



# The Nine Acre Field Chester Road, Wrexham



**THE "NINE ACRE FIELD"**

**CHESTER ROAD, WREXHAM**

**DRAFT DEVELOPMENT GUIDANCE**

**APRIL 2004**

# THE NINE ACRE FIELD, WREXHAM: DEVELOPMENT GUIDANCE

## 1. Purpose

1.1 The Groves School in Wrexham closed in August 2003 as part of Wrexham County Borough Council's plans for school reorganisation. Although the Groves School has closed, the site will continue to be used by Rhosnesni High School (until July 2004), and by Ysgol Clywedog (from September 2004 until January 2005) while remodelling of the new schools takes place. From January 2005 however, the site will no longer be required for educational purposes.

1.2 The Nine Acre Field has been used by the Groves School and its successors, and when the school site closes it will no longer be required for educational purposes. The Council has therefore considered potential future uses and/or development of the site in the light of national and local planning policies.

1.3 This development guidance seeks to:

- improve the efficiency of the development process through highlighting specific land use issues which need to be considered prior to the submission of a planning application;
- define acceptable future uses for the site;
- identify those parts of the site which are suitable for development;
- ensure that development is of high quality and reflects the site's environmental setting.

1.4 This guidance will form a material consideration in the determination of all relevant planning applications.

## 2. The Site

2.1 The **Nine Acre Field**, the name by which it is commonly known to local people, is shown in Plan 1 attached to this guidance. It is bounded to the west by Chester Road, to the north by Rhosnesni Lane, to the south by Westminster Drive, and to the east by residential development. It has an area of 3.7 ha.

2.2 The field lies at two different levels, the eastern third being at a slightly lower level than the remainder, separated by a break of slope of just under one metre. The higher level is better drained than the lower level and would sustain a higher amount of use than at present. Two soccer pitches run east-west in the western part of the site. Two rugby pitches run north-south in the eastern part of the site. The pitch sizes are:

Top Plateau:	Football	98 x 55 metres
	Football	80 x 55 metres
	Rugby	85 x 50 metres
Bottom Plateau:	Rugby	65 x 50 metres

The field is managed by the Environmental Maintenance Section of the Council's Community Services Department, although maintenance is contracted out to a private company.

## 3. Development Plan Context and National Planning Policy

3.1 The Wrexham Maelor Local Plan still forms the adopted development plan for Wrexham. However it will be replaced soon by the Wrexham Unitary Development Plan, which is now approaching the formal adoption. In view of the advanced stage reached by the UDP, it may now be given substantial weight in the determination of development proposals, and the following assessment of the development plan context is based primarily on the policies in the UDP.

3.2 The Nine Acre Field is located within the Wrexham settlement limit as defined in the Wrexham UDP. The principle of development on the sites accords with UDP Policy PS1, which directs new development to within defined settlement limits. The types of developments directed to within settlement limits include housing, retail, business (Class B1), and commercial leisure. UDP Policy GDP1 sets out general development criteria with which all new development must comply.

3.3 Although the site lies within settlement limits, special policy considerations apply to proposals for the development of playing fields. UDP policy CLF1 states:

"Development which adversely affects indoor or outdoor community and leisure facilities, particularly within settlement limits, will not be permitted."

3.4 UDP Policy CLF4 is the Council's current policy on the development of playing fields, children's play areas, and open space, and provides more guidance on what "adversely affects" means. It should therefore be given substantial weight in the consideration of proposals. It states:

" The redevelopment of sports grounds, playing fields, children's play areas and informal open spaces and allotment gardens for uses other than sport and recreation will not be permitted unless:-

- a) redevelopment of only a small part of the site would allow the retention and enhancement of that existing facility; or
- b) the long term requirement for the facility has ceased and it would not lead to, or increase an existing shortfall of that facility in the immediate locality; or
- c) the loss can be replaced with an equivalent or greater provision in the immediate locality. Alternative sites should be within settlement limits or, in exceptional circumstances, adjacent to settlement limits provided that associated buildings, lighting, and parking facilities are not intrusive in the landscape and user accessibility is not reduced."

3.5 Policy CLF4 applies to all playing fields, whether they are owned by public, private, or voluntary organisations. The UDP states that the National Playing Field Association standards of provision for playing fields and open space (i.e. a minimum of 2.4 hectares of outdoor playing space per 1000 population) will be used in assessing the level of existing provision. The Council monitors the availability, quantity and quality of sports pitches within the County Borough. Paragraph 9.5 of the UDP, which sets out the reasoned justification to Policy CLF4, states: "The provision of facilities with synthetic or other surfaces capable of intensive use does not justify the release of grass facilities."

3.6 The location of public open space is also a key consideration in the assessment of whether playing fields can be developed for other purposes. The National Playing Fields Association recommends that playing fields with pitches should be available within 1.2 kilometres of all dwellings in major housing areas (about a 10-15 minute walk). The NPFA guidance states:

"To allow most effective use, proper distribution and location, as well as ease of access, are essential. If the facilities are too far away from the homes of potential users, or are not easily accessible, their purpose is largely defeated."

3.7 Planning Policy Wales, published in 2002, sets out the planning policies of the Welsh Assembly Government, and is a material consideration in the determination of planning applications. Paragraph 11.1.11 of Planning Policy Wales states that all playing fields, whether owned by public, private, or voluntary organisations, should be protected except where:

- facilities can best be retained or enhanced through the redevelopment of a small part of the site;
- alternative provision of equivalent community benefit is made available; or
- there is an excess of such provision in the area.

Technical Advice Note (Wales) 16 (Sport and Recreation) states that while synthetic surfaces capable of intensive use may help meet the demand for sports facilities, they are not a straight substitute for grass

pitches. "While they can take pressure off other pitches and sports halls, they seldom justify the release of grass pitches for other uses."

3.8 National and local planning policies also acknowledge the significant contribution that "green" open spaces make towards the visual and environmental quality of urban areas. UDP Policy PS2 states that: "Development must not materially detrimentally affect countryside, landscape/townscape character, open space, or the quality of the natural environment."

Paragraph 9.5 of the UDP states that "Increasing importance is placed on the contribution to the character of the local landscape and townscape and residents' quality of life made by open space through both its active recreational and visual contribution."

3.9 Paragraph 11.1.10 of Planning Policy Wales states that formal and informal open spaces with significant recreational value should be protected from development, particularly in urban areas, where they fulfil multiple purposes. They not only enhance the quality of life, but also contribute to biodiversity, the conservation of nature and landscape, air quality, and the protection of groundwater.

3.10 Technical Advice Note (Wales) 16 (Sport and Recreation) states: "playing fields are of special significance for their recreational and amenity value and, in towns and cities, for their contribution to the urban environment. When not required for their original purpose, they may meet the growing need for recreational land in the wider community."

3.11 In conclusion, the key considerations against which proposals for development on the playing field have to be considered are:

- the detailed criteria for the development of playing fields in Policy CLF4;
- the requirement in UDP policy PS2 to ensure that development does not detrimentally affect townscape character and open space;
- the location of the playing field in relation to the needs of the local community;
- the contribution which the playing field makes to the urban quality and visual amenity of Wrexham.

The site is assessed against these factors in the following section.

#### **4. Assessment of Developability in relation to UDP Policy CLF4**

4.1 Proposals for the development of any part of the playing field will have to satisfy one of the three criteria in UDP Policy CLF4.

4.2 Criterion a) of Policy CLF4 states that the redevelopment of a small part of the site would be acceptable if this would allow the retention and enhancement of the existing facility, for example, by the replacement of a grass pitch with an all weather pitch. There is clearly scope for argument as to precisely what the term "small" means, but a reasonable interpretation in this context is that it implies an upper limit of one-fifth (20%). The conclusion is therefore that criterion a) of Policy CLF4 would allow the development of up to one-fifth (20%) of the playing fields, provided that this allowed the retention and enhancement of the existing facility.

4.3 Criterion b) of Policy CLF4 sets out two requirements, both of which should be complied with. The first part states that the long term requirement for the facility should have ceased. In past years the Nine Acre Field has been generally used for school activities only. Due to the costs involved in maintaining such a large area of ground, together with a pavilion which was prone to vandalism, the school decided to minimise its community use. However there was always extensive unofficial use of the field for sports events, mainly by local football clubs. Due to its remoteness from the school, this was very difficult to control, and use by the general public was accepted.

4.4 With the projected closure of the Groves School site for educational purposes in January 2005, the long term requirement for the Nine Acre Field for use by the school will have ceased. As stated above however, the Nine Acre Field is still used by members of the public and local sports teams, and the long term requirement for the Nine Acre Field for public and community use does not therefore appear to have ceased. However the whole of the Nine Acre Field may no longer be required for public and community use.

4.5 The second part of Policy CLF4b) requires that the redevelopment of the sports ground or playing field would not lead to or increase an existing shortfall in the immediate locality. A quantitative survey of the Open Space in Acton Community has revealed that:

- the level of provision of Youth/Adult Playing Fields in September 2003 was 19.80 hectares;
- there is a requirement for 20.80 hectares according to the standards recommended by the National Playing Fields Association (2.4 hectares per 1000 population);
- there is therefore a deficit of 1 hectare of youth/adult playing fields in Acton Community.

In Wrexham Town as a whole the same survey showed a deficit of 6.12 hectares. These figures could change through the provision of new playing fields, or through the intensification of use of existing facilities. (National Playing Fields Association consider that it is reasonable to equate artificial pitches in urban areas to twice the area of natural turf, recognising their capacity for intensive use).

4.6 The overall conclusion in relation to criterion b) of Policy CLF4 is that:

- the first part of the policy may allow the release for development of some of the Nine Acre Field, if it could be established that all the area was no longer required for public and community use;
- the second part of the policy means that at the present time any development of the playing field would increase an existing shortfall in the immediate locality, and would therefore not be permitted;
- the second part of the policy does however mean that should the shortage of youth/adult playing fields in Acton Community be eliminated at some point in the future, either by the provision of new facilities or the intensification of use of the existing facilities, this may allow the redevelopment of some or all of the playing field for other purposes.

4.7 Criterion c) of Policy CLF4 requires the loss of sports pitches or playing fields through redevelopment to be replaced by an equivalent or greater provision in the immediate locality. There is no definition in the UDP of "the immediate locality", but NPFA consider that playing fields with pitches should be available within 1.2 kilometres, about a 10-15 minute walk. Any replacement provision should therefore be within 1.2 kilometres of the Nine Acre Field. At the present time, there are no proposals for additional playing field provision within the 1.2 kilometre radius. To develop all or part of the Nine Acre Field, a developer would need to provide an equivalent or greater provision at an alternative location within the immediate locality. Policy CLF4 would permit this to be done either through the intensification of use of the remaining pitches, or at other pitches in the immediate locality. If equivalent or greater provision is made in the immediate locality, criterion c) of Policy CLF4 would allow the development of the whole of the site, subject to compliance with other UDP criteria and policies.

4.8 In conclusion, Policy CLF4 would allow for the following:

- criterion a) would allow the redevelopment of a small part of the playing field (defined here as no more than one-fifth) if this allowed the retention and enhancement of the existing facility;
- the first part of criterion b) may allow the release for development of some of the Nine Acre Field, if it could be established that all the area was no longer required for public and community use;
- the second part of criterion b) means that at the present time any development of the playing field would increase an existing shortfall in the immediate locality, and would therefore not be permitted;
- the second part of criterion b) means that should the shortage of youth/adult playing fields in the immediate locality be eliminated at some point in the future, either by the provision of new facilities or

the intensification of use of the existing facilities, this would allow the redevelopment of some or all of the playing field for other purposes.

- criterion c) would allow the development of the whole of the site if equivalent or greater provision is made in the immediate locality.

This assessment is made solely in relation to Policy CLF4 of the UDP. Any development proposal would of course need to comply with other UDP policies and criteria.

## 5. Assessment of visual and amenity value

5.1 It is necessary to determine whether any parts of the site could acceptably be released for development without detracting from the visual quality of the local environment.

5.2 This Brief has had regard to Local Planning Guidance Note 19 'Wrexham Town's Character Areas', adopted by the Council in September 2001. The Nine Acre Field lies within Character Area 3a as defined by LPG 19, i.e. "Interwar suburban houses". The design objectives for this area include:

- conserve and enhance existing highway verges and street trees;
- conserve low density of development and resist over-development of plots;
- conserve existing stone or brick boundary walls;
- conserve hedges.

5.3 The Nine Acre Field is a very important green area at one of the main entrance points into Wrexham. The scale of the open space, contrasting with the built up areas around, contributes greatly towards the feeling of openness in this part of the town and it is important that this impression of space and openness, in a key location near the town centre, is not compromised. Reducing its extent significantly would lose this feeling of openness. The most distinctive landscape feature on the Nine Acre Field is the avenue of Poplar trees on its western boundary, adjoining Chester Road, set off by a background of open space beyond. There are relatively few trees within the rest of the site, but the appearance of the area is greatly enhanced by the avenue of mature beech trees which lies in the open space just to the north of the nine acre field, on Rhosnesni Lane.

5.4 The eastern part of the Nine Acre Field, which adjoins the backs and sides of houses on Westminster Lane, Lawson Close, and Rhosnesni Lane, is reasonably attractive, due to the variety of buildings, colour, and the amount of vegetation. However the housing does not have a direct relationship with the open space. It is considered that the eastern part of the field could be released for development without unacceptably compromising the open character and appearance of the area.

5.5 Criterion a) of Policy CLF4 would allow only a "small" part of the site could be developed. This has been defined for the purposes of this guidance as no more than one-fifth (20%) of the total site area (approximately 0.8 ha). Criteria b) or c) of Policy CLF4 would allow all the site to be developed, if there were no other planning policy considerations to be taken into account. However because of the visual and amenity considerations outlined above, it is considered that the maximum area that should be released for development is the area currently occupied by the eastern rugby pitch, and separated from the remainder of the Nine Acre Field by the break in slope. This amounts to one-third (33%) of the total site area (approximately 1.25 ha). For visual reasons, it is important that any new development should front onto whatever space remains. Proposals to enhance the visual appearance of the remaining area of open space are set out in Section 9 of this guidance.

5.6 Because of the very important contribution which the remaining undeveloped area of the Nine Acre Field would make towards the visual and amenity quality of the area, it is considered that it would not be appropriate to replace the grass pitches with one or more synthetic all-weather pitches. Artificial pitches

would fundamentally alter the appearance of the area, and would detrimentally affect the character of the local townscape.

5.7 The conclusion of this assessment of the visual and amenity value of the site is:

- it is important that this impression of space and openness created by this site, in a key location near the town centre, is not compromised;
- the eastern part of the field could be released for development without unacceptably compromising the open character and appearance of the area;
- the character of the local townscape would be detrimentally affected by the replacement of the grassed pitches by artificial pitches, and this should therefore be avoided.

## 6 Overall Conclusions on Developability

6.1 Paragraph 4.8 sets out conclusions with respect to the impact of the UDP open space policies on the area. Paragraph 5.7 sets out conclusions on the visual and amenity value of the area. This section comes to an overall conclusion as to the developability of the site, based on known proposals for open space provision in the area.

6.2 The significant development of the Nine Acre Field would compromise its openness and be unacceptable in terms of open space provision. Given that the long-term school need for the playing field will cease and be replaced elsewhere, that community use is limited, and that the eastern part of the field could be released for development without compromising its visual character, some land is available for residential development. This would amount to approximately one-fifth if development of a small part of the site was allowed under criterion a), or one-third if development were allowed under criteria b) or c). These two possibilities are indicated on Plan 1.

## 7 Planning Policy on potential uses

7.1 Given the location and size of the potential development area, it is considered that the only acceptable type of development would be residential.

## 8 Townscape and Design Issues

8.1 Residential development at the Nine Acre Field should be comparable with the existing low density development in the adjoining area i.e. two storey. Development should take the form of houses, as opposed to flats, to best reflect and strengthen the character of the area. Houses should face west onto the field, since flank walls facing the field would be unacceptable in visual terms.

## 9 Public Open Space, Landscape, and Trees

9.1 **Public Open Space:** Local Planning Guidance Note 10 "Public Open Space in New Housing Development" would apply to housing development at the Nine Acre Field. The following section of LPG10 is of particular relevance to the site:

"exceptionally in suitable limited cases where new developments are in close proximity to existing council owned play and amenity provision, developers should enter into legal agreements in order that funding can be provided to enhance, upgrade, augment and maintain the existing facilities in lieu of providing provision on site".

9.2 **Landscape:** Local Planning Guidance Note 7 "Landscape and Development", adopted by the Council in 1993, would apply to the development of the Nine Acre Field. As LPG 7 points out, good landscaping schemes can greatly enhance an area, and will provide a positive contribution to the neighbourhood.

Landscaping schemes can help integrate new developments into the environment, softening the harsh outlines of new buildings and the monotonous surfaces of driveways and parking areas. Whilst the open space within the site is visually attractive, there is still scope to improve its appearance, and measures to achieve this are set out below.

9.3 **Trees:** The existence of trees significantly enhances the visual amenity of the Nine Acre Field. UDP Policy EC4 states that:

- development proposals should provide for the conservation and management of trees and include new planting in order to enhance the character of the landscape and townscape;
- development which results in the loss or significant damage to valuable trees will not be permitted.

9.4 Tree protection must include sufficient space to minimise short and long-term impacts from construction. If the trees are to remain assets to the community, sufficient space is needed to permit the increase in size that will occur over time. Current size and future growth potential need to be taken into consideration. Development should be carried out in accordance with Local Planning Guidance Note 17 'Trees and Development', adopted by the Council in September 2000.

9.5 The Nine Acre Field contains a number of trees which are of significant amenity and townscape value, but which do not merit statutory protection through a Tree Preservation Order (see attached plan 2). However in accordance with UDP policy EC4, any development proposals should avoid causing any significant loss of or damage to these trees.

9.6 The appearance of the remaining open space at the Nine Acre Field would be enhanced by the removal of the fencing which currently surrounds the site, except where it is required on safety grounds due to the proximity of busy roads. Fencing does not need to be situated on the edge of the open space, as at present, and could be located away from the edge of the pavement. This would leave a verge wide enough for large avenue trees such as limes, oaks or beeches to be planted, but such proposals should not compromise the primary use of the area as playing fields/sports pitches, should they be required.

9.7 Avenue planting alongside existing and proposed roads adjoining the open space will be in keeping with the existing urban character, and will enhance both the townscape and the open space. There is much scope for additional tree planting, particularly the establishment of new avenues. The Lombardy Poplars next to Chester Road will have very extensive root systems, the extent of which should be ascertained, since they could be affected by building development (or affect buildings) and will shade areas to the east.

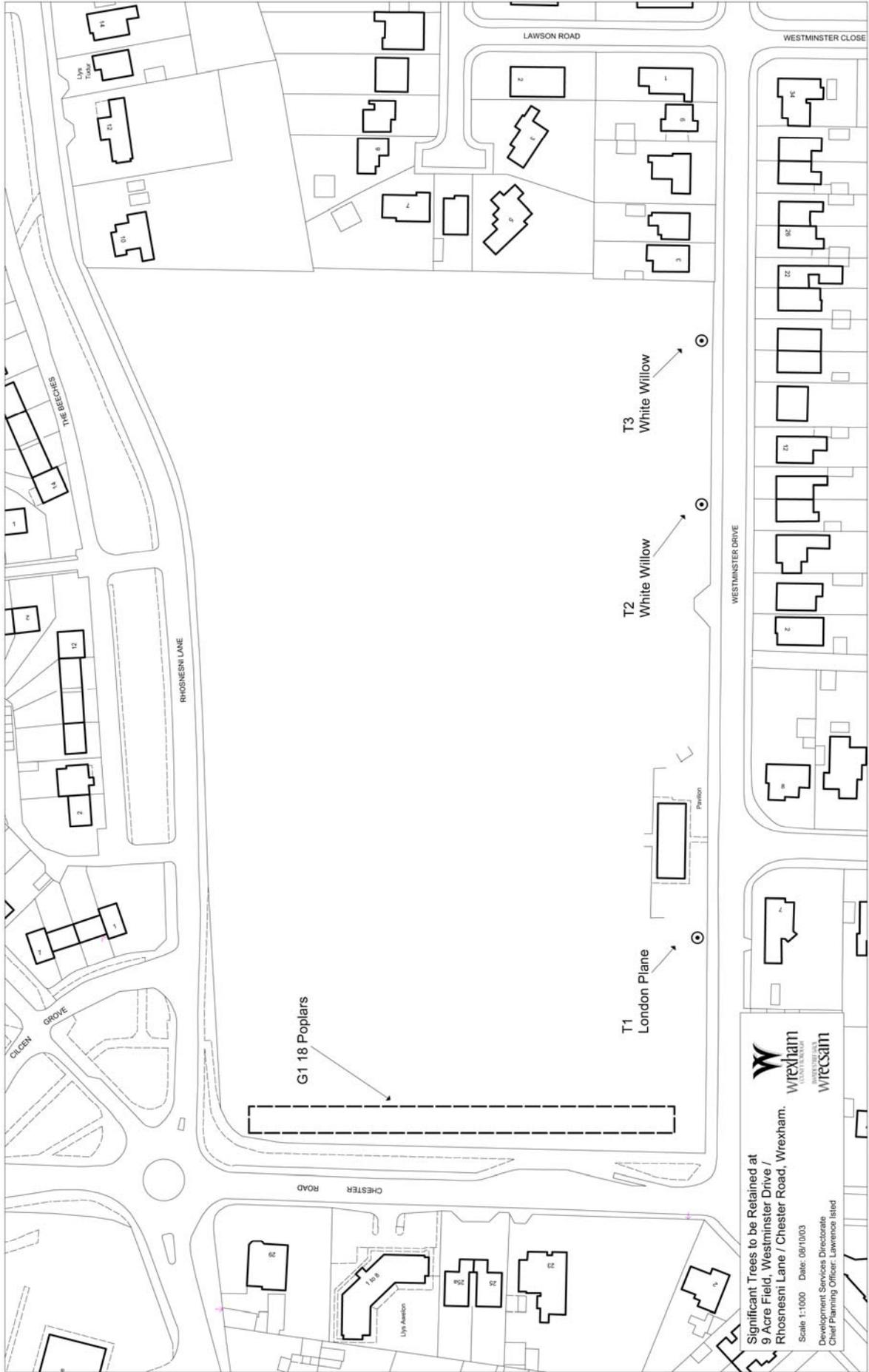
9.8 The replacement of the unsightly changing rooms situated on Westminster Drive would represent an important enhancement of the facilities.

## 10. Transport Considerations

10.1 It is proposed that access would be provided from Westminster Drive, at a point midway between the two existing willow trees. Vehicular access onto Rhosnesni Lane would be unacceptable because of restricted visibility to the east, although provision should be made for walking and cycling access at this point.

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**wreccsam**
  
 Wrexham City Council

Significant Trees to be Retained at  
 9 Acre Field, Westminster Drive /  
 Rhosnesni Lane / Chester Road, Wrexham.

Scale 1:1000 Date: 08/10/03  
 Development Services Directorate  
 Chief Planning Officer: Lawrence Isted

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