

Planning Statement

Prospect Park Pavilion - Play Service Provision



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1. Introduction

This Planning Statement is submitted in support of a planning application for improvements to the existing play service based at Prospect Park Pavilion, Liebenrood Road, Tilehurst, Reading, RG30 2ND.

This Planning Statement assesses the proposals against the policies in the Development Plan and other material considerations and should be read in conjunction with the other supporting planning documents.

2. The site and pavilion

Prospect Park is a 48hectare Grade II Registered Historic Park, laid out in the 19th Century and includes an 18th Century grade II Registered Country House, the Mansion House set on south face of Prospect Hill overlooking the south of the park. In 1902 the Reading Corporation (now Reading Borough Council) acquired the park and developed it as a public amenity. The park now comprises a bowls green, grass sports pitches, tennis courts, multi-use games / 5aside courts, a children's play area, a wooded area and informal park land. A mid-1970's single storey brick pavilion with an 80 space car park is located approximately 180m along the main vehicle access road from Liebenrood Road. The Mansion House screened by trees is a further 300m along the access road.

The pavilion currently houses football changing, showers and toilets, the play service offices, staff room / toilet, and an integrated works garage and storage room. Externally there is a courtyard and small shrubbery at the front of the pavilion; and at the rear a works yard and storage containers with access from the carpark.

3. Proposals

The proposal is to convert underused and redundant space within the east side of the pavilion and the area immediately to the front and rear of the pavilion to provide a unique mix of indoor and outdoor facilities focused at the primary school age children. This will compliment existing facilities already provided within the park. The existing football changing facilities within the pavilion will remain and are not part of this proposal.

The proposals were developed by the play service in consultation with existing users and presented to Reading Borough Council's Policy Committee in February 2021 who approved the proposals to proceed to a planning submission.

Below is a summary of the proposals:

- An indoor low ropes activity for children age 7 and under
- An outdoor 9 hole mini-golf course
- A small café with a small outdoor seating area
- Toilets including an accessible changing places facility
- An outdoor education area to support the existing play service educational outreach work which includes using play as a tool to improve particularly vulnerable young people's social skills and wellbeing.

A webpage has been set up to provide more details on the scheme proposals and can be found at <https://www.reading.gov.uk/leisure/proposals-to-transform-play-at-prospect-park/>

4. Planning history and pre-application advice

Relevant planning history

27/12/1991 / 91660 Extension to Bowls club to provide extended changing rooms and sitting area - permitted.

03/06/1993: 930142 Application to vary condition 10 of 90/0050/OA so a play area is not provided - application refused.

27/02/1995: 950069 Extension to paved area outside pavilion - permitted.

24/05/2007: 070361 Demolition of existing public toilet and new toilet erected in another location - permitted.

29/08/2009: 090271 Retrospective minor amendment to 07/00166/REG3 - agreed.

Pre-application advice

The Council requested pre-application planning advice from the Local Planning Authority and based on the information supplied at the time it considered that the proposed scheme would be accepted in principle. Further information would be required on areas such as car parking, the mini-golf fence and protecting the veteran trees at the rear of the pavilion.

5. Planning policy context

Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires planning applications to be determined in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Reading Borough Council's Local Plan was adopted in 2019 and has 'Development Plan' status.

The National Planning Policy Framework is also a material planning consideration in the determination of planning applications. At the heart of the NPPF is a presumption in favour of sustainable development. In making decisions on planning applications: *"Local planning authorities should look for solutions rather than problems, and decision-takers at every level should seek to approve applications for sustainable development where possible. Local planning authorities should work proactively with applicants to secure developments that improve the economic, social and environmental conditions of the area."*

6. Proposal Assessment

As mentioned previously the application concerns the development of underused and redundant space within and immediately around the pavilion to provide a unique mix of indoor and outdoor facilities focused at the primary school age children. This will complement existing facilities already provided within the park and is considered against the following:

- ❖ Heritage and open space impact
- ❖ Design
- ❖ Transport
- ❖ Ecology and Trees
- ❖ Flood risk
- ❖ Archaeology

Heritage and Open Space Impact

In accordance with the requirements of paragraph 189 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) this statement describes the significance of the heritage assets affected by the proposals and provides an assessment of their impacts on that significance. The assessment methodology is in accordance with Historic England's Conservation Principles (2008), the Good Practice Advice in Planning Note 3: The Setting of Heritage Assets (2017) and Advice Note 12 Statements of Heritage Significance: Analysing Significance in Heritage Assets (2019).

Section 66(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires the Local Planning Authority to have special regard to the desirability of preserving (i.e. not harming) listed buildings and their settings. Listed buildings and Registered Parks are termed ‘designated heritage assets’ (NPPF glossary) and paragraph 189 requires the applicant to establish the significance of any assets affected by proposals. Paragraphs 193 to 196 deal with impacts on heritage assets and requires the Local Planning Authority (LPA) to give great weight to an asset’s conservation. Any harm must be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal but requires ‘clear and convincing’ justification. Proposals that preserve elements of setting that make a positive contribution to an asset or better reveal its significance should be treated favourably (paragraph 200) and loss of elements which contribute positively should be treated as harmful. Significance is defined in the NPPF as ‘The value of a heritage asset to this and future generations because of its heritage interest. That interest may be archaeological, architectural, artistic or historic.’

Relevant local planning policies are contained in the Reading Borough Local Plan, adopted November 2019. The Heritage Statement highlights the importance of the heritage of Prospect Park as one of the country houses which once surrounded Reading.

The following policies are relevant to this planning application:

- EN1 - Protection and enhancement of the historic environment.
- EN4 - Locally important heritage assets.
- EN6 - New development in a historic context.
- EN7 - Local green space and public opens space

Prospect Park is a designed landscape with considerable artistic and aesthetic interest. The Mansion House lies at the centre of its design, taking advantage of the south facing slope of Prospect Hill to create a layered vista across the naturalistic parkland and into the landscape beyond. Working areas of the park, including service buildings, kitchen garden and orchards lay to the rear of the house away from this view and paths across the park were routed to the east, west and from the north avoiding crossing the park to the south of Mansion House.

The park’s Historical Interest is also a contributor to its heritage significance. The park is a surviving element of the historic manorial estate of Calcot and the story of its origins, and the naming of Prospect Hill, is a legend which has been immortalised in literary works of poetry, albeit by an unknown author.

Since the late 19th century, the significance of the park has been impacted by the loss of land on its eastern side and by the encroachment of the hospital complex on its west side. A consequence of these changes has been to increase the use and prominence of the path from Liebenrood Road to the Mansion House. This path, which once appears to have been a meandering way through parkland, has become a main thoroughfare, expanded to accommodate modern traffic and is the focus of modern community sports and recreation and education facilities including the Pavilion. These facilities form part of the development of the park, but nevertheless do detract from its original design intent.

The Mansion House is a late 18th century house surrounded by parkland. It has Historical Interest as a grand house with association to the Calcot Estate and to the architectural tastes of the gentry in the late 18th century. As a country manor house with a clear design intention linked to the landscape it also has considerable architectural and artistic interest. The surrounding landscape setting is integral to its design which presents a grand elevation to the south overlooking sweeping parkland views. However, views to the west are restricted by flatter topography and vegetation and make a more limited contribution to the setting.

The Pavilion is a modern addition to the park and is considered to have no heritage value. Changes to the interior of the pavilion will have no impact on any heritage assets. External changes to the front and rear of the Pavilion will be visible as changes to modern features within the Registered Park.

There are no proposals to significantly alter the external appearance or increase the massing of the existing Pavilion or to enlarge the overall footprint of the site. The proposals will not be visible from Mansion House, nor affect any important views within the park.

It is predicted that the proposals to refurbish the pavilion and its external areas will create a more active site, giving the building more purpose and improving public interaction with, and appreciation of, the park.

The landscaping changes proposed are predicted to be an improvement on the current landscaping scheme around the Pavilion which has aged poorly.

Overall, the proposals are considered to represent a small benefit to the Heritage significance of Prospect Park and will be neutral with respect to the Mansion House.

In the context of open space, the NPFF and Local Plan place a high emphasis on access to high quality open spaces, sport and recreation which can make an important contribution to the health and well-being of communities. These proposals contribute to meeting these aims.

Design Detail

A number of policies within the Local Plan and the SPD on sustainable design and construction (adopted Dec 2019) encourage good design which reflects current national policy on good design: *“The Government attaches great importance to the design of the built environment. Good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, is indivisible from good planning, and should contribute positively to making places better for people.”* The proposal is assessed in this context.

The application site is occupied by a late 20th century single-story pavilion building, including its front and rear external areas. The pavilion is constructed of brown brick with dark red brick detailing, under a low-pitched tiled roof (see appendices for an overhead view of the site).

There are no proposals to increase height or massing of the existing pavilion, nor alter the existing utility services for the building with the existing surface and foul drainage to be maintained. The area of the pavilion to be converted uses electric heating and this will continue in the new proposals. The aim is to re-use existing apertures within the building elevations to continue the building’s form and minimise construction waste.

Internally, the aim is to convert the unused internal machine store / garage into an indoor low ropes play facility for 7year olds and under. This will result in removing the garage vehicle shutters on the east elevation, to be replaced with a glazed window unit and fire exit door; both to be protected by shutters when not in use. Signage advertising the facility will be located on both north and east elevations. On the north elevation, the existing shutter door will become the main entrance to the low ropes space with a serving hatch formed on the right. Other internal changes include converting the storage room into a small office; the staff room into an accessible toilet; and the office area into a small café with access out on to a raised external seating area. The café will aim to serve light snacks and non-alcoholic beverages; it will not have any external noise generating equipment.

Externally, at the front of the pavilion, a small raised seating area will be formed with direct access to the new café. Adjacent to this, the existing pavilion courtyard would provide the location for a small 9 hole mini-golf course, enclosed by a 2.1m weldmesh fence and pedestrian gates for access. The facility has been designed to be accessible friendly with specialist accessible putting equipment available and will include miniature models to represent some of Reading’s well-known landmarks. The existing footpath across this area will be diverted to provide a more direct route from the pavilion to the 5aside courts. The existing silver birch trees will remain.

At the rear the works yard and ancillary area would house the outdoor education zone with a lowerable 7m high climbing wall, archery and den building area. The entrance to this area from the carpark will be retained. The western line of line of conifer trees at the rear will be thinned and

where agreed removed to help the longevity of the veteran oak tree and to ensure safe access into the archery and den building activity zones. The dilapidated existing chain link fence will be replaced by a weld mesh. The archery area will be protected by a 3.6m high green metal panel and netting. The intention that this is not to be visible from the car park or western side of the park.

See Appendices for existing and proposed layout and images to show the scheme in context.

In summary, the design intention illustrates a sustainable designed approach with minimum intervention to the fabric of the building. The proposal improves the future longevity and use of the pavilion and immediate surrounds and thereby meets the requirements of the Local Plan.

Transport Statement

The proposal is considered in relation to the Local Plan policy CC6: Accessibility and Intensity of Development and the SPD: Revised Parking Standards and Design (adopted 2011). The standards are based on a zonal scheme. The Pavilion is within zone three (the secondary core area), whilst the southern part of the wider Prospect Park is classed as zone four (the wider urban area). The SPD sets maximum car parking standards for non-residential developments. The document notes that this will support the need to “promote sustainable transport choices; reduce carbon emissions; take into account levels of public transport accessibility; reduce the amount of land needed for development; and tackle congestion”. The land uses proposed do not directly correlate to the land uses listed in the standards.

Feedback from the pre-application advice from the LPA Transport Development stated:

“In principal Transport do not have any objections to this application; however consideration should be given with regard to the potential increase in the number of vehicles parking within the park accessing the proposed new leisure facilities. Justification is required as to why additional parking is not required as we would wish to reduce further parking in the surrounding roads. As the proposals would result in an increase in traffic in a sensitive location, a transport statement should be submitted with a full planning application, which should include a justification as to why an increased parking area is not proposed.”

A summary of the transport statement is below:

The pavilion is located in a sustainable transport location and that a significant number of future users would be able to access the site on foot, bicycle and by public transport.

Cycle parking - The pavilion and immediate vicinity currently benefits from 21 Sheffield stands, accommodating 42 cycles. It is not proposed that any further cycle parking would be provided as part of the pavilion improvements.

Servicing and deliveries - The servicing and delivery vehicles will reach the site via the access road from Liebenrood Road as is currently the case and it is not proposed to change this.

The forecasted number of peak and off-peak visitors to the low ropes and family mini-golf can be accommodated within the existing parking provision for the pavilion and wider park. The low ropes activity will be pre-bookable, allowing for numbers to be controlled.

The mini-golf will be operated on a pay and play basis, unless privately booked out. It is expected that a considerable number of people playing mini-golf would already be in the park, with this activity undertaken as part of a linked trip.

The café is also largely expected to be used by people already on the site. It is therefore assumed that any trip generation associated with this would be minimal.

Reading Play already use the pavilion to support their educational outreach work. It is not expected that the proposals will lead to additional trip generation associated with Reading Play activities.

The overall proposals are forecast to generate a maximum of 19 additional cars. The assessment undertaken demonstrates that the existing car park could accommodate this level of car parking in addition to the typical existing car park demand, and therefore no additional car parking would be required. Additionally, at times where there may be car park capacity constraints, the booking system for the low ropes will allow the number of users to be controlled as appropriate.

Ecology and Trees

The proposals are considered in the context of planning policies:

- EN12: Biodiversity and the Green network
- EN14: Trees, hedges and woodland

The proposed works to the pavilion and immediate area is supported by an Ecological Appraisal carried out by John Wenman Ecological Consultancy and an Arboricultural Impact Assessment carried out by Reading Borough Council Arboricultural Unit.

Ecology

John Wenman Ecological Consultancy was commissioned to carry out a preliminary ecological appraisal of the site and a Phase 1 walkover survey was completed in February 2021 and summarised below:

The site is comprised of the Pavilion building with introduced shrubs and patches of amenity grassland with scattered broadleaved trees to the front, and bare ground with a strip of coniferous trees and scattered scrub towards the rear. A car park was present to the east, hardstanding to the west of the building and several footpaths amongst the amenity grassland to the front northern side of the building.

The pre-existing data held by Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre (TVERC) has shown that the survey site is not statutorily designated for its wildlife interest and therefore not recognised as being of international, national or county level conservation significance. The site is surrounded by Prospect Park (& the Rookery), a non-statutorily designated Local Wildlife Site (LWS), so is recognised for its wildlife importance within Berkshire.

The survey has shown that overall the site supports species poor amenity grassland with beds of introduced shrubs with occasional scattered broadleaved trees of no conservation importance beyond the site. The scattered scrub offered some potential for widespread nesting birds but was not an example of a priority habitat. The mature oak trees and one veteran tree just outside of the boundary are examples of a UK Priority Habitat and therefore of conservation importance.

The proposals involve the removal of a small patch of scattered scrub, amenity grassland and introduced shrubs. The proposals are unlikely to have an impact on protected and notable species and habitats, but some proposed habitat and protected species avoidance and mitigation measures and recommendations have been outlined including:

- Precautionary measures during the removal of trees and a section of scrub to avoid impacts to mammals, amphibians and reptiles;
- Precautionary measures to prevent disturbance of nesting birds.

The proposals present opportunities for ecological enhancements in order to achieve a net gain in biodiversity value and include:

- The provision of features for invertebrates, small mammals, amphibians and reptiles such as rockeries or partially buried log piles.
- Any new planting as part of the landscaping should make use of native ground cover plants.

Arboriculture

An Arboricultural Impact Assessment was carried out in April 2021 and is summarised below:

Trees removed to enable the proposed development to be implemented:

For access and visibility into the new play activity area located at the rear of the pavilion, the line of Lawson cypress trees is to be thinned with an agreed number removed. This will be in consultation with the Local Planning Authority's (LPA) Natural Environment Officer and the Council's Parks department. The Lawson cypress, planted as a hedge, but not maintained as a hedge, now form a high and impenetrable barrier.

These trees will be having both a positive and negative effect on the nearby veteran trees: an English oak and a horse chestnut. The conifers will be applying significant stress to these two trees in terms of competition for light, nutrients and water. However, they will also be providing some protection from wind and weather. Their removal is desirable for the long-term survival of the old deciduous trees, but this should be done in stages in order to allow adaptation to exposure to wind.

To enhance the ecology of the site, where trees are to be felled, as much of the material as possible will be kept on site and stacked nearby as wood piles, or laid as woodchip, so that eggs and larvae are kept on site.

Trees to be planted:

The stock of trees at Prospect Park is added to every year. New avenues are being created from the main driveway to the Bath Road (liquidambar and liriiodendron), from the driveway to the Tilehurst Road/Liebenrood Road roundabout (beech), and diagonally from near the mansion house to the existing playground (English oak). In addition, a collection of cherries near the pond has been extended, and specimen trees are planted in many locations around the park. This will continue to occur as part of the management plan and because of the high demand for memorial trees in the park.

For this reason, it is proposed to mitigate any loss of trees relating to the proposed development by planting three trees for every tree lost in an area of low canopy cover. This takes account of the requirements of the Council's revised Tree Strategy and contributes to the objectives of the Strategy. Also consistent with this, new tree planting will not be the same species as those removed but will be according to the recommendations in the Strategy for diversity of family and genus. Details of proposed planting will be agreed with the LPA Natural Environment Officer and the Parks department.

Retained trees to be protected

The following actions are proposed in order to protect retained trees within and adjacent to the works area:

- Where possible, no construction will take place within 5m of the stem of any mature tree, and within 15m of the stem of a veteran tree.
- Trees will be protected with a tree protection barrier, like heras fencing, outside the root protection areas as set out in the survey table.

Where works are required within the root protection area, eg to install gravel surfacing and a close boarded fence, a no-dig construction method will be used for new surfacing and the fence post holes hand dug under direction of the Parks Arboricultural Unit.

Flood Risk

The proposal is considered in the context to planning policy EN18: Flooding and sustainable drainage systems. The site is located in a Flood Zone 1 area, is at a low risk of fluvial flooding with a similarly low risk of surface water or groundwater flooding. The intention is to continue to use the pavilion's existing surface and foul water systems and with no increase in the building mass, the scheme will not propose a flood risk.

Archaeology

The proposal is considered in the context of planning policy EN2: Areas of archaeological significance. The outline proposal was discussed with Berkshire Archaeology who researched the Historic Environment Record and advised that the immediate vicinity around the pavilion would have been disturbed in the past and would not be of particular archaeological concern. However, the wider park is registered under the Historic Buildings and Monuments Act 1953 as a Grade II listed within the Register of Historic Parks and Gardens (refer to the Heritage Impact statement).

7. Conclusion

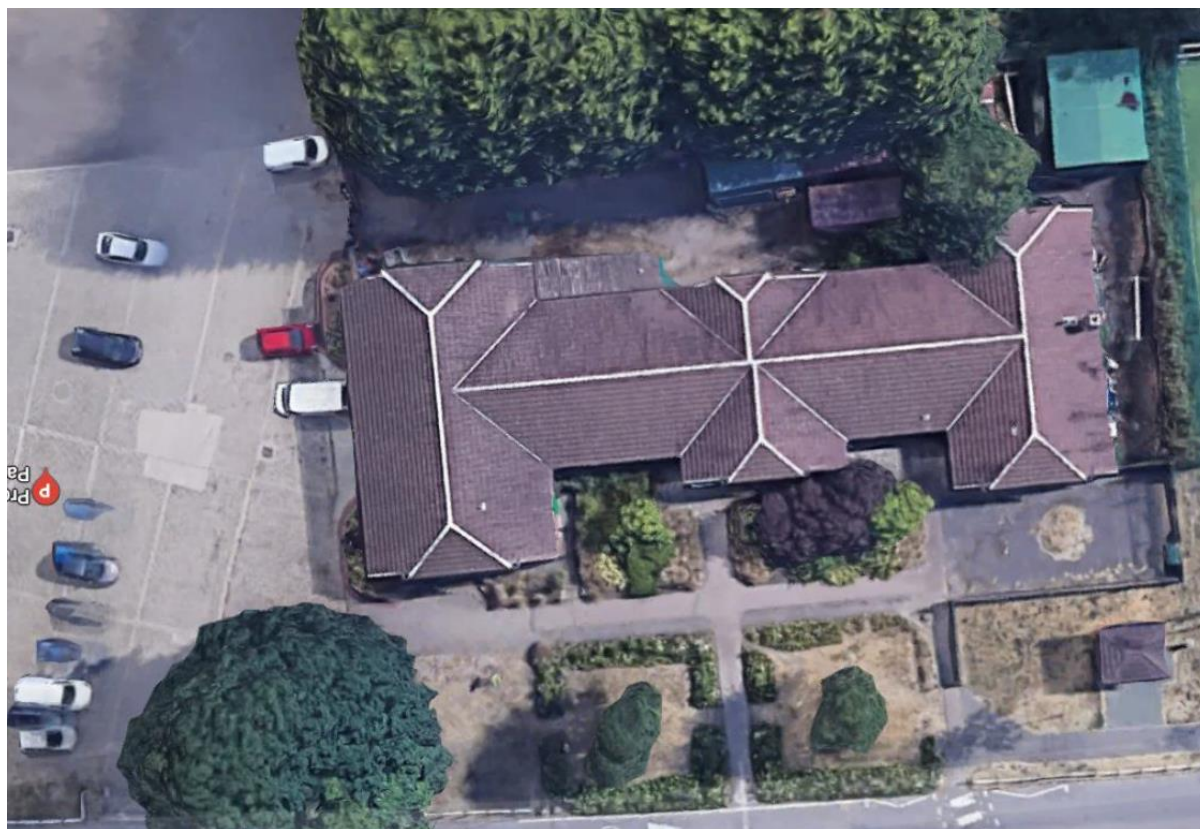
This Planning Statement is submitted in support of a planning application for improvements to the existing play service based at Prospect Park pavilion which sits within the wider Grade II registered Historic Prospect Park, an open space designated for the provision of recreational facilities to the benefit of local people. The proposals set out a scheme that meets these requirements and provides an opportunity for the sustainable development of the pavilion without any adverse impacts in planning terms.

The NPPF and Local Plan place a high emphasis on access to high quality open spaces, sport and recreation which can make an important contribution to the health and well-being of communities. These proposals contribute to meeting these aims.

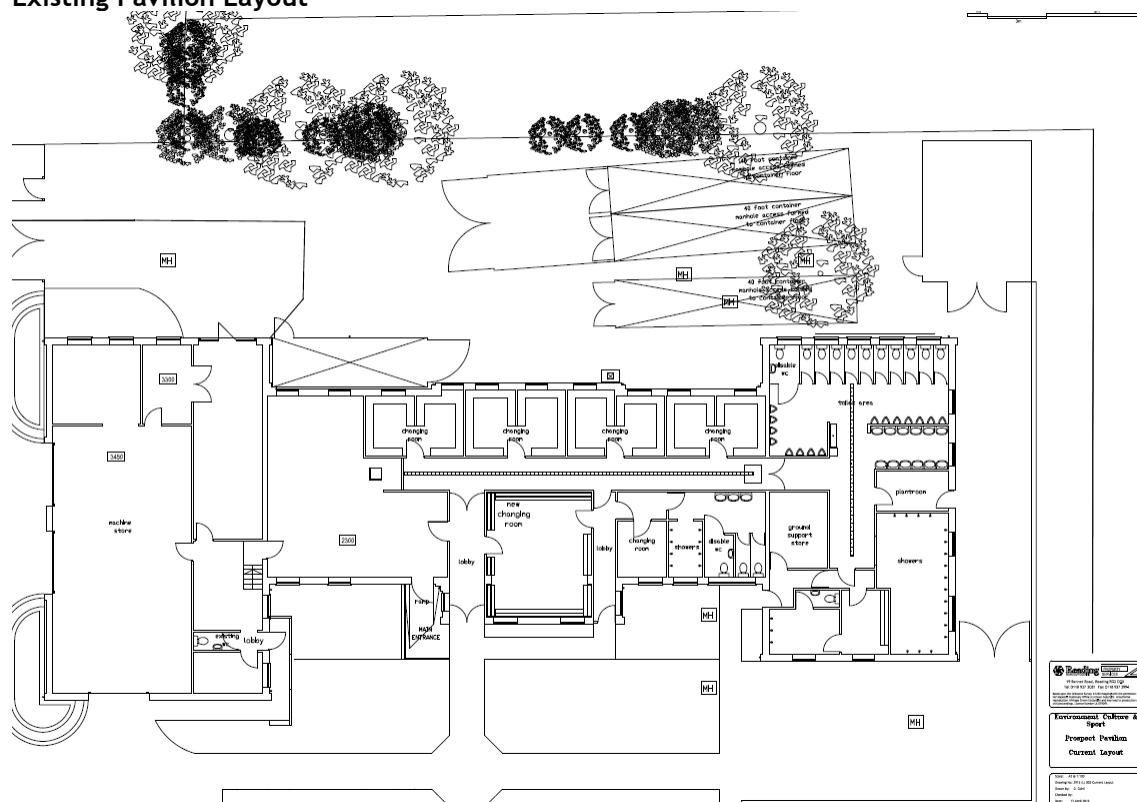
8. Appendices

Appendix 1: Images of the Pavilion and facilities

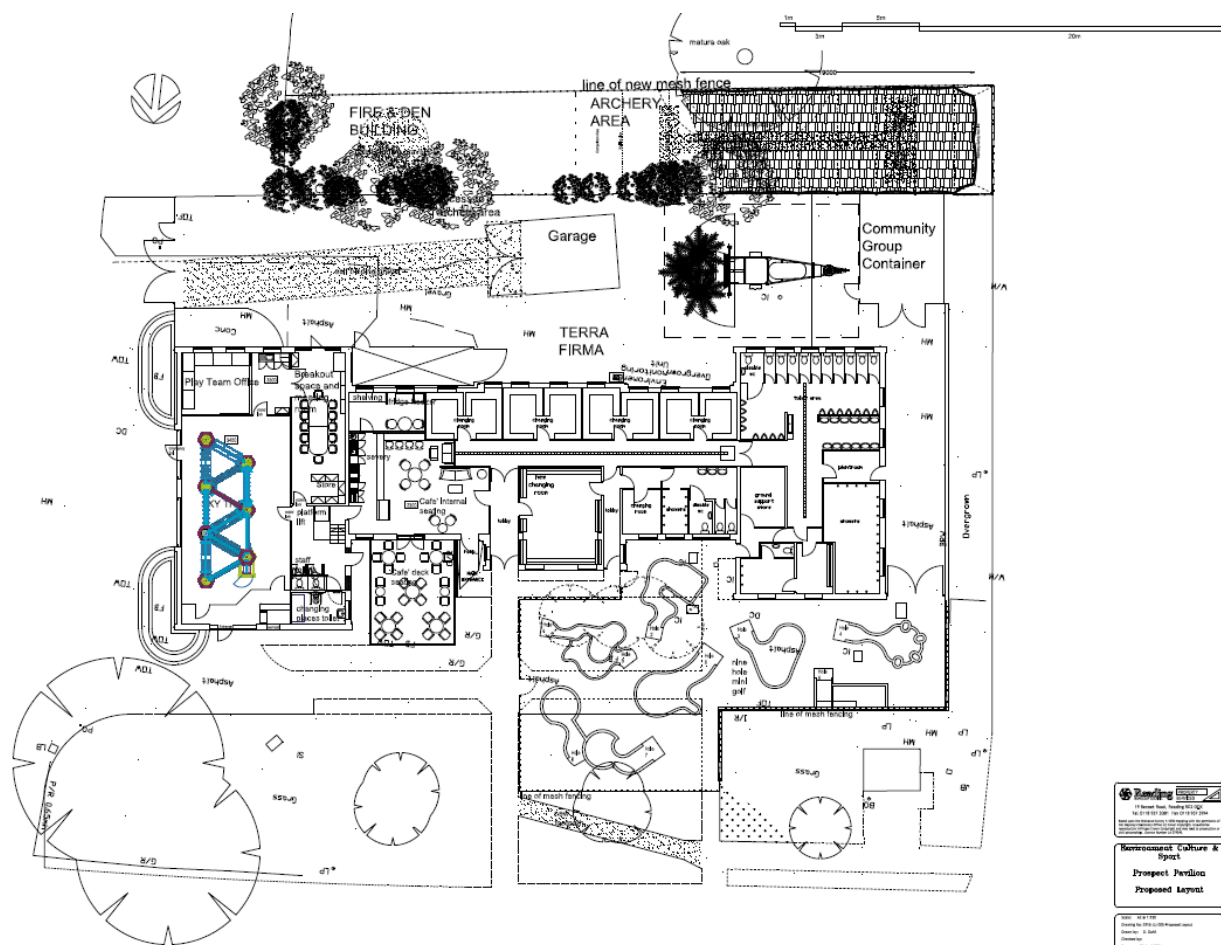
Existing Pavilion



Existing Pavilion Layout

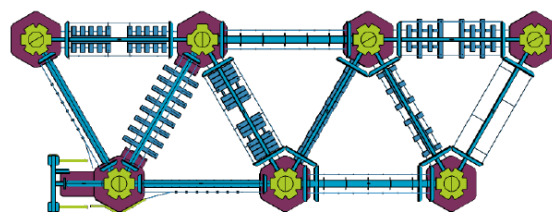


Proposed Pavilion Layout



Indoor Low Ropes Design

DIMENSIONS							
7 Pole Sky Tykes*							
# of Elements	Capacity	Imperial (ft/in)			Metric (m)		
		Length	Width	Area	Length	Width	Area
11	15	33' 0"	12' 3"	405 ft²	10.06m	3.74m	38m²
Distance Between Columns		10' 0"			3.05m		
Platform Height		2' 8"			0.82m		
Top of Steel Height		8' 2"			2.49m		
Features		Popular Elements: - Pass Throughs - Roller Rails					



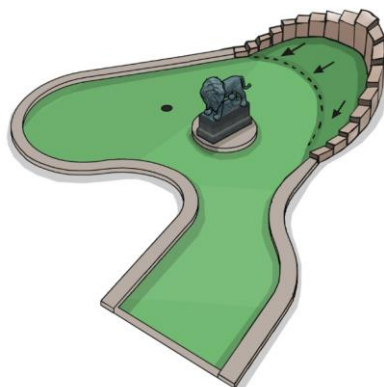
PLAN



ELEVATION

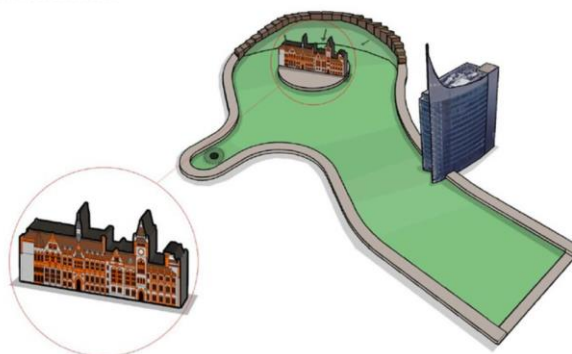
Mini-golf Images

Reading Maiwand Lion



Reading Town Hall and the Blade Buildings

TOWN HALL & BLADE BUILDING



Coconut Climbing Tree Images

