

# Country style



Burnley businessman Andrew Brown took a plunge into the unknown when he exchanged the world of office equipment for a daring venture into the leisure industry. His plans for a sports

and leisure club in the heart of the Lancashire green belt are now storming ahead, having overcome the opposition of local environmental groups, and impressed inspectors with his forward-thinking yet considerate plans for this beautiful part of the country.

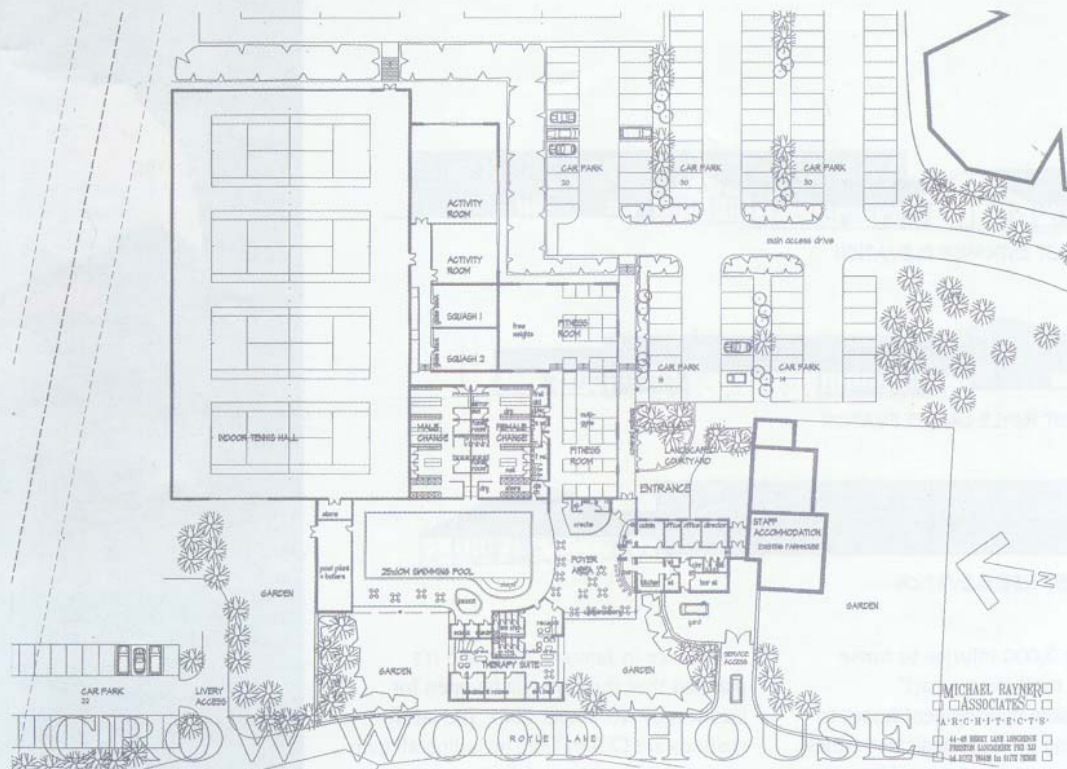
**A**ndrew Brown decided to make a move into the leisure industry because he 'just fancied a change after 25 years of selling photocopiers and fax machines'. He had always harboured an ambition to own a tennis club - by his own admission this is quite bizarre considering the fact that he doesn't actually play tennis himself! He and his brother sold the family business in 1997 and Andrew decided to venture in a new direction - he certainly had no inclination to retire at the age of 40.

Having searched for some time for the perfect site for his dream club, Andrew

thought he'd found the ideal place in the Crow Wood House Farm - an existing dairy farm that once supplied the whole of Burnley's milk by horse and cart surrounded by 100 acres of good quality Greenbelt land, just off the M65. Unfortunately, there were some people who didn't agree that it was the ideal site for a leisure centre.

## Overcoming resistance

Although the scheme was backed by the local council, officially approved by them as far back as 1998 and the vast majority of local residents seemed to be in favour,



the plans were 'called in' by the Secretary of State due to the green belt status of the site. The resulting public enquiry took several months and involved opposition from the local Civic Trust as well as Friends of the Earth, who opposed the scheme on principle. At times during the drawn-out enquiry, Andrew was close to giving up. He says, "There were many times when I felt like just throwing in the towel - but my wife, Sue, kept on encouraging me - she had a feeling that it would all go through in the end." He was buoyed by public support and the belief that people would prefer his plans for the area over the possibility of industrial units or a retail complex in the future - which can never be entirely ruled out!

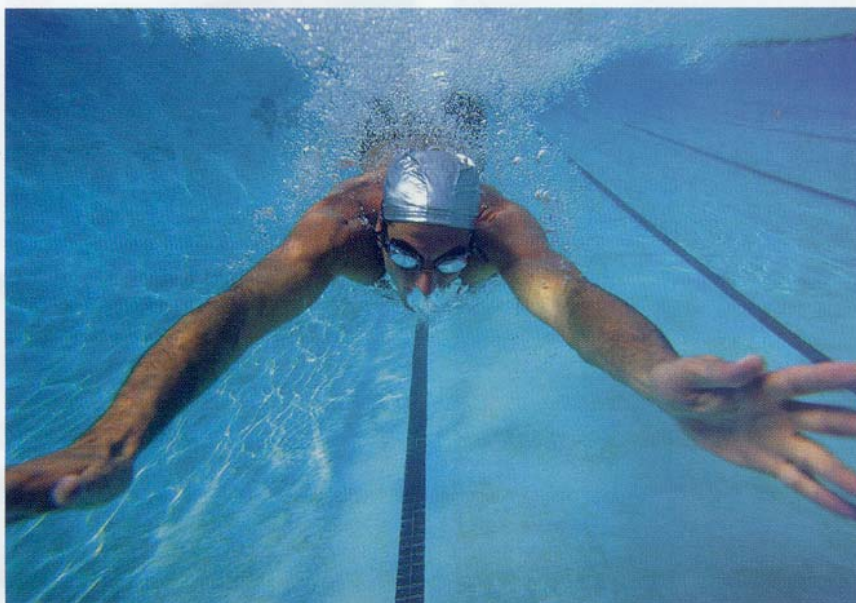
Eventually, at a cost of £79,000 (excluding VAT) the public enquiry found in his favour, deciding that there were 'very special circumstances' that should be taken into consideration when allowing the development to go ahead. Andrew's plans for community access to the facilities and his commitment to preservation of the character of the area obviously helped, as did the fact that there were no real alternative sites for a development of this size, and that the extra jobs and income would undeniably provide a boost to the local economy.

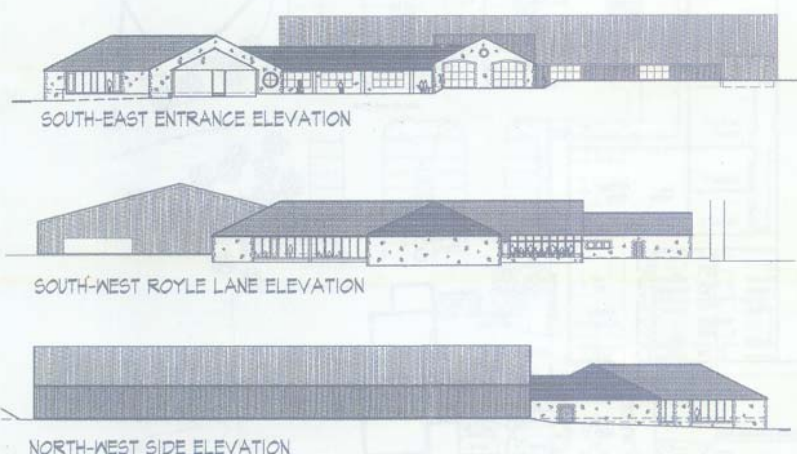
### Something for everybody

The club will be called 'Crow Wood' with a strap line 'Leisure, Raquets,



Equestrian' and will contain two areas of existing ancient and semi-natural woodland which will be more than quadrupled in size and enhanced to provide the setting for the equestrian centre. Andrew considers that his plans to plant 25,000 trees, half in March 2001 and half in the winter of 2001 will do much to protect the countryside. "The trees will take five to ten years to mature, and when they do, it will create a natural area of woodland. There are already deer in the surrounding countryside, and the area provides a natural refuge." Maintaining the look and feel of the area has been a high priority, and it's hoped that the woodland will offer an oasis for wildlife, as well as horse lovers, with two to three kilometre woodland trails, an eventing course, bridleway, and stunning all-weather horse gallop. Andrew feels strongly about these facilities, "It's a big bonus to be able to provide safe places for people to ride, especially in winter. At present there is nowhere for youngsters - or adults - to go other than the roads, →





and there are 3,000 injuries to horse riders on the road every year!"

The A B Leisure development hopes to offer everything for both dedicated fitness enthusiasts to occasional users, from a relaxing swim to a work out in the state-of-the art £1 million gym. It will also include tennis courts, squash, dance and aerobics studios, 25 metre pool, beauty therapy suite, bar and crèche. The club is designed to appeal to everybody, and Andrew says, "We will be aiming at the top end of the market - the absolute best that



we can justify for the demographics of the area. We have done a detailed demographic survey and we have a target of 3,500 members and will have the capacity to take up to 4,000. I am confident that the club will be a success"

The swimming pool will include a large concrete spa area designed to accommodate eight to ten people, and will be provided by Buckingham Pools. So far, no other contracts have been confirmed. Demolition of the existing farm started in December 2000, the building work is due to

commence in January 2001, and it's planned that the club will be open for business by November 2001. The latest costings are £7.9 million, including all gym equipment, fixtures and fittings.

### Community spirit

Passionate about the local community, Andrew intends to provide facilities for local schools and organisations to use - and hopes to encourage disadvantaged members of the community to use the pool, gym, and dance studios, in addition to the riding for the disabled classes in the equestrian centre. This is a massive private and personal investment, and Andrew Brown clearly has great strength of character and a great attachment to the area. He says that he never wants to leave Burnley himself - with Crow Wood Farm he aims to provide a bonus to the town he loves. •

### Budget Breakdown

The estimated total cost of this private project is a cool 7.9 million. This total includes:

Tennis hall and viewing gallery	£1,140,000
Squash courts	£1,210,000
Therapy suite	£180,000
Swimming pool	£785,000
Changing rooms	£335,000
Equestrian centre	£450,000
Furniture and furnishings	£ 50,000
Gym/activity equipment	£350,000
Office and IT equipment	£100,000
Security	£35,500
Landscaping	£40,000
Hedgerows, bridleways and footpaths	£80,000
River crossing	£30,000

*NB: All figures are approximate*

