

COVENTRY STADIUM APPEAL

REF: APP/E3715/W/23/3322013

Statement by Steve Rees

on behalf of

the Governing Bodies of U.K. Stock Car Racing including:

The British Stock Car Association (BriSCA Formula One
Stock Car Racing)

BriSCA F1 Management Board

British Stock Car Drivers Association (BSCDA)

Oval Racing International (ORCi)



September 2023

Coventry Stadium Appeal – Statement by Steve Rees

Introduction

1. My name is Steve Rees. I am current Chairman of both the British Stock Association, BriSCA F1 Management Board and the Oval Racing Council International. For this statement, I am also representing the British Stock Car Drivers Association. I have requested to attend and speak as a Third Party.

2. I have been a promoter of stock car racing events at numerous venues across the U.K. 1995 to 2021 I have also operated an indoor go-kart racing circuit in Huddersfield. I am well-placed to advise this appeal on the past, present and future of stock car racing.

3. On 28 of July I submitted a representation into the appeal process by email to the Planning Inspectorate. I have attached a copy at Appendix 1. In this statement I have sought to provide a brief overview of the sport, the importance of Coventry Stadium as well as responding to several points I have read in the evidence produced on behalf of Brandon Estates.

Main points

4. Oval racing in the UK is in a reasonable and healthy position, having recovered from the many economic issues created by the Pandemic which lasted 2020 / 2021.

5. The sport currently operates at around 20 venues from Aberdeen in Scotland to St Day in Cornwall. Many of those venues have been around since 1954 and the most recent addition in 2021, one of the biggest elite sports venues in the UK, Odsal Stadium, Bradford.

6. In my 30 years of experience as a promoter, no oval race venue has closed on viability grounds, indeed in recent years commercial investment has taken place at many venues in terms of improvements and where possible the purchase of freeholds [to protect the sport] to justify long term viability and sustainability.

7. The sport has suffered significantly by profligate decisions to allow planning permission on development value on heritage / prestige stadiums. Most recently, Belle Vue in Manchester, which was the first Greyhound track in the UK, and despite the fact of an historic covenant and lawfully agreed heritage value. Stadiums such as Coventry, Belle Vue, Wimbledon and Birmingham Wheels, were central to the sport in major conurbations. However, the sport has worked hard to adapt and attract new audiences.

8. My own personal experience promoting over 30 years promoting are considerable, Belle Vue, Coventry, Stoke [all lost due to redevelopment based on development value] also Swindon, Bolton [again sold for redevelopment despite being rejected at planning - the stadium remained derelict after a mysterious fire for over a decade and was proven by the council as viable for sports]. Hartlepool - again redeveloped into Morrisons, Sheffield [which remains as the owners invest heavily in its facilities for multiple activities, and we returned our sport there in 1996] and Odsal Stadium, Bradford, which I reopened in 2021. There are several other venues we have operated at, as a , across 30 years and all were 'viable'. At one or two of these venues, we attempted to purchase the freehold [at c£1m] however, the owners valuations were around £3m, as development land.

9. The ORCi is currently working towards recognition by Sports England but it must be emphasised that other motor sports are already recognised. Oval racing very much is a

community and family-based hub and sport. Several thousand competitors in Mainland UK race regularly across several different categories. The sport is family inclusive offering Junior racing from 6 years of age which the kids are very passionate about. It has a strong passionate and resilient driver and fan base.

10. Whilst the sport suffers demographically when major stadia, such as Coventry, are unnecessarily closed, so too does it affect local communities with children to adults who may only be able to afford to travel and race or spectate locally. We are a community sport which also provides incremental revenue into the local economies where stadia are based.

11. I have read Mr Osborne's comments. He is a person I am well aware of, and regard him with respect. I was quite excited when he announced plans and a route to develop a new multi sports venue [including motorsport], and quite a 'shot in the arm' I had thought given his company's reputation and ability to deliver. I am bemused that some the points he has raised are contradictory to his own plans, which I find quite interesting. I believe if he reaches out, there would be significant interest from established business operators. Equally, Mr Matt Ford has a track record of being a progressive and flamboyant Speedway promoter with integrity and I have no doubt he would be able to deliver at Coventry.

12. I have had sight of the estimates of costs to bring racing back to Coventry of c£750K and believe to be a reasonable and achievable estimate to at least return it to an operational status in a basic form and have advised SCS on this in a qualified manner and using comparison to our own experience in returning Odsal Stadium which was a redundant venue, at a cost of around £500k.

13. Stock car racing has the support of significant companies and businesses that can deliver the necessary works and expertise required, as shown by our own Odsal, experience where tremendous support was forthcoming from fans and associated businesses in the innovative commercial models we deployed.

14. BriSCA F1 attracts audiences that generally cover running costs. However, the viability of stock car racing is not simply admissions but incremental and substantive revenue from bars and catering that come and add into the mix and viability. Oval race audiences spend significantly on food and beverage and this enters the equation for re investment.

15. Stadiums and the sports contained are of community value [Belle Vue had the status as an agreed 'asset of community value' (ACV) but sadly, Councils can weigh against that in their decisions.]

16. Stadiums should be 'preserved' and land values should be based upon ongoing stadium operation and not development value. Several stadia that have been sold could have been saved by promoters willing to invest had the value been 'realistic' and not assumed on development value. Those stadia would have subsequently been reinvested in. Models in recent years where promoters have been able to secure freehold purchase and made significant investment have seen significant revenue and attendance levels.

17. Oval Racing has existed since 1954 and remains vibrant and well subscribed and has community purpose.

18. This appeal should and must be rejected given the huge community value of the stadium and sufficient discussion at local level to permit the viability and re-opening costs to be more accurately reflected, with access permitted for specialists. Once this stadium goes, this huge local asset will be lost forever as the cost of replacing it will be impossible to justify. If there

was an easy alternative then it would have been taken up by now, but the fact is there is a dearth of racing opportunities in the West Midlands.

Steve Rees, September 2023

APPENDIX 1: Email to PINs

From: STEVEN REES

Sent: 28 July 2023 13:59

To: Wordsworth, Robert <ROBERT.WORDSWORTH@planninginspectorate.gov.uk>

Cc: Sophie Clark ;secretary@orcj; BriSCAF2Secretary; David Carter <briscaf1mb>

Subject: APP/E3715/W/23/332013

ORCi Ltd
BriSCA Management Board F1
British Stock Car Association
British Stock Car Drivers Association

Mr Robert Wordsworth,
The Planning Inspectorate,
Temple Quay House,
2 The Square,
Bristol, BS1 6PN

28th July 2023

Dear Sir

Appeal Reference: APP/E3715/W/23/3322013 - Re appeal by Brandon Estates Ltd, site :
Coventry Stadium, Rugby Road, Coventry

The British Stock Car Racing, F1 & F2, BriSCA Management Board, British Stock Car Drivers Association and the Oval Racing Council International wish to jointly re emphasise our absolute objection to planning application appeal, R18/0186 regarding Coventry's Brandon Stadium.

As per our earlier representations and the substantial weight of objections received from race fans and competitors, there is compelling evidence to support that Coventry Stadium is a well supported and much loved centre of oval motorsport excellence in Europe. Without doubt, it's historic relevance cannot be ignored that may be traced back, for Stock Car Racing to post the second world war although significantly earlier for Speedway and Midget Car Racing.

The venue has been centric to many of the sports major championships.

Our solidarity on this determines our firm belief that this application must be rejected and every effort invested to return this historic venue as a multi use sporting venue once again.

We are disturbed at inaccurate misrepresentations of the sport by the consultants representing the developers in the various information submitted for the planning consent and subsequent appeal.

We also wish to place on record that we do not accept in any way the manner in which the sport as a whole has been portrayed in documents provided by the developers, both in the original planning application and subsequently in the appeal. We challenge and have some knowledge of the source of such information and the assertions are inaccurate and bereft of fact. These must be tasked.

There is no substance to many of the points submitted with regards and in particular, the support nationally and Europe wide for the sport. Indeed the sport is flourishing currently and any decline may be only be attributed in areas because major historic and iconic stadiums based upon their development value and such justification is repeatedly and inaccurately portrayed to ensure a successful outcome.

As you will be aware, there are significant individuals together with the governing bodies, prepared to invest to restore this marque as a successful events arena together with the substantive incremental income generated from major events for the local economy.

We must urge you to reject this appeal as viable alternatives exist to preserve the venues continued use.

As governing bodies we are happy to engage and assist in providing further supplementary evidence to further support the case as may be required.

Yours Sincerely,

Steve Rees
Chairman of ORCi and British Stock Car Association F1

Peter Falding
Chairman of the British Stock Car Drivers Association