

Land at Brandon (Coventry) Stadium, Rugby Road, Coventry, Brandon,

Outline Planning Application with all matters reserved except access for residential development of up to 104 dwellings, the partial demolition of the existing stadium and the development of a replacement speedway track and associated facilities and infrastructure.

P.A. Ref : R26/0559

Brandon and Bretford Parish Council **objects** to the above planning application submitted by Brandon Estates Limited on the following grounds.

The proposal is contrary to Policy LF1 of the Neighbourhood Plan

The Brandon & Bretford Neighbourhood Plan (NP) was made on 4th June 2019 and forms part of the Development Plan. In dismissing the Applicant's appeal in January 2024, The Inspector cited conflict with Policy LF1 in that the Stadium isn't surplus to requirements and that the benefits of alternative provision did not outweigh the loss of the facility. The Inspector gave significant weight to this policy conflict.

The Planning Statement submitted by DPP Planning on behalf of Brandon Estates Ltd for the current application states, in the Section on Pre-Application feedback from the LPA, that Rugby Council does not consider that the proposal (to reinstate a speedway facility on the site,) would provide equivalent or better provision when compared to the former stadium use and advises that any application must be supported by robust evidence demonstrating either:

- That stock car use is no longer viable or required
- That the proposed sporting provision would clearly outweigh the former use in terms of quality and community benefit.

The Parish Council agrees with this view which reflects the requirements of Policy LF1. The Policy is fundamental to one of the 5 guiding Objectives of the Neighbourhood Plan which is to support the establishment of new community facilities and recreation within the Parish and to protect and maintain existing community facilities, open spaces and recreation and leisure facilities. Proposals that would **diminish** or remove a community facility will need to demonstrate that the facility is no longer needed or viable and that there is no realistic prospect of viability being improved.

Whilst the submitted proposals purport to reinstate a speedway facility (should an interested party come forward to develop and run such a facility,) the application falls a long way short of providing any assurance that this would happen. In addition, it proposes to prevent the use of the new stadium for stock car racing, without providing any evidence to

demonstrate that the use is no longer viable or required. The only justification being put forward by the applicant to prevent the use of a new stadium for stock car racing, is that it isn't a recognised sport and that it would take up the area that has been earmarked for housing. Neither of these points provide the necessary justification for removing a use which the appeal inspector considered is needed and which would assist in putting a new stadium on a firmer financial footing.

The application also proposes the loss of around 50% of the Stadium site in order to redevelop it for housing, which is land that was formerly used for parking. Whilst the illustrative layout includes approximately 499 car parking spaces around the proposed new stadium, the applicant accepts that, if major events are held at the new stadium in the future, this would necessitate the need for a Major Event Management Plan to cater for the parking demand that cannot be accommodated on the site.

The Parish Council considers that both the loss of the stadium's car park and the removal of stockcar racing can only be regarded as diminishing the operational needs and viability of the stadium and, as such, the application would be contrary to Policy LF1.

Although the Applicant accepts that there is a realistic prospect of viability being improved and that the stadium is needed and viable, it has provided no assurance that the new stadium will come forward, as it has not identified an operator nor has it submitted any evidence to demonstrate that the scheme which it is promoting, will definitely deliver a new stadium. The only commitments that are currently being promised as part of the submitted proposals are:

- The partial demolition to slab of the existing buildings.
- A landscape buffer to protect the new housing
- A new access road to the boundary of the new stadium
- A noise attenuation fence

Whilst demolishing the grandstand and other structures, which are structurally unsound, largely due to vandalism and neglect since the stadium closed 10 years ago, will lessen the cost of bringing forward a new stadium, the only other tangible benefit being committed by the applicant is the noise attenuation fence, albeit that is largely needed to protect the proposed new houses. The landscape buffer and the access road are only needed to develop the proposed new stadium, because of the intention to redevelop the former car park to deliver 104 dwellings.

When the Inspector considered viability in the 2024 appeal, she took account of the increased revenue that would be generated by uses other than speedway, including stock car racing (paragraph 53.) If Brandon Estates believe that a new stadium can be delivered and would be viable in the form it has proposed, it needs to provide robust evidence to demonstrate that contention as has been requested by Rugby Council. The fact that it has not chosen to do so gives the Parish Council very little confidence that a new stadium will be

brought forward and that all the applicant intends to deliver are the 104 dwellings. Policy LF1 requires a level of assurance being given that community facilities will be retained, enhanced or improved, but in the absence of any such assurance being provided by Brandon Estates the application is contrary to Policy LF1.

Green Belt Considerations

The Parish Council do not agree with paragraph 7.33 in the Planning Statement.

The developable area including the proposed housing and the new stadium, appears to be much greater in extent than that proposed in the appeal application. In addition, the Inspector took account of the height of the existing stadium, which was to be demolished, in reaching her conclusion that the appeal proposal would not occupy a greater developed area than the existing stadium. As the current application retains the majority of the housing element and proposes a new stadium of up to 15 metres in height, the proposals are both higher than the considerations pertaining to the appeal as well as the overall developable area being increased.

It will be a matter for the LPA to determine whether or not the proposals accord with Policy GB7 1e in the 2026 NPPF. If they do not, then the LPA will need to consider the application under GB7 1g.

Other Considerations

The combined uses of the site for housing and as a stadium, will impact the A428 as it passes through the Parish. It will be a matter for the LHA to assess the impact which needs to take into account the level of usage of the stadium to enable it to become viable. Particular concern is raised about the loss of the large area of former car parking which served the stadium before its closure, which has resulted in the decision to exclude stock car racing and the need for Major Event Management Planning. The Parish Council doesn't believe that the proposals set out in the report by PJA will prevent off site parking impacting upon Rugby Road or the village of Brandon, given its close proximity to the site.

The loss of TPO trees to create a new access for the stadium is a matter that has been identified by the LPA's tree officer. The Parish Council share his concern.

Neighbourhood Plan review

The Parish Council has commenced a review of the current Neighbourhood Plan with a Parish wide survey of residents and business currently underway. Due to the holiday season, the Parish Council is extending the consultation period to the end of September, following

which it will review the existing policies in light of the 2026 NPPF and the emerging policies of the Local Plan Review including Policy W1 which seeks to support the restoration of Coventry Stadium, Brandon for speedway and stock car racing and other motor sports together with other community uses.

The resident survey includes a question specific to the stadium site, asking for views on what uses residents would like to see on the stadium site if it were to be redeveloped. It would be premature to draw any firm conclusions on the feedback until the consultation is closed, but current indications do not show a marked change from the Parish survey that was carried out for the existing Neighbourhood Plan which resulted in the inclusion of Policy LF1.

Since the review of the Neighbourhood Plan will take time to run its course, the Parish Council has attempted to engage with Brandon Estates to assist in responding to the planning application. The Parish Council did not receive any direct approach from Brandon Estates prior to the submission of the planning application. On 24th June, a letter from Brandon Estates was sent to the clerk to the Parish Council requesting a meeting to discuss the proposals in more detail, with the wish to work constructively and transparently with the Parish Council. In response, the Parish Council suggested holding a public meeting to enable Brandon Estates to present their proposals and to listen to the views from the local community, but that suggestion was declined. In its place the Parish Council agreed to a video call with a representative from Brandon Estates supported by representatives from DPP Planning and Thirty 47. This took place on 14th September but unfortunately nobody from Brandon Estates attended the meeting. During the meeting, the Parish Council was told that Brandon Estates had undertaken its own targeted survey of residents, but that was restricted to properties located next to the stadium.

Whilst the Parish Council objects to the submitted application for the reasons set out, councillors are fully aware that an acceptable solution needs to be found to end the last 10 years of uncertainty and significant inconvenience, especially to the residents who live close to the site. Brandon Stadium has been an important community facility within the Parish since it was constructed in 1926. Its closure since 2016 does not negate the potential for community benefits to recommence, as was recognised by the Appeal inspector in dismissing the appeal. The Parish Council remain resolute in defending the principles embodied in Policy LF1 and will continue to engage with all stakeholders and interested parties to try to find an acceptable solution.