



Canterbury Eagles FC

Supporting Statement: Westbere Butts Sports Facility Proposal

Canterbury Eagles FC welcomes the opportunity to support the inclusion of the proposed sports facility at Westbere Butts within Canterbury City Council's ongoing Infrastructure Delivery Planning and wider Local Plan processes.

Canterbury Eagles is one of the largest grassroots football clubs in the district, recently achieving FA 3-Star Accreditation and charitable status. The club currently supports more than 450 youth players across 27 teams, runs both men's and women's adult teams at recreational and competitive level, engages over 1,000 people annually through football and volunteering activity, and generates an estimated £1.9 million in annual social value for the local community.

The club's growth over recent years has highlighted both the scale of local demand for football provision and the increasingly unsustainable nature of the current facilities landscape across Canterbury. Canterbury Eagles currently operates across 13 different venues, creating significant operational inefficiencies and limiting the club's ability to deliver consistent player development pathways, community programmes and long-term strategic planning. Access to quality floodlit training provision remains particularly challenging during the winter months, while poor quality public and school pitches continue to lead to regular disruption and cancellations.

More broadly, Canterbury has a longstanding football facilities problem. There remains insufficient floodlit provision for youth training, limited high-quality grass pitches, and no suitable spectator-ready venue capable of supporting the long-term progression of senior football within the city. This affects not only Canterbury Eagles FC, but also Canterbury City FC. Both clubs face significant barriers to progressing beyond county-level football due to the lack of facilities of the required standard.

The proposed Westbere Butts site presents a rare opportunity to address these challenges through the delivery of a sustainable, partnership-led community sports hub. The scale of the landholding provides sufficient flexibility to accommodate a full-size floodlit 3G pitch, additional grass pitch provision, parking, pavilion/community facilities and associated infrastructure, while still allowing sensitive positioning of pitches and facilities within the wider site. The proposal represents an opportunity to create a major asset for the immediate local community, while also addressing a significant shortfall in football infrastructure across the wider Canterbury district.

Sites capable of accommodating this type of facility are increasingly rare within and around Canterbury, particularly where sufficient space exists to sensitively position pitches, lighting, parking and supporting facilities while still maintaining appropriate separation from residential areas. The size and flexibility of the Westbere site creates a number of potential layout options and offers the opportunity to deliver facilities in a way that is both practical and sensitive to the surrounding environment.

Importantly, the site also represents a potentially deliverable short and medium-term solution to the city's football infrastructure challenges. While provision for a future sports hub at Merton Farm exists within the wider city planning framework, there is a significant risk that current momentum behind Canterbury Eagles and wider football development within Canterbury could be lost if clubs are required to wait for the timescales associated with major strategic development. The current situation of operating across multiple sites is not sustainable indefinitely and risks hampering the future progression of Canterbury's senior football clubs, including Canterbury Eagles FC and Canterbury City FC, both of whom currently face limitations in progressing beyond Kent-level football without access to suitable facilities.

By contrast, the Westbere proposal offers a realistic opportunity to deliver meaningful improvements far more quickly, while complementing rather than competing with future long-term strategic sports infrastructure elsewhere in the district.

A particularly significant strength of the proposal is the availability of the land on a long-term lease at a peppercorn rent. This substantially reduces one of the major barriers typically associated with community sports facility delivery, namely land acquisition and long-term security of tenure. In turn, this significantly strengthens both the viability and potential fundability of the proposal and provides a far more realistic pathway towards delivery than many comparable community sports projects.

A further strength of the proposal is the opportunity to establish a genuinely partnership-led community facility. Initial discussions have included opportunities for collaboration with Sturry Parish Council and Canterbury City FC, alongside wider use by schools, community organisations and grassroots providers. There would also be clear opportunities to explore future partnership working with local clubs including Sturry FC and Sturry Kings FC. The intention would be for the facility to operate as a shared community asset, rather than a single-club venue.

The proposed pavilion element would further support this wider community role, providing flexible space for local meetings, youth activities, social events and wider community use beyond football itself. Sturry Parish Council has also expressed interest in exploring additional complementary community facilities and activities associated with the wider site, including opportunities such as a bowls club and nature walk.

Initial conversations with both the Football Foundation and Kent FA have been extremely supportive and positive. Canterbury Eagles' FA 3-Star Accreditation, charitable status, participation levels and community impact place the club in a strong position in relation to future funding opportunities.

The Football Foundation would be expected to represent the primary source of funding for the core football infrastructure, particularly the proposed floodlit 3G pitch and associated football facilities. The Football Foundation has already identified a need for additional 3G pitch provision within the Canterbury area and has indicated support for the principle of the project. However, access to this funding is contingent upon the project being included within the Local Pitch Strategy and demonstrating sufficient long-term usage through partnerships with clubs, schools and wider community users.

The proposal is particularly well positioned in this regard due to the level of identified and potential demand already associated with the site, including possible use by Canterbury City FC, local grassroots clubs, schools, community providers and the East Kent Football Academy.

In addition to Football Foundation support, there may also be opportunities to access wider funding streams linked to the broader community aspects of the project. This could include potential Section 106 or other infrastructure-related contributions associated with wider development in the area, alongside potential National Lottery or community grant funding for additional facilities and activities connected to the pavilion and wider site, such as indoor community activity space or facilities linked to other recreational uses.

Encouragingly, discussions have also taken place with the East Kent Football Academy, which is currently seeking a viable long-term base for its post-16 football programme. This would create significant daytime use of the facility, greatly strengthening both the sustainability and funding case for the project. The academy currently provides football development programmes for boys and girls studying alongside sixth form qualifications at The Canterbury Academy and Simon Langton Grammar School, with coaching delivered by staff experienced in professional football pathways. A partnership of this nature would provide a valuable educational and sporting dimension to the proposal while ensuring year-round daytime utilisation of the site. It is also understood that the Academy may have access to private funding streams which could potentially contribute towards elements of the wider development.

Further discussions would also take place regarding access opportunities for Orion Spires School, which is situated close to the proposed site. Additional daytime usage opportunities could include primary school tournaments, local schools' Sports Leaders programmes, and specialist disability football provision.

Should the project progress, Canterbury Eagles would envisage supporting the day-to-day operation and programming of the football facilities as part of a partnership-led management model involving local stakeholders. The intention would be to operate the site as a shared community facility, with pitch allocation and pavilion use managed transparently to balance the needs of partner clubs, schools, community users and football development programmes.

The proposal therefore has the potential to address multiple identified challenges simultaneously, including grassroots pitch shortages, lack of spectator-ready senior football provision, limited daytime sports usage capacity, and wider community facility needs within the area.

In summary, Canterbury Eagles believes the Westbere Butts proposal represents a realistic, deliverable and strategically important opportunity to address a recognised shortfall in sports provision across Canterbury while creating a long-term community asset for Westbere, Sturry and the wider district.

We would strongly support the inclusion of the site within the Local Pitch Strategy, Infrastructure Delivery Plan and wider planning discussions moving forward.

Yours sincerely,

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Dan Porter
On behalf of Canterbury Eagles FC