

This blank front page allows you to view the article PDFs in 'spreads' for best effect.

If viewing as single pages please scroll down to page 2 to see the start of the feature.

## The King's School

# Crowning vision for sport

**In 2020, a major school sporting hub will rise in Cheshire Green Belt land to replace provision currently dotted around three sites. Greg Rhodes reports on what will prove to be a transformation in turfcare**

**T**he view from the clubhouse at The King's School Macclesfield's Derby Fields is quintessentially English.

Manicured rugby pitches are surrounded by immaculately clipped perimeter Leylandii hedging that creates a serene setting before giving way to mature woodland and the Cheshire hills rising beyond.

One of three grounds the school owns, but its most extensive at some twenty-five acres, Derby Fields will soon see wholesale transformation as this eminent school, founded in 1502, bids farewell to its town centre headquarters to relocate in Green Belt land.

Beyond the hedging lies the new site for the school buildings, explains Head Groundsman Steve Moores, who will be steering sports provision on to a single spot over

the next three years. "By September 2020, the school, complete with its 1,200 students, is planning to have moved here from the sites it owns and runs currently," he explains.

The 2020 vision marks a radical redevelopment for such a venerable educational establishment, but one that chimes with the times in terms of operational efficiency. "Rather than running two of everything - from dining to office space - and maintaining historical buildings, King's will benefit from the economies of being based in one location and in modern buildings," he states.

Steve enjoys strong links with King's. He attended the school until 1982, with hockey and cricket his main sporting strands, when he left to start his career in groundsmanship at nearby Macclesfield Cricket Club, before heeding the call of his 'alma mater'



Deputy Head Groundsman Alex Bailey (left)  
with Head Groundsman Steve Moores



Cricket being played in front of the historic buildings at Cumberland Street

“My role had changed significantly, as well as having three children by then, so everything worked better by creating a deputy’s position, which Alex slotted into



Steve Moores

to return as assistant groundsman.

“I was a batsman and spin bowler and would love to have been a better sportsman. Local cricket was my level - hockey too - while my brother Pete moved on up to captain Sussex before going on to coach.”

“Once you start working on the grounds though, you never want to do anything else,” recalls Steve of his first days here.

When the then head groundsman, David Taylor moved away in 1990, Steve applied for the vacancy and he has developed the role ever since to now embrace a fair degree of financial control of sports planning and development, not forgetting his role as head of cricket and hockey.

Cricketing is in the Moores genes (his brother Peter rose to become England head coach and is now in that position at Nottinghamshire, and there is plenty to get his teeth into at King’s.

The home of the school’s first team cricket is on a lush expanse of sportsturf, overlooked by the Cumberland Street main entrance and buildings, occupied since 1850.

It’s no surprise then to learn of his interest in progressing cricket and hockey provision, including practice facilities. “We’ve rectified the nets’ surfaces,” he says, “replacing concrete bases with engineered ones incorporating shockpads, which deliver consistency and bounce as well as good drainage.”

“I also wanted to install floodlighting because we could increase income from hiring out, so prepared a business case for the school.”

His responsibilities now embrace school fixtures programming and community bookings for the synthetic pitches, covering fixtures, practice sessions and junior activities.

King’s caters for the three to eighteen age groups. Founded as a boys’ school in Tudor times, it took over the former Macclesfield High School in the 1980s to open a Girls’ Division and an infants and junior school.

Infants and juniors are fully co-educational, with the boys and girls divisions (11 to 16-year-old) based at the Fence Avenue and Cumberland Street locations respectively, and sixth formers at the latter site.

King’s delivers the full spread of sports you’d expect from a leading independent school - cricket, hockey, rugby, netball, tennis, athletics and rounders, but no football beyond eleven-year-olds.

Grounds on the scale of those King’s provides - more than sixty acres across three sites - Cumberland Street, Derby Fields and Fence Avenue - are a challenge to maintain and Steve picks and chooses which elements he contracts out.

Aside from the scale of sporting provision, King’s commands significant hectareage of woodland, hedging, gardens and mature trees.

Coping with the demands on three sports foci must be tough. “Everything has evolved and developed over time,” says Steve reassuringly. “We know who wants what in terms of provision and can plan that in, accommodating last-minute requests if at all possible. Ease of communication today makes that process easier.” Sports compete for bragging rights of course, adds Steve, who has a fine balancing act to achieve to keep everyone happy.

From his own perspective, “cricket is more labour-intensive, but preparing wickets is more satisfying, I find. The first-team outfield is looking particularly good”, he states proudly as we walk along the perimeter of the campus.

Under the organising skills of deputy head groundsman Alex Bailey, each of the King’s team has key tasks across the estate.

A landscape gardener until the early 1990s, Alex, 53, was interviewed for the position of assistant groundsman - tackling flower beds and shrubbery before deepening his impact on the school’s turfcare programme.

“We didn’t have a deputy post at the



The rugby pitches at Derby Fields

time,” Steve recalls, “and my role had changed significantly, as well as having three children by then, so everything worked better by creating a deputy’s position, which Alex slotted into.”

Although Steve’s other commitments take him away from the grassroots work, he and Alex are in touch several times a day, with monthly face-to-face meetups. “Everything’s quite relaxed and the guys are quite

content,” Steve notes; a sure sign of effective management in play.

Senior groundsman Carl McCormack, 42, in his thirteenth year here, is the cricket man who looks after the squares and has completed his NVQ Level 3 at nearby Reaseheath College.

Worms remain a problem, especially now carbendazim has been banned. “It was effective on three squares but not on the

hard clay of the Cumberland Street square,” says Steve. “At the moment, I can’t see a replacement.”

Longest serving assistant groundsman Andrew Leonard, 56, has clocked up thirty years’ service at the school. The mechanical man, he keeps the tractor fleet oiled and running and tends much of the natural turf.

Newcomer Rick Astley (no, not that one), 29, has worked his way in really well since





Three aerial shots of the facilities: Cumberland Street ...



... Derby Fields ...



**People like working here, so we must be doing something right. Maybe it's the free school lunches. The food is very good. We're a good sized team and have plenty of staff in winter and summer**

coming here four years ago from a local garden centre, Alex reports. His NVQ Level 2 already completed, Rick's trying to book his place on Level 3. Sporting a Mohican haircut, he is the artistic one, creating the bughouse wildlife haven in the school garden as well as tending beds and helping with cricket preparation.

"People like working here," adds Alex, "so we must be doing something right. Maybe it's the free school lunches. The food is very good."

Apprentice Alex Hartley, 20, is keen to progress his career, Alex notes. "He knows you need qualifications to advance and is planning NVQ Level 2 at Reaseheath as soon as he can.

"We're a good sized team," Alex sums up, "and have plenty of staff in winter and summer."

A stone's throw from the northern uplands, Macclesfield is regularly snowed up in winter, but not so now. "It's rare," says Steve. "We all liked those early starts in the white stuff," he quips. "When it does, we are out there clearing paths and drives."

Now at King's second, Westminster Road, site, Steve confirms, "We've established a core centre here, where we house all the tractors and main grounds machinery."

We look across the TigerTurf 18ml monofilament, sand-dressed hockey surfaces (full and half sizes, one floodlit) from the terrace of the dramatically angular architecture of the Sixth Form Centre.

"Technical Surfaces carry out major maintenance, while we do the regular work on the pitches," adds Steve.

Busy blowing leaves and debris to the perimeter fencing, ready for collection, are a trio of King's groundsmen, who progress from the extensive practice nets to the open expanse of the main pitches, comfortably springy underfoot.

"These blowers have been an absolute boon for us," chirps Alex cheerily. "They save so much time compared with the rakes we began with. We brush the surface every week or fortnight using a rotary brush and Sisis Flexicomb and leafblow two or three times a week in autumn."

As we move in for a few photos, one of



The impressive artificial surfaces at King's



the team sides off. "He's camera-shy," Alex reveals, but the other two are happy enough to pony up for a 'synchronised blowing' session.

Beyond are two natural turf rugby pitches, "used mainly for mid-week practice," confirms Steve. "A tree consultant visits us annually to check the health of our stock; as you can see, we own some large specimens," he says, looking up at a line of impressive beeches overhanging the main road end of the site. We have no Tree Preservation Orders on the new site, but will have to acquire a felling licence to allow us to clear where we have to. More native broadleaf species will be introduced to replace conifers, larch and pine."

At the third of King's sites, a flight of stone steps leads to the plateau of Derby Fields pitches; a fine prelude to the vision greeting you when you stride out on to the turf. "A great view, isn't it," declares Alex. Many aspiring, eager sporting youngsters must feel a thrill of expectation after that short climb.

Consolidation on one site will bring major benefits for the grounds team, Steve predicts. "Shifting large equipment and machinery between three sites is time-consuming and we have to negotiate often congested roads in the town centre. The move to Derby Fields will spell a welcome end to that."

"However, sports use will intensify, as we attract greater community use, so optimal pitch management programmes will be even more critical to accommodate that."

Gazing from the clubhouse across the fields to the hills, it's hard to visualise that, in three

years' time, an extensive complex of buildings will populate this place. "Everything will be one or two-storey to minimise environmental impact," Steve explains. "The Cumberland Street buildings will be sold off for residential living to fund development here. The library is listed so, along with the main Cumberland Street building, will remain."

Two new hockey pitches will be constructed here and new natural turf pitches. The Sports Turf Research Institute advised on facilities specification, Steve adds, as have Sport England. "We consulted with them as the school will be consolidating playing provision on one site, although we will increase sporting use and broaden the provision overall."

Here will rise a veritable hub of activity including sports hall, cricket centre, swimming pool, two full-size hockey pitches, a county standard and two other cricket squares, more grass pitches and six floodlit netball and tennis courts.

The outdoor cricket nets will be relocated here too, whilst Steve is vying for floodlit rugby and a 3G pitch, he notes.

"The school had always wished to purchase land around Fallibroome Farm and, thanks to a generous donation from a former pupil, it was able to do so. Certainly makes great sense logistically for King's to move here."

"Focused on a single site, we will be able to do so much more in a given time," Steve says, "and the work will prove less onerous because we won't have to waste time transporting kit across town."

The rationalisation of sporting

**What's in the shed?**

- New Holland TN60 tractor
- New Holland TZ24
- Kubota 5040 GST tractor with loading bucket
- Ford 1520 tractor with finishing deck
- Toro sidewinder triple mower
- Dennis G660 mower
- Dennis 610 mower with grooming and scarifying reels
- Lloyds Paladin wicket mower
- Wicket roller
- Honda rotary mowers x 4
- Spray linemarking machines x 3
- Spray boom linemarkers
- Stihl leaf blowers x 2
- Husqvarna leaf blower
- Tractor-mounted blower
- SISIS quadraplay
- SISIS spike splitter 1.8m
- Husqvarna hedge trimmers x 3
- Husqvarna chainsaw
- SISIS roller spiker
- Trimax Snake mower
- Trimax Procut 237 mower
- Sisis Litamiser
- Sisis tractor-mounted triple scarifier
- Sisis roller spike 1.2m
- Sisis SSS1000 rotary brush
- Tractor-mounted snow plough
- Chemical safe
- Various hand tools



Artists impression of the new pavilion

provision may also reduce the impact of wildlife on turf. "Moles present a problem at the Cumberland Street and Westminster Road sites, but foxes, badgers and rabbits don't present a massive issue.

Derby Fields is a haven for birds, with visiting buzzards and kestrels wheeling overhead and opportunistic herons always eyeing the main chance in the neighbouring pond.

"As a former pupil, I'll be sad to see the old buildings left behind but, as a father of three children, who all attend King's, this is the future."

Macclesfield Rugby Club, across the road from Derby Fields, is selling off some of its land for housing development, offering a major opportunity for King's to take up demand.

The clubhouse harbours a host of King's sporting history - England rugby shirts from those who went on to represent their

country, cricket jumpers courtesy of Peter Moores amongst others, and many an heraldic shield and silverware. The main room is hired out for seminars, generating added revenue for the school.

There's a proud history of sports touring, Steve reveals. "The girls are going on a hockey and netball tour of South Africa this summer, there's a cricket tour of Dubai in February and the First XV have just returned from a rugby tour in Australia. There are exciting times ahead, so Pitchcare must come back and see us in three years to see the difference."

It's in the diary Steve.

*Images: Jo Gornall/speedmediaone*



Cricket at Cumberland Street