

# Hull Community Stadium – A Focal Point for Civic Pride

By Debbie Gray

## Introduction

The underlying aim in building the Kingston Communications Stadium was succinctly spelt out in the mission statement, to *'provide a first class venue capable of embracing all leisure activities and encouraging participation by all sectors of our community. To offer permanent international standard facilities to all the professional sporting clubs of Hull.'*

Following an initial feasibility study in 1999 by Hull City Council, a detailed planning approval and design brief were prepared for interested companies. Planning consent was subsequently granted in December 2000 with the main contractors, Birse Stadia Limited, being appointed in 2001 after a lengthy and exhaustive tender process. The contractors commenced work on the stadium in October 2001 and had completed the stadium by December 2002.

A great source of pride to the people of the city, this iconic and innovatively designed stadium has proved to be a catalyst for the wider regeneration of the West Hull area. At a cost of £46 million the stadium complex was completed in December 2002, ahead of schedule and under budget. The overwhelming majority of the funding for the project came from Hull City Council, additional financial backing included: a £2.4 million grant from the Football Stadia Improvement Fund, and a further £900,000 from the Single Regeneration Budget round 6

funding. This level of funding enabled the development of a stadium complex comprising a 25,400-seat stadium, which is now home to Hull City Football Club and the Hull FC rugby league team, a 12 court multi-use indoor sports arena, two artificial turf pitches, a free-to-use skate park and multi-use games area, as well as other associated works and various highway improvements. In addition the project encompassed the relocation off site of the West Hull Amateur Rugby League Club and Hull Cricket Club, who had been the previous residents of the Circle site.



Hull Community Stadium, View 1

## LOCAL WORK

No. 55 March 2004

### Hull Community Stadium - A Focal Point for Civic Pride

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Local Work is published by the Centre for Local Economic Strategies, Express Networks, 1 George Leigh Street, Manchester M4 5DL  
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Web: [www.cles.org.uk](http://www.cles.org.uk)  
ISSN: 09503080

The views expressed in Local Work are not necessarily those of the Centre for Local Economic Strategies.  
Printed by Russell Press,  
Nottingham.

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Local  
Economic  
Strategies

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### KC Stadium as a catalyst for regeneration

From the outset the regeneration of the West Hull area was linked with the stadium development. The appointment of Birse Stadia Limited, whose corporate headquarters are located in Barton-upon-Humber just 8 miles from Hull, retained a large proportion of the total investment in the stadium within the East Riding of Yorkshire. In spite of the specialist nature of the construction, Birse were proactive in their sourcing of local suppliers to the extent that over £4 million of sub-contracting work (varying from external groundworks to internal fittings) was awarded to local companies. In addition, around one third of the construction site workforce at any one time were from Hull or surrounding areas. Thus a significant proportion of the investment in the stadium was reinvested in the local Hull economy. This was a reflection of Birse's commitment to utilise local suppliers, sub-contractors and labour wherever possible.

Examples from similar projects in other communities highlight that far too often much needed levels of investment and resources have been allowed to leak out of the local economy, through the appointment of contractors, workers and suppliers from outside the local area. In a sustained effort to retain as much local money within the local economy as possible, further construction works to provide new childcare facilities, and further improvements to the adjacent fairground and West Park, generally, will all be tendered to local companies. The Stadium Management Company has also committed to using local suppliers to operate stadium facilities wherever possible.

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### International events for an international stadium

In the KC stadium Hull has a venue of international standards, which allows the city to compete with the

likes of Liverpool, Manchester, London, Birmingham and Leeds for prestigious sporting and leisure events. Recently the stadium hosted an England Under-21 international football match between England and Holland, and it has also hosted a rugby league Ashes Test Match between Great Britain and Australia. The last time Hull hosted international football and rugby league matches was in 1977 and 1982 respectively. The reputation of the stadium complex as an international centre of excellence for sport is further enhanced by the events held in the Sports Arena, including championship boxing and forthcoming national and regional events in badminton and trampolining.

As Councillor Tom McVie, Stadium Committee Chairman said:

"These events are not just great news for sports fans, but for the city as a whole. The stadium was built for the people of the city and is an immense source of civic pride. It has already created hundreds of jobs and given the local economy a boost. Now we are beginning to see it fulfil its potential as a stage for major events."

The idea that a sports complex can be a focal point for civic pride is certainly one born out by the significant increases in the average attendances for both Hull City F.C. and Hull FC Rugby League. Since moving to the new stadium, average attendances have increased by 67% and 80% correspondingly. Indeed, Hull City F.C. are currently at the top of division three and regularly draw crowds of 20,000. The stadium's profile has been further enhanced by acting as a music venue, already attracting sell out crowds to see performers such as Elton John and Westlife.

The KC stadium has also raised Hull's status as a venue for business and social events. In the short time since it was completed the KC stadium has quickly established itself as the city's top corporate hospitality venue. The stadium offers high quality facilities for conferences,

business events, trade shows and parties, and enjoyed over 600 bookings for events in 2003. These events ranged from the Chamber of Commerce's prestigious Annual Dinner, through to community-based events, such as various meetings of Ward Forums and residents' groups.



*Hull Community Stadium, View 2*

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### Community participation in sports

Sport has always been able to draw a crowd, but the stock of sport and its personalities has never been higher (especially for football) than it is today. To this end the KC stadium has opened up a world of opportunities to engage the local community in a range of activities using sport as the hook. Both the professional local clubs are strongly involved in encouraging the local community to participate in the activities open to them at the stadium.

Currently the arena is working with over 20 local community organisations to promote the use of the stadium and the development of sporting activities amongst the local communities. The objective is to promote social inclusion and the adoption of healthy lifestyles, as well as providing a focus for the community and a centre of sporting excellence. To entice local groups the arena offers special incentives such as low hire charges, in particular to clubs and organisations involved with youth development. One such local group who are actively utilising the arena is the

innovative Dads Against Drugs (DADS) organisation.

John Butterick of the Children's University Education Services, commented on how the professional teams are taking a proactive approach to engaging the local community in wider issues, such as learning, through sport:

"The Hull FC - Children's University Partnership has offered children a different approach to learning. Coaching staff, players and officials at the club have worked alongside the Children's University teachers, mentor and pupils to accelerate and inspire children's learning through rugby league. [A] tour of the ground, interviews with the players, songs and poetry... [and] watching live games have all brought to life literacy through rugby league. It's created a love of learning, which will stay with the children forever"

This example highlights the force of sport and the impact that it can have on some of the most disadvantaged communities. In particular, the learning facilities and opportunities offered by the clubs can offer an alternative for those children and young people who, for whatever reason, do not find their inspiration in a traditional school environment.

There is a clear and definite commitment to putting something back into the local community from both the football and rugby league clubs. Hull City Football Club have developed a holiday club, which is focused on physical recreation for young people by teaching them football skills as well as other sports. The club is also involved in year round activities, which include running soccer skills courses for young people and visiting local schools to help the pupils improve their football skills. Hull FC rugby league team are involved in a similar programme of working with local children and young people to teach them rugby skills. In the last 18 months over thirty schools have been visited with two thousand pupils enjoying the experience.

Some of the positives experienced by those participating include an improvement in their social skills and social engagement, and development of their knowledge about healthy lifestyles and the importance of exercise.

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### Encompassing a range of sporting activities.

The strength of having a complex that encompasses so many different sports is that it engages a much broader community than just football and rugby fans. It caters for a whole range of sports and is increasingly the focus for the development of sports clubs locally, especially in involving and developing young local talent. This scope for the development of sports clubs is due in the main to the quality of the facilities on offer but also to the level of accessibility that enables such a diversity of sporting interests to be housed under a single roof. Currently, the stadium is home to some of the city's top amateur teams that compete nationally, including: the Hull Stingers (basketball), the Hull Chevrons (netball), the City of Hull Volleyball Club, the Kingston upon Hull Hockey club and the Hull Gymnastics Academy. The stadium also caters for the largest five-a-side league in the UK, in which 100 teams compete.

The free skate park is proving to be extremely popular with local young people. It is estimated that the use of the facilities are approximately double to what was originally anticipated when it was designed. The skate park acknowledges the need to provide facilities for more informal popular leisure activities targeted at children and teenagers. It has proved so popular that plans to extend it are currently being considered. Designs for the original facilities were undertaken in conjunction with the Hull Youth Council, emphasising Hull City Council's commitment to social inclusion and participation and to involving young people in a constructive manner in order to better understand their needs.

The development of the KC stadium complex has had a real and positive impact for the people of Hull. The vision is that the new facilities will offer local children and young people a positive force across different aspects of their lives. There is the potential to get more young people involved in sporting activities, which can only make for a healthier population, as well as raising the educational attainment and the aspirations of people inspired by their involvement with the programmes, which bring them into contact with the teams they support and their local sporting heroes. In addition to the impact on the individual there are also benefits for the wider community who may not directly use the stadium facilities. For example, providing a safe environment for young people helps take them off the streets, which will hopefully impact on the quality of life of the wider community by reducing levels of anti-social behaviour.

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### The Learning Zone

The KC stadium has been designed in such a way to be a true community asset. The main community facility in the stadium is the Learning Zone, which is managed by Hull College.



Hull Community Stadium, View 3

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It comprises classrooms, IT suite, library, cyber-café and health and fitness suites. Opened in January 2003, the Learning Zone aims to provide a 'state-of-the-art' environment in which school children and college students can undertake sports related courses and school tuition with a focus on healthy living. The learning zone will also provide a venue for adult education, after school clubs and summer schools.

The Zone offers education to three main groups:

Full time courses: studying sports programmes from pre-GCSE, NVQ levels two and three and HND level. The courses are targeted mainly at performance and fitness, with the majority of students choosing to continue their studies at University or seek employment in the sports and leisure industry.

Part time courses: available to students in employment wishing to further their development, such as single parents looking to gain entry back into the labour market or students wanting to study a short course as part of their hobby or main interest. These programmes are generally sports related i.e. short fitness programmes or A-level sport. There are also a range of I.T classes and basic skills courses in literacy, and numeracy being taught.

Community Partnerships: the college works closely with the City Council's sports development unit to provide local schools with the resources to promote healthy lifestyles and working as part of a team, as well as improving school children's key skills through a range of sports studies. These programmes are offered on site with local schools visiting the zone each week. A prime example of this is the Playing for Success programme led by Sports Development. The programme uses college students, aged approximately 16 to 18, as mentors for local school children. This programme brings children from schools across the city into the Learning Zone to get them involved in workshops and lessons on healthy lifestyles.

## Conclusion

The development of the KC Stadium has been a real driving force for the regeneration (in its broadest sense) of the West Hull area in particular, and more generally the City as a whole. As Stadium Project Manager, John Topliss, commented

"The stadium complex is already making a significant impact on the local economy and on the quality of educational, community and social resources in the city".



*Hull Community Stadium, View 4*

This is quite evident from the figures, which show that since opening the stadium has created 669 full or part-time jobs. The range of jobs created includes: stewards for match days, hospitality staff, management positions, and administration and support staff for the every day operation of the stadium. In addition to this a further 17 new jobs have been created through the development of the Learning Zone. This is just the direct impact that the stadium development has had on the local labour market, but its influence and impact on the local economy has been much wider than this in terms of the sourcing of materials from local suppliers and the employment of local people in the building of the stadium.

However, the impact of building the stadium complex reaches far beyond the purely economic benefits. There

is also a need to recognise the social, physical, environmental and even cultural changes that have been engendered by this major development. For example, the increased opportunities available to start up clubs or sports teams, along with improved access to high quality learning facilities. The stadium development is more than a tool for economic growth; it can be viewed as a truly regenerative development. The engagement and inclusion of the local community in a range of stadium initiatives has made the KC stadium a source of civic pride for the City of Hull.

## CLES Annual Conference

Wednesday 24th March 2004,  
Mersey Maritime Museum,  
Liverpool

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