

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 13th July 2023 to 9th September 2024. 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 2024.

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 2024, forming the need for the subject planning application.

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

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 13th July to 9th September 2024. 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.

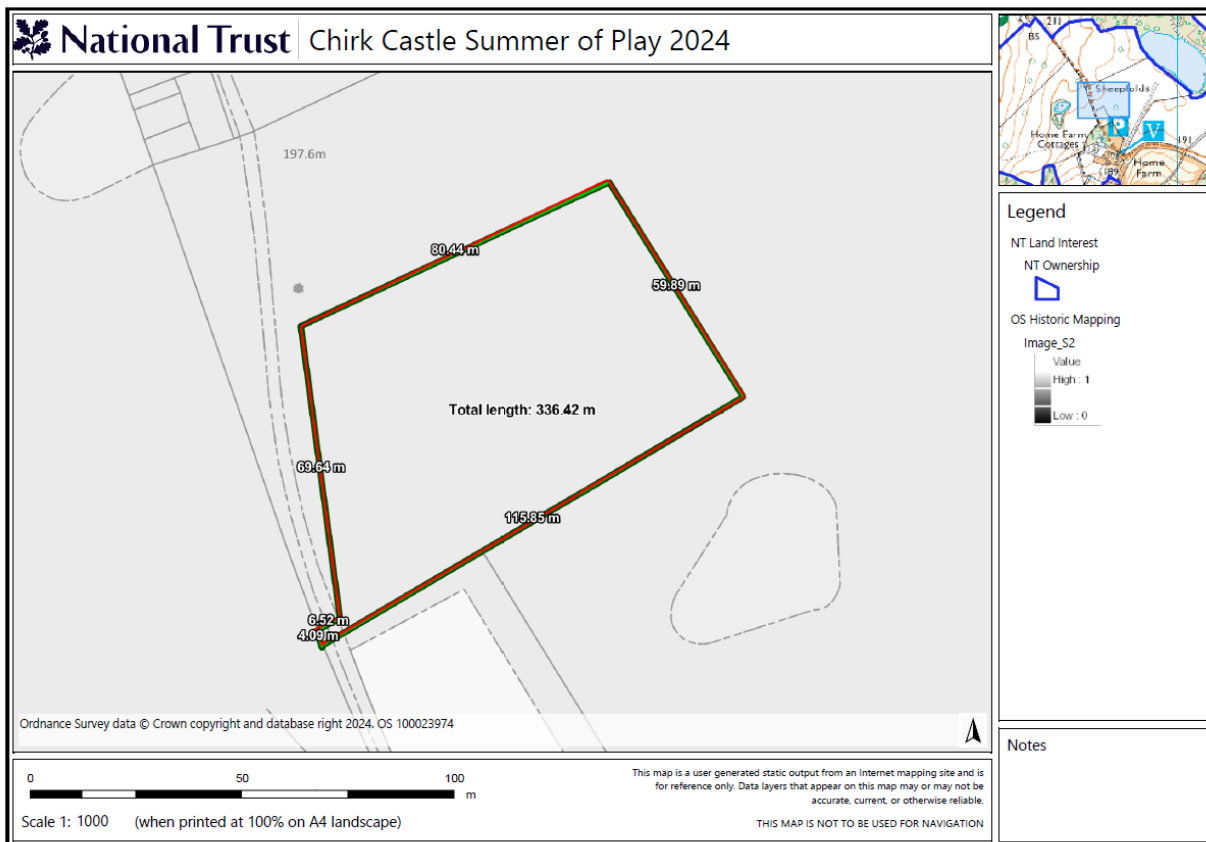
Permission is sought as the proposed period is slightly longer than the 28 day permitted temporary change in use available to NT.

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.



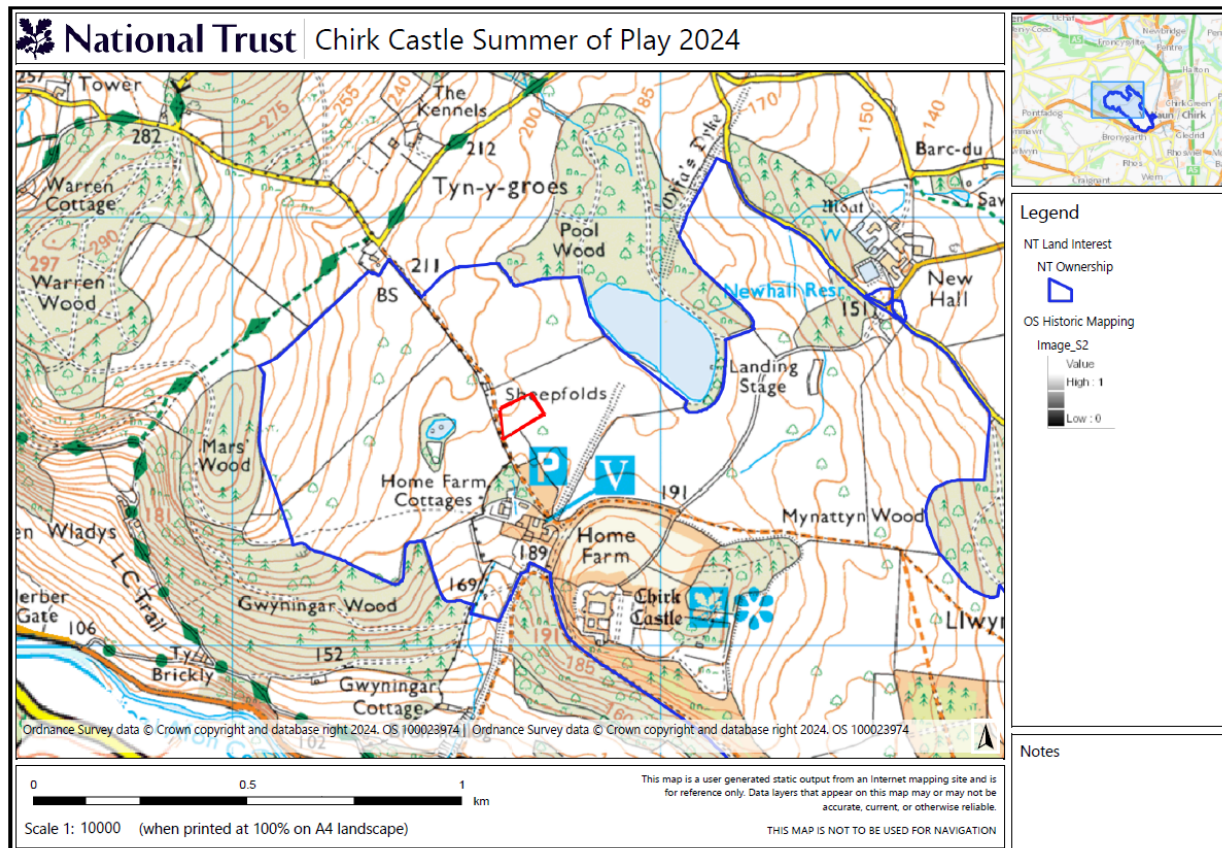
Proposed site



SUMMER OF PLAY 2024

The area will be used to bring forward a summer of play castle theme. This involves the placement of straw bales to resemble a castle.

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 in the shape of a castle is not considered to bring forward any planning requirements. We were successful in our similar planning application for last year which brought forward no issues (GLY P/2023/0366, granted conditional consent on 17/8/23).

Due to the nature of the site, we are required by NRW to rotate the location of the site for the proposed summer of play, hence the application in a slightly different location than last year.

Straw Bales – Overall Design

Feature 1: Three step pyramids

Base - 25, 49, 25 of $\frac{3}{4}$ Hesston Bales, with upper layers of 10, 35, 10 Quadrant Bales
154 bales in total (99x $\frac{3}{4}$ Hesston Bales, 55x Quadrant Bales)
Highest central bale provides a 3m lookout point

Feature 2: One double-layer maze

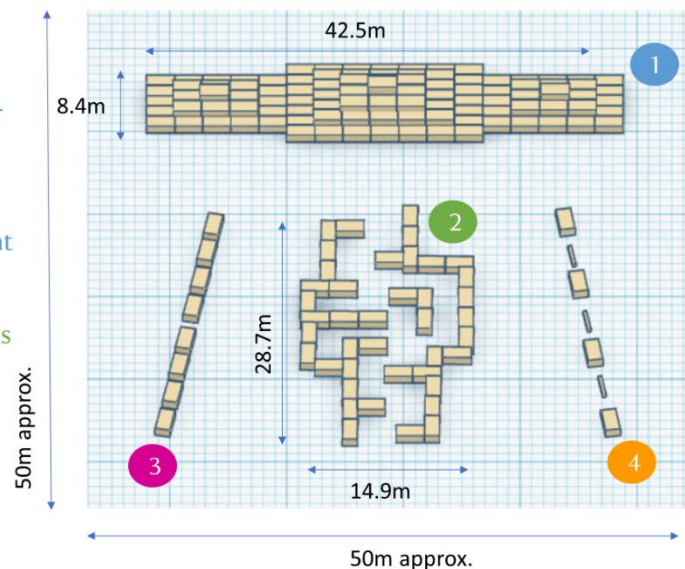
41 quadrants, stacked double with support posts
82 bales total (all Quadrant)

Feature 3: Run and jump route

8x $\frac{3}{4}$ Hesston Bales, spaced out evenly

Feature 4: Climb and balance route

4x $\frac{3}{4}$ Hesston Bales, with 3 balancing beams in between

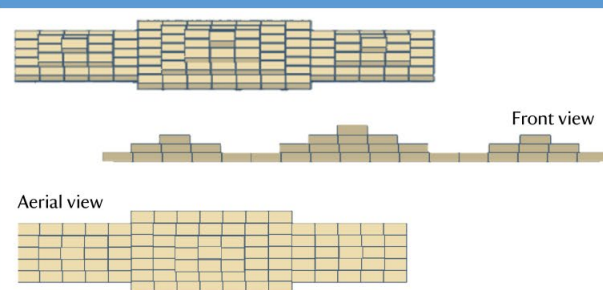


Link to 3D design - <https://www.tinkercad.com>

Straw Bales – Features 1 and 2 in more detail

Feature 1: three step pyramids

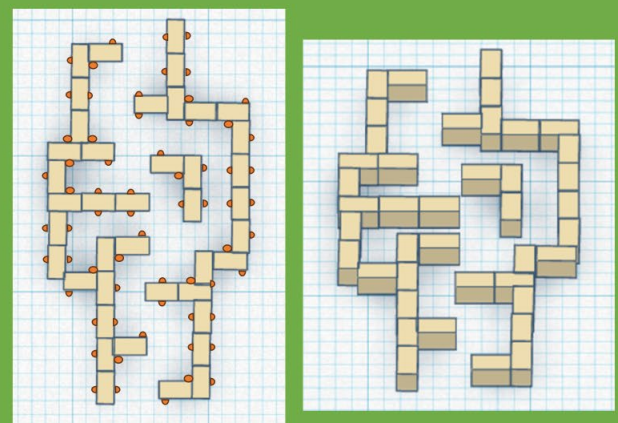
The left and right pyramids are 3 bales high, while central pyramid is 4 bales high.
The bales will be butted together and stacked in layers.
Each bale will be staked into the ground and/ or each other using 90cm long metal stakes, malletted through each bale by hand. Any gaps between butted bales will be filled using excess straw to create a solid surface.

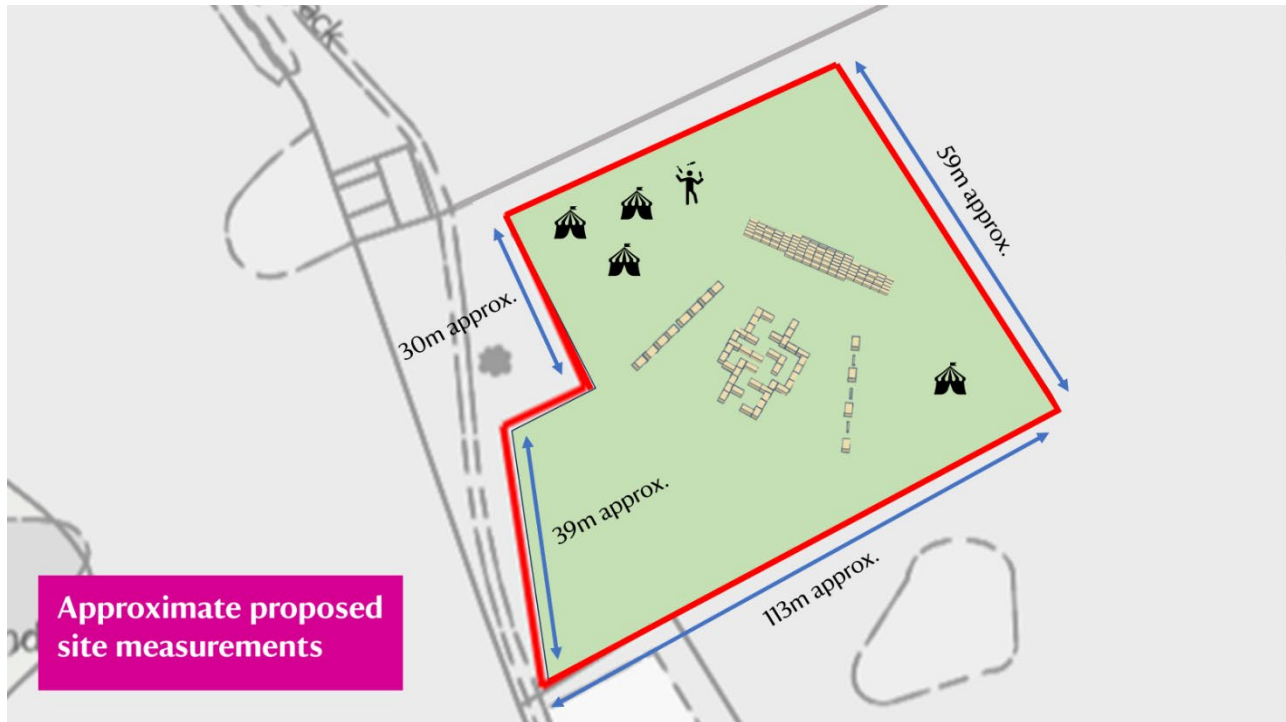


Feature 2: a double-layered maze

The maze is formed of bales butted up against each other and stacked two bales high (1.4m) to create a winding 30m path to follow, with some false routes and dead-ends.

To reduce the risk of toppling, half and full-moon posts can be used to support the bales in the maze. The orange half and whole circles below signify potential post locations, amounting to roughly 65 wooden support posts in total:





The scheme will use 268 bales of three sizes and include several small tipis and additional equipment to support the play offer, such as loose parts play, deck chairs and a small tipi. Decoration will include temporary bunting and flags on the theme of a medieval castle.

PLANNING CONTEXT

The site is agricultural land and considered open countryside.

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 is like that chosen last year but 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 2023 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.

Our requirements only extend the 28 days permitted development slightly, and a longer time is required given the level of investment and likely interest in the project.

A successful project was consented last year on an adjoining site. Due to NRW requirements on the SSSI, an alternative site is proposed this year.

No planning issues are raised by the use, and it is considered to meet the requirements of 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. Please contact me should there be any queries.

John Pearson, Planning Adviser, National Trust