

Hertsmere Call for Employment Sites
2021
**Representation on behalf of Veladail
Leisure Ltd**

Bushey Hall Golf Club
Bushey Hall Drive, Hertfordshire, WD23 2EP

March 2021



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1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 On behalf of our client and site owners, Veladail Leisure Ltd, we are pleased to put forward the site at Bushey Hall Golf Club (BHGC) in response to Hertsmere Council's new 'Call for Employment Sites' as a new strategic employment site that can be developed over the next 5 years, delivering not only substantial economic benefits but community and sustainability benefits to Hertsmere Borough.
- 1.2 This statement has been prepared to assist the Council in assessing the deliverability of the BHGC site for employment uses and provides information on the existing site, sets out the proposals for the site's future development and explains the benefits that the proposals would deliver.
- 1.3 Veladail Leisure Ltd request that the site is removed from the Green Belt and allocated as a *strategic employment site* in the Local Plan comprising commercial, sport and recreation, leisure and cultural, retail and community uses.
- 1.4 The site is suitable, available for development that is achievable and deliverable in accordance with the guidance in the NPPF/NPPG and is an excellent candidate for removal from the Green Belt and a strategic sustainable employment allocation in the Local Plan comprising commercial, sport and recreation, leisure and cultural, retail and community uses.
- 1.5 The proposals for the site include the relocation of Watford Football Club (WFC) from their current home at Vicarage Road to a new state of the art 33,000 capacity stadium, WFC HQ and Watford Community Sports and Education Trust (WCT) administrative offices, a 6,000 seater arena, hotel and conference centre, cinema, restaurants, care home and outdoor recreation.
- 1.6 Watford Football Club endorse the promotion of the BHGC site for a new stadium as part of Hertsmere's new Local Plan, for proposals that would provide them with the opportunity to develop the UK's first zero carbon stadium and community hub in a location within the catchment of the Club's existing supporter base. The Club has identified the BHGC site as one that is in a sustainable location maintaining good connections with Watford town centre and accessibility from Watford Junction mainline railway station, with access also from Bushey railway station. This site would also allow the Club to bring together all of its various office functions in one place, including the Watford Community Sports and Education Trust, which whilst maintaining its work in the communities in Watford would be able to extend this to communities in Hertsmere.

Location of Site

- 1.7 The site has an area of circa 41 hectares, is in single long term ownership having been acquired and operated as private golf course for over 30 years by Veladail Leisure before its closure in 2019. The site is located in Bushey Heath as shown on the Site Location Plan in Figure 1 below.
- 1.8 The site is bounded to the north by residential development on Park Avenue, to the east by fields associated with the Lincolnsfield Centre (under construction – 55 units) and the Queens and Purcell Schools on Aldenham Road. Existing development to the south and south east of the golf course is mostly residential with some employment uses which are all well screened from the existing golf course. Park Avenue bounds the site to the west with some residential development and a recreation area.

- 1.9 Vehicular access to the site is currently from Bushey Hall Drive, however there are opportunities to create new vehicular and pedestrian linkages from Park Avenue and Bushey Mill Lane to the northern part of the site.
- 1.10 The site has good access to public transport with Watford Junction, Watford High Street and Bushey railway stations all within walking distance with access to mainline and local rail services. There are opportunities for local sustainable transport improvements as part of the proposals for the site.

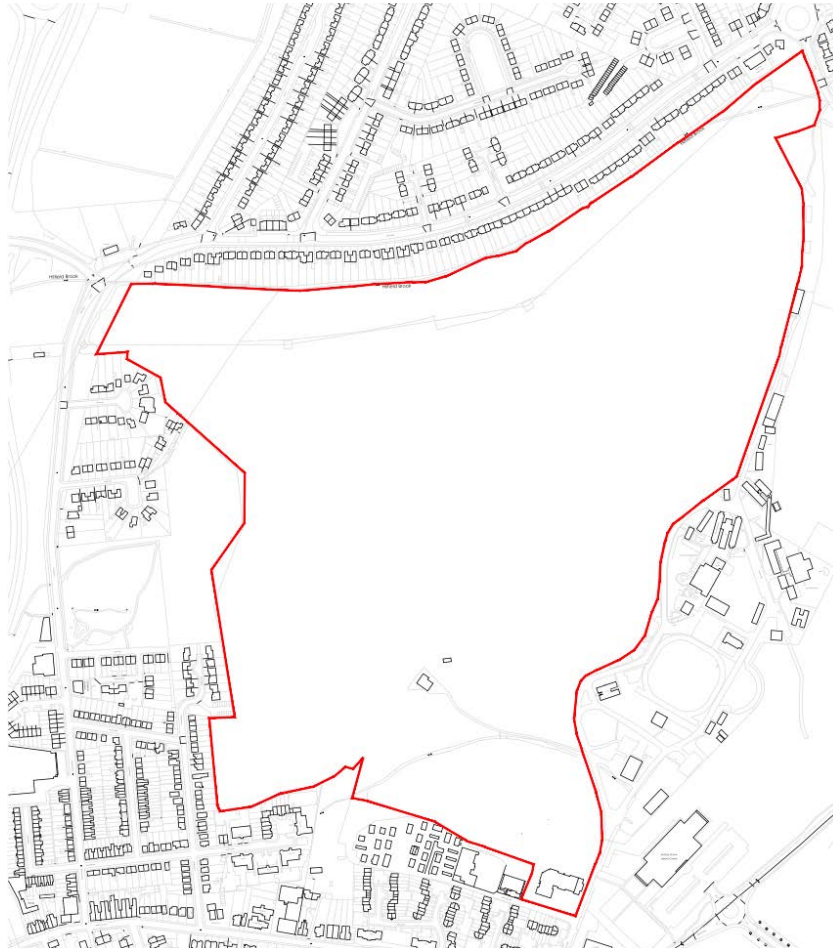


Figure 1: Site Location Plan

- 1.11 This statement should be read alongside the completed Hertsmere *'Employment Land Call for Sites 2021 Site Questionnaire'*, a plan with the site boundary outlined in red and plans showing the proposals for Phases 1 and 2 of the proposed development.

Structure of Statement

- 1.12 The statement expands on the questions set out in the pro-forma to provide the Council with sufficient information to be able to assess the suitability of the site for future employment development and is structured as follows:

Section 2: Proposals and Benefits.

Section 3: Planning Background including planning designations and recent planning history.

Section 4: Assessment of suitability of site for employment development.

Section 5: Summary and Conclusions.

2.0 Proposals and Benefits

Development Proposals

- 2.1 The site has the potential to accommodate an exemplar sustainable employment generating development with commercial, sport and recreation, leisure and cultural, retail and community uses set in a publicly accessible community country park.
- 2.2 It is envisaged that the site would be developed over two phases: Phase 1 deliverable over the next 0-2 years; and Phase 2 to be delivered over the next 3-5 years.

Phase 1

- 2.3 Indicative proposals for Phase 1 of the development are presented in Figure 2 and include the following:
- ◆ New Clubhouse with conference and business centre.
 - ◆ 80 – 100 bed care home.
 - ◆ 5 - 7 a-side football pitches.
 - ◆ Retention of golf course (remodelled to 9 hole).
 - ◆ New football / golf reception (clubhouse)
 - ◆ New access off Duncan Way / Bushey Mill Lane



Figure 2: Phase 1 Proposed Site Plan

Phase 1 Benefits

2.4 The Phase 1 proposals would result in a number of economic and other local benefits including:

- ◆ A number of new jobs associated with the conference and business centre, care home and football pitches both during construction and operation (see Table 1 below for further information on job creation).
- ◆ Conference and business centre to provide much needed facilities for local businesses.
- ◆ A new care home to meet local need.
- ◆ Improved sport and leisure provision.

Phase 2

2.5 Indicative proposals for the second phase of development on the site are illustrated on the extract of the indicative masterplan for the site below (Figure 3). These proposals involve the comprehensive development of the site for an employment led development comprising the following:

- ◆ Relocation of WFC with a new 33,000 capacity stadium, WFC head office functions, Watford FC Community Trust offices, expanded hospitality offer for match days and non-match days.
- ◆ Watford Football Club shop.
- ◆ High quality office accommodation.
- ◆ 6,000 seater arena.
- ◆ 200 bed hotel.
- ◆ Conferencing facilities for 800 – 1,000 people.
- ◆ Cinema.
- ◆ Restaurants.
- ◆ Recreational facilities e.g. Go Ape type experience and football pitches.
- ◆ A new public country park.

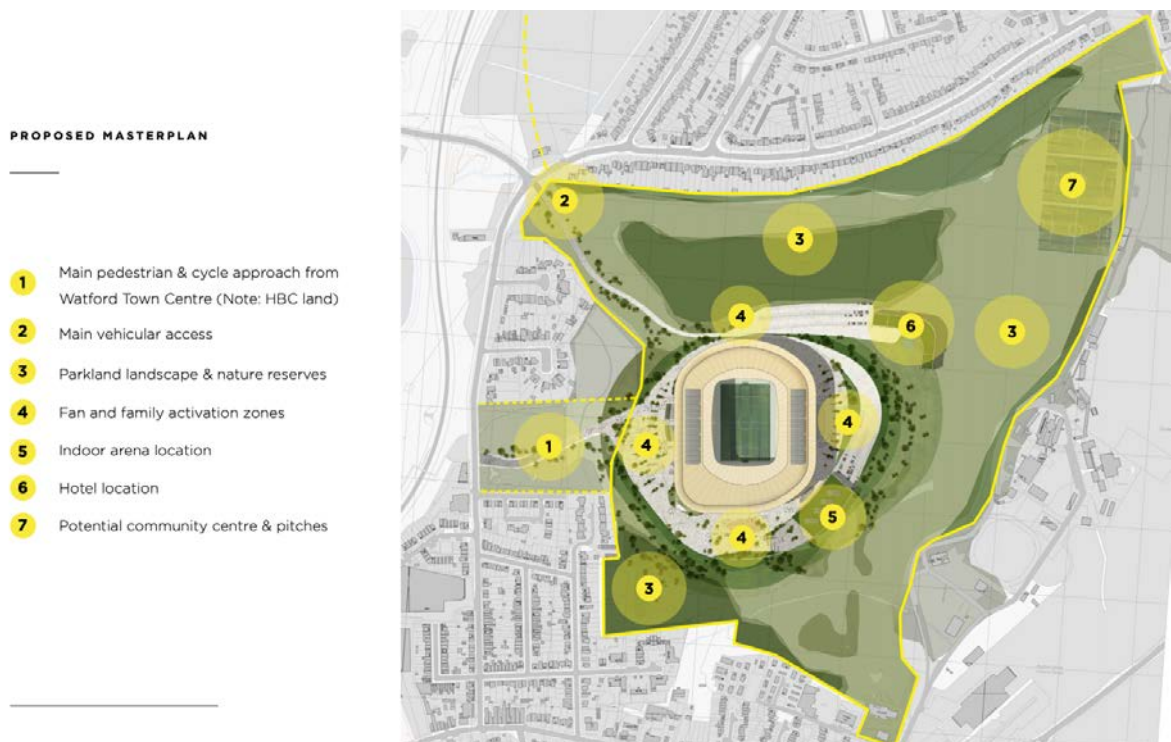


Figure 3: Phase 2: Proposed Masterplan

Phase 2 Benefits

2.6 The Phase 2 proposals feature a new state of the art zero carbon football stadium along with the other facilities listed above and the opening up and use of the site for the public 365 day of the year. The proposals would deliver significant economic and other community and sustainability benefits to Hertsmere and the wider Hertfordshire / North London area as summarised below.

- ◆ **Significant employment generation** with a variety of full and part time jobs across the income spectrum as estimated below during the operation of the development. The number of jobs at the football club would increase due to the expanded offer of facilities:

Proposed Use		Number of jobs
Watford Football Club	Head office (including Watford FC Community Trust)	225 – 250
	Match days (Cira. 25 times pa)	1,000 per match
	Club shop	10 (plus additional on match days)
Business Club / flexible office space		Up to 100 per day
Care Home		85
Arena	Circa. 100 events pa	150 – 200 per event
Hotel		90
Conferencing facilities	Up to 1,000 delegates	50-80 per day
Cinema		10 - 15
Restaurants		20 (per restaurant)
Go Ape		15 – 30
Sports Pitches		25
TOTAL		c. 1,780 – 1,905

- ◆ **Employment generation in the construction of the development with a construction cost of £250 – 300 million over a 3 year period.** The construction process would result in a significant number of direct construction jobs (1,300 – 1,500) with applicants recruited locally and the creation of training and apprenticeships. In terms of indirect (supply chain) jobs this could generate a similar number (1,300 – 1,500) from the local and wider economy.

- ◆ **Business Rates:** Significant revenue collection annually by Hertsmere Council would exceed £2,000,000.
- ◆ **New Football Stadium with identified occupier.** The proposals include a new state of the art zero carbon 33,000 capacity football stadium for WFC. The BHGC site provides a fantastic opportunity to relocate the stadium to a location that is closer to Watford Junction mainline railway station than the existing stadium and is also within walking distance of Bushey railway station as well as being located a similar distance from Watford town centre.
- ◆ **6,000 seat indoor arena providing the only venue of its kind in the area.** The only indoor arena currently serving north London is the SSE Arena at Wembley which experiences a high demand for events. To the north some 38 miles away in Milton Keynes there is the 6,000 capacity Marshall Arena adjacent to Milton Keynes Dons football stadium. There are no other facilities of this size or type that serve the market north of London, in the counties of Hertfordshire, Essex, Bedfordshire and Buckinghamshire. The arena would be able to host a variety of events such as indoor sporting events, exhibitions, trade fairs, concerts, product launches, national conferences and other cooperative events attracting visitors who would also use other local facilities and spend money (multiplier-effect) in the local economy.
- ◆ **Hotel and conferencing to serve an identified need.** There are a number of mid-range hotels in the locality such as the Hilton (Watford), Mercure (Watford - due to close), The Village (Elstree), and the Double Tree (Borehamwood), budget hotels such as Travelodge, Holiday Inn and Jury's Inn (Watford) and Premier Inn, Travelodge and Ibis (Elstree / Borehamwood) and at the other end of the market high end 5* hotels, such as The Grove in Watford. Whilst some of these existing hotels have conferencing facilities there are no 4* hotels with the scale of conferencing facility proposed. The provision of a 4* hotel with conferencing facility for up to 800 to 1,000 people will meet a need not currently serviced elsewhere in this part of Hertfordshire and North London and with its convenient location near to Watford Junction railway station would attract guests from other parts of the UK.
- ◆ **Creation of a publicly accessible business and leisure destination.** The golf club has always been in private ownership. The co-location of the football stadium with other employment generating uses in the site such as the hotel and conference facilities, cinema, restaurants and recreational activities will create a publicly accessible development open 365 days of the year.
- ◆ **Creation of a new public countryside park.** The golf club has always been in private ownership with no public access to the site. The proposals include a new public countryside park creating new publicly accessible space for local residents as well as a new sustainable east – west link across the site.
- ◆ **A highly sustainability development.** The UK's first zero carbon football stadium is proposed and the other buildings on the site will also be designed and constructed to achieve high levels of energy efficiency. As the site is in a single ownership the design of the buildings and the landscape can be co-ordinated to achieve a cohesive development with biodiversity net gain.

The BHGC site remains accessible to Watford Town centre and is just as accessible to local transport links as the existing stadium and in fact has a shorter walk distance to Watford Junction railway station than the existing stadium at Vicarage Road (0.8 miles and 15 minute walk compared with the existing stadium which is 1.2 miles and a 24 minute walk) as shown on Figure 4 below. Figure 4 also shows the walking routes from Watford High Street (0.9 miles and 19 minutes) and Bushey (0.8 miles and 18 minutes) railway stations. A range of sustainable transport initiatives, including electric shuttle buses and bike hire schemes will be explored in the detailed design of the scheme to reduce reliance on the private car.

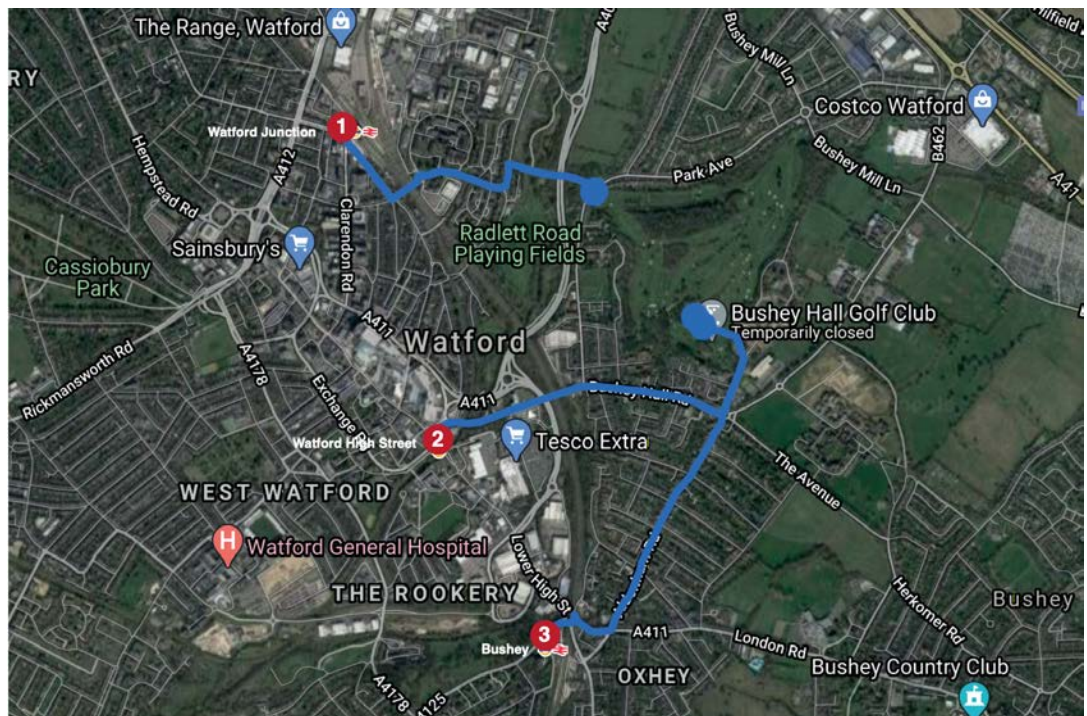


Figure 4: Walking routes from local railway stations

- ◆ **Community benefits.** The scheme will provide a number of benefits to the local community through the delivery of the proposed publicly accessible country park, sport pitches and other cultural and recreational activities in site. Furthermore, the site offers WFC the opportunity to bring together all of its back office functions in one location and this includes the Watford Community Sports and Education Trust. The Club has a long and proud tradition of serving its community and has established a reputation as the ‘Original Family Club’ a club which actively provides a range of services to those who live in and around the area. The Trust amongst other work provides activities and social groups for local people across all age groups. The BHGC site would enable the Trust to continue its work in Watford and expand these community benefits to the residents of Hertsmere.

2.7 The above demonstrates the wide ranging economic, sustainability and community benefits that the allocation of the site for employment uses could bring to Hertsmere Borough.

3.0 Planning Background

Current Planning Designations

- 3.1 The majority of the site falls within the Metropolitan Green Belt, however the bottom south east corner that contained the club house and former print works was removed from the Green Belt following a review of Green Belt boundaries during consideration of the current Local Plan.
- 3.2 A small Local Wildlife Site is situated along part of the northern boundary of the site.
- 3.3 A provisional TPO has been issued on the site. This has been challenged by the owners of BHGC.

Planning History

- 3.4 The lawful use of the site is for a golf club. The golf club up until recently comprised of a clubhouse with small car park; printworks; larger car park and pro-shop which was located in the south eastern corner of the site near to Bushey Hall Drive.
- 3.5 In November 2017 planning permission (ref: 16/1579/FUL) was granted for redevelopment of the south east corner of the site for:

“Demolition of existing Clubhouse, former Printworks, Proshop and maintenance buildings. Erection of a new single storey Golf Clubhouse with associated basement facilities and retention of the existing golf club car park, accessed off Bushey H/all Drive. Erection of a part two, part 3 storey with roof level accommodation residential building comprising 31 self-contained residential units (6x1 bed, 19 x2 bed and 6x 3 bed) with underground car parking, relocated access off Bushey Hall Drive, with associated refuse and cycle stores.”

- 3.6 Since this planning permission has been granted there have been four s.73 applications that have been approved for minor material amendments to the approved plans.
- 3.7 The works to demolish the Clubhouse and former Printworks have commenced.

4.0 Assessment of site for employment development

- 4.1 National planning policy and guidance requires sites that are promoted for development through the 'call for sites' process to be assessed for development potential. This includes an assessment of the **suitability**, **availability** and **achievability** of sites that will inform whether a site can be considered deliverable within the next 5 years.
- 4.2 An assessment of the site at BHGC to demonstrate that it is suitable, available and achievable for employment development is set out below.

Suitability

- 4.3 The NPPF advises that a site can be considered suitable if it would provide an appropriate location for development when considered against relevant constraints and their potential to be mitigated. The NPPG provides further guidance on the factors to be considered in assessing the suitability of sites for development (Reference ID 3-018-20190722).
- 4.4 Initial advice sought on technical matters has confirmed that there are no technical matters that would be a barrier to the delivery of the proposals. A high level assessment of the factors to be considered in assessing the suitability of the BHGC site is provided below.

• **Heritage**

- 4.5 The site is not subject to any heritage designations nor is within the setting of any heritage assets. Archaeological investigations in connection with the approved residential scheme on the site and adjoining site, Lincolnsfield Centre, have not identified any artefacts/remains. Low Potential.

• **Contamination**

- 4.6 The site has been in use as a golf course and none of the site is contaminated.

• **Flood Risk**

- 4.7 The majority of the site falls within Flood Zone 1 (low probability of flooding) on the Environment Agency's Flood Map for Planning. Land along the northern boundary of the site and a small area to the south of the site falls within Flood Zones 2/3 (medium / high probability of flooding). The majority of the proposed built development would be sited in the area of the site within Flood Zone 1. A full Flood Risk Assessment would be prepared to support any future development on the site and a sustainable drainage strategy would be developed for surface water.

• **Trees**

- 4.8 There are a number of trees on the site, some of which are subject to a provisional TPO (objections separately lodged by applicant). Whilst a small number of trees will need to be removed to facilitate the development proposals, the proposals would incorporate significant tree replanting to outweigh the loss of a number of existing trees and enhance biodiversity on the site.

• **Access**

- 4.9 The existing access for vehicles and pedestrians to the site is from Bushey Hall Drive.

- 4.10 As part of Phase 1, a new vehicular and pedestrian access would be created off the junction of Bushey Mill Lane and Duncan Way to the north of the site (access to 3G pitches/clubhouse reception).
- 4.11 The Phase 2 proposals includes a main new vehicular and pedestrian access from Stephenson Way link road (A4008) and/or Park Avenue to the north west of the site. A new pedestrian/cycling access at the west of the site could be created with sustainable east – west links through the new country part on the site.
- **Sustainable Transport**
- 4.12 As set out in section 2 of this statement, a major benefit of the BHGC site is its proximity to three railway stations all of which are in walking distance of the site (see Figure 4 above).
- 4.13 Watford Junction railway station is on the West Coast Mainline with services south to London Euston and north to Milton Keynes, Birmingham and Manchester. All stations have local services south to Euston and north to Milton Keynes. This makes the site easily accessible for home and away football supporters, visitors to events at the arena, those attending conferences and people who live more locally visiting the cultural and recreational attractions.
- 4.14 As part of the detailed design of the proposals, a range of sustainable transport initiatives will be explored to reduce reliance on private modes of transport.
- **Appropriateness and likely market attractiveness for the development proposed.**
- 4.15 Watford Football Club endorse the promotion of the BHGC site for a new stadium as part of Hertsmere's new Local Plan, for proposals that would provide them with the opportunity to develop a new stadium and community hub in a location within the catchment of the Club's existing supporter base. The Club has identified the BHGC site as one that is in a sustainable location maintaining good connections with Watford town centre and public transport nodes. This site would also allow the Club to bring together all of its various office functions in one place, including the Watford Community Sports and Education Trust, which whilst maintaining its work in the communities in Watford would be able to extend this to communities in Hertsmere.
- 4.16 There are a very limited number of sites in the Watford area that are in the right location for Watford supporters (which is important not just for football matches but also for the work that the Community Trust undertakes), are large enough to accommodate a new stadium, have good accessibility from Watford Junction station, and are available for the development of a new stadium.
- 4.17 An operator has therefore been identified for the football stadium.
- 4.18 As identified in section 2 of this Statement, there are no arenas of the size proposed (with the exception of Wembley) in North London, Hertfordshire or other surrounding counties. With the high level of accessibility this site is one that is attractive for an arena development. Likewise there are no other hotel and conferencing facilities of this size in the local and surrounding area. Operators for the other proposed uses such as the cinema, restaurants and recreational uses will be attracted to the site due to the presence of the stadium, arena, hotel and conference facilities.
- 4.19 The BHGC site is therefore considered to be appropriate for the employment development proposed, already has an operator for the stadium and the other uses will be attractive to the market due to a lack of these proposed uses and need for them in the locality.

- **National Policy**

- 4.20 The NPPF is clear in section 2 that the purpose of the planning system is to achieve **sustainable development** and that the planning system has three overriding objectives (economic, social and environmental). The economic objective includes helping to build a strong, responsive and competitive economy, by ensuring that sufficient land of the right type is available in the right place at the right time to support growth, innovation and improved productivity.
- 4.21 The social objective includes supporting communities by fostering a well-designed and safe built environment with accessible services and open spaces that support communities' health, social and cultural well-being. The environmental objective includes making effective use of land, helping to improve biodiversity and moving to a low carbon economy.
- 4.22 Para. 80 of the NPPF advises that planning policies and decisions should help to create the conditions in which businesses can invest and expand. Significant weight should be placed on the need to support economic growth, taking into account local business needs and wider opportunities for development. Planning policies should identify strategic sites, for local and inward investment to meet anticipated needs over the plan period (para. 81). Planning policies and decisions should recognise and address the specific locational requirements of different sectors (para. 82).
- 4.23 As set out above, the BHGC site is **available** and has the locational requirements to support the growth and business needs of WFC over the next five years along with wider opportunities for other employment development. The proposed facilities and expanded WFC would enable to Club to create a safe and accessible environment and expand their community programme as a result of increased revenue at the club. The proposals will be zero carbon and improve the biodiversity of the site as well as the creation of a new publicly accessible country park fulfilling all three sustainable development objectives of the NPPF.

Availability

- 4.24 The site is in single ownership with no legal or ownership impediments to development and is **available** for development now.

Achievability

- 4.25 The NPPG advises that a site is considered **achievable** for development where there is a reasonable and realistic prospect that the particular type of development will be developed on the site at a particular point in time.
- 4.26 The land is in single ownership and there is an operator for the development of the proposed football stadium, the landowner considers that there is a greater than reasonable prospect that phase 1 of the proposed development will be delivered on the BHGC site within the next 2 years and phase 2 of the development can be delivered within 5 years. No constraints have been identified that would prevent development on the site, as such the development is considered to be achievable.

Deliverable

- 4.27 The BHGC site is **suitable, available** and the proposed development is **achievable** and therefore the site is considered to be **deliverable** within 5 years for employment development.

5.0 Summary and Conclusions

- 5.1 The development of the BHCG site for a mix of employment uses including a new zero carbon football stadium for WFC (to incorporate all office functions and club shop), a 6,000 seater arena, 80 – 100 bed care home, 200 bed hotel and conferencing facility, cinema and restaurants on this 41 hectare site would generate a number of net positive economic outcomes including jobs (direct and indirect through the local supply chain), local economic output and local authority revenue.
- 5.2 In addition to the benefits to the Hertsmere local economy, the proposals would provide wider community benefits through the Watford Football Club Community Trust, the creation of a publicly accessible park and sporting, cultural and recreational facilities for local residents. The development would be highly sustainable with the UK's first zero carbon stadium, landscape enhancements and biodiversity net gain. It would take full advantage of the site's location in walking distance to Watford Junction, Watford High Street and Bushey railway stations and incorporate new sustainable transport links and initiatives.
- 5.3 This statement demonstrates that the BHCG site is suitable and available and that development on the site is achievable and deliverable.
- 5.4 The owners of BHGC, Veladail Leisure Ltd and Watford Football Club request that the site is removed from the Green Belt and allocated as a *strategic employment site* in the Local Plan comprising commercial, sport and recreation, leisure and cultural, retail and community uses. Redevelopment of the site will generate a net economic gain, including direct / indirect construction and operational jobs, local economy spending, and local authority revenue in the form of significant enhanced local authority revenue in the form of business rates,
- 5.5 This is a once in a lifetime opportunity to facilitate the relocation of the Watford Football Club and create an exemplar development with substantial economic, community and sustainability benefits to Hertsmere.



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