

COVENTRY STADIUM, BRANDON

Planning Application R18/0186 (revised July 2021)

Save Coventry Speedway & Stox Campaign Group response to the Planning Notice related to the above application, posted on 23rd September 2022.

Background

Save Coventry Speedway & Stox Campaign Group (SCS) have previously submitted a number of comprehensive representations related to the above planning application:

- 80 page response to the original planning application sent on 28th February 2018
- 65 page response to the Sports Needs Assessment sent on 6th November 2018
- 51 page document entitled 'Errors and Untruths' (in Brandon Estates (BE) documents) sent on 8th January 2019
- 82 page document in response to the revised application sent on 18th August 2021
- These documents included 66 appendices of evidence in support.

In addition, we have submitted many other documents in response to the applicant's failed attempt to get their proposals within the Local Plan and their failed attempt to secure planning permission via their original, speculative planning application.

It is clear to anyone who objectively reads the Officer's Report, originally published to be considered at Planning Committee on 14th September 2022, that our extensive representations have not been addressed. In recent weeks, we have lobbied Planning Committee Members via the distribution of Briefing Papers. The first 8 Briefing Papers were written before the Officer's Report and its recommendation for approval was published and were intended to provide Members with background information. The 9th briefing paper is a critique of that Officer's Report. We have attached copies of all 9 Papers to ensure they are registered as official responses to the current consultation and we will also be placing these Papers in the public domain and issuing them to the local and national media.

We have informed senior officers that we believe the Officer's Report is unbalanced to the point of being biased.

We understand that following the departure of the case officer from Rugby Council, a replacement has been appointed. We do not know what brief has been given to this officer or whether she will be reviewing / rewriting the original Planning Committee Report. We would respectfully request that Rugby Council need to look at our extensive representations and give them appropriate consideration and present a balanced view in any revised or new report to Planning Committee Members.

Planning Notice posted on 23rd September 2022

We note that another new planning notice was recently posted on site and have been informed by Richard Holt it has been posted as a result of a procedural error when the original notice was posted (by not referring to the fact the application may affect a Public Right of Way and that it is a Departure from the Development Plan).

As this has effectively extended the consultation period to 20th October 2022, SCS wish to raise two further issues in addition to those already raised and referred to above.

1. Brownfield designation

The Officer's Report in discussing the Green Belt states (section 5.4 page 15) "The existing built form takes up approximately 4.35ha of the site and the proposed built form will cover approximately 4.1ha of the site".

Within the perimeter of the stadium itself there are a number of buildings such as the main grandstand, the back straight covered area, the hangars, the dog kennels and a number of smaller outbuildings. In addition, concrete terracing surrounds the racing circuit. These areas we do not dispute could be considered brownfield.

Then there are the racing surfaces – the dog track, the speedway / stock car track, the infield (which is an integral part of the race track), the pits area and the changing rooms.

We dispute the notion that these areas should be considered brownfield and instead, should be considered as a 'sports pitch', in the same way for example, a tennis court, or indeed, a 3G football pitch is.

The proposed 3G football pitch / changing rooms / pavilion are clearly not included in the 4.1ha, so the race tracks and associated integral facilities should not be included in the 4.35ha.

Taking this into account, the proposed extent and scale of housing proposed would extend well beyond and far exceed the existing built form.

This issue was raised in the SCS response to the original planning application (Section 2, Page 5). We raise it again now because the Officer's Report refers to the respective coverage of the existing and proposed footprints, which makes it clear this inconsistency has been overlooked, or ignored.

2. Development Plan Policies HS4 and HS3

The second issue we wish to raise relates to the planning application conflicting with the Development Plan.

- Policy HS4

Policy HS4 seeks to protect sports and recreational facilities in line with National Planning Policy and the application clearly conflicts with this policy.

Following the Local Plan Public Examination, Policy HS4 was subject to main modifications to reflect, amongst other things that the approach to the protection of sports and recreational facilities is reflected in the Local Plan. These changes were required by the independent Government appointed Inspector to bring the local plan in line with national policy as set out in the NPPF.

- Policy HS3

Policy HS3 seeks to protect Local Shops, Community Facilities and Services and states:

*“Proposals that would result in a significant or total loss of a site and/or premises currently or last used for a local shop, post office, public house, **community** or cultural **facility** or other service that contributes towards the sustainability of a local settlement or the urban area will not be permitted except where the applicant demonstrates that:*

- *alternative provision of equivalent or better quality, that is accessible to that local community, is available within the settlement or will be provided and made available prior to commencement of redevelopment; or*
- *there is no reasonable prospect of retention of the existing use as it is unviable as demonstrated by a viability assessment and all reasonable efforts to secure suitable alternative business or community re-use been made for a minimum of 12 months or a period agreed by the Local Planning Authority prior to application submission.*

Supporting text in Section 8.11 states:

*“Current inadequate profitability of a facility will not, however, be considered a sufficient reason in itself to merit its loss as the future potential of the premises as a local service or community facility could be made more viable or run in an alternative manner such as a social enterprise. On this basis, **the Council must also be satisfied that there is no other interested party prepared to re-open the facility or that there is no scope for an alternative community use**”.*

Section 8.12 states:

*“In terms of demonstrating that all reasonable efforts to secure a suitable alternative community re-use has been explored, applicants will firstly be expected to demonstrate that they have consulted the Parish and the Borough Council. **The applicant will be expected to demonstrate that the premises has been marketed for a period of 12 months or a period agreed by the Local Planning Authority prior to application submission, before the Council will consider a change of use and the valuation attributed to the property should properly reflect its current use**”.*

Neighbourhood Plans are an integral part of the Development Plan and the Brandon & Bretford Parish Council Neighbourhood Plan lists several community facilities they wish to be protected. Along with the Village Hall and local Pubs, they list Brandon Stadium as one of those **Community Facilities**.

This means that Policy HS3 should be applied to the proposals at Brandon Stadium.

With regard to Paragraph 8.11, the Officer is fully aware another interested party (Mr Warren Hunter) has made a formal written offer to buy the stadium. Evidence of this has been provided to the Officer, including a copy of the offer letter (Appendix 4 of the SCS response to the Revised Application).

And with regard to Paragraph 8.12, can RBC demonstrate that all reasonable efforts were explored and that the Parish Council have been consulted? And neither the applicant, nor the Officer can demonstrate the premises have been marketed for 12 months. The initial speculative approach made by Mr Hunter in March 2017 (to buy the stadium) met with a response from solicitors acting for the Applicant which clearly implied the cost of buying the site would be housing value rather

than current use value (Appendix 1 of the SCS response of 18th Aug 2021). And two further approaches from local businessman Gary Townsend (to lease the stadium), met with responses from the same solicitor that “Stock car racing will never be allowed to return to the stadium” (Appendices 2 and 3 of the SCS response of 18th Aug 2021).

The Officer makes no reference to Policy HS3 or supporting text in Sections 8.11 and 8.12 and neither the Applicant nor the Officer can demonstrate the requirements of this policy have been met. This represents a serious misinterpretation and misunderstanding of the veracity of the development plan in respect of the proposed redevelopment of Brandon Stadium.