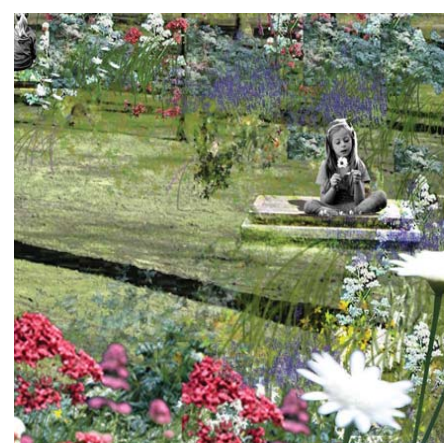


A Vision for Highbury Fields



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Introduction

The Council recognises that Highbury Fields is a very significant open space in the Borough, not just in terms of being the largest open space but also in the way it serves and attracts a wide community from outside the Borough. The development of a Vision document is to establish both the communities desires and priorities for the future of the space and the technical issues that need resolving so that Highbury Fields can better serve both the existing and future users of the site.

The Vision document is not a comprehensive strategy for the future of the Fields, this is not its purpose. The Vision document outlines the way the Fields should develop, whether that is through significant grant funding, through a series of projects or changes in management that together over time can realise the Vision. It identifies broad priorities that require further study and commissioning. This will result in a co-ordinated approach that will deliver both the aesthetic and functional changes identified through the development of the Vision.

Wherever possible the Vision should be interpreted and applied in day to day management where resources allow. The Vision document will be used to inform a master plan and associated business plan to lever in funding and enhance the character of Highbury Fields.

Highbury Fields forms part of a Conservation Area, is designated Metropolitan Open Land and is surrounded by many listed buildings. Highbury Fields was opened to the public on Christmas Eve 1885. Contributed by the Metropolitan Board of Works and Islington Vestry and is detailed in the Metropolitan Board of Works Act 1885. Highbury Fields is covered by the provisions of the Metropolitan Board of Works Act 1885. The Fields are a significant heritage asset both to the local community and the Borough as a whole characterised by open grassland, mature plane trees and Georgian terrace architecture. The Vision document shows options that retain and enhance this special character, a priority voiced by most people during the consultation.

The Vision is broadly:

“Less will mean more”

in relation to being modest in the programme of capital works, and,

“whatever changes are considered, maintenance, upkeep and sustainability are most important”

reflecting the need for sufficient revenue to ensure adequate investment into the maintenance of the Fields.

In order to retain the character for future generations, the document addresses various issues such as pathways, sports facilities, grass coverage and lighting improvements and the upgrading of existing facilities, particularly toilets, benches, play facilities and the café. The Vision reviews management and maintenance issues which could be improved, particularly related to litter collection, drainage, condition of paths and sports surfaces. It also advocates the promotion of a tree strategy aimed at securing the long term health of the considerable number of majestic trees and tree groups that contribute culturally, environmentally and visually, and an ongoing sustainable planting strategy.

The Vision supports the 20mph bid currently being promoted by Islington Council for the neighbourhood.

The Vision recommends a partnership arrangement between the residents and users of Highbury Fields with the Council to oversee the events programme in line with the executive approved events policy and to ensure that reparations are undertaken to safeguard the Fields for all the various informal uses it supports. It encourages a pre-emptive dialogue on issues related to planning matters, management and maintenance with the aim of safeguarding the character of the Fields and moderating intensive use.

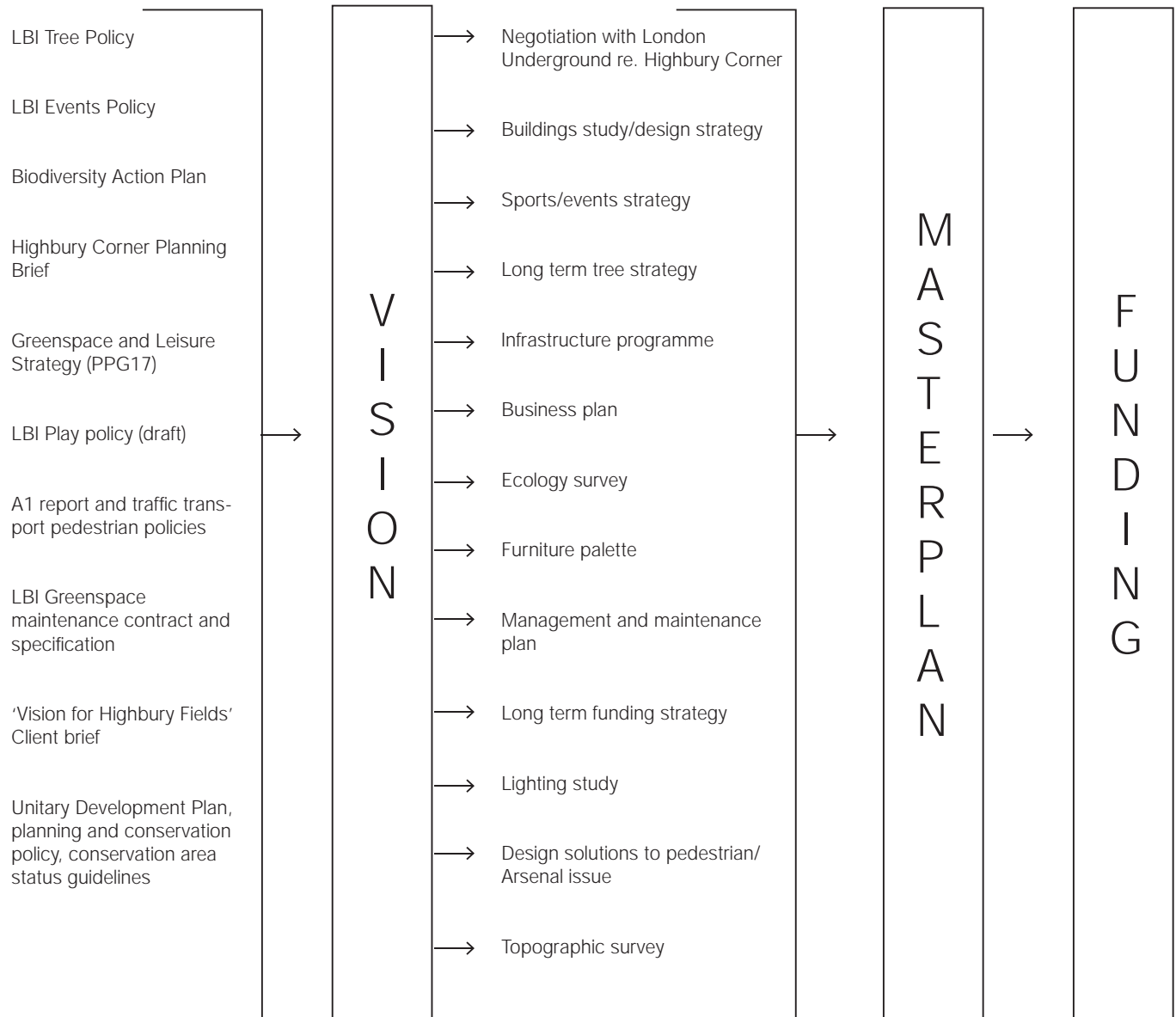
The Vision endorses the principle of increased community engagement in the management of the Fields.

All of the strategies identified in the Vision require more detailed studies and in-depth analysis to ensure the aspirations of the Vision can be implemented. These 'next steps' are identified at the end of each of the following chapters.

The pressure on the Fields related to pedestrian flow to the new Emirates Stadium has been of concern during the consultations, particularly as the football season runs over the winter period when the grass is most vulnerable to wear. The options of a path across the Fields was strongly opposed as it would significantly affect the character of the Conservation Area and would also affect community use of the Mother Field. A range of other options are under consideration subject to a detailed study commissioned by the Council's Street Management Division.



The Vision: Process





Summary of analysis

CONSERVATION ASSESSMENT

The Vision document makes reference to the significance of the individual elements of the heritage asset under consideration (buildings, park, gardens, statuary etc.).

It considers the significance of the interrelationship between spaces, their context, use and needs, not simply to inform the recommendations, but to be their foundation.

The Vision includes thorough historical research, site analysis and synthesis with a series of analytical drawings and other documentation to communicate the historical, visual, spatial, cultural and social significance of Highbury Fields. It demonstrates how the spaces work collectively, rather than separately. Detractors as well as threats are also considered within the context of the MOL (Metropolitan Open Land) and Conservation Area designations.

USE AND VALUE

The population of Islington is projected to increase by 20% in the next 15 years and yet the amount of open space is unlikely to increase proportionally. Therefore, the value of, and pressure on the existing spaces will only increase.

The use of Highbury Fields varies depending on the season, although it is a well used through route all year round. In the absence of objective survey data, observations and direct experience (photographically recorded) has informed the use analysis.

The value of the space for informal, non-commercial and impromptu use has been reiterated throughout the consultations. The value of the separate enclaves where passive and active recreation can be separated is deemed to be a positive and much loved attribute of the Fields as much as its flexibility of use by community groups, individuals and local clubs.

SPATIAL STRATEGY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

London's character and the spatial experiences it offers tend to be a complex and often paradoxical blend of silence and noise; containment and openness; full and empty; active and passive.

These are the everyday qualities that the local community have asked to be retained, essentially in the form that exists today. While the promotion of greater visual and spatial clarity has been raised as an issue (through rationalising redundant structures, signage and increasing permeability to enhance the sense of personal safety), these should not be done at the expense of eroding the historic asset.

There is strong resistance to change at Highbury Fields, but through the consultation process it has been acknowledged that improvements could be made to various facilities, in preference to building entirely new facilities.

New opportunities clearly exist, and have been discussed during the consultation process. A variety of views on their need, their benefits and impact on the heritage of the place is summarised in the consultation report. Some opportunities continue to be promoted, others have been dropped through lack of support, and a few ideas generated through feedback merit further consideration, for example, the suggestion of creating a more generous pedestrian environment at the northern end of the Fields around the listed Clock Tower.

During the process of consultation, the Vision study has sought to highlight that however great the resistance to change, landscapes are not static. The dynamic quality of change is inevitable as shifting needs occur and landscapes mature.

Historical referencing, particularly through the use of old post cards matched with photos taken today from the same positions, have been included in the presentation and consultation material. This has evidenced the change from open field to Victorian park to semi-open field enclaves, reinforced with maturing clear stem Victorian tree plantings. This analysis demonstrates how some sections of the Fields could be returned to their original spirit and form of the Victorian times. For example, consideration was given

Summary of analysis

to returning the northern top end of the Fields to a sports field or introducing a garden into the orchard area. Highbury Corner is identified as a strategic gateway within the Borough of Islington, and the spatial strategy of this space will be integrated at the southern end of Highbury Fields. Likewise enhancing the northern end of the Fields and the pedestrian environment around the listed Clock Tower within the curtilage of the listed Christ Church is seen as an opportunity.

TREES

Due to the foresight of previous generations, for much of the 20th century the capital has benefited from the large scale planting of trees, notably the London Plane (*Platanus x hispanica*). The long-term replenishment of London's maturing tree stock is highly desirable. However this has many technical challenges including new planting within an existing treescape, ground conditions and relationships with buildings.

The understanding and evaluation of the arboricultural asset is not fully possible without appropriate expert technical advice. For this reason an arboricultural survey by CBA Trees was commissioned to identify value and tree protection zones in accordance with BS5837:2005 with the aim of identifying appropriate protection of the significant tree groups.

An independent survey by arboricultural consultant Mr. Booth challenged the accuracy of a small element of the CBA Trees survey. A subsequent revision to the survey gained consensus with regard to baseline data. This process has engaged the project in a detailed arboricultural discussion, wholly appropriate considering the significant group, amenity, heritage and cultural value of the trees.

Through the consultations the Vision has explored the opportunity to set a phased plan of replanting to help create a better age balance on the Fields. These discussions included replanting the outer avenue of limes on Highbury Place. It acknowledges that there is no certainty of the life expectancy of the plane trees that account for 42% of the tree cover on the Fields. Historical research reveals that these trees are approximately 120 years old, and are likely to live for several hundreds of years more.

A detailed tree management and tree planting strategy for the Fields is considered an essential additional piece of work.

APPENDIX D & E (1 & 2)

ECOLOGY

Highbury Fields is not only a vital recreational and aesthetic resource. Its ecological value is important. Highbury Fields is a site of Local Nature Conservation Importance and has potential to expand the communities engagement and understanding of urban nature conservation. Any proposed changes need to consider the ecological impact and develop mitigation measures.

SOIL

An appreciation of the potential for improvement of the sports facilities, horticultural improvements, drainage and the management plan depends on a thorough soil survey. Soil & Land Consultancy provided the baseline study of landscape and sports pitch facilities, which might inform a future management plan and the potential for sward improvements. Unsurprisingly the soils were found to be heavy in texture, containing high proportions of clay and silt, demonstrating slow drainage rates and soils prone to degradation due to intensive use.

APPENDIX F

CLIMATE CHANGE

Detailed proposals would be subject to analysis of the likely impacts of climatic conditions.

CONSULTATIONS STRATEGY AND PROGRAMME

This element is critical to the success of the project, with the aim of engendering a positive response to the project process and support for the Vision.

J & L Gibbons with Urbancanda undertook the consultations. This included a desktop review and analysis of all relevant recorded public opinion to help inform the initial stages of the information production for consultation, the design of supporting publicity, and running two open community dialogue events. The first ran as a formal consultation evening in June 2006, the second as a two day

exhibition on the Fields followed by a formal consultation evening in September 2006. Leaflets, posters and banners were designed and distributed by J & L Gibbons. The events were advertised in the local newspapers and letters were also written to those who had participated in the first consultation.

In addition, J & L Gibbons undertook a whole raft of technical and community consultation dialogues, some face to face, some by letter and email, and others in small groups.

Document 2 of the suite of Vision documents summarises the findings. Together the events generated over 600 completed questionnaires and over 500 post-it-pad suggestions along with numerous email correspondence and letters from local schools, residents, users and youth groups.

APPENDIX B

The draft Vision was uploaded onto LBI's website for comment at the beginning of December 2006, and a full copy was available for review at the Central Library (2 Fieldway Crescent, N5 1PF). The period for comment closed in the second week of January 2007 enabling J & L Gibbons to analyse, and incorporate or respond to the comments.

During the period of the website consultation J&L Gibbons received 12 emails which have been analysed. Altogether there were 158 hits on Islington Council's website while the Vision document was uploaded. (DOCUMENT 5)

PHASED REALISATIONS AND FUNDING

The Vision will facilitate the commissioning of a number of studies so that a phasing and funding strategy can be produced in conjunction with more detailed design proposals and management strategies. The document will also be used to support funding applications.



The Vision that has emerged through the consultation process is described through both drawn and written strategies, which aim to create a cohesive and integrated Vision of quality; a sustainable Vision that enhances both the local heritage together with community use and enjoyment.

The Vision is not a master plan, but gathers together and synthesises a series of ideas and highlights a number of priorities that have community support. The Vision is the umbrella document under which a masterplan of detailed design and management proposals could be made.

The Vision is drawn in the context of Highbury Corner and A1 improvements, which seek to reconfigure the multi modal interchange for Highbury and Islington Station in relation to buses, taxis, cycling, walking, accessibility, road safety, general traffic, parking and loading. Its objectives are to create a measured reduction in bicycle accident frequency, improve the area ambience, contribute to the improved visual perception of the area and enhance the sense of personal safety, especially for pedestrians. This is an important interface with Highbury Fields, as it seeks to elevate Highbury Corner beyond merely a transport interchange, so that it becomes a gateway, and a place with a strongly defined character of high quality.

The elements of the Highbury Fields Vision:

The following recommendations received strong support during the preparation of the Vision for the Fields. Each element requires further consideration within the context of the additional studies that this document proposes. All recommendations are subject to funding being secured.

SPECIFIC ELEMENTS:

Boer War Memorial:

Retain Boer War Memorial in position and rationalise surroundings with more turf instead of tarmac.

The mound:

Consider bringing together the mound and war memorial areas and fence with bow top railing to create an extended dog free turfed area.

Rationalise tree planting to favour trees in character with the Fields, rather than memorial and ornamental trees, and include new plane tree planting along the path.

Shrub planting:

Consider removing/reducing shrub planting adjacent to pool mound and widen and repave the path with tarmac incorporating a running track to match the broad walk. This should, where possible, be compensated with planting elsewhere on site. Raising the area outside the entrance to the pool would mean that all dwarf walls surrounding mature trees could be removed, the pavement re-levelled with new benches and an entrance canopy to the swimming pool and gym could be incorporated to mark the building entrance.

Recycling:

Consider relocation of the recycling to free the area from clutter and improve the spatial quality outside the leisure centre. Temporary hoarding lines, tree protection and exact position of shaft construction by London Underground, to be negotiated.

Highbury Terrace lighting enhancement:

Enhance lighting to the southern sweep of Highbury Terrace outside the playground and adjacent to the mound.

Consider enhancing lighting to Queen's Walk path that traverses the Mother Field, by upgrading existing luminaires rather than adding lampposts.

Enhance lighting to Highbury Terrace. Raise tree canopies to allow more effective light spill and enhance the luminaire specification rather than adding lamp posts.

All subject to detailed lighting strategy.

Playground building:

Consider upgrading the playground building retaining the existing structure, creating a more inviting seating deck, better office with visibility across the playground for the supervisor, drinking fountains and toilets. Selective removal of shrub planting in one or two areas to allow views between the play area and the meadow.

Redesign and upgrade the Broad Walk on Highbury Place:

Consider resurfacing path with integral running track defined by surface treatment into the top surface of path, consider replacement tree

Vision description

planting on a 20m centres of non-drip limes into an outer planting trench to ensure their establishment and success, and specify with adequate clear stems to plan ahead for CCTV visibility beneath, surrounded by tree grilles and additional seating, subject to detailed tree planting and management strategy. Prune existing inner avenue of planes to balance canopies and ensure enough light is delivered to outer new tree planting.

Mother Field meadow:

Retain the meadow and mown lawns.

Retain and enhance the Mother Field:

Protect from wear related to the pedestrian flow to the Arsenal stadium. Install field drainage to enable sward to recover after intense use, and install a water attenuation tank in the south eastern corner. Ensure an integrated events management strategy is agreed (see management strategy), which prevents Heavy Goods Vehicles from trafficking the grass and soil compaction. Ensure related reparations are conditioned. Retain open for multi activities and agree a coordinated street furniture and materials palette.

Ranger's office:

Consider removing the Ranger's office building with associated shrub planting and realign the northern end of the Highbury Crescent park path in a broad sweep to match historical photographs, extending the Mother Field north, opening views across to Highbury Terrace. Infill plane tree planting at 20m centres with high clear stems in place of the building and where other opportunities arise to replace short-lived Prunus with plane trees. Ensure all are planted to semi mature specification with high clear stem. Decompress the trodden jogging track. Retain the trodden desire line through the meadow. Realign and repave path to playground.

Upper Highbury Crescent temporary road closure for weekend events:

Consider installing lifting park barriers similar to those in Hyde Park to allow this section of road to be temporarily closed off for community events and youth activity events, thus joining the Fields on these occasions for pedestrian enjoyment.



Install an aligned central island in Highbury Crescent to allow pedestrians proper refuge in the centre of the road, against the flow of commuter traffic cutting through the Fields from Highbury Grove to Holloway Road.

Upper Fields north and south:

Consider installing drainage and enforce no dogs. Explore design and management solutions to control football games. Install south facing benches/seating on the north side of each space.

Two O'clock Club:

Consider rebuilding with enhanced facilities including toilets and kitchen over existing footprint. Install new bow topped railings and gates around play area to match adjacent railings.

Oasis Café and adjacent general play and picnic lawn:

Consider retaining and replacing timber palisade fencing with bow topped railing. Retain as a picnic and no dogs area. Consider removing toilets and booking hut and integrate into an upgraded and extended café building with Park Keeper's office and storage for sports equipment with drinking fountains, proper services and timber deck for eating out. Remove corner shrubs and occupy the full corner with the café for strategic overlooking. Reinstate edge to tennis courts including drinking fountain. The specification for the café building should address the highest design and sustainable standards, possibly incorporating green roofs and planted walls.

Tennis courts:

Improve the sports facilities.

North and South Orchard:

Consider selective tree felling in the north and south orchard to allow more light to reach the ground and to enable the remaining trees to mature.

Northern pitch and courts:

Consider removing redundant buildings, earth mound/rockery, formalise access to Highbury Fields School and upgrade fencing between the school and the Fields.

Establish the benefit of retaining and upgrading contractor's yard. Repave and reconfigure the extent to the path with meadow margin. Replace all fencing with 4.5m high weld mesh to the north to protect adjacent gardens from stray balls, east and west and low 3.0m high fencing to the Fields. Resurface and cross mark for multiple games, particularly 5-a-side, basketball and tennis and instigate an events programme especially for youth activity.

Trodden paths:

Retain and manage as necessary.

GENERAL ISSUES

Paths:

Consider resurfacing and paving all formal paths with asphalt and chippings, running track with polymeric tarmac construction, colour black with distance markings. (See Maintenance Strategy)

Signage:

Consider rationalising all signage. (See Management Strategy)

Street furniture:

Consider increasing the number of benches, litter bins, street furniture and litter collection. (See Maintenance Strategy)

Pruning:

Before undertaking any pruning of trees or removal of shrubs advice should be sought from the Council's Nature Conservation Team. It should also be established to what height the branches can be pruned without affecting any wildlife.

SPECIFIC ELEMENTS REQUIRING FURTHER CONSULTATION

Ecology garden:

This gained support but needs to be discussed further with regard to partnering with various voluntary groups and schools to ensure that the garden is able to be sustained, supervised and monitored. It also depends on the instigation of a highly developed management and maintenance strategy for the Fields.

The garden could include picnic and educational areas, interpretation, butterfly

Vision description

and invertebrate zones, where biodiversity and alternative management is encouraged. Consider the creation of a species rich and structurally diverse tapestry of vegetation, with seating for quiet enjoyment and observation by young and old.

Clock Tower:

Consider the idea for paving around the Clock Tower to enhance the entry to the Fields at the northern end to match the enhancement at the southern end. The paving should be able to be trafficked, and be of high quality natural stone, to provide for additional hard wearing space for fetes, festivals and gatherings and creating an upgraded setting for both the listed Clock Tower and Christ Church. Discussion with Transport for London would need to be undertaken to understand the impact on routing and turnaround of the Number 19 and 236 buses.

Reinstate northern grass sports field:

Consider returning the top courts and pitch to grass playing fields as historic research revealed it was at the turn of the 20th century. This has been of particular interest to local schools. The field could be constructed to playing fields standard and let out for school use during the week and open to the community in the evenings and weekends. This would require much greater analysis to determine the physical and economic feasibility of this proposal. However, it is acknowledged that a grass pitch will only accommodate a limited number of games per week. An artificial pitch can accommodate much higher and more intense usage.

The cross-marked five-a-side and tennis court, 50 x 35m, could be relocated to the north eastern corner of the orchard area where it would cause less disturbance to residents, but with equally good vehicular access from Highbury Hill.

London Underground station improvements: Shafts are to be constructed to enhance platform safety on the Victoria Line. Temporary hoarding lines and exact position of shaft construction by London Underground is to be negotiated. Tree Protection zones have been issued.

The Vision



- 1** removal of existing building
- 2a** reconfiguration or demolition of contractor's yard to be determined
- 2b** reconfiguration of cafe include ticket office, toilets, drinking fountains and park keeper's office
- 3** rebuild 2 o'clock club in existing location
- 4** upgrade playground building
-  remove existing bollards and resurface
-  upgrade and repair paths
-  new avenue strategy
-  resurface of tennis courts as necessary
-  new tree planting
-  trees to be removed
-  proposed running track (approx. 1500m)
-  proposed low bow top fence
-  temporary barrier



All recommendations are subject to review when the additional works identified as 'next steps' have been completed.

Elements requiring further specific consultation



- 1** resurface top sports field with turf
- 2** create a paved piazza around the Clock Tower
- 3** Tree felling to install cross marked courts
- 4** create ecology and education garden
- 5** install low bow top fencing to the mound area



All recommendations are subject to review when the additional works identified as 'next steps' have been completed.