

## **Birmingham Development Plan Public Examination Matter G**

### **Birmingham Wheels Park - Further Statement of Wheels Operators**

#### **Background**

Both Birmingham City Council and representatives of the Wheels operators appeared at the Public Examination with regard to Matter G and the following question from the Planning Inspector:

“Issue 13 – Does GA7 take sufficient account of the existing wheeled sports users at the Birmingham Wheels site?”

The City Council have suggested that the site is brought forward for employment development given the evidenced need for employment land within the city and the significant levels of unemployment and worklessness in the local area<sup>1</sup>.

The current occupiers on the existing site (which has the benefit of a long term lease with c100 years remaining) wish to remain in situ but they have indicated their willingness to rationalise their operations to occupy a smaller footprint. The Wheels Operators consider this represents a positive and reasonable attempt to balance the interests of the established sporting activities while leaving extensive areas of land available for alternative forms of development as part of the regeneration of the wider area. In the event they have to relocate then they strongly wish to relocate as a single entity and carry on with the charitable work that they have been involved in over many years. It is important to point out that the Wheels Operators understand that Sport England support the facilities remaining in-situ. Further, in correspondence (attached) both the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Development, Jobs and Skills have indicated the consolidation proposals will be seriously and properly considered, and indeed the operators were encouraged to make representations to this effect.

#### **Discussions re Statement of Common Ground**

At the request of the Inspector the Wheels Operators suggested, as part of the discussions, the following form of words to the City Council:

“To assist in exploring all options the current Wheels Operators agree to work with the City Council to help identify a fully funded alternative site (to layout including the land cost) within the city’s administrative area taking account of locational and operational requirements including the objective of making ‘wheeled’ sports within the urban area, available to those living in the inner-city. In order to progress this, consultants will be appointed to work to explore and identify potential consolidation and relocation options (the consultants work is being funded through the Homes & Communities Agency’s Asset Accelerator initiative with the City Council)<sup>2</sup>.”

The City Council have not agreed to this suggestion and it appears that they are neither prepared to negotiate or work in true partnership:

- A ‘decision’ to demolish the sports facilities and break up the activities at the Wheels Park and to resist the relocation of the oval racing track, appears to have, already been made. This ‘decision’ has been made without the scope of the City Council’s formal decision-making procedures and is contrary to extant policies in the Birmingham Unitary Development Plan, contrary to the approach in the NPPF and made without the benefit of an advance assessment of need and without due consideration of objections through the BDP Examination process. The Wheels Operators in their evidence have demonstrated a healthy and continued ‘need’ for all the activities at the Wheels Park and can confirm the continued viability of the operations.

- The City Council's defence of their position at the Public Examination has been to fabricate an argument that participatory sports should be treated differently and have incorrectly concluded that the oval racing track is a spectator facility-only and should therefore be considered a tourist facility<sup>3</sup>.
- The City Council's interpretation of the NPPF is at odds with the representations of Sport England who indicate that sports stadia are defined as sports facilities and as such should be protected and enhanced. If the City Council's perverse interpretation were to be accepted then this would, in effect, remove protection from all sports stadia throughout the country.
- The City Council's position on Birmingham Wheels Park is at odds, for example, with its approach to Perry Barr Stadium which is defined as a sports facility in the recently adopted Area Action Plan (see paragraph 7.48 of the adopted AAP) and offered appropriate assurances by Policy LC1 of that plan. One possible interpretation is that the City Council's approach has unfortunately confused its land interest (as freeholder) at Birmingham Wheels with its role as local planning authority.

### **Modification to Policy GA7 proposed by the Wheels Operators**

In their representations the Wheels operators proposed an additional bullet point to Policy GA7. This is as follows:

*" \* Protection and enhancement to a number of important and varied sports facilities of national importance including Birmingham City Football Club and a variety of wheeled activities at Birmingham Wheels Park."*

It is considered that such an amendment remains appropriate and should form part of the policy rather than the supporting text thus recognising that the activities provided at the Wheels site significantly add to the Birmingham's overall leisure portfolio and serve to attract visitors thus contributing to the economic prosperity of the city.

In addition to this proposed modification the Wheels Operators also proposed an additional modification in its representations under Matter M in relation to Sports Facilities which still stands but for the record they have not made representations about Policy TP24 relating to Tourism nor have they been invited to do so.

### **Footnotes:**

1. This employment proposal is not explicitly included as part of Policy GA7 in the submitted BDP. It should also be noted, following a session of the House of Commons High Speed Bill Committee in late 2014, that pressure on the city's employment land supply has been eased to an extent by HS2's decision to accept that the depot at Washwood Heath should be on a smaller footprint to enable the creation of up to 2,000 jobs on the balance of the land. This significantly reduces the shortfall in employment land purported by the City Council at the hearings.

2. The Wheels operators might have reasonably anticipated they would both be consulted on the consultants brief and be represented on the Study Steering Group to avoid possible accusations of bias. Neither has happened.

3. For the avoidance of doubt the Wheels operators wish to be clear that they (and the Sport England) do not agree to the distinction of participatory sports in this way. Nevertheless, if the City Council's position is accepted by Mr Clews then they wish to be recognised that ALL of the sporting activities at Birmingham Wheels are of a participatory nature including those that use the oval raceway.



**COUNCILLOR IAN WARD  
DEPUTY LEADER OF THE COUNCIL  
COUNCIL HOUSE  
VICTORIA SQUARE  
BIRMINGHAM  
B1 1BB  
TEL NO: 0121-303 1292 / 4155**

Email: [Ian.Ward@birmingham.gov.uk](mailto:Ian.Ward@birmingham.gov.uk)

Our Ref: IW/TCFry

01 November 2013

Mr J Fry (Chairman)  
Birmingham Wheels Roller Skating Club  
4 Windsor Road  
Castle Bromwich  
Birmingham  
B36 0JN

Dear John

**Re: Birmingham Wheels Roller Skating Club and the Bordesley Park Area Action Plan (AAP)**

Thank you for your letter dated 10 October 2013 and may I once again congratulate you on your success at the Birmingham Sports Awards. In particular the success and efforts of young people such as Ffion Lewis is something that the city should both commend and celebrate.

In terms of your concerns about the future of the Club and the operators on the Wheels site generally can I stress once again that the City Council is committed to working with all parties going forward. In this regard matters fall into two broad areas; the future of the Wheels Trust and the future vision for the area as a whole which is being shared through the Bordesley Park AAP.

You will be aware that the Wheels Trust has experienced financial difficulties and Peter Jones and John Wynn from the City Council have been working with Philip Bond and John Keattch on behalf of the current operators on the site to identify a way forward. Hopefully through these discussions the current operators on site will be able to identify a way forward and as I have said before, it is the Council's intent to work with the current operators to that end.

The Bordesley Park AAP covers the area to the east of the city centre, some 580 hectares, including the Wheels site. The AAP once adopted will be a statutory planning document which will provide planning guidance for the area up to 2031. The overall vision for the area is a revitalised neighbourhood delivering growth in a high quality urban environment. This incorporates the promotion of sustainable growth (including 3000 new jobs and 750 homes) as well as enhanced connectivity and transportation links and a much improved environment. I am sure that you will agree that these are aspirations that we can all share for the area.

The AAP is now at the Preferred Options stage and the preferred option for the Wheels site is for the promotion of new industrial and employment opportunities creating a high quality employment site in an improved environment. I know that officers have met the operators on the Wheels site regarding the Preferred Options and that the operators are likely to put forward a variation of the option for the Wheels site which consolidates the current operations on a smaller area of the site. I would urge you to submit this or any other proposals that you might have so that they can be considered as part of the public consultation process.

Finally I would like the opportunity to visit the Roller Skating Club to see at first hand the facilities that you offer and the work that you undertake with young people. If this is agreeable would it be possible for my office to contact you to arrange a suitable date.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ian Ward', with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

Councillor Ian Ward  
Deputy Leader of Birmingham City Council



## Birmingham City Council

Councillor Tahir Ali  
Cabinet Member, Development, Jobs & Skills  
The Council House  
Victoria Square  
Birmingham B1 1BB

Telephone: 0121 303 7233  
E-Mail: [tahir.ali@birmingham.gov.uk](mailto:tahir.ali@birmingham.gov.uk)

Our Ref: T ALI/CD/CAB14848

Date: 7 November 2013

John Fry  
Birmingham Wheels  
4 Windsor Road  
West Bromwich  
Birmingham  
B36 0JN

Dear Mr Fry

### **BORDESLEY PARK AREA ACTION PLAN**

Thank you for your letter regarding the future of the Wheels Roller Speed Club within the context of proposals set out in the Preferred Options Report of the Bordesley Park Area Action Plan.

I understand that the Deputy Leader of the Council has also written to you following your discussions at the Birmingham Sports Awards and your email to him.

As you are aware, the preferred options for the wheels site promotes new industrial and employment opportunities with the aim of helping to address the need for job and training opportunities within the area and wider city. The Preferred Options Report has allowed widespread local consultation on the current proposals for the area and this has generated a large number of comments that are currently being considered.

The City Council is committed to working with all operators on site regarding the future of the current activities. I am aware that officers have been in discussion with occupiers in order to explore a way forward and I understand that in response to the consultation, operators have recently submitted alternative proposals which suggest current activities remaining on site within a reduced foot print. These will be considered and will form the basis of further discussions prior to the publication of the final version of the Area Action Plan next year and its submission to the Secretary of State prior to Examination in Public.

Yours sincerely

**Councillor Tahir Ali**  
Cabinet Member for Development, Jobs and Skills