

SUSCT NEWSLETTER 25

FOSSETTS CAMPAIGN SPECIAL

ALL hands to the pumps has been the order of the day since the Southend Council meeting on March 7, which confirmed what we possibly suspected but had been led to believe we need not fear. The Fossetts Farm development, upon which the future of Southend United could depend, failed to get outline planning permission.

It is easy to look back now and say we should have been higher profile before the council meeting. Yet the Trust has to rely on information handed down from the top - and that gave an air of optimism we maybe accepted too readily. Now reality has set in and, with less than three short months until the decisive 'yea' or 'nay' is due, ALL parties connected to United are working with a will to try to give the plans the best chance of getting the thumbs-up next time round. Without it, the doo-dah really will hit the fan.

This 'emergency' newsletter is designed purely to fill in Trust members on the latest Fossetts happenings and the direction of Trust response. Normal service, with all the tales of Blues derring-do and disaster, other Trust business and a sprinkling of any sleaze I can find, will be in NUMBER 26, which should hit the streets in about a couple of weeks.

Planning Application No: SOS/00/00700/OUT FOSSETTS FARM seeks outline planning permission to: Demolish nightclub and training facilities (ie r.i.p. Boots and Laces), erect 16,000-seat football stadium, 80-bed hotel and leisure complex (21,400 sq mtrs comprising 10-screen cinema, health club, 10-pin bowling, entertainment centre, nightclub, retail units, food and drink outlets, first-class restaurant, wine bar, casino and concourse), lay out car and coach parks, form vehicular accesses on to Sutton Road and Eastern Avenue and form lagoon (presumably Blue).

THE planning committee has decided, on the recommendation of the Director of Technical Services, to make a final decision in three months. The DoTS declared: *'Members will note that information requested in November has not been received at the level of detail expected. Significant concerns therefore remain with respect to both the issues of principle and detail'*.

At the meeting Ron Martin said his piece for three minutes, as did KARERS figurehead Peter Bliss. Next time we also hope to have a barrister member putting our side of the story. Our planned peaceful mass lobby of as many Trust members and concerned supporters as can attend whenever it is in June or July will also be designed to show the strength of 'pro' feeling and rout (in the most polite way) the opposition.

Your committee convened a special meeting on March 12 at which the repercussions of the initial council decision were fully discussed. We are very fortunate to have been able to co-opt on to the committee Garry Smith BA MA MRTPI, a Trust member, true Blue and, more important at present, a planning expert in his own right. He sees the main obstacles to Fossetts progress as the continuing difficulties concerning traffic access and the proposed leisure development within the plans. *You will find his excellent summary of how he regards the problems that require resolving and their chances of resolution enclosed.*

Garry can at least assure us that Ron Martin has some top-flight teams working in his corner. All they have to do is convince the council of their case. Should Martin Dawn plc not succeed in their application, they can appeal. Ron, however, said at his December Boots and Laces gathering that this would not happen. Even with an OK there will be provisos - section 106 legal agreement, highways and landscaping agreements etc, which could add another six to nine months to the time frame. And 2004-05 is really not that long off when you are in United's position.

Trevor expressed concerns about Delancey pulling the plug, but Garry remains convinced that at present the development remains the horse for them to back.

GARRY next joined liaison officer Jeff Allen and Chris Berry at a meeting with the council's development control officer John Collins on March 19. Edited details are again enclosed. Jeff and Garry were also due to meet Ron Martin prior to the Hull game. But with another deluge putting that fixture on ice (or rather under water) another date is being fixed.

As, hopefully, you can see, the Trust is not sitting on its backside over this vital issue. Our current three-fold goal is to keep League football in the borough of Southend, to do all we can to see Fossetts Farm gets planning permission and to endeavour to put pressure on the council and the football club to ensure that comes about. But equally important is the part that all our members can play – both through the Trust direct (check info on www.susc.co.uk) and Save Our Southend, which is the focal point for the campaign as a whole. Dave 'Techno Trousers' Scriven has designed a website for SOS on www.saveoursouthend.co.uk, with Trust chairman Trevor Bashford the physical centre of the universe at 45 Audley Road, Great Leighs, Chelmsford, Essex. CM3 1RS (Tel: 01245-362742). The SOS e-mail address will be fossettsfarm@hotmail.com Any ideas or views on how we can take the fight forward, GET IN TOUCH. Trust assistant press officer Martin Penton (01376-345340) will also always lend an ear.

So while Ron Martin, the Trust officers etc push on, what can YOU do to help.

Firstly, we would ask as many of you as can muster the strength to raise a pen to write to your local councillor and try to impress upon them how important it is that they give their backing to the Fossetts Farm scheme – stressing particularly its importance to the wellbeing of SUFC and its potential value as an amenity to the town.

We would also appreciate as many letters as possible being sent along the same lines to your local MP, notably our Trust president Sir Teddy Taylor and David Amess. They will be conscious of people's voting plans with a general election looming.

And finally you should not forget Southend Council's planning department. Go direct to the department or to Roger Weaver, Development Control Committee, Southend-on-Sea Borough Council, Victoria Avenue etc etc.

We have been advised that such mailings will be far more effective than any petition, though there is no reason why our petition should not start up again.

PLEASE do this AS SOON AS YOU CAN. If you delay, you might forget – and we need as big a response as possible as time runs out. That is how the council in particular will gauge the strength of feeling from our side and be made totally aware that there most definitely is an alternative view to the so-called KARERS.

Ron Martin is keen for as many SOS or similar banners to be on view around the ground on match days and away games, so there is an incentive for you all to take up sewing. Dave Scriven has already put a lot of work into getting us the sort of flag that will really make an impact and has raised a certain amount of money towards it. Further donations will be welcome from anyone wanting to contact him on thewebmaster@benfleet276.freerve.co.uk

Just as vital, you can help by continuing to turn up at matches. If our support drops off because the season looks to be tailing off – and we know our gates are nowhere near big enough as it is – then it does not create a good impression with Fossetts doubters. In fact, drag a friend or two along.

In the pipeline we also have a special postcard shot to councillors likely to be done at a forthcoming home game and a joint info sheet from the Trust and the football club, again to be distributed on a match day.

So all there is left to say is get to it. Please do your bit if you can. It could make all the difference in these trying times for SUFC.

Having a planned council election bang in the middle of the build-up to the big meeting is not going to help. If we feel some current council members are not sufficiently briefed on all the issues as it is, what will a likely 13 novice incumbents be like? But we have to accept that. Just get those letters out now to those who count – and to help all of you who do not know your local councillors, you will also find enclosed a current list for your information.

We have to show our strength of feeling is the equal or deeper than that of any opposition. What should also help is showing that we are operating on a less sensationalist basis than those who would try to pretend that anyone attending a football match in the vicinity of Fossetts Farm will first have to be provided with the modern-day equivalent of a World War I gas mask to prevent instant asphyxia by Jupiter-like levels of lethal pollutants. Such KARER tactics are palpably arrant tosh – and I think I'll make that SKARERS from now on.....

All the best – and we will keep you posted.

NIGEL RICKARD (27/3)

Southend United Supporters Club Trust

Planning Issues surrounding proposed move to Fossetts Farm

1. Introduction

On 10th July 2000 a planning application was submitted to Southend Borough Council for the following:

A 16,000 capacity all seater sports stadium

Ancillary shop and ticket office (500sq. m.)

80 bed, three-star hotel (3,000 sq. m.)

A leisure park complex (21,400 sq. m.)

The application was submitted in outline (i.e. to establish the principal of development) although was accompanied by various drawings for indicative purposes only. It was also supported by the following documents:

- 1. Report by Deloitte & Touche to support the relocation of SUFC**
- 2. Architect's design report by KSS Sports & Leisure Ltd**
- 3. Planning & Leisure report by Donaldsons**
- 4. Travel impact assessment and new stadium match day supporter travel plan prepared by Buchanan Consulting Engineers**
- 5. Landscape appraisal report prepared by The Landscape Partnership**
- 6. Environmental Impact Statement by WSP Environmental.**

A detailed and comprehensive report was put to the Council's Development Control Committee on 7th March 2001. The report sets out clearly the position to date and also why the planning officers consider that they still do not have sufficient information on which to make a recommendation.

2. Matters Outstanding

Although the information submitted by Martin Dawn PLC on behalf of the club appears to be comprehensive and has been prepared by reputable consultants in their respective fields, the Council Officers are still not satisfied that sufficient information has been received. In particular they require the applicants to address the following points:

- A. **Highways - The Council are still very nervous about highways matters. Martin Dawn have employed (in my opinion) highly respected consultants to deal with these matters, but they are yet to satisfy the Council's own consultants, WS Atkins. In particular they have identified the following deficiencies:**

- 1. No projections of anticipated traffic growth**
- 2. No evidence of how the "modal shift" would be achieved.**

In my (layman's) opinion the first one of these should be relatively easy to prove by a highway engineer. It is only really for the basis of calculating the contribution that the developers would need to make towards highway improvements (probably towards upgrading around the Priory Park area which is the big problem area, also Sutton Road roundabout).

The 2nd issue is a tricky one. Basically, the application states that whereas at Roots Hall 65% of people come by car, at Fossetts Farm only 45.4% would. 17.1% would walk to Fossetts, compared with 9% to Roots Hall, and so the list goes on. They are really after some justification for these figures – a cynic might say that the developers looked at the road capacity and parking and then worked out the modal split to fit – but they wouldn't do that would they?

The Sutton Road roundabout is a difficult issue as the Fire Brigade has highlighted its concerns. Basically if the roundabout is grid-locked, how are they going to get to a fire in the centre of town?

In my experience, most highways matters can be resolved if you throw enough money at them – however the developers are going to be reluctant to put anything more than the bare minimum towards the offsite highway works as it will hit their profits and potentially the viability of the scheme.

- B. **Why Leisure? – The Fossetts Farm site is allocated for "employment" purposes in the local plan. ("Employment" does not include leisure – don't ask me why, it just doesn't - right!). The Council has also allocated other areas of the town where it would like to encourage leisure development, chiefly around the Sea Front. Their basic problem is; what is the justification for taking one of their best employment sites when by putting leisure facilities here they may well also "sterilise" sites allocated for leisure elsewhere in the Borough. If it's got to be leisure then they need to see adequate financial justification for it and also proof that it is not going to harm both existing businesses and the potential for new development in the town centre and on the sea front**

CONCLUSIONS

In my opinion the officers' recommendation of approval for this development is critical. The general tone of the report is negative and it would seem that at the moment the professional planners are leaning towards refusing the application. It now falls to Ron Martin's team of professionals to come up with the goods so that the planners cannot recommend refusal.

To get a positive recommendation from the planning officers the developers will have to demonstrate (using THE COUNCIL'S chosen methodology) that the Borough will not be harmed with regard to Highways, Loss of employment land, Impact on Town Centre/Sea Front. They will also have to come up with a full justification for need, both for a new stadium on a different site and for the leisure (as opposed to employment) development.

The ancient monument, environmental, ramblers etc. objections are planning considerations but are peripheral in the overall scheme of things.

If the developers don't get the officers on their side then the political lobbying is going to have to be pretty strong and may prove to be an impossible task. If members are satisfied that their professional officers are willing to grant approval then they will be more reluctant to refuse (it could lead to an appeal on which THEY are representing the Council and could incur costs against them).

Meeting at Southend Borough Council – 19/3/01

Present: John Collins – Group Manager, Development Control, Jeff Allen – SUSCT/SUFC liaison officer, Chris Berry – SUSCT Committee, Garry Smith – Chartered Town Planner and SUSCT planning adviser.

JC gave a brief introduction to the process to date and the steps taken by the applicants (Martin Dawn PLC) to convince the Council's planning officers of the need for the new stadium and associated development.

Firstly the applicants need to prove the need to move. This has not yet been satisfactorily proved.

Secondly the applicants must demonstrate that Fossetts is the only reasonable site to move to. JC stated the Council were already convinced of this and supported a new stadium on the site.

Thirdly the club need to demonstrate the viability of the development and convince the council the enabling development (leisure park) can finance the deal.

Fourthly it must be demonstrated why leisure development should be agreed on the site when other areas of the borough have been designated for that. Fossetts Farm may be viewed by the council as part of the 30 hectares of land they need for employment land e.g. a new B & Q in the plans might go down better. IF the applicants can prove the need for leisure development, they will then need to prove the proposed development will neither harm the Town Centre or Sea Front areas nor sterilise other proposed leisure sites (front of old gasworks, Dizzyland etc).

Fifthly highway matters are a further point of contention – focusing on how many people will arrive at the new ground by the different transport methods. Current future estimates of only 45 per cent driving, compared to 65 per cent at present are seen as optimistic. This will impact on required road upgrading and provision.

The Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM) is a consideration, but English Heritage may have left their complaints too late and the plans for it as laid out are felt to be quite adequate.

Also in the equation is the matter of land purchase from the likes of Lansbury Developments. With planning permission in place, the council would quite likely back compulsory purchase – though there is potential for costs to rise.

The meeting was regarded as valuable by those who attended and John Collins was extremely open and helpful. He also has a high opinion of Ron Martin! The feeling is the council want to give the football club every opportunity to survive in the town, but there remains significant work to be done if the plans for Fossetts Farm as envisaged are to be passed in the desired form. There are particular doubts concerning the short amount of

time – only about six weeks – remaining for Martin Dawn to provide the detailed evidence concerning viability and potential harm to the town centre / sea front.

THANKS AGAIN TO GARRY SMITH FOR ALL HIS WORK ON THE ABOVE.