

Matter 8 – Community Infrastructure

Issue 2 – St Albans City Football Club – Policy COM5

Q1 What is the justification for setting out what might constitute very special circumstances in Policy COM5? Would this not be a matter of judgement for the relevant decision-maker taking into account site specific circumstances and evidence available at the time? Does the Plan set out what constitutes very special circumstances for other types of development in the Green Belt?

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- 1.1 There has been a longstanding issue regarding the long-term future for St Albans City Football Club. This is set out the adopted 1994 Local Plan - LPCD 15.01 - District Local Plan Review 1994 – Saved and Deleted Policies Version (2020) at:

ST. ALBANS CITY FOOTBALL CLUB

10.18 The club has ambitions to improve its status and provide better facilities. The existing ground in Clarence Park causes some environmental problems and the scope to expand the facilities is very limited. Consequently, relocation of the club would be desirable if an acceptable new location can be found. Possible relocation of the ground raises complex and

potentially controversial issues which need to be carefully considered before any conclusions are reached.

10.19 Relocation of the club could either involve a new ground purely for its own use or a ground-sharing scheme, possibly with one of the nearby Football League clubs (Watford, Luton and Barnet). Government guidance on all-seater Football League stadia is provided in Planning Policy Guidance Note PPG 17 (Sport and Recreation). PPG 17 encourages dialogue between local planning authorities and football clubs seeking to relocate. The PPG also refers to the possibility of county councils convening a forum of interested parties to consider the question of a strategic site. The District Council is willing to be involved in any such arrangements. This could possibly lead to the identification of a site in the next Local Plan.

- 1.2 The contextual position in relation to the Football Club in 2025 is very similar to that set out at 10.18 in the 1994 Plan.
- 1.3 The issue has been the subject of much discussion at Planning Policy and Climate Committee and its predecessors and at Full Council. The Football Club are currently bringing forward proposals which they consider to be in line with draft Policy COM5 and have entered into a Planning Performance Agreement with the Council.
- 1.4 Essentially, the justification for setting out what might constitute very special circumstances in Policy COM5, is to help guide both the Football Club in their endeavours to find a long-term solution and the Council/decision-maker in its endeavours to balance the inevitable Green Belt impacts with other factors. It is considered that Policy COM5 still leaves the decision-maker with the full ability to use their judgement to take into account site specific circumstances and evidence available at the time.
- 1.5 LCRT 02.01 - Playing Pitch & Outdoor Sport Strategy & Action Plan (2023) forms part of the local plan evidence base and it supports the aspirations of the St Albans City Football Club, at page 61 it recommends:

...The Club has been looking at opportunities for a new stadia development elsewhere within the City/District...

...the Club should be supported, where opportunities are available, to explore the transfer away from the site and into a new purpose built stadia offer...

- 1.6 LPCD 03.01 - St Albans Local Plan Sustainability Appraisal Report (2024) states:

Paragraph 9.2.4 'Chapter 7 – of the plan presents a suite of policies dealing with 'Community Infrastructure'. Most of the policies are fairly standard, but there is some local specificity, e.g. in respect of St Albans FC.'

Does the Plan set out what constitutes very special circumstances for other types of development in the Green Belt?

- 1.7 No, the Plan does not set out what constitutes very special circumstances for other types of development in the Green Belt. Policy LG5 b) does set out support in principle for infrastructure provision identified in the Plan that is essential to ensure sustainable development across the District and beyond.