areas to be used for parking and play. The NDO will also include a set of Conditions requiring of details and supporting information to be submitted and approved after the NDO is 'made' to demonstrate compliance with the relevant standards including SuDS.

As a non-residential development of over 1,000m² requires SuDS scoping and design is required and must be included within the early stages of the site design in accordance with policy ENV 1.

This note sets out how SuDS has been considered within the early stages of the site design and the NDO will include a Condition requiring the submission and approval of a SuDS scheme in accordance with Cheshire West and Chester Borough Council's Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) Guidance Volume 1.

Analysis

The site is within Flood Zone 1 and currently laid out as football pitches along with two single storey structures used by the football club, a hard surfaced play space and a hardstanding for access and a parking area. Drainage of the hard surfaces is run off onto the highway.

The Environment Agency Surface Water Flood mapping (**Fig. A**) shows that there are four small areas of Surface Water Flood Risk around the perimeter of the site: three that are 0.1 percent annual chance, and one of 1.0 percent annual chance on the existing hardstanding parking area.

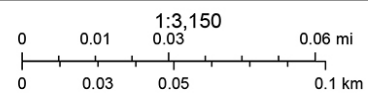
Blacon Site Surface Flooding Map



20/02/2025

- Risk of Flooding from Surface Water Extent: 3.3 percent annual chance
- Risk of Flooding from Surface Water Extent: 1 percent annual chance
- Risk of Flooding from Surface Water Extent: 0.1 percent annual chance

World Hillshade



Esri Community Maps Contributors, Esri UK, Esri, TomTom, Garmin, Foursquare, GeoTechnologies, Inc, METI/NASA, USGS, Sources: Esri, Airbus DS, USGS, NGA, NASA, CGIAR, N Robinson, NCEAS, NLS, OS, NMA, Geodatastyrelsen, Rijkswaterstaat, GSA, Geoland, FEMA, Intermap and the GIS user community

Fig. A: surface water flood mapping

SuDS Strategy

The overlay of the NDO development parameters on the Environment Agency Surface Water Flood mapping (**Fig. B**) shows the general principles for the layout of the development. The existing access of Cairns Crescent will be retained to serve the development.

The two main football pitches will be re-planned to create space for the development in the south western of the site within the area outlined in red. Within this, the building will be located within the building zone area defined by the black outline. The remaining land between the building zone and the south western boundary will be for parking and the set back from the Cairns Crescent boundary will be for children's play space.

The existing impermeable surfaces in this area total 1,300m². The proposed building with a roof area of up to 3,000m² will create additional run off that will need to be addressed through the SuDS design.

An integrated site wide SuDS strategy is proposed which includes the design of the drainage of the re located pitches the use of rainwater harvesting from the development for irrigation. The SuDS design will include:

- Access, parking and play areas as permeable surfaces.
- On site attenuation as part of the design of the parking area.
- Water conservation through rainwater harvesting for pitch irrigation.

The SuDS design will take place after the NDO has been made and the size of the building agreed. This will provide the information necessary for a combined strategy that includes the pitch re-configuration. This approach will be part of the NDO Condition covering drainage that will be agreed through the Regulation 21 consultation.

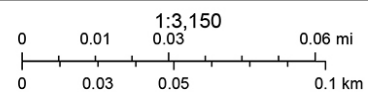
Blacon Site Surface Flooding Map



20/02/2025

- Risk of Flooding from Surface Water Extent: 3.3 percent annual chance
- Risk of Flooding from Surface Water Extent: 1 percent annual chance
- Risk of Flooding from Surface Water Extent: 0.1 percent annual chance

- Site
- Development area
- Building zone



Esri Community Maps Contributors, Esri UK, Esri, TomTom, Garmin, Foursquare, GeoTechnologies, Inc, METI/NASA, USGS, Sources: Esri, Airbus DS, USGS, NGA, NASA, CGIAR, N Robinson, NCEAS, NLS, OS, NMA, Geodatastyrelsen, Rijkswaterstaat, GSA, Geoland, FEMA, Intermap and the GIS user community

Fig. B: development parameters

