



Greenfield versus Brownfield Sites for Sports Stadia - A Tale from Southampton

Introduction

In recent years a number of football clubs, such as Reading and Bolton, have moved their stadia from inner-city locations to sites which are less congested, often on the edges of towns and cities. Other clubs such as Everton are intending to follow suit. In this respect the relocation of Southampton Football Club (the "Saints") from the Dell is not unusual. However, it is unusual for a County Cricket Club to relocate. Southampton has seen both the Saints and Hampshire County Cricket Club move to new stadia in the past 2 years. Both applied for **greenfield sites** on the edge of the city. Southampton's plans were turned down though Hampshire's were ultimately approved.

Southampton FC finished up moving not to a greenfield site but to a brownfield site in the inner city. The reasons why the two clubs were treated differently make an interesting case study.

Background

Southampton is situated at the head of Southampton Water in southern Hampshire. Its origins as a port date back to Roman times but the modern growth of the city began in the 19th century with the arrival of steam power. By 1860 it had become the 5th UK port and by 1921 it had a population of 161,000. It is now 214,000. The late 19th century was a period of increasing leisure time. This led to a growth of leisure facilities. Amongst these were Hampshire County Cricket Club and Southampton Football Club.

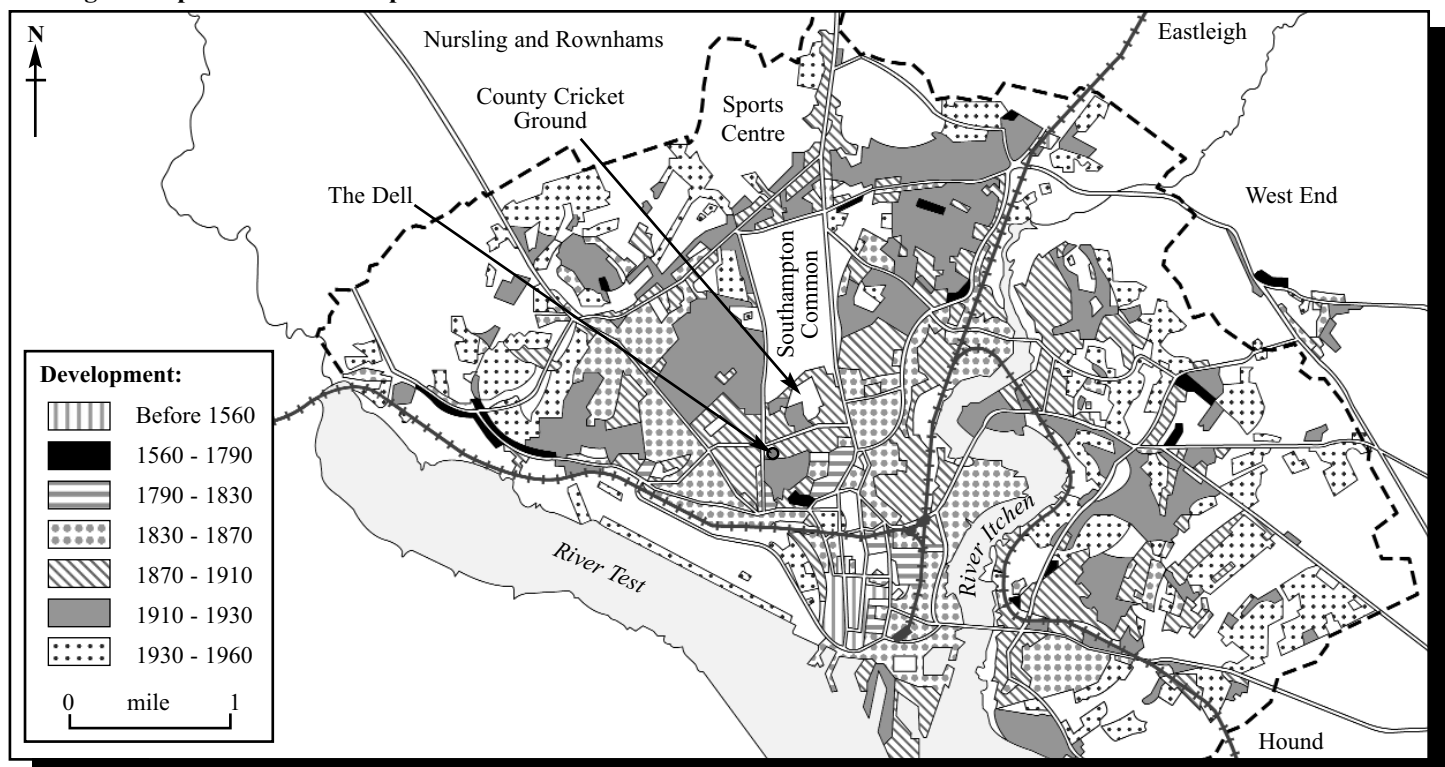
Table 1 Some Costs and Benefits Relating to Greenfield and Brownfield Sites.

Factor	Greenfield	Brownfield
Land	Easy to plan and build on	Takes pressure off Green Belt and recycles land
Traffic	Keeps traffic out of cities	Inner city liable to congestion
Politics	Creates NIMBY protests	Tend to minimise public protest
Social	May benefit the poorer by allowing more relevant facilities in the inner city	May benefit middle classes as green belt environment may be maintained
Finance	Usually cheaper to build on	Often more expensive, e.g. land may be polluted

The County Cricket Club ground known as the "County Ground" was opened in 1884. For a while it played host also to Southampton Football Club until the increasing size of football crowds led 'Saints' to the move away. The cricket ground was originally on the edge of the city but saw middle-class housing develop around it and engulf it.

Southampton Football Club was formed in 1885 but did not move to the Dell until 1898. The Dell was also located close to what was then that the city edge. It was set adjacent to housing dating largely from the late 1800s, although inter-war housing was subsequently to develop both to the north and south of it. The area to the south, west and east of it was largely working-class but a more middle-class area evolved to the north during the 20th century (Fig. 1).

Fig. 1 The Dell and County Ground in relation to phases of housing development in Southampton.



Both clubs enjoyed periods of success and failure in the 20th century which led to pressure on their congested facilities. By the 1990s both clubs:

- had found problems in developing their grounds, having become engulfed by residential development;
- occupied sites that were congested with poor road access and had little space for car-parking;
- caused disruption to their immediate environments in terms of noise and, in the case of football, inconsiderate behaviour by some fans in surrounding streets, for example litter, verbal abuse and occasionally violence. These problems are called **negative externalities**;
- had little land available on which to expand or develop;
- had very poor facilities, for example changing rooms for the players and toilets, refreshments and seating for spectators;
- occupied sites with valuable property potential.

Additionally, the cricket club:

- had been turned down in some planning applications to improve its spectator facilities;
- was overlooked by housing that enjoyed free views of the cricket.

Meanwhile the Saints had:

- been bought up by a company with property and other interests;
- a minimum specification pitch in terms of size and standards;
- limited spectator capacity - following the Hillsborough disaster all Premiership clubs were required to be “all-seater” and this reduced the Dell’s capacity from over 20,000 to around 15,000; this severely limited cash flow from attendance and thus potential purchase of players.

Not surprisingly both clubs began to consider new sites. Given increasing car use and the increased accessibility of sites close to motorways, both looked to locations on the outskirts of Southampton close to the M27 and M3. However, subsequent developments have unfolded very differently for the two clubs.

The Search for New Grounds

Southampton Football Club identified a site at **Stoneham** (see site 1, Fig. 2) in the strategic gap between Southampton and Eastleigh. Much of the land was owned by Hampshire County Council. The club proposed a community stadium with associated retail developments, extensive car parking and links to Southampton Parkway station. Although the original idea had the support of Hampshire County Council, Southampton City Council and Eastleigh Borough Council, early planning submissions were turned down. The developers went to appeal and the government overturned the local decisions. It was given outline planning permission by the Secretary of State in 1994.

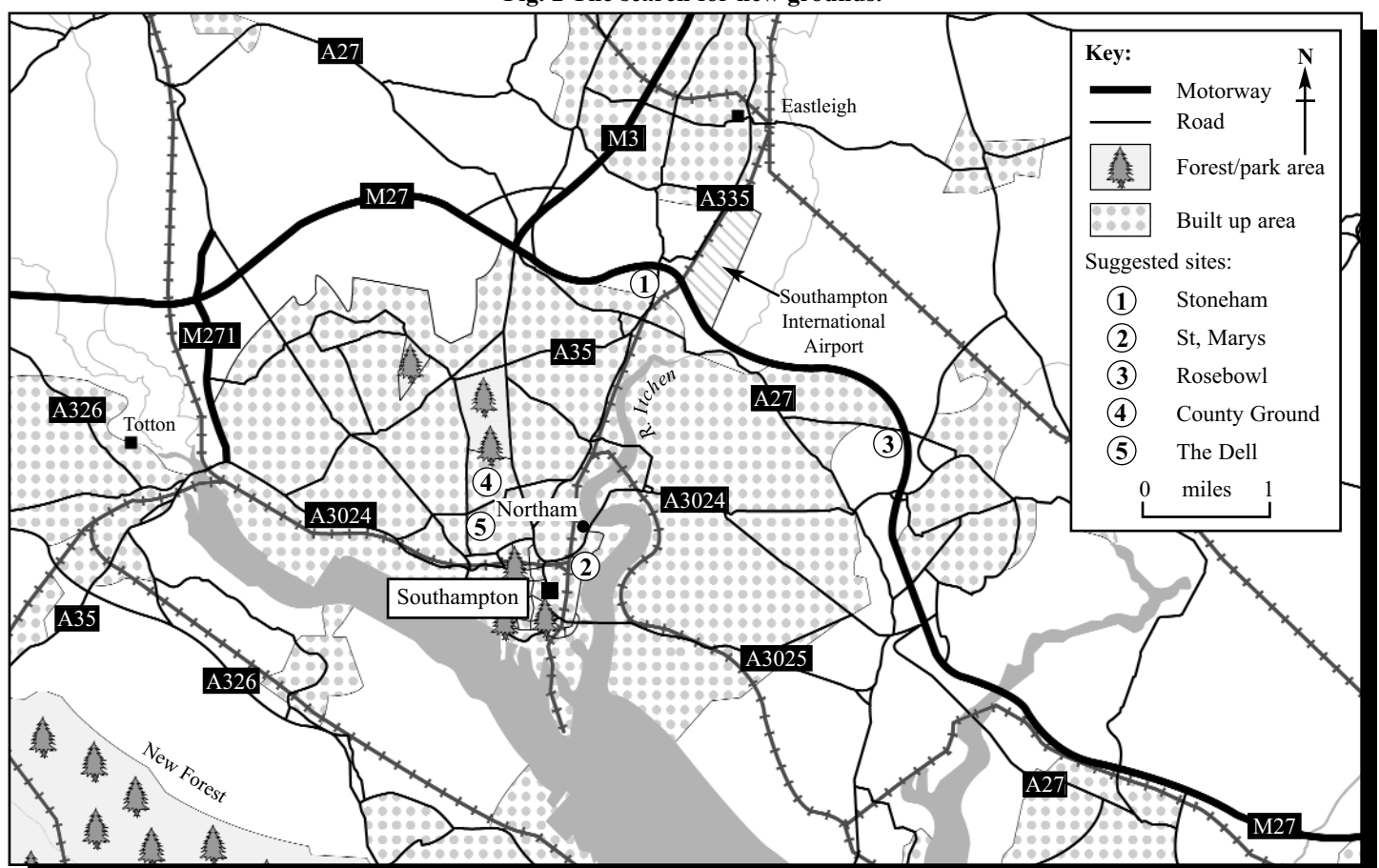
Following this outline permission, detailed proposals were drawn up in consultation with the various local authorities. In 1997 a formal planning application was made to Eastleigh Borough Council. The proposal was a complex one and included:

- a 25,000 seat stadium for Southampton Football Club;
- a community sports hall, offices, bars and restaurants;
- a community athletics facility with 3000 capacity stand;
- playing fields for rugby and football;
- 13,750 m² of leisure facilities including a multiplex and health club;
- a 10,000 metre square retail complex selling related community sport and leisure products;
- links to Southampton Parkway station;
- road improvements and car-parking for 5000 vehicles.

On the surface the proposal seemed to incorporate many positive features:

- it would greatly enhance community sport and leisure facilities;
- it would provide Saints with a new stadium;
- it would maximise use of public transport;
- it was close to the two principal motorways in the area; and
- it would release land for property development at the Dell in a city with a high demand for new housing.

Fig. 2 The search for new grounds.



It was turned down by the County Council and subsequently by Eastleigh Borough Council. The principal reasons cited by the County Council were:

- retail developments in the area were inappropriate - in particular it would be difficult to monitor the nature of products sold;
- a new multiplex was inappropriate in such a location;
- there would be an unsatisfactory visual impact in the area that constituted the principal approach to Southampton;
- there would be adverse effects on traffic flow on the M27 and car-parking proposals were unsatisfactory;
- links to the station were inadequate; and
- local residents would be adversely affected by cars accessing the parking areas.

In summary the County Council felt the proposal was incompatible with the area's status as a strategic gap between Southampton and Eastleigh.

Eastleigh Borough Council's position was slightly different. They were the authority who could ultimately grant planning permission. They had to consider three separate applications - one for retail space, one for the multiplex and one for the community sports facilities including the stadium. The Borough Council having consulted with other authorities turned down the multiplex and retailing on grounds that included:

- breach of national, county and local policies
- adverse impact
- transport-related concerns
- design

Comments in the report to committee are revealing:

"(Eastleigh) is not prepared to see its town centre and other local centres undermined by major shopping or cinema developments in the wrong place out-of-town."

"The Community Stadium project...would have been a facility at which the region could look with pride. That the three councils and the Saints have not worked together in close partnership, in the spirit in which the development brief was agreed, to evolve mutually acceptable proposals to address commercial viability issues, is an indictment of all concerned."

Without the commercial interests the developers felt the project would not be viable. As a result, the application to build the stadium was withdrawn. This led to much cynicism in the area. A quote from the Saints website gives an indication of the real reasons that lay behind the refusal.

"First choice for the new site was Stoneham, a 60 acre plot on the outskirts of the city. It looked ideal. It was right by the M27, the airport and Southampton Parkway station, and, with ample car-parking space planned, transport looked to be sorted. But the land fell between two planning authorities, the Labour City Council and the Lib Dem Eastleigh Borough Council and it was owned by the Tory controlled County Council. Almost inevitably, they were unable to agree on plans and it looked as though the dream of a move might be doomed."

To set this in context, it is worth noting that between the granting of the outline planning permission and subsequent refusals, local government had been reorganised. Prior to 1997 Southampton had been a district council within Hampshire County Council which was a strategic authority. In 1997 Southampton regained its status as an independent unitary authority which was no longer part of Hampshire. This led to a realignment of powers in the area that appear not to have helped the project. It has also been suggested that the project was not welcomed in what was essentially a middle-class suburban area when the bulk of the fans were likely to be of working-class or lower-middle-class origin.

Saints Settle for a Brownfield Site

Southampton City Council came up quickly with an alternative at St Mary's (see site 2, Fig. 2). It was a different type of site:

- It was a brownfield site located in the inner city of Southampton;
- It was the site of a contaminated former gasworks;
- It was an industrial/warehousing area close to the docks;
- It had a relatively poor road communications;
- It was in a built up area;
- It was in one of the most deprived inner-city areas in southern England.

It did have some potential advantages, however:

- It lay adjacent to the main rail link to London, the Midlands and south-east England (Away fans!).
- It could help regenerate a run-down area.
- Southampton Football Club would contribute to the cost of road improvements.

This project was granted planning permission and initial funding of £17 million secured through loans. The site clearance began in the autumn of 1999 and a new stadium was complete by the summer of 2001. The 32,500 capacity stadium, costing finally £32 million, saw its first match on August 11th, 2001. For the team, however, it seemed jinxed at first; not until 24th November 2001 did they achieve their first home win against Charlton.

The new stadium, known as the New Dell, has had many advantages:

- Saints now have a state-of-the-art stadium with more than double capacity of the Dell.
- The roads in the area have been improved.
- The passage of fans (and earlier the labour force to build the stadium) through the area has brought in additional income particularly to cafes, pubs and fast-food outlets.
- The Dell was released to enable the building of 256 new homes.

Some fans, however, do not like the new stadium, describing it as soulless. Inevitably the transport difficulties envisaged by many have come to pass. Although the roads have been improved and the club has rented parking spaces from firms and institutions in the area, the area becomes very congested on match days. Big matches have created traffic jams both in and out of the city.

Scandalously, in an era of supposed integrated transport infrastructure, no use has been made of the railway that runs along the edge of the site. Cynics have suggested the establishment of a new station was opposed by commercial interests in the city centre who envisaged that they would benefit from fans having to walk from the station (an unpleasant, exhaust fume dominated, 25 minute walk alongside busy roads), to the ground. South West trains, the principal rail operator, have said that the lines already run at capacity. The result is that relatively few fans travel by train, not encouraged by the fact that trains after matches are not at all well-timed, especially in the evenings. Not surprisingly, a number of councillors, supported by the police, are campaigning for a new station to be built that will enable fans to have direct access to the stadium.

Cricket has Green Credentials

Hampshire County Cup Cricket Club's problems centred less on planning permission and more on funding. The proposals had a number of similarities to those of Southampton Football Club at Stoneham:

- The new stadium at Rosebowl (site 3, Fig. 2) lay on the outskirts of Southampton but within the jurisdiction of Eastleigh Borough Council.
- It lay in a strategic gap, this time to the north-east of the city.
- It was close to the M27.
- It was part of a larger development proposal.

There are some significant differences, however:

- The land was owned by Queen's College Oxford, (evidence of middle-class links?).
- It involved little retail activity.
- The main stadium had a capacity of only 10,000, this representing less disturbance to adjacent residential areas and less pressure on the transport system.
- Other parts of the scheme included a health spa complex, nine-hole golf course, tennis centre indoor bowls and a hotel.

Despite their less threatening nature, the first plans, submitted in 1988, were turned down, largely on the grounds of their constituting unsuitable development in a strategic gap. Re-submission of revised proposals, however, gained outline planning permission in 1991. This was subject to submission of detailed proposals for various aspects of the development. The tennis centre and health spa were approved in 1993, squash facilities in 1994, the cricket pitch itself in 1995, the golf club in 1997, the main stadium, at the Rosebowl, in 1999 and a 131 room hotel in 2002.

Despite its middle-class appeal, cricket is less well financed than football. Funding was a major problem for the club. This created delays and resulted in an extension of the outline planning permission to 2002. The Rosebowl itself was not secured until a lottery grant of £7 million was awarded in 1997. Despite this the costs spiralled. Cited as costing £16 million in 1997 its final costs have risen to £24 million. This has been partly offset by the sale of the old county cricket ground for £5 million for residential development. However, the club did eventually complete the project and the first match took place in 2001.

The new West End Leisure Park (which includes the Rosebowl) has many advantages:

- The Cricket Club has a new state-of-the art stadium holding 10,000 people.
- The Rose Bowl is likely to gain full international status and may eventually host Test matches.
- Excellent new recreational facilities are provided in an area of rapidly growing population and rapidly growing incomes.
- Road facilities been improved in the immediate area.

However there are downsides:

- Another major development has evolved in a strategic gap in an area where urban coalescence is difficult to prevent.
- There is additional traffic in the area and an element of disruption and visual intrusion.
- The cricket club no longer play at Portsmouth, Bournemouth or Basingstoke - this has led to resentment in the areas of the county away from the new ground and to some resignations from the club.
- The club is in short-term financial difficulty, a loss of £60,000 was envisaged in the 2000/2001 financial year.

None of this of course has been helped by the club's relegation from Division One in 2002.

Further Research

Other interesting case studies include:

- Arsenal's search for a new ground - to be relocated near their existing stadium.
- The relocation for the 2003 season of Manchester City in the former Commonwealth Games Stadium.
- The relocation of Derby in the sustainable site of Pride Park.
- The relocation of Oxford and Reading in new out-of-town stadia.

Useful Websites

www.hants.gov.uk

www.eastleigh.gov.uk

www.cricket.org

www.southampton.gov.uk

www.saintsfc.co.uk

www.dailyecho.co.uk

Summary

Overall much can be learned from these two developments.

1. The pressure to move sports stadia from congested 19th century sites is likely to continue fuelled by:
 - commercial potential for property development;
 - cost efficiencies of the new facilities;
 - the need for large capacity stadia, particularly since the requirement for all-seater facilities;
 - the difficulties of policing congested inner-city grounds and managing their negative externalities;
 - poor road access to the 19th century sites; and
 - the effect of competition from other relocated clubs.
2. New stadia will not inevitably be sited on greenfield sites, despite their advantages of motorway access and ease of policing. The Government's emphasis on the use of brownfield sites and on urban renewal may lead to more inner-city stadia such as St. Mary's.
3. Planning decisions are not based just on rational appraisal. They are rooted in values, perceptions and conflicting interest groups. They are about politics. Those wishing to influence those decisions are likely to benefit as much and the study of politics and media manipulation as from planning theory.
4. The two decisions were not, on theoretical grounds, consistent. Both related to strategic gap locations and ancillary commercial development yet one was rejected and the other accepted. Critically, however, there were differences in the scale of the proposals, 32,000 fans compared to 10,000, and the nature of them- ancillary retail activity rather than leisure activity.
5. Perceptions relating to the nature of the two sports and their fans may well have influenced the outcomes.
6. Despite the Government's emphasis on public transport this was not an issue that was ultimately given much precedence. Access to the Rosebowl is largely by road, as it is to St. Mary's. Stoneham would have facilitated rail access but was turned down. Despite St. Mary's location adjacent to the railway, no station has been built. It would appear that commercial considerations have prevailed over strategic transport ones.
7. In the short-term both clubs have excellent new facilities. However, Saints made a profit of over £3 million in the last financial year, Hampshire County Cricket Club made a loss. Whilst profit-and-loss depend on other factors as well, such as playing success, capital costs are nonetheless significant.
8. The Rosebowl may mark the beginning of the centralisation of county cricket and the loss of matches played locally, such as those at Basingstoke. Whether people will be prepared to travel by car so much in the future with rising fuel prices and increasing congestion remains to be seen.

Acknowledgements

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