

Design and Access Statement

Mapledurham Playing Fields Landscape Master Plan



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1. Introduction

This Design and Access Statement is submitted in support of a planning application for a landscape master plan made by Reading Borough Council in its capacity as the Trustees of Mapledurham Playing Fields (MPF), located at 129 Upper Woodcote Road, Caversham, Reading RG4 7LH.

The charitable purpose of MPF is: “the provision and maintenance of a recreation ground for the benefit of the inhabitants of the Parish of Mapledurham and the Borough of Reading without distinction of political, religious or other opinions.”

In August 2018 the Local Planning Authority (LPA) approved the location of The Heights Primary School with subsequent approval by the Trustees. This instigated the development of the landscape master plan to mitigate the impact of the school on the site and provide an opportunity to enhance the recreation ground.

This document details the design and access proposals and should be read in conjunction with other supporting planning documents.

Consultation with MPF key stakeholders has taken place to inform the development of the landscape arrangements and details of these discussions can be found in the Reading Borough Council’s committee minutes library, Mapledurham Playing Fields Sub-Committee minutes:

<http://committee.reading.gov.uk/TROVEPROGS/TROVEIIS.DLL?/IS=19428408/LI=Committee+Minute+Library/ID=40/RW=2560/RH=1080/CD=32/VD=committee/WV=7/ST=ag/AC=AO/SI=159/HU=EmptyURL>

The final landscape master plan (see appendices for details) has been reviewed by the MPF Management Committee and the final plan approved by the Mapledurham Trustee Sub-Committee members.

2. Site Assessment

The MPF is approximately 11ha in size and consists of a community car park accessed from Upper Woodcote Road, a pavilion which serves as changing and social rooms for the tennis and football clubs; 4no floodlit tennis courts; a children’s play area in the centre of the site (there is no footpath access to it); a small open hard surface ball area, a community orchard, and open areas of sports pitches which are in high use. There is a wooded area at the eastern end and the site has wooded boundaries with a number of informal entrances used by visitors on foot, particularly by dog walkers but no formal footpaths around or across the site. There is a secondary gated entrance off Chazey Road from the south.

The new school will introduce a number of pressures on the landscape which will require mitigation but will also provide the opportunity to improve the recreational use of the playing fields.

The new school is to include a small hall and a Multi-Use Games Area (MUGA) which will be made available for community uses outside school hours though an agreed Community Use Agreement.

3. Access

A principal design brief is to improve access into and through the MPF for all users to use the site in all weathers and during the winter months.

The landscape master plan provides the opportunity to develop a coherent landscape with a strong natural landscape feature which draws the eye across the site away from the car park and buildings to the north (the pavilion, tennis courts and school) to the rest of the playing fields. This is achieved by forming a central avenue of large trees with seating and for improved access across the site to Chazey Road in the south. This main footpath uses generous proportions (a 3m wide breedon

gravel walkway) to accommodate pedestrians and cyclists with lighting to provide safe access particularly on winter mornings and evenings (the lights is to be timed to switch off at 10.00pm). The central avenue of trees will set back from the path edge, and once they approach maturity, the entire feature takes on a strong visual appearance that creates a spatial organising principle.

This is complemented by a perimeter network of 1.5m wide breedon gravel footpaths to the west of the central footpath, which provide dry walkways in wet weather, links a new children's play area and the existing three pedestrian entrances on Hewett Avenue with the main route across the park. The footpath network will support greater use of the fields especially during wet weather by pushchairs, wheelchairs and people requiring firm, smooth surfaces to walk.

4. Recreation and sports provision

Football pitches

Another principal design brief is the provision of football pitches at least equivalent to the current level of provision in terms of capacity and quality. The inclusion of a school on the site has meant a loss of the mini soccer football pitches / training area.

In order to replace the lost football pitches, the existing space would be re-configured with the relocation of the children's playground, the removal of the basket-ball court (to be replaced by use of the school MUGA) and removal of the arc of trees in the centre of the site. The area to the east of the new central footpath would be re-profiled to provide a 'sports terrace' area with pitch drainage installed to improve the quality and capacity of this area for grass sports including football. This will create sufficient space to provide the required number of grass pitches. This would also allow possible future development of an artificial turf pitch, subject to funding and planning approval.

Consideration was made in re-profiling the ground and installing pitch drainage to the western side of MPF. However archaeology investigations across the site showed the presence of an early Roman pen enclosure in the north western area which has influenced the location of the improved grass turf area. Refer to the archaeology report for more details.

The landscape plan identified the following existing need for football pitches:

Pitch size including run-off	Weekly equivalents	Peak use	Pitches required		
			Good	Standard	Total
Adult U17/18 11v11 106mx70m	4.5	2	1	1	2
Youth U15/16 11v11 97mx61m		2		1	1
Youth U13/14 11v11 88mx56m	3.5	4		2	2
Youth U11/U12 9v9 79mx52m	3	3		1	1
Mini's U9/U10 7v7 61mx43m					2

The provision of pitches to be made in the landscape master plan is:

Pitch size including run off	Pitches provided		
	Good	Standard	Total
Adult U17/18 11v11 106mx70m	1	1	2
Youth U15/16 11v11 97mx61m		1	1
Youth U13/14 11v11 88mx56m	2		2
Youth U11/U12 9v9 79mx52m	1		1
Mini's U9/U10 7v7 61mx43m	1	1	2

This provides an overall increase in the quality of pitches and carrying capacity for football over existing arrangements. There is considerable flexibility to move pitches between the drained and non-drained sports turf areas. This will provide significant flexibility in how pitches are configured, also allowing for a different mix of pitch sizes to be accommodated as the club needs change. The layout also allows for pitches to be moved (rotated) meaning areas of high wear can be rested.

Basketball court

The existing court is in a remote location, very poorly used not being served by paths or lighting. As part of the school development a Multi-Use Games Area (MUGA) is being provided which will be available for community use outside of school hours. The MUGA will be accessed from the footpaths, fenced, lit and of a higher standard than the existing basketball court and able to support a variety of uses.

Children's play area

The existing play area is of poor quality, not served by footpaths and little used in comparison to most other Council playgrounds. Given the envisaged increase in daily use by children, the current play provision is to be increased with the number and range of different types of equipment. This will be circa 600m² in size and consist of a low level fenced space for junior and toddler equipment (see appendices for equipment details) with non-loose fill safety surfacing and seating for parents.

The play area will be located just south of the new school MUGA improving its accessibility being closer to the community car park, school and pavilion and accessed by the new footpath network.

The siting of the play area was considered in various locations details of which can be found in the appendices with the advantages and disadvantages of each location. Its final location just south of the school MUGA was proposed by users of the MPF Management Committee and agreed by members of the MPF Trustees Sub-Committee.

Fields in Trust (FiT) guidance (Guidance for Outdoor Sport and Play: Beyond the Six Acre Standard) includes recommended buffer zones for play areas between play activity areas and the boundary of dwellings. FiT classify the new play area as a Local Equipped Area for Play (LEAP) for which a 20m minimum separation buffer is recommended. The new play area is circa 40m away from the boundary of the nearest residential property on Hewett Avenue and circa 100m away from the boundary of the nearest residential property on Knowle Close. This location benefits by being accessible, provides improved play equipment, and is located further away from residential properties than the existing tennis courts, pavilion and new school with their associated outdoor play areas and MUGA. In this context, the new play area location is unlikely to result in any significant noise impacts on residents above existing noise sensitive receptors and no risk of significant adverse impacts on health.

Trim trail and furniture

A small outdoor fitness trim trail following the footpath network is to be installed. This will introduce a new activity likely to encourage a different group of people into using the MPF to existing users. The experience at other parks in Reading indicates that this provision is likely to be well used.

With increased use of the playing fields it is important to provide furniture to support general use. This is particularly useful for those who are less fit or mobile. There are five benches to be removed due to the pitch re-configuration which will be re-provided along the central footpath.

5. Ecology and trees

To meet the core design needs to maintain the existing level of football provision and improve access into and through the site. This will involve installing a new lit, tree-lined central footpath. The land to the east of this footpath is to be re-graded and have new drainage installed to improve the existing football pitches. The area to the west will have a perimeter footpath to improve access.

The proposal will result in the removal of the arc of 15no trees (of which 5no are native trees) around the existing play area. In their place a central avenue of 40no liquidambar trees will be planted along with the following additional trees:

- 6no specimen trees located as shown on the landscape plan consisting of 3no Holm oaks (*Quercus ilex* and 3no Scots pines (*Pinus sylvestris*). There are very few evergreen trees in the playing fields and scots pine will provide winter interest and cover. The former are native to the UK, the latter to Europe.
- 5no new English oaks (*Quercus robur*) located to the north east of the playing fields.
- 6no ornamental trees (*Cornus* 'Norman Hadden') located on the periphery of the pavilion outdoor area

In summary 15no trees are removed and 57no trees planted which would result in a net gain of 41no trees across the site from this planning application.

The central avenue of trees once they approach maturity, takes on a strong visual appearance that creates a spatial organising principle for the site. The purpose of the avenue is to compensate for the loss of amenity from the tree loss rather than habitat. They also need to not impact upon the sports pitches, limiting the choices available. A range of habitats e.g. woodland, woodland edge, conservation grass, orchard, are retained across the site which balances the needs of all aspects of the playing fields.

On the western side of the playing fields, the line of poplars will be retained. Lombardy poplars are relatively short lived. At around 40 to 50yrs these trees start shedding branches and are very likely to be blown over in high winds, with each successive tree lost exposing the neighbouring tree creating a domino effect. Poplars also have spreading invasive roots that negatively impact on sports turf. One tree has been lost in recent years. As the Lombardy poplars reach the end of their life and start to fail it is proposed to replace all 10no trees with 10no fastigate English oaks (a tall thin columnar variety of the native oak).

In order to ensure the successful integration of retained trees during the construction works various tree protection measures will be incorporated into the design which is intended to maintain the trees in a safe and healthy condition.

The proposed 5m high light columns along the central pathway will have warm white LEDs which is considered an appropriate luminaire specification to limit impacts on bats. Dark corridors will be retained in the thin perimeter woodland and along the defunct hedge thus there will be no negative impact on commuting and foraging bats.

As the Liquidamber mature (growing to 15m to 21m) the lights will quickly become increasingly less visible outside the avenue.

Community car park 'overflow'

A small reinforced turf 'overflow' informal car park space is proposed north of the new primary school to allow for additional parking of six cars at peak times.

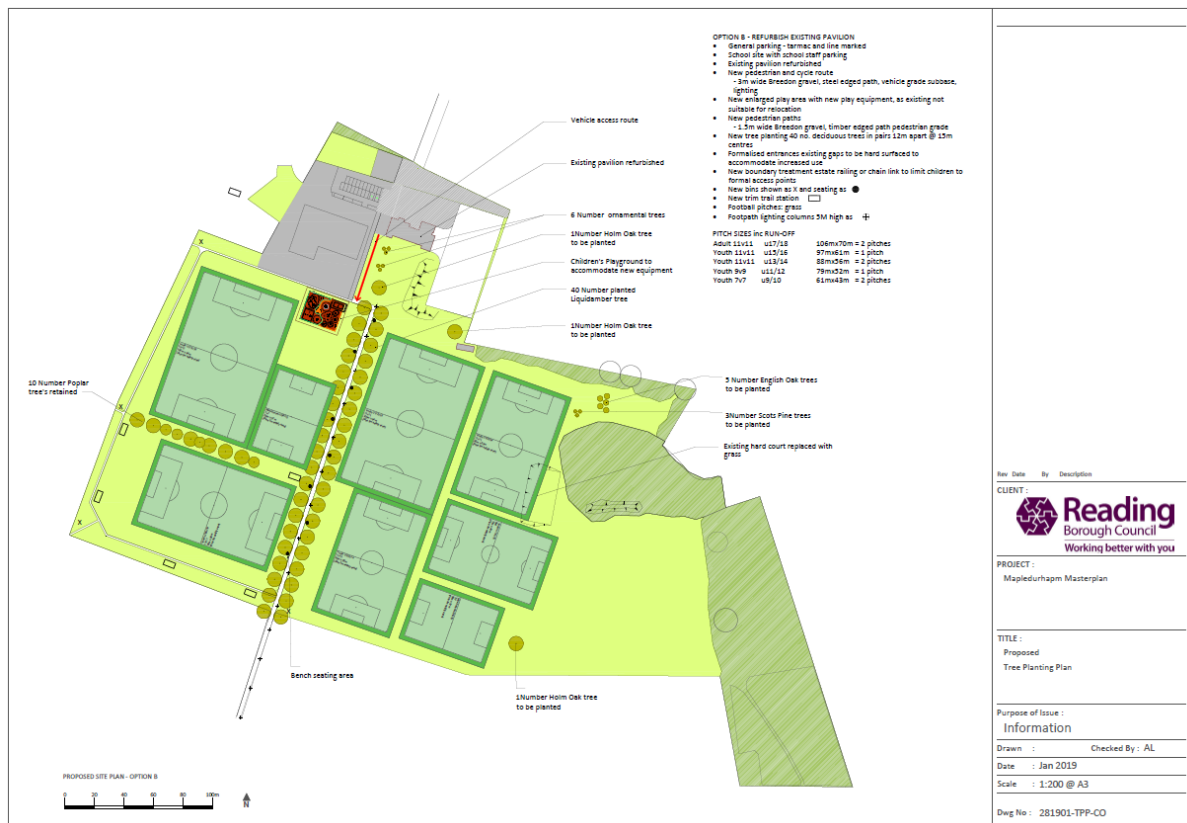
Summary

As with most landscape design changes there will be a number of impacts with varying degrees of benefit or impact across the site. The landscape master plan provides a clear opportunity to improve the overall amenity value, functionality and usage of MPF that balances the often competing needs of its users.

Appendices

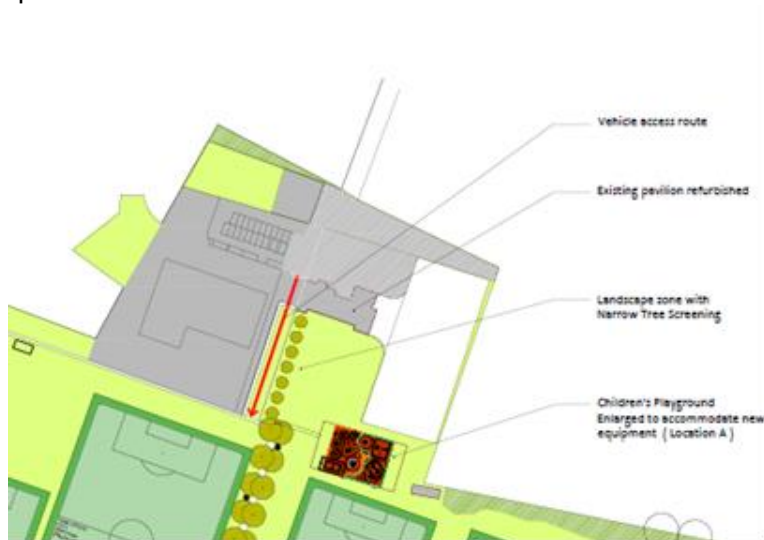
Landscape Master plan
Children's play area location options
Children's play area equipment

Landscape master plan

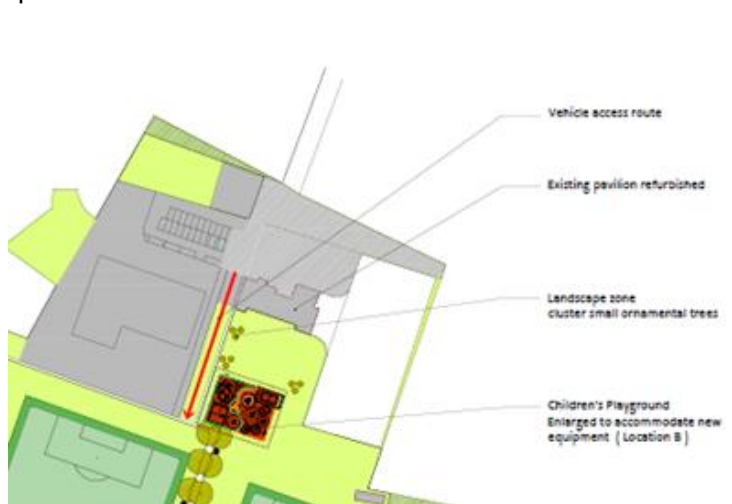


Appendices: Children's play area options

Option A



Option B



Option C



Option D



Option E



The following advantages and disadvantages have been identified:

Option A

Advantages

- Maintains open views from the pavilion into and across the fields. (WADRA have expressed strong concerns that not having this will limit the ability to host wedding and other similar activities in the pavilion).
- Can utilise the space behind the pavilion for formal play/activities
- During events a continuous and interrupted piece of open space flows from the pavilion into the playing fields providing uninterrupted event space

Disadvantages

- A minimum recommended distance (buffer zone) from a large play area (NEAP) to the nearest property boundary is 30m. This standard is identified by Fields in Trust and adopted by the Council. This buffer zone is not achieved using location A. There is a risk that if noise nuisance were encountered the play area would need to be moved.
- Negative evaluation by environmental health (noise) during the planning process is expected.

- There is a risk of the play area being used by young people in late evenings resulting in disturbance to neighbouring properties if youths congregate in the play area
- Slight cost increase to provide extended path to play area.
- Close proximity likely to introduce conflicts with football pitch use to immediate south
- Least passing surveillance /policing by playing field users of the 3 options
- Longest distance from the parking area to walk with small children of the 3 options
- Potential disturbance to tennis players
- If desired further extension of the tennis courts to the south in the future would be constrained

Option B

Advantages

- Appropriate buffer zones to residential properties provided (reduced noise disruption)
- Proximity to car parking for parents with small children
- Proximity to the pavilion allowing use when the pavilion is hired out for family events or refreshments available
- Proximity to the school providing activity for use by siblings awaiting brothers/sisters at the end of the school day and after school use
- 'Contains' a garden area between the pavilion and the play area, which can be used for summer time events and included as an outdoor space attached to the pavilion for private hire
- Adjacent to main access into playing fields
- Visually attached to the public recreation facilities rather than to the school
- Allows direct vehicular access onto playing fields
- Close to Multi Use Games Area and tennis courts.

Disadvantages

- Interrupts view into field from pavilion
- Large events will need to be organised around the play area (If centred on the pavilion)
- No buffer zone between school and playground

Option C

Advantages

- Appropriate buffer zones to residential properties provided (reduced noise disruption)
- Proximity to car parking for parents with small children
- Proximity to the pavilion allowing use when the pavilion is hired out for family events or refreshments available
- Proximity to the school providing activity for use by siblings awaiting brothers/sisters at the end of the school day and after school use
- Garden area between the pavilion and the play area can be used for summer time events
- Adjacent to main access into playing fields
- Adjacent to Multi Use Games Area and tennis courts

Disadvantages

- Interrupts direct vehicular access onto playing fields
- Interrupts direct pedestrian access, forcing park visitors to dog-leg around the play area
- Immediate proximity to school may create conflicts between play area use and school
- Being adjacent to school may create impression of being a school facility
- Partially interrupts views from Pavilion into playing fields
- Intrudes into the zone behind the pavilion, reducing the usefulness of the grassed area without adding any substantial benefit

Option D

Advantages

- Maintains open views from the pavilion into and across the fields. (WADRA have expressed strong concerns that not having this will limit the ability to host wedding and other similar activities in the pavilion).
- Can utilise the space behind the pavilion for formal play/activities
- During events an uninterrupted piece of open space flows from the pavilion into the playing fields providing continuous event space
- Appropriate buffer zones to residential properties provided (reduced noise/disruption)
- Adjacent to main access into playing fields
- Visually attached to the public recreation facilities rather than to the school
- Allows direct vehicular access onto playing fields
- Adjacent to main access into playing fields

Disadvantages

- Close proximity to pitches likely to introduce conflicts with football pitch use to immediate east.
- The width of the play area is severely restricted to allow 2 junior pitches next to it. This is to the extent it adversely affects the effectiveness of the play area
- Partially interrupts views from Pavilion into playing fields
- Restricts flexibility of use of improved sports turf area. Rotation of pitches is compromised, adult and junior pitch cannot be laid out side by side in northern half of playing area.
- Likely to necessitate relocation of drainage soakaway, implication of re-siting currently unknown.

Option E

Advantages

- Maintains views from the pavilion into the Playing Fields.
- Appropriate buffer zones to residential properties provided (reduced noise disruption)
- Proximity to car parking for parents with small children
- Proximity to the pavilion allowing use when the pavilion is hired out for family events or refreshments available
- Proximity to the school providing activity for use by siblings awaiting brothers/sisters at the end of the school day and after school use
- Continuous open space from the Pavilion, which can be used for summer time events and included as an outdoor space attached to the pavilion for private hire
- Adjacent to main playing fields through route
- Visually attached to the public recreation facilities rather than to the school
- Allows direct vehicular access onto playing fields
- Close to Multi Use Games Area

Disadvantages

- Run off space between adult pitch and 7 a side pitch is likely to be compromised. 7 a side and adult games can be timetabled to not coincide to minimise this problem
- Limited space behind goals of adult pitch
- Low risk that archaeology may limit ability to relocate pitches.

Option E is therefore considered to be the best location and is recommended as the appropriate location for the play area. Option B should be retained as a fall-back position if it is found either the archaeology or space constraints result in a material reduction in carrying capacity of the sports areas.

Designs from 4 playground manufacturers were sought and compared. A direct comparison purely on cost is not possible as playground manufacturers do not supply interchangeable items. They compete on the basis of different specifications and designs, the Parks Team have identified Sutcliffe Play as the chosen play equipment manufacturer for the following reasons:

- The majority of the existing play equipment at Mapledurham is Sutcliffe Play and other local playgrounds around Reading are provided by other manufacturers.
- Using different suppliers around Reading ensures each playground continues being distinct in its design and specialism from other designated play areas in the Caversham/Mapledurham area giving the broadest range of facilities for beneficiaries.
- The added play value of specifying inclusive play equipment. Sutcliffe Play is one of the leading companies in inclusive play through innovative design. This provides a range of activities for children with mobility problems which allow children with disabilities and special needs to be active side-by-side with able bodied children.
- There is no other fully accessible/all-inclusive play area north of the River. The Mapledurham play area will be served by car parking, footpaths and not have loose-fill (bark or sand) surfaces which is difficult to use by children with limited mobility.
- The equipment also provides a broad range of play opportunities for able bodied children.

Appendices: Children's play equipment

