

# The National Bowl Development Brief



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# SECTION 1

# INTRODUCTION

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## 1.1 Introduction

- 1.1.1 The Bowl was constructed during the 1970s as an outdoor venue to hold large rock and pop; the arena can accommodate concerts of up to 65 000. Since 1979 the Bowl has attracted numerous high profile bands and artists including: Police, UB40, Queen, Genesis, David Bowie, Status Quo, U2, Simple Minds, Michael Jackson from the 1980s, Bruce Springsteen, Guns n' Roses, REM, Bon Jovi from the 1990s and more recently Robbie Williams, Eminem, Oasis and Green Day and the Foo Fighters. Swedish House Mafia played at the Bowl in 2012. In recent years however the regularity and prominence of these concerts has significantly dwindled.
- 1.1.2 The Milton Keynes Bowl represents a significant yet underutilised leisure facility in Milton Keynes. The infrastructure at the Bowl is outdated and the site is in need of substantial investment to maximise its potential.
- 1.1.3 Milton Keynes Council has however recently

acquired the freehold of the Bowl and wants to work closely with key partners to maximise the potential of the entire site to achieve a major leisure and sporting facility for not just Milton Keynes but also for a wider regional, national and international audience.

- 1.1.4 This Development Brief plays a key role in achieving this. The Milton Keynes Development Partnership\* (MKDP) Agreement furthermore requires that the MKDP should seek approval from Milton Keynes Council for development briefs before marketing/selling any of the sites under its control.

*\* Milton Keynes Development Partnership (MKDP) is a limited liability partnership set up by Milton Keynes Council to facilitate Milton*

*Keynes' continued growth and economic success by promoting the development of land assets transferred to the council from the HCA, in line with the council's Corporate Plan and Economic Development Strategy. MKDP take a commercial and entrepreneurial approach to sell and develop these assets with third party developers and*

*investors, whilst ensuring full community and stakeholder engagement in the preparation of development briefs for the sites*

## 1.2 Purpose of Development Brief

- 1.2.1 The purpose of the Development Brief is to provide appropriate planning, design and development guidance for the future use of the Bowl so that the potential of the site can be realised in the most optimal way possible.
- 1.2.2 The Brief will ensure the best possible outcome for the Bowl in terms of providing a major leisure and sporting destination for Milton Keynes and the wider region.
- 1.2.3 The Development Brief and its options will also be used to undertake a marketing exercise to help establish whether an acceptable and deliverable proposal does exist for the site.

## 1.3 Structure of Development Brief

- 1.3.1 **Section 1** outlines the introduction including the purpose of the Development Brief
- Section 2** outlines the existing planning policy context relevant for the Bowl
- Section 3** outlines a contextual desk top analysis of the site identifying strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats
- Section 4** identifies the sporting requirements for \*Badminton and Lawn Tennis, the MK Dons Academy and First Team training as well as British and Milton Keynes Cycling Association and the requirements of the Bowl if it is to be a national concert and event venue
- Section 5** outlines five options and associated Key Features for the future use of the Bowl:
1. Occasional Concerts/Events, \*Badminton/ Lawn Tennis, MK Cycling and MK Dons First Team Training and Academy

2. \*\*Occasional Concerts/Events, Badminton/ Lawn Tennis and MK Dons
3. Concerts/Events, Badminton/Lawn Tennis and MK/Local Cycling
4. \*\*Concerts/Events and Badminton/Lawn Tennis
5. \*\*With the exception of Badminton / Lawn Tennis on the east car park which must be included, any of the above or additional activities /uses so long as it complies with the existing planning policy identified in this Development Brief

*\*Milton Keynes Council granted on the 29 April 2013, subject to a satisfactory negotiation on s106 requirements, planning permission for a National Badminton Centre and Lawn Tennis on the east car park of the Bowl. While Badminton England are hopeful of tennis still being included in the project, they or 1 or 2 other sports may well be part of the project in some phased build. For the purposes of this Development Brief, Badminton and Lawn Tennis will only be referred to as the Badminton Project.*

*\*\*Existing Planning Policy requires provision to*

*be made for a suitable alternate replacement cycling facility*

## 1.4 **Other Information**

- 1.4.1 A Marketing Brief was prepared in July 2013 which outlines pertinent information regarding title, existing leasehold arrangements, rights of access, restrictive covenants and clawback arrangements

# SECTION 2

# PLANNING POLICY

# CONTEXT

2.1 Planning Policy Context

pg09

## 2.1 Planning Policy Context

### 2.1.1 National Planning Policy Framework

#### Planning Healthy Communities

Para 69 states that the Planning System can play an important role in facilitating social interaction and creating healthy, inclusive communities.

Para 73 says “Access to high quality open spaces and opportunities for sport and recreation make an important contribution to the health and well being of communities. Planning policies should be based on robust and up-to-date assessments of the needs for open space, sports and recreation facilities and opportunities for new provision.”

### 2.1.2 Milton Keynes Local Plan (adopted 2005)

The Bowl is currently allocated with the adopted Local Plan as Recreation and Open Space as well as a Linear Park. Loughton Brook runs through the Bowl Site and is identified as a wildlife corridor.

Highlighted below are key policies that relate to the use and development of the Bowl.

Policy L2 of the Local Plan seeks to protect existing area of open space from development and to ensure that development proposals address any unmet need for community facilities. The policy states that planning permission will be refused for proposals involving the loss of open space used for leisure and recreation unless alternative provision of at least equivalent size, quality, suitability and convenience is made.

Policy S12 seeks to protect and enhance linear parks. The Bowl is identified as within the Loughton Valley Linear Park. Development proposals in the Linear Parks should contribute to achieving the following

objectives:

- I. Protecting and improving the landscape
- II. Protecting and enhancing features of nature conservation value
- III. Retaining and improving public access to land and water areas for countryside recreation
- IV. Flood Control
- V. Minimising any adverse impacts on local residents and agriculture

Policy L12 specifically relates to the Milton Keynes Bowl and therefore should be given significant consideration. The objective of the policy is to facilitate intensification of the use of the Bowl for commercial leisure and recreational purposes.

The policy recognises that the Bowl has not been used to its full potential in recent years and recognises that there maybe scope for some enabling development at the Bowl to contribute towards improvements but highlights however that retail uses would not be appropriate.

The policy identifies the secure closed road circuit which serves as an important facility for cycle racing and training and states that development proposals will need to retain the existing road circuit for the use of cyclists or, make provision for an alternative, replacement facility either on or off site.

Planning permission will be granted to intensify the use of the Milton Keynes Bowl for commercial leisure and recreational purposes provided that proposals:

- I. Are capable of being well served by public transport
- II. The proposal would not result in additional traffic inappropriate to or exceeding the environmental or highway capacity of the local road network
- III. Would have no significant adverse impact on the amenity of residential areas
- IV. Where need can be demonstrated, training and other facilities should be safeguarded for community groups and sports clubs including use for cycle race trials
- V. Are consistent with policies applying to Linear Parks

- VI. Do not include commercial leisure uses or 'enabling' development which could undermine the vitality and viability of existing town and district centres
- VII. Retain the existing cycle, equestrian and pedestrian sites across the site or make provision for suitable alternative routes.

### 2.1.3 Core Strategy

The adopted Core Strategy (July 2013) includes as one of its objectives, "To develop Milton Keynes as an International Sporting City". The International Sporting City concept seeks to attract and support regional, national and international facilities and events to improve peoples health and wellbeing through new opportunities to participate in sport and active recreation (Core Strategy, Pg18)

Paragraph 15.6 of the Core Strategy states that "Green Infrastructure and open space is a key feature of the city, with high levels of good quality accessible spaces that give MK a unique character. We want to maintain this green character as MK grows. The city is well

served by linear parks, mostly along the river valleys that run through and along the edge of the city. These are multi-purpose green spaces that primarily provide flood water storage but also recreational facilities, ecological resources and attractive settings for development on their boundary. They also contribute to the overall quality of life for residents by providing opportunities for formal and informal recreation, improving health and well-being. These features will be extended as part of the expansion into the Strategic Land Allocation. Linear parks may also act as green buffers between settlements and any major development sites that may be identified through the Plan:MK, or otherwise."

### 2.1.3 International Sporting City (ISC)

After an extensive consultation MKC Cabinet adopted the ISC Report in December 2011. Cabinet noted that the proposal was in line with the core strategy and would position MK in terms of sporting participation and events at the highest level

The ISC is based on 3 clusters. The Bowl is included in cluster 2 (South and East MK). The ISC proposals are to maintain and enhance the Bowl as a cultural events venue. The site also offers the potential for multiple ISC sports uses, for example as a team training base / training ground for various visiting international sports teams, as well as for the MK Dons Football Club.

The current cycling facilities could be retained, enhanced and extended, with potential links to, and use of, Furzton Lake and the Loughton Valley Country Park (“Tear Drop Lakes”).

The Bowl could also be a potential site option for the location of The Sports Quarter with its 12 court sports hall.

### 2.1.4 Milton Keynes Council Corporate Plan

The Corporate Plan sets out how the Council and its partners will work together to achieve our collective ambitions for Milton Keynes.

The Corporate Plan outlines a vision and outcomes that will continue to make Milton Keynes unique and special and a great place to live for current and future residents. It is also an important vehicle for delivering the ambitions of the Core Strategy which contains the most detailed articulation of future plans for MK.

The Corporate Plan includes 5 Themes of which development and improvements at the Bowl can help directly deliver 2 of them, namely

- “World Class MK” in terms of the outcome “Being a Premier Sporting City”, and
- “Visiting MK” in terms of the outcome a “strong reputation as a visitor destination, nationally and internationally”.

2.1.5 The enhancement of sport, leisure and recreation would help deliver the following themes

**Living in MK** in terms of the outcomes:

- Be satisfied with their area as a place to live
- Enjoy happy and fulfilled lives

**Working in MK** in terms of the outcomes:

- A mix of businesses that give a thriving and resilient economy
- High levels of inward investment and business growth

**Cleaner, Greener, Safer and Healthier MK** in terms of the outcomes:

- Be Healthy and have a sense of well being
- Is clean and has high quality open green space and buildings

### 2.1.6 Planning Summary

A summary of the planning status and policies would indicate the following:

- Intensification of sporting, commercial leisure and recreational uses at the Bowl is supported, provided that it occurs in a way that is consistent with Local Plan and Core Strategy policies on linear parks
  - Pure retail and employment uses will not be acceptable, except where they are associated and ancillary to the core leisure uses. Residential development would also be unlikely to be acceptable
  - There is no planning policy to ensure the retention of the Bowl as a concert venue per se
  - There is no planning policy requirement to provide or re-provide elsewhere for the existing car boot sale and Sunday Market. Prospective bidders may however choose to include this activity within their proposals
  - Proposals should include facilities for local community groups and sports clubs
  - Proposals should be capable of being well served by public transport
  - Proposals would not unacceptably impact on the local road network
- Proposals will need to retain the existing cycling facilities or make provision for an alternative replacement facility either on or off site
  - Proposals would have no significant adverse affect on residential areas





# SECTION 3

## CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS

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### 3.1 Site Location

- 3.1.1 The National Bowl is located fairly centrally within Milton Keynes, approximately 2km south of Central Milton Keynes (CMK). The Bowl is located within its own grid square bounded by the H7 (Chaffron Way) to the north west, the V4 to the south west and the A5 Dual Carriageway to the west.

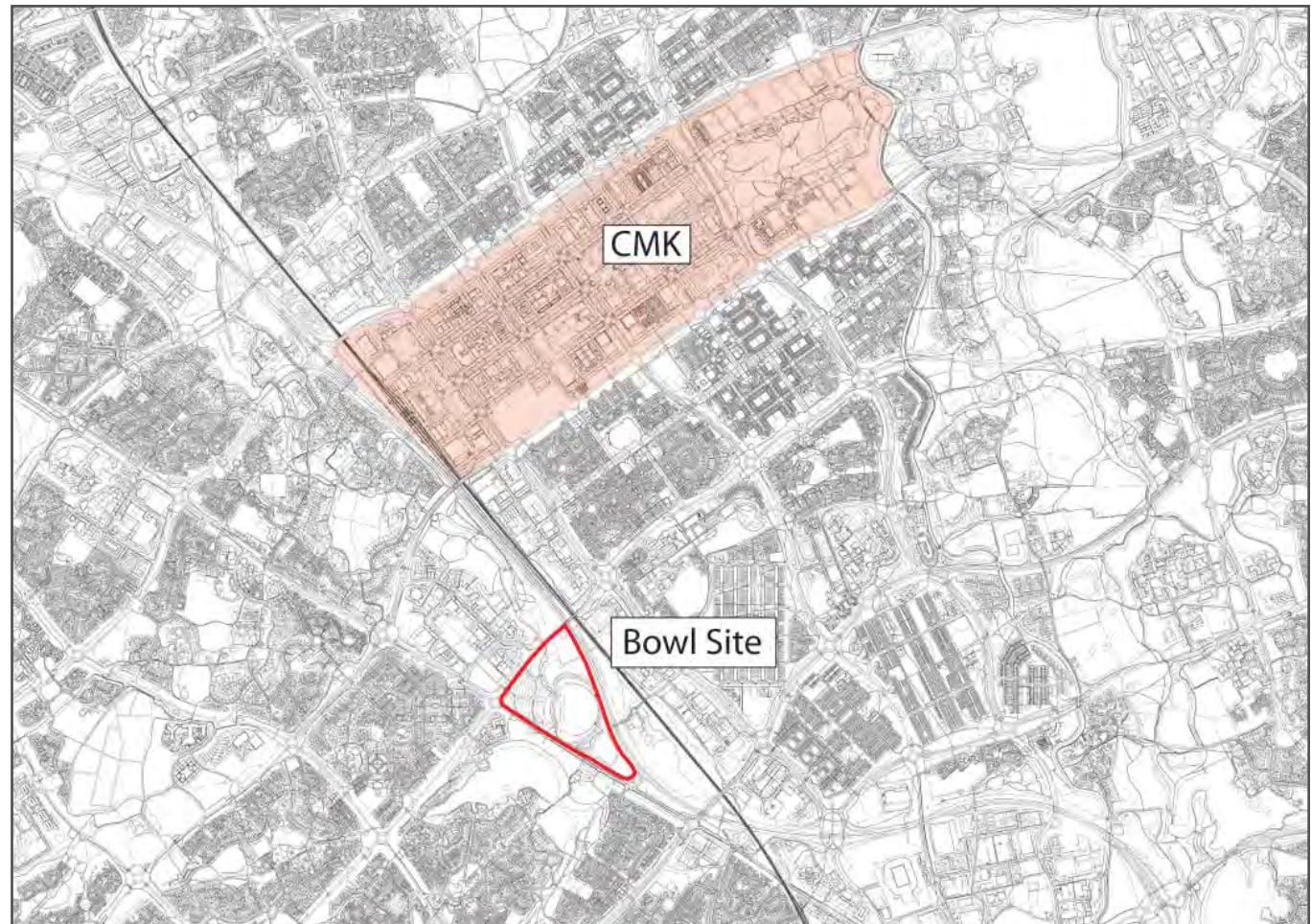


Fig.1 - Bowl site location within Milton Keynes

## 3.2 Surrounding Area

- 3.2.1 Being located within its own grid square (and hence separated from adjacent development by high speed grid roads with grid road reserves) has resulted in the Bowl being generally well segregated from surrounding areas and their uses.
- 3.2.2 To the north west is the employment area of Knowlhill while to the south west is Furzton Lake which sits within substantial grassland. The south east edge of the site is very short and does about a single residential dwelling. Elfield Park and Elfield Park Nature Reserve form the surrounding area to the north east.
- 3.2.3 While the 2 sites are well segregated from surrounding areas they are well connected to them through various public rights of way that enter cross the 2 sites (these will be outlined in a subsequent section).

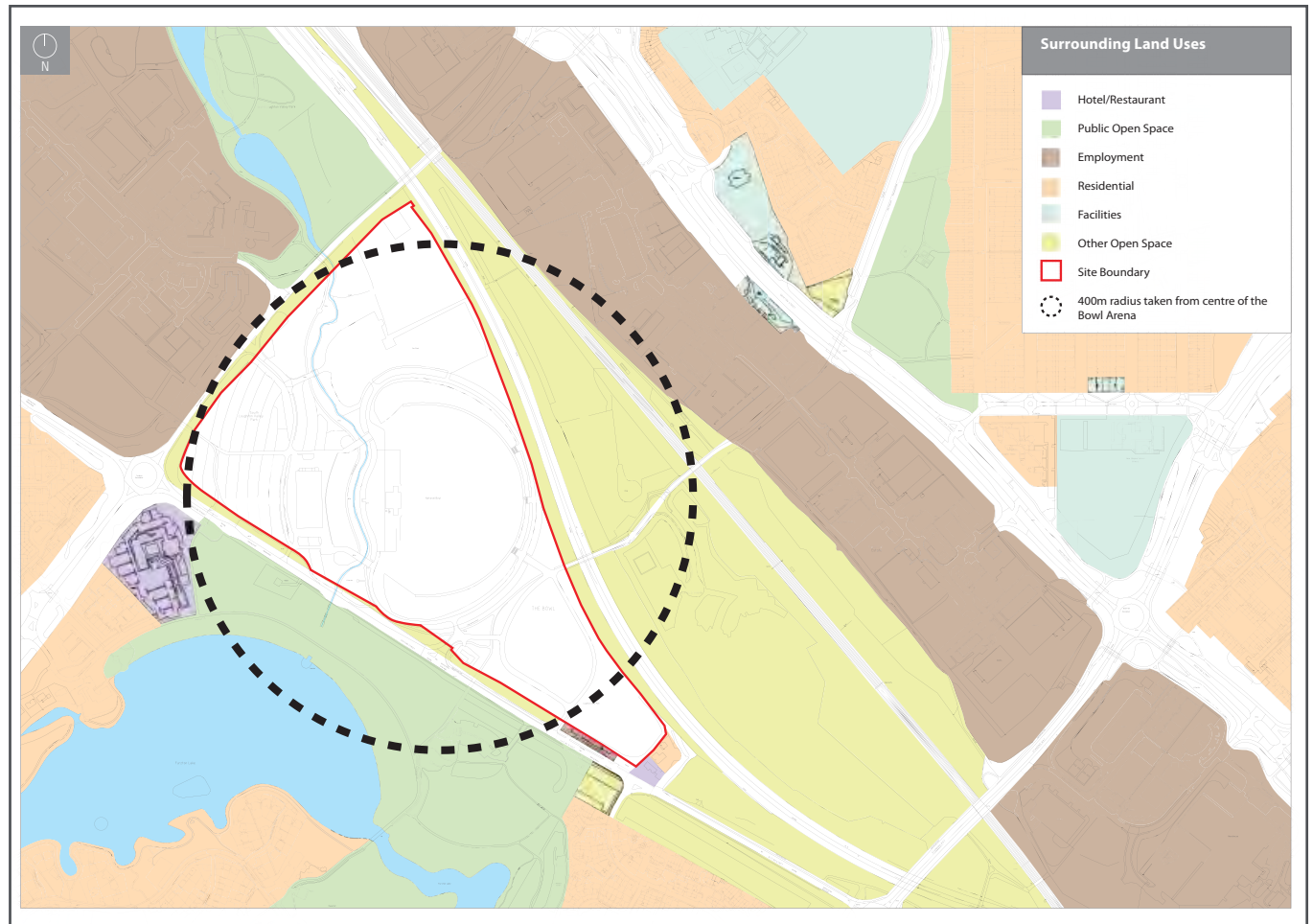


Fig.2 - Surrounding Land Uses



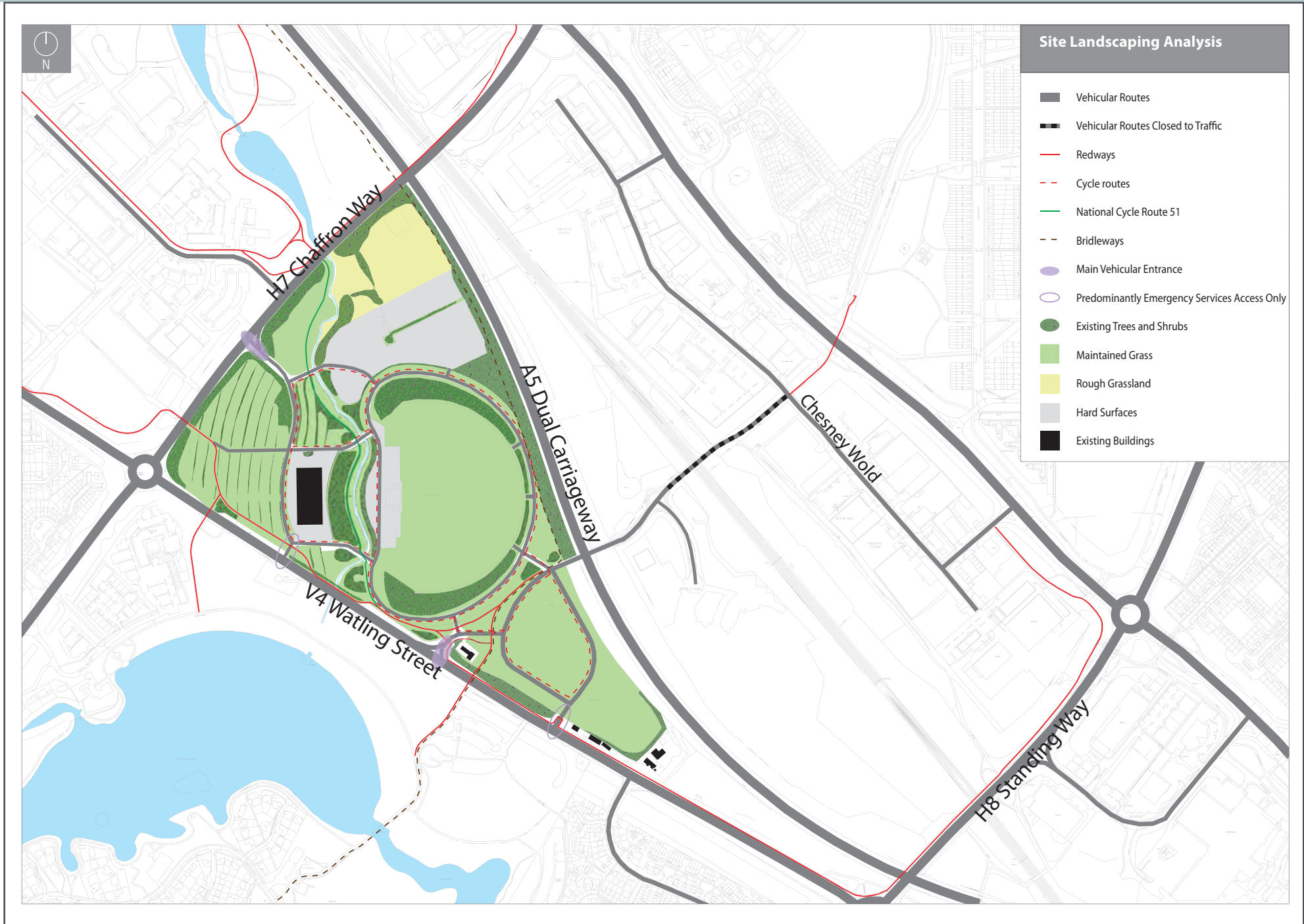
### 3.3 Site Analysis

- 3.3.1 The National Bowl site is a triangular block of land roughly 30ha in size.
- 3.3.2 In terms of topography, the site has a range of features the main one being the bowl itself, which is an artificial u shaped amphitheatre rising between 7-11metres. The rest of the site is subject to fairly minor changes in level. The site lies within the Oxford Clay vale of the East Midlands and the strata dip gently south – south eastwards towards the lower Greensand escarpment around Great Brickhill.
- 3.3.3 The site is underlain by a non-aquifer (Oxford Clay) with a minor aquifer being present to the south west of the site.
- 3.3.4 The site sits within a significant landscape setting, typical of Milton Keynes, that is accentuated by it being part of the Loughton Valley Linear Park.
- 3.3.5 The extent of landscaping particularly on the edge of the site, in conjunction with level changes (most notably along the A5) has

however resulted in poor visibility of the site. The challenge is to retain the landscaped setting of the Bowl, whilst at the same time improving visibility of what it offers.



Aerial view of the Bowl site



### Site Landscaping Analysis

- Vehicular Routes
- Vehicular Routes Closed to Traffic
- Redways
- Cycle routes
- National Cycle Route 51
- Bridleways
- Main Vehicular Entrance
- Predominantly Emergency Services Access Only
- Existing Trees and Shrubs
- Maintained Grass
- Rough Grassland
- Hard Surfaces
- Existing Buildings

Fig.3 - Bowl site Landscaping Analysis



3.3.6 The Bowl can be divided into 6 main areas (fig.4):

**Area A – North Car Park (and land adjacent to H7 and A5).**

3.3.7 The North Car Park is approximately 9ha (22 acres) and currently used for a range of activities including production area (bone yard), bus, coaches and mini bus parking area, waste holding area, public access via queuing lanes and for entertainments ancillary to concerts - e.g. fairground trades, food and beverage merchandising, Christmas parties (tentage). The area is generally flat although rises slightly towards the south of the area with around 60% covered by hard surfacing. A belt of trees break the car park into 2 interconnected areas. The land rises steeply towards its north eastern point, where there is a significant level change. The change in level reduces as the H7 moves east to west until it matches that of the site from the northern vehicular entrance onwards.

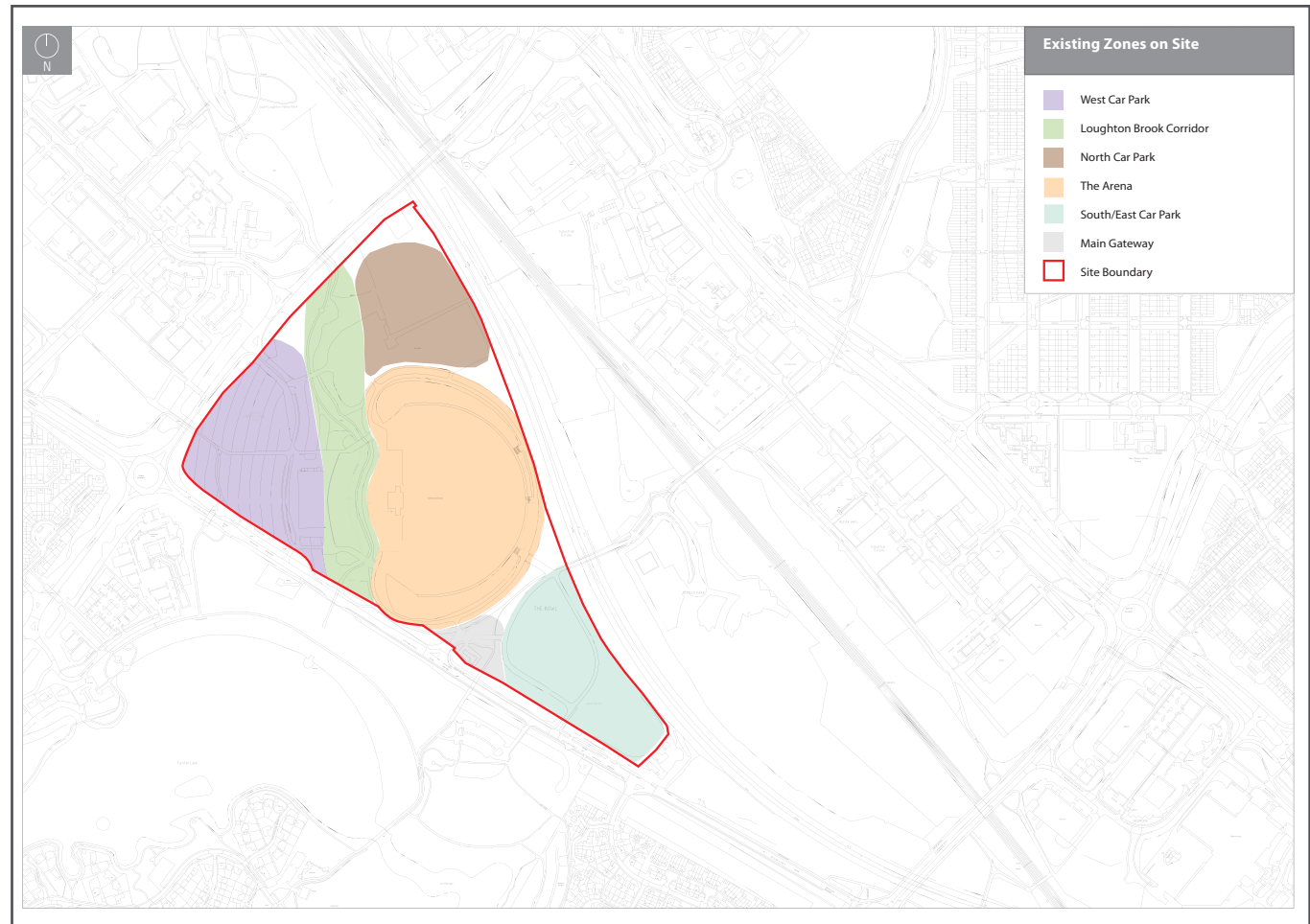


Fig.4 - Existing 'zones' on the Bowl site

### Area B – West Car Park (Planted Area)

- 3.3.8 The triangular corner of the site between H7 and V4 is approximately 7 hectares (17 acres) in size. It is heavily planted with relatively mature trees and shrubs in lines with grassed areas between the planting used for car parking during concert events.
- 3.3.9 An extensive network of public rights of way run across this part of the site including the northern vehicular entrance.
- 3.3.10 In the south western part of this area, just to the west of the arena is the 'Art of

Engagement' a large rectangular pavilion as a temporary structure with temporary planning permission that hosts in the main, corporate training events.

### Area C – The Arena

- 3.3.11 The Arena is situated on a former claypit / brick works which has subsequently been filled with inert material. It has furthermore been formed from utilising surplus soil from other development sites within the city. The arena is approximately 8ha in size and theoretically has capacity for 100,000 people. The clay/ brick pit closed in 1965 was filled during the

1970s. At their highest point the banks of the Arena extend to 12m above the flat bottom. The Arena is covered with a layer of grass. The focal point is the main stage, behind which is a hard surface utilised for parking, back stage and hospitality functions. This area also includes an electricity sub-station.

- 3.3.12 From a utilities perspective the bowl is well suited to accommodate concerts. The arena has mains water with a ring main around the perimeter, foul sewage, 3 phase electricity along with telephone connections. There are also in situ cable ducts from the stage area to front of house. There are however no



Landscaping within West car park



Hardstanding area behind main stage



The Bowl Arena



existing permanent facilities on the Bowl which reduces the attractiveness of the Bowl to host concerts and events due to the need to bring them in each time a concert is held.

- 3.3.13 The arena on its outer bank is enclosed with a dense belt of trees which is used as part of a cyclo-cross course.

#### Area D – East Car Park

- 3.3.14 The East Car Park extends to approximately 6ha (15 acres) in size and is located to the south of the Arena, with frontage onto the V4. This area is almost fully grassed (although

includes large areas of grasscrete which helps in inclement weather) with substantial and mature landscaping around its eastern, western and southern edges. The area has a gentle slope to it, rising up to its highest point at its north west corner where a bridge passes over the A5 connecting providing access to Elfield Park.

- 3.3.15 A major gas pipeline does exist a few meters to the south of the access road linking the main entrance to the bridge across the A5.
- 3.3.16 This area acts as a car park during concert events.

- 3.3.17 The main access to the entire site is located at the north west edge of Area D, close to the southern boundary of the arena. Its western edge is formed by the access road running from the main entrance across the site and across the A5 into Elfield Park.

- 3.3.18 This area includes a loop road that is also used for cycling that connects to the main entrance off the V4, a secondary access onto the V4 further south as well as the bridge over the A5 linking to Elfield Park.



Existing South car park



Main site entrance off V4 Watling Street



Loop road forming part of cycling circuit

## Loughton Brook

3.3.19 In addition to Areas A-D, Loughton Brook threads its way in a north-south direction through the site directly to the west of the arena. Much of the brook is enclosed in thick planting and trees and is not therefore an obvious feature, but does add to the landscaped setting of the Bowl.

3.3.20 Information acquired from the Environment Agency in 2005 suggests that part of the Bowl falls within Flood Risk Category 2 (Low to Medium Risk).



Route 51 running alongside Loughton Brook

## Other Areas

3.3.21 A small single storey brick building is located to the right of the main vehicular entrance off the V4 which currently serves primarily as a facilities building for cycling's activities at the Bowl, the use of which is shared by MK Horizon Motorbike Training Centre and which contains signage items of joint use to cycling and concert use

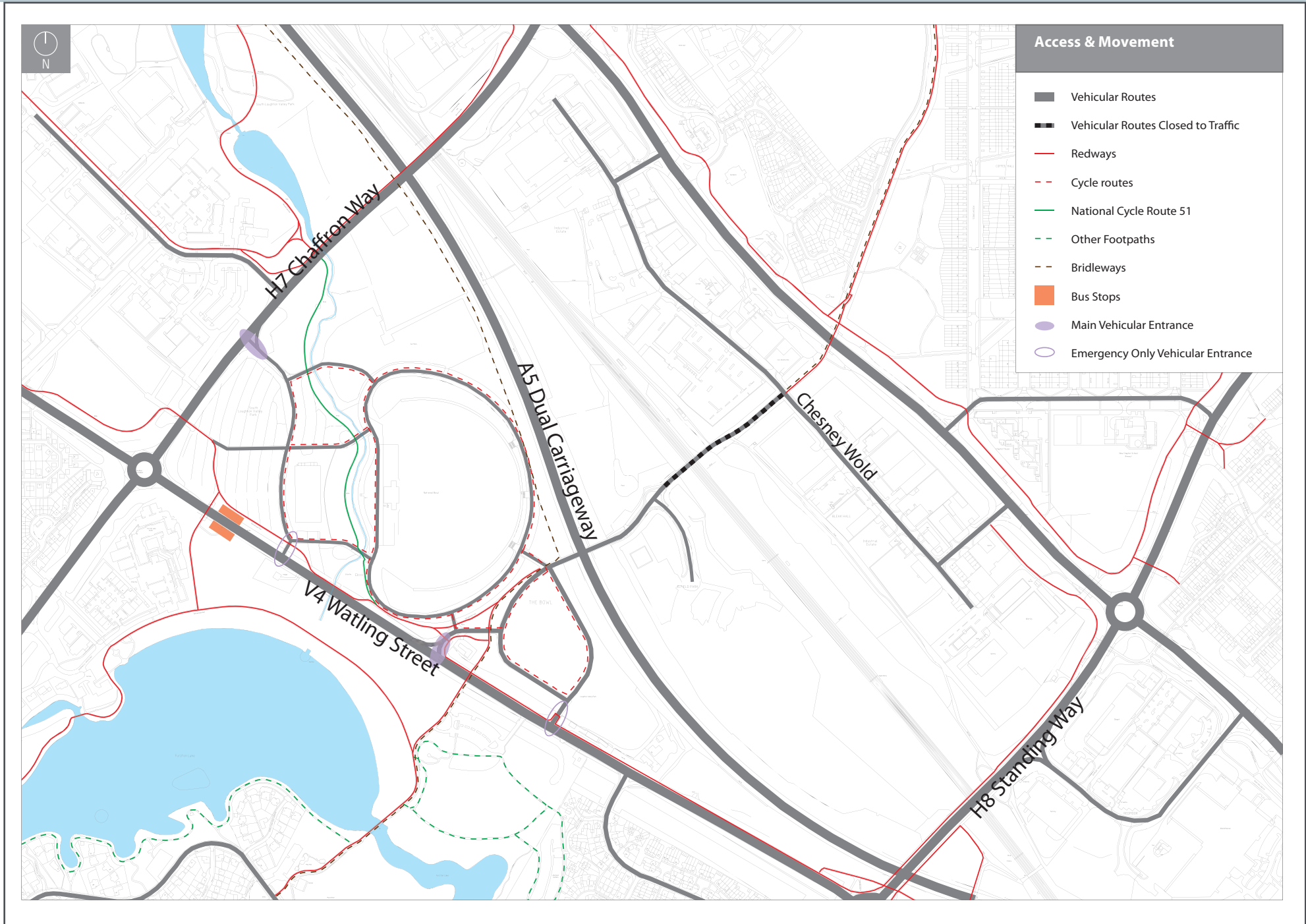


Poor quality gateway building - Horizon Training Centre

## 3.4 Current Users

3.4.1 There are short term leases granted to various users namely, Gaming International, Art of Engagement, Horizon Motorcycle Training Centre and Milton Keynes Cycling Association. Further details regarding these leases can be found in the marketing brief.

3.4.2 A Sunday market / car boot sale occurs at the Bowl and has created some additional regular usage. It tends to be located on the hard surfaced area behind the stage and along the perimeter road running around the outside or along the pathway running around the outside of the arena. Weather permitting, it also occurs within the Arena itself and the West Car Park. Car parking for the market occurs within the North and East Car Park





## 3.5 Access & Movement

- 3.5.1 There are currently 4 vehicular access points into the Bowl, 1 off the H7 and 3 off the V4. The main vehicular entrance is off the V4 just to the south of the arena. There is an additional access further to the south along the V4 that provides access to Area D, but this is normally gated off.
- 3.5.2 An additional vehicular access to the north of the main entrance off the V4 is also normally gated off. The entrance off the V7 provides the second operational vehicular entrance.



Main site entrance off V4 Watling Street

- 3.5.3 Within the Bowl there are series of linked roads that are 6m wide and in addition to taking vehicular traffic and motor cycle training serve as cycle routes for training and racing. The Bowl operates as a sub regional cycling facility by Milton Keynes Cycling Association and its member organisations.

- 3.5.4 Although segregated from surrounding land uses by the grid roads and A5, the Bowl is well connected into the surrounding area by a variety of rights of way including footpaths, redways and bridleways that run within the edge and across the site. This is illustrated in **figure 5**.



Existing redway crossing under Chaffron Way into the Bowl

- National Route 51 – between Teardrop Lakes and Watling Street running alongside Loughton Brook
- A redway alongside the northern side of Watling Street along the entire western edge of the site
- A redway from Furzton adjacent to the street providing access to Elfield Park off Watling Street
- Bridleway 29 – Tear Drops along the north western edge of the Bowl adjacent to the A5 to the bridge crossing
- Bridleway 32 - From Chesney Wold in Bleakhall, across the bridge over the A5 to Watling Street and on into Furzton



National Route 51 coming from Furzton

3.5.5 Although centrally located within Milton Keynes, the Bowl is poorly served by public transport. This is partly understandable as, due to its low level of utilisation, there is currently no reason to have a regular service to the Bowl. Any intensification on this site that will see a daily presence of people will have to include enhanced Public Transport.

3.5.6 Routes 30, 31 and 639 currently serve the Bowl albeit with a morning and afternoon service only. The closest bus stops are those on V4 (Watling Street) just south of The Bowl roundabout on the H7.



Part of North Car Park

### Potential Car Parking

3.5.7 The council doesn't specify a minimum or maximum requirement for car parking on the Bowl site during concert days.

3.5.8 The Bowl can potentially provide approximately 3000 parking spaces on site, broken down as follows:

North Car Park – 1000 spaces  
West Car Park – 1000 spaces  
East Car Park – 1000 spaces

3.5.9 In practice, on concert days significantly less can be accommodated and this in turn is very much weather dependant as the North Car Park is the only hard surfaced car park at the Bowl. On concert days if the weather is dry, the following car park can normally be provided on site.

- North Car Park – potential 500 spaces, however this area is normally only used for parking if there is spare capacity after coaches have parked and production and catering companies have established their

compounds

- West Car Park – potential 1000 spaces, however it is used by VIPs and key staff as well as disabled and first aid as well as security so the public are only allowed to park in there if there is spare capacity
- South/East car park – 1000 spaces

3.5.10 In practice therefore only between 1000 – 1500 members of the public can typically park their cars on the Bowl site during concert days.

3.5.11 On concert days additional temporary parking is provided as follows:

- Furzton Lake Car Park – 2000 spaces
- Tear Drops Car Park – 1500 spaces
- Knowlhill Car Park - 1000
- Elfield Park Car Park – 900 spaces
- Denbigh Car Parking – 2500 spaces
- CMK Parking – 4000 spaces

### 3.6 **Summary: Key Principles & Issues from Site Analysis**

3.6.1 The key principles to be addressed are as follows:

- Achieve an international, national and regional leisure and sporting facility within the existing landscaped setting of the Bowl.
- Enhance the main gateway into the site off Watling Street
- Retain the public rights of way across the site. These can potentially be realigned, but any diversions must be kept to a minimum. It is however required, that where existing public rights of way enter the Bowl that they connect to the locations where they exit the site
- Improve where possible views into the site and show it off as a major destination – thin out vegetation where feasible
- To exploit land to the rear of the existing back stage area to provide a permanent facilities building that fulfils a multi-functional role
- In line with existing policy Loughton Brook must be retained as a wildlife corridor or alternatively proposals must demonstrate adequate mitigation measures are incorporated.
- Respond appropriately if required to the fact that some of the site is with Flood Risk Zone 2
- Address the likely protected species issues at the Bowl.
- Address the lack of public transport to and from the site.

