

Cannon Hill Neighbourhood Forum

Cllr Mike Whitby
Birmingham City Council
Council House
Victoria Square
BIRMINGHAM
B3 3AA

Our Reference WCCC-Whitby2

Your Reference

Date 28 October 2009

Dear Councillor Whitby

Consideration of Loan to Warwickshire County Cricket Club (WCCC)

Over the last few months, Vijay Sarathy (on behalf of Cannon Hill Neighbourhood Forum) has made repeated requests for a meeting with you, so that MPs and the Local Residents' Associations could put forward their perspective about the above development. Professor Carolyn Hicks has also written to you for the same purpose. While we are fully aware of your busy schedule, we have been very disappointed not to have received any response to our requests. As you and other members of the Council have met with WCCC on a number of occasions, we believe that in the interests of natural justice we should be afforded the opportunity to express our concerns and offer possible solutions to this most contentious of proposals.

As you will of course know, WCCC has obtained planning permission and therefore, provided they can secure financial support, may proceed with this development. As the city is a significant source of funding, it retains some leverage over the size, extent and intensity of the plans. Therefore, because it is unlikely that we will be able to meet with you before the Council determines the amount of its funding, we are summarising our position in writing. For clarity, the key issues are expressed as bullet-points:

- The issue of floodlights is especially contentious, as they will forever ruin the visual amenity and make many residential homes significantly less pleasant places to live. Moreover, they are inherently unsuited to test match cricket, as clearly evidenced at Cardiff and Lords this summer. By using temporary floodlights, WCCC can still achieve the minimum conditions necessary for test match status, without either the irreversible blight of permanent floodlights or the loss of its option for occasional 20/20 or limited-over matches.
- The minimum number of spectator seats demanded by the ECB for test match status is 16,000. Edgbaston already has seating for 21,000, although maximum capacity is rarely achieved. Therefore, to increase the seating to accommodate 25,000 is both unnecessary in either ECB or business terms. The consequent environmental damage, extra cost and loss of amenity to local residents as a result of extending the pavilion cannot possibly be justified on this basis. However, the pavilion and facilities can be updated to a level that meets TFS2 specification without the collateral damage.

- The nature of the British climate means that the opportunities for evening floodlit matches are fewer than the 15 currently proposed, which in turn undermines further the need for a further 4,000 seats and the permanent floodlights. WCCC's business case is therefore based on ill-founded premises.
- Similarly, significant drivers for night-time floodlit matches, evidenced over the past decade, come from the sub-continent and the pressure to broadcast matches contemporaneously. Yet despite the \$1 billion ESPN contract for television broadcasting, the popularity of these matches in India seems to be declining, advertising revenues are more than likely to fall and loss of audience interest in India has been noted internationally. It is against this backdrop that WCCC is requesting a massive expansion for a game that is on the wane.
- WCCC could have all the improvements they require to meet ECB/TFS2 specifications while containing the development within the current footprint. The cost to the city would be less, the environment would be preserved and local residents would be satisfied. In short, a compromise could easily be effected that meets the requirements of all stakeholders, whilst simultaneously keeping the budget down.

However, to date, WCCC has not engaged in any meaningful discussion with local residents, relying instead on their unassailable position of having planning permission, thus offsetting the need to compromise or adapt. Therefore, while CHNF is very reluctant to subject BCC to judicial review, WCCC leaves us with no option. Our voice has, quite simply, not been heard and our rights as residents of Birmingham have effectively been ignored. The principles of democracy, fair play, concern to preserve an invaluable environmental asset and the imperative of avoiding a non-viable, toxic debt together leave us with little choice but to proceed with judicial review in the hope of protecting our heritage and quality of life.

We still remain hopeful that BCC can achieve a compromise that suits all parties in the way outlined above, by limiting the funding provided for WCCC. We urge you to take this action in the interests of all.

Yours sincerely

Leo NATION
Chair, Cannon Hill Neighbourhood Forum.