

BLACON NEIGHBOURHOOD ALLIANCE
The Designated Neighbourhood Forum for Blacon

DESIGN FEASIBILITY REPORT INDOOR SPORTS & COMMUNITY HUB

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Indoor Sports & Community Hub at Cairns Crescent is a central element of the Blacon Neighbourhood Plan and Blacon Neighbourhood Development Order, reflecting the clear priorities of local residents identified through extensive surveys and community engagement. The hub is designed to deliver a flexible, inclusive facility that meets the needs of both sports users and the wider community.

However, during consultation, questions were raised about whether the indicative Concept Building Layout (Plan E) could realistically accommodate all of the proposed uses. This uncertainty has led to concerns from Cheshire West and Chester Council, Sport England, and some residents about the scale, layout, and practicality of the design.

It is important to emphasise that the Concept Building Layout is **indicative only** and not a submitted drawing for approval. To address these concerns and provide clarity, the Blacon Neighbourhood Plan Working Group is working in partnership with Liverpool John Moores University's architecture masters students to develop refined feasibility drawings.

These will demonstrate how the building can accommodate all proposed functions, indoor football, boxing, flexible community space, changing facilities, and social areas, within the defined building zone.

This design exercise will not only establish clearer spatial parameters but also provide a professional and visual tool to strengthen community engagement, reassure stakeholders, and support discussions with funders. Ultimately, it will ensure the Indoor Sports & Community Hub is deliverable, sustainable, and capable of meeting the long-term needs of Blacon.

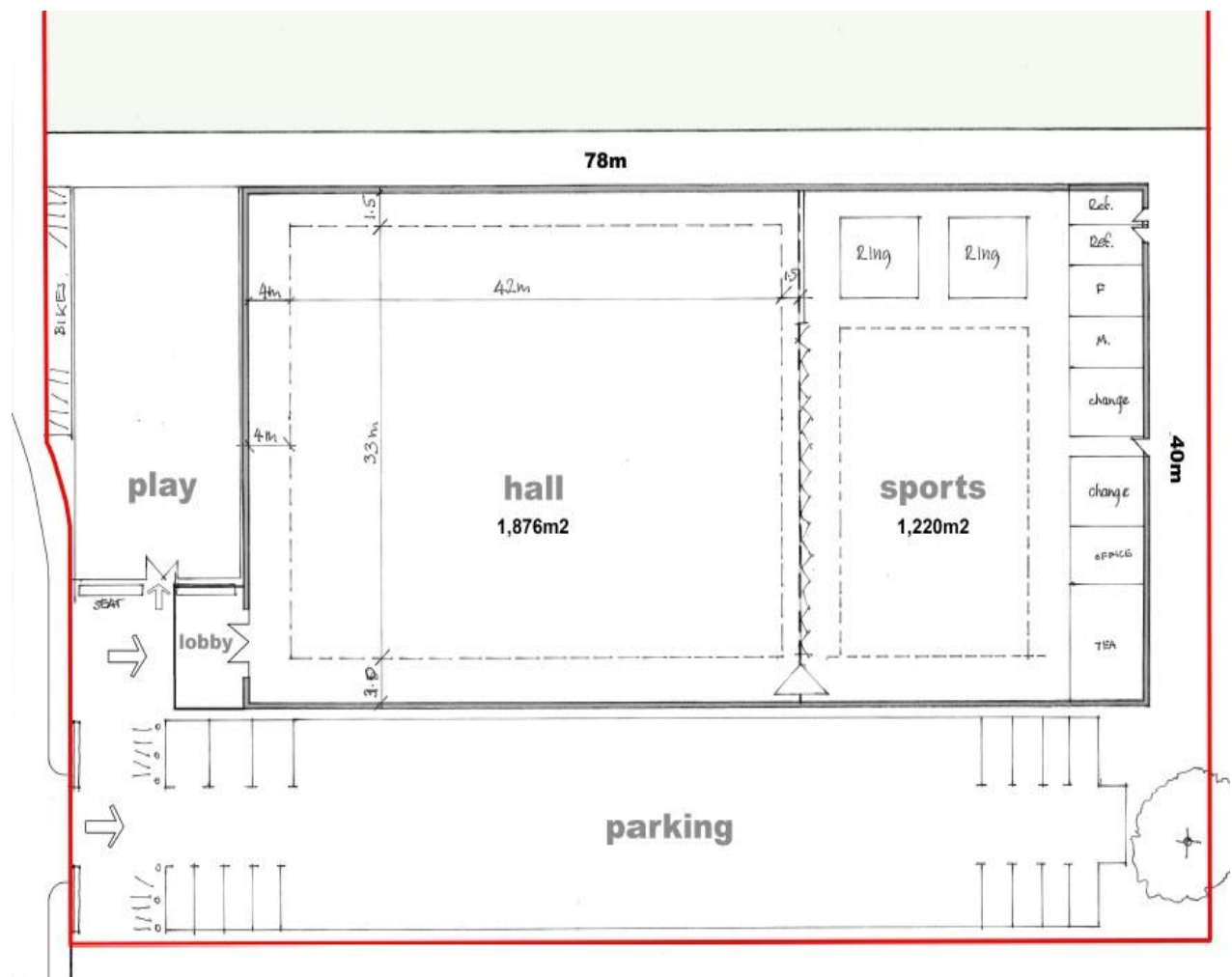
2. CONCEPT BUILDING LAYOUT PLAN

The Concept Building Layout Plan (see Plan E) illustrates how a building of the maximum size permissible within the parameters of the Building Zone may be located and sub-divided. It is not a fixed proposal but instead is intended to show one way in which the requirements of Policy BLACON1 can be met. For that reason, Plan E is not a plan for approval per §2.4 of the Neighbourhood Development Order. Blacon Community Trust will prepare a detailed proposal to discharge the conditions of this Neighbourhood Development Order once it has finalised its operating model and funding plan.

In the example shown, the building is in two parts that are configured to be used independently or together:

- A multi-use Hall area of 47.5m x 40m (1,876 sq.m.) capable of accommodating a range of sports and community uses including a 5-a-side football pitch and the youth club.
- A multi-use Sports area of 40m x 30.5m (1,220 sq.m.) with fixed provision for boxing including two rings and a flexible sports activity area. It will also provide replacement modern football changing facilities for the football clubs within a 6m wide services strip along the SE elevation with direct access to the pitches – that same strip will also accommodate space for toilets, a kitchen, an office and equipment storage space.

The Hall space will be large enough and of a maximum building height of 8.1m to accommodate a wide range of indoor sports uses with potential partitioning of the space for multiple uses. Importantly, it will offer up to five times more space for the youth club than its current buildings, which may encourage other community clubs and uses to want to use the building. The Sports space can be configured in a number of ways to enable easy access from the Hall to the services strip without disrupting sports users.



3. PARTNERSHIP WITH LIVERPOOL JOHN MOORES UNIVERSITY

The collaboration with Liverpool John Moores University offers a unique opportunity for both the students and the Blacon Neighbourhood Plan Working Group. For students, the project provides valuable real-world experience, applying their design skills to a live community development that has strong social and sporting impact. They will gain insights into community-led planning, stakeholder engagement, and the challenges of balancing technical design with affordability and inclusivity. For the Blacon Neighbourhood Plan Working Group, the partnership brings professional-quality feasibility drawings and fresh, innovative ideas at no cost, strengthening our ability to demonstrate deliverability to Cheshire West and Chester Council, Sport England, and potential funders. This mutually beneficial partnership ensures the project is both grounded in community need and informed by emerging architectural talent.

4. BRIEF & TIMEFRAME

Liverpool John Moores University's architecture programme will undertake a 6-week feasibility and design project. Two teams of three Master's students will be assigned, each bringing undergraduate qualifications and one year of professional practice experience. A competitive process will see both teams develop proposals, with a preferred scheme selected through a structured voting process.

The project will follow a clear timeline:

- Initial site visit and briefing meeting
- Two-week progress review with interim feedback from the Working Group
- Final presentation before Christmas
- Refined feasibility report delivered in January

Student deliverables will include a sketch-scheme feasibility study alongside professional-level advice on procurement methods, contract structures, and phasing options. Students will also provide:

- Calculations of Football Association (FA) and Boxing England technical requirements and space allocations
- Cost estimates (noted as indicative, with the caveat that architects' early costings often lean optimistic)
- Guidance on consultant appointments and expected fee structures for the next phase of development

This structured programme will ensure that the Working Group receives both creative design concepts and practical, professional advice to help shape the next stages of the Indoor Sports & Community Hub project.

5. CONCLUSION

The Indoor Sports & Community Hub at Cairns Crescent represents a once-in-a-generation opportunity to provide Blacon with a modern, flexible, and inclusive facility that directly responds to the needs identified through extensive resident consultation. While the current Concept Building Layout has raised understandable questions about space and functionality, the partnership with Liverpool John Moores University ensures that these concerns are being addressed with professionalism and creativity.

Through the feasibility and design work, the project will produce clear and deliverable design solutions that demonstrate how indoor football, boxing, flexible community space, and essential facilities can all be accommodated within the building zone. The resulting drawings and feasibility report will not only reassure Cheshire West and Chester Council, Sport England, and residents about the practicality of the proposals but will also provide a powerful tool for securing external funding and wider community support.

By combining strong community backing, professional planning through the Neighbourhood Plan and Neighbourhood Development Order, and now enhanced design input from Liverpool John Moores University Masters Students, the project is well-placed to move forward with confidence. The Indoor Sports & Community Hub will be a sustainable, community-led asset that enhances wellbeing, promotes inclusion, and creates lasting benefits for the people of Blacon.