

Design and Access Statement



Proposed Activity Centre at
Cross Lanes Hotel, nr. Wrexham for
Robinwood Activity Centres

Our Ref: 15-077

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1.0 Introduction

Storah Architecture have been commissioned by Robinwood Activity Centres to provide architect services for the submission of a planning application to Wrexham County Borough Council for the change of use and the redevelopment of The Cross Lanes Hotel and The Lodge and the grounds for both properties.

The building is currently in use class C1, but the hotel ceased trading on 17th July 2016 prior to the sale of the property to Robinwood Activity Centres. There is an adjacent house, The Lodge, which has also been purchase by Robinwood Activity Centres. The hotel and house are unlisted. The site is not within a conservation area. The proposal is for an activity centre for typically 7-11 year old school children, this will run three day residential courses on weekdays and be in use class C2.

The proposals have been developed during pre-application discussions, over an 8-month period from February to September 2016, with planning officers, including the arboricultural officer and the ecologist of Wrexham CBC.

As a result of these discussions:

- the number of children that the centre can accommodate has been reduced in order to enable a reduction in some activity area provision and in the accommodation areas required.
- the design of the lake and the positions of the zip wire, giant swing and high ropes have been revised;
- the design of the high activities building has been revised. The building has been significantly reduced in size and the floor level has been dropped to 3 metres below ground level, to greater reflect the position and massing of the existing hay barn on the site;
- positions of buildings have been revised to allow for screening, to reduce their massing, height and landscape impact;
- the development proposals for two buildings have been withdrawn, to retain the smaller buildings currently on site in these locations
- The existing garage is now being used in replacement of the proposed toilet building.
- the exit route for coaches has also been changed to avoid use of the Kiln Lane exit;
- the coach drop off and pick up location has been change to avoid having this in front of the main activity centre building.
- proposals are for weekday operation of the centre only, allowing some use of the facilities by local groups over the weekend.
- changes have been made to the extension proposal for which planning permission has already been granted, in order in particular to save two category A trees, which the previous permission had given approval to remove.

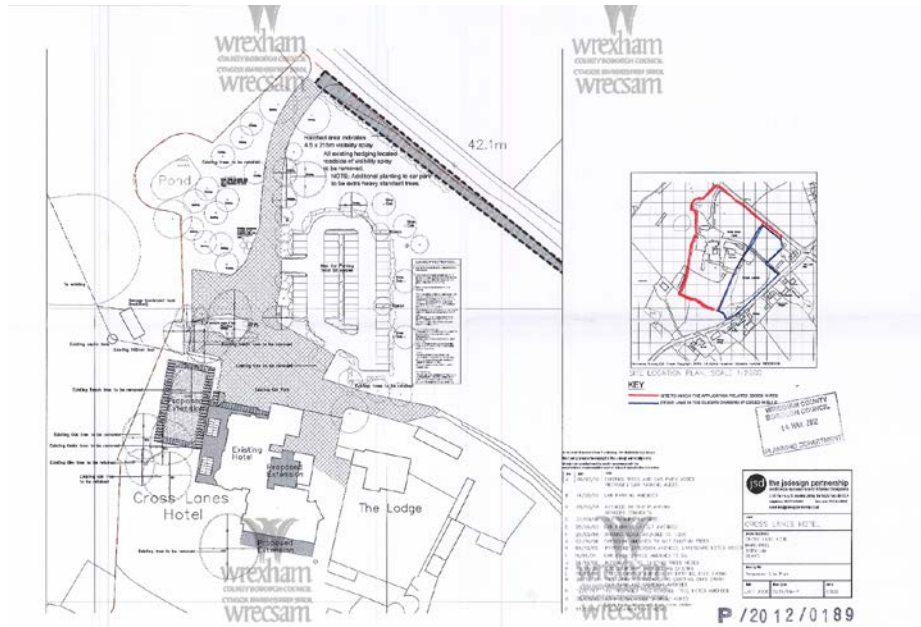
2.0 Planning History

Two planning applications are identified on Wrexham CBC's online portal.

P/2012/0189 dated 14/03/2012

Cross Lanes Hotel Bangor Road Cross Lanes Wrexham

Erection Of Bedroom Block, Internal Alterations And Extensions And Construction Of Car Park (Renewal Of Application Previously Granted Under Code No P/2006/1333)



Site Plan from application P/2012/0189.

Our proposals affect both areas edged red and blue.

P/2010/0171 dated 08/03/2010

Cross Lanes Hotel Bangor Road Cross Lanes Wrexham

Variation Of Condition 2 And 8 Of Planning Permission P/2006/1333 To Allow 'phase One' Construction Without Starting Work On 'phase Two' Construction.

3.0 The Proposals

The proposal is to retain the former hotel as accommodation, dining and living space and for use for indoor activities and general meeting rooms. There will be minor internal changes to the buildings to accommodate new activities.

The centre will operate with 13 groups with around 11 children in each. They will be accommodated in the existing hotel and new extension.

Externally, several changes are proposed, some of which will require planning consent. These are briefly as follows:

- A building for high indoor activities; Climbing, Trapeze (Leap of Faith) and Crate Challenge
- A building for Archery and Caving.
- A building for a changing and a shower room block for children taking part in raft building.
- A Zip wire.
- A Giant swing.
- A High ropes course.
- A lake for canoeing and raft building

In addition, there are other external activities which involve little construction or development and are not considered to require planning consent:

- Night Line - a trail on which children wearing blind folds follow a rope around a course.
- Quest - a generally outdoor themed problem solving area.

3.1 A building for high indoor activities

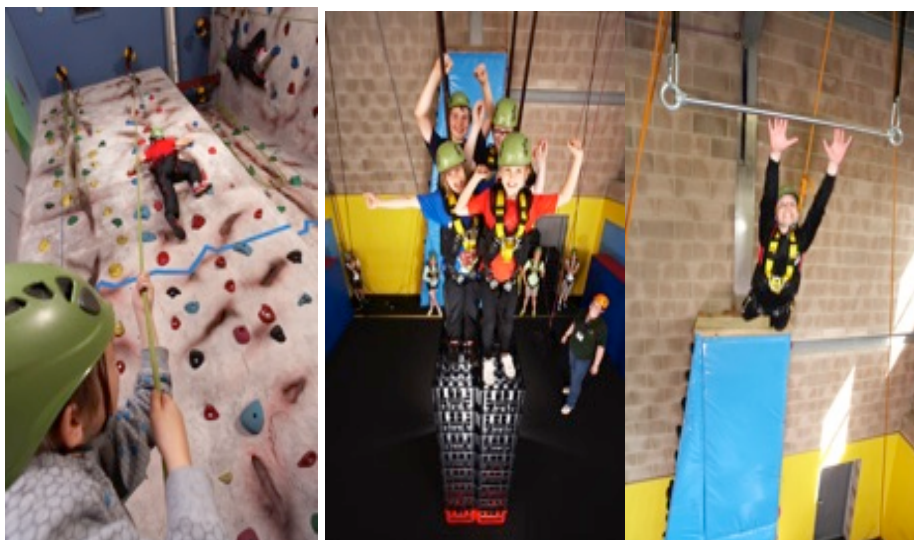
The largest building proposed is for three high activities; a climbing wall, crate challenge (tower building) area and trapeze (leap of faith).

It would have a maximum height of 5.4 metres externally, with cladding broken at 3.7metres to reflect the massing of the existing hay barn which currently occupies the site. The floor level would be 3 metres below the existing ground level to ensure sufficient internal height for the activities, and minimising the external impact of the building on site. A ramp outside is proposed for inclusive access.

The building shall be well screened by the existing trees from all directions. Additional screening from Kiln Lane will be achieved by new planting of trees to provide year around density to the foliage.

It is proposed to distribute excavated soil from the site to a depth of a metre on the land between the building and Kiln Lane, making the building from Kiln Lane appear lower relative to the external ground level. The proposed materials are a stone clad plinth course, with vertical natural larch boarding to clad the elevations and a zinc clad roof.

The report prepared by the landscape architect explores the details of the proposed planting and the additional screening in more depth.



The three high activities are illustrated with pictures from Robinwood's Old School Centre

3.2 A building for archery range and caving.

The archery range and indoor caving would be housed in the same single storey building, which would be around 11 metres by 20 metres, with a height of 3 metres. The proposal is for vertical natural larch boarding, with a grey green metal clad roof to fit in with the tree canopies around it. The building would be well screened by woodland. It would be replacing two current wooden buildings, which are in a poor state of repair, on the same site.

The archery range area would be around 11 metres by 13 metres. The caving room would be around 11 metres by 7 metres.



Indoor archery range

3.3 A changing and shower room block for lake activities

A building is required to provide changing and showering facilities for groups of children and teachers taking part in raft building sessions.

The proposed building would be constructed on stilts for minimum impact to the existing ground condition taking in to consideration the existing Root protection areas in that location. It would be around 21 metres long and 5 metres wide, which would be located on the existing building's footprint. The design has been carefully considered to blend in with its existing surroundings, complementing the surrounding trees while keeping a continuant use of materials for the proposed buildings throughout the site. The building will be well screened from the road by the existing surrounding trees and to the rear will be screened by the adjacent existing garage building and house.

It would house around 18 individual showers, with changing areas. It would also have provision for 3 toilets with wash basins. Located at one end of the building would be a storage area 7 metres long enabling secure storage for all of the water sports equipment and avoiding the need for any buildings around the lake.

3.4 A garage building converted to a toilet block.

The current brick built double garage for the lodge would be converted to accommodate toilets and washbasins for use by the children taking part in activities around this area. The building would remain exactly the same size. The garage door entrances would be partially bricked up extending the current walls as required, with doors and windows provided as appropriate for a toilet block. Proposed windows would be frosted and located using existing openings at a high level for natural light and additional ventilation into the space.

3.5 Zip Wire

The position of the zip wire is determined by the topography and the need for the run to be clear of trees that would obstruct the route. This gives less flexibility in terms of location on site and has been subject to discussion with the planning and arboricultural officer. As a result of these discussions and a survey which contains information of all of the trees in the Cross Lanes grounds, the zip wires have been shortened. The position of the start tower and zip wires has been revised to address the Council's concerns, particularly regarding mature trees on site. There has been a reduction from 6 wires to 3 wires, which reduces the total width of the avenue required for the zip wire activity by more than 50 percent.

The zip wires will extend from a start tower positioned around 10 metres from the southern site boundary, running toward the activity centre accommodation building. The tower would be screened by trees around the boundary perimeter that are taller than the tower.

The position of the tower and the route followed by the zip wires is informed by the detailed plans of the grounds and the tree survey provided. The start tower would be constructed in steel, painted to blend with the wooded surroundings.

The platform would be completely enclosed to the rear and the sides, with a simple sloping roof. The tower would be 5 metres to the floor level of the platform and another 2.4 metres to the highest point at the front of the roof, making a total height of 7.4 metres.

Cladding would be vertical larch boarding with a grey green metal clad roof to match other new buildings on site. Having an enclosed shelter at the top of the tower, which is just partially open to the northern side, from where the zip wires run, would be good for warmth and shelter in all weathers and for minimising any noise impact.

The floor area of the platform would be around 5m x 5m. There would be 3 wires going from the zip wire start tower and they would each be approximately 80metres in length. The wires would be around 1.5m apart at the start, with the spacing increasing on the descent to provide more space on the landing zone.

Zip wire sessions would be timetabled to only operate between 8.40am and 6.00pm. In the winter months when it is dark before 6.00pm floodlighting would be used to enable zip wire to continue to a 6.00pm finish.

The landing zone requires a reinforced earth ramp to cope with the impact of landing. This ramp needs to be gently sloped to allow for slowing down by the trailing of feet along the ground. The cables terminate at the landing on poles, with a braking system and with tension restraints to maintain their positions.

3.6 Giant swing

Following discussions with planning, the position of the giant swing has been changed. It is now proposed to place the swing within the former garden of The Lodge, keeping this within the buildings on site, clear of trees and away from adjoining properties.

Giant swing sessions would operate between 8.40am and 6.00pm each day. The giant swing would have floodlighting to operate after dark in the winter, but the latest finish would remain at 6.00pm.

The giant swing is a simple structure, constructed in steel, painted to blend with the existing surroundings, with tie wires to provide restraint. The poles supporting the swing are up to 14 metres in height; though high, the poles and restraint are relatively lightweight and very little would be visible above the high activities building.



Pictures show one of the giant swings currently operating at Robinwood's Dobroyd Castle centre. The giant swing would be of similar size and construction.

3.7 High ropes

A high ropes course is proposed to be constructed alongside the zip wire. The location has been changed following feedback from planning officers to avoid impact on the existing trees. The high ropes would be constructed in steel and a relatively lightweight structure, with little visibility as a result of the tree screening.

The ropes course would be in two halves at different heights. The lower level would have the children's feet at a height of 3 metres, raising to feet at 4.4 metres in the higher section. A safety wire would run at a further 2.4 metres above feet level. In the centre of the ropes course would be a tower with stairs for access.

High ropes sessions would operate between 8.40am and 6.00pm each day. The high ropes would have floodlighting to operate after dark in the winter, but the latest finish would remain at 6.00pm.

3.8 Night Line

Night line is an activity on which children wearing blind folds follow a rope around a course designed and constructed by the Robinwood team. The session is partially covered and includes small shelters where groups of around 11 children can meet with a group leader.

Some night line sessions would take place after dark, with the latest finish time during the summer being 8.40pm and during the winter 7.20pm. Low level lighting is needed for safety reasons, when this activity session is operating after dark.

Pictures below show a nightline at our Dobroyd Castle centre. We would look to construct night line trails, primarily within the garden area south of the hotel buildings.

Night line provision involves very low level development, with relatively temporary structures, and we understand as such that there is no need to submit further night line details for planning permission.



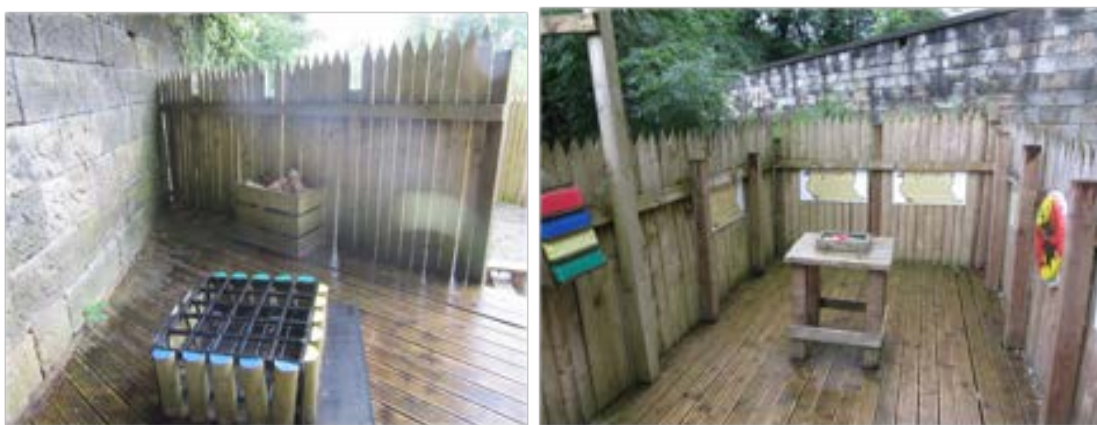
The night line area at Robinwood's Dobroyd Castle centre.

3.9 Quest (a themed problem solving session)

We would look to introduce a themed problem solving area (around 22 metres x 14 metres) where children would look to solve various problems in smaller groups. The area to be used is bounded by a hedge on one side, woodland / shrubs on another side and a perimeter fence on a third side. We would plant a new hedge along the fourth side to complete the natural screening of this themed problem solving area.

Quest would have low level lighting in order to be able to operate after dark in the early evening. From November to March this activity session would continue through until 7.20pm. From April to October when there is more natural light, activities would continue until 8.40pm.

The quest area would be constructed in timber with cover provided through the winter operation.



The 'Quest', a typical themed problem solving session area.

3.10 Water Activities - Canoeing and Raft Building

We would need to construct a shallow lake (approx. 55m x 30m) to allow for canoeing and raft building. The total area of this lake has been reduced to half of the area originally proposed, taking into account the feedback from the planning officers. The lake will generally have a soft margin to allow for wildlife.

A borehole will be required to provide the water source. In the past Robinwood have had lakes successfully constructed at two current centres and would be working with the same company to ensure successful provision of a suitable lake at the Cross Lanes site. The lake would be used for water sports, would be around 1.5 metres in depth and would be fully lined. Wooden jetties would be constructed (typically around 5 metres by 4 metres) for launch of canoes and rafts.

Watersports would take place in the daytime only, running from 8.40am to 6.00pm over the summer. From November to March raft building would no longer operate and Canoeing sessions would finish by 3.20pm.



Canoeing at other Robinwood Centres

3.11 Accommodation

Robinwood plan to build the extension for which planning permission has already been achieved in order to increase the accommodation provision on site.

Our initial proposal was to only make relatively minor internal changes, but taking into account the feedback from the planning and arboricultural officer, we now propose to reduce the size of the extension particularly in order to save two category A trees. The trees, which the previous permission had given permission to fell, were identified to be of particular high quality by the arboricultural officer (during a consultation on site on 24th February 2016) and he asked if we could find a way to amend proposals to save these trees.

Approved application footprint is:

Proposed Double Height Extension – 456.68 sqm

Proposed Single Height Extension – 247.56 sqm

Overall – 704.24 sqm.

Amended Design footprint:

Proposed Double Height Extension – 352.7 sqm

Proposed Single Height Extension – 82.68 sqm

Overall – 435.38 sqm

This amounts to a total reduction of **268.86 sqm** which is just under 40 percent of the approved proposed footprint.

Construction of the extension would enable the centre to accommodate up to 170 children, slightly fewer than the number originally proposed.

3.12 Design Approach

Reviewing the feedback from the planners, the arboricultural officer and the public at the consultation, we have taken additional consideration into the impact of the placement and materiality of the proposed buildings on site. By removing the tired and unusable structures around the site and replacing these with a discrete continuous design that runs throughout. We have approached each site with careful consideration taking into account the existing surroundings emphasising more primarily on the trees and the views from in and around the area.

The design for the outbuildings have been developed carefully by trying to create a subtle addition to the site that house the needs of the centre with materials that sympathise and complement the existing materials and objects present throughout the site.

The proposed extension design, taken from the previous approved application, has been developed to accommodate the reduction in size and to maintain the existing entry point to the existing hotel building as the main focal point. The materials and style of this addition are to be a continuation of the existing building.

4.0 Footpath lighting

We would need low level footpath lighting to any areas where activity sessions take place after dark, the design of this lighting would be discrete and easily maintained with minimum impact to the existing fabric of the site.

5.0 The impact of the proposed works

In planning terms, we consider that the use of the site as an activity centre would require a change of use from C1 the existing hotel use to the C2 use class.

The external activities have been sited to provide shielding within the topography of the landscape making use of tree cover where appropriate. Buildings have been sited to reduce their impact on the wider countryside, replacing buildings in a poor state of repair that are already present on site.

5.1 Noise impact

Six activities will take place outside all year round, although for each of these sessions, apart from canoeing, there will be a degree of shelter and some general indoor provision. Additional to these six sessions, raft building will take place outside from April to October each year. All outdoor sessions will be finished by 6.00pm at the latest, except for Night Line and Quest.

Night line and quest are activities which involve low noise levels and they are positioned more than 100 metres from the nearest houses on Kiln Lane. These activities would be finished operating by 8.34pm at the latest. In the winter months from November to March they would be finished by 7.20pm.

Robinwood will not operate their residential activity courses over the weekend or during most of the school holiday periods.

Timetabling outdoor activity sessions in this way will result in a reduction of overall noise levels when compared with the use as a hotel, hosting weddings and other events. In particular, there will be a significant noise reduction in the evenings and at the weekends.

5.2 Transport impact

Coach arrivals and departures

Robinwood Activity Centres only accepts bookings from groups, 99% of which are school groups and these groups virtually always arrive by coach. When operating at full capacity we would expect a maximum of 5 coaches to bring groups for a Robinwood course.

The coaches would generally only be present for around 30 minutes at a time at the activity centre; either dropping off or collecting groups. Arrival and departure times would also be staggered, to avoid any more than 3 coaches on centre at the same time.

The coach arrival period would run from 10.20am to 11.40am on Mondays and Wednesdays (early arrivals would likely be scheduled at 10.20am and later arrivals at 11.00am).

The coach departure period would run from 1.20pm to 2.40pm on Wednesdays and Fridays (early departures would likely be scheduled at 1.20pm and later departures at 2.00pm).

Provision for coaches turning has been created towards the end of the main drive from the A525 entrance. This alternative turning provision was introduced in response to feedback from the planning officers. The previous arrangement involved a short new stretch of road to create a turning circle for coaches on site. This however meant that the pick-up and drop off took place in front of the main hotel building, which planning officers were keen to avoid.

All vehicles would use the main A525 road entrance, for both arrival and departure, avoiding the Kiln Lane access. The road onto Kiln Lane would only be needed in emergencies if the other route is blocked for any reason, so Kiln Lane traffic would therefore be reduced as compared to the current operation.

The new provision for coach drop off and pick up also allows for better securing the site with estate fencing and a gate at the end of the main drive.

Car parking on site

Robinwood would employ 52 staff at the Cross Lanes Activity Centre. There would be a maximum of 45 staff on duty at the same time. We typically target 1 car on site for every 3 staff working that day.

There would be a limited number of other cars on site, generally those of visiting teachers but also on occasion vehicles belonging to contractors doing work on site and companies making deliveries.

The proposal includes parking spaces for 43 cars which would be more than sufficient for the operation of this Robinwood centre at full capacity.

Travel to work scheme

1 car for every 3 staff working is achieved at our Todmorden centres through the travel to work scheme that we operate. We incentivise staff with payments to both staff and to charities chosen by the staff team, if staff either walk or cycle to work. We would in particular encourage staff to cycle to work at the Cross Lanes centre and we believe that based on experience at other sites, a significant proportion of staff would do this.

Robinwood staff raise more than £5,000 for charity each year as a result of our travel to work scheme. Robinwood make a 20p donation for every one-way journey either walking or cycling, so someone cycling to work at Cross Lanes could raise £2 each week.

The pattern of travel to and from Cross Lanes

The pattern of travel to and from the activity centre would be different from travel when operating as a hotel and on balance we believe that journeys to and from Cross Lanes would be reduced.

It is likely there would be more journeys to and from the activity centre during the day time on week days, but fewer in the evenings and at the weekend.

6.0 Access provision

Whilst Robinwood do not operate specialist centres specifically for children with special needs, we make every effort to ensure the best possible provision and maximum participation opportunity for all children and adults attending our courses.

The Cross Lanes activity centre is designed with two, wheel chair access bedrooms. Each shower block also has a wheelchair access shower and toilet. There are additional access toilets on site.

Although we have needed to drop the floor level of the high activities building by 3 metres as compared to external ground level, we are creating ramp access with a 45 metre ramp to enable children and adults to access the facility in wheel chairs.

All Robinwood course bookings are made a significant time period, typically a year, in advance and we ask at the time of booking for details of any children with special needs. We arrange preview visits to the activity centre in order to assess the best individual provision that we can offer in each case. We have specialist staff at each centre who make assessments and provide a tailored programme, which is appropriate for each individual attending with special needs.

Whilst each case is looked at on an individual basis, most children with special needs can still take part in the vast majority of Robinwood activities. There are variety of ways in which the provision can and is adapted, to ensure the best possible experience for all.

Taking one example, although children in wheel chairs cannot climb the zip wire tower, they can and do still participate in the zip wire session. The children are attached to the zip wire at the finish ramp and are then pulled up the zip wire until they reach the top point alongside the start tower. They can then have the same experience as all other children going down the zip wire.

7.0 Planning Policy Context

The proposal is for the change of use of a hotel in use class C1 to a training centre in use class C2.

The hotel has ceased trading due to on-going losses over a 6 year period. The business was actively marketed for sale, by Colliers, as a going concern over a period of almost 3 years. Details of this process are given in Colliers' report, submitted as part of this application.

The hotel was classed as a community facility in Cross Lanes. Policies S9 and CLF1 of the current Wrexham UDP. These place particular importance upon the value of existing community facilities.

Policy S9 states *'Outside Wrexham Town Centre the district shopping centres, proposals that entail the loss of shopping/commercial facilities will only be permitted where:-*

- a) the use is no longer viable and all reasonable attempts to sell or let the business over a 12 month period have proved unsuccessful or;*
- b) the building is in a derelict or unsightly condition and the proposal would bring about substantial environmental improvements and*
- c) the loss of the facility would not prove detrimental to the social and economic fabric of its locality.'*

Policy CLF1 states *'Development which adversely affects indoor or outdoor central multi-activity community and leisure facilities, particularly within settlement limits, will not be permitted.'*

Regarding policy S9(a), as documented in the separate report the existing hotel business has been losing money for the past 6 years, with a total loss in excess of £200,000 (5.6% loss) over this period. This level of loss over this extended period of time meant the business was not viable. As a result of these losses the business ceased to trade and the property was sold with vacant possession.

Details of the accounts for the period are also provided. The hotel had been actively marketed for the past three years without success. Details of marketing and sales particulars are also provided. Sale details were available online at www.colliers.com/uk (property ref. 204329). This meets the requirement of Policy S9(a) of the Wrexham UDP.

Regarding policy S9(b), whilst the hotel and house are in good condition, the remaining buildings on site including outbuildings, pavilions, gazebo and agricultural buildings are not. The level of losses incurred by the hotel are not sustainable and as a result the building fabric on site is suffering from a lack of investment.

The lack of resource for investment in the property by the previous business and its lack of long term viability resulted in the closure of the business.

The proposed activity centre development commits to very significant additional investment bringing about environmental improvements and satisfying policy S9(b).

Regarding policies S9(c) and CLF1, the proposals would substantially increase the economic activity and employment prospects on the site, creating more than 50 jobs. As the hotel has closed there is currently no-one employed at the site.

If planning permission is achieved there would be significant work involved in the development of the site, the earliest date at which the new activity centre business would start operating residential courses would be February 2018. 52 Robinwood jobs would commence with staff training and final preparation work in January 2018, if planning permission is achieved in 2016. New jobs would not commence until 1 year after planning permission is achieved. Any delay in achieving planning would result in delay of new employment opportunities.

The proposed activity centre would result in a significantly higher level of employment than the hotel previously offered.

The activity centre will provide courses for school groups operating on weekdays only and will generally be closed over the school holiday periods. Weekday operation only will make staffing and operations easier and enable some use of the activity facilities by local groups and clubs particularly on Friday evenings. Further details of the proposed provision for local groups are given in the document covering the pre-application consultation process. This will meet the policy requirements of the UDP.

The development should also be considered in the context of Planning Policy Wales Edition 8 – January 2016. Relevant paragraphs include the following:

Para. 4.6.1 notes that *'Development can help to arrest the decline in community facilities ...'* The proposal will provide an economically viable future for the site, providing additional jobs, contributing to the local economy. It is also proposed to open up the centre facilities for local groups including climbing, canoeing and archery clubs, at times when the centre is not operating residential course, increasing the area's recreation provision. More details are provided in the pre-application consultation response.

Para. 7.3.1 notes that *'New businesses in rural areas are essential to sustain and improve rural communities'*. Para. 7.6.1 adding *'Local planning authorities should adopt a positive and constructive approach to applications for economic development. In determining applications for economic land uses authorities should take account of the likely economic benefits of the development based on robust evidence. In assessing these benefits, key factors include: the numbers and types of jobs expected to be created or retained on the site...'* The proposal will provide additional skilled jobs with excellent training and development opportunities and will contribute to the local economy.

Para 11.1.3 notes that *'Sport and recreation contribute to our quality of life. The Welsh Government supports the development of sport and recreation, and the wide range of leisure pursuits which encourage physical activity. These activities are important for the well-being of children and adults and for the social and economic life of Wales...'* The proposal whilst not providing public facilities does provide for sport, recreation, and leisure pursuits which encourage physical activity.

8.0 Conclusion

This Design & Access Statement has demonstrated how the physical characteristics of the proposed development have been informed by a rigorous process including thorough assessment, involvement, evaluation and design.

The below table summaries this Statement and demonstrates how the proposed development complies with the key Design & Access Statement considerations:

Design & Access Consideration	Proposed Development
Use	It is proposed to change the use of the site from a C1 hotel to a C2 residential institution for the use of a children's activity centre. The submitted Planning Statement demonstrates that the proposed use complies with local and national planning policy
Amount	The amount of new floorspace proposed is negligible in comparison to the existing development with the permitted extension. We have worked hard to utilise the existing floorspace and built form within the site, replacing rather than creating entirely new buildings in new locations.
Layout	The proposed layout of the development has been dictated by the existing built development on site and its natural features.
Scale	The proposed development is of an appropriate scale and indeed of a smaller, more appropriate scale than the existing built form on site and the permitted hotel extension.
Landscaping	The interventions within the landscape have been designed to be discrete and fit with the form of the site including the existing buildings and tree cover. Proposed additional landscape features will improve the site further.

The proposals have been developed during detailed pre-application discussions with planning officers, the arboricultural officer and the ecologist of Wrexham CBC, and as a result significant changes have been made to address the Council's concerns.

A high proportion of activities take place indoors. External activities will generally take place in the daytime and have been sited away from site boundaries that are adjacent residential properties to reduce any noise impacts.

Changes to the operation of the centre will free up opportunities for local groups to use the facilities on occasions.

The new proposal provides more than 50 jobs, with excellent training and development opportunities within a thriving company, which was rated in the top 20 mid-size companies to work for in the Sunday Times list 2016.

Report prepared by

Richard Storah