

Bristol City Football Club's new stadium development at Ashton Vale.

Bristol City Football Club intend to flog off the family home (Ashton Gate Stadium site), then plead homelessness ("we've got nowhere to put a new stadium!") and finally insist that the City Council re-house them (by ignoring planning regulations, the green belt's supposed protection from inappropriate projects and indeed the local development plans for Bedminster, all in order to allow a new stadium to be built on the Ashton Vale site.)

Since the club cannot themselves afford to build their new stadium the council will also be required to endorse an "Enabling Development" of 300 houses, plus hotels, restaurants and the odd office complex, all on supposedly protected green belt land at Ashton Vale in order to fund this pipe dream. The stadium/landfill site itself is only 1/3rd of the total proposed Ashton Vale development site and the only part that, for technical reasons, cannot be used for housing/commercial developments.

The new LibDem administration at Bristol City Council (with a knife edge majority of only two seats) is already being heavily pressurised by the club, their multi-millionaire stock broker chairman Steve Lansdowne and his hangers on in the media, even before any plans have been submitted.

To add insult to injury, Bristol City FC's great rivals (Bristol Rovers) are locally known as "Gas Heads". But with the site for City's proposed new stadium is on an old land fill site, currently plagued with highly explosive methane gas seepage, there are no prizes for guessing what a future soubriquet for Bristol City FC is also likely to be!

Finally, the club also expect the whole planning process to be fast-tracked in order that Bristol **might** become a Host City (against stiff competition from other cities) for some Group Games in the 2018 World Cup, the franchise for which England **might** win from FIFA (against stiff competition from other countries and other continents).

Now I want to see Bristol City FC in the Premier League **and** watch World Cup football in Bristol, but if England does not get the franchise, or if other cities in the region are preferred, what are we left with?

- ❖ Another retail shed in Bedminster, with North Street winding down as a vibrant shopping area because of competition from the new Tesco super-store, not to mention grid-lock around the Winterstoke Road.
- ❖ A 30,000 seater, state of the art, 21st century football stadium owned by Steve Lansdowne (not the football club,) sitting on a methane gas time bomb.
- ❖ A precedent set for building anything developers want anywhere in the green belt.

It is this last point, of course, which triggers the need for the Save Our Green Spaces campaign groups to mobilise against the whole "House of Cards" that Steve Lansdowne has

carefully constructed - most importantly against his seemingly innocuous Tesco supermarket proposal for the Ashton Vale site.

Without Tesco's £20 million pounds to add to his personal £40+ million input raised from the recent sale of some of his Hargreaves Lansdowne equity (the balance coming from the Ashton Vale housing and commercial developments) then the new stadium can't happen.

None of Steve Lansdowne's proposals is tied to the now indefinitely postponed South West Regional Spatial Strategy. All plans will be submitted to Bristol City Council as "exceptional developments" within current planning guidelines.

But if the Ashton Vale project does get built, then the line of the green belt will have been smoothed out at Ashton Vale. Consequently, North Somerset's proposed Ashton Park mini-town development between Dundry and the city boundary would become a true "Urban Extension." How could it be resisted because the precedent of building such developments would have been set by Bristol City's approval of the Ashton Vale development. How can Bath & North East Somerset council refuse developers' plans for Whitchurch and so on round to the East Kingswood Urban Extension at Warmley and Shortwood.

A Strategy for opposing the stadium plans.

- ❖ The club's stranglehold on the media means there is no outlet for a "No" vote. One has to be created. I am in the process of setting up a 10 Downing Street Epetition that might facilitate this, but it will need sharing around Bristol, particularly amongst the football fraternity and Bedminster residents.
- ❖ No-one has really consulted the public either on the Tesco proposal or the stadium and certainly not on linking the two. So campaigners will have to get involved. I'm happy to knock-up a questionnaire, but the hard part is getting down to North Street and stopping people to ask the question.
- ❖ We have to establish contact with Bristol City Council's LibDem administration to make it clear there will be objections if "due process" is not rigorously observed.
- ❖ If the Bristol Evening Post will not explore the "No" voice then we'll have to mobilise support in smaller rival publications.
- ❖ Regionally we have to throw our backing behind the Ashton Vale campaign group when, in due course, they launch their formal challenge. They are a formidable group and "keeping their powder dry" for maximum impact at the most crucial point. I wouldn't want to cross them!

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