

CHAPTER 5: ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

Introduction

- 5.1 The proposed sustainable mixed-use scheme is led by the objective to deliver a new Community Stadium for Boston United Football Club (BUFC). It is generally accepted that in a case such as this, alternative options and sites may be a material consideration if the need identified can be met with lesser environmental consequences.

Potential Alternatives

- 5.2 Before embarking on the proposed development, the Applicants considered the opportunity of remaining at the current football ground as well as ground sharing at Boston Town's ground at Tattershall Road. These alternatives are considered below.

Remaining at Current Ground

- 5.3 In terms of remaining at the current football ground, and as explained in the Planning Statement, the Club does not own the current stadium and merely has a lease arrangement that is scheduled to expire in 2018. There is little or no prospect of the lease being renewed by the owner of the stadium and therefore there is no guarantee for BUFC to be able to occupy its present facilities beyond the expiry of the lease.

Ground Sharing

- 5.4 Insofar as ground share is concerned, and given Boston's isolated position in geographical terms within Lincolnshire, sports ground within other towns such as Sleaford, Lincoln and Peterborough are simply too far away to be considered practical and would fail in maintaining the civic pride and identity that links the football club to the town. Therefore, the only potential opportunity exists at Boston Town's ground and a ground share at this location would not make financial sense for BUFC and would risk the very things BUFC is trying to protect and enhance namely its league status and its contribution to the community. It would lead to the

contraction of BUFC and therefore not satisfy the realistic growth ambitions the Club is seeking to deliver. For these reasons this option has therefore been discounted.

'Enabling Development'

- 5.5 Given the above, the only feasible alternative is to accept the concept of 'enabling development' (as detailed in the Planning Statement) and, due to the significant costs associated with stadium construction, retail and commercial leisure are important enabling elements as well as supporting services for the proposed development scheme. As the project delivery will be dependent upon these elements of enabling development to generate the necessary funds to facilitate the community stadium scheme, the most effective risk averse and deliverable method of achieving the desired outcome is through a single-site solution rather than applying the sequential test separately to each proposed town centre use. To disaggregate the entire development will mean that it will be unable to fund the development package as a whole and therefore the entire scheme will fail, including all of the benefits that are envisaged.
- 5.6 Projects have been approved elsewhere, such as Rugby League grounds at Warrington, Salford and Wakefield, with similar funding gaps using town centre uses as enabling development as a principal funding mechanism. Despite the availability of sequentially preferable sites, the value of considering the development as a single unit has been strongly supported by Inspectors and The Secretary of State. Further strength is given to this argument where the land is in a single ownership in order to ensure that it is available, suitable and viable for the proposed development, which is also the case in terms of this application. It would be unreasonable to assume that a landowner may simply hand over profits from another development in order to fund the stadium. Not only does the application site fall within the single control of the applicant but also the land on which the proposed Community Stadium will be built (east of the A16) is being acquired on a long lease basis without any capital costs but with any ground rent to be ongoing revenue costs for Boston United Football Club Community Interest company.
- 5.7 Against this background, agreement has been reached with the Local Authorities that alternative sequentially preferable sites for each individual proposed town centre use

can be dismissed as they would not realise the same financial benefits that would allow the stadium and community facilities to be funded.

Site Selection and Sequential Test

5.8 The site selection and sequential test for the 'main town centre uses' of the development scheme have been based on the concept of enabling development being the principle tool in order to fund and deliver the project. As such, it has been agreed with the Council that, provided the retail and leisure elements of the proposal are properly and reasonably required as enabling development for the stadium and the important benefits that the overall package would bring can be demonstrated, the sequential test approach should not require disaggregation of the different retail and commercial elements.

5.9 In terms of identifying the size of the site needed, this is determined by the scale and associated build cost of the Community Stadium. The scale and type of the proposed stadium has been derived on a rational basis having regard to a range of factors:

- The aim and immediate ability of the club is to play within the Conference Premier League but the stadium should also have the capability of meeting the regulations required to achieve Football League status if BUFC become more successful on the pitch.
- The ability to meet the Community needs and provide community benefits.
- Provide a sufficient scale of facilities so that the club is self-sustainable and financially viable moving forward.

5.10 The facilities proposed are all realistic and proportionate based on the ambitions the club is seeking to achieve.

5.11 As detailed in the Planning Statement, the land value to acquire an alternative site would be an additional cost as the parcel of land relating to the proposed stadium has been 'gifted' by the landowner on a long-lease basis. The land cost would additionally have to be met if a scheme were to be developed elsewhere. Furthermore, given the history of BUFC, it has no capital assets and therefore cannot contribute towards a new stadium. There are a number of potential grant sources

that are being pursued on behalf of the Applicants but these will be insufficient on their own to address the funding gap. In these circumstances, the viability assessment work has revealed that the scale of enabling development compared to the scale and type of the proposed stadium is reasonable and should be provided as a whole. Agreement has therefore been reached with the Borough Council that the sites covering an area of approximately 28 hectares in size should form part of the site selection process criteria.

5.12 It is also considered that the area of search should not be extended beyond the town of Boston given the role and importance of BUFC within the community and the significance of the game to the town in terms of achieving socio-economic benefits.

5.13 Against these site selection criteria, and in relation to availability, sustainability, deliverability and viability, there are no sequentially preferable alternative sites.

5.14 During the public consultation process, two sites were raised and identified by members of the public as potential alternative locations for the proposed development. These sites are as follows, with plans showing their location and extent included in Appendix 5.1:

- Kirton Storage and Distribution Park and
- Land adjacent to Princess Royal Sports Arena.

5.15 As detailed below, both these sites would qualify as 'out of centre' having regard to the sequential test and are therefore no better than the proposed application site. Indeed, the application site is more accessible and better connected to the town centre and therefore is more preferable.

Kirton Storage and Distribution Park

5.16 This site is located on the southern edge of the Village of Kirton adjacent to the eastern side of the A16. The wider site extends to approximately 17.5Ha. Outline planning permission for change of use of agricultural land to storage and distribution park was granted in December 2005. This consent has subsequently expired but services and civil's associated with the development were installed in breach of

planning control although subsequently, they have become 'lawful' through the passage of time. In addition to the 2005 outline permission, the site has been subject to several more recent commercial/employment permissions. The County Council who own the site are currently marketing approximately 11.5 hectares for employment purposes. It is considered that the marketing of the site for employment purposes means the locating of the proposed development on this site will directly conflict with the County Council's objective to create a high quality employment site. This confirms that the site is not available to accommodate the proposed development. Furthermore, the size of the whole site is not large enough to accommodate the proposed development let alone the 11.5 hectares which is currently being marketed by the County Council. Indeed, the site of the proposed Q1 scheme would be disproportionate and out of scale with the size of Kirton Village.

- 5.17 There is a suggestion that the site might be considered to be previously developed (brownfield) land. However, it is debatable whether anything more than the extent of the access roads that have been constructed could be considered to constitute brownfield land from the adopted Local Plan the site is located outside of the settlement framework within countryside designations. Given the majority of the site remained in agricultural use (notwithstanding the brownfield land issue), the site is not considered to be a sustainable or sequentially preferable allocation for the proposed development as the application site. Kirton is not as geographically well related to Boston and the recognised community and regeneration benefits would not be achieved for the town.

Princess Royal Sports Arena

- 5.18 The PRSA lies on the western edge of Boston and accommodates a range of sports facilities. The relocation of the football stadium to the PRSA was considered at a very early stage in the project, however it was not clear how the stadium required by BUFC could readily and cost effectively be incorporated into the existing facilities without significantly altering the way the PRSA currently operates. There was also felt to be a huge potential for any such relocation by the football club to conflict with the rugby/athletics operations that are already well established on the site. Clearly sufficient enabling development could not be provided on the site, and transport/pedestrian links were considered inferior to the proposed Quadrant site.

- 5.19 Together with the surrounding land, the PRSA is located outside the development limits of Boston within a countryside designation having regard to the adopted Local Plan. From the Sports Revision and Open Space Assessment (November 2012) prepared by Ploszajski and Lynch Consulting Limited, it confirms that whilst there is a high quality athletics, rugby facility and health fitness facility, it does not achieve a high status in terms of an overall sporting venue. As such, it is considered that the PRSA lacks the critical mass the study considered as being a key sporting venue that could act as an anchor for the proposed development.
- 5.20 Whilst the Borough Council own the freehold of the PRSA, the surrounding land is in private control and evidence would suggest that it is not considered to be available for development as it is not on the market and is in agricultural use. There are a number of SHLAA sites in the vicinity of the PRSA but these are being actively promoted by developers for residential use with one of these already owned by a housing developer.
- 5.21 The land immediately surrounding the PRSA is located in the Countryside and is therefore not sequentially preferable to the application site. Furthermore, it is situated in an unsustainable location remote from residential development and public transport links. This is confirmed within the Sports Provision and Open Space Assessment which refers to a Boston Residents Priority Survey of 2008 in which the PRSA was considered inaccessible for anyone without a car - the leisure centre users survey records just over 85% of visitors travelling to the PRSA by car with only 13% by bicycle, less than 2% on foot and none by public transport. Compared to the application site, the PRSA is therefore inaccessible and a remote location which is not well connected to the town centre. This is particularly important when considering the nature of the enabling development proposed. A foodstore and commercial leisure are uses that require a location that can be easily and conveniently accessed by all modes of transport, as well as being situated in a high profile location, which is not possible on the land adjacent to the PRSA site.

Summary and Conclusions

- 5.22 In conclusion, there are no available alternative sites within Boston to meet the composite needs of the development in relation to availability, sustainability,

deliverability and viability set against the concept of enabling development. The wider community and sustainable benefits that would be achieved are sufficient in scale to allow an exception to applying the sequential test on the basis of a disaggregated manner.

- 5.23 In terms of viability, the need to purchase a 28 hectare site will prevent funding being made available to secure the construction of the proposed Community Stadium. It is important to appreciate that the Community Stadium is the reason why the planning application has taken the nature and form that it has.
- 5.24 This chapter has also established that there are no alternative options or proposals (i.e. continue at the existing ground or ground share) to meet the needs of the football club. Having considered a range of possible alternatives, there are no other more sustainable sites which are capable of accommodating the whole development. As such, the application proposal is the only option that is capable of meeting both the needs of the Club and the benefits that will be achieved.