

LUTON LOCAL PLAN (2011-31)

PUBLIC EXAMINATION – STAGE ONE – 19 July 2016

Representation by Luton Town Football Club - Position Statement by Luton Borough Council

The issue:

The Inspector has asked the Council to make a brief statement to confirm its position in relation to Luton Town Football Club (LTFC) proposals followed by a short discussion of any procedural implications for the examination.

The Luton Local Plan 2011-31 includes a proposal (Policy LP5) for a new football stadium at Stockwood Park close to J10 of the M1. LTFC have submitted representations to the local plan, and are concurrently preparing two planning applications comprising (1) a new football stadium and other uses on Power Court in the town centre and (2) proposals at Stockwood Park (Newlands Park) for large-scale out-of-town retail and leisure uses as well as office space and a hotel. LTFC suggest the Stockwood Park proposals are necessary and linked to the delivery of the town centre-based stadium.

1. Luton Town Football Club

LTFC was established in 1885 and since the 1905-06 season has occupied its current Kenilworth Road Stadium in the Bury Park area of Luton. The stadium has a capacity of c10,400.

The Club's intention to move to a new stadium was first stated in 1955. The search has taken many twists and turns over the years including a suggestion of a move to Milton Keynes in the 1980's, a move very unpopular with fans. During the 1990s, under the chairmanship of David Kohler, a "Kohlerdome" was proposed on the land at the site now known as Stockwood Park. This would have seen a retractable roof and a pitch placed on a "hovercraft" that could have been moved in and out of the stadium on match days. After a public inquiry in 1996, outline consent for the plan was given, contingent on widening of the adjacent M1 motorway. In 1997, however, the new government confirmed that it would not be widening the M1, and consent for the stadium was withdrawn.

In 2007, the club's then-owners proposed to relocate to a site near Junction 12 of the M1 motorway, close to Toddington but this proposal was withdrawn shortly after.

The Kenilworth Road Stadium was sold to the Council in 1989 and has been leased back at a peppercorn rent ever since. In 2012 the Club entered into talks with the Council with a view to buy back the existing stadium (which is allocated in the extant adopted Local Plan for housing and open space). Since then, however, the interest has shifted back to relocation, initially to Stockwood Park as per the adopted local plan and more latterly in favour of a move into a stadium on the Power Court site in Luton town centre.

This brief history is important because it shows the commitment and strong desire for success that the Council has towards the Club including making provision for a new stadium on one of its

strategic allocations in an adopted local plan on a site which, subject to conditions on motorway capacity, had initially received ministerial approval. It also demonstrates, however, that LTFC's search for a new site has been a very long process and it would be very unfortunate if the latest chapter in this matter led to a significant delay to progressing the local plan and all that this would entail for constraining growth and investment across the town.

2. Luton Local Plan 2001-11

The Luton Local Plan 2001-11 was adopted in 2006. Policy SA1 covers the Stockwood area which supports the provision of a new stadium for LTFC as well as other sports facilities for which there is an identified need. The proposals were subject to M1 improvements - which have taken place through a section of SMART running from Junction 10 to 13 and widening from Junction 6 to Junction 10- as well as public transport services improvements including park and ride. Sub para (viii) indicates that "enabling development will not be to a scale that exceeds that of the related sports facilities, or adversely affects the regeneration of the central area."

The Luton Local Plan 2001-11 remains the extant development plan pending the adoption of the Luton Local Plan 2011-31.

3. Luton Local Plan 2011-31, what the plan says including responses to consultations

Under Policy LP5 the revision to the Local Plan effectively rolls forward the proposals for a new football stadium at Stockwood Park. LTFC in commenting on the consultation draft of the plan suggested amendments to the policy including commercial developments to a level that would fund the development of the new stadium, the contention being that the level of B1 Office proposed would be insufficient.

In effect, similar comments were carried through to the pre-submission version of the plan but widened to propose a town centre location for the stadium, preferably at Power Court, supported by the commercial development at Stockwood Park. The representation notes that the funding gap is likely to be significantly higher at Power Court due to significant abnormal costs. Notwithstanding this point, LTFC gave no evidence to indicate the likely scale of the supporting development needed except to increase the land area and widen the scope of such commercial uses.

In responding to the representations the Council has indicated (in SUB 009 and referred to in EDO16), "The relocation of Luton Town Football Club is a longstanding proposal carried forward from the extant local plan. While the Club's proposal for a new town centre site has merit, the Council has not had the opportunity to review the impact of the proposed scale and nature of the required facilitating development and it is not possible to change the allocation of the stadium until detailed information and justification is given." Clearly the Council took this position because the representations submitted by LTFC on the local plan did not provide the answers.

4. Pre app discussions

LTFC's proposals have not been sharpened up until relatively recently and the scale of the commercial, and in particular retail and leisure, elements at Stockwood Park was revealed when LTFC put forward its pre-app proposals in April 2016. This included a public exhibition of the proposals during late May 2016. In essence the proposals seek to switch the location of key developments from Stockwood Park (i.e. the stadium) to the town centre and vice versa (in particular large-scale retail and leisure offerings).

LTFC have proposed the two major developments are linked with the mix and scale at Newlands Park required to fund the development at Power Court. For the local planning authority each development has to be acceptable on its own in planning terms and there is a need to understand the viability implications.

In planning terms it is obvious that the critical strategic issues are the impact of large-scale out-of-town development at Stockwood Park and potential highway and transport impacts at Power Court that are of most concern. The Stockwood Park proposal includes sub-regional scale retail proposals as well as large-scale leisure development all of which will impact on Luton town centre as well as other town centres further afield. Until the implications of this and other factors are fully understood the Council cannot be expected to consider whether or not there ought to be a major change to the submitted plan.

5. The Planning Applications

LTFC have gone on public record that the two planning applications would be submitted before the end of June 2016 but this has not happened. Registration of the applications will not occur until all the necessary supporting information specified in pre-app discussions and EIA scoping have been submitted to the Council.

On 18 July 2016 the position on the planning applications remains unchanged although it is known the LTFC is continuing to work towards submission.

6. The way forward

After careful consideration of various scenarios LBC's current preferred way forward would be to continue with local plan examination which enables LTFC to produce all the critical evidence which can inform the latter stages of the local plan examination.

The planning applications, if and when submitted and validated, will be determined in the normal way.

This protects third party interests enabling them to be considered through the local plan process and any changes appropriate to the local plan being made, following the hearing sessions, through main modifications and adoption of the plan.

In conclusion, therefore, LBC would recommend to the Inspector that the local plan as submitted represents the 'final word' as the phrase is used in the Procedural Practice in the Examination of Local Plans (issues June 2016) and that the examination proceeds as planned.

Paul Barton

Luton Borough Council

18 July 2016