### ‘The b-EIA-utiful game’: The Practice of EIA in Sports Stadia

#### Triggering EIA
Developing, expanding and diversifying sports stadia is the increasing aim of sporting club owners across the UK, as they attempt to transform their clubs into businesses which capitalise on regeneration opportunities in the local area. Due to their size and scale, proposals for the development of new or the redevelopment of existing sports stadia, often with associated mixed-use development, have the potential for significant environmental effects, triggering the need for Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA). Consequently, the practice of EIA has had to ensure that these development proposals are robustly assessed, reflecting the requirements of the EIA Regulations.

Large crowds which generate variable traffic movements and resulting noise impacts and large non-match event days are some of the characteristics of sports stadia which need to be assessed as a worst case for the purposes of EIA. Some of the recent EIAs undertaken for sports stadia across the UK have had to tailor their assessment methodology to ensure a robust approach is adopted which covers all relevant scenarios.

#### An Assessment of Worst Case
Tottenham Hotspur Football Club received planning permission in December 2015 for the club’s new stadium proposals. The club aimed to make use of the stadium’s existing heritage surroundings, develop mixed uses around the stadium and improve the viability of the project. The application was supported by an EIA which developed multiple scenarios to ensure an assessment of a realistic worst case was conducted. With regard to an assessment of likely significant noise effects, baseline noise surveys were conducted on both match days and non-match day events which involved high powered amplification. A Wednesday evening match between Tottenham Hotspur and Liverpool was used to gather baseline conditions for noise on match days at the stadium.

This was a high scoring match with a score of 4-2 and is considered to represent a realistic worst case baseline for noise conditions. Monitoring was conducted over short periods of time due to the sudden change in noise levels which occur when a goal is scored. Other components were also assessed, such as the pre-match announcements, half time entertainment and crowd noise before and after the match.

The variable traffic movements associated with sports stadia were assessed in Chelsea Football Club’s application for the redevelopment of its Stamford Bridge stadium. The application was supported by two Transport Assessments, one match day travel plan and one non-match day travel plan. Peak times in traffic terms were identified as Saturday, Sunday and weekday matches, both pre and post-match. Baseline assessments were conducted for multi-use transport methods generated by the development.

#### An Assessment of Alternatives
An assessment of alternative development options is included within the EIA regulations to ensure alternative locations, designs and uses are assessed. Sports stadia are usually ‘fixed’ in terms of location with very little scope for re-location due to the costs associated with developing new infrastructure at new sites and local allegiance to a specific town or city. An application to expand the Main Stand of Liverpool Football Club’s stadium, Anfield, was submitted in June 2014 and will accommodate an additional 13,300 spectators. The ability to assess alternative locations for this type of development is hindered by the historical connection of Liverpool FC with its location. The stadium is a dominant feature in the area and is the second highest visited tourist attraction in Liverpool.

#### Centres of Economic Viability
Sports stadia are no longer used for only holding sporting events. Many are critical for the economic viability required to facilitate other development and investment in the surrounding area.
For example, Reading Football Club submitted an application for the development of land surrounding its Madejski Stadium in February 2016. The application sought to provide a convention centre, ice rink and hotel. Subsequently, beneficial effects on local expenditure and community facilities were predicted due to the additional retail and leisure facilities provided as part of the development. The diversification of sports stadia and their ambition to become centres of commerce has increased the need for EIA’s to adopt a more flexible approach to robustly assess likely significant effects.

The application of EIA for sports stadia is one that has had to adapt to fit their unique nature and variable effects. The best practice assessment of traffic and noise impacts should reflect a realistic worst case, which may need to incorporate different scenarios for flexibility. The application of alternative assessments for sports stadia has to reflect their fixed location and historical connection with their existing sites. Overall, it seems the complexities and complications which surround the beautiful game and form much debate in the sporting world, extend far beyond the football pitch and what decision the referee may or may not have made.

_Hannah Bedding, Barton Willmore, March 2016._