

WE WANT WIMBLEDON (“WWW”)

STATEMENT IN RESPONSE TO INSPECTOR ROBERT YUILLE, MSc DipTP MRTPI, MAIN MATTERS AND ISSUES QUESTIONS REGARDING SITE 37 – WIMBLEDON GREYHOUND STADIUM

Site 37. Wimbledon Greyhound Stadium.

(a) Is this site a suitable location for an intensification of sporting activity with supporting enabling development?

The site known as “Wimbledon Greyhound Stadium” has been used for the past 85 years as a site for the intensification of sporting activity, being the home of greyhound racing since May 1928 along with speedway racing and subsequently stock car racing.

The site’s location is not well served by public transport and thus does not, and would not, be a suitable location for a large stadium, the proposed greyhound stadium is 4,500 capacity compared to the aspirational 22,000 capacity football stadium being proposed. Currently, notwithstanding the run down facilities at the stadium, an average of 2,000 patrons visit the site for greyhound racing on race nights. However, on prestigious race nights such as the William Hill Greyhound Derby, in excess of 4,000 patrons would be in attendance.

WWW is aware that for big major greyhound events, such as the Greyhound Derby, the stadium could potentially attract crowds considerably bigger than the 4,500 self-imposed capacity. However, given the reference to ‘suitability’ of the site, we believe that this limit is vital.

Whilst conscious that, three or four decades ago, the site regularly hosted crowds of four or five times that figure, the nature of travel during that period has changed considerably with a large percentage of patrons choosing private transportation in preference to public transport. Indeed, we do not believe that the public transport network could handle those numbers. Nor would it be realistic to expect the neighbouring road network to facilitate the hundreds of additional anticipated vehicles.

It is expected that all major greyhound events would be limited to ticket access only.

Currently there is a large expanse of ground used as a car park which could be developed sensitively to enhance the site and new stadium incorporating secure parking, sports and leisure club with housing and small retail to provide a sustainable multi-facility complex.

Moreover, it is our understanding that the open design of the greyhound track provides a better foot print as regards flood risk and water retention issues, unlike a football stadium which may well face problems in this regard.

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(b) Support has variously been expressed for providing an enhanced greyhound stadium or a football stadium on the site. On the face of it the allocation in the Plan would allow for either option. It would not be appropriate at this stage to go into the relative merits of these schemes but it has been suggested that the Plan should include a more explicit reference to seeking to retain a greyhound stadium. Is there any merit in this suggestion?

Greyhound racing has taken place at Wimbledon Greyhound Stadium, Plough Lane since 1928, when, on the 19th of May, there was an estimated 22,000 spectators in attendance. Since then Greyhound Racing at Wimbledon Stadium has continued to attract hundreds of thousands of people from all over Britain and the World, both young and old.

Sadly, the Greyhound Stadium has been deliberately run down by the current owners, Galliard Homes Ltd, whose main aim is to develop the site as a housing estate. Notwithstanding the poor state of the Grandstand, thousands of race goers still attend on a weekly basis to watch and marvel at the athleticism of these magnificent dogs. It is one of the very few leisure activities which families can enjoy at an affordable cost and within a safe environment. An added complication is that the debt raised by Galliard Homes to purchase, amongst others, the site was borrowed from The Irish Nationwide Building Society (in Liquidation), the assets of which are now held by the National Asset Management Agency of Ireland ("NAMA"). NAMA has a financial charge over the site and it is expected that Wimbledon Greyhound Stadium will be put up for sale on the open market in Spring 2014.

Wimbledon Greyhound Stadium hosts the unique English Derby, sponsored by William Hill and the winner's prize for this will be £200,000 in 2014. The Derby attracts thousands of race goers every year from all over the world and Wimbledon has been host to this prestigious race since 1985. It is inconceivable to think that the premier event of the greyhound racing calendar may not take place in the Capital just as we expect other sports to hold their premier matches in London – Wembley, Twickenham, Wimbledon to name a few London sporting venues.

Wimbledon Greyhound Stadium is now the **last** greyhound stadium in the Capital. The site at Plough Lane has been designated by Merton London Borough Council as a site for the Intensification of Sport and Leisure. It is, therefore, our plan to support the development proposals of Hume Consulting Ltd to completely rebuild the Greyhound Stadium and after discussions with Merton Council, Peter Donoghue and Mick Lowe from Christopher's Squash Club, Hamilton Architects have designed what we believe to be a mini-Olympic Village, with a state-of-the-art, World Class Greyhound Stadium, as well as a first class, seven court Squash and Fitness Club with Dance Studio, bar and changing facilities and a Medical Centre to provide sports therapy, massage, and related treatments (*see Exhibit C attached*).

Moreover, The Mayor, in both responses to the Merton DPD Consultation processes (Feb 2013 and Aug 2013) has expressed that the ***“loss of an active greyhound stadium use at the site remain and would raise strategic policy concerns***

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regarding the protection of London's cultural heritage. The intensification of the site for uses that would support the continuation of the greyhound stadium would be supported....." (see Exhibit A and Exhibit B attached).

WWW supports The Mayor's concerns and contends that greyhound racing is a sporting activity whose practices have been handed down through generations and is a tradition and custom well associated with the Capital. Its tradition and customs have been passed from one generation to another. It forms an integral part of London's cultural heritage and is a tourist attraction with thousands of visitors attending race meetings at Wimbledon every year.

Greyhound racing is also an integral part of the community providing full-time and part-time employment both professionally within the greyhound industry and through the associated leisure activities (see Exhibit D and E - GBGB Annual Review and Welfare Notes). The new Wimbledon Greyhound Stadium will provide in excess of 250 full and part-time jobs, 52 weeks a year, four nights a week, many of which will be suited to 18-25 year olds. Local businesses will also benefit including local hotels, restaurants and taxi firms as well as local printing firms, catering, wholesale and advertising agencies. The greyhound stadium will be used far more regularly than a football stadium and will also be made available to the local business community to host conferences in world-class surroundings with associated fine dining and also to the local community for adult education classes and other community based activities. This is in addition to the other community based activities offered through the squash club. Furthermore, the greyhound stadium will support fundraising events on a weekly basis, using the model of Irish Stadia whereby every week a different club or charity can hold fundraising events in conjunction with the greyhound stadium. This will enable the clubs and charities to raise millions of pounds to assist their chosen causes. The fundraising will be carried out through the sponsorship of races, individual dogs and the ability of the clubs or charities to sell admission tickets the proceeds of which will remain the clubs or charities as the case may be. This is a community benefit which is simply not possible through a football club where admission proceeds are required to pay players wages.

WWW also contends that, as Wimbledon Greyhound Stadium is the **LAST** greyhound stadium in London and the Capital, the issue regarding the Plan being in "general conformity" with the London Plan, cannot be met as regards greyhound racing and London's cultural heritage, as there is no alternative for the retention of this cultural activity anywhere else in the Capital. Accordingly, WWW submits that the Plan is not and cannot be in general conformity with the London Plan in this regard and there is no other option but for site 37 to have a designation for "**the intensification of sporting activity.... which would support the retention and continuation of greyhound racing**".

It is interesting that Merton Council have considered in various Council meetings whether the site designation should have a reference to a football stadium and a squash club, the latter having been adopted as a condition for the overall site plans. However, notwithstanding the fact that Wimbledon Greyhound Stadium is the last greyhound

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stadium in London, the Council have never considered such a site designation for the retention of greyhound racing!

WWW has no doubt that the new world class Wimbledon Greyhound Stadium will become a “tourist destination” attracting thousands from across the globe and will be an outstanding leisure facility for the City of London.

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(c) Is the site suitable for the sort of enabling development (residential/leisure/retail) that has been suggested?

WWW contends that for the site to be developed in such a way to provide a world class greyhound stadium, first class squash and fitness club with medical facilities including hydrotherapy pool to also be made available to local hospitals, it is imperative that the development be financially viable for promoters to invest in. The addition of a small retail will facilitate local needs as well as the residential element to be included in the site design. WWW does not feel that the inclusion of the retail unit would detract from the overall site designation. Moreover, in the site plans of Hume Consulting the retail element has satisfactory parking facilities for approximately 336 consumers.

Furthermore, for the overall financial viability of the project, it is crucial for there to be housing which will also assist Merton with its affordable housing requirements. The design proposed by Hume Consulting is based on the very successful Irish model at Shelbourne Park and will not only enhance the site but will also raise and maintain the property values of the surrounding area.

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(d) It has been suggested that the site is more suitable for industrial and warehouse development together with leisure facilities and school use. What are the advantages and disadvantages of this approach?

WWW contends that the road infrastructure would not accommodate industrial or warehousing development. There is already a substantial issue and problem with traffic caused by industrial units located at and around Summerstown Road and the perimeter roads at the site. Furthermore, WWW understands that a Council survey showed that there was no further need for industrial / warehousing facilities in and around this area.

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APPENDICES

EXHIBIT A – Greater London Authority Pre-Submission report dated 27 February 2013

EXHIBIT B – Greater London Authority Pre-Submission report dated 28 August 2013

EXHIBIT C – WWW Information Memorandum and details of proposed Greyhound Stadium development

EXHIBIT D – GBGB Annual Report

EXHIBIT E – GBGB Welfare Notes