

Wiltshire Council

Council

12th May 2015

Public Participation

Statement from Mr Michael Sprules, - Chairperson RADAR
(Residents Against Development Affecting Recreational Land)

Item No. 7

Statement :-

“Sport Provision” is “Lost” as Archaeological Excavations scar Westinghouse Sports Ground at the West End of Chippenham.

Cabinet Members and attending Elected Members

In light of recent events at Westinghouse Sports Ground, I thought it would be prudent to resubmit this Statement which was originally submitted to Full Council on 20th January 2015.

It is with a heavy heart that I write this Statement to Full Council today. Cabinet Members and Elected Members will be aware that I have spoken at Cabinet many times, over the past five years, in regard to my concerns over Westinghouse Sports Ground and for the potential for this “Existing Sport Provision” to be “Lost” prior to being provided elsewhere.

Indeed, on 22nd April 2014, I submitted a Statement to Cabinet which demonstrated a “Deficit” in “Sport Provision”, at the West End of Chippenham, following the decision of Westinghouse Cricket Club to fold. In light of recent events at Westinghouse Sports Ground, I have resubmitted this Statement for the attention of Cabinet Members and attending Elected Members.

Sport England legislation is clear on the matter of “Mitigation of Sport Provision”. It states that, *“In light of para 74 of the National Planning Policy Framework, Local Planning Authorities should ensure that the requirement for any replacement provision to be of an equivalent or better quantity and quality and suitably located in relation to the current users. Planning conditions and/or legal agreements should be used to facilitate, secure and enhance the replacement provision, along with ensuring it is available before the loss of the existing provision.”*

Indeed, Officers for the Wiltshire Council Leisure Strategy Team, that are working on the emerging Sports Pitch Strategy for Wiltshire, have stated the following, in regard to Outdoor Recreation and Playing Pitches within Chippenham, *“It is vital that all sites presently identified as outdoor recreation /playing pitch sites remain as such and are protected, prime examples of these being Stanley Park & Chippenham Sports Club.”*

Whilst Chippenham Town Council are keen to further develop **Stanley Park** (fishing lakes, further sports pitches and upgrading of existing facilities) which should be encouraged there is a **significant distance** from a number of the strategic sites to this site therefore **Chippenham Sports Club, Westinghouse Recreation Ground and Chippenham Rugby club** become **important** not only because of the sports they develop but also because of their **geographic balance position** for the town and its sports facilities.

Westinghouse Recreation Ground though presently not used by any sports club due to its uncertain future, needs to **remain** as a **designated recreation area** and therefore **protected to meet the demands** of the **present and future population** of Chippenham even if residential development as per the existing planning application does take place." It is worth noting that Officers at the Wiltshire Council Leisure Strategy Team have also submitted this statement to the upcoming Chippenham DPD.

This is given greater clarification by an email that I received from Sport England. In this email, Mr. Brian Taylor, Area Development Manager (Wiltshire North), states, "As you are aware there is a legal agreement associated with the decision that requires the **provision of replacement sporting facilities**. This requires certain actions to have been undertaken prior to commencement of development. We have **not** been advised that these actions have been **satisfactorily resolved** as yet. "

Furthermore, I have now received an email from Mr. David Boakes, at Siemens U.K., in which he states that, "I have been in discussions with Linden Homes and their partner Sovereign Housing Association over the last few months, but have **not** been able to **reach an agreement** with them to **complete the sale** of the former sports ground at this time. It is now likely that the legal title of the land will transfer to Linden Homes at the end of the option agreement in March 2017."

Having spoken to Mr. Clive Wiltshire, Managing Director of Linden Homes (Western), on 24th November 2014, Mr. Wiltshire gave me an assurance that no "Mitigation" of "Sport Provision" would potentially begin until such time as Westinghouse Sports Ground was owned by Linden Homes.

In light of this, I was saddened to be witness to the Archaeological Excavations that took place at Westinghouse Sports Ground on 18th December 2014.

Although there are Conditions within the planning Decision that need to be satisfied, it should be noted that there are also Pre-Commencement Conditions, held within the Section 106 Agreement, that also need to be satisfied in regard to the much needed "Sport Provision".

The fact that Archaeological Excavations have now been carried out on Westinghouse Sports Ground, which is still considered as "Existing Sport Provision" (that is to say "Sport Provision" that is yet to be Commenced, Completed and ready to use elsewhere) has set a dangerous "Precedent" in this instance.

Any Developer or Agent could now, potentially, request an Archaeological Excavation on any "Existing Sport Provision" within the Settlement Boundary – Present and Future – of Chippenham. This now firmly puts "At Risk" : Chippenham Rugby Football Club, Chippenham Town Football Club, Chippenham Sports Club, John Coles Park Sports Provision and, of course, Stanley Park.

Indeed, if any request for an Archaeological Excavation of **“Existing Sport Provision”**, within Chippenham, by a Developer or Agent were to be refused then, that Developer or Agent could cite **Westinghouse Sports Ground** as the **“Precedent”**.

As Cabinet Members and Elected Members debate the Adoption of the **Wiltshire Core Strategy**, in this Chamber, it is important to remember that there were areas of the **Core Strategy** that were considered, by Mr. Andrew Seaman, Planning Inspector charged with testing the Soundness and Robustness of the **Wiltshire Core Strategy**, to be **“Unsound”**. One of these areas was the need for a more Sound and Robust Site Allocation for Chippenham.

As the **Wiltshire Core Strategy “Adoption”** will help the County of Wiltshire to prevent Speculative Development, it remains my hope that, moving forward, the Town of Chippenham can grow in a **“Balanced Way”** as the Chippenham DPD progresses.

May I, once again, reiterate the sentiment that all Cabinet Members and Elected Members continue to work with myself and all other parties to facilitate a solution to this issue that will, ultimately, be satisfactory to Mr. David Boakes, Estates Manager, Siemens U.K., Mr. Clive Wiltshire – Managing Director of Linden Homes (Western) and, finally, a solution that will be to the benefit of the Local Residents of Chippenham.

May I, once again, thank Cabinet Members and, indeed, Elected Members for allowing me to submit this statement.