

## **Save Brandon Stadium**

**Meeting held at 8pm on Thursday 23 July 2015**

**Location: Binley Woods Village Hall**

### **Note of Meeting**

#### **Present:**

The meeting was attended by in excess of 100 people including Councillor Michael Stokes, Leader of Rugby Borough Council as well as local Councillors. A list of those who signed the attendance register is appended.

#### **1. Welcome and introductions**

Pete Lawrence opened the meeting by asking for a show of hands of those from the local community, speedway supporters and stock car racing supporters. The result was a roughly even mix from all three groups.

Councillor Paul Salisbury who is the Chairman of Binley Woods Parish Council asked why the two Parish Councils had not been notified of the meeting. Dave Carter explained that invites had been sent to the Clerks of both Binley Woods and Brandon & Bretford Parish Councils but for some reason these did not appear to have been received.

Pete Lawrence then explained the background to the campaign. Winter of discontent 2010 after title win. Sandhu vs. the rest, he pulled out of speedway and at the same time told the fans that “there will be houses” at Brandon, but he’d ensure that we were given a new stadium first.

Mick Horton stepped in the following year as Bees promoter and has been leasing the stadium since then, and Bees fortunes have been on the up with a successful season last year and the team are currently riding high at the top of the elite league. By all accounts, support is good too, as it is for stock car.

In terms of the housing development nothing happened until last autumn when plans were unveiled by agents Frampton’s here in Binley Woods. Investin Brandon presented proposals for 2 phases of building for up to 250 homes and the ‘levelling’ of the stadium. From what we understand there was local opposition.

Nine months on, no outline planning application has yet been submitted, to our knowledge, but the idea is still very much alive, as Frampton’s statement – which will be read out later – outlines.

So last autumn the Facebook group was set up and there was a lot of support for it, given that fans wanted to be in touch with any ongoing plans to secure the future of both speedway and stock car racing. We had heard no news of any progress in terms of finding a new site, all we had heard was that speedway and stock car would run until the end of the 2016 season. Through the Facebook group, the fans of both sports came together and we gained much media coverage in the local press and a good feature on BBC Midlands Today.

The campaign as it stands is essentially myself and Dave Carter – a stock car man with much experience of planning – with valued help from a handful of helpers who run Twitter accounts and are building a website etc, but we need to increase our resources in order to be effective.

We see our role as both a pressure group and a campaigning body to keep the stadium issue top of the agenda. To ensure the future existence and prosperity of speedway – and stock car racing in the Coventry area. We are here with wholly positive intentions, to bring people together as much as possible around a common cause and to play our part in the future of the two sports in the area.

In doing so, we hope we are able to keep the pressure on, to promote transparency, to be a resource of information and at the same time start to build what could become useful supporters' co-operative – through meetings and initiatives, through new ideas and positive PR.....but we are mindful that certain fundamental questions remain and in our first months of existence we have realised that several different political agendas are very much at work.

Many supporters have been unsure of some key issues. Is it the stadium owners or the promoters who should be seeking out a new stadium? Could Sandhu be persuaded to sell Brandon for continued usage as a motor sports venue (already one of the best facilities in the country with all the necessary permissions)? Are the sports actually still viable in what has become an old, tired stadium? Why have we not seen any architects plans for any new stadium? Have the stadium owners been talking to Rugby Council and what is the nature of those discussions? Is anyone actually serious about finding and building a new stadium and what about the huge number of issues which would need to be addressed even before planning permission was sought? All these things would take time – many years in all probability – whilst fans have had no update at all on the last news that we only have one more year left.

So we're here to try and get a full picture and to understand what the current situation is and hope that this evening's discussion will focus us and give us resolution to pull together and work towards protecting the future of our beloved sports in the local area.

Pete Lawrence then explained that we want to give everyone a chance to have their say but please bear in-mind that we have to finish by 10pm. Please be brief, avoid repetition of points already made and only speak when directed by the Chairman!

## **2. Background to the meeting**

Dave Carter started by explaining his background as a town planner, having retired from Birmingham City Council, as the Secretary of the BriSCA F1 Management Board and a race official but stressed that he had become involved in the campaign as a longstanding stock car supporter who had first visited the stadium in 1974. In this item he would summarise the activities that Pete Lawrence and himself had been undertaking.

Investin Brandon's proposed housing scheme threatens demolition of Brandon Stadium potentially bringing an end to motorsport at one of the UK's best stadiums. Speedway started in 1928 and Stock Cars have raced since 1954. Both sports have incredibly rich heritages at Brandon.

Since the initial housing proposals were announced in October last year things have gone very quiet. Pete and I were very concerned that published information suggested that racing would end after the 2016 season, a date that is very close and approaching rapidly.

There is a feeling that we need to share the information we know and for improved links to be made between fans of both sports and the local community.

We need to establish the extent of common ground and decide if there is a need to get organised and the nature and timing of any activities.

We want to stress that it is not our intention that this meeting should be provocative or confrontational.

We do want to be clear, however, that the users of the stadium and local residents have legitimate concerns that the stadium owner(s), promoters and authorities need to be aware of and that the robustness of the arguments being put forward by Investin Brandon's consultants needs to be questioned.

We can say that the starting point is that the planning system not only strongly protects the Green Belt – and the stadium is located in confirmed Green Belt - but also protects sports facilities and stadia where the need for such facilities can be demonstrated.

Redevelopment should only be contemplated when comparable alternative facilities are put in-place. We know that Coventry City Football Club are also looking for a new stadium site and from documents released to the press we know they have been told to inform Rugby BC of their intentions later this year so they can be considered through the review of the local development plan.

Pete and I have done several things so far:

Pete has established the 'Save Coventry Speedway' Facebook Group.

Late last year Pete and I went to see Mark Pawsey the local MP who is taking a strong and continuing interest in the matter. Mark asked us to convey his apologies as he is unable to attend the meeting in person but has asked we let him know the outcome.

In March we went to meet with Ian Davis and Rob Back two key officers at Rugby BC. This was very helpful since we were able to get across the significance and importance of the stadium for both sports to the Council. There had been no discussions at that stage either with the prospective developers on the housing proposals or in relation to an alternative stadium site. Hopefully we might get any update later in the agenda. At about the time of that meeting Oxford Speedway's stadium had been successfully designated as a Conservation Area and that the designation had successfully resisted a High Court challenge. A discussion on whether such an approach at Brandon would be appropriate was inconclusive but this form of additional protection for the heritage of the site is a matter still on the table for further discussion.

In April we met with Mick Horton the Speedway promoter. Since Mick is with us we can leave him to provide an update but the short notice period for the possible termination of racing is causing considerable concern.

In late June we met with Jeremy Heaver who told us about the very constructive work he has been doing in relation to Motofest and also his search for a new stadium site. Jeremy was clear in this meeting that the existing stadium had a limited future. We were hoping that Jeremy would be present this evening but he has issued a message on the Facebook Event page which I will read out:

*"As I explained to Pete before he announced this meeting we have nothing new to report and when we do we will host a public meeting to enable people to have a input into the future for speedway and stock cars. At the moment we will continue to operate as a venue for both sports with at least twelve months notice of any likely change. It is for that reason that I will not be in attendance as nothing new to report either good or bad and progress on securing a new site is best done in private until such time as it is secured."*

This statement is helpful since it provides up-to-date confirmation that an alternative site has yet to be identified and there is a continuing threat to the continuity of racing post-2016.

We have also sought to hold a meeting with Frampton's to discuss the proposals but we have not succeeded in this.

Frampton's have been invited to give a presentation to this meeting but this request has been declined, and this takes us to the next item on the agenda.

### **3. Current position on the housing proposals**

Pete Lawrence then read out an email he had received from Louise Steele on 20 July 2015:

*"Dear Pete*

*Thank you for the kind invite to the public meeting, unfortunately we are unable to attend. Investin Brandon Ltd is continuing to promote new development proposals for a high quality housing development at the Brandon Stadium site.*

*We are in the early stages of developing housing proposals on this sustainable brownfield site in the Green Belt. In doing so we are keen to work with the local community to progress a high quality scheme which will positively contribute to the area and increase the local housing choice. The proposal is being worked up in an area where there is an existing shortfall of housing.*

*A public exhibition was held on 18 October 2014 setting out the initial proposals for the site. The exhibition was well attended and a wide cross section of opinion was expressed including preferences from Speedway fans for the stadium to remain.*

*It will be a matter for the planning authority to reach a balanced judgement between the competing planning interests, weighing the advantages of the more efficient use of brownfield land and the need for more housing in the Rugby Borough against the loss of the stadium.*

*If you have any queries, please contact me.*

*With kind regards"*

Pete then went on to suggest there was probably little point in dwelling on this statement now but to emphasise that most of the points made can and in due course will be disputed.

### **4. Contributions and updates from Rugby Borough Council and Binley Woods and Brandon & Bretford Parish Councils and Mick Horton (Promoter of Coventry Bees)**

Pete Lawrence welcomed Councillor Michael Stokes, Leader of Rugby Borough Council to the meeting and invited him to bring everyone up-to-speed from the Council's perspective.

Councillor Stokes thanked the organisers for their invite to the meeting but stressed it was important that his role at the meeting was to listen to what everyone had to say. He also introduced the local councillors who would be in a position to add comments.

He went on to explain the sequence of events from the Council's perspective starting with the October 2014 pre application consultation meeting. That meeting was very well attended but it was important to understand that this was done in isolation from the Council. In November 2014 Frampton's had requested a pre-application meeting with Council Planners and in March 2015 followed this up with a request for a site visit at the stadium. That site visit was cancelled at the 11<sup>th</sup> hour and there have been no further discussions since. This means that at the present time no planning application has been received. Councillor Stokes again stressed his attendance as an observer and the importance of him remaining independent.

Councillor Stokes then introduced Councillors Heather Timms and Derek Poole who he encouraged those present to liaise with, thus building on community activities.

Councillor Timms said that it was really good to see the meeting take place and hoped that the result would be a campaign group. It was highly likely that a planning application would be made and it was important to be ready for this to happen as timescales would be short. She also referred to role with Brandon & Bretford Parish Council who had already started to think about seeking Community Asset status for the stadium.

Pete Lawrence thanked both Councillors for their contributions and then turned to Mick Horton, the Bees promoter.

Mick started by thanking Pete and Dave for the hard work they had been putting in. He also thanked the contributions from the Councillors and the support expressed by Councillor Timms. Mick then said that the facts were that the speedway lease ran only until the end of the 2016 season. In May he had had discussions for a further three year lease but this had not, at least for now, been forthcoming. The stadium owners had suggested they did not what would happen and that, maybe, nothing would change for years to come. They had suggested that 12 month licenses could be offered at the end of each season. Apart from the uncertainty of this approach there was a big question about the costs. Mick also indicated that he had been speaking to Jeremy Heaver and specifically asked if Sandhu would be prepared to sell the stadium to continue as a sports facility? A response has yet to be received on this.

At this point in the meeting Pete Lawrence asked for questions of comments from those present. A wide range of points were made including:

- Colin Smith asked what protection did the existing development plan provide for the stadium? Dave Carter indicated that the site was within confirmed Green Belt but in his view the key question was whether representations should be made to strengthen protection in the review of the plan which was forthcoming in the Autumn.
- In relation to possible sites for a new stadium for Coventry City Football Club Councillor Stokes indicated that he could not disclose the two locations being considered but he could confirm that Brandon was not one of them.
- Paul Hines recognised that pressures for new housing and queried whether there were other more suitable sites in the locality?

- There appears to be a lack of clarity over ownership of the stadium and Investin Brandon. [NB: here is a link to further information on Investin Brandon: <http://companycheck.co.uk/company/08866112/INVESTIN-BRANDON-LIMITED> ].
- Councillor Timms was able to quash a suggestion of a long (50 year) lease being put in-place for motorsport when the Ochitree's interests in the stadium ended, but confirmed there is permitted use for motorsport on the site. She also clarified that a planning application which would result in reopening of the garden centre opposite the stadium entrance had been approved but that a application for housing on the Garage site had been withdrawn.
- Councillor Timms also informed the meeting that the site and buildings did not have listed status and that curfews were self-imposed.
- The description of the car park as a brownfield site was challenged.
- Councillor Poole from Binley Woods Parish Council explained how they were working with Brandon & Bretford Parish Council and the importance of working together. He referred to the identification of the site as a Community Asset and how any planning application needed to be considered in the context of the Parish Plan. This had established a need for six new dwellings in the village of which three were required for elderly people. The scale of housing proposed on the stadium site would crucify the village and would be intolerable for schools and health services which were already over-stretched. These matters were all material to consideration of an planning application. Councillor Poole confirmed that the local community supported what the supporters of both sports were trying to do and they wished to see the stadium remain as a venue for both the speedway and stock car racing.
- The possible impact on highways and congestion and also consistently low water pressure in the area were also mentioned.
- There was a suggestion of including more information on the Coventry Bees website and Mick Horton referred to the potential for greater community use of the site including possible apprenticeships.
- There were several ideas for improving the viability of the site through additional community, leisure and sporting activities. Councillor Timms recognised there could be some potential but this should not be close to residents. It was also noted that permissions to add a lift for people with disabilities and veterinary centre had not been built. Nigel Harhry noted that earlier plans to permit more intense use of the site had been resisted.
- Councillor Stokes indicated that the financial climate had changed and gave an assurance that sensible ideas to enhance viability of the site would be given proper consideration.

## 5. Future organisation

At this point in the meeting Dave Carter indicated that the discussion so far had concentrated on the sharing of information and understanding. We now needed to think about how we move forward and he proposed the following elements.

(a) Establish a committee, or as suggested by Councillor Timms a Campaign Group (volunteers required - speedway, stock car and local community reps) which would provide a basis for in-depth discussion and, for example, agree submission of representations to the forthcoming local plan review and any planning application(s) and so on. This proposition was agreed unanimously and Dave and Pete indicated they would liaise with Councillor Timms to take this forward. (NB: anyone wishing to become involved is encouraged to contact Pete through the Facebook Group)

(b) The Committee would report to wider meetings (say six monthly or as needed, if required, with 23 July the first such meeting) so that the wider interests including all those present could continue

to influence and provide backing and legitimacy to the actions being taken. This approach was agreed unanimously.

(c) Website development and further action on social media were in-hand and Pete Lawrence indicated that announcements would be made through the Facebook page. This approach was noted.

(d) Funding – it was suggested that a PayPal (or similar account) should be established with all spending to be agreed by the Committee. In the event any funds become surplus they should either be returned (if requested) with any balance remaining split equally between (1) Speedway and (2) Stock Car Benevolent Funds and (3) local causes. This proposal was unanimously agreed and at the suggestion of Councillor Timms, those present were encouraged to contribute to a collection on their way out, after the meeting.

Dave emphasised that we would obviously like to hear from anyone who might be in a position to provide technical or financial support outside the meeting.

## **6. Other potential courses of action**

Pete Lawrence identified two matters we would like to examine here:

(1) As had already been mentioned earlier in the meeting whether Rugby BC should be formally requested to include Brandon Stadium as an Asset of Community Value (ACV) on the local register? This should help raise the profile of the stadium and it is important we should raise this in advance of any planning application being submitted. We understand the registration lasts for five years and is then subject to renewal.

This request is based on the premise that ‘a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush’ but there is nothing to stop this being reviewed in the event an alternative stadium proposal accommodating both sports emerges.

(2) There has been a suggestion that a Supporters Trust might also help and in relation to this Pete welcomed Simon Priest from the Dudley Heathens Supporters to the meeting to explain what they have been doing. Pete reminded the meeting how the Cradley Heathens had lost their track to housing developers which means we are now in a situation where we are trying to avoid history repeating itself!

Simon made a short presentation to the meeting explaining how the Cradley Heathens had lost their track to development and how the site had not been designated for leisure. He went on to explain how the Supporters Club in 2008 sought to re-establish team by racing temporarily at other tracks and trying to seek a new venue. While the team had been successful on-track insufficient effort was going into providing a new permanent home and in order to progress this a new Supporters Trust – the first for Speedway – was now on the cusp of being established. The Cradley team were keen to share their experiences to help Coventry survive.

Pete thanked Simon for making the effort to come to the meeting and share their experience and support.

## **7. Summary of key actions**

Bearing in-mind the time and there being no further questions Dave Carter then suggested several conclusions and resolutions to be drawn from the discussion.

- (a) We have already agreed a range of proposals for better organisation (recorded above under item 5).
- (b) In the light of earlier comments we also wish to propose that a formal request be made to Rugby BC to add Brandon Stadium as an Asset of Community Value. We will liaise with the Council on how this needs to happen. This proposition was unanimously agreed.
- (c) We propose that representations be submitted to Rugby Borough Council requesting that the importance of Brandon Stadium be recognised and protected in the forthcoming local plan review. This proposition was unanimously agreed.

There was then a short discussion on the concerns surrounding the 12 month notice period of potential stadium closure. Councillor Stokes kindly suggested that he would request a direct meeting with Sandhu to discuss this matter.

David Deakin from BBC Radio Coventry and Warwickshire indicated that the Breakfast Show on 24 July would be discussing the potential closure of the Stadium.

In closing the meeting Pete Lawrence welcomed the strong support expressed at the meeting, the importance of us all working together and thanked everyone for coming, he also thanked the Village Hall for accommodating us and to encourage those who wish to become more closely involved to come forward.

The meeting closed at c940pm.

The bucket collection taken at the end of the meeting raised £189.94 (+ 1 Euro!) of which £26.00 was used to cover the room hire. This leaves a balance of £163.94 for future activities.



**Save Brandon Stadium - Attendance – 23 July 2015**

A Perkins	Julia Sidesy
Alan Higginson	Katie Billingsley
B Harvey	Keith Denton
Carol Smolka	Keith Parsons
Carole Cooper	L Gaunt
Chris Cleaver	L Payne
Chris Wincott	L Stilgoe
Colin Smith	L Williamson
D Franke	L Wooding
D J Rowe	Lawrence Collins
D Neale	Les Payne
D Poole	Liz Lewis
D Thompson	M Perkins
Dan Thompson	M Shirley
Dave Bastock	Michael Stokes
Dave Carter	Mick Horton
Dave Robottom	Mick Jenkins
Dave Wincott	N Moore
David Coulens	Neil Storey
David Deakin	Nigel Harrhy
David Kendall	Nigel Lewis
Dawn Payne	P Salisbury
Dean Redmond	P Trudden
Dianne Hodgetts	Paul Barrow
Eddie Adkins	Paul Hines
Emma Payne	Paul Wincott
Evie Adkins	Paul Woodward
George Smith	Paula Golby
George Stevens	Pete Lawrence
Graham Tyler	Phylis Trickett
H Timms	R Knowles
Harry Adkins	R Nutt
I Barford	R W Shirley
Ian Fulton	Richard Cleaver
J R Leech (Mr)	Robert Harrad
J R Leech (Mrs)	S Richardson
Jack Ashill	Simon Farringdon
Jake Harrhy	Stephen Timms
James Ansell	Steve Smith
James Perkins	Stuart Fletcher
Jamie Golby	Susan Maher
Janet Oathwaite	T F Aston
Jean Timms	Tony Cooper
Joe Thompson	Victoria Mitchell
John Abberley	Wayne Robson
John Gaunt	William Fisher
John Sidesy	Zoe Powell