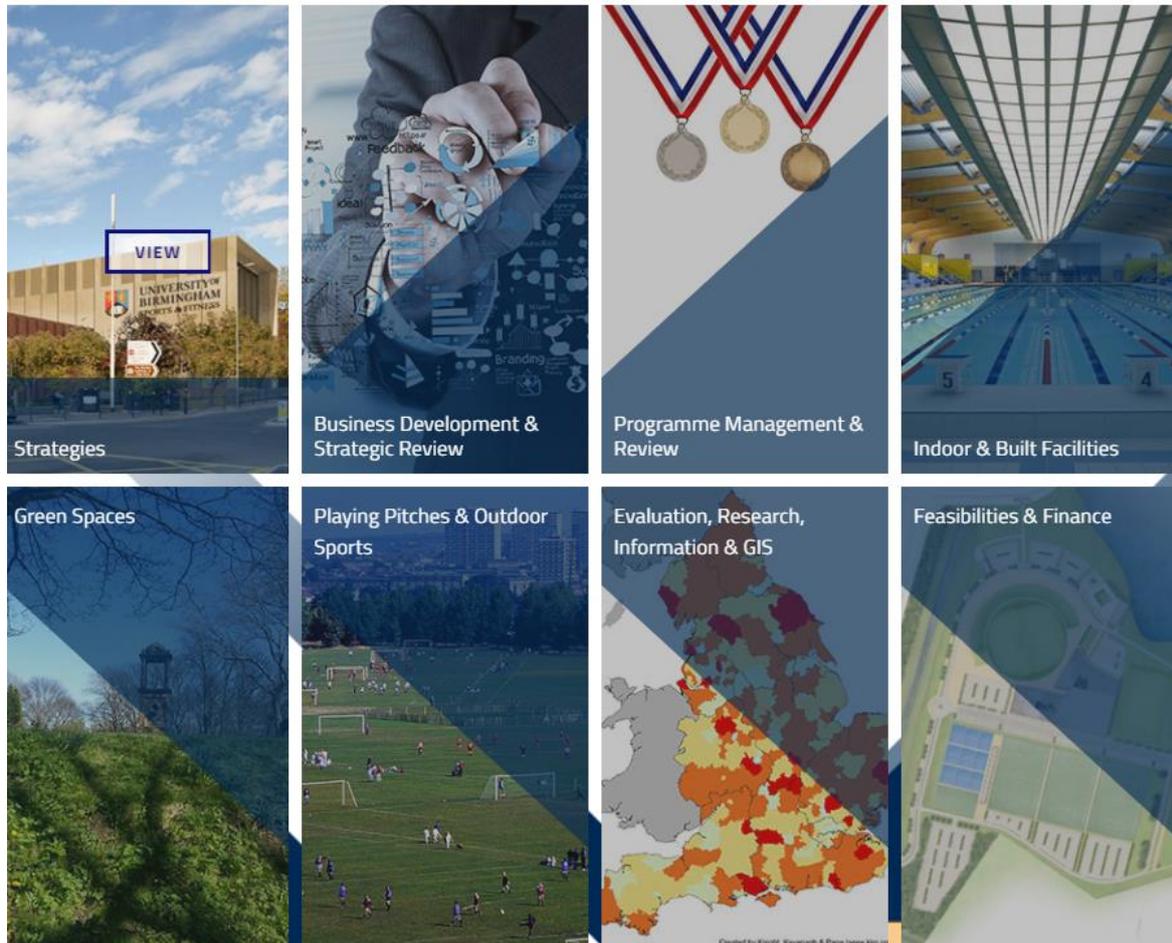


**COUNTRYWIDE PROJECT MANAGEMENT LTD
DPP UK LTD**



**COVENTRY STADIUM
SPEEDWAY VIABILITY APPRAISAL
DECEMBER 2020**

QUALITY, INTEGRITY, PROFESSIONALISM

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COVENTRY STADIUM SPEEDWAY VIABILITY APPRAISAL

CONTENTS

PART 1: INTRODUCTION.....	1
PART 2: STRATEGIC CONTEXT	3
PART 3: HISTORY OF COVENTRY STADIUM.....	7
PART 4: NATIONAL TRENDS.....	10
PART 5: ASSESSMENT OF VIABILITY	14
PART 6: CONCLUSION	16

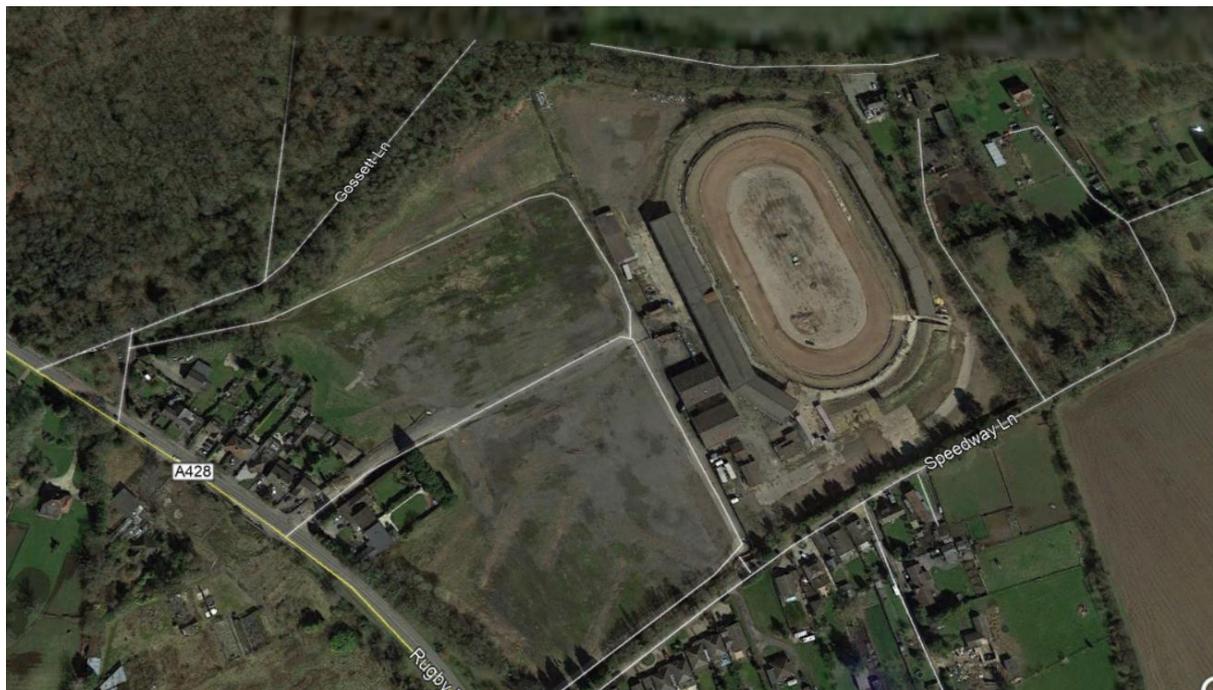
COVENTRY STADIUM SPEEDWAY VIABILITY APPRAISAL

PART 1: INTRODUCTION

This report by Knight Kavanagh & Page (KKP) relates to the potential re-development of the speedway facilities at Coventry stadium (also known as Coventry Stadium). It has been commissioned by Countrywide Project Management Ltd and DPP UK Ltd.

The site is within the Green Belt and located in the Rugby Borough Council authority area, albeit in close proximity to the boundary of Coventry City Council's administrative area. Its current status is shown in the figure below.

Figure 1.1: Aerial view of Coventry stadium



Source: Google Earth

Plans are in place for development of 137 dwellings at the site in place of the existing speedway provision, which is no longer operational. However, for a proposal resulting in the loss of an outdoor sports facility to go ahead, planning policy needs to be met as per the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). An independent review into the loss of the track was undertaken in September 2019. This concluded that the track could not, at this point, be deemed to be surplus to requirements.

This report considers the viability of re-developing or replacing the speedway track to provide appropriate mitigation, either on-site or off-site, and assesses whether or not this is a practical solution. It is being conducted concurrently with a feasibility study that is evaluating the potential to install a full size third generation artificial grass pitch (3G pitch) and associated facilities onto the site. Both are being conducted to gauge which, if either, would be the best, most realistic and viable option in terms of mitigation.

The viability appraisal is based upon:

- ◆ An assessment of the level of activity taking place at Coventry stadium prior to its closure (also taking into account the reasons for the closure).

COVENTRY STADIUM SPEEDWAY VIABILITY APPRAISAL

- ◀ A review of existing available research and reports on speedway provision including the Independent Review carried out by *wyg*.
- ◀ An analysis of the national and local 'market' for speedway and the current national position in respect of operational speedway stadia.
- ◀ An analysis of other speedway venues and their present status and viability.
- ◀ A precis of the known environmental impact of speedway provision e.g. air and noise pollution.

To inform the above, the process has incorporated consultation with operators of other speedway facilities across England. This has been done in order to ensure that the study is informed by a sound understanding of the factors required to make provision sustainable in the long-term. A focus has been placed on aspects such as facility and operational needs, existing business models, current demand and likely future trends. It has included discussion with:

- ◀ CEO - Gaming International (owner of Swindon and Poole speedway stadiums)
- ◀ Owner – Swindon Robins Speedway
- ◀ Former Chairman – British Speedway Promoters Association (*BSPA*)
- ◀ Co-ordinator - Speedway Control Board (*SCB*)

COVENTRY STADIUM SPEEDWAY VIABILITY APPRAISAL

PART 2: STRATEGIC CONTEXT

This section of the report summarises previous work undertaken with regard to Coventry stadium, It also covers national and local strategies and plans that potentially relate to the wider development of the site and the mitigation required. It helps set the scene in terms of speedway and the governance of the sport.

National and local context

National Planning Policy Framework

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) paragraph 97 states that existing open space, sports and recreational buildings and land (which incorporates facilities for speedway) 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.

Chapter 13 of the NPPF focuses on protecting Green Belt land. It notes that, once land has been defined, local planning authorities should plan positively to enhance use of the Green Belt, such as looking for opportunities to provide access; to provide opportunities for outdoor sport and recreation; to retain and enhance landscapes, visual amenity and biodiversity; or to improve damaged and derelict land.

Paragraph 143 of the NPPF states that “inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances”. Green Belt boundaries should only be altered where exceptional circumstances are fully evidenced and justified, through the preparation or updating of plans.

Paragraph 145 details that the construction of new buildings within the Green Belt should be deemed to be inappropriate. However, one of the exceptions to this is “provision of appropriate facilities for outdoor sport, outdoor recreation and for cemeteries, as long as it preserves the openness of the Green Belt”.

Chapter 15 of the NPPF deals with conserving and enhancing the natural environment. Paragraph 170 states that planning decisions should prevent “new and existing developments from contributing to, being put at unacceptable risk from, or being adversely affected by, unacceptable levels of soil, air, water or noise pollution”. It goes on to say that development should “help to improve the local environmental conditions”.

Rugby Borough Council Local Plan (2011-2031)

Policy HS4 of Rugby’s Local Plan aligns to Paragraph 97 of the NPPF, stating that no existing open space, sports and recreational buildings and land should be built on unless one of the three exceptions are met.

COVENTRY STADIUM SPEEDWAY VIABILITY APPRAISAL

It adds that planning permission will be granted for development that enhances the quality and accessibility of existing open space providing it is accessible and of high quality, and that it:

- ◀ Is appropriately maintained;
- ◀ Is secure and safe;
- ◀ Is attractive in appearance;
- ◀ Enhances the natural and cultural environment;
- ◀ Is conveniently accessed and facilitates access to other areas of open space;
- ◀ Facilitates access by a choice of transport; and
- ◀ Avoids any significant loss of amenity to residents, neighbouring uses or biodiversity.

In relation to Green Belt land, the Local Plan states that development will only be permitted where National Policy allows.

Policy HS5 of the Local Plan deals with air quality, noise and vibration. It states that development proposals should look to minimise impact on air quality, noise and pollution. Proposals for more than ten dwellings need to achieve or exceed air quality neutral standards or address the impact of poor air quality by reducing exposure and mitigating effects. Similarly, any adverse impacts of noise or vibration on existing and future occupiers and users of public space must be addressed.

Coventry stadium - Independent Review

wyg was appointed by Rugby Borough Council to undertake a review of the sports planning case in respect of Coventry stadium with a view to supporting its decision-making process. This followed submission of an outline planning application for the demolition of the speedway track to enable residential development on the site.

Supporting documents were presented, including a sports needs assessment; however, a campaign group submitted separate information to counter the evidence provided. The Planning 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 to assess the application in the context of the NPPF.

The Independent Review concluded that there is not an “unequivocal case that Coventry stadium is surplus to requirements”, despite intent of the Framptons Town Planning Consultants Sport Needs Assessment to prove this. Consequently, point A of Paragraph 97 of the NPPF, which says that “an assessment has been undertaken which has clearly shown the open space, buildings or land to be surplus to requirements”, is deemed not to have been met.

Due to the above, the report suggests that the alternatives set out by the NPPF need to be considered, with the applicant instead being recommended to explore point B of Paragraph 97, “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 point C, “the development is for alternative sports and recreational provision, the benefits of which clearly outweigh the loss of the current or former use”.

Further the above, the wyg study highlights that the question of viability of speedway operation at Coventry stadium is a difficult to interrogate and respond to.

COVENTRY STADIUM SPEEDWAY VIABILITY APPRAISAL

Save Coventry Speedway and Stox Campaign Group (SCS)

SCS is an umbrella grouping of people who wish to see the long heritage of speedway and stock car racing in Coventry continue and to be returned to Coventry stadium. SCS was consulted as part of the Independent Review and openly objected to the proposed loss and redevelopment of the Stadium. In April 2018 SCS released a planning objection on its website, stating that the objective of forming the campaign group was to “identify a clear vision, avoid duplication of effort, and co-ordinate activities to achieve that vision in a structured manner”.

Governance of Speedway and other activities

The Auto Cycle Union (ACU)

The ACU is the internationally recognised national governing body of sport (NGB) for motorcycle sport in the British Isles, covering all forms of (on and off-road) motorcycle sports including speedway. It represents licence holders, volunteer marshals, officials, clubs, and issues thousands of motorcycle sport permits annually. In the context of this study, its pertinent role is that it is “in constant contact with many Government departments to defend and develop motorcycling”.

Federation Internationale de L’Automobile (FIA)

The FIA is an international governing body for motorsport which was established in 1904. Its primary purpose is the licensing and sanctioning of a range of international motorsport events including, but not limited to, Formula One, the World Touring Car Cup and the World Rally Championships as well as the Speedway Grand Prix and Speedway of Nations. Various national federations affiliate to the FIA, including the ACU.

British Speedway Promoters Association (BSPA)

The BSPA is responsible for organising speedway fixtures and events in the United Kingdom. These include Premiership, Championship, National Development and youth leagues. The BSPA is also responsible for the promotion of FIA events staged in the UK. By way of supplementary context, each professional speedway club is managed by a promoter and these promoters are members of the BSPA. In addition, the BSPA is responsible for the overall management of the Great Britain speedway team.

Speedway Control Bureau (SCB)

The SCB is authorised by the ACU to act as the recognised NGB for speedway racing in the UK. It is financed entirely by fees generated via the issue of track licenses, rider registrations, and official’s licenses. The SCB seeks to act as the independent body to ensure that the BSPA, member tracks/venues, riders and officials all act within its rules and regulations. Its Board comprises nominated members representing the ACU and BSPA, under independent chairmanship, the role of which is currently covered by a former speedway referee.

COVENTRY STADIUM SPEEDWAY VIABILITY APPRAISAL

British Stock Car Association (BriSCA)

BriSCA Formula One is the brand name of the British Stock Car Association, the organisation responsible for the operational organisation and delivery of BriSCA Formula One Stock Car Racing in the UK. The organisation consists of six permanent promoters, one of which acts as chairman. In addition, a proportion of BriSCA members work in liaison with members of the British Stock Car Drivers Association to form the BriSCA Management Board, which acts as the NGB.

The origins of this motorsport can be traced back to 1954, with the first ever stock car race taking place at New Cross Stadium, London. All venues that stage BriSCA events are required to be licensed and meet NGB requirements. Due to the similarity of requirements, venues used are generally venues that also host speedway events.

Greyhound Board of Great Britain (GBGB)

The GBGB's role is to safeguard the integrity and future prosperity of greyhound racing in Great Britain so that it continues to be a successful, sustainable sport with welfare at its heart. It oversees 19 stadia across the Country and ensure that each race is run fairly and clearly.

Traditionally, many speedway venues have doubled up as greyhound tracks including, originally, Coventry stadium itself. However, this is becoming much less common and many such venues have closed in recent years, or remain open but without an attached speedway club. The only tracks that are still dual use are Central Park Stadium (Kent), Newcastle Stadium, Owlerton Stadium (Sheffield), Perry Barr Stadium (Birmingham) and Swindon Stadium.

Summary

Given the findings of the Independent Review into the development of Coventry stadium, it is clear that some form of mitigation is required to enable the housing proposal to go ahead on the basis that the existing provision has not been deemed to be surplus to requirements. The question therefore is whether point B of Paragraph 97 of the NPPF could be pursued i.e. via re-development of the speedway facility, or whether a different approach is needed. To inform this, consideration needs to be given to expected usage levels and physical activity benefits, as well as ultimately whether or not a replacement track would be viable and sustainable in the long-term.

When considering re-development of the speedway provision from a planning perspective, attention must also be given to the potential environmental impact it may have, especially in relation to air and noise pollution. In addition, the Green Belt status of the existing site, or any alternative site, should also be accounted for, with the openness of the space needing to be preserved. Any proposal must be delivered in a way that is complementary to the local surroundings.

Consideration also needs to be given to the governance of speedway and how the sport operates, as well as other sports and activities that have and could utilise the facility. Whilst speedway is the only Sport England recognised sport that might use the venue (it does not recognise stock cars or greyhound racing), other activities are important to supplement usage and income.

COVENTRY STADIUM SPEEDWAY VIABILITY APPRAISAL

PART 3: HISTORY OF COVENTRY STADIUM

The section of the report provides background information relating to Coventry stadium, with particular focus on past users and usage levels, where this is known.

Coventry stadium

Coventry stadium was opened in 1928 and was first used for speedway events. The original Sports Needs Assessment which was produced on behalf of Brandon Estates in 2018 provides some historical detail on the facility. The Stadium was owned and operated by the Sanderson family (as the majority owners) and Charles Ochiltree (minority shareholder), who also went on to acquire the Lythalls Lane Stadium in Coventry and the Leicester Stadium. Once these acquisitions were complete, the owners formed Midland Sports & Stadia Ltd, which operated all three. As part of this, Coventry stadium has traditionally hosted a variety of motorsports, with speedway and banger/stock car (including BriSCA F1) racing being the primary formats.

In addition to motorsport, the Stadium hosted greyhound racing meets from 1978 onwards. However, due to various factors, this was not a permanent activity and only took place intermittently from 1978-1986, then from 2004-2009 and finally from 2012-2014.

In 2003, Midland Sports & Stadia Ltd sold the Stadium to Mr Avtar Sandhu. Included in this purchase was the promotional right to hold speedway and stock car racing events at the venue.

Speedway – Coventry Bees

As abovementioned, speedway racing has taken place at Coventry stadium since 1928. The initial users were the former Coventry City speedway team, which used the facility from its opening, and only ceased operations during the Stadium's use as a workshop during World War Two.

Following the end of World War Two, the Stadium re-opened in 1948 and, at this point, the Coventry Bees Speedway Team formed, competing at the Stadium from 1948 through to its closure in 2016. The promotion of speedway at Coventry stadium and the management of Coventry Bees was undertaken by Charles Ochiltree until his death in 1998, at which point duties were passed to his son before being transferred to Mr Avtar Sandhu in 2003 following his purchase of the facility. The Coventry Bees and its promotional rights were subsequently acquired by local businessman Michael Horton in September 2011.

During the Coventry Bees tenure at Coventry stadium, the Club was extremely successful and in total won 28 championship titles. This is broken down as follows:

- ◀ Elite League Champions – 2005, 2007, 2010 (forerunner to the current Premiership)
- ◀ British League Champions - 1968, 1978, 1979, 1987, 1988 (Elite League forerunner)
- ◀ Elite League Knockout Cup Winners - 2006, 2007
- ◀ British League Knockout Cup Winners – 1967
- ◀ National League Division Two Champions – 1953
- ◀ League Cup - 1981, 1985, 1987
- ◀ Elite League Pairs Championship - 2008, 2010
- ◀ Midland Cup - 1952, 1960, 1966, 1969, 1971, 1976, 1977, 1978, 1979, 1981, 1982

COVENTRY STADIUM SPEEDWAY VIABILITY APPRAISAL

For the majority of the Club's history, it has operated with one adult team, although this was complemented by the addition of Coventry Storm from 2014 onwards. Coventry Storm acted as a feeder team for Coventry Bees and competed in the National Development League.

In respect of specific activity at Coventry stadium prior to its closure, desktop analysis of speedway fixtures at the site is detailed in the table below. As is evident, the number of fixtures for Coventry Bees reduced from a maximum figure of 33 in 2000 to a low of 19 in 2013, although the number of fixtures at the site then increased to 44 in 2014 due to supplementary Coventry Storm fixtures being added. It fell to 36 in 2015 before again rising, slightly, to 37 in 2016.

Table 3.1: Coventry stadium speedway fixtures (2000-2016)

Year	Number of Coventry Bees fixtures	Number of Coventry Storm fixtures
2000	33	-
2001	25	-
2002	28	-
2003	25	-
2004	27	-
2005	27	-
2006	32	-
2007	32	-
2008	30	-
2009	29	-
2010	27	-
2011	22	-
2012	27	-
2013	19	-
2014	26	18
2015	22	14
2016	21	16

The source of the fixture data is the Coventry Bees website; further analysis is detailed in Part 5 of this report.

Following closure of Coventry stadium, Coventry Bees entered into a groundshare agreement with Leicester Lions at Beaumont Park Stadium. However, due to capacity issues, it was not allowed to participate in the Premiership due to being unable to satisfy the BSPA that it could fulfil all its fixtures.

In 2018, the Club reformed to compete in the National League, with fixtures again being scheduled at Beaumont Park Stadium. This, however, lasted just one season as Leicester's promotion then decided to run its own National League team at Coventry Bees' expense. As such, Coventry Bees has not participated since and is now considered homeless (if not defunct).

COVENTRY STADIUM SPEEDWAY VIABILITY APPRAISAL

Coventry Stox (BriSCA racing)

BriSCA F1 racing began at Coventry stadium in 1958 and ran on the first Saturday of every month from April until November before ending with closure in 2016. In 1960, the BriSCA F1 World Championship was first held at the Stadium and since then it has hosted this as well as numerous other championship events:

- ◀ World Championship (1960, 1964, 1968, 1971, 1974, 1977, 1980, 1983, 1986, 1989, 1993, 1996, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2006, 2010, 2014)
- ◀ British Championship (1961, 1965, 1969, 1992, 1995, 1996, 1998, 1999, 2001, 2002, 2008, 2012)
- ◀ Grand National Championship (1973, 1998, 2006, 2011)
- ◀ Trust Fund (1981, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011)
- ◀ World of Shale Championship (2011, 2012, 2013)

Similar to the speedway operation, promotion of BriSCA F1 racing was historically undertaken by the Ochiltree family until the sale of the Stadium and promotional rights in 2003. It was then promoted by Mr Avtar Sandhu, under the name Coventry Stox, via a lease granted to Coventry Racing Club Ltd, until the end of the 2016 racing season.

There is limited data available on the number of stock car events held at the Stadium prior to 2010. In that year, 19 events were staged, whilst only nine were held in 2016, suggesting a significant reduction over the time period.

Greyhound Racing

The first greyhound racing meet at Coventry stadium took place in 1978. It was then intermittent, with regular meets taking place between 1978-1986, 2004-2009 and finally from 2012-2014, but little being scheduled in years outside of these periods. Finally, the stadium had its license revoked by the Greyhound Board of Great Britain in February 2014 due to it incurring significant financial losses over consecutive years.

The meets at the stadium were organised by Coventry Dogs Ltd, which was dissolved in December 2015. It is understood that it arranged independent events following the loss of its licence in 2014, although further information relating to this is unavailable.

COVENTRY STADIUM SPEEDWAY VIABILITY APPRAISAL

PART 4: NATIONAL TRENDS

In the first instance, it should be noted that up to date information relating to speedway events and attendances for either domestic or international fixtures/events is difficult to obtain on a reliable and consistent basis. No figures are published by the ACU, BSPA, and SCB. As such, it is accepted that in preparing this report we are not able to provide a full picture in terms of trends. The primary purpose has been to analyse the information that is known and to use this wherever possible, to make realistic, appropriate but caveated statements and assumptions.

Some national trends were presented as part of the consultation for the redevelopment of Essex Arena in Thurrock (application reference 18/01671/FUL). At this site, plans are in place for 2,500 homes to be developed on a wider parcel of land and for the former speedway stadium to be demolished, with final planning permission currently pending. Mitigation has been offered in the form of alternative sports and recreational provision, with proposals including the creation of a lido, mountain bike routes and a BMX pump track.

The trends presented which are relevant to this report are as follows:

- ◀ Motorsports participation including speedway, go karting and moto-cross has been in decline nationally and in 2016 adult participation had fallen to 0.06% of the population participating at least once a week; this is a reduction from 0.10% of the population in 2008.
- ◀ Speedway has been in historic decline as a spectator sport. This is exemplified by the fact that television audiences have declined by 77% over a 10-year period.
- ◀ It does not attract high levels of commercial sponsorship compared to other sports. This has contributed to facilities at speedway tracks being unable to secure the investment required to modernise to attract new, and retain existing, audiences.
- ◀ The sport has struggled to adapt to attract new participants and spectators while others have successfully drawn in new audiences. Speedway is an adult male dominated sport in terms of both riders and spectators.
- ◀ Most speedway clubs now struggle to run training schools or junior development programmes that would, were they operational, assist in developing the sport.
- ◀ The sport only has a small number of riders who are transient in terms of the clubs for which they ride and do not usually have an association with the local area in which clubs are based.

Further to the above, a *Needs Assessment for the Essex Arena Development* was produced by *wyg*. This concludes that the venue is not a viable operation due to declining interest in speedway, stating that the alternative provision proposed “will far outweigh” the benefit of the current motorsport provision. Over the period 2008-2017, average attendance for fixtures declined by 59% from an average of c.860 to an average of c.340.

It is generally agreed that the high point for speedway venues was after the second world war and then again in the 1960s. In both periods, crowds were big and even Wembley Stadium supported a team. During that period, tracks flourished, and young home-grown riders dominated the sport. Now, promoters run the clubs and the sport, and the lack of long-term planning and thinking is resulting in a day-to-day struggle for teams to stay afloat. A number of speedway teams are currently up for sale or seeking alternative owners, whilst there are also plans within the sport to merge the top two leagues and reduce the total number of teams in an attempt to provide a more sustainable future.

COVENTRY STADIUM SPEEDWAY VIABILITY APPRAISAL

It can be argued that speedway has failed to reinvent itself and adapt to the 21st century. Other sports have engineered a shift to provide greater entertainment value with a focus on attracting new audiences and enhancing the spectator experience. This often takes the form of adding production value to fixtures and trying to make the sport more interactive and engaging for a wider range of spectators. There is no evidence of this happening in speedway; although there are no available statistics on age demographics of fans in the sport, the primary consumer is thought to comprise predominantly of older males.

Speedway also has a diminished position in the media, despite previous Sky TV coverage. Due to this, the sport does not attract high levels of commercial sponsorship relative to those achieved by many other sports. This vital revenue stream is key to building sustainability. This position gives speedway limited revenue to invest in new and improved facilities, and when coupled with decreasing gate receipts, barely provides sufficient income to break even and buck the trend of speedway stadia closing. These two factors mean that the sport is struggling for sustainability and is clearly in a state of retraction, team sales and closures.

In 2017, Sky Sports took the decision to stop broadcasting live speedway fixtures after being the home for UK speedway broadcasting for over 20 years and despite its contract having two years left to run. This was due to a substantial decline in viewership, with average numbers reducing from 145,550 in 2008 to just 34,000 in 2017.

Table 4.1: UK Average Speedway TV viewers

Year	Average TV viewers per event
2008	145,550
2009	106,944
2010	74,733
2011	80,611
2012	71,809
2013	57,750
2014	67,260
2015	70,822
2016	67,181
2017	34,000

Coverage was picked up by BT Sport, although the audience viewer base subsequently declined by a further 50%. As of 2020, BT Sport primarily broadcasts International FIM events including the Grand Prix series and Speedway of Nations, with BSPA fixtures (UK Premier League) instead broadcast by Eurosport.

Added to this, the quality of speedway stadia in the UK is generally considered to be poor, with the possible exception of the National Speedway Stadium in Manchester which received significant investment from Manchester City Council in 2016. The challenges and general decline of speedway in the UK has led to a number of stadia closures, with the primary drivers being unsustainable revenue streams due to declining attendances and fewer broadcasting deals.

Traditionally, speedway is working-class entertainment. As a result, clubs keep the price point low in order not to alienate its core market. However, at the same time, the costs of running a club continue to increase, most notably in relation to rider's wages. This creates a highly challenging environment for clubs to survive commercially.

COVENTRY STADIUM SPEEDWAY VIABILITY APPRAISAL

Analysis of BSPA fixture data clearly shows that participation in the sport is in decline; the primary factor in the high number of clubs that are folding and/or stadiums closing. From a high of 43 teams participating in 2006, there are now just 26; there has been a particularly sharp year-on-year decline from 2016 onwards.

Table 4.2: – Number of Speedway teams competing in BSPA leagues

Year	SGB Premiership ¹	SGB Championship ²	National Development League	Total
2005	10	15	-	25
2006	11	14	18	43
2007	10	10	10	30
2008	9	16	8	33
2009	9	14	10	33
2010	9	14	10	33
2011	10	10	10	30
2012	10	13	8	31
2013	10	13	8	31
2014	9	13	9	31
2015	8	13	10	31
2016	8	13	12	33
2017	8	10	11	29
2018	7	11	10	28
2019	7	11	8	26

In total, there has been a 40% contraction in teams when compared to the 2007 season and a 21% decline from the 2016 season. A total of 14 speedway teams have ceased operations since 2005, as evidenced in the table below.

Table 4.3: Defunct Speedway teams

Team	Folded (year)
Exeter Falcons	2005
Hull Vikings	2005
Wimbledon Dons	2005
Oxford Cheetahs	2007
Boston Barracudas	2008
Reading Bulldogs	2008
Weymouth Wildcats	2010
Hackney Hawks	2011
Newport Wasps	2011
Coventry Bees	2018
Lakeside Hammers	2018
Rye House Rockets	2018
Workington Comments	2019
Stoke Potters	2019

¹ SGB Premiership was previously branded as 'Elite League' from 2005-2016

² SGB Championship was previously branded as 'Premiership' from 2005-2016

COVENTRY STADIUM SPEEDWAY VIABILITY APPRAISAL

In March 2019, The Guardian published an article focusing on the challenges faced by speedway, 'Out of time and on the skids: speedway's struggle for survival'. This provides some insight into the demise of Workington Comets in particular, stating that the Club announced it was pulling out of the sport despite winning three trophies the prior year. This was a result of it "losing money every year and the sporting success coming at a huge financial cost".

Speedway participation is transient. Most riders participate in at least two, sometimes three, and occasionally four European leagues at one time, meaning there is little club loyalty among riders. They can easily switch clubs or may be dropped without notice if they suffer an injury or have a poor run of form. In that sense, it can be argued that speedway is not really a true 'team' sport, but rather that the 'teams' consist of individuals who also race for other 'teams' across Europe.

Clubs would ideally have a youth policy and develop their own riders, putting them on contracts, which would encourage trust and loyalty on both sides; however, for a variety of reasons, they now rarely run training schools or junior development programmes. Finance is a crucial factor, but this is also affected by reliance on hired stadia not enabling clubs to access tracks for practice outside of race days.

The picture is similar for participation in stock car racing; the number of events is declining as the number of available speedway venues reduce. Based on the BriSCA fixture lists, 12 venues ran a total of 43 BriSCA F1 events in 2019, as detailed in Table 4.4 below. There is no data available for the 2020 season as fixtures were restricted due to the Covid-19 Pandemic.

Table 4.4: Venues for BriSCA F1 events in 2019

Venue	Number of BriSCA fixtures
Kings Lynn	7
Belle Vue	6
Stoke ³	2
Skegness	7
Sheffield	3
Mildenhall	1
Northampton	8
Birmingham	3
Ipswich	1
Hednesford	2
Buxton	2
Birmingham	1

Similarly, as noted earlier, greyhound racing is also seemingly in decline, with, as mentioned previously, only five speedway venues now doubling up. At present, just 19 active facilities host greyhound racing, despite there having been over 100 operating in the 1950's, 40+ at the start of the 1990's and a total of 298 sites that, at one point, have accommodated the sport. Attendances are also reportedly in decline, as is gambling on the sport, which is what ultimately provides its financial footing.

³ The Stadium at Stoke closed at the end of the 2019 season and is no longer functioning as a facility.
December 2020 Knight Kavanagh & Page 13

COVENTRY STADIUM SPEEDWAY VIABILITY APPRAISAL

PART 5: ASSESSMENT OF VIABILITY

The Independent Review into Coventry stadium identifies that the viability of the facility was difficult to establish. A financial assessment was produced by Rugby Borough Council in November 2017 seeking to piece together the various strands of the financial jigsaw; however, it is concluded that clarity surrounding the commercial operation is still limited. Ultimately, the viability of the previous Coventry stadium offer is entangled in the finances of individuals and individual companies who are no longer available to speak to or that are unwilling to disclose information, meaning that it is unlikely that a true picture can ever be fully established.

Based on the above, this report does not look to determine whether the now closed speedway track at Coventry stadium was a viable enterprise, but rather looks to evidence whether a re-developed facility could be sustainable. This takes into account the previous offer but is predominantly informed by consideration of the aforementioned sporting trends and analysis of other providers nationally.

As a starting point, it is reported in the Independent Review that, through condition survey work, the estimated cost of re-instating the Stadium (at 2017 prices) is £3.73 million due to the significant quality issues that have been exacerbated through a lack of maintenance since closure. This substantial amount is considered to be the minimum that any future operator would have to put forward in order for appropriate licences to be accredited. This said, it should also be noted that the SCS believes that the cost would be substantially lower, citing support from local businesses and pledges from volunteers. Nevertheless, it is reported that the group has not had access to the site, meaning any alternative cost estimate cannot be scrutinised or verified.

In the year prior to the closure of Coventry stadium, 37 speedway fixtures were held in addition to nine stock car fixtures. When put to providers of other facilities, this is deemed to be nowhere near sufficient for a viable operation, their contention being that significantly more meetings are required. As such, the long-term viability of redeveloping the track must be questioned, especially when considering that participation would at first likely be below pre-closure levels. Coventry Bees previously had two teams, whilst it would be more likely to have just one team were it to be re-established; at least initially. There is also no guarantee that stock car racing would return to the site.

Furthermore, the viability of a speedway operation has been heavily linked to commercial income for many years. This has evidently declined significantly in recent years exacerbated by the loss of the Sky TV deal and it shows no signs of improving for the foreseeable future. This decline has meant that providers are now more reliant on income from spectator attendance and secondary spend, although the number of spectators has also been reducing across the Country, as evidenced at the Essex Arena, which was the home of a team (Lakeside Hammers) competing in the same league as Coventry Bees. When engaging with consultees for this report, it was stated that revenue produced from attendance at home fixtures can now equate to up to 50% of all revenue for speedway operations.

National Speedway Stadium – Manchester

The Independent Review makes it clear that consideration of recently opened stadiums, management models and viability should be considered. The only relevant example of a recently opened stadium is the National Speedway Stadium in Manchester following the site's redevelopment in 2016 on the back of a £7 million capital investment from Manchester City Council.

COVENTRY STADIUM SPEEDWAY VIABILITY APPRAISAL

After opening, it was reported that the site's leaseholders have failed to meet important requirements tied to its agreement, including the payment of any rent to the Council. This led to Belle Vue Speedway 2017 Ltd taking over the lease; however, a report tabled to councillors shows that it is yet to make a profit and may not do so for the foreseeable future.

The National Speedway Stadium is part of a wider development which includes a leisure centre and 3G pitch (located in the centre of the speedway track). This in theory makes it more likely to be a viable concern when compared to a standalone speedway facility, given that the additional facilities can supplement income. As such, its lack of profitability provides a prominent example of the financial issues associated with speedway provision.

Covid-19

Whilst the impact of fixture/event cancellations due to the Covid-19 pandemic are yet to be fully seen, it is suggested that speedway and other sports that can utilise speedway venues have been and will be further damaged in the resulting economic fallout. It is widely understood that venues operate on the limits of commercial viability and were not prepared for what has happened. As such, re-developing a speedway facility in the current climate could be accompanied by significant added risk, although demand could also be higher from fans and participants if other facilities are lost as there will be fewer clubs as a result.

Other considerations

This report set out to assess the environmental impact that coincides with an operational speedway facility, particularly in terms of air and noise pollution. However, very little information has been unearthed, at least in formal terms, with evidence with regard to any issues essentially available in anecdotal form at present. In that regard, consultation with the operator of the Swindon and Poole speedway facilities identifies that it is a growing concern and is becoming more and more of an issue with residents and campaign groups.

COVENTRY STADIUM SPEEDWAY VIABILITY APPRAISAL

PART 6: CONCLUSION

Although detailed information in terms of the previous commercial operation at Coventry stadium is not available, it is clear from the national picture that speedway facilities are struggling and in a state of decline. There is no evidence to suggest that this situation will change in the foreseeable future. As such, re-developing a track at this moment in time would not be recommended, as evidenced by the issues presently faced at the purpose built National Speedway Stadium.

For provision to be sustainable, it is considered that both usage and attendance needs to be maximised. This is considered likely to be very difficult to achieve at Coventry stadium given that more established venues and clubs are struggling. Furthermore, with commercial revenue continuing to decrease, even the more popular facilities are facing an uncertain future, especially in the wake of Covid-19.

In addition, the costs reportedly required to re-open the venue are unlikely to be deliverable and the same logic applies to replacement provision at an alternative site. It is therefore considered that the re-development of Coventry stadium is not a viable option, unless evidence can be provided to show that demand exists for sufficient events at the site, and that attendance at such events will provide adequate income.

Motorsports are a minority sport in terms of participation and the impact on health and physical activity is limited and less far reaching than other activities. As such, with the provision not considered to be viable, an alternative sports and recreational provision development is, almost certainly, a more realistic option.