Conditional Support for Studley Grange Planning Application

# Statement of Conditional Support

I wish to state my conditional support for the Studley Grange planning application, subject to the following express requirements and obligations.

# Key Conditions

* No development of the Swindon Speedway track at the Abbey Stadium should proceed until the full construction and operational availability of replacement Speedway facilities at Studley Grange.
* Any further development at the Abbey Stadium, Blunsdon, Swindon, must be expressly contingent upon the completion of the new Speedway track at Studley Grange and its readiness for Speedway racing.
* These requirements must be formalised as explicit conditions and legally binding obligations within any planning approvals or agreements relating to the Abbey Stadium site.

# Basis for Conditionality

* National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) Paragraph 104, which affords protection to sporting facilities at risk of development.
* Local policies governing the provision, retention and enhancement of sport and recreation facilities.
* The precedent set by the Coventry Stadium Appeal Decision dated 19 January 2024.

# Confirmation of Conditional Approval

On the express basis that the development and availability of a new Speedway track at Studley Grange are secured as conditions and legal obligations for any further development at the Abbey Stadium, I confirm my conditional approval for the Studley Grange planning application.

# Express Rejection

I expressly reject the suggestion that the Studley Grange planning application is the “best, and final chance” to secure the future of Speedway in Swindon. My conditional support must not be treated as an endorsement of this suggestion.

# Further Considerations

In considering this application, I draw particular attention to the relevance and primacy of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) in safeguarding sporting infrastructure and ensuring the continuity of Speedway racing in Swindon.

Without compromising the essential conditions of my approval, in considering this application I also draw the Planning Committee’s attention to the following positive features;

1. National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

The proposal aligns with several key principles of the NPPF:

* **Paragraph 40**: Encourages early and effective pre-application engagement. The applicant undertook extensive consultation with Wiltshire Council, stakeholders, and the public, resulting in 84% support for the development.
* **Sustainable Development**: The scheme promotes economic, social and environmental sustainability through job creation, biodiversity net gain and community engagement.
* **Previously Developed Land**: The site includes restored landfill areas, supporting the NPPF’s preference for reusing brownfield land.
* **Leisure and Recreation**: The motorsports park is classified as a leisure use, contributing to community well-being and active lifestyles.

1. Wiltshire Core Strategy Policies

The proposal is assessed against several Wiltshire Council policies:

* **Core Policy 34 (Employment Uses in the Countryside)**: The business centre and motorsports facilities support rural employment and diversification.
* **Core Policy 51 (Landscape)**: The Landscape Visual Impact Assessment addresses potential impacts on the North Wessex Downs National Landscape, with mitigation strategies proposed.
* **Core Policy 58 (Historic Environment)**: The refurbishment of the Grade II listed Studley Grange Farmhouse aligns with heritage conservation goals. The building is currently at risk and the proposal offers a viable restoration strategy.
* **Core Policy 61 (Transport and Accessibility)**: The site is well-connected via Junction 16 of the M4 and includes active travel infrastructure improvements.
* **Core Policy 67 (Flood Risk)**: The site is in Flood Zone 1 and includes a robust drainage strategy to mitigate surface water flooding.

1. Environmental and Technical Compliance

* **Biodiversity Net Gain**: The proposal achieves a minimum 10% BNG, meeting statutory requirements and enhancing local ecology.
* **Noise and Public Protection**: A comprehensive noise impact assessment is included to address concerns from nearby receptors.
* **Sustainable Energy and Carbon**: The proposal includes PV panels and aims for BREEAM ‘Excellent’ certification. An Embodied Carbon Assessment is planned in line with the emerging local plan.

1. Planning History and Precedent

The site has a history of approved developments including restoration schemes and recreational uses, demonstrating its suitability for leisure and mixed-use development.

The proposal is consistent with other approved applications in the area, such as the crematorium and motorway rest area, which support infrastructure and community needs.

1. Noise Impact Assessment

The Noise impact assessment evaluates motorsport-related noise impacts on nearby receptors including homes, farms, a crematorium, and Studley Grange Garden Centre.

Mitigation includes:

* + - Natural attenuation via topography and distance.
    - Strategic site layout and landscaping.
    - Noise barriers.

Speedway noise is predicted to be non-dominant and infrequent, with acceptable levels under varying wind conditions.

1. Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) Assessment

* The Biodiversity Net Gain Technical Report confirms a preliminary BNG of 10.37%, exceeding the statutory minimum.
* Habitats include woodland, scrub, ponds, open mosaic habitat (OMH), and grasslands.
* A full UKHab survey and condition assessment is underway to refine the baseline and ensure compliance with the Environment Act 2021.

7. Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment

The Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment addresses:

* + Impacts on the North Wessex Downs National Landscape.
  + Integration of the development with existing landform and vegetation.
  + Use of planting and layout to minimise visual intrusion.

8. Lighting Assessment

The Lighting Assessment outlines a strategy to:

* + Minimise light spill and glare.
  + Protect nocturnal wildlife.
  + Ensure compliance with environmental lighting standards.

9. Ground Conditions and Remediation

The Remediation Strategy includes:

* + Tiered risk assessments for contamination and groundwater.
  + Proposed earthworks and constraints.
  + Verification strategy for remediation.