

Heritage Statement – Patio Extension at Cobham Sports Pavilion

1. Introduction

This Heritage Statement accompanies a planning application for the modest extension and improvement of the patio area and creation of an access ramp at Cobham Sports Association Pavilion. The pavilion is situated within the Cobham Conservation Area and is a longstanding focal point for community sport and recreation.

The building itself has undergone very little modification since it was first constructed, retaining much of its original form and character. While this is testament to its durability, it also means that facilities now fall short of modern safety, accessibility, and capacity requirements. The proposed works represent essential improvements, carefully designed to respect and enhance the heritage setting while enabling the building to serve its growing and diverse membership.

2. The Proposal

The project comprises:

- Extending the existing patio by approximately 2.5m to provide adequate space for players, families, and supporters.
- Removing deteriorating and unsafe brick walls and steps, replacing them with a traditional white picket fence and safe steps.
- Installing an accessible ramp into the pavilion and level access onto the patio, ensuring full wheelchair accessibility to all key areas of the building.
- Improving the safety and amenity of the outdoor space while enhancing the pavilion's traditional village cricket aesthetic.
- In the longer term, incorporating a removable pergola or retractable awning to provide shade and shelter, enabling year-round use of the patio space.

3. Heritage Context

The pavilion sits within the Cobham Conservation Area. Development in such locations must sustain and enhance the character of the setting. The proposals achieve this by:

- Replacing inappropriate, crumbling brickwork with a traditional white picket fence, reinforcing the rural village cricket aesthetic.
- Modestly extending the patio into an area already occupied by tables and chairs on grass, meaning no material change in use.
- Retaining all playing space, with no encroachment onto sports pitches or harm to the openness of the Green Belt.

- Eventually introducing sympathetic, removable structures (pergola/awning) that provide flexibility without detracting from heritage value.

4. Heritage Significance of the Site

Cobham Sports Association is home to Cricket, Football, and Tennis Clubs, with a sporting heritage of local, national, and international importance.

- Founded in 1850, Cobham Cricket Club proudly celebrated its 175th anniversary in the summer of 2025 with a historic week of cricket and community events. We hope that this extension and improvement will serve as a lasting legacy of that momentous occasion, ensuring the pavilion continues to meet the needs of future generations.
- In 1883, Cobham's most famous cricketer, The Hon. Ivo Bligh (later Lord Darnley), captained England in the Test series against Australia that gave rise to *The Ashes*. The famous urn, now housed at Lord's, originated from this event – firmly linking Cobham to one of cricket's greatest traditions.
- Cobham Colts Football Club celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2024, reflecting the growth and success of football alongside cricket and tennis in the village.
- Today, the clubs collectively welcome hundreds of participants across boys', girls', men's, and women's teams.
- The Sports Club is run entirely by volunteers – from coaches and grounds staff to those maintaining the pavilion – with not a single paid employee. This remarkable commitment underlines the importance of the site as a true community hub. On any given weekend, the pavilion is alive with activity, welcoming children, parents, and grandparents alike. It provides a safe, inclusive, and intergenerational space where the whole community can come together to keep active, support local sport, and socialise.

This long and evolving tradition means that sympathetic, modest investment in the pavilion is both justified and necessary to sustain the site's unique heritage.

5. Need and Justification

The current patio area is too small for the growing numbers of participants and families. The limited space forces tables onto the grass, creating congestion and access issues. The brick wall is deteriorating and unsafe, and wheelchair users cannot currently access the patio directly.

The proposals will:

- Provide a larger, safer, and more inclusive outdoor seating space.

- Preserve and enhance the traditional character of a village cricket pavilion.
- Improve accessibility and safety for all users.
- Allow for year-round use through the provision of a removable pergola or retractable awning.

6. Impact Assessment

- **Scale and Visual Impact:** The extension is modest (2.5m) and remains in keeping with the size and form of the existing building. The picket fence is low in height and traditional in style.
- **Impact on Playing Space:** There is no loss of sports pitches. The patio extension only formalises an area of grass already in active use for tables and chairs.
- **Conservation Area:** The works enhance rather than detract from the setting, replacing inappropriate, deteriorated elements with high-quality, sympathetic materials.
- **Green Belt:** The proposals do not compromise openness or character.

Overall, the works represent a minimal physical and visual impact while delivering significant benefits in accessibility, safety, and community use.

7. Policy Considerations

The proposals support:

- **Conservation Area Appraisal:** Enhances local character through traditional boundary treatments.
- **Gravesham Borough Council Policy CS13 (Green Space, Sport & Recreation):** Improves facilities for sport and recreation.
- **Green Belt Policy:** Maintains openness and appropriate use.
- **Equality and Accessibility Requirements:** Ensures inclusive access for all community members.

8. Conclusion

The proposed works represent necessary, proportionate, and heritage-sensitive improvements to a pavilion that has changed very little since it was built. By extending the patio, improving safety, introducing accessibility measures, and providing for year-round use, the project will secure the future of this vital community facility.

The impact on the Conservation Area is minimal, the benefits are significant, and the works are wholly in keeping with the long sporting heritage of Cobham, which has proudly celebrated 175 years of cricket and 50 years of football.

On this basis, the proposals should be supported as positive, sensitive, and policy-compliant enhancements to the pavilion and its setting.