



**PRELIMINARY FEASIBILITY STUDY FOR REPLACEMENT LEISURE CENTRE.  
LANDSCAPE APPRAISAL.  
PART ONE : REPORT.**

**UNDERTAKEN FOR WINCHESTER CITY COUNCIL.**

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**DAVID HARES LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE  
4 NORTHGATE  
CHICHESTER  
PO19 1BA  
[www.hareslandscape.co.uk](http://www.hareslandscape.co.uk)**

## **Acknowledgements**

We have quoted and referred to the Roberts Limbrick Architects Outline Facility Brief and site appraisal study as a primary source, and acknowledge the use which has been made of this document, including the use of various plans and illustrations.

The copyright of the illustrations reproduced from other sources is gratefully acknowledged. All are sourced from the Roberts Limbrick study unless otherwise noted.

Whilst we acknowledge the assistance of other people and organisations, this report represents the views of David Hares Landscape Architecture alone.

David Hares

August 2014

## **Cover photograph**

A view from the north side of St Catherine's Hill overlooking Bar End and the Itchen Valley.

"Landscape means an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors." (***European Landscape Convention, 2000***)



## CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION.....	2
2. EXISTING LEISURE CENTRE SITE AT NORTH WALLS.....	5
3. THE ALTERNATIVE SITE AT BAR END.....	14
4. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSIONS.....	20

### APPENDICES IN SEPARATE DOCUMENT:

- APPENDIX 1 AERIAL VIEW SHOWING THE SITUATION OF THE TWO SITES
- APPENDIX 2: PUBLISHED LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENTS
- APPENDIX 3 VISUAL ANALYSIS NORTH WALLS
- APPENDIX 4 VISUAL ANALYSIS BAR END
- APPENDIX 5 TERMINOLOGY



# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Background to the study

This landscape study has been undertaken as part of a series of feasibility studies for a new leisure centre in Winchester. The existing leisure centre at North Walls was built in the 1970's and a replacement is being considered. Winchester City Council have commissioned feasibility studies<sup>1</sup> looking at both the existing site, and an alternative site at Bar End for the replacement building complex.

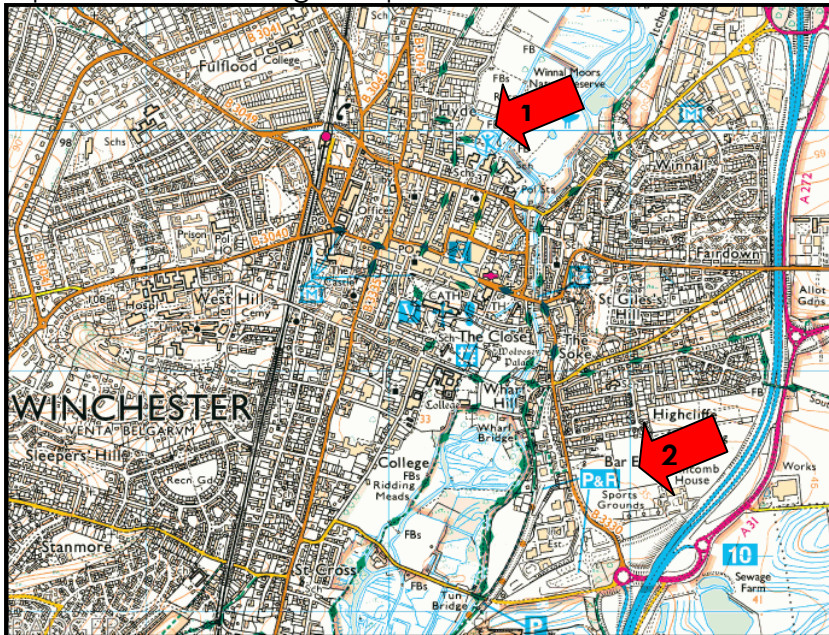


Figure 1: The Location of the two sites: 1 at North walls, and 2 at Bar End

The aerial photograph at Appendix 1 shows the two sites in context.

## 1.2 Brief

The brief for the study was to produce:

*preliminary landscape and visual impact advice for the two sites. Both of these sites could involve building partially on green field land, and are located in close proximity to the boundary of a National Park.*

and to

*Evaluate potential impacts using indicative building designs provided by WCC, which postulate potential development size and configurations on the two sites*

## 1.3 Method

This is a preliminary study, undertaken as part of the feasibility studies for the siting of the new leisure centre. This report is not the full landscape and visual impact assessment (LVIA) which may ultimately be required to accompany a planning application.

The methodology for LVIA is described in current guidance issued by the Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment<sup>2</sup>. It is normally a component of an environmental impact assessment, which is mandatory for major projects. In the context of this study the

1) Outline facility brief and site options appraisal Roberts Limbrick Architects 2014

work required is a non- statutory appraisal of the potential effects of developing either of the alternative sites or options. At this early stage the report is comparing two sites, and detail of the proposed building is still fluid. It is therefore appropriate to regard this report as a landscape appraisal rather than a landscape and visual impact assessment. In this study, although the analysis of the effects of the development have been based on national LVIA guidance<sup>2</sup>. In all cases the approach needs to be adapted to suit the nature of the development and to respond positively to local distinctiveness, which includes historic sense of place and the character of the countryside within which the development is to be sited.

The two sites are both situated close to the boundaries of the South Downs National Park, and it will be necessary to address the potential impacts of the proposed buildings on the setting of the National Park as part of any planning application. This appraisal is intended to provide guidance on minimising potential impacts on local character and sense of place as it affects Winchester City and its setting.

In addition to assessing potential landscape impacts in this report, it has also been appropriate to consider the sensitivity and capacity of the landscape setting of the two sites to accommodate a development of the nature of that being proposed. The report has been based on guidance on landscape sensitivity assessment which is provided in 'Techniques for Assessing Landscape Capacity and Sensitivity'.<sup>3</sup>, and where relevant within the Natural England/ Hampshire County Council research paper *Assessing Landscape Sensitivity at a Strategic Level*.<sup>4</sup>

#### 1.4 Landscape Context

The landscape context of the two sites has been considered by referring to the published landscape character assessments of the area<sup>5</sup>. Landscape character assessment (LCA) is a process which has been developed over a period of some thirty or more years by landscape professionals as a way of classifying and analysing landscape. Recent government guidance referred to and supported the LCA approach.

Landscape Character assessments are designed to 'nest' one above the other such that more detailed description and analysis is provided at the regional county and local scales. The relevant higher tier and more detailed lower tier studies produced by local authorities have been included at Appendix 2.

2) Guidelines for landscape and visual impact assessment 3rd Edition (2013) Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental management and assessment

3) Topic Paper 6 Carys Swanwick for Countryside Agency and Scottish Natural Heritage 2004

4) Assessing Landscape Sensitivity at a Strategic Level. A description of the methodology HCC/ NE 2004

5) Winchester District Landscape Character Assessment (2004); Hampshire County Council Integrated townscape and landscape character assessment (2010); Winchester City and its Setting document (1999); South Downs National Park Integrated landscape character assessment (2011) and the Winchester Conservation Area appraisal (2003).

## 1.5 Report structure

This report is structured as follows:

### **Section 1:** Introduction

**Section 2:** Describes the North walls site and location as it currently stands. This baseline analysis covers the existing townscape, landscape character, the landform and associated extent of visibility of the site. It includes views of the site from key viewpoints and describes the nature of the views, their context and the potential viewers, or receptors. Finally it considers the potential effects of the three development options for this site, on the character of the landscape, and the views into the site.

**Section 3:** Covers the same topics for the site at Bar End and the two options which are being considered for this area.

**Section 4:** Compares all of the options and considers the scale and significance of the effects of each option. It also considers whether it is possible to mitigate the effects of the development. The conclusions confirm the preferred site and option based on the scale and significance of the effects of each development option on the landscape. Options for mitigating the effects of the preferred option are also considered.

## 2. EXISTING LEISURE CENTRE SITE AT NORTH WALLS



Site plan taken from Roberts Limbrick Report showing layout and constraints of the site.





Aerial image of North Walls site taken from Bing Maps whose copyright is acknowledged;



## 2.1 Geology

The North Walls site is situated on an area of alluvial deposits on the edge of the valley of the River Itchen. These overlay the chalk of the Hampshire Downs. Chalk is a relatively permeable soft limestone, and precipitation falling on the downs percolates in to the surface and then forms artesian water layers within the chalk. These ground water layers flow from the surface as springs or seasonal rivers (winterbournes) feeding the upper catchment of the River Itchen.

## 2.2 Topography, drainage and watercourses

The valley bottom is broadly level due to the manner in which alluvium has been deposited. The river has been modified to create water meadows in the past which has entailed the digging of a series of smaller rectilinear channels. These are a feature of the site, as is a larger channel which is part of the braided main river and forms the eastern boundary. The flood plain of the river extends across the site and consequently the building development needs to be resilient to flooding. This may require the building to be elevated, or even to be built over an under-croft.

## 2.3 Soils

Erosion of the chalk material in the upper catchment by water and frost action produces a mixture of chalk rubble flints and clay. This is then further separated and both gravels and smaller alluvial particles are washed down the catchment, and deposited across the valley in times of flood. The west bank of the Itchen includes gravel terrace material as well as alluvial soils. The undeveloped soils within the valley have been classified as being from the Adventurers 3 series of soils which are described as deep peat soils with associated extremely

calcareous mineral soils. Further site investigation will be required to ascertain the exact nature of the soils under the site, and the fluctuations in the water table.

## 2.4 Ecology and vegetation

The North Walls site is situated close to the edge of the Winnall Moors SSSI, which lies approximately 50 Metres to the east of the site. The site is predominantly covered either with hard surfaces, ( car parks, pavings, sports courts or buildings,) or amenity grass ( cricket pitches). The water channels running through the site, and existing trees provide ecological niches which could support wildlife such as bats, reptiles, water voles and other protected species. Removal of trees or modifications to the water channels will need to be carefully considered and undertaken, particularly given the sensitive situation close to the Winnall Moors SSSI .

## 2.5 Existing trees

The river valley is well stocked with riverside trees, many of which would have been planted in order to help to stabilise the river banks. These include characteristic willows and poplars. The site includes various lines of trees, including a line of weeping willows on part of the eastern boundary, various ornamental plantings within the site and a number of tree lines around the perimeter of the site. Most of the trees are well established, mature and of a substantial height, and would help to screen and integrate the new development into the existing sensitive landscape.

## 2.6 Landscape character and sensitivity

At a national level ( Tier 1 ) the Itchen valley and adjoining down land is included within the *Hampshire Downs* character area. The Tier 2 integrated character assessment undertaken

by Hampshire County Council allocates the site to the Itchen valley (3C ) character area, rather than the adjoining townscape character area.

The area of the Winnall Moors SSSI , to the east of the site (which is within the National Park is described in the 2011 update of the South Downs Integrated landscape character assessment as being part of the Itchen valley landscape character area also. Sections from the three different character area descriptions are included within Appendix 2

In summarising the local townscape of the immediate area surrounding the site it is possible to identify the following key characteristics:

- *A flat and well contained area of sports facilities and a sizeable leisure centre building which are well integrated into the edge of the river valley abutting the Victorian terraces of the city.*
- *Existing mature trees help to screen the site from the wider landscape, both from the north, west and east.*
- *The braided river channels, mature trees and enclosed character situated close to the city centre create a wonderful setting for the existing leisure centre.*

The sensitivity of the landscape to new development reflects the nature of the site and the surrounding landscape, as well as the nature of the proposed building. The National park designation raises the sensitivity of the land to the east of the site. There are however a number of intervening trees which help to screen the existing leisure centre from this area, and a like for like replacement is therefore unlikely to lead to any significant effects on the setting of the National park, particularly given the density of mature trees on the site and surroundings.

## **2.7 Current visibility of the site.**

As a result of the significant numbers of tall screening trees within the Itchen valley it has been very difficult to identify any viewpoints which overlook the site from the wider landscape to the east, where there is higher ground from which views might be expected. There may be views from within west facing rooms in the flats situated on the upper slopes of the Winnall ridge, however these buildings prevent views from the public roads which service this area. A small part of the roof of the leisure centre can just be identified in the lookout point on St Giles Hill, otherwise it has not been possible to identify viewpoints which can see the leisure centre from the wider landscape. If the new building is significantly taller than the existing leisure centre there may be a possibility of the building being more visible particularly during the winter, however at this stage the North Walls site is considered to be well screened from the wider landscape.

The more local landscape does provide some views into the site from public footpaths roads and sports facilities. The nature of the scale of visual change which will occur will depend on the design option which is chosen, and the detailed positioning and height of the building. However in general the scale of change is likely to be less significant, the closer the new building is kept to the existing leisure centre.

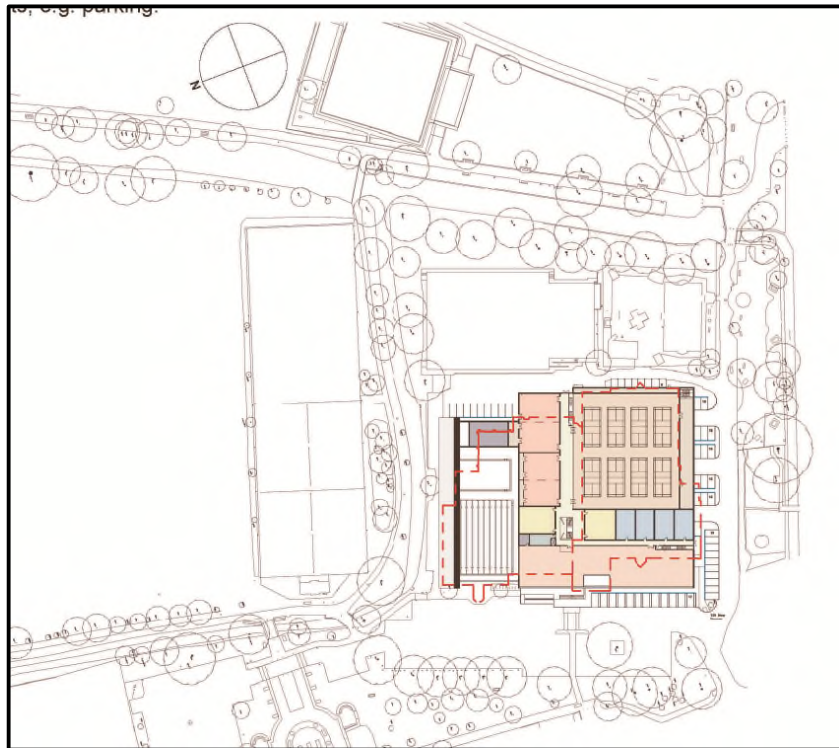
The mapping and photographs at Appendix 3 show the viewpoints and potential views of this site.

## **2.8 Built context**

The townscape character element of the Hampshire assessment includes the land immediately adjoining the site within the Hyde (northern historic suburbs) character area. This is predominantly an area of regular Victorian terrace and semi

detached housing, with occasional larger villas. Land to the south of the leisure centre is more recent development and includes educational buildings as well as the police station. The relevant extracts from the assessment are included at Appendix 2.

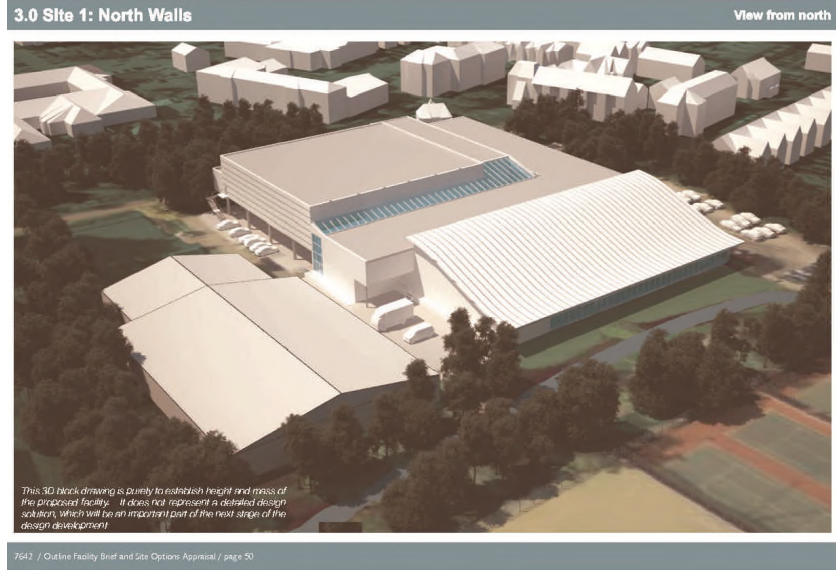
**2.9 Option 1: Existing footprint & retain bowls centre.**



**Option 1 Plan taken from Roberts Limbrick Study**

This redevelopment option is likely to generate the least change to the wider landscape, as it focuses redevelopment onto the existing site, and leaves the bowls centre, which is situated on the eastern boundary un-affected. In so doing the bowls centre and associated trees will continue to provide

screening to the eastern boundary, and buffer the appearance of the site to views from the National Park to the east. At this stage it is difficult to assess the potential differences in height between the proposed and existing buildings. Based on the massing diagrams provided in the Roberts Limbrick feasibility report, we would anticipate that the new building is likely to be a similar height to the existing. Opportunities will exist for the new building to have less visual impact, and be made more landscape friendly, by for example incorporating sections of green roof. This could mean the redeveloped leisure centre has net beneficial rather than adverse landscape and visual effects. Retention of the existing bowls centre will however leave a more basic building fronting onto the riverside, which would mean an opportunity to enhance this side of the site is lost.



Massing diagrams of option 1 from the north. Car parking underneath the building enables the building to be more compact but will also potentially raise the height.

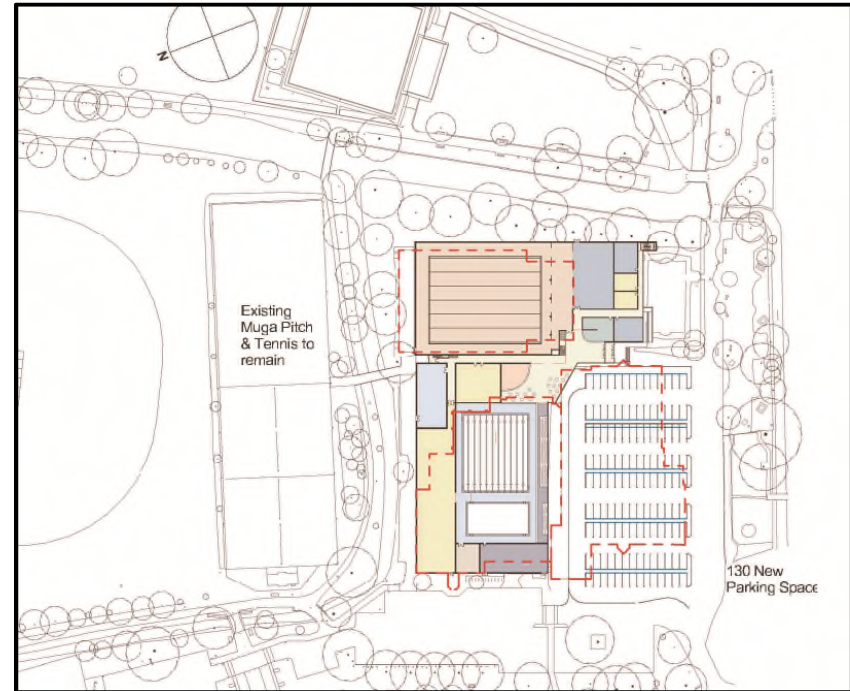




Massing diagrams of option 1 from the south which shows how mature trees help to screen the site.

## 2.10 Option 2: Existing footprint and integrate bowls centre

Although this option removes the bowls centre, and potentially places a larger building closer to the river, it would be unlikely to remove existing screening trees, and could provide a higher quality building close to the river. It could also allow users of the building to enjoy views towards the river, with the potential for associated informal external spaces overlooking the riverside. This is currently a lost opportunity as the building is largely inward looking and the peripheral uses of the site tend to ignore the riverside.



Plan showing layout of option 2. The sports hall is next to the sensitive eastern boundary



### Option 2 view from North

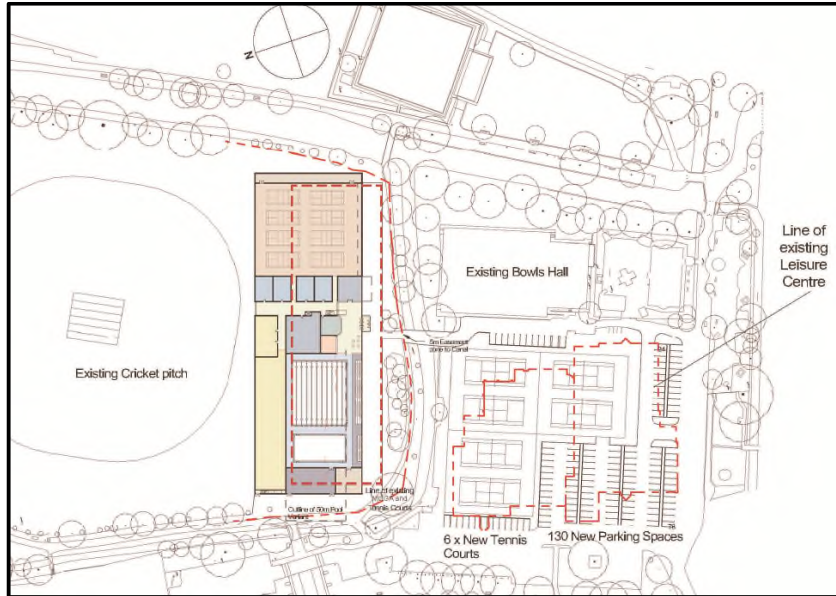
This shows how the tallest part of the building faces the river, ideally the tallest part of the building would face the city, which would then reduce potential visual impacts on the most sensitive landscape



Option 2 view from South. This shows how the car parking tends to separate the building from the city.

### 2.11 Option 3 Tennis court site

Option 3 which places a linear building onto the tennis courts, is likely to have a marginally higher level of adverse visual effect on the National park to the east, as whilst the narrow eastern elevation will be partially screened by the existing bowls club from the east, it will be necessary to remove the conifer trees which currently separate this area from the cricket field, opening up views of the building to the cricket pitch area and the northern boundary with the National Park.



Plan showing layout of option 3. The bowls club remains and parking and tennis courts cover the footprint of the existing building.

Redevelopment of the tennis court site as shown would move the built form away from the existing city buildings, (which currently screen the leisure centre from higher ground to the west) into a more isolated position where it is more likely to be visible. There will also be potential adverse effects on the setting of Hyde Abbey Gardens.



Option 3 view from north. This shows how the tallest part of the building would face the national park, and how the positioning of the building opposite the open space created by Hyde Abbey garden will both impact on the setting of the garden and more readily permit views of the leisure centre from the

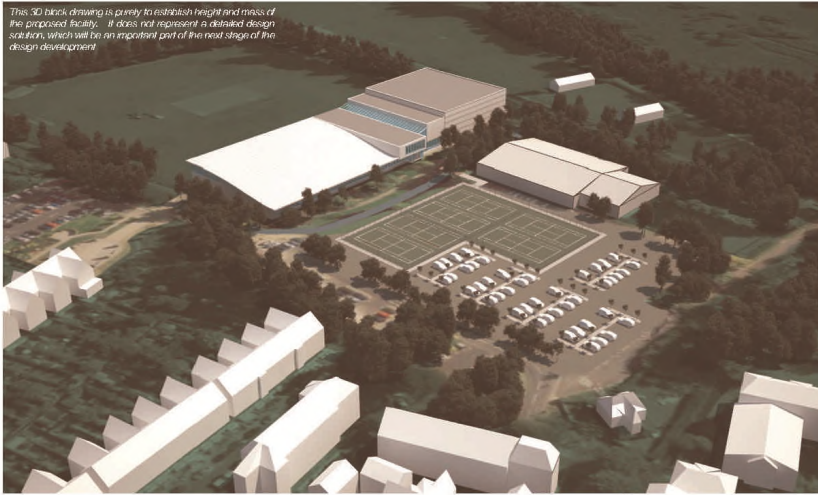


west.

View from south

3.0 Site 1: North Walls

*This 3D block drawing is purely to establish height and mass of the proposed facility. It does not represent a detailed design solution, which will be an important part of the next stage of the design development.*

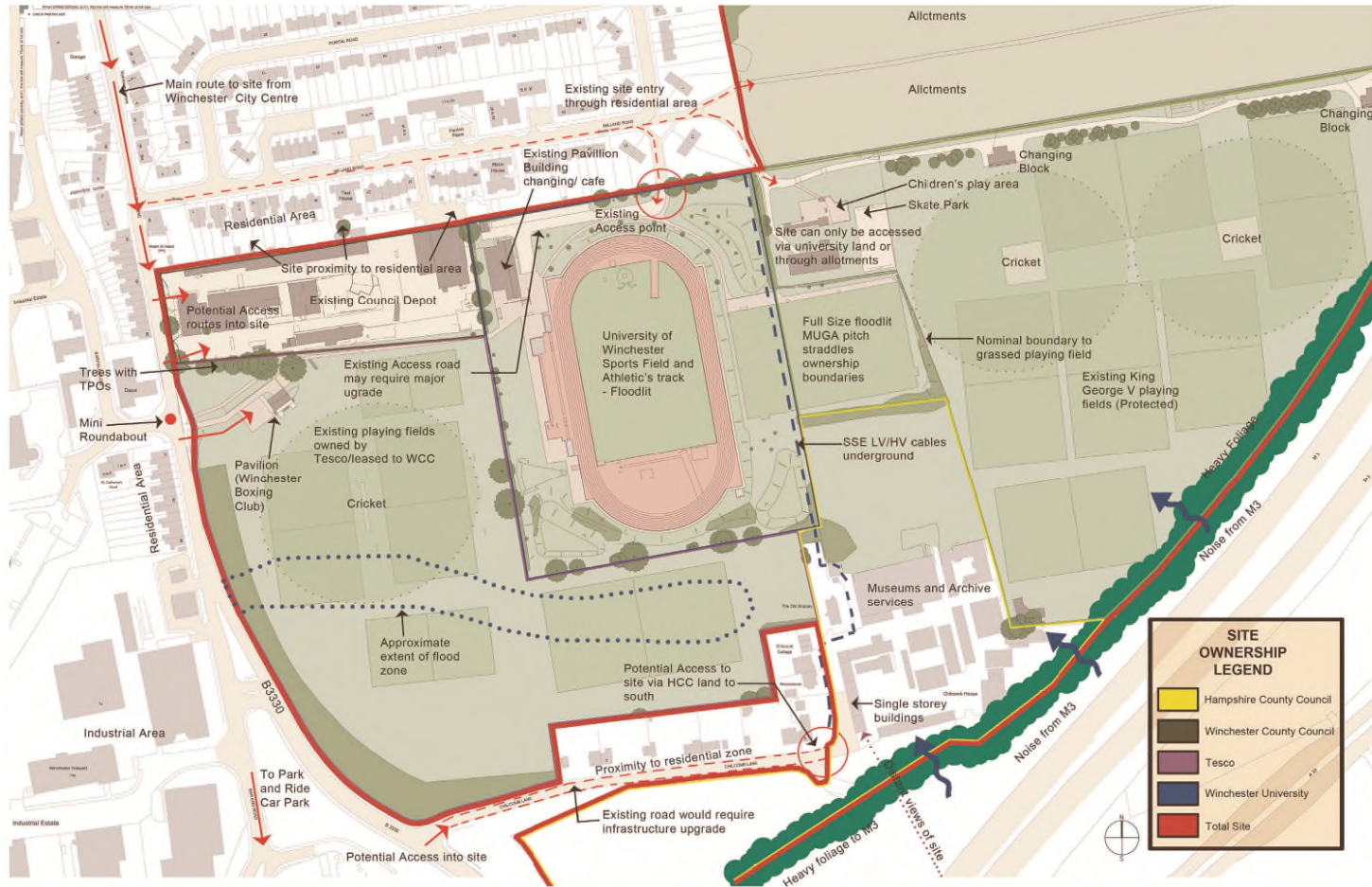


7642 / Outline Facility Brief and Site Options Approval / page 61

Option 3 view from the South showing how the building is separated from the city by tennis courts and car parking.

### 3. THE ALTERNATIVE SITE AT BAR END

Site plan taken from Roberts Limbrick Report showing layout and constraints of the site.







Aerial image of Bar End site taken from bing maps whose copyright is acknowledged



### 3.1 Geology

The site at Bar End is situated in a minor tributary dry valley within the Chalk, above the level of the Itchen valley, and appears to not be covered with the alluvial material which was deposited within the main river valley.

### 3.2 Topography, drainage and watercourses

The Bar End site is a broadly level area, although there is a slightly lower section which is subject to potential ground water flooding. Drainage generally takes place through the permeable chalk into the groundwater table.

### 3.3 Soils

The soils found within the undeveloped part of this area are classified as being from the Coombe series of fine silty chalk drift soils.

### 3.4 Ecology and Vegetation

Parts of the site are previously developed land, occupied by a transport depot, or by outdoor sports facilities. Much of the land is amenity grassland used for sports fields. There is a generally low likelihood of protected species being present in the area, due to both the nature of the grassland, and its isolation from nearby higher value habitats.

### 3.5 Existing trees

There are primarily three groups of trees on or adjoining the site. These are firstly a line of horse chestnut trees situated on the south side of the depot, occasional amenity trees (including horse chestnuts) adjoining the athletics track, and finally a belt of native trees (primarily Ash) which separate the site from the

B3330 Bar End road, on the west, Chilcomb lane to the south, and extends around the eastern boundary as screen planting to the M3 motorway which runs along the eastern boundary. Currently both Ash and Horse chestnut are vulnerable to tree diseases which are causing considerable damage or the death of these species.

### 3.6 Landscape character and sensitivity

At a national level (Tier 1) the Bar End site is included within the *Hampshire Downs* character area. The Tier 2 integrated character assessment undertaken by Hampshire County Council allocates the majority of the site to the Itchen valley (3C) character area. The land to the south of the site (which is within the National Park) is described in the 2011 update of the South Downs Integrated landscape character assessment as being part of the Itchen valley landscape character area also. The three different character area descriptions are included within Appendix 2

In summarising the local townscape of the immediate area surrounding the site it is possible to identify the following key characteristics:

- *A flat open area of tributary dry valley situated on the southern side of St Giles Hill extending to the northern escarpment edge of the chalk hills where St Catherine's hill overlooks the South of Winchester.*
- *A largely undeveloped open area of sports fields and other athletics facilities with few buildings, and a hard edge where the sports fields meet a council depot and a residential area which extends north up the sides of the hill.*
- *The eastern side of the valley is bisected by the M3 motorway, which is in cutting along part of this length.*

- the southern and western boundaries are also formed by roads, but softened by the presence of a fringing tree belt.

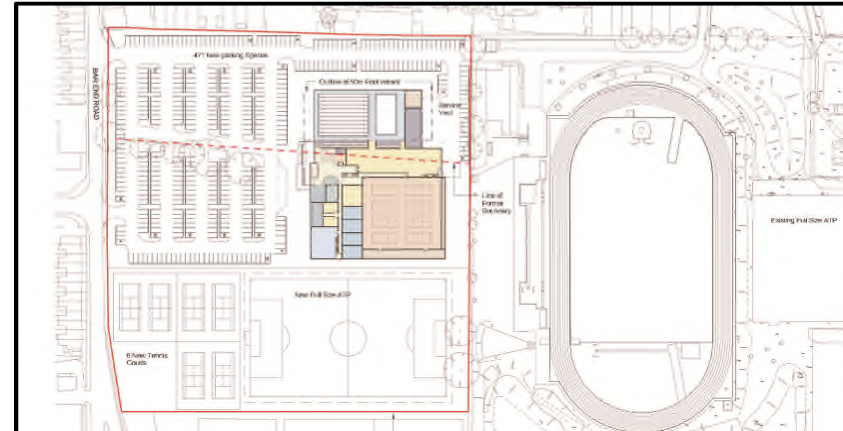
The sensitivity of the landscape to new development reflects the nature of the site and the surrounding landscape, as well as the nature of the proposed building. The national park designation raises the sensitivity of the land to the south of the site. There are some publicly accessible viewpoints within the elevated chalk hills from which there are views towards the site, and from which a new leisure centre development would be visible. A typical selection of these are included in Appendix 4 along with mapping showing the positions of the viewpoints in relation to the site and the national park boundary.

### 3.7 Built context

The townscape character element of the Hampshire assessment includes the land to the north of the site as being within the St Giles Hill character area, but with land immediately adjoining the site to the north being a part of the Highcliffe sub area, a mix of Victorian, Edwardian and post war small scale terraced housing.

### 3.8 Option 4: WCC and Tesco sites

The first option considered for the site at Bar End uses land to the north west of the site for the new leisure centre. This requires the demolition of the depot, but, due to factors such as access and noise, the building is placed on green field land, and parking occupies the former depot area. This means that the new building is situated within a relatively open part of the site, and consequently will be highly visible from the national park area on high ground to the south.



Plan showing the layout of option 4. The new building is separated from the existing built up area and housing by car parking.



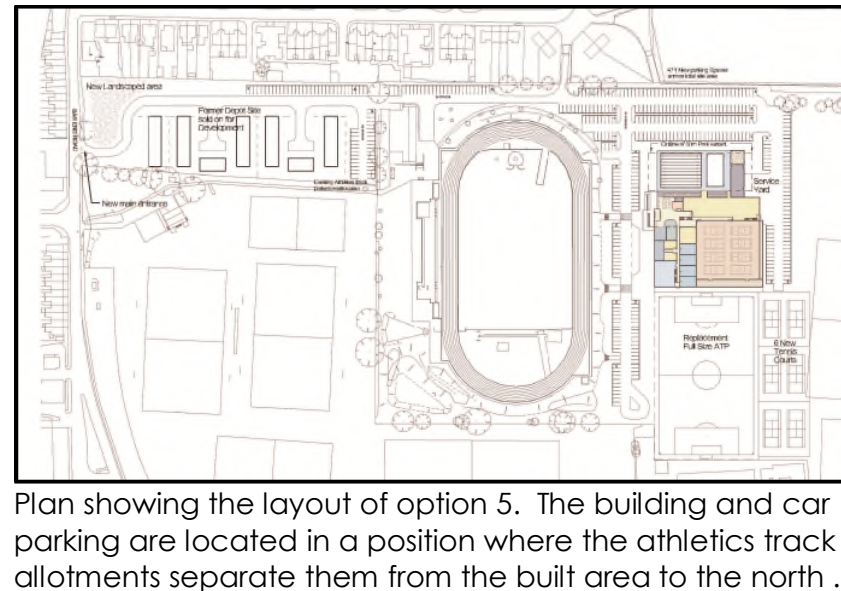
Option 4 view from the North. The extent of required car parking is shown.



Option 4 view from the south. There will be prominent views of the building and car parking from the elevated national park land to the south due to the topography and absence of screening.

### 3.9 Option 5: WCC and HCC sites

Option 6 places the new leisure centre adjoining the athletics track to the east of the site, with the depot unaffected. The leisure centre is separated from the built up area by the existing allotments. Similar to option 5 the new leisure centre building will be highly visible from the national park area on high ground to the south.



Plan showing the layout of option 5. The building and car parking are located in a position where the athletics track & allotments separate them from the built area to the north.



Option 5 view from the north. Showing how the building is remote from other buildings which might otherwise screen it.





*This 3D block drawing is purely to establish height and mass of the proposed facility. It does not represent a detailed design solution, which will be an important part of the next stage of the design development.*

Option 5 view from the south. This view shows how the building will be visible from the elevated areas of the national park to the south and particularly from Morestead road.

## 4. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSIONS

### 4.1 Sites at North Walls

The site of the existing leisure centre at North Walls is well integrated with the landscape of the cities interface with the Itchen Valley and adjoining housing. This is due to the strength of the existing tree structure surrounding and within the site. The existing leisure centre provides a synergy between the city and the Itchen Valley nature reserve. Ideally a redeveloped leisure centre would continue to provide and enhance this synergy. There is also potential to enhance the site with the new development, with the element of running water adding to the mix. Options 1 and 2 in particular using the existing site cause least potential impacts on the wider landscape, and option 2 offers the greatest opportunity to revitalise the surrounding area. Option 3 causes more potential adverse landscape effects, the building is separated from screening vegetation and buildings, and has the potential to impact on both Hyde Abbey Gardens and the National Park.

### 4.2 Sites at Bar End

The two options at Bar End may be easier to deliver, as they are less constrained by neighbours, access, and nearby nature reserves. There is however what would be considered to be a higher level of adverse visual effect as a result of the sites overall visibility towards the sensitive South Downs National Park landscape on elevated ground to the south. Of the two options, Option 4, which does recycle part of the depot and can screen some car parking behind existing trees is potentially less visible than option 5 which is sited almost completely on green field land.

### 4.3 Conclusions

After studying the potential landscape character and visual effects of the proposed 5 options for a new leisure centre for Winchester we would conclude that the options in the order of least adverse effects are as follows:

1. Option 2
2. Option 1
3. Option 3
4. Option 4
5. Option 5.

Based on our preliminary studies we would therefore suggest that the least potential landscape harm would result from a re-development of the existing leisure centre site ( options 1-3) rather than the site and options at Bar End. Further work is likely to be required to further refine the details of the site and proposals and we would recommend that a landscape consultant is appointed to assist the design team in this task.

Some of the techniques which might be appropriate to minimise and mitigate for potential visual impacts include:

- Undertaking preliminary perimeter and off site planting prior to the construction of the project in areas where visual effects might cause potential problems; i.e. facing Winnall Moors
- Continue to explore the potential which under-croft car parking can offer to reduce the footprint of the building and screen cars.
- Seeking to reduce the height of the building wherever possible.

- Explore the potential for the use of green roofing to both reduce the impact of gently sloping roof elements, and reduce potential water quality/ flooding downstream.

David Hares

Tuesday, 21 October 2014