

Stadia, Football Academies and Centres of Excellence

Introduction

This bulletin focuses on sports stadia – sporting facilities that enjoyed a boom in the 1990s both in the UK and worldwide. The Millennium Stadium in Cardiff which hosted the Rugby World Cup final in November 1999, the National Stadium in Sydney which will host the Olympic Games later this year and the new Wembley Stadium have all featured heavily in the news over the past few months. On a smaller scale, many football clubs and rugby clubs play in new stadia often located away from their traditional heartlands, or in stadia that have seen major expansion and adaptation. These changes have happened partly to accommodate the requirements of the Taylor Report on the Hillsborough Stadium disaster and partly as a reflection of professional sport's move 'upmarket'.

New and expanded stadia can have a significant impact on townscapes, the highway network, local communities and sports fans and therefore raise important issues for local planning authorities and related organisations. This bulletin explores how such issues have been addressed by looking at specific proposals that have been the subject of planning appeals or 'called in' applications.

The planning implications of training facilities, football academies and centres of excellence will also be examined. New training and youth development facilities are being planned and built by many leading football clubs, often in green belt and countryside areas. The planning issues raised by such facilities are complex and will be examined by reference to two case studies.

Stadia

Sports stadia are familiar landmarks to all sports spectators, both the armchair and the more active varieties. A major stadium will often be the most recognisable feature of many British towns and cities, and of cities around the world. Indeed, it is likely that more people are able to identify the Old Trafford football ground as a Manchester landmark than the city's cathedral or town hall.

Many of Britain's football and rugby grounds and stadia were built in the first part of the twentieth century or earlier. In 1991 a factsheet produced by the Sir Norman Chester Centre for Football Research noted that 66 football league clubs (over two-thirds of the total number) were then playing in stadia originally built

before 1910. It also noted that only two new football league grounds had been built between 1955 and 1991, at Scunthorpe and Walsall.

Following a long period of general deterioration in football stadia, the issue of crowd safety in football grounds was brought sharply into focus by the Bradford City FC fire in May 1985 and the Hillsborough disaster in April 1989. The Popplewell Inquiry into the Bradford fire and Lord Justice Taylor's report and recommendations on the Hillsborough disaster led to major changes in the quest for ground safety and effective crowd control at football and other sports venues. The replacement of terraces with all-seated facilities was perhaps the most obvious sign of change,

but the Hillsborough disaster can now be seen as a watershed in thinking on stadium design, spectator safety and crowd control.

The high costs of implementing the recommendations in the Taylor Report acted as a catalyst for many clubs to consider the future of their facilities. Most clubs are located within residential or industrial areas and generate severe traffic and other problems on match days. The idea of selling an existing site for redevelopment and moving to a less congested site in the area was very attractive to many club boards and the early 1990s saw a boom in proposals for new stadia, a number of which were built and in use before the end of the decade. The table below shows the major new stadia built in England in the 1990s.

Stadia built during the 1990s			
Stadium	Main user	Capacity	First used
Pride Park	Derby County FC	33,258	1997
Britannia Stadium	Stoke City FC	28,000	1997
Stadium of Light	Sunderland AFC	42,000	1997
Riverside Stadium	Middlesbrough FC	35,000	1995
Reebok Stadium	Bolton Wanderers FC	27,800	1997
Alfred McAlpine Stadium	Huddersfield Town FC/ Huddersfield/Sheffield RLFCs	24,000	1994
JJB Stadium	Wigan Athletic FC/ Wigan Warriors RLFC	25,000	1999
Madejski Stadium	Reading FC	25,000	1998
The New Den	Millwall FC	20,000	1993
The County Ground	Durham CCC	5,000 for county matches and up to 20,000 for internationals	1995

The stadium boom was partly encouraged by PPG 17 which picks up many of the key thrusts of the Taylor Report and notes that ‘many grounds are outdated, lack amenities, and are unsuitably sited in residential areas where access by public transport is poor and parking space inadequate.’

The PPG goes on to ask local planning authorities ‘to give sympathetic consideration to development proposals designed to achieve the aim of all-seated accommodation at Football League grounds.’

The PPG advises that, within green belts, major football stadia cannot be regarded as appropriate development and very special circumstances would be needed to justify setting aside the normal presumption against such forms of development. ‘All other practicable options for location’ would have to be exhausted before those very special circumstances could be met.

The process of exploring other locational options for new stadium development alluded to in PPG 17 was described in the second publication in this series *Strategic Planning for Sport* in relation to the Southampton FC proposals at Stoneham and the Dewsbury rugby league stadium. Akin to the sequential approach to retail and leisure development adopted in PPG 6, the onus is on developers to demonstrate that no other non-green belt site is available and suitable to accommodate a stadium and the associated infrastructure. The Barnet FC stadium proposal which was called in for determination by the Secretary of State has provided a different interpretation to previously accepted thinking on the suitability of alternative sites in green belt locations (see case study 1).

The issue of sustainability is of major significance and it is essential that sites for new stadia ‘are readily accessible by a range of means of transport’ (PPG 13). The draft revision of PPG 13 issued in October 1999 makes no specific reference to stadia, but local authorities are advised to ‘focus major generators of travel demand in city, town and district centres and near to major public transport interchanges.’ The prevalence of enabling or complementary development such as retail parks and leisure developments in modern day stadium proposals adds a further policy factor to be considered by local planning authorities and planning inspectors.

The effect of current government policies is to discourage out-of-town relocation of football grounds and to make more acceptable the improvement of existing venues – Old Trafford, Stamford Bridge and Anfield, for example. A third option being pursued by Portsmouth FC, Southampton FC and Arsenal FC is to relocate in an urban



The County Ground (Durham CCC)

area within a short distance of an existing ground, thus satisfying national policies and remaining within the traditional catchment area. Manchester City FC's proposed move from their Maine Road ground to the new 2002 Commonwealth Games Eastlands Stadium some three miles to the north-east is another example of an 'intra-urban' relocation.



Pride Park (Derby County FC)

One of Lord Justice Taylor's recommendations that has not met with universal support is the concept of ground sharing. Although common in Europe and South America, British fans have resisted the idea of sharing a stadium with, inevitably, a local rival. Ground sharing arrangements that do exist are usually intended to be short term and are often the result of economic necessity rather than choice. A recent rugby union example is the sharing of the Stoop Memorial Ground by the owners, Harlequins RFC, and London Irish RFC who have sold their

ground in Sunbury. Previous tenants, London Broncos RLFC, have now moved back to the Valley, home of Charlton Athletic FC.

Ground sharing involving different sports, such as rugby league/union and football, tends to be less problematic, particularly when the two sports have complementary winter and summer seasons. The Alfred McAlpine Stadium in Huddersfield has been used by the town's football and rugby league teams for several years and is recognised as a superb facility by fans of both sports. A more recent example is the sharing of the new JJB Stadium, close to the town centre, by Wigan Athletic FC and Wigan Warriors RLFC. This arrangement has been aided by virtue of the fact that both clubs are owned by the same businessman but, nevertheless, similar arrangements may be the way forward for others. Further examples of ground sharing include Saracens RFC who play at Watford FC's Vicarage Road ground and Wasps RFC who play at Loftus Road, Queens Park Rangers' ground.

The 1998 research report *The Effectiveness of Planning Policy Guidance on Sport and Recreation* jointly commissioned by DETR and Sport England, points out that stadia developments seeking permission involve other activities than league football. In addition to rugby league and union, new cricket grounds are proposed for Hampshire CCC and Yorkshire CCC and there are substantial numbers of smaller scale proposals for league and non-league football. Despite the advice contained in PPG 17 the report notes that very few development plans sampled in the study contained policies for stadia. One of the exceptions is the following policy in the Portsmouth City Local Plan, adopted in 1995.

Policy LC5

In the event of Portsmouth Football Club being unable to undertake an extension to its ground at Fratton Park, the city council will permit its relocation provided that the development takes the form of a multi-purpose sports stadium, incorporating community-based leisure facilities;

Is acceptable against the relevant provisions of Policy OS5 in respect of the loss of any playing fields available for public use;

Is acceptable against the relevant provisions of Policies S9 and/or S10 where proposals include major retail development; and

Is acceptable against all other relevant policies of the Local Plan.

A planning application for a new 35,000 capacity stadium for Portsmouth FC, immediately adjacent to the existing ground, was submitted to Portsmouth City Council in late 1999. The stadium would be built in two phases with phase one providing a 26,500 capacity ground and the second phase adding a further 8,500 seats. The site for the new stadium is a redundant railway goods yard which has a railway station to the west that would provide the means of transport for many fans – a large proportion of fans already use the railway for home games at Fratton Park. Due to site constraints and current planning policies, relatively few car parking spaces will be provided for the new stadium (around 500), with a park and ride scheme and bus services accommodating many of the fans who will not be using the railways or cars.

A new 32,000 capacity stadium for Southampton FC, half a mile from the existing ground at the Dell, will be ready for the start of the 2001/2002 season. The Dell will be



JJB Stadium (Wigan Athletic FC/Wigan Warriors RLFC)

redeveloped for housing, although the site of the present centre circle will be retained as a grass feature to retain a link with the past. The site of the new stadium is currently a gasworks adjacent to one of the main road spines for the city and also adjacent to the Waterloo to Bournemouth railway line. Although the planning permission for the stadium does not require provision of a railway station/halt it is likely that one will be provided in the future.

The new stadium will be close to a major residential neighbourhood and a significant amount of consultative work was undertaken by the city council to ensure that the residents were involved in the planning of the stadium. A stadium monitoring group has also been established to maintain links between the football club, the city council and the community.

Sport England's guidance on planning for sport and recreation is contained in the document *Planning Policies for Sport: a land use planning policy statement on behalf of sport* published in November 1999. It urges local planning authorities to provide clear guidance in their development plans on both the need for new stadia and the locational criteria that will be used to guide prospective developers. Planning Policy Objective 27 seeks:

'to support a strategic approach to the identification of need for stadia and site selection so that any new developments can be achieved in a way that meets sustainable development objectives. To encourage, where possible, a contribution towards urban regeneration objectives and the provision of community benefits.'



Reebok Stadium (Bolton Wanderers FC)

Case study 1: Multi-sports complex at Copthall Sports Centre, Mill Hill – London Borough of Barnet
 Ref: LRP270/N5090/0/31

The proposal principally concerned two new stadia in the north London green belt: a 10,000 all-seated stadium for Barnet FC and a 1,000 capacity stadium for athletics and rugby to replace an existing stadium on the site. The proposals also included an indoor athletics training facility, 704 car parking spaces, 40 coach parking spaces and the provision of a shuttle bus service to collect home supporters from certain points before a match and return them afterwards. The local planning authority, the London Borough of Barnet, was minded to approve the application but the Secretary of State directed that the application be referred to him for decision in view of the type, scale and effect of the development on the green belt. An inquiry was held in June and July 1998 and the Secretary of State's decision was issued in June 1999.

The problems facing Barnet FC have been well documented. Underhill, the existing stadium, has a capacity of 4,057 – the lowest in the Football League, the worst slope in the Football League and severe site constraints that make redevelopment or significant ground improvements almost impossible, a point accepted by the Inspector. To meet the requirements of the Taylor Report the club has therefore been obliged to seek a site for a new stadium having explored and dismissed possible ground sharing proposals. The original deadline given by the Football League for all clubs to achieve a 6,000 spectator capacity with at least 2,000 covered seats was 31 May 1999, however a special dispensation was given to Barnet FC until their planning

application was determined by the Secretary of State. The following aspects of the Secretary of State's decision are relevant in the context of this bulletin:

- the effect of the proposal on the green belt and the consideration of very special circumstances which could outweigh any harm
- the availability and suitability of alternative relocation sites
- the accessibility of the stadium by various means of transport.

Green belt – The Inspector concluded that the proposal represented inappropriate development in the green belt on which it would have a seriously harmful impact. He did not find any support for the proposal in the adopted UDP nor did he accept the argument that, as part of the site was already developed as a stadium, the proposal should be considered as redevelopment. The club's urgent need to relocate if they are to remain in the Football League was accepted by the Inspector but he nevertheless concluded that the harm to the green belt was not outweighed by very special circumstances.

Ground sharing/alternative sites – Nine options for ground sharing arrangements were investigated by the applicants and the local planning authority, none of which was considered to be suitable by them or by the Inspector. The local planning authority considered 44 relocation sites and the club considered 30. All these sites were within the Barnet Borough boundary although the local authority did consult adjoining authorities to determine if there were any sites in those areas that could

accommodate a 10,000-seater stadium. Unsurprisingly, perhaps, none of the adjoining authorities could identify a suitable site.

The local planning authority interpreted the reference in PPG 17 paragraph 50 to 'all other practicable options for location' to mean all practicable options other than in the green belt. The Inspector agreed with this interpretation, saying 'if a site is objectionable because of its green belt location it would not make sense to substitute for it an alternative which also had a green belt location and was therefore objectionable for the same reason.' The authority and the Inspector agreed that the Dewsbury appeal decision (see Planning Bulletin Issue 2) supported such an interpretation. However, the Secretary of State took a different view, considering that it may 'be possible to identify a green belt or MOL site where very special circumstances outweigh the harm that otherwise inappropriate development would cause.'

Additionally, the Secretary of State disagreed with the Inspector regarding consideration of alternative sites with an existing recreational use, stating that they should not be automatically excluded from consideration.

Transport – There was general agreement that the Copthall site was not presently well served by public transport. The Inspector did not share the view of London Transport that the level of car parking proposed would act as a disincentive to supporters choosing to travel by public transport. The Secretary of State, however, did not agree with his Inspector on this point or that the proposals put forward by the applicants (shuttle bus service, limited car parking, controlled parking zone) meant that the project was appropriately located in

terms of accessibility by a range of means of transport. The Secretary of State referred to PPG 13 and the need not only to provide choice of means of transport but also to encourage the use of transport other than the car.

Although the Secretary of State disagreed with his Inspector on several aspects of the proposals, he did not disagree with his recommendation that planning permission should be refused. Consequently, the club are still faced with expulsion from the Football League unless they can identify a solution that is acceptable to all parties.

This case highlights a number of interesting interpretations of policy by the Secretary of State that are relevant to future proposals for stadia in green belt and other areas:

- When looking at possible alternative sites in order to 'explore all other practicable options for location' it will now be necessary to identify and dismiss potentially suitable green belt sites, not only those sites within the urban area.
- Similarly, possible alternative sites that are presently in recreational use cannot be summarily dismissed.
- This case clearly confirms that the need for a club to relocate is not, in itself, a very special circumstance sufficient to outweigh the harm to green belts that inappropriate development would cause.
- The firm stance taken by the Secretary of State on the accessibility/transport issue reflects the current guidance on levels of car usage and the move back to public transport.

Case study 2: Chelsea Village (Stamford Bridge Stadium) – London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham

Ref: T/APP/H5390/A/98/292187/P5

This case study relates to a public inquiry into ten appeals concerning the Chelsea Village development that includes the Chelsea FC stadium, hotels, restaurants, apartments, offices, the Chelsea FC megastore and other ancillary facilities. Some of the appeals related to development that had already been completed or initiated at the time of the inquiry, which commenced in October 1998 and concluded in July 1999.

The wide variety of facilities available in the Chelsea Village demonstrates the importance of non-sports facilities in modern day stadium complexes. Such enabling development frequently forms a major component of new proposals for sports stadia and adds to the complexity of determining whether such proposals are acceptable in terms of local planning policies and national guidance.

Chelsea FC's redevelopment schemes date back to the 1970s and the proposals considered at the 1998/99 inquiry reflect the ambitions of the club's owners to maintain Chelsea FC at the forefront of national and international football. The capacity of the ground at the time of the inquiry was 35,000 and the proposals would increase this



Stamford Bridge (Chelsea FC)

to around 41,300. The football club is a wholly owned subsidiary of Chelsea Village, the holding company for other enterprises operated at Stamford Bridge.

The Inspector identified nine issues relevant to consideration of the proposals. These were sub-divided into two categories – environmental and non-environmental. The former took account of traffic generation and parking, noise and disturbance, character and appearance, and impact on the amenities of residents of an adjacent apartment building. The latter category included the need for the proposals, the sequential test, and measures to enable spectators to get to and from matches in safety. Also considered were

potential benefits of the proposals, including new controls over the use of the stadium (achieved via conditions and unilateral undertakings), impact on the local economy and employment, community benefits and benefit to the football club.

The strategic policies of the approved Unitary Development Plan identify Chelsea Village as a major entertainment and recreational facility and the Inspector interpreted this to mean that development of the site should be encouraged for those purposes, subject to safeguards on the impact of such development. Transport policies in the plan encourage the improvement of public transport in the area.



Britannia Stadium (Stoke City FC)

The Inspector felt that ‘the issue at the root of the most significant controversies in these appeals is striking the right balance between the reasonable aspirations of Chelsea for the Chelsea Village site and the proper protection of residential amenities.’ Although the site was adjacent to the town centre and therefore an ‘edge of centre’ site, the Inspector found that the proposals were not required to satisfy the sequential test or the test of need as they accorded with the strategy of the Unitary Development Plan. The site has reasonable access to the public transport system which would be further improved by elements of the appeal proposals.

While accepting that noise and disturbance from matches and other major pitch events was substantial, particularly the amplification of music and voices, the Inspector took into account a package of measures put forward by the appellants which would overcome many of the difficulties identified. The effect on residents of the adjacent apartment block would be harmful but not so bad as to warrant refusal, particularly as a traffic and noise calming regime would be instigated.

Benefits from the scheme including additional employment, tourism and improvements to public transport were recognised by the Inspector who noted the benefits to the club that the additional stadium capacity would generate. However, the benefits did not override the need for controls to ensure that the impact on amenities did not become unreasonable.

The appellants sought a limitation on the number of people attending social events at a specified number of complex facilities to be set no lower than 5,600. The



Deva Stadium (Chester City FC)

Inspector considered that this would lead to unacceptably high numbers of cars being parked outside the village complex and imposed a limit of 2,500 people.

In assessing the reasonableness and enforceability of conditions suggested by both main parties, the Inspector took account of the likely increased number of matches at the stadium and the need for the stadium to maintain its national and international role, balancing these against the need to protect the amenities of nearby residents and the local environment.

Nine of the ten appeals were allowed, subject to a total of 21 pages of conditions and a unilateral undertaking put forward by the appellants covering a range of improvements including CCTV, controlled parking zones, a night bus service and management measures for a night club.

This case demonstrates the complexities facing local planning authorities and planning inspectors when considering the impact of such multi-faceted proposals as new or improved stadium developments.

Football academies and centres of excellence

The concept of sporting centres of excellence and academies has been commonplace for many years both at local and national levels. Often the result of partnerships between local authorities and governing bodies of sport, such centres are intended to provide a focal point for individual sports. One example was the FA National School at Lilleshall National Sports Centre in Shropshire which helped produce several members of the current England squad including Michael Owen. The school has recently closed and will be replaced by local centres of excellence and academies, as detailed below. Published in October 1997, the FA's *Football Education for Young Players – A Charter for Quality* set out to rationalise and improve existing football centres of

excellence and academies in order to provide quality experiences for all young players. Also part of the FA's plan is the development of small-sided games for children under ten years of age to attract them into football. The more talented players are then encouraged to develop their skills, but not to the detriment of their overall education or welfare.

The new framework for academies and centres of excellence is intended to enable clubs to provide improved structures for young footballers that will reduce 'overplaying' and give the clubs time to develop the players. The technical document provides criteria for various aspects of the centres of excellence and academies, including the facilities required. These are shown in the boxes below.

Football academies: Minimum requirements

Age group

under 9–under 11	one 60 x 40 yard area for each 40 players registered
under 12–under 16	one 60 x 40 yard area for each 30 players registered
under 17–under 21	one full-size pitch for every 30 players registered
	plus one indoor area: minimum 60 x 40 yards

Maximum number of artificial surfaces: one indoor area and one outdoor area

Medical facilities

Treatment and examination areas as defined by the FA

Study facilities

Homework and study area for a minimum of 40 young players, as defined by the FA

Parents' facilities

Parents' lounge

Centres of excellence: Facilities

Outdoor grass coaching area: 60 x 40 yards
 Changing rooms/shower
 Separate medical room

Either: Floodlit synthetic outdoor area: minimum 60 x 40 yards
 or: Indoor sports hall: minimum 50 x 30 yards

The current number of clubs with academy status (38) and those with centre of excellence status (54) in each league/division is shown below:

Academy	Centre of excellence
Premiership: 19	Premiership: 1
1st Division: 14	1st Division: 10
2nd Division: 4	2nd Division: 20
3rd Division: 1	3rd Division: 22
	Conference: 1

In order to achieve centre of excellence or academy status clubs are required to satisfy the criteria set out in the FA *Charter of Quality*, including the facilities criteria referred to above. Objective 3 of the FA's *National Facilities Plan for Football* seeks to establish a national network of licensed football academies and centres of excellence, subject to the following implementation criteria:

'In populations of a minimum 250,000 and within travelling time of one hour, children under 16 years of age should have access to a football academy or a centre of excellence.'

At least one football academy to be established in the following areas:

- all metropolitan areas
- Staffordshire
- Lancashire
- East Midlands
- East Anglia
- Tyne and Wear/Teesside
- Greater London boroughs (x3)
- Hampshire
- Bristol.



Madejski Stadium (Reading FC)

A number of new academies and centres of excellence have been developed in the past 12 to 18 months, including major facilities on new sites for Liverpool FC and Everton FC at Kirkby and Litherland to the north and east of Liverpool respectively. Both academies were located at existing sports grounds/pitches and did not raise major planning policy issues.

Other proposals for academies or centres of excellence have been put forward in green belt or other countryside areas and have led to much discussion and consideration of their acceptability in terms of national and local planning policies. Most prominent have been new academies developed by Arsenal FC in south Hertfordshire and by Manchester United FC to the south-west of the Greater Manchester conurbation (see case study 4) and those proposed by Derby County FC on the periphery of Derby and by Sunderland AFC to the north of Sunderland (see case study 3). Both the Arsenal and the Manchester United proposals were approved by the

relevant local planning authorities (Hertsmere BC and Trafford MBC) after referral to regional offices of the Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions as departures from the development plan.

As will become evident from the following case studies one of the key issues to consider when assessing the acceptability of academy/training proposals in terms of green belt policy is the impact of the indoor facilities on the openness of the green belt in the area. While 'essential facilities for outdoor sport ... and other uses of land that preserve the openness of the green belt' are appropriate, examples of such essential facilities provided in PPG 2, namely 'small changing rooms and unobtrusive spectator accommodation for outdoor sport' are considerably smaller scale than the type of indoor facilities referred to above. It should also be noted that the indoor facilities included in the four examples quoted above go far beyond the minimum indicated by the FA. Further details can be found in the case studies.

Case studies – football academies

Case study 3: Proposed Sunderland AFC Academy at Whitburn Moor Farm – South Tyneside Metropolitan Borough Council
 Ref: APP/H4520/99/1023406

This proposal was for a range of training and educational facilities to replace the club’s existing training facilities at the nearby Charlie Hurley Centre. The site is in the South Tyneside Green Belt, a very narrow wedge of open land to the north of Sunderland which separates built-up areas to the north and south. A number of football pitches and a car park, together with agricultural buildings, were present on the site. The existing farmhouse and cottages would be used for staff accommodation. The outline planning application envisaged the following facilities:

- indoor training/fitness areas
- medical, physiotherapy and hydrotherapy facilities
- administration, support and changing facilities
- educational facilities
- canteen facility
- floodlit main practice pitch and training area
- three other full-size practice pitches
- one full-size artificial turf pitch
- two artificial practice areas
- one goalkeepers’ training area
- junior practice pitches.



Stadium of Light (Sunderland AFC)



The New Den (Millwall FC)

The subject of this case study was, in fact, the second application to be submitted for an academy on the site. An earlier proposal, involving more buildings and a larger site area than the later application, was withdrawn following advice from the local planning authority.

The club provided the following justification for the proposals:

- With the development of UK football into a multi-million pound leisure industry, there is a need to improve training and medical/education facilities.
- Such facilities are common in Europe and are recommended in the FA technical document *Football Education for Young Players: A Charter for Quality*.
- Existing facilities are inadequate and offer no potential for development.
- Ten alternative sites in the Sunderland and Durham areas have been investigated and discounted as unsuitable.
- The academy buildings would occupy an area about 12% less than the existing footprint of the agricultural buildings, with building heights no more than those already in existence.

Reference was made to academies proposed by Manchester United FC (see case study four) and Arsenal FC, both of which are on green belt sites and both of which have been approved by local planning authorities after consideration by the Secretary of State.

The club also provided details of the likely usage of the facility split into morning, afternoon and evening sessions including use by club personnel (senior players and staff) and by the academy (young players and those involved in the community coaching programme, the mini-soccer centre and other initiatives). Fairly extensive community usage would be organised via the club, although no casual access would be possible.

The local planning authority considered the main issues in determining the application to be its acceptability in terms of green belt policy, more general environmental

issues and access and traffic generation issues. Although the outdoor facilities were considered to accord with green belt policy, the extent of the built development led the authority to conclude that the proposals as a whole were inappropriate in a green belt area. There needed to be very special circumstances that would outweigh potential harm to the green belt to justify such inappropriate development.

Careful planting and design of the new buildings will reduce adverse impact on the openness of the green belt while a reduction in the height and number of floodlighting columns, together with the use of recently developed 'lanterns', would lessen the impact of additional lighting. Proposals by the club to construct a new strategic recreational route to the south of the site would enhance public access to the area. Access and traffic concerns could be overcome at the detailed



Bescot Stadium (Walsall FC)

application stage by various roadworks and technical improvements funded by the club. The officers came to the conclusion that planning permission should be granted and recommended this to their members. The members disagreed, however, and refused permission on green belt grounds.

The matter was the subject of an appeal heard at a public inquiry in September 1999 and subsequently allowed by the Secretary of State who agreed with his Inspector's recommendation. In his report the Inspector considered that there were exceptional circumstances to justify the buildings and facilities in the green belt. The proposal would:

- Provide a high quality sporting facility of regional importance.
- Boost the image of the region and help with regeneration.
- Provide sporting and educational facilities for the community.

He also dismissed concerns that the development would lead to the merging of Sunderland and South Tyneside, noting that the new buildings would not extend the footprint of the existing agricultural buildings. The club's examination of alternative sites had been



Alfred McAlpine Stadium (Huddersfield Town FC/Huddersfield /Sheffield RLFCs)

rigorous but none was suitable, either in the built-up area or in other locations outside the green belt. Interestingly, neither the Inspector nor the Secretary of State felt it necessary to examine alternative sites within the green belt as had been required in the Barnet FC stadium appeal (case study 1).

The Inspector's thoughts on the wider benefits of the scheme are of particular interest. He felt that the club's increased ability to compete at the highest level would benefit the economy of the area 'due to improved attendance at work and production levels from those who support the club.' He did not consider the impact of the club's success on Newcastle United or Middlesbrough fans.

One aspect of the Inspector's report that did not find favour with the Secretary of State was the view that not calling in the Manchester United and Arsenal proposals reinforced his (the Inspector's) conclusions. The Secretary of State made the following comments:

'No two applications and their circumstances are ever completely identical. One planning decision cannot set an automatic precedent for another. As a general principle, each case must be considered on its individual merits.'

Although his comments are clearly correct, those clubs pursuing proposals for academies in green belts will no doubt welcome the latest decision by the Secretary of State.

This case study demonstrates the difficulty faced by a local planning authority and subsequently by the



Glanford Park (Scunthorpe United FC)

Secretary of State, in balancing arguments on sport-related issues in green belts. Given the considerable amount of built development in a typical academy, it is unlikely that any local authority would consider such proposals to be appropriate development in green belt locations.

Those responsible for determining such applications or appeals must therefore consider the degree of harm to the green belt that the proposal would cause and balance that against the benefits to sport, the local community and the local economy.

Case study 4: Training, remedial and rehabilitation facilities for Manchester United FC at Carrington, Greater Manchester – Trafford Metropolitan Borough Council

Ref: H/OUT/43657 (Outline application)
H/ARM/45558

This case study involves a new training facility for Manchester United FC that opened in January 2000. Although it is not an academy as such, it does raise very similar issues to those posed by the previous case study. In this case, the planning application was approved by the local planning authority after referral to the regional government office.

The training ground was to replace the club's inadequate existing facilities at the Cliff in Salford to the north of Manchester, with more extensive and more secure facilities on a new green belt site to the west of the Greater Manchester conurbation. The site extends to some 44 hectares although much of this is to be retained in agriculture or made into a nature reserve.

The Manchester United academy currently operates from two sites in Salford and it is not yet clear whether it will relocate to the new Carrington site. The Carrington facilities include the following principal elements:

- eight full-size grass pitches
- one extended grass pitch (1½ normal length)

- five-a-side caged enclosure
- shale enclosure for small-sided games
- grass running track/cross country track and cycle track
- indoor facilities building:
 - physiotherapy unit
 - treatment rooms
 - doctor's room
 - podiatry and dietary rooms
 - saunas, steam room and pool
 - multi-sports area
 - canteen
 - offices
 - changing rooms
- warden's house, security building, groundsman's building.

The indoor facilities building measures 96m x 38m with a maximum height of 9m. It is on two floors and incorporates one large space (40 yards x 40 yards) for indoor play plus the wide range of support facilities detailed above. The building also includes a small studio for the club's own television channel.

Although the original proposals included a floodlit artificial turf pitch and a floodlit five-a-side enclosure, these were subsequently removed from the proposals following concerns expressed by the local planning authority.

As with the Sunderland application the club provided a detailed rationale for its proposals and identified six other sites which had been considered but found to be unsuitable. The outline application, submitted in January 1997, was considered satisfactory by the planning committee of the local planning authority, although the major built elements of the proposal were clearly identified as being inappropriate on a green belt site. The permission was subject to a S106 Agreement concerning the provision of a nature reserve on part of the site. Because the application was a major departure from the approved development plan it was referred to the Secretary of State. He indicated, however, that he did not wish to intervene with the matter and planning permission was finally granted in January 1998.

This case contrasts with that of Sunderland AFC, particularly the way in which the proposals were dealt with by the Secretary of State through the respective Government Offices. The Manchester United case was approved by the local planning authority after the Government Office – North West had decided it did not wish to intervene in the matter. The Sunderland AFC case, however, appears to have been the subject of considerably more scrutiny by the Secretary of State/Government Office – North East following the submission of the appeal Inspector’s report at the end of 1999. In the event, the decisions reached were consistent and will be welcomed by the clubs concerned and by those with similar future plans.



Old Trafford (Manchester United FC)

March 2000

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- **more people involved in sport**
- **more places to play sport**
- **more medals through higher standards of performance in sport**

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