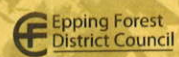




**EPPING HALL
SPORTS AND LEISURE FEASIBILITY STUDY**

October 2012

Allies and Morrison
Urban Practitioners





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Ownership plan of the area identifying the Epping Hall site and the adjoining Epping Junior School land

1. INTRODUCTION

Introduction

This paper has been prepared for Epping Forest District Council by Allies and Morrison Urban Practitioners supported by costing advice from Northcroft to explore the potential for the delivery of a sports and leisure facility on the Epping Hall site on St John's Road, Epping. It sets out a series of options for the project including a preferred option, along with an evaluation of the options and an initial estimate of the likely project costs associated with each option. It has been prepared to inform decisions about future leisure provision in Epping.

Purpose

Public consultation undertaken in March and April of 2012 demonstrated that there is very strong local support for the idea that sports and leisure facilities might be provided within the St John's Road site as a replacement for the Hemnall Street facility which is in an old building and requires significant investment. Several options explored through the consultation showed potential for a sports facility within the proposals, albeit with the caveat that this was unlikely to be a viable project without significant investment from the Council.

It is considered that a facility on this site would relate better to the town centre than is currently the case with the Hemnall Street building. Particularly, users of the sports centre would be better able to use the town centre car parks, including any new areas proposed on the St John's Road area and the location of the centre closer to the existing shops would benefit town centre vitality.

In response to the public consultation, the recently adopted brief for the St John's Road area includes the potential for sports and leisure development. This allows for the Council to evaluate options which

could include a sports facility, but also to allow the market to respond to the opportunity. Importantly, the brief does not tie the Council into delivering a sports and leisure facility on this site if it proves to be un-affordable.

The initial brief for this paper was to answer the following questions:

- What extent of land would be required for a replacement sports facility on a near like-for-like basis for the Hemnall Street facility?
- What facility could be accommodated if the site were to be limited to the land in Epping Town Council ownership?
- Are there options which allow some or all of the existing building to be remodelled and incorporated into the new facility in either of these options?
- What are the build costs of the options?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of the options?

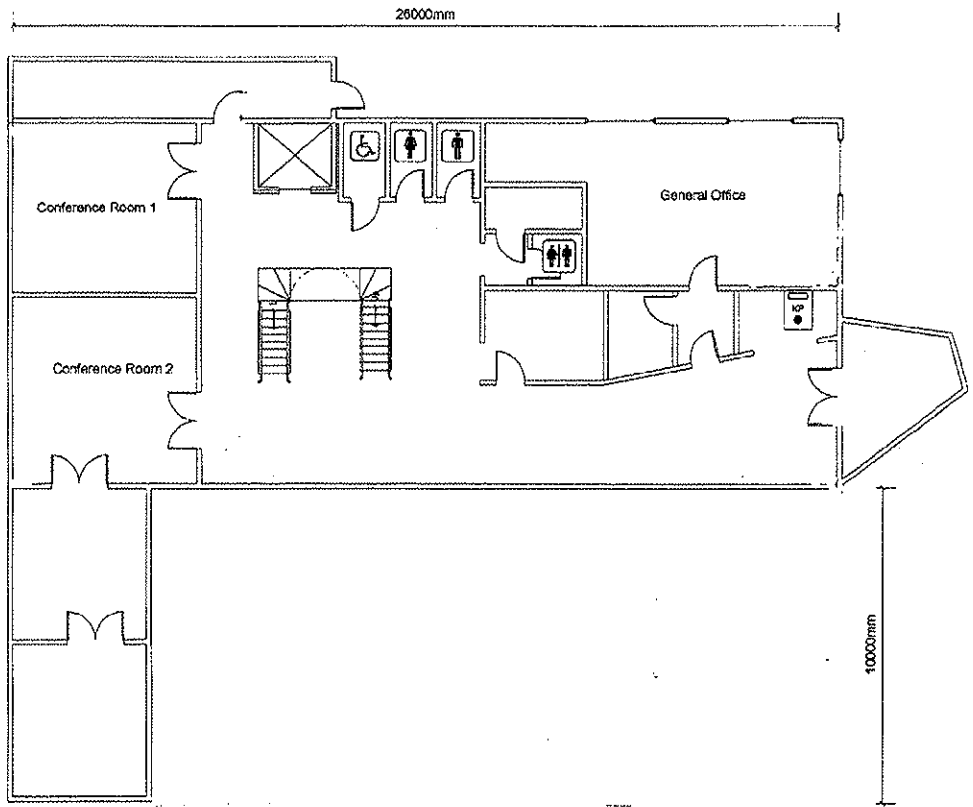
Early work on the options has demonstrated that it would be possible to achieve a like-for-like re-provision of the space at Hemnall Street, albeit with varying implications for the impact of the building on the surrounding context – some of the options would require a more bulky and prominent building than others. Having demonstrated that all of the options could match the existing programme of uses a preferred option has been developed which slightly revises the approach to the leisure use. This takes account of the reduced popularity of squash but the increased trend towards gym and studio space. The result is a building of approximately equivalent area, but with a revised pattern of uses which is designed to be more appropriate to current requirements and hence more likely to be well used.

Epping Hall

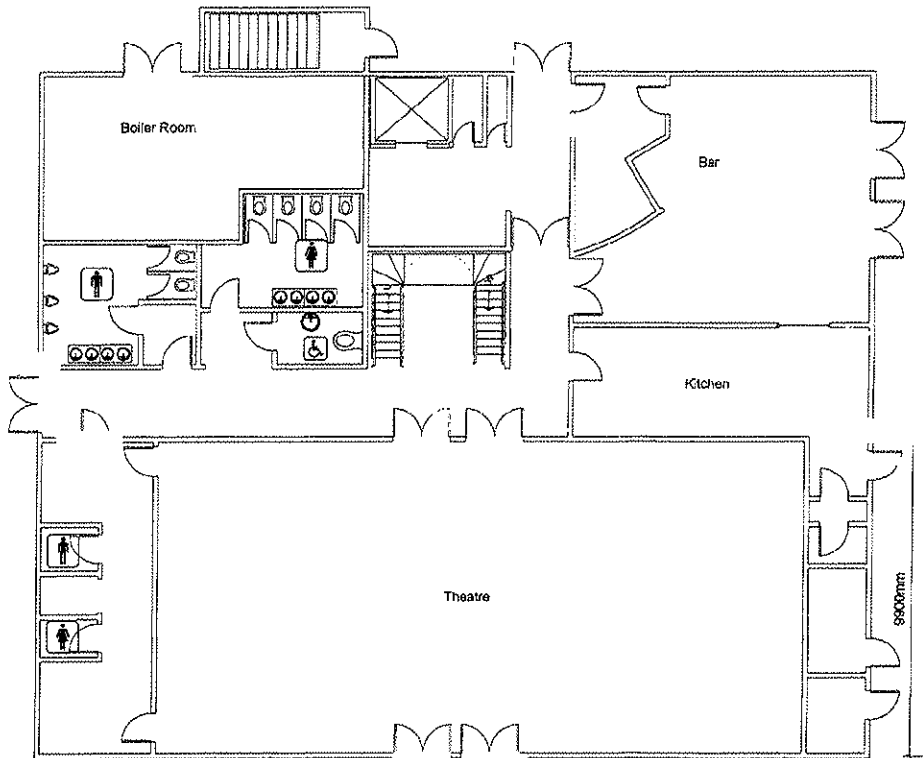
The existing Epping Hall building comprises a main hall, conference room, offices, kitchen, bar and ancillary spaces. It is well set back from the street and cut into the slope of the site, leaving it with little street presence and unusual access across a bridge and poor servicing arrangements. Over the course of the main St John's Area Design and Development Brief project the building has been identified as a potential site for redevelopment, subject to the agreement of Epping Town Council and subject to the land being purchased by EFDC. It is expected that the purchase cost of the land would at least need to exceed the outstanding mortgage on the building to ensure that ETC is not left out of pocket. Their expectations beyond this are not known.



The existing Epping Hall building viewed from the parking area adjacent to St John's Road



Epping Hall upper level
 (entrance level)
 not to scale

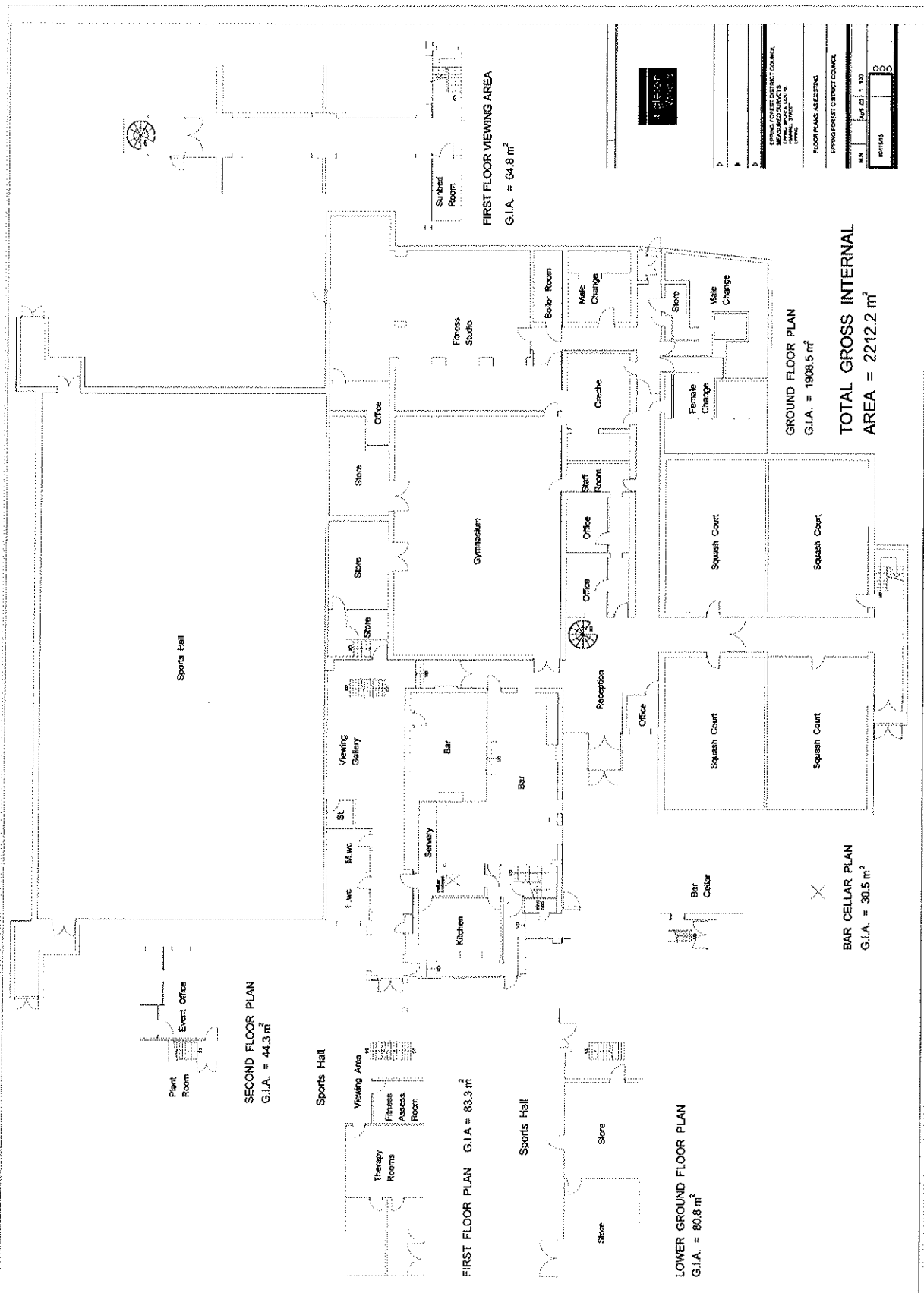


Epping Hall lower level
 (hall level)
 not to scale

Existing Hemnall Street Facility

The existing sports and leisure building located in Hemnall Street provides a four court hall, gymnasium, fitness studio and four squash courts supported by a range of ancillary spaces. The core of the building is a large Victorian house which has been extended in a series of phases to provide a total of 2,212sqm gross internal area. The result is a building in which it is difficult to achieve an optimal layout and energy efficiency. The age of the building also means that accessibility is an issue and that maintenance is likely to be increasingly expensive.

The location of the building away from the town centre and the lack of parking on the site means that the facility has a significant impact on parking in surrounding streets. In the event that the facility is moved and the land sold, the site is considered very suitable for residential development.



Hemnall Street leisure centre - existing floorplan (not to scale)

2. OPTIONS FOR SPORTS PROVISION

The work which has been undertaken suggests that it could be possible to provide a sports centre on a like-for-like basis within the existing ETC site, either making use of the existing building, or starting with a completely fresh structure. Options have also been explored which retain the existing forecourt and green space at the front of the building.

The options for sports provision have been explored as follows:

- Option 1 – replacement facilities on a like-for-like basis with a new building extending back from the existing Epping Hall building line to retain the green space and accessible parking;
- Option 2 – replacement facilities on a like-for-like basis retaining and reusing the existing Epping Hall building;
- Option 3 – replacement facilities on a like-for-like basis within the curtilage of the ETC ownership; and
- Option 4 – replacement facilities on a like-for-like basis within the curtilage of the ETC ownership and retaining the existing building.

On the basis of the options explored above, a preferred option has been prepared. This works within the curtilage of the Epping Hall site, but removes the existing building. This provides the opportunity for a new facility which can be constructed whilst minimising the likely need for significant excavation. In view of the current patterns of use at the existing sports centre, the profile of uses for the new centre has also been slightly revised, with the key variations being a reduction from four to two squash courts and an equivalent increase in gym space.

Plans and accompanying notes for the options appear on the following pages.

OPTION 1



OPTION 2



Options 1 and 2

These options both work to the existing building line which is set back from the street. The aim of this approach is to achieve the minimum urban impact over and above the existing building.

Strengths:

- Minimal impact on the character of the street – most of the change in the urban form is well set back from the road;
- The internal layout of the building is less compromised by the configuration of the site – there is greater flexibility to deliver an ideal building, particularly where starting from scratch;
- No further major excavation is likely to be required; and
- The layout of the building footprint in this way could work within the main development area as shown in consultation option 2 from the St John's Road Design and Development Brief Consultation. This allowed for a reconfigured entrance from within the site, releasing the street frontage for other development.

Weaknesses:

- The building is well set back from the road and as a result lacks a strong public presence;
- The existing building is of modest architectural character and may not project the positive new image which a new sport and leisure building may warrant as a flagship council project;
- Any development which extends beyond the ETC site will require the purchase of further land from EEC, increasing the project cost; and
- Option 2 which retains and re-uses the existing building is not as efficient in land terms and would require a greater extent of new building to the rear of the plot – this could have a more significant impact on adjoining neighbours.

Options 3 and 4

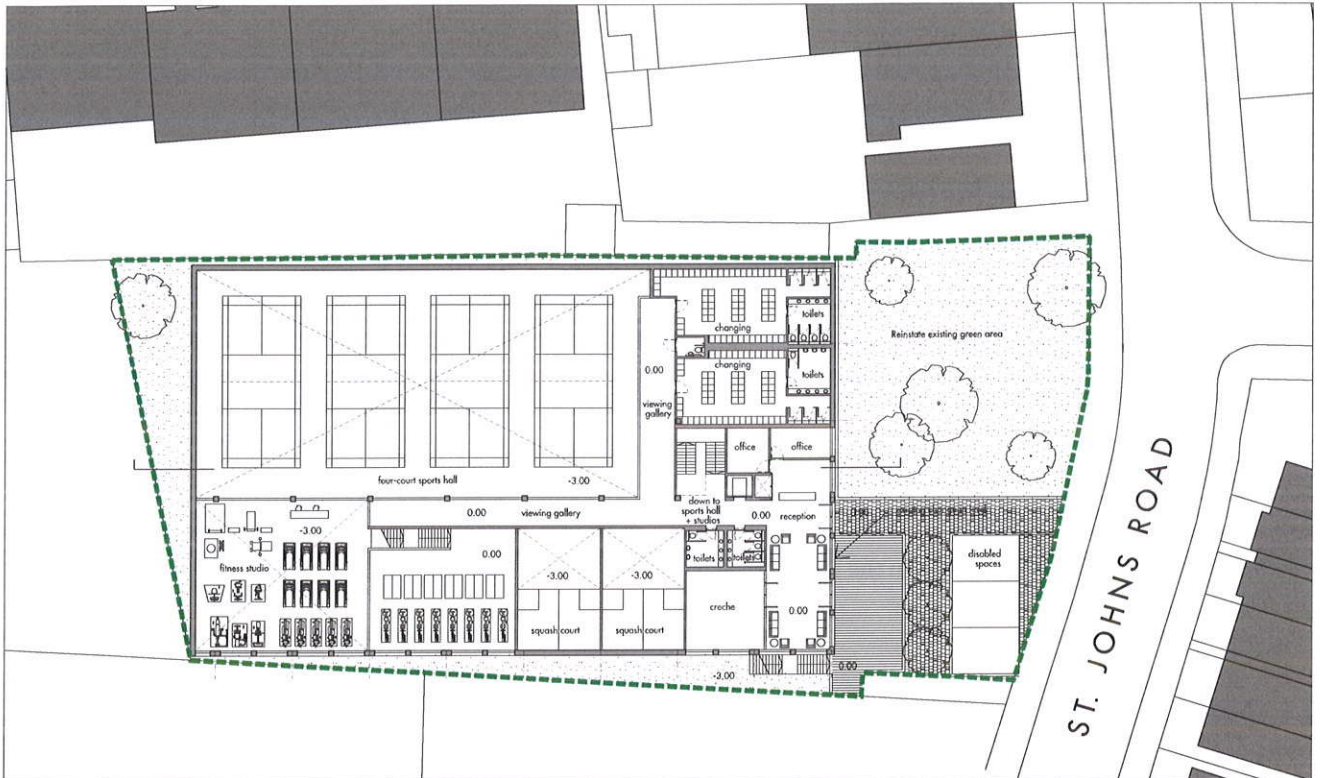
Both of these options work within the limits of the existing ETC ownership

Strengths:

- Limited land take, leaving more space for other development and reducing the land cost associated with the project;
- Potential to use the excavated area of land for new buildings to keep the overall bulk of the building as low as possible with further excavation to keep the bulk of the building down at the street frontage; and
- Location of the building with a strong frontage to St John's Road will give it a more public profile, appropriate to a building of this nature.

Weaknesses:

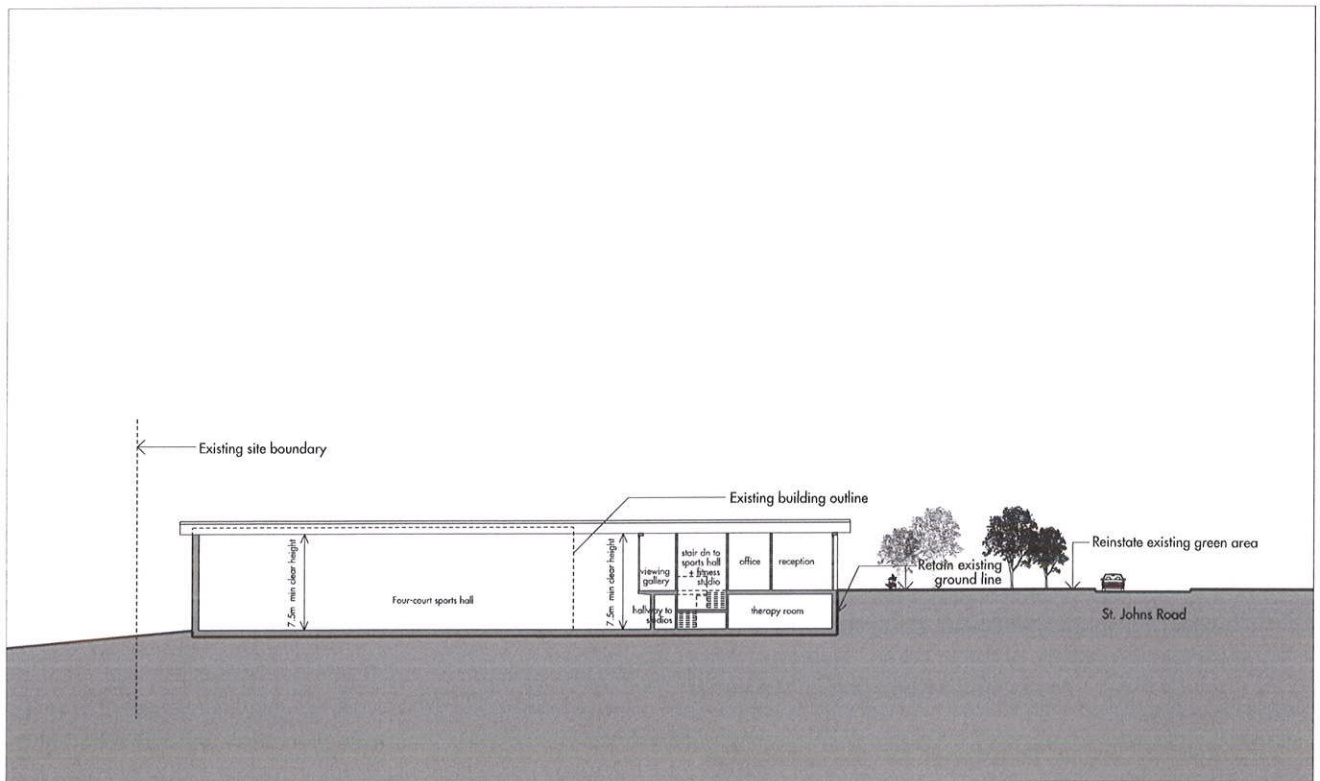
- The building would be constrained within the site, potentially compromising the internal layout. This is particularly so for the option which retains the existing building – the large sports hall needs to be slotted in between the existing building and the road and as a result the internal layout is not ideal;
- A considerable amount of excavation is likely to be required to achieve the layout shown which remains within the curtilage of the existing site;
- The excavation issue could be overcome by exploring options which are designed with a step in the section of the building. However, this would result in a more bulky building on the street frontage; and
- All of the site would be used, leaving no forecourt area or accessible parking for disabled drivers.



Upper ground floor plan: Option ETC land only and new facilities
 Scale 1:250
 Total site area: 2356sqm
 Total area (GEA): 1531 sqm on lower ground floor + 530sqm on upper ground floor
 Proposed building area (GEA): 2061 sqm
 Components: Four-court sports hall, fitness studio, class studios, therapy rooms and 2 squash courts

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 AMUP

October 2012



Site section
 Option ETC land only and new facilities
 Scale 1:250

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 AMUP

3. PREFERRED OPTION

As a result of considering these strengths and weaknesses a preferred option has been developed as a variation on option 1. This considers the potential for a new building, but pulled forward to the extent of the existing excavation line with the following key attributes:

- It would reduce the land take whilst limiting the need for further excavation work;
- There is potential to achieve a near-ideal form of internal layout for the building – it is not compromised by the need to work with the existing building and hence the bulk of the sports hall can be accommodated where it will have least impact on the street scene;
- A small public space can be retained at the front of the building, maintaining the landscape quality of the street as it gradually opens out to the more domestic context to the north west. However, the access to the building will be much improved, avoiding the need for the bridge link;
- The stepped terrain is used to good effect in terms of reducing the apparent bulk of the building from the street; but
- The building is closer to the street and can be designed to have a more visible profile than the existing building to suit its public role.

Notes on the re-use of the existing building

It might be expected that by adopting the previous Options 2 and 4, which entail the refurbishment of the existing building, that the build cost would be less as the shell of the existing building would be utilised. Whilst there was some difference between options, the refurbishment options did not realise significant savings due to the extent of the work that would be required to refurbish and convert the existing building:

- The existing layout would be altered requiring demolition of some existing walls and construction of new walls to create the new layout;
- Whilst a large proportion of the external walls would be retained, some works such as cleaning, repairs and possibly even adaption and creation of new windows may be required. Similarly we would envisage that modifications and repairs to the roof may be required;
- The flank wall would require structural alterations to create a link to the new sports hall (furthest away from St John's Road);
- It is likely that the building services would be replaced in their entirety and designed as part of a package to meet the needs of the whole new building rather than being part of a cumulative addition which would be more expensive to run and maintain in the long term. When installing new services, there is likely to be an element of making good the existing walls and floors which would not be the case with a new building; and
- It is more difficult to install building services in an existing building as this often requires use of existing ducts and risers necessitating additional builders work.

It is possible that a more economic refurbishment option could be developed. However, this may further limit the potential to deliver a scheme which best provides the new sports and leisure use envisaged.

This report has been prepared to evaluate the urban design and spatial potential for the sport and leisure facility. It should be noted that there may be unknown constraints such as underground services, contamination etc which cannot be identified at this stage of work and which should be the subject of further investigation.

