PLANNING STATEMENT



INTRODUCTION

This planning statement is submitted voluntarily to assist consideration of a planning application for a change of use of land at Chirk Castle. The proposed change of use is from agricultural land to sui generis use for tourism/visitor attraction by National Trust. A single season change of use is sought from 14th July 2025 to 8th September 2025. The land is owned by National Trust, and currently forms part of the agricultural estate of the castle. The proposed use will facilitate a vital visitor enhancement project for a short period of the summer of 2025.

The proposed area is known locally as land at the Pool Ley Field.

National Trust (NT) is a charity founded in 1895 by three people who saw the importance of our nation's heritage and open spaces and wanted to preserve them for everyone to enjoy. More than 125 years later, these values are still at the heart of everything we do.

Chirk Castle was transferred to the Trust's protective ownership in 1981, along with the surrounding gardens and park. The castle welcomes over 170,000 visitors a year. Chirk Castle is a grade I listed building set within a park and garden registered grade I on the Cadw/ICOMOS Register of Landscapes, Parks, and gardens of Special Historic Interest in Wales. The gardens and park include several other listed buildings.

Our work at Chirk recognises the fundamental contradiction at play with a castle constructed to dominate, now shares its deep connections through Welsh and English culture. It is a property that welcomes composers, artists and actors; a creative haven in which to entertain and be entertained. We seek to manage one of the most important heritage sites in the UK to be lively, informal, relaxing, fun and surprising. It is these factors which have led to the project for the Summer of Play 2025, forming the need for the subject planning application.

We ran our first Summer of Play in 2023 and then subsequently in 2024. This our third year builds on the experience of the last two years, we will build on some of the practical lessons learned on reducing impact but continue to enhance our visitor experience.

We have had feedback from NRW that the site chosen for last year is suitable for this years event. Our reasoning is considered below.

Reasonings for applying to re-use section of Pool Ley Field, the location of our 2024 Summer of Play offer

- **Logistical access and visitor safety** – This area is suitably located for our summer offer, providing a safe visitor access route from the main carpark, and is accessible for larger vehicles, which enables shorter journeys for us and easier and faster access during installation and de-installation.
- **Tenant Farmer relationship** – Using this space does not impact our Tenant Farmer's access to the rest of the field and the other fields within his licence. It also allows them to use the sheep runs, which is important from an animal welfare perspective.
- **NRW Approval** - Holding an initial consultation with NRW for their approval remains a priority; we have an in-principle agreement from NRW to use the same site, with the official SSSI PDO request being submitted on 21.02.25.
- **Strategic placement of rubber matting -** In 2024, we used additional 23mm rubber matting (Impact-absorbent material) to help protect areas of predicted increased footfall. This included the entrance walkway into the field and through/ surrounding the straw bale features. In addition, this year we aim to use further additional matting to protect the area under the Tipi and those including and surrounding the planned location of loose parts play equipment and storage units. Our design requires a significantly lower quantity of straw bales than in previous years too. The success of the rubber matting in protecting the grass areas last year was proven by a faster recovery of grass post-removal.

Reasonings for applying to re-use section of Pool Ley Field, the location of our 2024 Summer of Play offer

- **Prompt removal of temporary offer after closure-** We learnt from 2023 that our offer, in particular features which require vehicle access onto the field in order to be removed (ie. straw bales, Tipi), should be taken off promptly after offer closure (this year, week commencing 1 September). We found this minimised damage to field caused by tyres of heavy vehicles before weather and field conditions typically become considerably wetter in the following months. We were also able to remove all excess straw from the field by using our cut and collect machine, ensuring that nothing was left to rot down and add to nutrient levels.
- **Current field condition** - NRW were pleased with the management of the site last year and the lack of impact on the ground, thanks to the rubber matting that was put in place.
- **Frequent monitoring** - The field will be monitored and checked often for the duration of its use. We will close the offer to the public and remove visitor access to the space for a few days to let the field rest should conditions become poor.

PROPOSED SCHEME

NT is seeking a change of use of land of a small area of agricultural land to a Sui generis use class to bring forward a visitor enhancement project. The use is for a temporary period from 14th July to 8th September 2025. This time includes a week set up and disassembly at either end of the project.

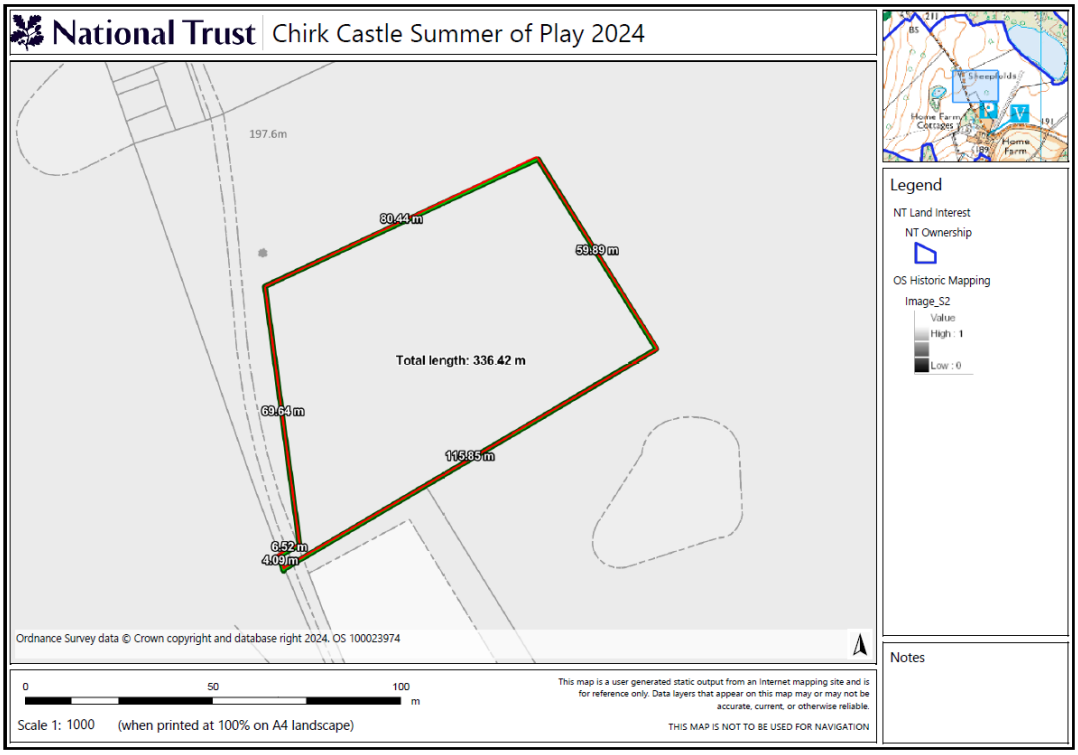
The application site area covers 6100sq m, currently grazed agricultural land, and will be returned to agricultural land immediately after the project has closed.

The proposed area has a perimeter length of 336m. New temporary fencing will isolate the area from surrounding agricultural land which will continue to be grazed whilst the Summer of Play takes place. The site is grazed agricultural land, adjoining the existing car park at Chirk.

No further planning permissions are being sought for the project, all installations will be removed by the end of the project, and are not considered to need any separate planning permission. A Sui generis use is sought to be consistent with the wider mixed use by National Trust at Chirk castle.

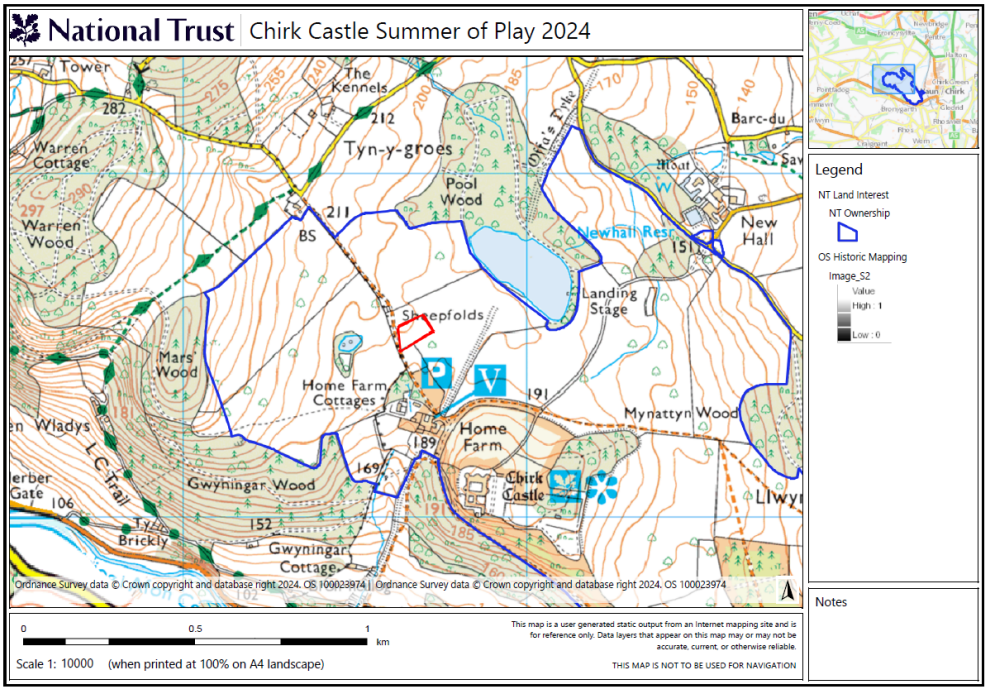


Proposed site

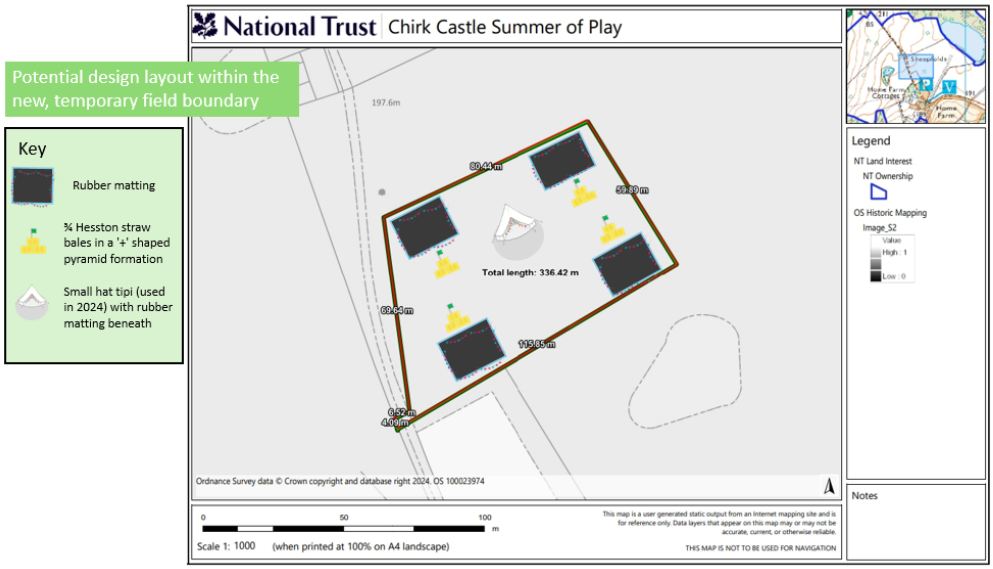


SUMMER OF PLAY 2025

The location of the site is adjoining the existing car park at Chirk Castle.



The indicative layout is provided for illustration and information below.

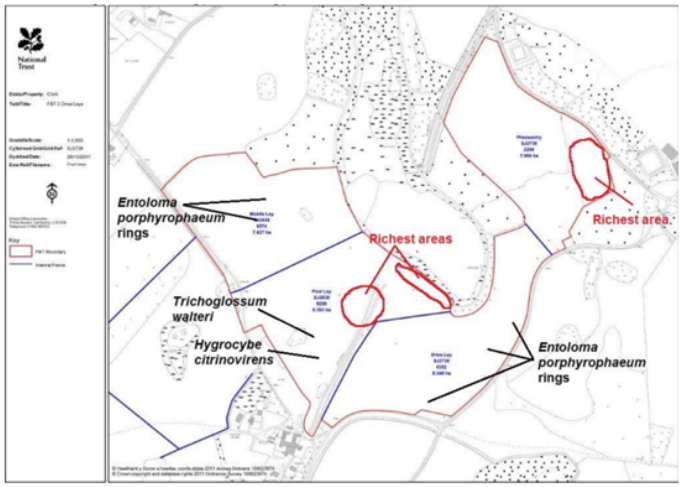


The placement of straw bales is not considered to bring forward any planning requirements. We were successful in our similar planning applications for the two previous years which brought forward no issues.

Positive feedback from NRW has brought forward consideration of the 2024 site.

Reasonings for applying to re-use section of Pool Ley Field, the location of our 2024 Summer of Play offer

- **Biodiversity** – We will continue to develop new areas of the estate with work such as our meadows project as an offset to using this space for our temporary installation.
- The proposed area is relatively small and the grassland/fungi interest in the section is not notable as proven in the recent grassland fungi survey.
- Although the field in general is considered regionally important for grassland fungi, but the proposed area is not where the fungi are concentrated in this field (see diagram).



Our designs are illustrated below.

Design features - Material Storage Units

Large storage structure (shelter)

- 1x Small Hat Tipi with rubber matting and deck chairs/ picnic benches, offers shade and seating area.









Large outdoor containers

- These will hold various smaller loose parts play items and will need to be secured with small wooden stakes into the ground
- Large metal container (for noodles, bamboo sticks, longer/ larger items) LOOSE PARTS STORAGE TROLLEY
- Metal trolleys and colourful trays - Buy Large Plastic Tidy Baskets | School Reading Book Storage Boxes on School Coloured Mobile Lunchbox Trolley | Educational Equipment Supplies

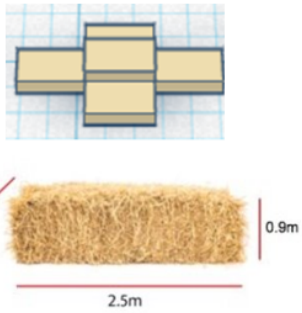
Straw bales and periscopes

- 4x small pyramids made up of 5x ¾ Hesston or quadrant (TBC) straw bales to climb up
- 1x periscope at the top of each pyramid (secured to a wooden post) to look through





Periscope or Telescope 2



PLANNING CONTEXT

The site is agricultural land and considered open countryside. The same area was considered acceptable as a temporary seasonal permission last year with a very small change to the nature of play structures proposed.

Pertinent planning issues are discussed below but need to be considered in the context of a very short, light touch, temporary change of use.

Biodiversity.

The application site is part of the Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) at Chirk Castle. NT has submitted a Section 28E – Notice of intention to carry out or permit an operation likely to damage special interest on a SSSI. Initial discussions have taken place with NRW, and the permit has been submitted. A separate Green Infrastructure Statement is submitted as required.

Arboriculture

No trees will be impacted by the short-term change of use. No trees are sited within the area proposed, and no root or crown protection zone of any existing trees form part of the application area.

Archaeology

The scheme will involve no sub surface construction works or excavation.

A check of public historic environment records, National Trust historic environment records, lidar data, aerial photographs and historic maps indicate a very low potential for archaeological remains or deposits within the proposed temporary development area. This coupled with ground disturbance limited to fence posts associated with a boundary fence and stakes associated with tents indicates that there will be no physical impact on the historic environment.

The site benefits from a copse of mature trees which will screen the proposed location from views to and from Chirk Castle.





Offa's Dyke Scheduled Monument (DE 198), an early medieval linear boundary, is 170 m from the proposed temporary development area. This suggests the potential for a low level but temporary visual impact on the monument during the 6 weeks of the installation.

Residential amenity

The opening hours of the Summer of Play will follow the same as the wider visitor hours at Chirk. There are no issues of note for residential amenity.

Landscape and Heritage

The site lies within the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley AONB. The application site will be visible from elevated areas of the AONB to the north-west. The application site lies within the Buffer Zone of Pontcysyllte Aqueduct and Canal World Heritage Site (WHS). The existing mature oak trees in this area of the Chirk Estate provide very good visual mitigation and will help screen some of the views into the site from the northwest. The site benefits from the mature screening. It is accepted however that for a short period of time a new colorful feature will appear in the Chirk landscape.

Offas Dyke footpath runs past the proposed area, and then climbs above the site with an elevated view around 470m to the northwest. Longer distance views will glimpse the site due to the mature trees in the landscape, but unscreened views of the Summer of Play will be experienced by walkers passing through the estate.


Glimpsed view from Offas Dyke path.

The site forms part of the wider Grade 1 Registered Park and Garden (PGW (C) 63)(2) at Chirk Castle. The change of use proposed is very short term and no issues are considered pertinent for the Registered Park and Garden designation.

Home Farm is the nearest listed building, at 40m to the proposed change of use (Nos 1 and 2 Home Farm Cottages, Grade II Listed). The change of use will be partially visible from the listed building, and its short-term duration considered appropriate for the visitor use now within Home Farm. The change of use will have no setting issue for the nearest listed building.

Need and economic benefit.

Chirk castle is one of the cornerstones of the tourism industry in south Wrexham. The property offers a complementary offer to the many visitors to the nearby World Heritage site. The castle, however, is still recovering from the financial implications of COVID, and continues to welcome new and existing visitors. The subject application is seeking to diversify the offer at Chirk Castle and bring further economic resilience to the property.

Wrexham already has a clear vision for improving conditions for children's play. This encompasses improving access and the quality of spaces for play; parent and professional understanding of play and the role decision makers have.

In late 2021, Wrexham Council set itself the challenge to become the 'capital of play'. This was part of Wrexham's bid to be named the UK's City of Culture 2025. The "play" within this planning application aligns nicely with the Wrexham Tourism strategy of 'Capital of Play' this summer. NT is proud to be delivering the summer of play as part of the wider Wrexham strategy.

Planning Policy

The application is considered in the context of national and local planning policy. National Policy might be considered to include the following: Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979; Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990; Planning Policy Wales (Edition 11, 2021) Section 6.1; Technical Advice Note (TAN) 24: The Historic Environment, 2017; Future Wales (2019).

Local Planning policy might be considered to include the following: Wrexham Unitary Development Plan (UDP) 1996 – 2011, Policy EC7, EC9 and EC11; and Wrexham Local Development Plan 2013 – 2028 Deposit Plan (March 2018). It is noted the decision by Wrexham Full Council not to adopt the Examined LDP, however, the following policies are considered to be met: NE4 (AONB), NE3 (Trees Woodland and hedgerows), BE1 (World Heritage Site), SP16 (Historic and Cultural Environment), and the overarching Development Management policy DM1.

The scheme is considered to meet national and local policy.

PLANNING CONCLUSION

An exciting new Summer of Play has been developed for 2025 at Chirk Castle. A site has been selected which is considered appropriate for the proposed temporary use, and complementary to existing visitor experience. A sui generis use class is considered appropriate and consistent with that operational at Chirk Castle by NT.

This application is only seeking planning consent for the change of use and not for any specific element or feature of the Summer of Play which is not considered to bring forward any operational development or individual planning requirements.

The same site was considered acceptable during 2024 and positive feedback provided by NRW on biodiversity management. No planning issues are raised by the use, and it is considered to meet national and local policy.

We look forward to your engagement in the project, and consideration of our proposed short-term change in use of agricultural land at Chirk. We welcome a planning condition which might time limit the proposed use.

Thank you for your consideration. John Pearson, Planning Adviser, National Trust