

PLANNING STATEMENT

TEMPORARY CHANGE OF USE OF LAND FROM AGRICULTURAL USE TO SUI GENERIS USE



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 25th July 2023 to 31st October 2023. 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 2023.

The proposed area is known locally as land at Jericho Wood.

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 2023, forming the need for the subject planning application.

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 25th July to 31st October 2023.

The application site area covers 21565sq m, currently grazed agricultural land, and will be returned to agricultural land immediately after the project has closed.

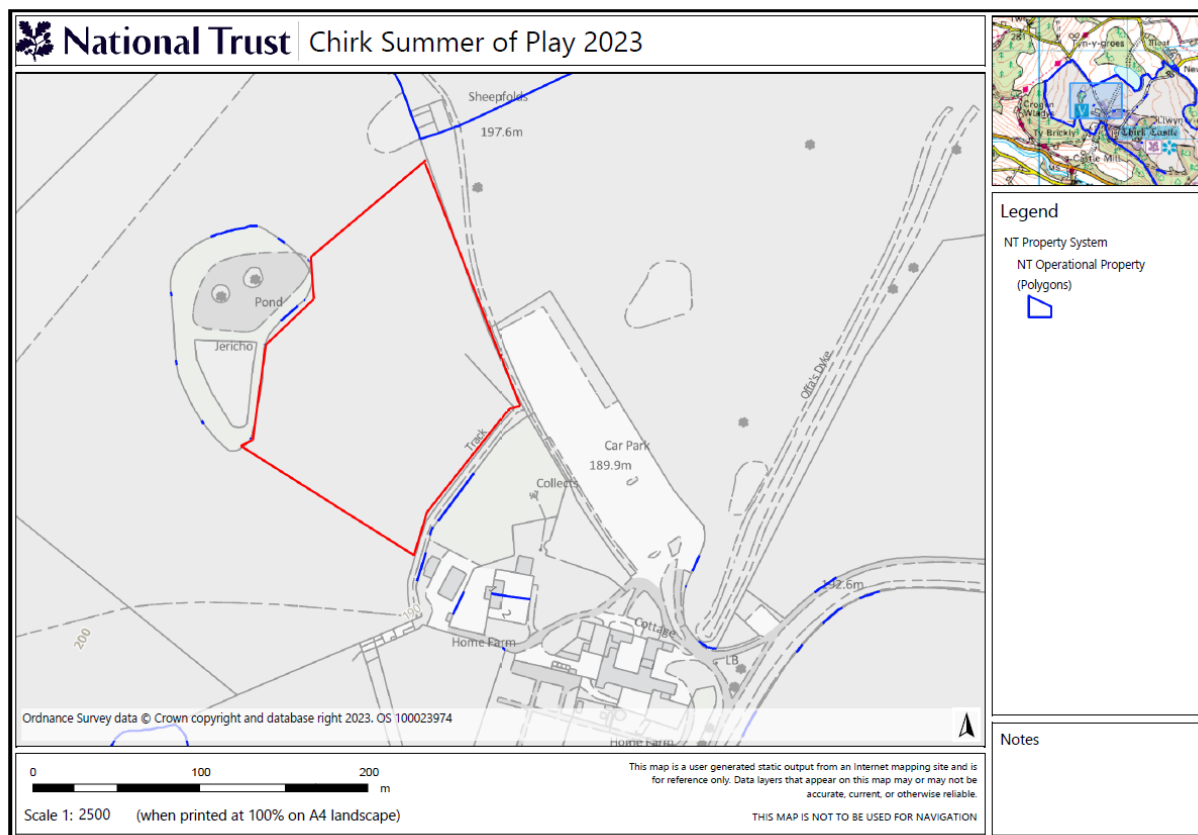
Permission is sought as the proposed period is slightly longer than the 28 day permitted temporary change in use available to NT.

The proposed area has a perimeter length of 615m with existing fencing. A 215m run of 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 October, 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.

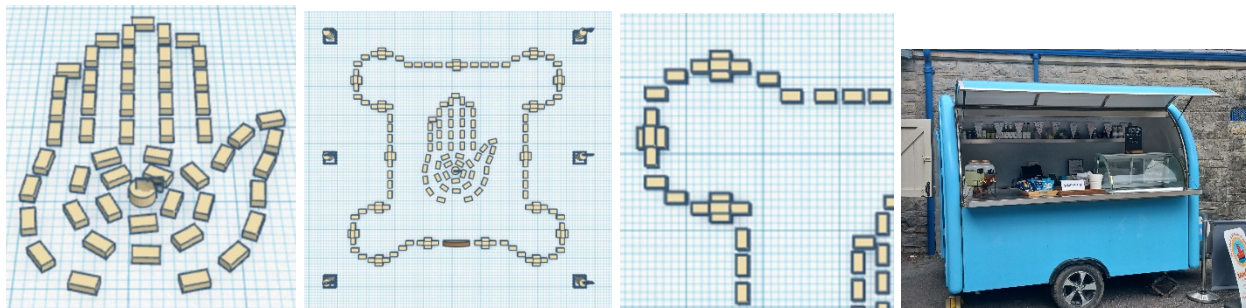


Proposed site



SUMMER OF PLAY 2023

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 wider change of use incorporates a 70x70m castle using 217 bales, with play zones 20x20m. Outer turrets are made from 3 round bales stacked and staked, with a flag on top—they will be fenced off to prevent climbing. A central labyrinth in the shape of the 'hand' will be created, unique to Chirk's heritage and the Myddleton Family ancestry. A mobile catering unit will be sited in the area, alongside deckchairs, flags and bunting.



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. A similar project by National Trust at Attingham Park, Shrewsbury did not require planning permission for the bales.

The mobile catering trailer will be brought to site and have no permanency and only present on a temporary basis for the duration of the change of use. The illustrative layout within the wider change of use is provided below.



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. Given the small-scale use and very limited time proposed, it is not considered that biodiversity enhancement is required for this planning proposal. Should the planning authority wish to move forward this element, further discussion is welcomed.

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. A veteran oak tree sited outside of the area will be temporary fenced for further protection.

Archaeology

The scheme will involve no sub surface construction works or excavation. The HMSMR Register indicates the presence of an archaeological object in the field this is object 61963 within the north-western area of the site. This is identified as Monument ID MNA178437, as an unrecorded ditch. No works are proposed in this area and the site will remain a ditch, unaffected by the proposed change of use. The site lies at its nearest point 140m to the Scheduled Ancient Monument of Offas Dyke. No direct or setting impacts are brought forward given the short-term temporary nature of the proposed scheme, and lack of any operational development.

Residential amenity

The scheme is 400m near to Tyn y Groes, the nearest property to Chirk Castle. The change of use area will be partly visible from the garden of the property but

with only a glimpsed view due to the intervening mature oak tree screen. The crown heights of mature oak in this area will help screen most of the proposed area from the residential property. The opening hours of the Summer of Play will follow the same as the wider visitor hours at Chirk.

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 provided by Jericho Wood and a backcloth of mature trees forming part of the wider Chirk estate. It is accepted however that for a short period of time a new colourful 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 50m to the proposed change of use (Nos 1 and 2 Home Farm Cottages, Grade II Listed). The change of use will not be 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.

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