



Football in the local  
community for over  
40 years



## **Re: South West Canterbury Strategic Development Area, Site C6**

*“Land is also identified for the provision of a new Sports Hub within the SDA to provide high quality facilities for both Canterbury Rugby Club and Canterbury City Football Club.”*

---

### **Football for the community**

Canterbury Eagles is the largest football club in the city, with over 500 young people and 100 adults (and 700+ parents) involved in our teams and wider activities. In earmarking a new football facility solely for the use of Canterbury City FC, we are concerned that you risk both excluding Canterbury’s wider football community and failing to maximise access, usage and value.

As countless examples across the country demonstrate, any new football facility can, and should, serve as a community hub, promoting healthy lifestyles, widening participation and driving economic and social benefits for its district.

With its focus only on men’s football, Canterbury City Football Club cannot deliver this. By contrast, Canterbury Eagles has consistently delivered these benefits to its community over a significant number of years, despite numerous challenges posed by a lack of suitable spaces to play and train. Eagles currently run over 30 teams for all ages, genders and abilities. In fact, the club has experienced a remarkable 275% growth over the last five years. Demand for places continues to be very high, but further expansion is no longer possible without new facilities becoming available.

While we recognise Canterbury City’s roots in the area, they currently consist of just one men’s team. There is no youth provision, no female teams, and no meaningful track record of wider community engagement. As such, we strongly urge you to consider the needs of Canterbury Eagles in the local plan to ensure the wider community can benefit fully from the proposed new sports hub.

### **Lack of local facilities**

Currently, Canterbury Eagles struggles to find local venues to meet the demands of its growing membership base, resulting in the use of an array of locations across the city, of varying quality, cost and availability.

- St Stephen’s School (where we will lose access this year)

- St Edmunds School
- University of Kent
- Canterbury Christ Church University
- Simon Langton Girls' School
- Barton Manor School

This nomadic existence without a genuine base impacts the club in several ways:

**1. Cost**

Over 50% of membership fees are spent on venue hire - this inflates the cost of our membership meaning lower-income families can find this a barrier to participation. It also means fewer funds are available for quality equipment, volunteer training and social activities.

**2. Community**

With teams forced to play in various locations, families and friends are often split across different venues, making fostering a true sense of community and belonging much harder. The club also loses a potentially significant source of revenue by not having a site from which to sell refreshments or hold club events.

**3. Development**

The club aims to offer an appropriate level of football for all, to ensure everyone receives coaching and support appropriate to their ability and has an enjoyable experience. But with limited space and capacity, Eagles can offer fewer options, meaning that beginners and recreational players do not receive the support they need, and higher-level players cannot thrive. Furthermore, the quality of the pitches themselves is often very poor, particularly in the winter months, which hampers the development of skills and can affect player confidence and enjoyment.

**4. Time**

There is a huge administrative burden placed on volunteers in liaising with so many venues and communicating arrangements to parents and players. This could be dramatically reduced if Eagles had a central venue, particularly if it were also to serve as an administrative centre for the club.

**5. Consistency and Predictability**

Canterbury Eagles are at the mercy of the schools and universities that rent their facilities to us. Frequently, as is their right, they cancel Eagles matches at short notice to preserve the condition of the pitches for their students, sometimes for weeks in succession. They are also able to cancel long-term arrangements with the club, leading to significant upheaval. Recently, for example, St Stephen's Junior School chose to end a 20+ year relationship with the club. A permanent base would remove Eagles from this precarious position.

## Changing Climate

*“If places to play are unavailable, people will go and do something other than sport and physical activity, leading to small clubs going under and vital community organisations disbanding.”*

## **Sport England**

It is increasingly acknowledged that climate change is harming participation in sport. Currently, one-third of all community pitches are unplayable for two or more months of the year, with the FA estimating 120,000 football games will be lost to the weather each year. Canterbury Eagles experienced over 40 cancellations due to the weather in the 2023-24 season, resulting in disappointed players, long periods of inactivity, dwindling interest and significant logistical challenges for the club. With the UK predicted to get 30% wetter in the next 50 years, grassroots football clubs will need access to facilities that can withstand higher rates of rainfall in order to survive. Currently, Canterbury Eagles are defenceless against the changing climate with teams feeling the impact more and more every season. A new, modern facility would help ensure long-term sustainability by allowing year-round participation without regular disruption from weather.

## **The rapid growth of female football**

Female participation in football grew an incredible 39% nationally between 2021 and 2024. During the same period, Canterbury Eagles have developed a full pathway for female players from 5-year-olds through to veterans, including a senior women's team, and eight age group teams. Girls' and women's football was the UK's fastest-growing sport in 2023, so it is unthinkable that a new football facility in Canterbury would not include provision for female football. Only Canterbury Eagles provide such a comprehensive offer for girls and women in the district.

In fact, as the women's game continues to rise in popularity, we feel there is a strong argument that a senior women's team in Canterbury could draw as much, if not more support from the local community as a senior men's team. Women's football attendances have risen 200% at the highest level of the game since England won Euro 2022. The female football community in Canterbury is thriving, largely thanks to Eagles' initiatives, and the structure of women's football in England allows for a rapid ascent through the leagues for well-run clubs. With the right support and infrastructure, it is feasible that Canterbury Eagles Women could compete at a national level in the future.

## **Health and economic benefits**

Access to organised physical activity through clubs such as Canterbury Eagles is vital in ensuring better physical and mental health in the community. The rise in sedentary lifestyles has contributed to increasing levels of obesity and related health issues. But by providing football opportunities for all ages and abilities, including walking, disability and recreational football, Canterbury Eagles help ensure that people stay both active and sociable for longer. The club truly believes there should be no barrier to playing football, and is ambitious to extend its outreach programmes to other parts of the community, but can only do so with reliable access to modern, well-maintained facilities.

Economically, an ambitious, wide-reaching community club like Canterbury Eagles can have a far bigger impact locally than a single men's team such as Canterbury City. The number of Eagles teams in action over a weekend results in many more participants and spectators than a one-off match at lower non-league level.. Enhanced facilities will attract yet more participants and spectators to Eagles matches, while having football activities concentrated on one site will bring commercial opportunities too. Plus, the ability to host regional tournaments and matches can bring additional revenue to the district, promoting Canterbury as a vibrant and attractive destination.

## **Conclusion**

Measured purely on community engagement, Canterbury Eagles are a much larger and more successful club than Canterbury City. While we would welcome their return to playing in the city, we feel strongly that any forward-thinking scheme for a new football facility must put the community first, particularly as the city's population increases. That means placing Canterbury's foremost community club at the heart of these plans. With well over 60 qualified volunteers, only Canterbury Eagles has the experience, ambition and structure to maximise use of this facility. Involvement in this scheme would allow Eagles to expand their outreach programs, inclusivity initiatives, and community events, strengthening social bonds and enhancing the quality of life for hundreds of residents. However, should Eagles not be included and the complex range of challenges inherent in having no permanent base continue, the club's future will remain extremely fragile.

We urge you to seize this opportunity to support Canterbury Eagles and, in doing so, create a legacy of mental and physical wellbeing, social cohesion and participation in football that the city's growing population both requires and deserves.