

05 March 2025



Reading
Borough Council
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Title	PLANNING APPLICATION REPORT
Ward	Church
Planning Application Reference:	PL/24/1684
Site Address:	John Rabson Recreation Ground, Northumberland Avenue, Reading, RG2 8DF
Proposed Development	Formation of Skatepark, associated landscaping and ramped pedestrianised access (amended description)
Applicant	Reading Borough Council
Report author	Gary Miles
Deadline:	7 th March 2025
Recommendations	Grant planning permission, subject to conditions as follows
Conditions	1. <i>TL1 – Time Limit – Three Years</i> 2. <i>AP1 – Approved Plans</i> 3. <i>M3 – Materials As specified</i> 4. <i>L4A – Landscaping Implementation as specified (visual amenity)</i> 5. <i>Retention of tree planting – 30 years (Biodiversity Net Gain)</i>
Informatives	1. <i>IF7 – Complaints about Construction</i> 2. <i>I1 – Positive and Proactive</i> 3. <i>Biodiversity Net Gain</i>

1. Executive summary

1.1. The proposal is to create a purpose built Skatepark in an area of public open space in Whitley, located in Church ward within the borough of Reading. The skatepark will have a positive social impact promoting a more active, healthy and physical lifestyle. The proposal is considered acceptable in terms of its effect on the character of the area and the effect on neighbouring amenity.

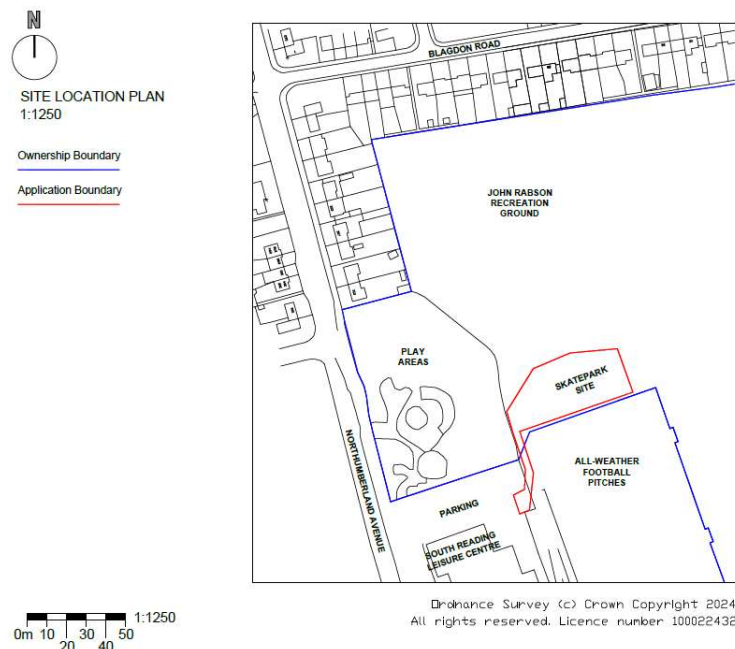
1.2. The proposal is recommended for approval subject to the conditions as outlined above.

2. Introduction and site description

2.1. The proposed skatepark for John Rabson Recreation Ground will provide a purpose-built venue for skateboarding. The proposed skatepark has been designed to be fully inclusive for users and spectators alike.

- 2.2. The application is required to be determined by Planning Applications Committee as Reading Borough Council is the applicant.
- 2.3. The proposal site is positioned in the centre of Whitley, to the east of Northumberland Avenue adjacent to the South Reading Leisure Centre, in the south of the borough. The site consists of a large green open space including full size football pitches, smaller 5-A-Side football pitch, 3G football pitch, tennis courts and a children's play area.
- 2.4. The proposed skatepark is to be positioned adjacent to and north of the existing 3G football pitch, the site is currently laid to grass and slopes in a west-east orientation. John Rabson Recreation Ground is made up of some 8.4 hectares, bordered to the north and the south by residential properties, to the east by Cowsey Wood Nature Reserve and to the west by Northumberland Avenue and additional residential properties. The proposed skatepark will cover an area of 418m squared.

Drawing no: PL-001-Site Location Plan



Photomontage-Images 1 to 7



3. The Proposal

- 3.1. Full planning permission is sought for a purpose-built, concrete Skatepark, along with associated landscaping. The work includes a new access route and ramped pedestrian access from the existing northern carpark associated with the South Reading Leisure Centre, making the facility accessible for all park users including spectators and pedestrians using the adjacent facilities within the John Rabson Recreation Ground.
- 3.2. The proposal includes soft landscaping including grass bund features at slopes of 1:3 planted with a wildflower seed mix, making good any other grassed areas, existing trees to be protected and retained along with the planting of an additional 83 Native trees within the John Rabson Recreation Ground, on land owned and controlled by the applicant.

3.3. Plans received:

Drawing no: PL-001-Site Location Plan, dated Nov 24
Drawing no: PL-002-Existing Site Plan, dated Nov 24
Drawing no: PL-003-Proposed Site Plan, dated Nov 24
Drawing no: PL-004-Dimension Plan, dated Nov 24
3D Visual 01 (Maverick Industries)
3D Visual 02 (Maverick Industries)
3D Visual 03 (Maverick Industries)

3.4. Other documents received:

Design & Access Statement (Maverick Industries)
Photomontage-Images 1 to 7
Noise Assessment (inacoustic) dated 8th August 24
Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (JohnWenman) dated Dec 24
Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment (JohnWenman) dated Dec 24

Received by the Local Planning Authority on 17th December 2024

4. Relevant Planning History

PL/24/0123 - Provision of Skate Park – Withdrawn – May 24

PL/03/0966 – Synthetic grass pitch with fencing and floodlighting – Approved - Aug 2004

PL/03/0546 – Improvements of levels and drainage of sports ground & installation of 4m high chain link fence on northern boundary – Approved - May 2003

PL/00/1021 - Development of an all-weather sports centre, comprising pavilion, 12 all-weather floodlit playing courts, training pitch and carparking – Approved - Jan 2003

PL/02/1291 - Improvements of levels and drainage of sports ground – Approved - Sept 2002

5. Consultations

- 5.1. Internal Consultees with an overview of comments received:

5.2. ***RBC, Ecology***

The Ecology officer confirms the Ecology report (John Wenman Ecological Consultancy, December 2024, ref: R2661_BNG_a) has been undertaken to the appropriate standard and concludes that the proposals are unlikely to adversely affect

any priority habitats or protected species. There would therefore be no ecological objections to the development.

The Biodiversity Net Gain report (John Wenman Ecological Consultancy, December 2024) concludes that a 245.67 % net gain will be achieved through the addition of 83 off-site native trees around the edge of the playing field.

In principle, the Ecology officer agrees with the planting as a means of providing the required net gain.

The Ecology officer confirms no objections to the proposal.

Note: 83 Native trees will be planted off-site, though around the edge of the John Rabson Recreation Ground, these new trees are highlighted in pink on the attached Tree Planting Map, the trees will be secured via a condition.

5.3 ***RBC Natural Environment***

The Natural Environment officer confirms the soft landscaping is acceptable and confirms no objections to the proposal.

5.4 ***RBC Environmental Protection***

The Council's Environmental Health Officer identifies some impact on the nearest property when assessed using the BS4142 noise assessment methodology. Although designed for assessing the impact of commercial noise sources it remains a useful measure for this play facility. When assessed in terms of the 'impact' noise (wheels hitting concrete/metal), the noise is deemed acceptable in terms of that assessment standard. The EHO confirms the skate park is a sufficient distance from the nearest property to comply with the guidance from "Fields In Trust".

Overall, the EHO does not consider the noise grounds would be sufficient to recommend refusal of the application. There remains a risk of noise being heard from the gardens of the nearby properties, although due to the distance it is unlikely to be intrusive during the day – it should be noted that this is a prediction and cannot be known until the site is in use. The EHO recommends that the skate park is not to be illuminated, to discourage use of it overnight when the noise impact would be greater.

The EHO confirms no objections to the proposal.

5.5 **External Consultations**

The planning site notice was put up on 7th January 2025 and attached to the RBC street furniture and left in place for a minimum of 3 weeks for the duration of the public consultation.

No letters of representation have been received.

6. Legal context

- 6.1 Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires that proposals be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Material considerations include relevant policies in the National Planning Policy framework (NPPF) - among them the 'presumption in favour of sustainable development'. However, the NPPF does not change the statutory status of the development plan as the starting point for decision making (NPPF paragraph 12).

- 6.2 In this regard, the NPPF states that due weight should be given to the adopted policies of the Local Plan 2019 according to their degree of consistency with the NPPF (the closer the policies in the plan to the policies in the NPPF, the greater the weight that may be given).
- 6.3 Accordingly, the latest NPPF and the following development plan policies and supplementary planning guidance are relevant:

National Planning Policy

National Planning Policy Framework (amended February 2025)

National Planning Practice Guidance

Reading Borough Local Plan (2019)

CC7 (Design and the Public Realm)

CC8 (Safeguarding Amenity)

EN7 (Local Green Space and Public Open Space) (EN7Sd John Rabson Recreation Ground and the Cowsey)

EN12 (Biodiversity and the Green Network)

EN14 (Trees, Hedges and Woodlands)

EN17 (Noise Generating Equipment)

EN18 (Flooding and Sustainable Drainage Systems)

CC2 (Sustainable Design and Construction)

OU1 (New and Existing Community Facilities)

Local Plan Update

- 6.6 The current version of the Local Plan (adopted in November 2019) turned five years old on Tuesday 5th November 2024. The Local Plan was reviewed in March 2023 and around half of the policies in the plan are considered still up to date. However, the rest need to be considered for updating to reflect changing circumstances and national policy. A consultation version of the draft updated version of the Local Plan was published on 6th November 2024.
- 6.7 Although there is a five-year period for carrying out a review of a plan after it is adopted, nothing in the NPPF or elsewhere says that policies automatically become “out of date” when they are five years old. Officer advice in respect of the Local Plan policies pertinent to this application and listed above is that they remain in accordance with national policy and that the objectives of those policies remains very similar in the draft updated Local Plan. Therefore, they can continue to be afforded weight in the determination of this planning application and are not considered to be ‘out of date’.

7. Appraisal

- 7.1. The main considerations relevant to the determination of this application are:
- i. Land use principles and appearance
 - ii. Amenity for nearby occupiers

iii. Ecology / Natural Environment

i) Land use principles and appearance

- 7.2 Officers consider the proposed skatepark, associated landscaping and ramped pedestrianised access will fit in with the use and character of the recreation ground. It would be grouped with the much larger artificial football pitches with their tall fencing and lighting and the existing children's playground and would not result in harmful erosion of the existing open space. The proposed tree planting within the surrounding recreation ground will mitigate the visual effects of small reduction in grassed area and a condition is recommended to secure these. It is considered that the proposal will not harm the open space, or the landscape character of the John Rabson Recreation Ground or the wider streetscene. The proposals do not affect existing sports pitches.
- 7.3 The proposal is considered compliant with policies CC7 and EN7 of the Reading Borough Local Plan 2019.

ii) Residential Amenity

- 7.4 Policy CC8 states that a development will not cause a detrimental impact on the living environment of existing residential properties. The following points have been considered as part of this application:
- Visual dominance
 - Noise and disturbance
 - Artificial lighting
- 7.5 **Visual dominance:** The John Rabson Recreation Ground covers an area of 8.4 hectares, the proposed skatepark will cover a small proportion of this at 418sqm and be located adjacent to the existing 3G football pitch and children's playground. The proposed skatepark will have a maximum height of 2.3m from existing ground level and 1.5m from the top of the newly created ground level, compared with the much taller fencing adjacent.
- 7.6 The proposed skatepark is not considered overbearing to neighbouring properties, with the nearest residential property located 80m away. Officers consider there is sufficient space between the proposed skatepark, and the nearest residential property, the proposal is compliant with guidance from "Fields In Trust" - a British charity set up in 1925 as the National Playing Fields Association.
- 7.7 The proposed skatepark as outline above, will be partially visible from Northumberland Avenue-the nearest road, will be fully visible from the existing carpark north of South Reading Leisure Centre and be fully visible to the north and east. An additional 83 Native trees will be planted around the perimeter of the John Rabson Recreation Ground effectively over time creating additional screening. The skatepark is not considered overbearing, unsightly nor harmful to visual or residential amenity.
- 7.8 **Noise & disturbance:** Officers have considered mitigation, such as an acoustic barrier, but there were concerns that this acoustic barrier could cause more nuisance by balls being kicked against the fence, creating additional noise. Another option considered was a soil bund positioned between the skatepark and nearest residential properties. However, this option would take up more room and potentially become a focal point for Anti-Social Behaviour. Officers concluded that while the proposed skatepark could result in noise which could result in a degree of harm to residential amenity it would not be unreasonable in the context of the wider site being a recreational area with existing floodlit 3G football pitch and other grass football pitches

and the children's playground. Any harm must be weighed against the public benefits, as discussed at the end of this report.

- 7.9 **Artificial lighting:** No artificial outdoor lighting forms part of the application and officers were keen for this to be the case, to deter the use of the facility passed dusk. Officers note there is every potential for light spill from the adjacent 3G pitch onto the skatepark facility, though this is difficult to mitigate against. It is considered there is no harm to amenity caused by artificial lighting as a direct result of the new skatepark.

iii) Ecology / Natural Environment

- 7.10 Policy EN12 states the key elements of the green network will be maintained, protected, consolidated, extended and enhanced. On all sites, development should not result in a net loss of biodiversity and geodiversity and should provide a net gain for biodiversity wherever possible. The proposals are subject to Mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain provisions.
- 7.11 It is considered that the Ecology report submitted has been conducted to the appropriate standard and that the proposals are acceptable in ecological terms. The proposal consists of landscaping works directly adjacent to the proposed skatepark, with the area planted up with wild flower seed mix. An additional 83 Native trees will be planted around the perimeter of the John Rabson Recreation Ground and will be made up of 3 Quercus Robur, 40 Acer Platanoides Crimson King and 40 Acer Platanoides. Officers confirm that the Biodiversity Net Gain of 245.67% is more than acceptable. A Biodiversity Net Gain Plan will be required to be submitted separately for approval under the requirements of the BNG regulations. A condition is also recommended to secure the trees on grounds of visual amenity. A further condition securing the planting for the 30 year BNG monitoring period is also recommended.
- 7.12 Policy EN14 states that individual trees, groups of trees, hedges and woodlands will be protected from damage or removal where they are of importance, and Reading's vegetation cover will be extended.
- 7.13 The Natural Environment officer was consulted and confirms no objections to the proposal. The additional 83 Native trees to be planted around the perimeter of the John Rabson Recreation Ground is very welcomed, this will create much needed biodiversity. Existing trees adjacent to and near to the proposal will be protected and retained.

Officers confirm that the proposal complies with policy EN12 and EN14 of the Reading Borough Local Plan 2019 and relevant BNG provisions included in the NPPF and associated Guidance.

iii) Flooding and Sustainable Drainage Systems SUD's

- 7.14 Policy EN18 states wherever possible, development should be designed to reduce flood risk, both on- and off-site. All major developments⁶³ must incorporate sustainable drainage systems (SuDS) as appropriate and in line with the Government's Technical Standards⁶⁴. Smaller schemes are encouraged to incorporate SuDS, where possible. Runoff rates should aim to reflect greenfield conditions and, in any case, must be no greater than the existing conditions of the site. Schemes should ensure that the movement of water through vertical infiltration as well as horizontal run-off does not worsen contamination effects. Wherever possible, SuDS provision should maximise ecological benefits, link into the existing Green Network, incorporate tree planting and landscaping and avoid damage to existing significant trees, including through changes to the site hydrology. All new developments in areas of flood risk should give priority to SuDS.

- 7.15 Whilst the proposal is on the smaller scale, the applicant has incorporated a Surface Water Management System. The scheme includes a new purpose-built soakaway sized at 1 x unit per 10m squared of new impermeable surface constructed to manufacturers guidance. The proposal incorporates a perimeter drain along the north-westerly edge, which is linked to the soakaway located to the west of the skatepark and associated permeable tarmac footpath. Officers considers the proposal has taken SUD's in to account and is therefore compliant with policy EN18 of the Reading Borough Local Plan 2019.

8. Equality implications

- 8.1 Under the Equality Act 2010, Section 149, a public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to:
- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
 - advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
 - foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
- 8.2 The key equalities protected characteristics include age, disability, sex, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sexual orientation. It is considered that there is no indication or evidence that the protected groups have or will have different needs, experiences, issues and priorities in relation to this application.

9. Conclusion & planning balance

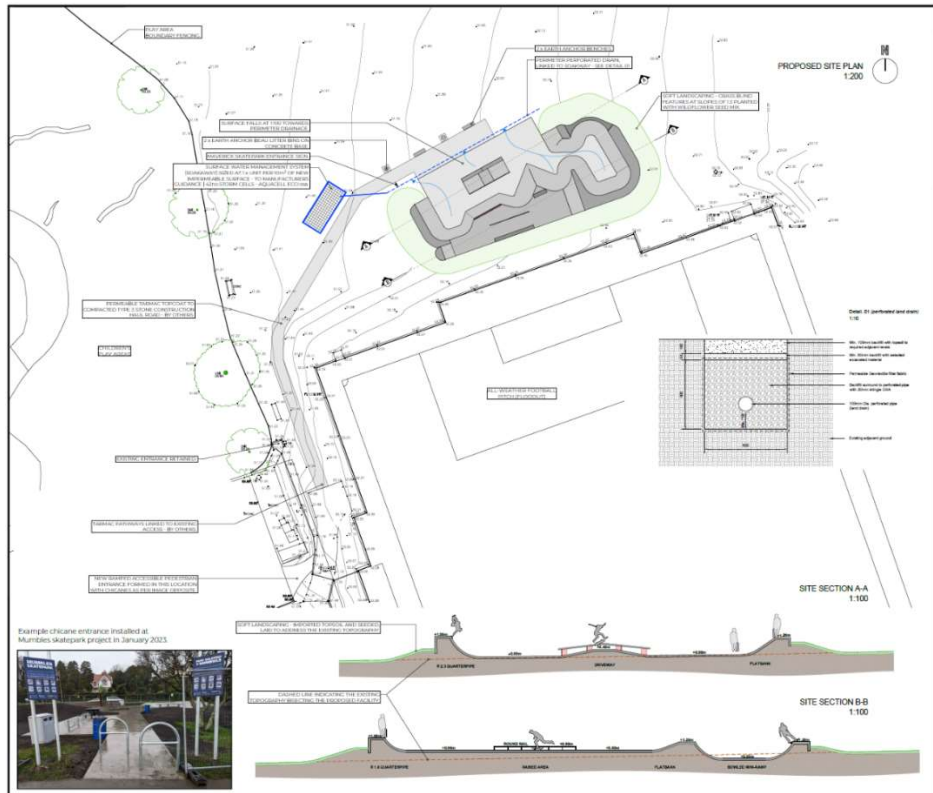
- 9.1 As with all applications for planning permission considered by the Local Planning Authority, the application is required to be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise, as per Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.
- 9.2 It is considered that, subject to the recommended conditions, the proposed formation of a Skatepark would be a beneficial addition as a new community facility and would enhance the existing leisure provision at the recreation ground. The associated landscaping would improve the visual amenity of the area and is an additional benefit. The proposal would have a ramped pedestrian access and would be inclusive in its design. The skatepark is not considered detrimental to the character and appearance of the existing recreation ground open space or the wider area. The development would be located an appropriate distance from neighbouring dwellings, and it is considered that any harm in terms of noise and disturbance would be outweighed by the public benefits of the scheme described above. Whilst the application is not SUDs compliant, the applicant has considered surface water runoff and management. A substantial Biodiversity Net Gain will be achieved. Overall, the proposal is considered to be a positive addition to the area and is recommended for approval, subject to the conditions included in this report.

Plans

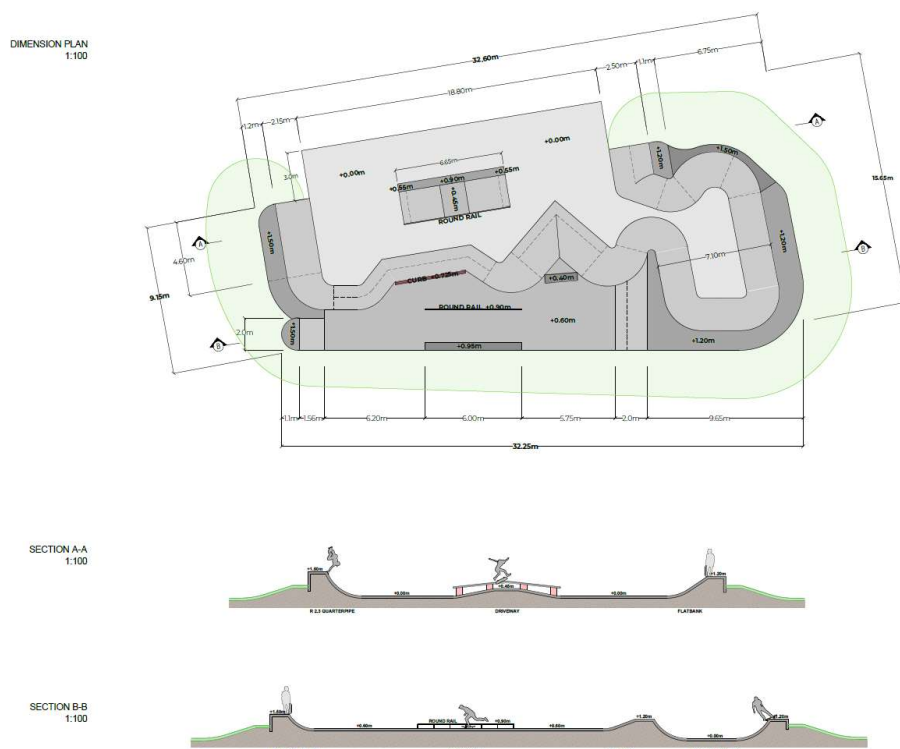
Drawing no: PL-002-Existing Site Plan



Drawing no: PL-003-Proposed Site Plan



Drawing no: PL-004-Dimension Plan



Aerial Plan



3D Visual 01



MAVERICK
INDUSTRIES

JOHN RABSON

SKATEPARK CONCEPT TWO



JOHN RABSON



3D Visual 02



MAVERICK
INDUSTRIES



PARK DIMS
32.3m x 15.5m

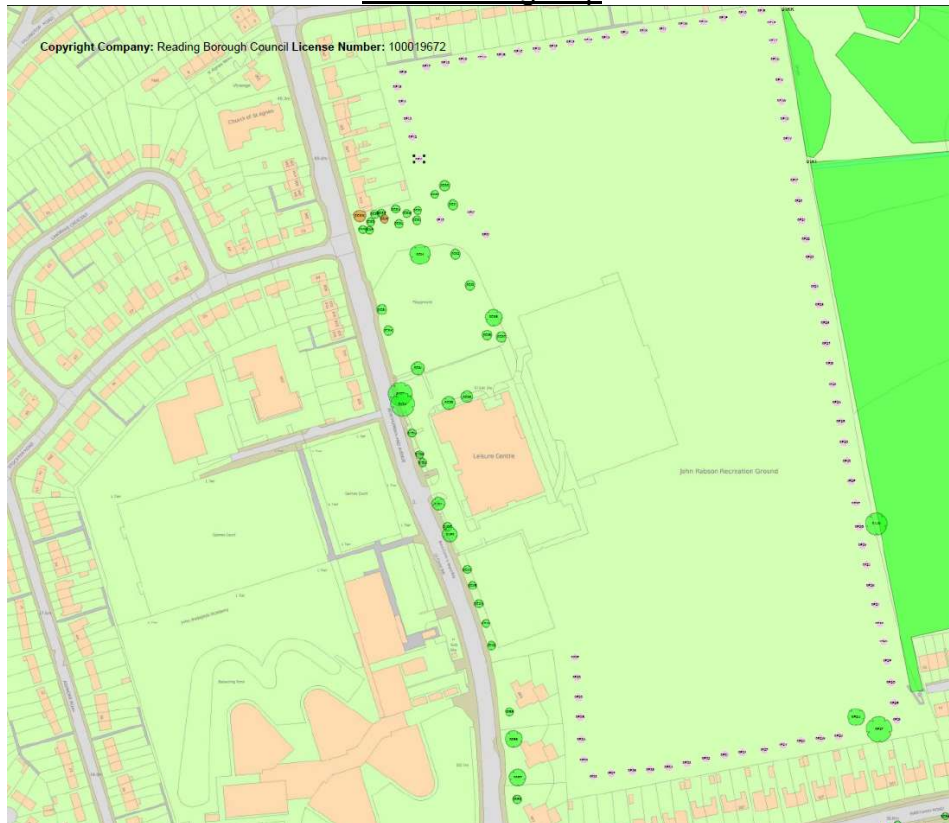
JOHN RABSON'S REC SKATEPARK CONCEPT TWO

- | | | |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------|
| 01 Quarterpipe 1500mm high (R2.3) | 10 Volcano 1200mm high | 19 Quarterpipe 900mm high |
| 02 Blend Corner to 600mm Flatbank | 11 Bowled End 1200mm high | 20 Ledge on Flat 350mm high |
| 03 Flatbank 600mm high | 12 Mini Ramp / Bowl 1200mm | 21 Flat Bar Rail 350mm high |
| 04 Hipped Bank 600mm high | 13 Corner Extension 1500mm | 22 Ledge 400mm high |
| 05 Curb 125mm high | 14 Hipped Quarterpipe 1200mm | 23 Flat Space 3m x 18.5m |
| 06 Blend Corner | 15 Flatbank 1200mm high | 24 2x Earth Anchor Benches |
| 07 Flatbank Hip 600mm high | 16 Driveway 450mm high | 25 2x Earth Anchor Beau Bins |
| 08 Blend Corner to 1200mm QP | 17 Grind Rail 550 - 500mm high | 26 Link Path (by others) |
| 09 Flatbank 600mm high | 18 Ledge 550 - 450mm high | 27 Safety Sign |

JOHN RABSON



Tree Planting Map



New trees are highlighted in pink on the above Tree Planting Map, the trees will be secured via a condition.