



## 1.0 Introduction

wyg were appointed by Rugby Council to undertake an independent review of the sports planning case in respect of Coventry Stadium, Brandon. This report represents that review.

Coventry Stadium was acquired in 2016 by Brandon Estates Limited ('the applicant'). An outline planning application was subsequently put forward for the Stadium to Rugby Council, which comprised of the demolition of the Stadium and residential development of the site for up to 137 dwellings. In considering the application evidence has been put forward by the applicant to support their planning case, including a Sports Needs Assessment (SNA). Save Coventry Speedway and Stox Campaign Group (SCS) have submitted separate information to counter the evidence set out in the planning application. It is a review of this competing evidence that the Council have sought support with.

As part of the Local Plan process, the Planning Inspector also provided comment to Rugby Council on how to deal with the application. The Inspector commented that the Council needed to start from the basis of *safeguarding provision*, in line with the general policy for sport and recreation buildings, and assess the application in the context of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), which seeks to ensure decision making is based on an assessment of need. The key criteria for decision making set out by the Inspector in respect of Brandon Stadium were evidence of *need, viability and alternative provision*.

wyg were appointed by the Council to provide capacity and expertise to advise the Council and comment on the evidence provided in respect of the above. The purpose of this report is therefore to provide *an independent review of the Brandon Stadium case to support the Council with its decision making*.

The report focusses on the '*sporting issues*' and does not comment in detail on the wider issues surrounding the closure of the Stadium and subsequent developments post closure. Neither does it reference wider planning policy e.g. housing etc, these are issues for Rugby Council to take on board and balance in their wider assessment of the future of the site and the outline application.

In undertaking the assessment, we have reviewed all the background documentation, which has been provided by all parties; *Rugby Council, 'the applicant', and Save Coventry Speedway and Stox Campaign Group (SCS)*. We have visited the site and met with representatives from all parties and have reviewed subsequent information provided following these discussions. In addition, we have consulted with Sport England, and have been provided with updated comments from the Speedway Control Board, BriSCA and BSCDA, the relevant governing bodies for motorsports.

In undertaking the review all sides have been helpful and open in discussions. Everyone has been positive and helpful and there have been various information exchanges following the meetings and points of clarification.



## 2.0 Context

One of the core planning principles of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) is to ensure that accessible services and open spaces reflect current and future needs and support communities *'health, social, and cultural well-being.'*

Section 8 of the NPPF deals with promoting *healthy and safe communities*, paragraph 92 in particular discusses the importance of providing facilities and services that the local community needs, including sports venues, open space and other local services to enhance the sustainability of communities and residential environments.

Paragraphs 96-97 refers to the importance of access to a network of high-quality open spaces and opportunities for sport and physical and the need to undertake assessments of need and protect existing open space, sports and recreational facilities.

NPPF paragraph 97 is related to activity undertaken and not spectators (though this does get encapsulated by the protection of the sport facility i.e. ancillary facilities which supports the users of the site) this is supported by the preceding para 96, which states *'access to a network of high quality open spaces and opportunities for sport and physical activity is important for the health and well-being of communities'*.

In terms of Sport England recognised sports, of the activities that took place at the site there is only Speedway, though stock cars/bangers activities are important in terms of the overall viability of the site i.e. they support a recognised use of the site.

Evidence of need is driven by NPPF paragraph 97 and Sport England Assessing Needs and Opportunities Guide (ANOG). Paragraph 97 states that existing open space, sports and recreational buildings and land, including playing fields, should not be built on unless:

*a) an assessment has been undertaken which has clearly shown the open space, buildings or land to be surplus to requirements; or*

*b) the loss resulting from the proposed development would be replaced by equivalent or better provision in terms of quantity and quality in a suitable location; or*

*c) the development is for alternative sports and recreational provision, the needs for which clearly outweigh the loss.*

The current application from Brandon Estates Limited seeks to make a case for development under paragraph 97 a) that the Stadium is *'surplus to requirements'*, with no proposals for replacement or alternative provision put forward. It is therefore in this context that this assessment is undertaken, alongside consideration of the inspector's comments in respect of evidence of *need, viability and alternative provision*.

Rugby Local Plan policy - Policy HS4: Open Space, Sports Facilities and Recreation, reflects the NPPF and states:

*'C. Public open space, sports and recreational buildings and land, including playing fields within Open Space Audit evidence and/or defined on the Policies Map and/or last in sporting or recreational use should not be built upon unless:*

- *An assessment has been undertaken which has clearly shown the open space, building or land to be surplus to requirements; or*
- *It can be demonstrated that the loss resulting from the proposed development would be replaced by equivalent or better provision in terms of quantity and quality in a suitable location; or*
- *The development is for alternative sports and recreational provision, the needs for which clearly outweigh the loss.'*

Sport England published two approaches in 2013 for how NPPF compliant needs assessment work should be undertaken; the Assessing Needs and Opportunities Guide (ANOG) and the Playing Pitch Strategy methodology (PPS). Essentially these form the new *'how to do'* needs assessments for indoor / outdoor sport and pitch sports in England and represent Sport England's response to the NPPF. The ANOG approach has therefore been used to assess the issue of need in respect of the Stadium.

A Needs Assessment using the ANOG framework is required to consider supply and demand under the following headings:

- Quantity
- Quality
- Accessibility
- Availability

This assessment therefore looks at the supply and demand of relevant motorsports facilities in terms of *quantity, quality, access and availability*, reflecting on the evidence provided by both parties.

### **3.0 ANOG Assessment (Need)**

#### **Overview**

The Sports Needs Assessment (SNA) work undertaken as part of the applicants planning application was undertaken in retrospect, following the closure of the site and the initial planning application. Whilst not strictly correct in terms of process, (the SNA should lead any consideration of the future use of the site), this is often what occurs. Following discussions, there is no evidence of the SNA being purposely deceptive, as claimed by SCS. The work was undertaken to support a particular narrative, but here again this is not unusual.

Although the ANOG principles can be followed, undertaking SNA work for motorsports is also difficult as there are no supply and demand models, participation is also low as the sports are mainly about spectating as opposed to participation, meaning many of the parameters set out in ANOG do not directly apply.



In this context the SNA provided by the applicant was a reasonable and proportionate response. It does however fall short in certain areas and there are inaccuracies, some of which have been raised by SCS, which do impact on the findings and the narrative set out by the applicant. Furthermore, the case around alternative provision set out in the application evidence has also evolved and is now less supportive of the applicant's case. The motorsports bodies were also not consulted as part of the SNA, an important step in the ANOG process, which was an omission and would have painted a different picture in terms of needs and outcomes. The ngbs were supportive of the role of Brandon and its importance to the sport and impact of its loss.

These issues are expanded upon below under the relevant ANOG headings.

## **Supply**

### ***Quantity***

Within the SNA an audit was undertaken of alternative motorsports venues to demonstrate the quantity of provision in the catchment area of 70 miles (this is commented on further later under accessibility). Whilst a comprehensive list was drawn up of both speedway and stock car tracks it is evident that there are inaccuracies within the detail of the audit, which make the quantitative claims within the SNA less robust. The track at Stoke is now closed, further reducing the quantity of provision in the applicants catchment.

A number of the facilities listed do not provide 'like for like' opportunities for either stock car racing or speedway as claimed, which impact on the quantitative measures set out in the SNA.

As indicated however there are no real measures of quantity for motorsports so this is a difficult criteria to judge objectively. The applicant has used measures, which set out relative provision for different motorsports disciplines and compares these to regional and national averages.

We do not however feel these measures are meaningful in the context of motorsports, more importantly they are no longer accurate given the adjustments in supply, which would need to be made.

What is evident is that the number of motorsports facilities is declining nationally and therefore the quantity of provision is declining overall. Other tracks are under threat and the number of facilities nationally is therefore being reduced. The motorsports bodies are now waking up to this and resisting closures through engagement with the planning process.

Up to now the sport has dealt with any closure by moving to other tracks and reducing the number of events, adapting and consolidating, but there is a point where the reduction in the number of venues starts to materially impact on the functioning of the sport. There is a sense from the governing body consultation that this tipping point is being reached and further quantitative loss of venues could lead to a downward spiral in motorsports.

Clearly however cases need to be viewed on their individual merits and if specific venues are no-longer viable then the case to maintain them becomes less sustainable and this is a key issue in respect of the Coventry Stadium.



Looking in isolation however at the issue of 'quantity' of provision there is limited evidence that there is an existing good level of quantitative provision and alternatives, that can justify the loss of Coventry Stadium.

### **Quality**

The quality of the track on its closure in 2016 is an area of disagreement between the parties. Both sides dispute the condition of the facilities and reasoning, before the chain of events, which saw the Stadium dismantled and further damaged as a result of vandalism. This report does not attempt to disentangle these events.

The only clear thing appears to be that the stadium was evidently *fit for purpose* operationally at the point of its closure before part of the facilities were dismantled and then further damaged following closure as meetings were being held. Furthermore, whilst investment would have been required there is no evidence that this was *over and above* the level expected of a venue of its age and type and nothing that would have pre-empted its closure on quality grounds.

Aegis Construction Consultancy undertook a condition survey when the Stadium closed on behalf of the new owners and applicant, it noted the site being in a generally poor state of repair, however at the point of closure the issues majored on internal and external finishes and potential regulatory upgrades, but no significant *showstoppers*.

In the context of motorsport stadiums Brandon could be reasonably considered to be a *quality* venue (in the context of motorsports), with no major investment required, which might threaten its operation. It was one of 13 UK venues accredited to host BriSCA F1 racing, the highest level of the domestic sport up to its closure.

Furthermore, Brandon undoubtedly had special significance and a long-history as a venue in terms of major event hosting, it is often termed the Wembley of motorsport and its long history of major events justifies this; from hosting major Grand Prix events, FIM accreditation and over 20 world championships, including the 2016 Stock Car World Championships. This was held at Skegness in 2018 but with a much-reduced spectator attendance. The opening of Belle Vue stadium has taken the major speedway events to Manchester, although Brandon remained a significant Speedway venue up to its closure. There are major event alternatives, but Brandon was unquestionably still a significant motorsport venue up to its demise and was more than just a local track.

Brandon clearly did have significance in motorsports and was a *quality* stadium (*in the context of and in relation to the motorsport offer, shale surface, capacity, ancillary facilities etc*) and in terms of the scale of facilities, more so than some of the alternative venues and other venues currently under threat or being lost, which are essentially local tracks.

Given Brandon's specification and scale, the alternatives put forward in the SNA are not '*fit for purpose*' and fall significantly short of providing the same qualitative experience as delivered at Brandon for motorsports. Using the analogy of sports halls some of the suggested alternative venues are akin to replacing a regionally significant 8-court sports hall with a small 3-court hall, where the range and scale of activities cannot be replicated.

There were therefore no clear qualitative drivers for closing the Stadium, before the chain of events, which precipitated its sale and spiral into its current state. In the context of motorsports facilities, Brandon was not in such a poor quality that would inevitably have led to its demise without significant investment. It was *fit for purpose* and was clearly a significant venue in the sport. Since its closure the Stadium has however deteriorated, and this is discussed under viability.

### **Accessibility**

There are no recognised catchments for motorsports facilities. To provide an illustration swimming pool and sports hall catchments are considered to be 15-minutes, where circa 75% of users are generally drawn from. The primary catchment area for a golf course is considered to be a 20-minute drive time, normally over half of a-clubs regular golfers live within this drive time. The SNA looked at alternative provision within a 70-mile radius, which equates to a significant drivetime catchment of circa 90 minutes. Clearly motorsports provision represents specialist facilities, however it is arguable whether users; participants but more importantly spectators would travel these distances to access stock car or speedway opportunities. The core of most sporting activity and spectating is drawn locally, as evidenced by recent football groundshares, which have proven problematic.

The SNA concluded that there was a choice of alternative provision within the catchment area. To illustrate, around the time of the SNA Speedway had moved to Leicester and a number of the stock car meetings moved to a combination of Stoke, Sheffield and Kings Lynn. Other alternatives were also set out. Stoke is over 50 miles away and Leicester over 20 miles away, both of these venues have not provided long-term re-location solutions. Stoke is now closed. This is discussed in more detail under the issue of availability.

In terms of other accessible venues put forward in the SNA it is evident that on further scrutiny, these are very different from Brandon in terms of quality and offer, other venues do exist and may have (limited, see later) availability but they are not comparable:

- Stoke – very basic offering (now closed)
- Perry Bar, Birmingham – not suitable for stock car racing
- Beaumont Park, Leicester – not suitable for stock car racing, no availability for Speedway
- Birmingham Wheels Park – not suitable for speedway, under threat
- Brafield – very basic offering
- Hednesford Hills, Cannock – restricted race times
- Trent Raceway – dirt track, restricted use under the 14-day rule

Some do not offer provision for both sports and others have planning restrictions; Hednesford Hill Raceway, Cannock and Trent Raceway, Burton-on-Trent, which restrict usage. The number of genuinely accessible facilities is therefore much reduced from the case set out in the SNA.

Furthermore, the importance of Coventry Stadium as a motorsport venue has been set out, part of this (*alongside the qualitative issues set out*), was due to its location in a central and accessible part of the country.

For the sport of motor sport Brandon Stadium is well located. On further analysis there are less accessible venues than set out in the SNA. The nearest accessible stock car venue put forward was Stoke, but this is not comparable, is well over 50 miles away and far inferior to the Coventry Stadium offer. Stoke is now closed. Speedway did move to Leicester, which is circa 20 miles away but again did not provide the same opportunities and the use of this has now ceased.



So whilst there are no accessibility standards for motorsports, the closure of Coventry Stadium does leave a gap in the West Midlands, since the SNA was developed in 2017, a potential alternative for stox, Wheels Sports Park in Birmingham is also threatened with closure (*BriSCA note this is being put forward as part of a wider Area Action Plan being promoted by Birmingham City Council*).

Again, despite there being no agreed accessibility catchments it is difficult to argue that reduced provision located significant distances away and with a much-reduced offer is acceptable in terms of access and passing the ANOG accessibility test.

### **Availability**

Re-locating provision and activities is a key tenant of an assessment of need and there being suitable alternatives available, with capacity to deliver the same or very similar offering can often provide the solution and help to make the case for a closure. Conversely the impacts of not providing re-location options can mean closures cannot be justified on the basis of NPPF Paragraph 97 a).

The re-location of Coventry Bees to Leicester Speedway was a significant part of the applicants SNA case and was put forward to demonstrate there were suitable available provision to justify the loss of Brandon. The reality was that the re-location was never *like-for-like*, the Coventry team that transferred did so to compete in the bottom division from the premier league (top division), which was a very different offering and team. It was also only ever done on a short-term basis, with no long-term commitment put in place. The re-location did not work, lasting only a short time and Coventry Bees no longer race.

There were a number of reasons why the re-location did not work. The applicant would argue it was due to viability. As discussed, distance was a factor with fans unwilling to travel, this was coupled with the standard of the offer and the very different team being presented. Operating two different teams at one venue is also not straightforward. Leicester Speedway team already raced at Beaumont Park. In programming terms, it is achievable but there are impacts as team identities can become blurred, with impacts on the tracks core team and business. Long-term re-location has therefore not occurred and is difficult. Coventry Bees have now ceased racing and Leicester are running two teams from Beaumont Park for the 2019 season, meaning there is no longer any availability. The Leicester track schedule is now made up of two Leicester teams with no availability for another team to use the track.

Stock car racing has also not successfully re-located. The immediate transfer of four events to Stoke has ceased, with the operator pulling the plug on these. The distance and quality of Stoke Stadium never provided a *like for like* re-location and the track is now closed.

Leicester was put forward as an alternative venue at the time of the SNA work for Speedway. This was not like for like replacement and has not worked as an alternative. As set out, other tracks at Burton and Cannock have planning restrictions in terms of the number of events they can hold therefore reducing *availability*. Others do not deliver either Speedway or Stox. Re-location opportunities are therefore not comparable or indeed deliverable.

The former Coventry F1 stock events have now been taken off the calendar, a reduction in 7 events and the speedway no longer operates, reducing the number of teams and competition.



In terms of the overall impacts of this, the ngbs suggest that some drivers have stopped competing and taken early retirement but would potentially re-start if provision was provided. With the loss of venues interest for the sport dwindles and drops off, particularly if it cannot be accessed locally. It is however also acknowledged that the sport does evolve in-line with supply. For example, the 7 BriSCA events were not re-allocated as the sport chose to run with a less congested fixture list, so loss of events is absorbed by the sport.

So, lack of availability has had a clear impact in terms of speedway ending and stock car activity being curtailed. There is and has not been adequate availability of suitable alternative provision and re-location opportunities to allow the sports to continue.

### **Demand**

There therefore have clearly been impacts of the closure of Coventry Stadium on the relevant sports and activities but these have to be contextualised and looked at against the demand for the sports concerned and the wider appeal and ultimately balanced against wider planning concerns.

In terms of motorsports there is little dispute that they are minority sports. Sport England data suggests that motorsport participation (*including speedway, motor cross and go karting*) has been in decline nationally and in 2016 adult participation in motorsport had fallen to 0.06% of the population participating at least once-a-week. Speedway popularity and spectator numbers is very much down from its heydays of yesteryear, where 2-3,000 would regularly attend major fixtures, although spectator numbers are very often linked to success and can fluctuate significantly.

The ngbs feel the sports are stable and consolidating, although loss of facilities and closures inevitably hamper any prospect of growth.

In terms of Coventry Stadium record of events and attendances are not exact but the experience would appear to mirror the national trends. The number of events has fluctuated with the number of teams competing in that season and spectator numbers have peaked and fallen in line with the relative success of the team.

The broad programme at the end of the final season at Brandon consisted of 10 BriSCA F1 events with around 60 cars competing. In terms of speedway this would depend on the number of teams in the elite league and the cup success but in a good season this would be around 18 home fixtures per season and around 14 if less successful. There are 7 riders in a speedway team, of which the largest percentage would be foreign riders, who will race for teams across Europe.

So, in total Brandon would host around 25-30 events days split between speedway and stock cars. There may be commercial one-off events on top of this.

There is therefore no long-term continual declining trend of activity equally it cannot be argued that the sport is in rude health. The ngbs perhaps capture the state of play in their comments re stabilisation.

The demand and participation drivers for investing in and retaining motor sports from a health and physical activity perspective are therefore potentially limited, in terms of wider social and cultural well-being there is perhaps more of a case.



Teams and events have been lost with the closure of Coventry Stadium motorsports are a minority sport in terms of participation, who's impact on health and physical activity is limited and less universal than other activities. The sport does adapt and evolves and has done in the case of Coventry Stadium. Locally the loss is more keenly felt by those with a passion and invested in Brandon Stadium.

This is not to suggest that the provision is not important and should not be retained, or that closure will not have an impact. There are clear social benefits for those attending events. The value of any loss is ultimately a judgement call and the Council may decide that the level of impacts balanced against the wider benefits of any development scheme make other considerations e.g. ANOG less significant.

### Summary

In planning policy terms and judging against the ANOG criteria of *quantity, quality, accessibility and availability* we are not convinced that the case has been made that Coventry Stadium is *surplus to requirements* as argued by the applicant.

Looking at the ANOG criteria we conclude:

- There is limited evidence that there is an existing level of *quantitative* provision that can justify the loss of Coventry Stadium.
- There were no clear *qualitative* drivers for closing the Stadium, before the chain of events, which precipitated its current state. In the context of motorsports facilities, Brandon was not in such a poor quality that would inevitably have led to its demise without significant investment. It was *fit for purpose* and was clearly a significant venue in the sport.
- It is difficult to argue that reduced provision located significant distances away and with a much-reduced offer is acceptable in terms of access and passing the ANOG *accessibility* test.
- Lack of availability has had a clear impact in terms of speedway ending and stock activity being curtailed. There is and has not been adequate *availability* of suitable alternative provision and re-location opportunities to allow the sports to continue.

This is always a difficult case to make and the SNA attempts to set out the case. What is evident is that Coventry Stadium holds a special significance in motorsport, which makes the tests even harder and is perhaps something, which is overlooked in the SNA. The re-location case central to the applicants SNA is also now no longer valid. Stoke has now closed.

It is therefore difficult to argue that Coventry Stadium is *surplus*, with no alternatives put forward. Teams and events have been lost with the closure of Coventry Stadium motorsports are a minority sport in terms of participation, who's impact on health and physical activity is limited and less universal than other activities. The sport does adapt and evolves and has done in the case of Coventry Stadium.

This is not to suggest that the provision is not important and should not be retained, or that closure will not have an impact. The value of the loss of events set out is ultimately a judgement call.

The value placed on this will however need to be balanced against the loss of the motor sports provision. There will need to be a balanced judgement made on what is important and why based on all aspects of the planning application.

#### **4.0 Viability**

The question of viability of the former Coventry Stadium is difficult to establish.

The applicant team produced a Financial Assessment in November 2017, which sought to piece together the various strands of the financial jigsaw. The assessment was extremely thorough and put together the available information clearly and coherently.

That having been said, through no fault of the applicant, clarity surrounding the operation of the Stadium and the ultimate viability is still clouded.

Crucial to this is the relationship between the various interested parties, the inter-relationship of businesses and the flow of monies and loans against the various companies involved. What remains lacking is any clear set of management accounts for the Stadium operation, separate to the company accounts, which clearly show the operational costs of the Stadium separate from any company encumbrance. This is despite significant efforts from the applicant.

Ultimately the viability of the former Coventry Stadium is enmeshed in the finances of individuals and individual companies, who are no longer available to speak with and it is unlikely that a true picture can ever be established.

The applicant claims there are numerous indicators that the Stadium was no longer viable, from the lack of any interest in the site as a going concern to the failure of operators to take up the offer of leases. SCS would claim there was always a presumption to sell the site for development and that leases were offered on terms which were unworkable and at times when potential operators were potentially more interested in opportunities afforded by development.

The current condition of the Stadium also impacts on future viability. We do not comment how the current condition was arrived at, and the precise condition, but it now clearly needs significant work.

Through further condition survey work, Aegis Construction Consultancy have estimated the cost of re-instating the Stadium at 2017 prices of £3.73m, although this would likely need to be updated to current date. SCS feel the costs would be far less, although not quantified, as they have not been able to access the site. They have worked hard to gain support from local businesses and companies to provide materials and have claim to have significant pledges of voluntary effort to return the Stadium to its former glory. Any alternative costs have however not been verified or externally scrutinised.

Given the current condition of the Stadium whatever the final capital cost, it would be costly and would question, even without the clear understanding of the exact Stadium operating costs, the viability of re-opening Coventry Stadium, with the added repayments on capital.



Re-opening the Coventry Stadium may struggle to be delivered viably in its current state and given the *ownership* would be difficult to deliver. This is different however from whether a new stadium operated under a new model could potentially be operationally viable.

## 5.0 Alternative Provision

A final aspect to be explored as set out by the Inspector is to consider *alternative provision*. The previous re-location Strategy, which sought to house Speedway at Leicester has not worked. Whether other longer-term alternatives can be found through discussions and support via the ngbs could be attempted however as set out the alternatives within a reasonable catchment are not evident. With the closure of Stoke this is even more limited. Furthermore, track sharing is also difficult for the reasons set out.

A new Stadium delivered as a planning condition unencumbered by debt could potentially be viable, particularly given the capacity of SCS to garner support. Whilst it is understood that a *campaigning group* is different to the skills required to deliver a facility, there is evident widespread support for motorsports in the area, as a legacy of Coventry Stadium and real capacity and a groundswell that could drive a replacement proposition. This is an important ingredient, which should not be underestimated.

Given this context, new models of delivery around Trusts could be explored and other partners brought in such as the GB Speedway team who have already expressed support. The relevant ngbs have indicated they are now holding the relevant licences for the former Coventry Bees and BriSCA events and would also seek to support any potential return of motorsport to the area. A two-team speedway offering and full programme of stox events could deliver a sustainable proposition.

Clearly the delivery of any new facility will not be easy but on the basis that the current Stadium cannot be deemed surplus and re-opening Brandon is unlikely to be deliverable or viable, a replacement option presents the next step, without a stalemate position being reached. This therefore needs to be explored. Consideration should be given to the learning from recent stadium openings, including Belle Vue.

Whilst venues are closing across the country these are generally where there is limited local support, proven quality and operational issues and where re-provision plans have often been put in place. The history and support behind the Coventry Stadium could suggest there may be potential to deliver an alternative. New Stadiums could potentially be viable, alongside recent closures new ones are also being built and in the pipeline in Yorkshire and Durham. There is potential learning and good practice from these.

An alternative provision Strategy would require developers to accept the principle of meeting paragraph 97 b) and all parties commit to explore this route.

## 6.0 Conclusion and Way Forward

Paragraph 97 of the NPPF, states that, existing open space, sports and recreational buildings and land, including playing fields, should not be built on unless:

- a) an assessment has been undertaken which has clearly shown the open space, buildings or land to be surplus to requirements; or*
- b) the loss resulting from the proposed development would be replaced by equivalent or better provision in terms of quantity and quality in a suitable location; or*
- c) the development is for alternative sports and recreational provision, the benefits of which clearly outweigh the loss of the current or former use.*

The applicants SNA has sought to set out the evidence against which to judge the planning application. As set out previously the current application from Brandon Estates Limited makes a case for development under paragraph 97 a) that the Stadium is '*surplus to requirements*', with no proposals for replacement or alternative provision.

Paragraph 97 of the NPPF and the recently adopted Rugby planning policy at HS4 are not cascade policies as they have the word 'or' inserted at the end of each criteria. Based on this and the review findings a summary is set out below.

### ***a) an assessment has been undertaken which has clearly shown the open space, buildings or land to be surplus to requirements***

We do not believe this test has been met sufficient for Coventry Stadium to be deemed surplus to requirements. Looking at the ANOG criteria we conclude:

- There is limited evidence that there is an existing level of *quantitative* provision that can justify the loss of Coventry Stadium.
- There were no clear *qualitative* drivers for closing the Stadium, before the chain of events, which precipitated its current state. In the context of motorsports facilities, Brandon was not in such a poor quality that would inevitably have led to its demise without significant investment. It was *fit for purpose* and was clearly a significant venue in the sport.
- It is difficult to argue that reduced provision located significant distances away and with a much-reduced offer is acceptable in terms of access and passing the ANOG *accessibility* test.
- Lack of *availability* has had a clear impact in terms of speedway ending and stock activity being curtailed. There is and has not been adequate availability of suitable alternative provision and re-location opportunities to allow the sports to continue.

Coventry Stadium holds a special significance in motorsport, which makes the tests even harder. The re-location case central to the SNA is also now no longer valid. Stoke has also now closed. It is therefore difficult to argue that Coventry Stadium is *surplus*, with no alternatives put forward.



Teams and events have been lost with the closure of Coventry Stadium motorsports are a minority sport in terms of participation, who's impact on health and physical activity is limited and less universal than other activities. The sport does adapt and evolves and has done in the case of Coventry Stadium.

This is not to suggest that the provision is not important and should not be retained, or that closure will not have an impact. The value of any loss is ultimately a judgement call.

The value placed on this will however need to be balanced against the loss of the motor sports provision. There will need to be a balanced judgement made on what is important and why based on all aspects of the planning application

With the current evidence available we do not believe there is an unequivocal case that the Coventry Stadium is *surplus to requirements*. There is therefore no clear-cut case that NPPF test a) has been met as set out by the applicant.

***b) the loss resulting from the proposed development would be replaced by equivalent or better provision in terms of quantity and quality in a suitable location***

The delivery of any replacement facility will not be easy but on the basis that the current Stadium cannot be deemed surplus and re-opening Brandon is unlikely to be deliverable or viable a replacement option presents the next step, without a stalemate position being reached.

A replacement provision Strategy would require developers to accept the principle of meeting paragraph 97 b) and all parties commit to explore this route through feasibility work.

NPPF test b) could therefore potentially be met subject to further work and discussions.

Consideration of recently opened stadiums, management models and viability should be considered.

***c) the development is for alternative sports and recreational provision, the benefits of which clearly outweigh the loss of the current or former use***

Nothing has been put forward in respect of alternative provision on-site by the applicant.

There could however be scope to put forward alternative sport and recreational provision on the site as part of the wider development. If the development on the site was for alternative sport and recreation provision, the benefits of which clearly outweigh the loss of the current former use, under criteria (c) an alternative sports provision could be considered acceptable on the site to outweigh the loss of the motorsports provision.

The Council would have to take a balanced view based on the analysis of any proposals, which might come forward.



## **Way Forward**

The Council need to consider the findings of this review in the context of the overall planning application.

The current policy position, meeting paragraph 97 a) is not supportable. Re-opening the stadium would be a significant challenge and may ultimately be undeliverable.

Paragraph 97 of the NPPF allows alternatives to be considered. The Council should seek to engage with the applicant in respect of this and the suggested strategy to seek to get their views on the alternative approaches of meeting paragraph 97 b) or c).

If the principles set out are agreed it is recommended that SCS are involved in any discussions to meet NPPF paragraph 97 b) with the applicant. Analysis of the learning from new stadium openings and their viability will be an important consideration.

The applicant may also consider c) but would need to put forward clear plans to demonstrate how alternative sport and leisure offerings on the site would deliver significant sport and physical activity benefits to outweigh the potential loss of the stadium.