

**Bristol City Football Club use the populist issue of a new football stadium to get stuck into local green belt land.**

West of England's Green Belt campaigners are united against the application by Bristol City Football Club for a 62 acre mixed development of housing, bars/restaurants and hotels on fields to the south of the city. The scheme would destroy land identified as a 'Wildlife Network Site' and a 'High Risk Flood Zone' whereas redeveloping its stadium on the existing site, which is easily accessible with established transport links and infrastructure, would seem a far more logical and environmentally friendly solution.

- ❖ **What's worse, the site designated is green belt land**, supposedly protected from such inappropriate building developments. The club are claiming exceptional circumstances because, they say, there is nowhere else to put a new stadium. That is of course if you overlook the fact that they intend to sell their current stadium site, at Ashton Gate, to Tesco for development as a superstore.

Mary Walsh of the Whitchurch Action Group says "If this goes ahead then no green belt land is safe from any kind of development anywhere in the country. If they agree to this, the city's LibDems will long be remembered around Bristol as the party which single-handedly destroyed 50 years of local government planning policy in their first major political decision."

- ❖ The club **cannot currently afford the stadium** and so, as part of the application, approval is sought for an "enabling development" of 253 houses, also on green belt land, to help finance the whole package. If agreed, this means that any urban based company could seek to re-locate to plush new premises in the green belt and apply for an "enabling development" to finance the whole project.

Mike Parsons of Protect Whitchurch Green Belt Alliance says "Any planning inspector giving the go ahead for this project would also be giving the green light for every other cash strapped urban factory owner to move onto a green field site and build a giant housing estate to finance the whole package."

- ❖ The club are pressing Bristol City Council to **compress the whole planning approval process** into a few short months in order to fit into the Football Association's 2018 World Cup bid programme. The Leader of the council and the City Council's Chief Executive have both appeared in full page articles in the local paper endorsing the campaign for 2018 World Cup Host City status, yet the success of this bid is dependent upon this planning application being approved.

Ron Morton of Shortwood Green Belt Campaign says "The club is attempting to bamboozle the council into approval. How can there now be any kind of unbiased decision making at local level on this particular planning application? The Secretary of State has now got to call in this application, blowing any chance of meeting the FIFA schedule for designating Host City status for Bristol. Sadly for the club and the city, it's an 'own goal'."

He continues, "We're worried that if this development on green belt land is given the go ahead it will kick start the highly profitable and environmentally dubious plans of creating 250,000 new homes on green land in the south west over the next 20 years. Green land equivalent to the area of 15,000 football pitches could be lost."

And finally,

- ❖ The only logical way forward now is for the City Council and Bristol City Football Club to work co-operatively and find a way of building a 21<sup>st</sup> Century, state of the art, multi-purpose stadium – **on the current stadium site in Ashton Gate.**

Jacque Stephens of the Warmley & Siston Save Our Green Spaces group says “For 100 years Ashton Gate has been the home of Bristol City Football Club and given a free choice, fans, supporters and season ticket holders would all say ‘Give us World Cup football and Premier League football at Ashton Gate!’ So why have they never been given any opportunity to say just that?”

### **Press Release ends**

You and your readers can access a summary of Bristol City Football Club’s Ashton Vale planning application and submit comments on [www.bristol.gov.uk](http://www.bristol.gov.uk) where there is a link to the stadium project on the home page. It is Planning Application Number 09/02242/F

Readers can also access our own website via [www.saveourgreenspaces.org](http://www.saveourgreenspaces.org) and click onto Ashton Vale Heritage Group in the drop down box, to follow the ongoing BCFC stadium campaign or indeed any other of the 20 affiliated groups campaigning to protect green belt and green spaces from inappropriate developments in their localities from Tewkesbury to Truro and across to Dorset.

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