

## MEETING NOTES

Meeting at Newbury Football Club (NFC), January 30<sup>th</sup> 2015

### London Road Industrial Estate Redevelopment (LRIE)

#### Present

Cllr Roger Croft (RC) – Deputy Leader WBC and Ward Member for Thatcham  
Keith Moss (KM) – NFC Chairman  
Knur Reimann (KR) – NFC Secretary  
Bill Bagnell (BB) – WBC Property Services

#### Fundamental position

RC stated:

The Council will not renew Newbury Football Club's lease on expiry. At present that will mean the club must leave the LRIE by August 2018 and requisite notice will be served. The redevelopment timetable is still uncertain as indeed is the zoned phasing of it, but August 2018 must be assumed to be the latest date by which the club must vacate the LRIE.

The Council cannot use public money to help reprovide facilities / help resolve the club's position.

The Council will help facilitate the process to find a solution that helps ensure the club's continued existence.

The Council has sought options for the club and will continue to do so, but the club itself must take ownership of its situation and use its own resources to help resolve its position. If nothing is agreed by August 2018 at the latest, the club will cease to exist.

KM stated:

Until the public meeting held at Newbury Football Club on January 30<sup>th</sup> this year, attended by LRIE occupants and St.Modwen as the Council's development partner, KM did not believe that redevelopment proposals were going to happen and that he now accepts the club has to address its position.

## **Ground Share with Thatcham Town Football Club (TTFC)**

RC described negotiations undertaken by WBC with TTFC.

TTFC has written to WBC CEO to confirm they are in principle comfortable to a ground share with NFC; copy of letter will be sent to NFC (actioned).

It was stated that this offer should be seen in the light of TTFC's present position (substantial freehold club assets, no club debts and good condition large club facilities which are well used); and the present position of NFC (no substantial assets, poor club facilities and no occupation rights).

It was stated that TTFC saw the ground share option as an overall benefit to football – at present both clubs chase the same pool of general football supporters and the same potential sponsors. It was confirmed both clubs have approximately the same number of dedicated supporters (150 each). It was also pointed out that TTFC saw any attempt to relocate NFC nearer to them (e.g. Henwick) as a major disadvantage to both clubs and TTFC would resist this.

BB pointed out that Sport England and the Berks and Bucks FA (as represented by Paul Backman) had sanctioned the exploration of a football club ground share but that subsequent FA individuals had advised against this; BB said that no explanation had been provided for this U-turn. BB stated that he has continued open negotiations with Sport England and even though WBC and Sport England are now in disagreement, BB will continue to share correspondence and provide updates, but for the greater good of the whole community the Council will continue its process to bring forward the LRIE redevelopment.

BB pointed out that whereas the FA (and thus Sport England) are concerned with a single issue (football), WBC has to deliver in a substantial way on a number of fronts that benefit the whole community – employment, housing, local economy and regeneration generally.

## **General Discussion**

KR stated that NFC is aware of the ground share option but that the club is uncomfortable pursuing this option because it needs to be temporary. The club requires a date by when a permanent solution will be secured.

BB reminded KR that during meetings at the clubhouse in the autumn of 2013, the Council explained an interim solution based on a ground share was probable and that this would have to be actioned before a long term solution emerged.

BB said that during 2013 the Council was still in positive negotiations with the Newbury Rugby Club. However, those negotiations collapsed and in the meantime it is unacceptable to put everything on hold on the LRIE until a guaranteed long term solution is found which in itself could take many years or indeed prove unavailable in

the foreseeable future - and all this in the knowledge the club has no occupation rights.

KM described the NFC's historic presence within the town and how football should remain within the town.

BB pointed out that even if public money could be utilised, there is no land available within and immediately around Newbury to provide a new ground.

KM enquired of existing Newbury open space – Victoria Park, Northcroft and Henwick.

Ref open public space RC pointed out it would be unacceptable to lose space available to the whole community to reprovide an asset available only to one user group. By its nature an enclosed football ground excludes all other community users.

BB pointed out that even if TTFC were to sanction the delivery of a new football ground at Henwick, the move would require the removal of playing field currently used by other sports and give over that land exclusively to football. BB pointed out that this loss, unless reprovided elsewhere (and thus presenting the same land availability problems as moving NFC) would be unacceptable to Sport England at present.

Funding aside BB described other sites looked at but which represent substantial planning problems – land North of Newbury (near Chieveley) in ownership of the Greenham Common Trust and land owned in the West by Sutton Estates.

BB again reminded the club of efforts made to facilitate a move to Newbury Rugby Club who originally approached NFC. These negotiations collapsed due to perceived development opportunities on the part of the Rugby Club, but BB stated it might be possible to reactivate these negotiations; BB confirmed he will actively look at this again.

KR said he believed any club move was premature since the redevelopment of the LRIE was financially unviable and that there were probable flooding and land fill issues associated with the LRIE.

BB said that the Council was aware of the market challenges associated with delivering redeveloped employment land but that WBC was committed to preserving employment land and thus housing, as part of a mixed use development and on appropriate land, is critical to making the wider scheme viable. Therefore the provision of housing on the football ground is central to the redevelopment.

RC stated that development risks associated with flooding and land fill were challenges regularly dealt with by major developers and in St.Modwen the Council has a national scale development partner.

KR stated that at the time the new short lease was issued to NFC, he was assured in writing that the club would not be required to move until a new site had been secured

for them. RC and BB both said they had no knowledge of such a commitment and asked to be sent a copy of this letter.

### **Closing and Summary**

BB said he would continue to explore options including again the Rugby Club ground share which may come back into line. As a Council resource BB confirmed that both he and Colin Broughton were available to help, but the club had to embrace any immediate solutions regardless of what BB and Colin Broughton might be able to deliver.

RC summarized by confirming again that the Council will not renew the lease on expiry and that the Council cannot use public money to reprovide facilities. RC reminded the club that they had to take ownership of their present situation and though the Council is willing to help and facilitate matters, the club is ultimately responsible for its own future. RC stated that if the club has not actively addressed the situation in a realistic way, closure of the club in August 2018 is a possibility. RC said it was essential the club embrace the ground share option as soon as possible and that they do so regardless of how open ended this option might be.