

# Monarchs' plans for new club scuppered by council

Plans by the Edinburgh Monarchs motorcycle speedway club to build a new stadium in Livingston have been dashed by the council's decision to sell the site for industrial use.

That decision could have a direct effect on a community battling incidents of motorcycle misuse on the streets in the area, residents said.

West Lothian's Council's Executive voted down an amendment from the SNP to question the sale, or find an alternative site for the club. With the Monarchs set to lose their home in Armadale next month at the end of this season a future in West Lothian looks uncertain.

The club's Development Director, Gordon Campbell branded the decision a "significant setback" and added the Monarchs were "extremely disappointed."

The team, originally based at Powderhall stadium in the capital, has been drawing huge crowds to Armadale for the last 26 years.

Race nights attract up to 1,400 spectators, and as the team races in a national league it draws visitors from around the UK for weekends throughout the season.

Local councillors had supported the plan to build a new

stadium at Deans Industrial Estate, as had the community.



Overview of new stadium

Councillor Robert De Bold, the deputy group leader of the SNP, raised the amendment to the proposals to sell the Deans site to a local businessman.

He called on council officers: “to reassess the recommendation after undertaking a review of the total economic value and community benefit of the two bids and associated land uses to West Lothian and, if the same recommendation is made, then to determine whether suitable land can be found within the Council’s property portfolio in order to retain the valued presence of the Monarchs within West Lothian.”

Speaking after the debate, which was held in private, Councillor De Bold told the Local Democracy Reporting Service (LDRS): “The SNP gave the council administration the opportunity to either reassess the bids on the basis of community benefit or help the Monarchs find suitable land for purchase within the Council’s land portfolio. Labour councillors rejected both options.

“They didn’t seem to recognise the strong local support for the team or the economic contribution from the large number of visiting fans.

“If the Monarchs have to leave West Lothian, the gain the administration thinks they are making here will very soon be outweighed by the lost future revenue.”

Armadale’s Independent councillor, Stuart Borrowman, echoed concerns about staying in West Lothian.

He said: “Edinburgh Monarchs have been in Armadale throughout my time as a councillor and – with their landlord having given them notice to quit – I’m disappointed West Lothian Council hasn’t taken a more helpful approach to keeping them in the area.

“We will see whether the council’s rigid approach could have been bettered by a negotiated sale or lease of the site in Livingston with the assessment taking into account the potential community benefits of competing proposals.

“Every political colour except Labour supported such an approach.”

For the Monarchs, Gordon Campbell said: “Monarchs firmly believe that our bid offered best value to West Lothian and we are extremely disappointed that a portion of the Council Executive voted to approve a rival bid for the site.

“The support for the new stadium from the local community has been tremendous and we feel this strongly demonstrates the desire to see this facility delivered. West Lothian Community Stadium would be constructed at no cost to the council and would be an excellent asset to the area.

“Our first enquiry to the council regarding the site occurred 14 months ago and since then the process and timeline of the sale has been lumbering. The severely frustrating decision

goes in the face of initially supportive words from across the council, along with strong support from elected members and in the local community.

“Monarchs remain fully committed to securing a new home for the club and delivering the extensive associated benefits for the local community.”

A spokesperson for Knightsridge, one of the local community councils pointed out: “There is a need for a response to the illegal riding of motorcycles in the Livingston North area.

“There are other successful groups of this kind in high crime areas. These groups have shown that this type of action reduces the occurrence of crime, but also is a benefit to the young person’s confidence and improves their future prospects.”

A council spokesman said the council, as a public body, has a legal duty to obtain the best price possible when selling land in a commercial transaction. This represents best value for the council and local services.

He added: “The land at Dunlop Court has been sold to Mr Cameron Stewart for £400,000. Mr Stewart is a well-established business owner and his proposed plan for the site is to develop new commercial business space to serve the local economy.

“The land is situated within a well-established Deans Industrial Estate and extends to nearly 3.89 acres. The land is not currently used and was marketed through June and July and offered to interested parties for lease, sale or community use. Two offers for the land were received and it was determined that Mr Stewart’s offer to purchase the land represented the best value to the council, being the highest offer.

“The funds raised from the sale of the land will be invested

in local services.”

## **By Stuart Somerville, Local Democracy Reporter**

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