

THE CLAVERTON CAMPUS MASTERPLAN

Background Paper: Maintaining & Enhancing Our Sports Facilities

1. Introduction

This paper sets out the rationale for the development of outdoor sports facilities at the University of Bath Campus. This forms part of our plans for the further development of the University campus contained in the emerging University Masterplan. Our proposals, including those for our sports activity, have been subject to consultation with staff, students, residents of Bath and other stakeholders, including Sport England. The outcome of that consultation that are relevant to sport are provided in this report.

The paper also outlines the University's more recent desire to build an indoor Climbing Centre as an extension to its Sports Training Village (STV) building.

2. Context

The University of Bath has a global reputation for high performance sport. Sport is an important part of our student offer and the sport facilities are also used extensively by the local community. The University was awarded the title "Sports University of the Year" in the Times/Sunday Times Good University Guide 2018 reflecting the excellence of its sports provision and the high quality of its academic sports programmes. In the 2021 globally-recognized, QS world university rankings, the University was ranked seventh in the world for sports-related subjects.

The University is one of six UK Sport-accredited Elite Training Centres and over 250 international athletes train on our campus. Ten medals were won by these athletes in the Rio Olympics and three were secured by skeleton athletes in the 2018 Winter Olympics. The 50m swimming pool, the indoor and outdoor tennis courts, the dojo, fencing salle, and a range of other facilities, combined with high quality coaching and performance analysis enable athletes to perform at the highest level. Several national squads are based at the University including swimming and modern pentathlon. The University hosts a super-league netball team and is the satellite centre for the Southampton Football Club Academy. The University has a strong reputation in Paralympic sports and is the National Training Centre for the highly successful GB Wheelchair Fencing squad.

Many students choose to come to Bath because of our strong academic reputation combined with an outstanding opportunity to develop their athletic career or simply to use the excellent facilities. The University consistently achieves a top six ranking in the British University and Colleges Sport (BUCS) competition structure despite being considerably smaller than many of its rivals. The University competes in the BUCS Super Rugby league which comprises the top ten university teams in Great Britain. Our offer covers a multitude of sports with professional coaching, physiotherapy and strength and conditioning training available to our student athletes. Regular participation in sport and exercise is regarded as making an important contribution to the physical and mental wellbeing of our staff and students.

The local community is a key part of our customer base with over 4,000 members of the community using the excellent facilities every week. There are quality development programmes for children and young adults in a range of sports including netball, tennis, judo and swimming and several, large community sports clubs are based at the University such as Team Bath Buccaneers Hockey Club and Team Bath Athletics Club). Many local, regional, and national events take place annually in the STV (e.g. trampolining, athletics, badminton). In 2019, the University hosted both the Federation Cup, attracting thousands of tennis fans from across the UK, and the European Modern Pentathlon Championships. Every year, one of the student Super Rugby matches is played at the Bath Recreation Ground and this event attracts over 5,000 spectators. Our home

super-league netball games attract well over 1,000 spectators and are often televised by Sky TV.

3. Our Sporting Ambition

As a University, we plan to continue to excel in our three areas of focus: elite performance, student sport and community engagement. In recent years, we have invested in a new swimming pool and a new gym as well as upgrading our existing facilities, including resurfacing one of our astro pitches, installing a 3G training area and upgrading our outdoor tennis courts.

Despite the above improvements, our outdoor facilities, while good, are falling behind what is required and expected today. Our two artificial pitches are used for hockey and other sports but are unsuitable for impact sports such as Rugby, American Football or Lacrosse. In addition, they do not meet the standards for football set by the Football Association. We also have considerable unmet demand from our student population and community users.

Our 14 existing full-size grass pitches and 5 junior pitches are well maintained but in order to retain their quality throughout a season, they are only used twice a week for matches. A number of pitches (e.g. Lime Kiln, Rugby 1) drain poorly due to the underlying clay rocks and as this is coupled with our exposed hilltop location, a number of our pitches are often unusable for several weeks in the depth of winter. Training areas around and between pitches are used more frequently and rotation maximises the recovery and thus availability of training space. However, despite our best efforts, we have very large unmet demand from students as has been evidenced in detail by our Students' Union.

Our ambition is to meet the demands of our students, high performance athletes and the community.

4. The Rationale for a new 3G Pitch

The Masterplan envisages the installation of one, full-size, 3G pitch on the grass pitch (known as Rugby 1) adjacent to our astro pitches. This would increase sporting capacity and as a 3G pitch with lighting could be used for up to 97 hours per week; that is 15 hours per day Monday – Friday (07:00-22:00), and 11 hours on Saturday and Sunday (08:00 – 19:00). It would also be better suited to the needs of many sports including football, rugby (union, league, and sevens), lacrosse, American football and ultimate frisbee. 3G provision would also benefit hockey by moving other sports off the two existing astro pitches.

By way of comparison, in 2017/18, the usage on the Rugby 1 pitch totaled 113.5 hours (see Appendix 1 for details). It was used most extensively in September and October for training and one match, with total usage of 57 hours over this nine-week period. This is just over six hours per week. The pitch could not take more usage without the risk of destroying the surface beyond recovery for the rest of the season. This is because of the damage caused to the grass surface by the impact of students training and playing rugby and American football, especially when the surface and underlining soil are damp so rendering them more susceptible to damage. Even this level of usage left it in a poor condition during December and January but avoiding excessive usage does allow the surface to recover sufficiently to play matches during the second half of the season in February and March.

Usage on our current pitches is limited to a maximum of two matches per week, which we record as five hours of usage. The University currently has 14 full size grass pitches, so in any one week around 70 hours of pitch use is available. One 3G pitch would provide more time in one week than currently provided by all 14 pitches! A typical programme of its proposed weekly use is provided at Appendix 2.

The development of 3G pitches is supported by the Football Foundation provided the proposal is FF/FA compliant. The RFU and England hockey are also supportive, the latter because of the additional capacity

that would be available to hockey on the existing astros. For the avoidance of doubt, the developments would be designed to comply fully with requirements of Sport England and relevant NGBs in order to accommodate BUCS premier league competition requirements (excluding BUCS Super Rugby as this requires spectator provision).

The proposed development would also create an opportunity to install additional sports provision between the recently installed 3G strip and the new 3G pitch. This could be three netball or basketball courts, a multi-use games area (MUGA), an outdoor gym, an additional 3G training area or a combination of these options.

5. Ensuring the 3G pitch provides an environmentally friendly solution

A number of environmental concerns have arisen regarding 3G pitches over recent years, most notably the use of rubber crumb as an infill. Rubber crumb is produced from used car tyres and comprises small pellets. These pellets break down over time leading to microplastics leaking into the local environment. In order to address these valid concerns, the University is developing a proposal for a completely recyclable 3G pitch which would be a unique and ground-breaking system. The technology in this area is developing rapidly and we are confident that there are suppliers in the market that would help us to deliver on this ambition.

6. The Claverton Masterplan

The University currently has 14 full-size outdoor pitches. 11 of those are located in the Green Belt and Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AoNB) on campus or at the Sulis Club which is around one mile away from the main site. In addition, there are four junior pitches at the Sulis Club and one on campus.

Three outdoor pitches and a junior training pitch are located on the "Eastern Playing Fields" to the east of the STV. This area was removed from the Green Belt to facilitate its future development to address the University's needs but remains part of the AoNB.

Our proposal would result in the loss of three full-size grass pitches and a junior training pitch on the Eastern Playing Fields, two to provide built development (academic and/or residences) and one plus the junior training pitch to accommodate the new 3G pitch. This would significantly increase the University's capacity by replacing three pitches that are used for around 15 hours per week with a 3G pitch that could be used for up to 97 hours per week: a 6-fold increase.

The proposed location of this 3G pitch provides a natural extension to the existing outdoor facilities, thereby, maximising customer experience through its relatively close proximity to the existing changing and toilet facilities. This location also enables the pitch to be fenced and managed as an extension to existing areas within the STV footprint (astros, running track, volleyball courts) so enabling usage of the areas to be monitored and controlled which will minimise the risk of inappropriate activity and potential damage.

There would still be 11 full size grass pitches left within the University's portfolio (1 Lacrosse pitch in the central campus, 4 on St Johns Field, 2 on Lime Kiln fields and 4 at the Sulis Club). With the exception of the Lacrosse pitch, they are all multiuse pitches for the outdoor sports identified above, although most commonly they are marked out for football and rugby. The Sulis Club also has four junior pitches in the winter and two good quality cricket pitches in the summer and these facilities are mainly used by the local community.

We propose to retain the recently refurbished outdoor tennis courts (4 artificial clay, 4 hard) by the main entrance road as these courts are heavily utilised throughout the year by both students and members of the local community. We are able to record the number of visits to the courts and these were 35,277 for

the 11-month period from July 17 – May 18. This summer for the 4 months from June to September, the number of visits was 21,057. The clay courts located close to the East Car Park will, however, be relocated closer to the STV to facilitate the development referred to above.

Sport England is a statutory consultee on planning applications for any development involving existing pitches. In its response to our Masterplan consultation, Sport England stated that our proposals which involve developing the Eastern playing fields and expanding sporting capacity by developing 3G pitches do not meet their policy requirements. It is understood that is because “a proposed artificial grass pitch may be unsuitable to accommodate some grass pitch sports or the standards of play or grades of competition required by some sports”. However, it is clear that this proposal is of the highest standard and would greatly expand the University’s pitch use capacity, improve playing facilities for a wider variety of sports and would still leave 11 full-size grass pitches available for use.

7. An Indoor Climbing Centre

The University wishes to build an indoor Climbing Centre adjacent to the existing dojo, in an in-fill location identified as an area for future development when the STV was originally built some 20 years ago. Climbing is a growing sport and centres are springing up across the country but currently there is no provision in Bath. There is a proven level of student and community demand and this is likely to increase as the sport makes its debut in the Tokyo Olympics.

The proposed centre, which would primarily provide the entry level activity of bouldering, would ideally occupy a footprint of 35m x 20m with a height of 8m in line with the existing elevations. Its location would extend the STV footprint into a car park.

Like the rest of the STV, significant levels of community usage would be actively sought. As such, the provision of this popular activity would become a welcome addition to Bath’s sporting infrastructure.

8. Summary

The University of Bath has a strong reputation for its sporting excellence. The Masterplan proposals will enable the University to upgrade its facilities and provide greater opportunity for student and community use as well as supporting elite performance. We believe Sport England’s requirements can be met by the overall provision at the University, and to release the full development potential of the campus and maintain the University’s sporting ambition, the provision of a 3G pitch is an essential element of the Campus Masterplan proposals.

APPENDIX 1:

EASTWOOD RUGBY PITCH USE 2017/18

Date	Hours	Training/Match	Customer
Aug-17			
29th	2.5	Training	Students
30th	1.5	Training	Students
31st	1.5	Training	External
	5.5		
Sep-17			
1st	2.5	Training	Students
2nd	2.5	Training	Students
4th	2.5	Training	Students
5th	3	Training	Students
8th	2.5	Training	Students
9th	2.5	Training	Students
15th	1.5	Training	Students
17th	2	Training	Students
20th	2	Training	Students
22nd	1.5	Training	Students
24th	2	Training	Students
27th	2	Training	Students
29th	2	Training	Students
	28.5		
Oct-17			
1st	2	Training	Students
2nd	1	Training	Students
4th	2	Training	Students
6th	1.5	Training	Students
7th	7	Training	Students
8th	7	Training	Students
10th	3.5	Training	Students
13th	1.5	Training	Students
18th	1.5	Match	Students
20th	1.5	Training	Students
	28.5		
Nov-17			
5th	6	Training	Students
15th	1.5	Match	Students
	7.5		
Feb-18			
4th	6	Match	Students
11th	6	Match	Students
18th	6	Match	Students
	18		
Mar-18			
17th	3.5	Training	External
	3.5		
Apr-18			
18th	5	Matches	Students
	5		

May-18

6th	6	Match	Students
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6

Jun-18

29th	8	Event	External
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8

Jul-18

16th	3	Event	External
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3

Total Hours = 113.5

**APPENDIX 2:
PROPOSED WEEKLY 3G PITCH USE PROGRAMME**

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
7am							
7.30am	Student Use	Student Use			Student Use		
8am			Student Use				
8.30am							
9.00am						SD5 Soccer Tots	Southampton Academy
9.30am							
10.00am					Student Use		
10.30am							
11.00am	Student Use	Student Use					
11.30am							
12.00							
12.30pm							
1.00pm	Student Use	Student Use			Student Use		
1.30pm							
2.00pm				Student Use			
2.30pm			Student Use				
3.00pm							
3.30pm						Student Use	Student Use
4.00pm							
4.30pm							
5.00pm					Southampton Academy		
5.30pm	Southampton Academy	Southampton Academy		Southampton Academy			
6.00pm			Southampton Academy				
6.30pm							
7.00pm			Southampton Academy				
7.30pm							
8.00pm							
8.30pm	Student Use	Student Use	Student Use	Student Use	Student Use		
9.00pm			Student Use				
9.30pm							
Sessions moved from Astros for Rugby, Football, American Football, Lacrosse and Ultimate Frisbee totaling 25 hours which would be freed up to facilitate other student sports							