**Bath Rugby Stadium proposals – WA response to public consultation**

Many members of the Widcombe Association Committee attended the public exhibition at the Guildhall and met on 19th December to discuss. This response was agreed at that meeting.

Earlier proposals had been given some publicity in the summer this year and the latest plans had apparently taken on board a number of the concerns expressed at that time. In particular the overall height of the structure had been reduced.

The WA supports the objectives of the club, recognising the need for its crowd capacity to grow as well as the benefits of its presence in the city centre location to the economic well-being of Bath and in the proposal to make the facilities available for wider community use.

However, we have several concerns about this scheme, which make it difficult to welcome it in its present form.

1. Of major concern is the inclusion of the car parking provision proposed under the pitch, which would substantially increase the traffic flows on Pulteney Road (the A36 through route) and North Parade Road and their junction, which even now is regularly blocked by traffic backing up from the west. This proposal is in conflict with the Council’s Traffic and Transport Strategies, the fundamental aim of which being to reduce traffic in the city centre. There is much scepticism about the claims made that a car park in this location would reduce cross-city traffic. This car park would, we are told, be available for public use every day (except match days) and so would act as a magnet for commuters and visitors, contrary to the general strategy of discouraging private car usage for travel into the city centre.
2. Although the overall height of the structure has been reduced, the reduction is very slight and does not save the view of the Bath skyline from the Grand Parade and Parade Gardens. This issue is not unrelated to 1 above, in that it would seem that the height could be more significantly reduced, whilst retaining the benefit of raising the level of the pitch above flood level, if the car park were excluded. Insofar as some curtailment of existing views would still remain, this needs to be mitigated by the very highest quality of design in form, detailing and materials.
3. The WA is strongly opposed to the provision for coaches to access the site, as North Parade Road is already a bus route and heavily used by taxis and other vehicles and the turning of coaches (and/or cars) into and out of the stadium site would be likely to cause major disruption and congestion. Drop-off points should be designed to keep coaches out of this central area.
4. The WA recognises the need for floodlighting to required standards of illumination across the playing area. However, the current lighting causes widespread and intrusive spillage far outside the grounds. When not in use the lighting towers themselves are visually intrusive in what must be one of the most sensitive locations in the UK. We acknowledge a dilemma, in that higher lighting masts can focus illumination more directly downwards, mainly across the playing area. The opportunity of redevelopment needs to be used to find the optimum set-up: if possible, units incorporated into the new stands or, if not, then to the slimmest and most elegant profile obtainable.
5. The WA would not support the temporary use of the remainder of the Rec during the construction period, which would prevent any other use of this valuable public open space.
6. The WA welcomes the opening up of the river frontage to greater public use and activity, although it believes the retail offer should focus on cafes, bars and restaurants, with a limit on general retailing to those with a direct relationship to sport.