



Providing a life-enhancing education that develops the character, talents and potential of every child

ACHIEVEMENT ~ DIVERSITY ~ RESPECT

Headteacher: Ms Jo Butler

Information Statement from Cotham School - October 2025. Update on Cotham School Playing Fields, Stoke Lodge

The High Court judge confirmed in June this year that (amongst other things) the open space at Stoke Lodge is held for statutory education purposes and it is for the school to determine how it uses the playing fields.

The land is leased to Cotham School on a 125-year lease as school playing fields. The link to the judgment is here: <https://caselaw.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ewhc/ch/2025/1382>.

Katharine Welham, applicant for the Town and Village Green, appealed to the Court of Appeal in respect of the High Court decision but leave to have this appeal heard was refused on 15 October 2025. That brings the village green matter to a close.

The issue of the alleged public right of way across the playing fields still needs to be determined. Cotham School has objected to the application to record those ways as footpaths because, amongst other things, the High Court's judgment conclusively determines that public rights of access could not arise because of the powers under which the land was held and the signage on the land. The application has been referred to the Secretary of State (via the Planning Inspectorate) for determination.

The governors and senior leadership team of the School have a clear project plan to get the playing fields back into educational use. This plan covers everything from the fence reinstatement, safety, and security measures, to user policy, communications, land, and property issues. Cotham School has carefully considered school/student needs and requests for permission to use the fields from youth sports clubs, other sports clubs, and the local community.

It is essential that the playing fields meet the educational requirements of the school creating a long-lasting, safe, and secure environment, reducing risks to the school and are affordable. We have considered in detail the extent of playing fields required for a school with nearly 1700 students, the most effective pitch layouts, and the least risk.

Cotham School, Cotham Lawn Road, Bristol, BS6 6DT | 0117 919 8000 | info@cotham.bristol.sch.uk | www.cotham.bristol.sch.uk



Cotham School: a charitable company limited by guarantee.

Registered in England: Company Number 07732888

Registered Office: Cotham School, Cotham Lawn Road, Cotham, Bristol BS6 6DT



In planning the work to reinstate the fence, the School wanted to respond to feedback, to improve safety by removing muddy paths, to respond to the Bristol Tree Forum concerns regarding footpaths impacting on the roots of trees protected by Tree Preservation Orders, to reduce any other ecological impact and to create an enhanced local open space.

The School is aware that many runners and dog walkers regularly follow a permissive perimeter walk and has therefore developed a plan for the school fields and the local space beyond. This plan includes a permissive perimeter walk that follows a route over school land beyond the fence, the footpaths along Ebenezer Lane and Parry's Lane then through the arboretum and links via paths in front of Stoke Lodge Adult Education Centre to the children's playground and beyond. This plan also includes an extended open space area alongside the children's playground and land for possible multi-use games area.

Work to reinstate the fence began in mid-September, the teams of contractors have done a great job and the fence is nearly complete. The playing fields will soon be marked up for sporting activities including but not limited to rugby, football, and general physical education. It is anticipated that school and club sports use will resume early in 2026.

In working at the fields, the team have been pleased to meet local people who clearly welcome the school back and community groups keen to work with the School going forward. There are several youth sports clubs and sports trainers hoping to have permission to use the fields when they are not in use by the School.

Cotham School will be working towards a 'Hierarchy of Users' policy which will guide decisions by the School as to whom and on what terms permission to use the land may be granted. In November, we will be inviting expressions of interest from clubs and other organisations to use the playing fields and we will work out how the various requests could be accommodated.

Cotham School is also hoping to set up a 'stakeholder forum' with an independent chair where those with an interest in the future use of our fields can meet to share their hopes, ideas, and requests for permission to use our school playing fields.

And finally, Cotham School has been extremely concerned at the significant number of inaccurate or offensive communications, comments and accusations levelled at the School. Given the impact on the health and wellbeing of governors, the senior leadership team, and the wider school community, we ask that this campaign stops.