

# Report: Evaluation of Proposed Peterborough: Nene Park Trust Lakeside Outdoor Activities Centre Development

## **Context and Proposal**

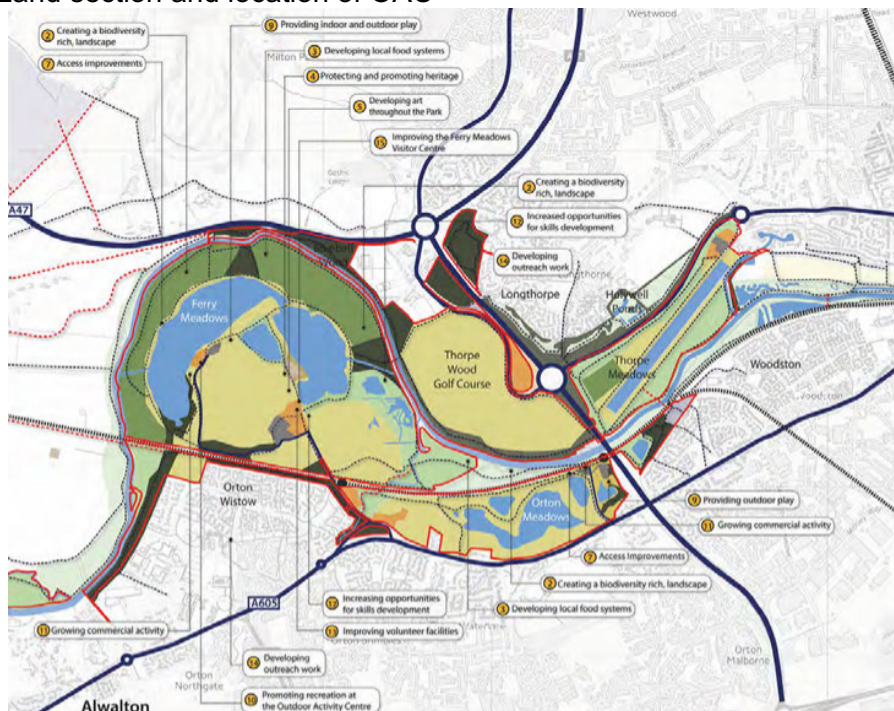
The Nene Park Trust has a 999 years lease gifted and land in Peterborough through which the river Nene runs (fig 1).

Fig 1 NPT Land Assets<sup>1</sup>



One of its sites includes the Outdoor Activities Centre (fig 2). OAC is appx 40 years old and the site was a target area for the NPT's 2050 Master Plan proposed developments which has an overarching aim to connect Nene Park (extending to the A1 trunk road) to the City Centre of Peterborough with enhanced social, sport and wellbeing related activities.

Fig 2 NPT Land section and location of OAC<sup>2</sup>



<sup>1</sup> Nene Park Master Plan 2017-2050, p.4, link <https://www.nenepark.org.uk/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=3e8a34cd-3576-4b1b-8fb4-93f9e15a7f5d>

<sup>2</sup> NPT Master Plan, ibid, p.29

OAC's current offer includes outdoor, water-based and park related activities along with an established small café (figure 3<sup>3</sup>). Stated aims<sup>4</sup> for OAC include –

- Indoor and outdoor play and leisure experiences for all age ranges
- Café destination as part of facilities
- Water based activities
- Cycle hire
- Lakeside swimming
- Recreational activities such as low and high ropes and climbing walls

A planning application (figure 4)<sup>5</sup> was subsequently prepared for an £8M centre proposal<sup>6</sup> and submitted in 2019, referred to as Lakeside Activity Centre. It was formally approved on 26 Mar 2021 (vote Peterborough City Council 10:1 in favour) for erection of LAC comprising an indoor climbing centre, climbing walls housed in a 34.25M tower, indoor children's play area, café, associated infrastructure and car parking. The scheme will create 31 new jobs and is estimated to bring in £2M/annum to the local economy<sup>7</sup> (eg., accommodation, travel and food<sup>8</sup>), primarily from 'out of town' visitors estimated to number an additional 112,000.

Fig 3 Current OAC ground floor plan

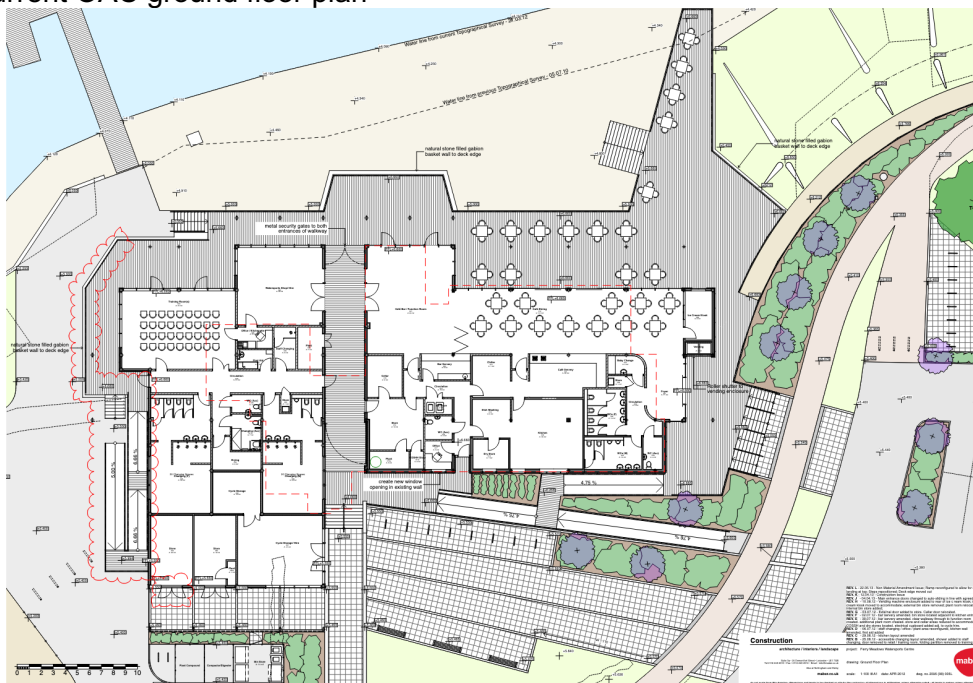


Fig 4 Overview of proposed LAC site plan

<sup>3</sup> NPT planning application documentation, <http://plandocs.peterborough.gov.uk/PublicDocuments/01233759.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> NPT Master Plan, ibid, p.23-24

<sup>5</sup> NPT Lakeside Activity Centre brochure

<https://www.nenepark.org.uk/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=c955bf56-060e-4f8c-867d-f16534239054>

<sup>6</sup> Waite (30 Mar 2021), Glen Howells' controversial climbing centre approved, Architects' Journal <https://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/news/glenn-howells-controversial-lakeside-climbing-centre-approved>

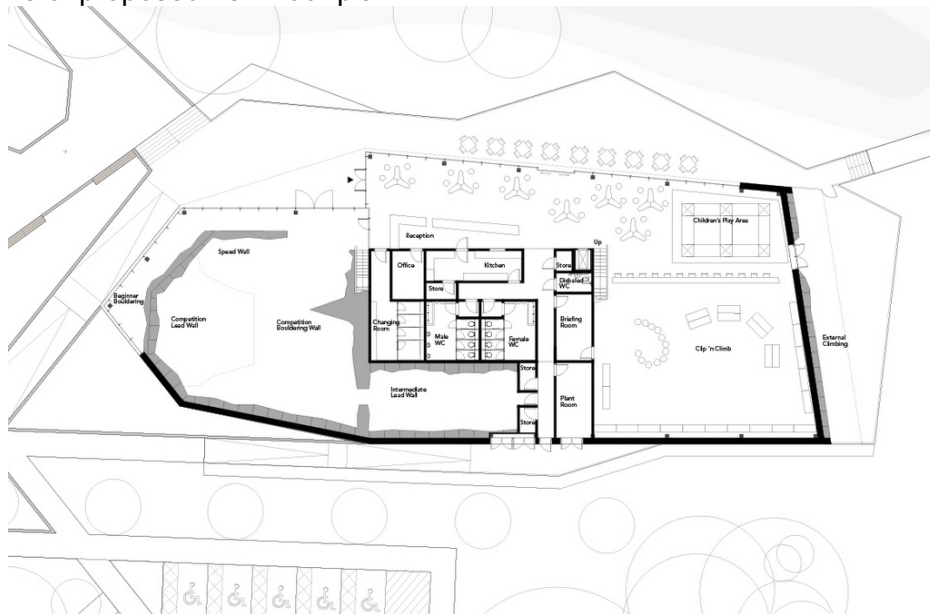
<sup>7</sup> Planning & EP Committee report (23 Mar 2021), p.31

<http://plandocs.peterborough.gov.uk/PublicDocuments/01236216.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> Towns Fund (Peterborough City Council) <https://www.peterborough.gov.uk/council/planning-and-development/regeneration/towns-fund/lakeside-activity-centre>



Fig 5 Outline of proposed new floor plan<sup>9</sup>



The plan was approved (3 years from 26 March 2021) subject to a number to conditions –

- Archaeological work and mitigation
- Flood risk assessment and mitigation
- Management and maintenance plan for surface water drainage
- Sewage infrastructure plans approved
- Materials approval and scheme visuals provided for each level of the build
- Arboricultural method statement and tree protection plan
- Softworks plan
- Ecological appraisal
- Bird nesting and bat roost scheme
- External lighting plan
- Parking and turning plan
- Cycle parking provision

<sup>9</sup> Glenn Howells Architects <https://www.glennhowells.co.uk/project/lakeside-activity-centre/>



- Pedestrian plan
- Electric vehicle charging plan
- Construction management plan
- Travel plan
- Crime prevention plan
- Noise/nuisance prevention plan

Hours of operation of new site noted to be approved: 7am to 10pm Mon-Fri, 8.30-10pm Sat, 9.30-10pm Sun & bank holidays<sup>10</sup>

Glenn Howells Architects have been used to develop the design concept. Planning consultants were Savills, landscape architect was SLR Consulting, structural engineer Arup, M&E consultant Cundall, quantity surveyor Edmond Shipway, CDM advisor Nene Construction Management Services. The site design concept was inspired by the geometry and materials of climbing and play (figures 4-5<sup>11</sup>). Site renders illustrate the design concept constructed building (figures 6-8<sup>12</sup>).

Fig 4 Design concept for LAC (Glenn Howells Architects)

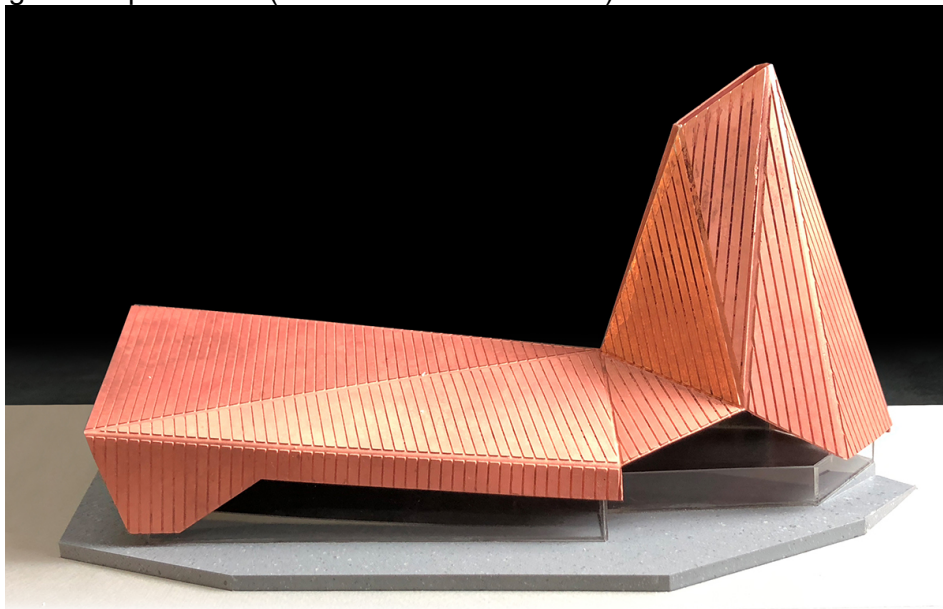


Fig 5 Geometry of LAC design concept (Glenn Howells Architects)

<sup>10</sup> Planning approval letter (26 Mar 2021) <http://plandocs.peterborough.gov.uk/PublicDocuments/01236683.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> Glenn Howells Architects design concept <https://www.cambridge-news.co.uk/news/local-news/peterborough-towns-fund-government-jobs-19177545>

<sup>12</sup> Waite (30 Mar 2021), Glen Howells' controversial climbing centre approved, Architects' Journal, <https://www.architectsjournal.co.uk/news/glenn-howells-controversial-lakeside-climbing-centre-approved>



Fig 6 Climbing Centre visualisation (Architects' Journal) – lake view



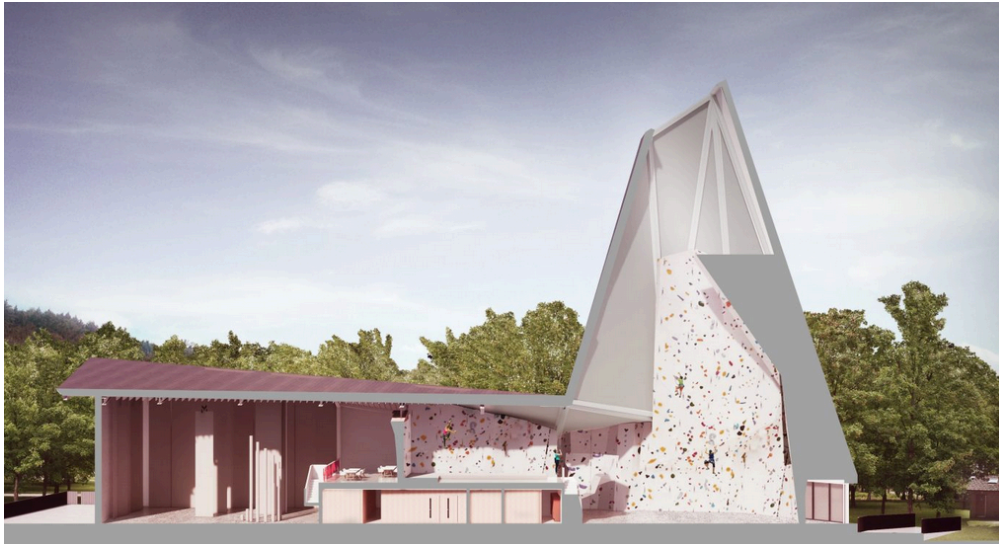
Fig 7 Climbing Centre visualisation (Architects' Journal<sup>13</sup>) – approach



Fig 8 Climbing Centre visualisation (Architects' Journal<sup>14</sup>) – cross section

<sup>13</sup> Waite ibid

<sup>14</sup> Waite ibid



Planning and Environment Protection Committee meeting minutes<sup>15</sup> highlight a number of important factors in the discussion of the site –

- The climbing tower is intended to serve as an Olympic standard climbing facility, including 50 lines of which 14 would be the competition lead wall, other areas include a clip and climb facility, up to 30 pieces of equipment for a children's play area, function rooms, office, training room, kitchen and changing rooms, view area, additional café seating, competition viewing area
- Footprint of the building is 60M x 23M with a floor area of 1,412M<sup>2</sup>, including 151M<sup>2</sup> restaurant/café
- Car parking for 225 standard car bays, 6 minibus parking bays, 10 accessible parking bays plus 10 additional bays closer to the centre for access
- Scale of the building (height) was considered by local residents to be inappropriate for the area (an area of natural preservation) and essentially flat land next to Gunwade Lake.
- Issues highlighted by residents included: air pollution impact from increased traffic, no bus services, impact on street parking due to parking charges being imposed
- 6,000 complaints (6,299 as at 21 Mar 2021<sup>16</sup>) were received against the planning application and 250 supporting individuals, many of whom were noted to be climbers
- Forecast figures suggest 270 visitors/day – a report alluded to 100,000 visits per year and 2000 journeys per week, most arriving by car
- Design of the building out of character with local area and city
- Climbing wall considered to be a 'honeypot' for other on-site amenities
- Attractive facility for local schools and young people with potential for 'curriculum benefits'
- Insufficient evidence of evaluation had been provided in relation to alternative sites for the new centre by NPT (in relation to its large estate and multiple possible locations for the centre)

Ultimately approval was favoured on the basis that the site would –

- Enhances local recreational offer and draw recognizable benefits to the local economy, promote active and healthy lifestyles and align with National Planning Policy
- No other suitable sites were identified
- Low perceived risk of flooding compared to other potential sites

<sup>15</sup> Planning & Environment Protection Committee meeting minutes (23 Mar 2021)

<http://plandocs.peterborough.gov.uk/PublicDocuments/01262476.pdf>

<sup>16</sup> Briefing Update P & EP Committee (23 Mar 2021)

<http://plandocs.peterborough.gov.uk/PublicDocuments/01236666.pdf>



- Provides a wider sustainability benefit to the community with minimal flood risk impact on other areas of the city
- Visual impact was outweighed by recreational benefit
- Limited impact on local biodiversity of area
- Building perceived to be of high quality, innovative design and add local distinctiveness
- Loss of open space outweighed by enhanced facilities
- Local highway network would not be unduly impacted
- Neighbours would not be adversely impacted
- Pollution evaluations (air, noise, light) within acceptable levels

### **About NPT and Funding for LAC**

NPT has a book value of £42M with an operating income of £539K and trading income of £51K in 2021 across all activity sites (of which LAC is one)<sup>17</sup>. Turnover was down appx one third on the pre-Covid year in 2021. NPT is a healthy organization on paper because it has high value land and building assets rather than a strong trading record and it is not permitted to sell land assets to fund or maintain activities.

No evidence was presented in the 2021 Annual Accounts identifying how funding for the new centre was to be raised, however, throughout 2021 it worked with Peterborough City Council's Towns Fund Board<sup>18</sup> to integrate the project into the city's regeneration programme. It also intended that once planning approval had been granted to approach other funders again. No information was provided on the business plan for operation of LAC – it is stated in the Annual Accounts that the project will be advanced only if the business case is viable.

Due to the failure of another service in the City as a consequence of Covid (Vivacity), NPT incurred an exceptional expense in taking over another organization, which ultimately resulted in a net loss of £531K being reported for unrestricted funds in 2021 (its total income was £6.287M in 2021 but reported a net loss of £1.229M overall).

Minutes of the Peterborough City Council Towns Fund Board (14 Mar 2022<sup>19</sup>) report that Andrew MacDermott (Head of Development at NPT) has joined the Board. Minute item 3 summarizes the business case and communications plan review for LAC in which an application to Dept Levelling Up, Housing & Communities is identified as the key strategy for funding. The business case comprises integrating place-making, facilities for students and residents, influence on choices of where to live, innovative purpose-built activity offer, promoting healthy lifestyle (outdoors and adventurous physical activity) and wider benefits.

All Peterborough City Council business cases for DLUHC (LAC is one of 8 being submitted) were due to be submitted (to Government for approval) on 15 April 2022. In a previous Towns Fund Board Minutes (20 Jan 2022<sup>20</sup>) it was noted that the intervention rate of the Towns Fund programme has achieved a 46% third party match – the total Towns Fund for Peterborough City Council being £22.9M with £19.6M match funding (Peterborough was awarded £22M in Round 1 which included provision for LAC<sup>21</sup>).

<sup>17</sup> NPT Annual Report & Accounts, [Charities Commission Annual report](#) (year ended Jan 2021)

<sup>18</sup> Towns Fund (Peterborough City Council) <https://www.peterborough.gov.uk/council/planning-and-development/regeneration/towns-fund/lakeside-activity-centre>

<sup>19</sup> Minutes of Towns Fund Board (14 Mar 2022) <https://www.peterborough.gov.uk/asset-library/towns-fund-board-minutes-140322.pdf>

<sup>20</sup> Peterborough City Council, Minutes of Towns Fund Board (20 Jan 2022) <https://www.peterborough.gov.uk/asset-library/minutes-for-the-towns-fund-board-meeting-20-january-2022.pdf>

<sup>21</sup> Leishman (29 Oct 2020), Peterborough set to be awarded massive £22M grant for major regeneration, CambridgeLive <https://www.cambridge-news.co.uk/news/local-news/peterborough-towns-fund-government-jobs-19177545>

According to another report, the LAC business case is for £1.5M Towns Fund investment<sup>22</sup> intimating approximately a further £1.3M is being third party matched through the Council. It is unclear from where the remaining £5M reported in the original application submission (for £8M) is being raised. One potential route for additional funds that is likely to be sought is the Sport England Strategic Facilities Fund (up to £2M per project<sup>23</sup>).

Overall, therefore, the funding strategy for the build phase of LAC is currently in progress, pending outcome of Peterborough City Council's Towns Fund spending allocation by Government, match funding confirmation and raising additional funds from other sources (eg., investment, sponsorship, loan secured against assets, etc).

Once operational, NPT Master Plan estimates that direct income to their operations from LAC will be appx £1M/annum. The climbing facilities will be registered with NICAS/NIBAS.

Work on the new car park for the facility was reported to have begun in June 2022, beginning with archaeological surveys<sup>24</sup> (update: 14 Jul 2022)

### **General Observations/Comments**

- Funding has at the date of this report not been fully secured. If funding is successful through the Towns Fund process, building work for LAC could begin in 2022 but is more likely to begin in Spring 2023, intimating potential operation will be from Summer 2023.
- If funding is not fully secured, planning approval will expire on 6 Mar 2024. However, the site is now integrated into Peterborough's regeneration plans intimating reapproval is a formality and development will proceed.
- LAC operating income highlighted appears to be derived primarily from car parking charges (already mandated on site at appx £1.80/day?) and general visitors to concessions (café, shop, children's activities) as well as climbing and pursuit activities (which are the 'honeypot' activities attracting users). The range of non-climbing related activities constitute the critical mass through which operating profit will be achieved.
- Positioning LAC as part of Peterborough's regeneration strategy with impact on the local economy (eg., £2M/annum) underpins the Council's rationale for investment alongside its stated commitment to enhancing the health and wellbeing offer. LOPC business case should explore similar positioning.
- The proximity of LAC is going to be something that any sports related grant funders for LOPC will consider, therefore the LOPC business case has to demonstrate competitive viability.
- The LAC planning application mentions that NPT has consulted widely among the climbing community which included potential target users/stakeholders from Leicester although none were specifically identified in documentation. An opportunity for LOPC may therefore be as a 'feeder' site for training or potential collaborative partner in related project activities (eg., regional training and competitions).

Prof Tracy Harwood  
27 April 2022 (updated 14 July 2022)

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<sup>22</sup> Baker (28 Mar 2022), Funding approved for business cases for city projects, Peterborough Matters <https://www.peterboroughmatters.co.uk/local-news/funding-approved-for-business-cases-for-city-projects-2330212>

<sup>23</sup> Sport England Strategic Facilities Fund <https://www.sportengland.org/how-we-can-help/our-funds/strategic-facilities-fund>

<sup>24</sup> Grinnell (23 Jun 2022), Work starts on new car park at Ferry Meadows, Peterborough Evening Telegraph