

Ella Casey

From: office <office@britishspeedway.co.uk>
Sent: 06 August 2021 15:48
To: Erica Buchanan; PAWSEY, Mark
Subject: BSP Ltd Response - Coventry

Dear Erica

British Speedway Promoters Ltd (BSPL) wish to formally object to the revised planning application R18/0186 regarding Brandon Stadium. In our view, none of the problems highlighted in the response to the original application are in any way solved by the latest submission, and the provision of a 3G floodlit football pitch in addition to the housing site fails to address the issue of the eviction of Speedway from the area, and indeed our colleagues in the stock car racing sector. The “benefits” of this pitch certainly do not “clearly outweigh” the loss of the previous use, as is required by NPPF section 97c.

Whilst accepting that the landowner is within their rights to do what they wish with the site, including nothing, should they choose, the failure of the initial application should clearly have resulted in an informed debate between all parties as to how matters could proceed satisfactorily to the benefit of the sporting community, the local residents, the Council, and the landowner.

Instead, the ongoing need for Speedway (and stock car racing) remains as great as ever, a case to prove the stadium is surplus to requirements was not made, residents have suffered yet more disruption as a direct result of the landowner failing to secure the site, and they are now asked to get behind a football pitch for which there is no apparent need and based on an unrealistic business plan. We consider this unacceptable.

Coventry was, and remains, one of our most important venues, both as a league racing outfit, and also as an appropriate stadium for major events. Were it to become available again, there is absolutely no doubt that it would host top-level professional racing, and there is every expectation that it would again pull in some of the highest crowd numbers in the sport.

We reject in the strongest possible terms the ‘Speedway Viability Appraisal’ prepared by KKP which goes well beyond the direct issues of Coventry and into a discussion and critique of the sport as a whole. We submit that this document is poorly prepared, badly researched, deliberately written to mislead and damaging to our sport. You will recall that in 2018 our Office Manager, Nikki Jamieson, alongside SCB Co-ordinator Neil Vatcher, willingly co-operated with the independent WYG investigation into the original planning application, and we consider that the report which resulted was largely fair and balanced. We remain perfectly open to co-operation over discussions regarding the current state of British Speedway and are dismayed that following criticism for not consulting the Governing Body three years ago, the applicants have once again failed to engage with us.

This makes it all the more remarkable and disappointing that page 2 of this report makes reference to a “Former Chairman – BSPA” having held discussions with KKP, although it is noted that none of the allegations over the sport which follow are actually attributed to that person. We find it quite incongruous that should the report’s authors have wished to gain a balanced viewpoint on the sport, and the challenges we undoubtedly face, that they would not have consulted either the current Chairman, or a current Board Member, or the current Office Manager, rather than go back to an unnamed promoter who, presumably, served several years ago and would not be fully up to speed on today’s issues.

You will no doubt appreciate that Speedway, in common with many sports in the UK whether regarded as ‘minority’ or otherwise, currently faces an uncertain period as a direct result of the pandemic. The controversy over re-opening restrictions for the hospitality and entertainment issues have impacted on several clubs, and we are perfectly open about that fact. Different clubs have been subject to different restrictions from the various local authorities, and some have experienced a tough period. In contrast, there are others who are actually enjoying significant success, possibly as a result of our official season starting on May 17 – the very first day permitted by the

Government roadmap, and therefore meaning Speedway was amongst the first sports to re-start on a professional basis following the forced 2020 shutdown.

The Viability Report, however, paints a damaging and inaccurate picture of our sport, and has clearly been written with one conclusion in mind. After all, why would a Viability Report be commissioned by developers and then submitted without making the case that the sport was faltering? All of the information in this report has been compiled in order to comply with that requirement, whereas we would be happy once again to participate in any truly independent report to give a true picture.

We make some brief comments below which we are prepared to expand upon should you wish. There are several other issues we can pick up on but have avoided in order to prevent this response from being unnecessarily lengthy.

1. The TV viewing figure analysis in the report is out of date and incorrect. British Speedway now has a 5-year deal in place with Eurosport, which incorporates free-to-air coverage on Quest and viewing figures have unsurprisingly taken a significant upturn as a result. As restrictions ease and 'normality' returns, we are confident that this will also lead to an increase in attendance figures.
2. Speedway is not an 'adult-male' dominated sport in terms of spectators. We are very much seen as a family sport and many of our clubs work hard to attract youngsters to their stadiums.
3. It is incorrect to state that a number of clubs are for sale (none are named) and that there are plans to merge the top two leagues... and it is incredible to suggest that reducing the total number of teams would provide a more sustainable future.
4. The analysis of 'defunct' clubs is wrong. We can take you through various closures over the years on a case-by-case basis, many of which have directly been lost to housing development. There is also, unsurprisingly, no mention here of the productive efforts taking place to return the sport to other venues, including Bradford and Oxford.
5. We were asked to comment on the quoted article in The Guardian, who ignored those comments and went ahead with an item which suited their own agenda and did not present the sport in a fair or accurate light.
6. Those clubs that are able to run training schools and develop juniors do so, and we have a thriving Youth system which is now delivering benefits into professional racing via the Rising Star scheme.
7. The comments regarding environmental impact are, as acknowledged by the authors themselves "anecdotal," and the sport complies with all regulatory requirements in that regard including, for example, the introduction of new silencers to limit noise. Once again, allegations are made but attributed to nobody.

We are unhappy with this Viability Report both from a context of Coventry Speedway and of the sport in general. It is damaging to the sport, inaccurate in many areas, clearly biased to reach a pre-determined conclusion, and should not be used as a basis to make an informed decision on a hugely important planning matter.

We object to the Planning Application and call on you to reject it and encourage your Council colleagues to take an active role in helping reach a more appropriate solution featuring the return of Speedway and stock car racing to the venue.

Yours sincerely

Rob Godfrey

Rob Godfrey

CHAIRMAN

on behalf of the Members of the British Speedway Promoters Ltd

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