

Regeneration Committee site visit to Brentford FC 15 July 2014

Attendees

Assembly Members	Gareth Bacon (Chairman), Navin Shah (Deputy Chair), Tony Arbour
Assembly staff	Jo Sloman, Alice Andrewartha, Peter Mason, Emma Gray
Visiting	Brian Burgess, Project Director Dave Hughes, Project Design Advisor Lee Doyle, Chief Executive, Brentford FC Community Sports Trust

Overview of visit

The Committee visited Brentford Football Club to receive a briefing about the club's plans to develop a new stadium. Members had a briefing, Q&A and tour at the Club's current premises, before visiting the Boating Arch (run by the Brentford Community Sports Trust) and the site where the club plans to build its new premises.

Discussion topics

The role of the new stadium in local regeneration

Rationale for a new stadium

- Brentford FC (BFC) has been working on plans for a new stadium for 12 years. The club has set up a new subsidiary company for the development.
- The club has played at Griffin Park for over 100 years. Its facilities are antiquated and the venue does not attract a wider crowd. The business has lost £5 million a year for the last 2 years. The club's owner has contributed funding as equity to meet this gap.
- The new site at Lionel Road, which will host both the stadium and enabling housing, is less than 1 mile away. The new site is also very near the site where the club was originally founded in 1889. The financial model depends on residential development. It has developed this approach with its preferred bidder for the role of development partner, Wilmott Dixon. The club puts in the land value and the owner is underwriting the project shortfall. The club does not have a hotel partner at this stage.
- BFC wants to move because it has a much smaller capacity than other clubs in the Championship. Committee members heard that average attendance increases by 60% when football clubs move into a new stadium. The operational impact of the new stadium will be worth an additional £3 million a year. The cost of the new stadium and associated infrastructure will be approximately £71 million (excluding the land). Wilmott Dixon needs detailed planning for the residential scheme (which will be phased over 9 years). The new stadium will have corporate boxes and hospitality lounges, which the club will also use for conferencing and banqueting on non matchdays.
- The club has 4 key objectives as part of its vision:
 - The new stadium will have 20,000 seats to host football and rugby.
 - It will be a social venue operating 7 days a week

- The CST will provide a range of community activities
 - The scheme will assist with wider regeneration
- The new stadium will generate local economic and social benefits. BFC has commissioned work to quantify the social benefits (using a methodology also used by the GLA); the report estimates the social value of the current community activities to be worth £8 million per year and the club aims to increase this to over £11 million per year at the new stadium.

Plans for the new stadium at Lionel Road

- BFC has owned the site for its new stadium at Lionel Road since July 2012. The club has detailed planning permission for the stadium, and outline planning permission for the residential and hotel developments. The site is currently an unattractive waste transfer site, and BFC aims to create a pedestrian link from Kew to Gunnersbury Park. It will become a recreational and sports hub. The waste transfer site is not a strategic waste transfer site; the club has engaged with the West London Waste Authority during its negotiations.
- All the existing tenants at Lionel Road are on notice. The club has done deals with tenants, some of which have moved, except for one. The club is currently helping another find a site. BFC is negotiating to buy an adjacent builders' site, and an empty office building, and car park site. The club requires this land in order to build a new bridge. At Kew Bridge station, the club also hopes to work with Network Rail (which owns part of the land) about access to the stadium ramp through a station arch that is currently closed.
- At the entrance to Lionel Road, BFC will look to improve a sharp corner turn. Lionel Road will become narrower to allow the introduction of new cycle lanes, and the site will become more permeable.
- Community contributions include a Mayoral Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) for the stadium and residential development. The section 106 agreement includes contributions to education, improving bus services, controlled parking zones, public realm improvements and Gunnersbury Park regeneration. The development must also fulfil health and wellbeing requirements. BFC has reserved some space for a GP clinic in the stadium (which will be held for 4-5 years).
- The club aims to 'sweat the assets' of the new stadium. The Bees United Supporters Trust has a golden share to prevent asset-stripping of the club; this allows the trust to veto the sale of the club's stadium if it is not in the best interests of the club.
- Lounges and meeting rooms in the stadium will have preferential rates (and some free provision) for local groups.

Associated development

- The stadium development will use an Arsenal type model, drawing on funding from the residential development, involving new housing next to the new stadium. This is likely to comprise 40% 1-bedroom units, 40% 2 bedrooms, and 20% 3 bedrooms. Under a community value commitment, the club has been permitted not to build any social housing. However, if the units sell for a price above a certain threshold (i.e. more than the site's predetermined viability), the agreement allows the council to request that BFC builds social housing or seek payment towards affordable housing. There is a phased housing plan; some of the housing will be built at the same time as the stadium, and some post-stadium development. The section 106 agreement has a calculator to assess the opportunity to include social housing in the final housing block.
- The club's current stadium, Griffin Park, will be converted into approximately 100 family houses, for which there is a big need.

- Some of the housing next to the new stadium will be in the private rented sector. There are cash flow issues; more than half the development will be for private sale and BFC is looking at around 30% private rented housing. BFC told the Committee that it is beneficial for the council to have a long term investor.
- The new stadium site sits alongside the 'Golden Mile' of headquarters to several large companies on the M4. The site is ripe for regeneration as several of the surrounding office buildings are undergoing regeneration.
- There is a longer term infrastructure plan for the wider regeneration of the Golden Mile. Proposals include converting the rail goods line that runs to Willesden Junction for passenger transport, and reinstating a disused line which runs north west to Southall to link with Crossrail. If the goods line were to be used for passengers, a new railway station would be needed. Network Rail has made future provision for a triangle of land west of Lionel Road to enable the line to be converted from single to double-tracking.
- Hounslow council is branding Kew Gate as an opportunity area. St George, St James, and Ballymore are already planning new residential development along the river. The BFC stadium site is also adjacent to several conservation areas. The new site will have better transport links. It will be next to Kew Bridge station and 12 minutes' walk to Gunnersbury Tube. 6 other stations are within a 30-minute walk.
- The local high street needs regeneration. New residents will bring their spending power to the area. The council owns some land on the high street and Ballymore has submitted a planning application..
- In Gunnersbury Park there are regeneration plans for new sports pitches etc. The club wants to create a community hub (hub and spoke idea). Gunnersbury Park straddles 2 boroughs and the Community Sports Trust has a reach across 3-4 boroughs. These plans will require funding from Sport England and other sports bodies
- Kew Bridge station building closed several years ago. It is a listed building which could be rented out; regeneration should create demand.

Challenges

- The club is popular in Brentford and there is a good relationship with residents at Griffin Park. People generally want the club to succeed. There has been some opposition from Chiswick among residents not used to living near a stadium. BFC has been talking to residents groups in Chiswick, Strand on the Green, and Kew.
- The club has twice reduced the height of the proposed residential towers. They vary from 9-17 storeys. Each residential block has parking for residents and some will include parking for the stadium as well. There is limited parking (although it will be provided for disabled people), with 210 stadium spaces and 575 residential spaces. BFC is doing a deal with offices near the new site to use their parking facilities on matchdays.
- BFC has a 3-year target to construct the stadium, as it requires an all-seater stadium within the next 3 years (due to being in the Championship). If BFC does not move, the club will have to spend money on an obsolete asset. BFC could expand its new stadium if necessary, as the North Terrace could have an upper tier. (The Premier League requires significant press and associated facilities.) The railway line would need to be built over and BFC would need to purchase land where there is currently an office block.

Brentford FC Community Sports Trust

- BFC is a community-focused club. Members heard that BFC has the broadest foundation programme in the country; Brentford FC Community Sports Trust (CST). CST outgrew its

original premises at the stadium and moved to separate offices in 2006. The new stadium will host the club and the CST – which runs Griffin Park Learning Zone – together.

- The Learning Zone uses football to create a programme of children's activities linked to the curriculum. The centre attracts 1000 students a year. Specialist teachers are also working at the club with excluded pupils and on schemes aimed at inspiring underachieving primary school pupils. The Learning Zone started with government funding for 10 years, worth £250,000 a year. When this funding ceased, BFC decided not to close the programme, and it included the facility within the Trust, which has been running the classroom itself for the last 2 years. The CST has had to restructure its provision as schools now buy in services. The CST is using outreach, with staff approaching schools directly. The Trust is pitching to deliver transition courses for pupils moving from primary to secondary school, for example. Schools used to have grants to use these services. CST has used club facilities and funding from other groups to fund the facility. The Learning Zone facility will be three times bigger in the new stadium.
- The CST has renovated a derelict arch at Kew Bridge, to become Brentford Boating Arch. The CST leases the arch from TfL. Developer St George applied for planning permission for development next to the arch. St George pays the rent and funded the renovation of the arch; its section 106 paid for a jetty for users to launch kayaks. The facility can be used by residents and the boating club. The total investment in the arch was worth £40-45,000. Sport England provides some revenue for the activities. The facility currently makes a loss but the CST sees it as a unique opportunity. The arch is used by children on a nearby estate, providing an accessible venue to enjoy the natural environment. The CST has linked up with a well-known boxer to look at using the arch to host a boxing facility for children.