

## **SAVE COVENTRY SPEEDWAY**

**Second Public Meeting - 7.30pm on 26 May 2016**

**Scarman House Lecture Theatre  
Scarman House Conference Centre  
University of Warwick**

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

Pete Lawrence (PL) representing the Save Coventry Speedway Group welcomed everyone to the meeting and then introduced:

David Carter (DC): also representing the Save Coventry Speedway Group from a Stock Car Racing perspective.

Mick Horton (MH): the Coventry Bees Promoter.

Councillor Michael Stokes (MS) – Leader, Rugby Borough Council.

### **Apologies had been received from:**

Jeremy Heaver who had provided a written statement.

Councillor Heather Timms from Rugby Borough Council and Brandon & Bretford Parish Council.

Kelly Foster who had started the recent Coventry Stadium Petition.

### **Invitation declined:**

Peter Frampton: the planning consultant representing the Stadium owners/ prospective developers.

### **2. Recap: what has happened to date.**

DC summarised the key conclusions from the last meeting held in July last year including:

- A range of proposals were agreed for better organisation some of which had still to be fully implemented
- That a formal request be made to Rugby BC to add Brandon Stadium as an Asset of Community Value.
- 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.

In relation to the concerns surrounding the 12 month notice period of potential stadium closure MS kindly suggested that he would request a direct meeting with Sandhu to discuss this matter.

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 left a balance of £163.94 for future activities.

In relation to the **Rugby Local Plan** consultation, DC read out extracts from the letter accompanying the submission (made on 18/02/16) noting that full copies of all the documents are all published on the Facebook group.

“Dear Councillor Michael Stokes

Rugby Borough Emerging Local Plan - The Preferred Option - December 2015

... .. We are aware of proposals for a replacement stadium to accommodate both Speedway and Stock Car Racing nearby and will be happy to support them subject to them being (1) fully funded, (2) they provide a genuine equivalent replacement to Brandon Stadium, (3) most importantly, that they have the full support of Rugby Borough Council and (4) they permit a smooth and unbroken transition of the racing from Brandon into the new facility. ... .. “

DC then summarised the content of a **Land Registry Search** for the stadium site undertaken on 18 February 2016. This showed:

Title absolute

1 (02.12.2015) PROPRIETOR: BRANDON ESTATES LIMITED (incorporated in Jersey) of Elizabeth House, 9 Castle Street, St Helier, Jersey JE2 3RT.

2 (02.12.2015) The price stated to have been paid on 23 November 2015 was £2,700,000.

3 (02.12.2015) A Transfer dated 23 November 2015 made between (1) Investin Brandon Limited and (2) Brandon Estates Limited contains purchaser's personal covenants.

The fee for the search was £14.95 which was financed from the outstanding funds collected at the July 2015 public meeting.

PL then quickly ran through the **meetings held since the first public meeting**. There were:

- i. A meeting held with MS, Council officials and Jeremy Heaver to discuss the possible new stadium site. At this meeting MS gave an amber light to Jeremy Heaver to prepare outline proposals and paved the way for a further meeting between Sandhu and MS.
- ii. We also met with MS yesterday.

DC then briefly summarised some other matters affecting **various sports venues** including the Birmingham Wheels Inspectors conclusions regarding potential redevelopment and also Wimbledon.

The licensees at **Birmingham Wheels** (including the promoters Incarace) made representations on the Birmingham Development Plan and the Inspectors conclusions and recommendations are good new for Birmingham Wheels but other stadia (not least Coventry) too. They provide strong support to the contention that no redevelopment should be allowed, at least until replacement provision is put in-place where a clear need for the facilities undertaken clearly exists.

Inspectors Report - References to Birmingham Wheels *“Office floorspace and employment land provision*

121. There is another potential source of Best Urban land at the Birmingham Wheels Park site at Bordesley, of about 30ha. However, as I make clear under Issue F below, appropriate alternative premises need to be found for the existing sports facilities on the site before it is redeveloped for employment use. There are also land contamination issues to be resolved. While neither of these factors is insurmountable, they mean that the Wheels site is unlikely to become available in the short term.

#### *Other Growth Areas*

233. MM15 corrects a policy cross-referencing error in policy GA4, which otherwise sets out a sound framework for development in and improvements to Sutton Coldfield town centre. MM19 & MM20 ensure that policy GA7 gives adequate recognition to existing sports facilities in the Bordesley Park area, including Birmingham City FC and the Birmingham Wheels Park. In particular, they require appropriate replacement premises to be found for the Wheels Park (or appropriate consolidation on site), before its existing site is redeveloped for employment use. This is necessary to achieve a proper balance between social and economic objectives for future development in the area, given the value of some of the facilities at the Wheels Park to local schools and community groups.”

In relation to **Wimbledon** DC was less clear but Boris Johnson had stepped in to force a reconsideration of the London Borough of Merton's decision to grant planning permission for the redevelopment of the greyhound/ stock car stadium for Wimbledon AFC and new housing. This has resulted in a temporary stay of execution and, with luck, the potential for alternative proposals to retain the only venue for stock car racing and greyhound racing left in the Capital.

Finally, and not related to speedway and motor racing but **Hall Green Greyhound Stadium** is also threatened with housing redevelopment.

All these cases not only highlighted the continuing pressure on sports stadia but also emphasised the importance of using opportunities to influence the outcomes.

At this point PL summarised the current position on the application for the designation of Brandon Stadium as an **Asset of Community Value (ACV)**

An application had been submitted by the Brandon & Bretford Parish Council on 10 March 2016. This application was unsuccessful with the following reason being stated on the Rugby BC website: The reason for not listing, "Not demonstrated as community use as defined by the Act".

PL concluded the recap by indicating that the main thing that persuaded us that now was the right time for a meeting: the 2016 seasons are now well underway and Speedway and Stock Car Racing fans are looking for some answers about next season.

### **3. Contributions and updates**

#### **A. Jeremy Heaver (Stadium Manager and Coventry Motofest),**

PL indicated that Jeremy Heaver had kindly provided a statement to be read out:

*“Listed below is the opportunities we have pursued in relation to a new stadium.*

*Land at Chorley offer made and accepted but following discussions we had to withdraw due to negative planning issues and site access difficulties.*

*Discussions with Coventry Airport and the old sewage works on site and whilst they showed interest they did not wish to complicate the plans they had already started to develop with the planners but would be willing to look again in 10 to 15 years' time.*

*Stoneleigh Park showed initial interest due to the site being divided by HS2 however the current operators have a covenant which states that any new development can only have an agricultural connection and the owners of the land did not wish to remove the covenant.*

*The Butts rugby stadium showed interest in developing a multi-use sports facility including us however after discussions with the local authority the proximity of the new flats for the over 55's and parking issues ruled this out.*

*Current/ex landfill Ling Hall near Rugby was ultimately rejected as parts of the site that maybe suitable were earmarked for future use and other parts were still venting to much methane.*

*Advantage West Midlands when they controlled the Ansty Park development rejected our proposal for a replacement stadium as they only wished to have industrial or heavy employment uses on the site.*

*Nuneaton outskirts an ex industrial site was considered however the seller withdrew it from sale once we started talks as they felt they could wait for a more profitable outcome possibly housing.*

*Offered sites further away in Nottingham, Derby and Telford all of which had local authority backing however the relocation of the Coventry Bees was not considered possible and both sports are needed for the project to be viable.*

*Brandon Wood Farm was a very serious and our latest possibility however Rugby BC have indicated that they would object to any application after three pre planning meetings on the basis that it is in Green Belt. This was disappointing as outdoor sports developments is one of the few things that can be developed in the green belt.*

*Rugby BC has taken the view that a perfectly good stadium exists and whilst it is operating no replacement is required and they will be making representations to the new owners that it should be preserved as a speedway/stox stadium. Our view is that this will fail but we will be interested renting the stadium if it becomes an option.*

*If we develop a new stadium we will need to move around 12 miles plus out from Coventry in order to bypass the green belt objection or spend a large amount of our redevelopment budget on fighting a lengthy battle to get permission from Rugby BC in the meantime we would have no venue to operate in.*

*We have a potential site that is currently being looked at for both sports which is 13 miles away but the discussions are at an early stage and may yet fail as they involve a different authority who may raise other concerns.*

*The above represents just a few of the efforts we have made and each has taken considerable amounts of time, meetings and initial plans. It is therefore disappointing to see so much negativity that we “are doing nothing” and “are not serious about building a replacement”.*

*We have a budget to build a replacement, do not require public funding but we do need suitable land and council backing neither of which have been found in the vicinity of the current stadium. “*

On 25 May Jeremy Heaver also provided a further note to be added to the above statement. This was read out by PL.

*“I am at our latest possible site in the afternoon and hopefully doing a commercial deal ahead of the negotiations with authorities. It’s not in Rugby BC control and we are having to move 13 miles away from the existing site due to the Green Belt and RBC opposition to any development within it regardless as to the green belt guidelines that allow outdoor sporting venues as permitted development.*

*In addition to the list I sent you we did look at around 20 other sites so the list was not definitive and we are hopeful that the talks Thursday afternoon are going to provide a solution that makes sense for fans of both speedway and stox. Whilst its 13 miles from the Brandon it is closer than that to Coventry as it is close to Nuneaton.*

*You can relay this information and due to the sensitivities of where we are I won’t be at the meeting but I am extremely disappointed that the best site has been rejected by RBC who keep saying they support development of a new stadium or continuation at the existing site yet seem to privately be saying that they will object to any development in the green belt.*

*Use both this and the other note I sent you to put our point of view.*

*Kind Regards Jeremy Heaver”*

In response PL suggested we can conclude from this:

- i. There is no alternative stadium site identified.
- ii. JH has not made representations seeking designation of a new stadium through the Local Plan
- iii. Planning permission would still need to be obtained even if a site can be found.
- iv. There is absolutely no prospect of an alternative stadium being built for 2017 and realistically – subject to site identification, planning permission etc. probably not for another three to five years.
- v. If the long heritage of racing in the Coventry area is to continue then it has to be at Brandon at least for the foreseeable future.

## **B. Mick Horton, Promoter, Coventry Speedway,**

From a Speedway point of view MH referred to visits to many of the different sites mentioned by Jeremy Heaver and need to keep options open. He also has had many meetings with Rugby Borough and Coventry City Councils both of which have expressed huge desire for the continuance of racing. Councillor Stokes and his team have been very supportive and are taking up the fight to keep the

racing going. Discussions ongoing and we will continue to discuss and hope for a satisfactory outcome.

### **C. Councillor Michael Stokes, Leader Rugby Borough Council**

MS opened by saying "Don't shoot the messenger!". He wished to clarify a few points. First, to take up one or two points raised by Jeremy Heaver and also stress that Rugby BC has no direct role. MS had bought along a number of papers because it was important to get the facts right. He was attending tonight as he wished to keep fully engaged and we have been asked to help.

MS referred to his meeting with Sandhu after the last public meeting at which he passed on the passionate views of the Speedway and Stock Car communities. Sandhu indicated at this meeting that he no longer had any business interests in either the stadium or land apart from the stadium lease until the end of 2016.

MS expressed surprise at some of the points in Jeremy Heaver's statement and referred to an email he had received from Mr Heaver following that meeting. In this he had thanked MS for an informative meeting and indicated that he would like to make a submission into the local plan on the Brandon Woods site and requested further guidance from Rob Back in relation to this. He also indicated that he would now undertake the more detailed work required to take forward a planning application. He accepted there were risks associated with both the local plan and a planning application. Reference was also made to supporting a three way meeting with Rugby BC and Coventry City Council. Jeremy Heaver once again thanked MS for the productive meeting with straight talking which he and Sandhu preferred. MS reiterated this email appeared to conflict with what JH has indicated in his statement.

MS went on to say that the former stadium owners have sold, at a considerable profit, a Green Belt site for £2.7m only then to request to develop an alternative site for a stadium elsewhere within the Green Belt. Even so, in the discussions with the Council, Green Belt was not the major issue; rather it was access along a one-mile single track road.

A three way meeting with the Leader of Coventry City Council subsequently was held.

MS stressed his commitment to trying to keep the stadium referring to the site as 'the perfect location'. MS was sorry if the approach of the Council had caused inconvenience for Jeremy Heaver but this only arose as a result of the sale of the stadium for £2.7m.

MS then referred to his recent statement on Facebook which reads as follows (most of which was read out):

"I wanted to contribute to this group and hopefully help clarify a few points and some of the rumours that have been circulating regarding Coventry Stadium. I will be attending the public meeting this evening but hope this contribution helps to clarify some topics and also serves to update those who are unable to attend this evening.

Firstly, the stadium in Brandon is entirely within the Borough of Rugby and therefore, in terms of any local authority responsibility comes under the jurisdiction of Rugby Borough Council.

As the Leader of Rugby Borough Council, I wanted to clarify my personal position on this matter; I am fully committed to retaining this well-loved, well used sporting facility. Over the past 18 months, it has been clear that members of the public overwhelmingly want to retain the stadium and I am

fully aware of its historic significance, but also the high quality of the track which is nationally recognised. I do not want to see it close.

Furthermore, I hope I can add some clarity around the following points;

*1. Rugby Borough Council (RBC) has no ownership or powers to take ownership, prevent the stadium and land from being sold or has any powers to make the owners use the site for a particular purpose.*

*2. As already publicly reported, the stadium and land has been sold to an investment company. The previous owners (Mr Sandhu and associates) no longer have any ownership of the site and have no relationship whatsoever to the new owners. However, they are tenants on the site under a lease that will end in December 2016. The current owners confirm there are no plans to extend this lease. (I have clarified these points directly with Mr Sandhu and the new owners)*

*3. I know there is a lot of speculation around searches on companies relating to the site. I am not able to speak for any parties that are named, but it is not unusual for temporary operating companies to be established for the purpose of consultation and/or marketing. It is also not unusual to see previous owners named on these temporary companies.*

*4. Since its sale, there has been NO planning application submitted to Rugby Borough Council for the stadium site. If an application were to be submitted, this would be a matter of public record and the usual consultations would apply.*

*5. There has been NO planning application submitted for any other site in the Borough of Rugby for a possible alternative site for a stadium to be built.*

*6. However, I have met and there have been informal talks with Mr Sandhu, Mr Heaver and Mr Horton around possibilities for sites within the borough. The most detailed document provided was an artist impression of what the possible new stadium could look like.*

*7. The site discussed was within the green belt land that runs through Rugby. The difficulties in using this site were explained relating to it being green belt, having access issues, ownership, traffic access, highways and potentially polluted land. However, it was also explained that if a planning application was submitted, it would be considered fully, fairly and independently.*

*8. RBC have not stopped, prevented or blocked any potential planning application. We have offered guidance and advice from a senior officer level of the legal position and possibilities for a potential site and professional experience. Although it has always been made clear that the determination of ANY planning application is down to council and national policy, the officer dealing with the case, the planning committee and potentially a planning inspector.*

*9. RBC have worked to identify any areas of land with the borough that may be suitable for another stadium/track and that may be more suited to the planning permissions needed. To date, we have not been able to locate another suitable piece of land.*

*Finally, I recognise the importance of this stadium not only to the fans and users, but to the Borough of Rugby. RBC have expended significant resources – about 28 hours of officer time in trying to find a suitable site - and will continue to do so until we have a conclusion.”*

MS concluded by saying those are the facts, he wished to keep the sports in Rugby and if a planning application was to be submitted on the stadium site it would probably be unsuccessful although this was a matter for the Planning Committee.

He supported Brandon remaining as a viable sports venue and mentioned the fantastic efforts of MH in trying to keep the venue going. MS would remain involved in talks to keep the stadium where it is. He had met the new owners, and while there could be no commitments, he remained confident and with all the info from JH, MH and the Save Coventry Speedway Group it is clear that the site is historically important to the sports, local community and the Borough. They have not told MS to go away. MS would continue to facilitate discussions and save for the stadium for local community.

MS then went on to cover the ACV issue. At the last meeting the ACV proposal was made and a request duly received from the Parish Council. This was rejected on May 4 but this was a tick box exercise where certain criteria need to be met. However, MS indicated he was not happy with the officers decision and proposed to go back and look again. MS then explained more of the background to ACVs.

MS concluded by giving his personal commitment to oversee what happens and any talks that take place.

#### **D. Petition**

In relation to the online petition a representative indicated that more signatures were required and the online petition would be supplemented by paper petitions. MS indicated that the petition would be helpful in gauging the strength of feeling but he was not entirely clear what the petition was asking him to do.

#### **E. Peter Frampton, Planning Consultant**

DC read out the email dated 16 May 2016 inviting Framptons to the meeting and the reply dated 18 May 2016:

“Please see the details (below) of our second meeting to discuss the future of Brandon Stadium and Speedway and Stock Car racing in the Coventry area.

We hope you will be able to make to meeting - as part of your ongoing consultation exercise - to update race fans and local residents on the housing redevelopment proposals. In particular we would like to ask for feedback from your consultation exercise, the current position on the proposed planning application and details of any submissions you have made to the Council.

We look forward to hearing from you.

With kind regards

Dave Carter & Pete Lawrence”

Reply: “Dear Sirs,

Re: Brandon Stadium

Thank you for your invitation to the meeting you propose to convene, which I decline for the following reasoning. I have made a submission within the development plan process that this site would serve the wider public interest as a brownfield housing opportunity. I readily recognise that your members and some local residents may have a preference for the site to remain in its current use. The LPA will consider these competing planning interests as part of the development plan process. This exercise has not as yet been completed by the Planning Authority.



We are awaiting the further considerations of the LPA which are anticipated during the Summer, including the submitted request for the site to be included on the ACV Register. As such I believe no useful purpose would be served in such a meeting.

Yours sincerely,

Peter J Frampton”

## **5. Q&A and open discussion.**

PL chaired the Q&A session in which some very constructive points were made from many of those present. Some of the points raised included:

- Why did Sandhu sell the site when he must have known of the strength of feeling?
- Given Sandhu selling out, why can't MH or someone else lease the land at least until planning permission for redevelopment is given? This makes even more sense given that the outcome of a planning application takes time.
- MS indicated his primary goal was to save the stadium permanently and look at compromise if necessary. Reason why not would probably be to avoid making planning application process more difficult. This would give time to find somewhere else, possibly years.
- MS indicated it may be in their interests to keep vacant but he said that discussions would cover all options. Doors have not been shut.
- It is illogical to keep the stadium vacant which has a cost until planning permission granted. The comparison with Long Eaton was made.
- What prevent demolition of the stadium. MS indicated this would require permission and the building is riddled with asbestos.
- On a previous structure plan Brandon is not a settlement earmarked for development. Is this going to change?
- Another stadium would require Green Belt land.
- How can planning permission for housing ever be given? It has been used as a community asset since the 1920's. If permission had been given for a gymnasium it would be more of a community asset.
- Brandon village is a small village. 200+ houses would more than double its size.
- How many local people were here? On a show of hands the audience had a good proportion of Speedway fans, Stock Car fans as well as local residents. The choice of venue was determined by room availability, the Binley Woods Village Hall and other venues closer to the stadium were not available.
- Developers land bank potential development sites.
- There was a discussion on the name of the land owner(s). MS suggested it was one man and the asset is being managed on his behalf. MS felt it was not appropriate for him to disclose names.
- Protected species including bats are present on the site.
- MS suggested that papers he had seen suggested Sandhu no longer had any interest in the land.
- What are the tactics to reduce costs? There is a continuing expenditure such as business rates and continuing security issues (estimated at £150K annually).
- MS indicated Brandon would not be a housing option in the local plan.

- Do the new owners want to go to the uncertainty and expense for housing in the long term or might they find a short term compromise more attractive?
- What sort of options? MS trying to reach out to facilitate a deal. Not charity. A compromise agreement if stadium stays subject to a limited amount of development.
- MH suggested a long term plan was required for Brandon given the need for investment. A five year lease would be required so as to allow time to look at other options.
- Best approach is to get a further lease to give time to deliver a new stadium. The attendance is showing the strength of feeling. Without this there is no need for a new track. MS confirmed no options are off the table and he referred to the success in bringing the World Rugby Hall of Fame to Rugby.
- What is Jeremy Heaver's position? If Sandhu has completely gone what is his role/position? MH said he is employed by Sandhu from the rental and income from Speedway and Stock Cars.
- In 2010 Sandhu clearly said he would provide a new stadium.
- If the Stadium is still there in 2017 then the racing should still take place with Speedway and Stock Cars standing together.
- MS suggested the dialogue could not go on forever given the forward planning for both sports. He hopes to bottom things out by the end of June.
- Should Rugby planners have backed Sandhu in making changes to the stadium? There was a stalemate over the height of a building and the applicants would not back down. It boiled down to the building being 1m too high.
- Assuming things do not go to plan where would the Speedway move to? Leicester? Birmingham? MH rejected both options and vowed to stay at Brandon if at all possible.
- People need to be clear, Coventry Bees could cease to exist.
- MH's role in keeping Speedway at Brandon was acknowledged.
- Rugby BC were not consulted on the sale of the stadium although there is nothing illegal about this. Morally there is an argument it should have happened.
- In relation to the ACV there may need to be another sale.

## 6. Summary of key action points.

DC highlighted that a note of the meeting would be produced and published on the Facebook Group.

He then proposed a series of resolutions which were all unanimously agreed. **The agreed resolutions from the meeting were as follows:**

**a) We call for transparency from the stadium owners, prospective developers and their representatives. We request they make contact so representatives of the Save Coventry Stadium Group can meet them.**

**b) To the stadium owners we say that it is clearly in the public interest to allow racing to continue at Brandon Stadium until such point that planning permission has been granted for its redevelopment. There is no reason why this commitment cannot be given immediately.**

**c) To Rugby BC we say that planning permission for redevelopment of Brandon Stadium, or any part thereof, should not be granted until such time as the future of Brandon Stadium is secured or an alternative stadium in the vicinity is provided to ensure continuity of both Speedway and Stock Car Racing.**

**d) To Rugby BC we say that this meeting strongly supports Brandon & Bretford Parish Council's application to designate the stadium site as an ACV and request that the Council urgently reconsiders this proposal.**

**e) To Rugby BC we request that our representations should be fully reflected in the next stage of the local plan and we look forward to participating fully through the public examination process.**

**f) To Brandon & Bretford Parish Council we say that the Save Coventry Stadium Group looks forward to working with them in the production of their new Neighbourhood Local Plan.**

**g) To representatives of the Press we ask for their support to help race fans ensure that the long heritage of racing at Brandon continues in 2017 and beyond either at Brandon or, in time, at a new stadium.**

PL wound up proceeding by reminding those present of the bucket collection stressing that in the event any money raised is not spent then this would be split 50/50 between Speedway Rider and Stock Car Driver Benevolent Funds.

PL also asked if there were any views for more direct action and asked for ideas.

MH indicated that he would be talking to Jeremy Heaver re a Speedway presence at Motofest. MH also encouraged everyone to get down to Brandon for Speedway and Stock Car meetings including tomorrow evening for the match against Belle Vue.

MH suggested that banners could be put up at Sky covered meeting and there was mention of the possibility for some sort of demonstration in front of the cameras.

It was also suggested that we should try to get more press coverage, for example the Speedway Star.

Everyone was requested to sign the attendance register and if anyone wished to be more closely involved speak or send a message to us!

Finally, PL expressed thanks to the speakers, everyone for coming along and for the constructive contributions to the discussion and especially a big thank you to Kate Bronserud and the University of Warwick for hosting the meeting and a gentle reminder about the bucket collection.

The meeting closed a c9.15pm

[The bucket collection at this meeting raised £215.65 to support the campaign – thanks to everyone who contributed for their generosity].