

Cotham School reveals plans to fence off Stoke Lodge playing fields

It comes after a seven-year legal battle with residents in the area

BY

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A secondary school has revealed plans to fence off its playing fields after winning a legal battle which lasted for years.

Cotham School has locked horns with residents over the public access of Stoke Lodge playing fields over seven years, with neighbours desperate to keep the area open to public access.

But after Bristol City Council agreed to [give the 22-acre playing fields Town and Village Green status \(TVG\)](#), essentially evicting the school from the site, the academy [launched an appeal](#) in the High Court and won.

Earlier this month, High Court judge Sir Wyn Williams said [the council committee had “acted unlawfully”](#) and did not properly analyse the evidence.

Following the ruling, the school has now revealed plans to put up a two-metre fence around the grounds off Shirehaston Road.

Full timeline below.

Why fences?



Stoke Lodge playing fields

The school said it needs to safeguard the students while they use the playing fields for PE and other sports facilities.

Since 2014, the school has been forced to pay for private premises instead, meaning pupils had to travel to Coombe Dingle.

They say without a fence the site posed the risk of strangers entering the area while children were using it, and that a fence is the “only reasonable solution” and an Ofsted requirement.

According to the plans, the fence will sit on the inside of the boundary of the fields, while retaining a pathway around the outside to facilitate public walkways.

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Made of a two-metre high weld mesh sports fencing, there will be a number of gates into the area.

Gates into the playing field will be locked when the school or other sports users - who can hire the pitches - are on site.



Fences for Stoke Lodge

Outside of those times, the school plans to leave a gate open so members of the public can use the area. Dogs, however, will not be allowed in.

“The school welcomes the public to use the walkway around the perimeter with open and unfettered access,” a statement read.

“This will also include the ability for people to walk their dogs. Dogs will not be allowed at any time to go into the fenced playing fields.”

How has it got to this point?

Stoke Lodge playing fields was sold to [Bristol City Council](#) in the 1940s for education purposes.

In 2000, [Cotham](#) School started using the site, with the school signing a 125-year lease with the council in 2011.

In that same year, resident David Mayer made an application to register the land for TVG status.

It was granted in 2016 by the Public Rights of Way and Green Committee, despite a public inquiry and officers at the council warning against it.



Map of fences around Stoke Lodge

The casting vote by Councillor Peter Abraham won it for the residents, but a High Court judgement has earlier this month reversed that decision.

Judge Sir Wyn said: “This is a case which the committee, having accepted a crucial finding by the inspector as to the legal significance of the signs they were first erected, failed, erroneously and unlawfully, to analyse the evidence and the further findings of the inspector as to when, if at all, the situation ‘on the ground’ had changed materially so as to permit of a conclusion that the signs were no longer sufficient to make contentious the use of the land by the local inhabitants.”

A statement from Cotham School said it was “very aware” of the strength of public feeling around the playing fields, which have been wrongly used by members of the public over the last few years.

It said it “wants to work with the community”, but also had to maintain its duty of care to students and staff.

Time Line

Stoke Lodge playing fields saga

1. 1947



Land sold to Bristol City Council for educational purposes. Large parts of land laid out as playing fields.

2. 1974

Avon County Council becomes landowner after reorganisation of local government.

3. 1996

Bristol City Council becomes landowner after reorganisation of local government.

4. 2000



Cotham School takes over lease from Fairfield School to use the pitches, still owned by council.

Local sports clubs made arrangements with the school or council.

5. March 2011

Resident David Mayer makes application to register the land as town and village green.

6. March 2011

Application objected by Cotham School, officers at Bristol City Council, Bristol University and Rockleaze Ranger, a local football team.

7. 2011



Barrister Philip Petchey asked to make recommendation.

8. May 2013

Mr Petchey recommends land should be registered as a green. Not implemented by council as case goes to court. Decision taken for the inspector to conduct a non-statutory public inquiry.

9. 2014

School leaves playing fields as it needs to guarantee the safety of the children using it.

10. June 2016



Public inquiry held. Mr Mayer, now heading a group called Save Stoke Lodge, makes reasons why it should be town and village green. The others object.

11. October 2016

Report from the inquiry produced by Mr Petchey. The comprehensive written report now recommends land should not be registered as green.

12. December 2016

Decision comes to Public Rights of Way and Green Committee at the council. Objections from some residents to the inspector's report, but officers suggest councillors follow the recommendation.

13. December 2016

Committee is divided, and chairman Councillor Peter Abraham makes casting vote for the residents. He is also the ward councillor, and Cotham School raised objections about his participation.

14. March 2017



School seeks an order to quash councillors' decision, claiming legal errors. Goes to court, with the council and Mr Mayer going up against the school.

15. May 2018

High Court rules committee's decision [was "unlawful"](#).

16. May 2018

Cotham School announces plans to put up fences around the site.

14

Sign in



1 HOUR AGO

Kd

I've been using stoke lodge as a recreational ground for the past 40 years. Only twice seeing it used by a school and only then a very small number of students. My children were involved in a rugby tournament held there a couple of years ago with St Brendan's rugby club. How is it fair to stop this type of use when it has been left for years!!! Absolute disgrace! Fencing is also ridiculous and ugly! How can they get away with this!!!

- Reply
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1 HOUR AGO

Bristolmebaber

This is a real shame. Makes the residents sound unreasonable when they are simply trying to keep a beautiful open space accessible for the community. Anyone who has been here must see what a terrible shame it would be to see the space fenced. Wonder if anyone has considered the impact on the adult learning service. Surely this will effect them too.

- Reply
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3 HOURS AGO

Bristolpeter

This is the same council that allowed Tesco to build on the golden hill playing fields.

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3 HOURS AGO

Hannah Kealy

If it's so unsuitable go find a sports field that is suitable and don't ruin a beautiful parkland. Cotham should be ashamed of their ridiculous behaviour. The fence is not an Ofsted requirement and goes against planning regulations, hopefully someone at the council will see sense.....!

- Reply
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4 HOURS AGO

BeardieQ

And that fence plan goes right through several trees with TPO's on them. I wonder if the Post remembers the history of Cotham School and trees with TPO's before? I bet they don't report that.

- Reply

- Share

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4 hours ago

newbristolian

Children are 'forced' to travel to Coombe Dingle? What, to those great facilities that are exactly as far away from Cotham as Stoke Lodge?

Sounds to me like the sensible thing would be for Cotham to terminate the lease at Stoke Lodge and carry on at Coombe Dingle - unless Cotham's planning to make £££ out of commercialising Stoke Lodge once it has fenced the community out? Follow the money...

- Reply

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2



5 hours ago

snork

Why did Cotham take out a lease for a playing field that they considered unsuitable and in need of fencing?

- Reply

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7

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5 hours ago

Forthy

Did cotham actually pay for this piece of biased "journalism"

- Reply

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5 hours ago

Dellastory

That's what they think.

- Reply
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5 hours ago

newbristolian

Wow, that fence is big and ugly. Way to ruin the local environment... There's no fence at Coombe Dingle is there? So it can't actually be an Ofsted requirement?

- Reply
- Share
- 1 reply

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5 hours ago

snork

It's not an OFSTED requirement.

Advertisement

Bristol mum's