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Secretary: Peter Hawkrige,  
43 Scholes Lane,  
Rotherham,  
S61 2RG  
Telephone: 0114 2464703  
[phawkrige@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:phawkrige@blueyonder.co.uk)

10th August 2010

Dear Mr Battersby,

**Planning Application No: RB2010 - 0945**

**Outline Application for new 12,000 capacity community stadium at Don Street, Rotherham, for Rotherham United F.C. Ltd.**

You will recall receiving a copy of the Society's letter, dated the 4<sup>th</sup> May 2010, addressed to Simon Chadwick of Signet Planning, outlining in detail the Society's views on the retention of the Guest and Chrimes listed building. On the 11<sup>th</sup> May 2010 Mr Chadwick acknowledged the letter and promised to keep the Society informed of what was happening. No further information has, however, been received until the current planning application was posted on the Council's website.

It is quite clear that the Society's stated intention to vigorously oppose any moves to demolish the listed building in its entirety has placed the Football Club and the Council in a predicament. Although Simon Chadwick sought to assure the Society that no decisions had been made on the building's future it is quite apparent that the basis is being laid for the future demolition of the listed building, the only issue in question being the timing of the application for consent.

Notwithstanding the Society's stated preference for a return to Millmoor on sustainability grounds, it has no objection whatsoever to the principle of developing the Don Street site on planning grounds. It strongly supports the need for Rotherham United F. C. Ltd to develop once more into a strong and viable football club and has no intention of opposing the present planning application.

There are, however, a number of matters within the application that the Society would take issue with.

**Public Consultation:**

The Design and Access Statement refers to the public exhibition and consultation in April 2010 and the fact that *nobody expressed concern about retaining the Guest & Chrimes site with the exception of the Civic Society*. The Society's view on this is as follows:

- The site plan was A2 in size and hardly capable of the closest of inspection with a group of people around.
- The site plan stated that the listed building was to be the subject of a separate application for demolition in whole or in part.
- By its very nature the consultation would specifically attract people directly interested in the football club rather than in the future of the listed building.
- The consultation form did not specifically highlight the issue of the listed building.

**Planning Support Statement:**

**Proposed Site Plan:**

1. The Proposed Site Plan exhibited in April 2010, showed the north car park entrance through the listed building. The revised Proposed Site Plan AP(00)003/A, dated 21/4/2010, implies that, with the listed building remaining in place, the north car park will now be accessed by cars travelling round three sides of the stadium to reach it. This would hardly seem to be a long term solution. A permanent car park access could have been accommodated, albeit with some difficulty, to the north of the listed building. The fact that it hasn't suggests to the Society that the plan is to eventually re-instate the original proposal as part of a future redevelopment of the site of the listed building.
2. The revised plan also indicates a riverside footpath along the entire eastern boundary of the site. There would appear to be some conflict between this proposal and the aspirations outlined in the Ecology report in relation to the creation of wildlife habitats along the riverbank.

**Paragraphs 4.12 – 4.14**

It is disingenuous of the consultants to attribute the entire expenditure levels and employment levels to the new stadium development. Many of these economic benefits were available to Masbrough and the Town Centre until two years ago when the football club was still located at Millmoor. Unless it can be categorically stated that the Club would no longer exist if it had remained at Millmoor then logically the economic benefits that should be taken into account are the net benefits in terms of additional spectators etc resulting from the use of a new stadium. As far as the Society is aware Mr Tony Stewart's offer to the Club's administrators in April 2008 was not conditional upon the Club leaving Millmoor, as the new Chairman reputedly entered into negotiations with the Millmoor site owner upon the Club exiting the administration process.

**Paragraph 4.32**

It is simply not credible that the assessment of alternative sites should effectively ignore the fact that the Millmoor Football Ground exists and remains allocated for 'Community Facilities – Leisure' purposes. From a layman's viewpoint the sites considered, including Basingthorpe Farm, Roughwood Playing Fields, Midland Road Bus Garage, Phoenix Sports

Ground, and Slag Reduction at Templeborough have far more difficulties to overcome than that of ownership. In planning terms Millmoor is available, allocated, and has no valid planning permissions for an alternative use. Reference is made, in paragraph 4.9 of the Environmental Statement, to a letter detailing the difficulties at Millmoor but this is not included in the application documents. The Society believes that the alternative sites chapter needs to be more explicit in justifying the Club's stance.

It is noted that one of the sites considered was Waverley; the fact that this was under consideration was previously denied by your officers at our last quarterly liaison meeting.

#### **Paragraph 4.42**

This entirely misses the point in suggesting that the 'loss' of 6.44 hectares of employment land is in effect inconsequential. As recognised in the Council's Draft Interim Planning Statement, dated May 2008, the site's location had significant potential for a major mixed use development of B1 business office uses and residential property.

All other things being equal, and with a comprehensive flood alleviation plan in place, the site because of its location has the potential for a higher employment density development than other small employment sites in the central area of Rotherham.

#### **Paragraph 4.50**

The conclusion drawn is that *the new stadium would at the very least preserve the setting of the listed building and would arguably enhance it.*

There is obviously a problem of semantics here. The implication of the Flood Risk and Run - Off Assessment report is that the entire site immediately to the west and south of the listed building will be raised to a new development platform 2.5 metres higher than the listed building. Additionally *the existing levels of Don Street are to be maintained in the most part, up until the road is adjacent with the Guest & Chrimes building. At which point in order to provide access to the elevated stadium it will be necessary to re-grade Don Street to match the main ground access.*

Clearly the intention is that the listed building be left in a bowl shaped depression encircled by higher ground. In the event of an extreme flood event it is intended that *should the system capacity be exceeded or partially fail the resultant overland flow can be managed within the site without impacting upon the stadium envelope.* This can only mean that the excess water is channelled to the area of the listed building.

In the Society's view the setting of the listed building is directly compromised by these actions.

#### **Paragraph 4.53**

The implication that the listed building has been extensively marketed in the past with little response thus casting doubts on its future viability is a complete manipulation of the facts.

At no point since Guest and Chrimes Ltd relocated to Ilkeston in Derbyshire has the planning status of this and the adjoining Gloystarne site been sufficiently clear to encourage any right minded investor to acquire the property. The listed building was first offered for sale by Evans of Leeds in May 2001, at which time, and for the subsequent 18 months, the future of the immediately surrounding area was embroiled in a planning battle between Evans/Tesco, Gloystarne/Finnegan, and the Council.

The planning status of the area was still not clear when, in August 2007, Evans of Leeds carried out a public consultation event on possible alternative development scenarios. It was not until December 2008 that Evans of Leeds received planning permission for the reclamation of the industrial wasteland it had created around the listed building and subsequently brought some clarity to the area's future by signing the agreement with RMBC for the construction of the new Civic Offices.

It is noticeable that although a number of 'kites' are flown in respect of *possible pedestrian route under Main Street* indicating a possible link to the railway station, and *possible location of a future pedestrian footbridge* link to Westgate/Sheffield Road no similar possibilities are raised for the listed building. In any event the Society believe that these 'possibilities' are just that and should be deleted as they have no bearing on the present application which should be solely treated on the basis of its own merits.

What is also noticeable is the reference, in paragraph 3.7 of the Planning Support Statement, to *uses – that may include proposals for an hotel, for example ....* This leads the Society to the regrettable conclusion that the following scenario will be played out over the next few years.

***Neither the Council, nor Rotherham United has any interest in the retention of the listed building. The Council, being in an invidious and compromising position, will ignore its statutory duty to keep the listed building in an appropriate state of repair, content to see its continued decline. In two years time, flanked on the one side by a new state of the art Civic Centre, and on the other by the new Stadium built on a higher development platform, the listed building will present a sorry sight. A major flood event or the total lack of security on the building will inevitably lead to further damage to the building and the day will dawn when RMBC and RUFC 'bow to the inevitable' and suggest the removal of the 'eyesore'. A 'visionary regeneration solution' will be promoted involving the demolition of the listed building, the raising of the development platform, and the building of a hotel on the site.***

The Society, however, still believe that the frontage of the listed building has a part to play in creating a unique sense of place in this locality, and is capable of being incorporated within an outstanding commercial development on the site. As envisaged in the recently published South Yorkshire Residential Design Guide the aim should be to create places that are *understandable, remarkable, and visually interesting*. The Society remain to be convinced that the potential vulnerability of the building to an extreme flood event is sufficient justification for its demolition particularly in view of the fact that it has received no response

at all to the points made in its letter of 4<sup>th</sup> May 2010 relating to the flood analysis contained in the Town Centre Draft Interim Planning Statement.

Yours sincerely,

Secretary