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Request To Call In The Plans For The Replacement Cycling Velodrome In Cardiff

Reference: 21/02848/MJR

To whom it may concern,

We are writing to you to request that you call in the plans for the proposed replacement cycling velodrome that has been approved by Cardiff Council Planning Department for construction at the International Sports Village, Cardiff Bay.

We believe this replacement velodrome development is of **national importance** and due to it's controversial nature and a clear conflict of interest on the part of Cardiff Council, any decisions on approval for the development to go ahead should be taken by the Welsh Assembly Government.

This proposed new velodrome is closely linked to the proposed expansion of a Cardiff high school and the subsequent proposed loss of Maindy velodrome, so we have included details of both to provide the wider context of this complex planning issue.

Background

In Wales we only have two "heritage" outdoor community velodromes.

One is in Carmarthen, the other is in Maindy Park, Cardiff.

Maindy Velodrome was opened in 1951 on part of an area of land gifted to the people of Cardiff by the Marquis of Bute in 1922 known as Maindy Park.

This is the centenary year of Maindy Park.

In 1958, Maindy Velodrome was the venue for many of the cycling events when Cardiff hosted the Empire and Commonwealth Games.

To our knowledge, the velodrome is the only surviving legacy sports facility from these games.

Whilst not actually formally listed, Maindy Velodrome appears on CADW's register of Historic Sites.

Maindy Velodrome has hosted many other sporting events including a world title heavyweight boxing match and numerous athletics events when there was an athletics track inside the cycle track.

The cycle track has been used for training by many subsequent Welsh Commonwealth Games cyclists and is regular use to this day by grass roots junior level cyclists up to senior level training and competition.

It is also a cycling and running base for Cardiff Junior Triathlon children.

Maindy Velodrome has nurtured young cyclists for many years and has been fundamental in the success of Welsh cyclists on the World stage.

Multi Olympic Gold Medal winners Elanor Barker and Geraint Thomas started their cycling careers at Maindy Velodrome, as did many other medal winners and successful competitive cyclists.

Geraint Thomas was the 2018 Tour de France Winner and went on to win UK Sports Personality of the Year.

Cardiff Council are seeking to destroy this famous Welsh (and Nationally and Internationally recognised) sporting facility and replace it with a smaller and steeper inadequate velodrome in Cardiff Bay which does not even comply with their own design brief.

Cardiff Councils Justification for the Replacement Velodrome.

Cardiff Council are planning to expand and rebuild Cathays High School which is adjacent to the Maindy Velodrome site.

Despite the misgivings of ESTYN, the local community and their own scrutiny committee, they want to rebuild and expand the school to cater for a total of 1,400 pupils.

The council want to use Welsh Government 21st Century Schools funding to achieve their goal.

Local demand is below 400 places, and when full the school will have approximately 1,065 pupils travelling in from outside of the current catchment area.

Understandably these plans are very controversial, not least because their expansion plan involves demolishing Maindy Velodrome and expanding onto the site.

Maindy Velodrome is located on a refuse filled former clay pit.

Despite misleading the community during the school consultation that the velodrome was needed to build the school on, they have subsequently had to admit that the site is unsuitable for building.

After giving various different reasons for requiring the site, they have now stated they require the destruction of the velodrome and inner and outer grassed areas in order to construct artificial plastic sports pitches for the new school.

They have repeatedly refused to detail where exactly they intend to place the actual school buildings due to the “distress” it would cause to the community and local councilors!

Their plans have resulted in over 400 objections to the school expansion, primarily due to the loss of Maindy Velodrome and associated park land plus over 4,600 people signing a “Save Maindy Velodrome” petition.

Cardiff Council have dismissed the objections as “a few people complaining about the loss of a cycle track” and just the usual local opposition you would expect with any development.

It is worth noting that the petition signatories and messages of support for the campaign include many from the whole of Wales, the rest of the UK, Europe and Worldwide.

This is most definitely more than just a “local interest” issue.

Supporters of the “Save Maindy Velodrome” campaign include Tour de France winner Geraint Thomas and Olympic Gold Medalist Sir Chris Hoy.

We believe that the demolition of Maindy Velodrome will be an act of cultural, historic and sporting legacy vandalism that the Welsh Government need to take action to prevent.

The case and justification for the new velodrome is totally reliant on the loss of Maindy Velodrome.

Funding for the Proposed “Replacement” Velodrome.

The funding of the proposed new velodrome is totally reliant on millions of pounds of Welsh Government funds.

The Welsh Government is not funding the velodrome directly, however Cardiff Council intend to use 21st Century Schools Education funding to part finance the project.

By removing Maindy Velodrome in order to facilitate the Cathays High expansion, they are trying to justify the use of part of the associated education funding to finance the building of the new track in the Sports Village.

So far, this is the only actual identified funding for the International Sports Village regeneration project.

The progression of the sports village redevelopment is therefore reliant on money which should be invested in schools and not a sports and leisure destination.

As this is Welsh Government funds they intend to use, it has the potential to cause considerable bad press and embarrassment for the Welsh Government.

Using Welsh Government schools money to fund a smaller elitist performance velodrome to replace a much valued historic community velodrome has the potential to cause a major scandal.

Inadequacies and Shortcomings of the Replacement Velodrome Plans

The planned new velodrome is supposed to be a direct and equivalent replacement for Maindy Velodrome.

Cardiff Council have continually stated in press releases and within the documentation accompanying the planning application that this is the case, including in the application design and access statement.

It is supposed to provide a “seamless transition” for the current users of the Maindy facility to be able to transfer to the Bay.

The design and access statement states the requirement to *“deliver and re-provide the facilities available to the cycling community at the current Maindy site”*.

The design brief was to provide an adequate replacement suitable for all ages, abilities and types of bikes.

Cycling club representatives were assured by the Council Velodrome Project Team during initial meetings that the banking of the new track would not be steeper than the Maindy Track.

However, the design specifications included in the planning application prove this not to be the case:

Maindy velodrome has a 460m track with 18 degree banking.

It is suitable for all ages and all types of bikes – track specific fixed wheel bikes, road bikes, mountain bikes, children’s bikes and scooters.

The majority of the day, when the track is not being used for formal training sessions and occasional competition, the community have free access to use the track and grassed inner areas.

By contrast, the replacement track will be smaller (333m) with much steeper banking at 28 rather than 18 degrees.

The design team have told cycling clubs that the banking will actually be 32 degrees.

These specifications would make the new velodrome a track bike specific “performance” velodrome.

The wide range of bikes types and sizes used at Maindy would be mostly unsuitable for use on the new track.

There would have to be age and ability restrictions on the track in line with other UK velodromes with similarly steep banking.

Access would be restricted and controlled, for safety reasons, to the track and inner track areas.

In short, the new velodrome would not be as required, described and promised and would be a totally unsuitable replacement for the existing facility.

Cardiff Council have stated that they have “overall support” from clubs and users for the new facility.

This is no longer the case and the cycling clubs and other stakeholders have made it clear that they have significant concerns that the design specifications are not compliant with their needs or what they were promised.

These concerns were put in writing to the council in advance of the planning committee meeting.

Further evidence of this mismatch between requirements and design can be found in the paperwork submitted by WPS, the agents responsible for compiling the new velodrome planning application.

WPS state more than once in the PAC summary report that the *“design of the existing Maindy Velodrome is not considered relevant to the design of the new proposed velodrome”*.

How can the design of Maindy be considered *“not relevant”* when the new velodrome is supposed to be a direct replacement facility.

Planning Committee Meeting 02/03/2022

The council planning officer, Justin Jones, despite being aware of all the shortcomings of the designs compiled a committee report recommending that planning permission be granted.

He was supposed to present his report to the committee, however Steve Ball, Operational Manager for Strategic Development presented the report instead.

During the meeting, Mr. Ball repeatedly instructed the committee to ignore all the objections and representations which proved that the new velodrome design was not fit for purpose.

We personally sent additional representation on top of our official objection to the plans once we were had sight of Justin Jones’ report recommending approval.

These were also ignored by the planning committee.

We believe that consideration of the shortcomings of the design should have been considered as part of the planning application process.

Fundamentally, this planning application was not for a “stand alone” new velodrome.

It was for a “like for like” direct replacement for the existing velodrome at Maindy and it’s uses by a wide range of cyclists and bike types.

Failure to consider the lack of merit and unsuitability of the design , especially in relation to their own design brief, shows that they were incapable of making an informed independent decision.

As a direct replacement for Maindy, determining whether the plans for the new velodrome met the necessary requirements should have been a key material consideration when forming a decision on this application.

However, the planning committee were directed to ignore this vital and relevant consideration.

If you watch the webcast of the meeting, it is deeply concerning to us that Steve Ball appeared to use his senior position to unduly influence the decision of the committee to approve the plan.

What would be a suitable replacement for Maindy.

As has been pointed out by the cycling clubs and others, the new design is not fit for purpose.

To comply with British Cycling standards, modern velodromes have to be divisible into 1 kilometer.

The closest to Maindy, at 460m would be 500m rather than the planned 333m.

This would also allow for the banking to be built at 20 degrees or less – meeting the actual requirements of all the current users of the Maindy Velodrome.

However, there is insufficient land available at the Sports Village.

Highways around the site will have to be altered just to fit in the planned 333m track, so there is definitely not enough space to accommodate a fully suitable 500m replacement track.

The design has been tailored to the confines of the site, rather than to the requirements of current users and in compliance with the design brief.

This explains why Cardiff Council are ignoring the needs of the current track users.

They want to progress the redevelopment of the Sports Village by building a substandard smaller velodrome that does not meet the required specifications and aim to fund it using Welsh Government 21st Century Schools money as their only identified potential funding stream.

The fact that a steep 333m velodrome is an insufficient unsuitable replacement that will be a “white elephant” of no use to the majority of the cycling community is an inconvenience they have dismissed as “not relevant” to the planning application.

This is further evidence that they are incapable of making an informed independent decision on this development of National importance that will be paid by way of Welsh Government funding.

Additional Information:

Maindy velodrome is sited in Maindy Park.

This is land was gifted to Cardiff in 1922 and is held under covenant in perpetuity by the Maindy Park Charity no. 524137. Cardiff council are sole trustees responsible for upholding the covenant.

They are also the “developer” that wants to remove the covenant and demolish the velodrome to allow them to access Welsh Government funding to pay towards the planned new velodrome.

We and others are currently in communication with the Charity Commission over the clear conflict of interest caused by Cardiff Council’s failure to uphold their duty as trustees to protect the land.

The Charity Commission have already confirmed that there is a conflict of interest in this case which will require careful management by the council. Their actions so far over their conflicting roles evidences that they are incapable of managing serious issues they themselves have created.

This relates to calling in the plan for the new velodrome as the removal of the covenant is crucial to the new velodrome project and the school expansion – all of which Cardiff Council want to use Welsh Government funding to achieve.

Conclusion:

We hope that you will agree this development is of a national rather than local importance.

The effects of this application impact on much more than the immediate locality.

The linked plan to demolish Maindy is of national current and historical importance.

The decision maker in this case should not be the local authority because of:

- The importance of a decision on a plan concerning a sports facility resource of national rather than local impact and significance .
- The impossibility of the local authority, as they are the both the developer and the decision makers in this case, to reach a fair and impartial decision.
- The undue pressure that appears to have been exerted on the process a senior member(s) of Cardiff Council.
- The local authority having approved the plans despite knowing that the replacement facility is not fit for purpose.

- The potential reputational damage that may be suffered as a result of Welsh Government schools funding being diverted to fund the redevelopment of Cardiff Bay Sports Village.
- The novel planning issue presented by the authority interlinking this development directly to a controversial school expansion and the destruction of an important well attended Welsh sporting heritage site of international renown.

We have compiled considerable documentary evidence to support this submission and are willing and able to provide any further detail and clarification should may require.

Submitted for consideration,

From: (Redacted)

30/05/2022