



**Needs Case to support the EBBSFLEET  
UNITED FC NORTHFLEET HARBOURSIDE  
DEVELOPMENT**

# AUGUST 2023

Stonebridge Road, Northfleet, Gravesend DA11 9GN

## **Document Purpose**

This Needs Case has been prepared in support of the proposed regeneration and renewal of the Ebbsfleet United Football club and surrounding area on located at Stonebridge Road, and should be read in conjunction with the related documents submitted under planning application ref: 2022/1064.

This document identifies the need for a modern, fit for purpose Stadium, club and conference facilities in the context of existing facilities that are aged, obsolete, life expired, below modern safety and facility standard expectations, and limited to servicing only traditional sporadic football events and not wider community interest uses.

## Executive Summary

EUFC is a well-established and historic community asset Football Club, embedded in the local community for generations having merged Gravesend United and Northfleet United Football clubs in 1946. The club has a healthy season ticket membership of 875, the substantial majority of whom live in Gravesham Borough and the area of Northfleet where the stadium is located.

Whilst the Club has a proud and established history, at the moment its financial standing is heavily supported by the Club's owners rather than being financially independent.

This is a pressure faced by many clubs in the UK, and for a team with growing success future security requires a sustainable financial model that allows them to manage and plan for the long-term. This is a requirement of the new football regulations being applied across all tiers of the sport by a new independent regulator which the government is appointing in late 2023, and for this to be successful must combine:

- traditional football revenues – ticket sales, merchandise, sponsorship opportunities, catering, advertising and retail. and
- non-core business revenues from supporting activities – hosting other sports and community events, hiring out rooms and spaces for conferencing, concerts, and rental income from investment opportunities.

The club faces many challenges including:

- Two thirds of the spectator seating and facilities are rapidly deteriorating designed and constructed over 80 years ago which fail to meet even the most basic contemporary standards for sports, community use and safety standards.
- Limited and often sub-standard, Spectator welfare facilities that have little provision for women, children or those with accessible needs. The facilities are also unable to meet the current standard for DDA/ accessibility needs.
- Player and staff facilities fail to meet modern standards, with inadequate toilet, changing, welfare and accessible facilities for male and female participants, and facilities lacking in being suitable for youth players
- Limited and dated social, catering, spectating and WC facilities, mostly in extremely poor condition and are inappropriate and unattractive to women, children, elderly or those with accessible needs.
- Limited income from rentals and other sources due to a lack of space and facilities to accept bookings for seminars and community use, we are constantly declining bookings due to our current space being sold out.
- Vandalism of buildings and equipment due to dated and costly to repair perimeter fencing and security barriers.
- a lack of wider facilities that invite more of the community into the site.

- Football regulations under The Football Association's rules that stipulate ground grading standards to accommodate male and female playing squads and match officials,
- Facilities below the minimum lighting standards set by The Football Association for safety and broadcast, and various other base compliance levels.
- UEFA Football regulations that stipulate a Financial Fair Play ("FFP") model which prevents clubs investing more money than they earn to ensure long-term financial stability. This is requiring clubs to earn and increase turnover and revenue to be allowed to re-invest into sporting purposes and for clubs to progress and develop.
- Promotion to the next division – the English Football League – (the EFL) requires a club to have an active charitable foundation and requires office accommodation and community space sufficient to host and home that foundation. This is not currently possible with the Club's current financial standing and quality of facilities.

Unless the Club address these core issues it faces, there is limited scope for the club to grow and advance and would need to return to a model which would see it forgo any ambitions to remain at the 5<sup>th</sup> Tier it currently operates at in the English System.

The financial sustainability of the club would not be self-sufficient and would require continued reliance on private funding from its owners which cannot – and should not – be the staple of a club's financial model into the future.

Creating a modern, relevant and sustainable club and stadium (both financially and environmentally, cannot be achieved by a "patch-and repair" approach of ad hoc and like-for-like replacement of the facilities. This would be an inefficient and wasteful approach. It would only serve to replace with expensive solutions of the same standard that only provide spectator viewing for Football use some 26 times per year, and would provide the community with no improved access or use of facilities and no improvement to the clubs need for wider revenue streams.

The solutions to the Club's position will be delivered by the proposed development. This scheme will:

- provide a new modern stadium that will create the foundation for club and local community and borough for many years to come
- provide a fit for purpose compliant home for the Ebbsfleet United Men's and Women's Football teams and juniors 7 days per week.
- providing a place for both club supporters and the local community to gather, meet, work and socialise.
- Provide a 8000 seat size stadium that is rare in the greater London area, and would be unique in Kent. Only Wycombe (9,558), Leyton Orient (9,253) and AFC Wimbledon (9,150 ) are of being comparable size, and none of the above compare in design and flexibility of use to our proposal for multiple mixed-use leisure and entertainment community events throughout the year

Delivering this development will allow Ebbsfleet United FC to:

- Preserve and increase the number of children and adults in our local Northfleet area and wider Borough playing or being involved in sport and community activities,

either directly through the Club's new Charity Foundation, or through sharing facilities, meeting and conference spaces, with other user groups such schools and other sports.

- increase the diversity of use away from the traditional and historic male centric football model, bringing parity and equality to our female and youth teams in a safe, welcoming and modern environment. We currently have youth and academy teams for both boys and girls from 8-17 years and the approval of our plans would enable us to expand that to bring under18s and under 21s teams into both boys' and girls' systems.
- Fulfil the current need for a high-quality community facility that can be used by all community and sporting groups throughout the day and in all seasons, 7 days per week; and
- deliver a venue and destination precinct that will bring visitation and commerce to the area which has been neglected and untouched in terms of regeneration and environmental improvement for decades.

It is not an overstatement to say that without the necessary facilities both in terms of the Club's facilities or ability to become financially sustainable, the ability for it to grow and progress through the football divisions will be severely limited. This will restrict in the wider community benefits that can be delivered by the Club, and risks turning away the fanbase.

## **EUFC Club Overview**

Ebbsfleet United Football Club is a member of the Vanarama National League, the 5<sup>th</sup> division in the United Kingdom. The Club was established in 1905 and merged with Gravesend in 1946 and has had its home ground in Northfleet for over 118 years. It is a core focal point for the Borough, with a number of fans coming from the Northfleet area.

As a professional football club, there is a requirement for it to operate in accordance with the regulations set by The Football Association, FIFA and UEFA. There is also a requirement for the Club to take every opportunity to meet the facility standards published by FIFA<sup>1</sup> and the Football Association<sup>2</sup>.

The club is a member and advisory board to the Fair Game Organization, which is the leading advisor to the government on the installation of an independent regulator, designed to reduce the waste and poor financial management of football clubs over the years and to promote a sustainable and transparent future for football clubs, their communities and supporters. <https://www.fairgameuk.org>

The club has a high level of performance on and off the pitch, however is optimised in its capacity to evolve and grow in its current physical facility.

The club has men's, women's, boys' and girls' system and also works closely with all junior boys and girls football clubs in the immediate surrounding community, albeit with the Club located in a predominantly industrial area there are limitations to this engagement. The season ticket membership is diverse in age and background however is focused very much within the Gravesham borough.

The club brings visitors from as far north in Hartlepool and all over the UK 23 times per year for football matches, with 16,500 away fans attending games in the 2022-2023 season alone. In addition the games attracts a national and international TV and streaming audience.

The club enjoys the support and involvement of a number of local businesses as both sponsors, supporters and suppliers, and maintains a locally focused purchasing policy for all suppliers and a similar locally focused recruitment policy for the majority of staff. This includes a large regular event matchday staffing over 65 +.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://publications.fifa.com/en/football-stadiums-guidelines>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.thefa.com/get-involved/player/ground-grading>

## The Need for Improvement

The design and configuration of the Club's current home at Stonebridge Road are no-longer fit for purpose. They perform poorly in terms of sustainability and efficiency, resulting in a facility that is costly to maintain, unable to generate meaningful additional income for the club, and limits future growth opportunities, all whilst providing an unsuitable and out-dated match day and visitation experience for the public.

Beyond the core football activities, there are significantly limited community benefits as a result of the lack of space and suitable facilities either for sports or community hire.

What was deemed to be appropriate in precious decades falls short of acceptable contemporary standards both in terms of visitor/player expectations or regulatory requirements.

Modern matchday and event attendance is a far more comprehensive event than traditional stadiums were designed for. Families attend and fill the day with activities from shopping to pre (or post) match dining, community events, and tend to spend far longer on site than has been the traditional model. This requires stadiums to be within a more diverse environment of uses, spaces and facilities to support the club both on event days and also on non-event days.

## Club Deficiencies

The Football Association has a standard set of Ground Grading Minimum standards of which the club fails to meet a number of, including:-

| Description               | FA Minimum Standard for Grade A Stadiums                                                                                                                                                                  | EUFC Provision                                                                                                    |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Stadium Capacity          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Minimum to expand to 5,000</li><li>• (2,000 seating)</li></ul>                                                                                                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 4,769 with no ability to expand</li><li>• (2,179 seating)</li></ul>       |
| Broadcast Gantry          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 6 cameras</li><li>• 6 commentators</li></ul>                                                                                                                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• None</li></ul>                                                            |
| Technical area & Dugout   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Capacity for 24 players and staff</li></ul>                                                                                                                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Capacity for 11 players and staff</li></ul>                               |
| Away Spectator Facilities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Minimum 2,000 segregated seats (including covered seating)</li><li>• Designated turnstiles</li><li>• Separate away facilities (toilets, food and drink)</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• None</li></ul>                                                            |
| Spectator CCTV            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Full CCTV surveillance system covering all sepectator areas</li></ul>                                                                                             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• None</li></ul>                                                            |
| Electronic Turnstiles     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Provision of electric turnstile entry</li></ul>                                                                                                                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• None</li></ul>                                                            |
| Player Changerooms        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Minimum 30 sq m for both home and away teams</li><li>• Separate female changerooms to allow "double header" match days</li></ul>                                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 26 sq m changerooms</li><li>• No separate female changing rooms</li></ul> |
| Medical Facilities        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Medical table areas within both home and away changerooms</li></ul>                                                                                               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• None</li></ul>                                                            |
| Floodlighting             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 800 Lux minimum</li></ul>                                                                                                                                         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 300 Lux</li></ul>                                                         |

|                 |                                                                                                        |                                                               |
|-----------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|
| Match Officials | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Minimum 10 sq m for both male and female officials</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Male only</li> </ul> |
| Media Room      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Space for post-match media interviews</li> </ul>              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• None</li> </ul>      |

It is clear that there are key shortfalls that have the potential to impact upon player and spectator welfare. This impacts the ability for the club to grow and invest in new players or attract a more diverse and younger fan base.

At the moment the club also faces visitor security and safety problems on matchdays. The Club exits straight on to Stonebridge Road, a busy and dangerous A-Road with minimal crossing facilities for visitors to access the stadium. Given this is the main arterial route through the area it is not possible to close the road and create a sterile security area (a FIFA requirement)

These improvements are not easy to resolve without wholesale redevelopment of the stadium itself, as many require a larger building to be able to accommodate the necessary standards.

These improvements are required to maintain the club's current position within the Football League. The club has experienced success and promotion in recent years, with the Club's aim to be promoted to the EFL League 2 by 2026 .The ability to reach this level is limited by the Club's facilities as without certain improvements the Club will not be able to operate at this level. A recent example of where this has caused promotion difficulties is Luton Town's promotion to the Premier League, where it has had to postpone matches as the stadium has yet to be upgraded.

The plans for the proposed stadium are therefore required not only to overcome the current deficiencies, but also to futureproof the ability for the Club grow and to be promoted. Without this, the future ability to move forward is limited.

### **Improved Stadium Facilities**

In addition to overcoming the current shortfalls noted above, the new stadium will solve the issues the club currently has by providing: -

- Suitable fit for purpose office accommodation for men's and women's football clubs and their administration
- Medical facilities that are adequate for the club to continue in this league and above.
- Lighting that meets the minimum requirements
- Change rooms for both men and women, including match officials of a size that complies with regulations for this level and higher, and also brings the club up to modern standards on diversity requirements.
- Conference and event facilities that will provide the size and availability currently lacking in the borough whilst providing non-core revenue for the football club that will allow it to operate sustainably into the future within the football FFP regulations.
- Covered, modern, comfortable seating that will make the stadium a viable and much needed option for non-football related leisure and entertainment-based events suitable for families. Adequate and modern toilet and accessible facilities coupled with modern standard food and beverage facilities.

- Match day and non-football event day hospitality areas that are fit for purpose and comparable with the market best practice which will increase revenue and ensure the club remains compliant with EFL regulations.

### **Addressing safety, vandalism and antisocial behaviour**

- The existing perimeter security is a major issue for the Club regularly resulting in vandalism, break-ins and antisocial behaviour.
- The Stadium is broken in to on average 3 times per year. Which has seen food and beverage outlet doors and windows smashed, security roller doors broken, cooking and cleaning applications broken and vandalised, glass windows smashed, and wires and water pipes broken. The club has seen many days of outlets being out of action as a result and substantial costs to repair and replace damage,

### **More Diverse Members and Visitors**

#### *To Appeal to More Diverse Communities in our Local Area*

- Due to our dated facilities and the health and safety issues, and focus on traditional men's football, the Club is struggling to grow a more diverse membership, particularly women, senior players and people from a broader ethnic background.
- The new proposed Stadium will better provide for the needs of a more diverse, less traditional football supporter by having non-football events but also by having facilities such as sensory rooms, better designed and plentiful bathroom facilities, and a wider range of catering options that only larger, modern kitchens and facilities can provide.

### **Space Demand**

To provide a stable and sustainable financial position the Club requires the ability to generate income through non-sporting activities. This is to be provided through community use and hire of facilities, as well as the ability to provide non-sporting events within the stadium which will derive other economic benefits for the area.

In summary:

- Since the Covid Pandemic the club has experienced daily demand and enquiries for space to be leased or let out casually. There is a lack of functional, modern standard event spaces in the borough. This high community and commercial demand for daytime use / rental of the spaces, includes:
- Local holiday club style day care, arts and craft, sporting and digital club enquiries
- Local charitable organisations such as the memory café, men's mental health club, sea scouts, NHS screening events, local fundraising fetes and fairs.

- The Club's locally focused schools' program which has housed 6 local primary schools in the last 6 months for learning programs but could have provided programs to fill the demand for an additional 14 school visits annually.
- There is a substantial market shortfall of available function and event space locally for weddings, wakes, community award events etc. Space is currently limited to a capacity of 240, and the Club have declined 24 events in the last 12 months due to size.
- Within Kent there are no venues capable of hosting medium-scale concerts and events. Family centric leisure events that are growth markets in the arena entertainment sector are not catered for locally. These events include Monster Truck and Nitro Circus style events, Drone Racing , Robot wars, gaming convention and stadium events, social media influencer appearances, and charity football matches among other events. At present these events only have venues in London central to accommodate them and the club has fielded and declined numerous approaches to host such events. The football club has a license agreement and contractual relationship with the largest YouTube influencer channel in the UK which will attract and hold these events regularly . An 8,000 seat stadium would be able to attract visitors from the whole of the region, especially given the high-speed sustainable travel options linking the venue with Kent and London.

### **Need for Supporting Development**

The necessary improvements to the Club cannot be delivered without the ability to grow the site of the stadium. This can only be achieved in one of two options:

1. The Club leaves Northfleet.
2. The Club expands its presents in Northfleet.

Option 1 to leave the area is not seen as a viable option for the Club and would not be favoured by the supporters. It would take away from the club's heritage and links to the area, as well as reducing the sustainable travel options for both home and visitor fans.

It is therefore necessary to look at how the Club can expand within the area to deliver the necessary improvements to create a viable future.

Investment in a bigger stadium within Northfleet cannot be delivered in isolation as there is a need to purchase surrounding land and look at ways to work around the main A-Road. This provides for a larger site whilst also removing the pedestrian / vehicle safety conflicts that currently exist.

This can only be achieved through other means of generating an income, which in this instance is able to be achieved through the delivery of residential and commercial uses to provide the necessary returns to fund wider works which the Club would not be able to achieve in isolation.

The supporting commercial facilities around the stadium are a requirement of being able to improve the visitor experience and create an attractive environment for all supporters, especially families. Visiting a football match is becoming more of a destination activity, with visitors looking for food and drink options before/after events.

The provision of retail facilities provides other reasons to visit the site outside of football matches, helping to aid the vitality of the area and support the related uses and residential. It is also part of the supporting infrastructure for when concerts and other non-sporting activities take place. The O2 and Webley are examples of this, and with no other destination like this within the Kent region it is important to deliver activities that support a day's travel to the area.

Crucially, the provision of wider commercial uses around the stadium allows for inherent safety and security matters that the Club would not otherwise be able to deliver. Under FIFA guidelines stadiums should be located within a spacious precinct to allow optimal safety, security and operational efficiency. The commercial uses around the stadium will allow for the creation of secure perimeters and access routes away from vehicles to direct and control the movement of visitors to games and events taking place within the stadium.

### Summary of the Needs Case

It is clear that the club faces an uncertain future without investment into a new stadium and the on-going revenues it will receive from its interests in the wider commercial precinct. The needs case can be summarised through the following analysis:

| Strengths                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | Weaknesses                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Established history and loyal membership base.</li> <li>Substantial majority of supporters live in or immediately around Northfleet and Gravesend</li> <li>Established part of the community.</li> <li>Good location for community use.</li> <li>A genuine community asset with great brand and affection among the boroughs</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Outmoded, obsolete and deteriorating facilities.</li> <li>Sub-standard changing and welfare facilities that do not adhere to compliance standards welfare standards.</li> <li>Inadequate social spaces or facilities for community or visitors</li> <li>break-ins, vandalism and related antisocial behaviour.</li> <li>Inadequate physio, medical and officials' facilities.</li> <li>Changeroom facilities are too small and don't cater for women's teams.</li> <li>A lack of wider facilities that invite more of the community into the site on event days but also non-matchdays</li> </ul> |
| Opportunities                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | Threats                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Retain and expand current market and community use including for different genders and backgrounds.</li> <li>Create a new fit for purpose stadium meeting contemporary standards and an aspirational destination to attract visitation to the borough</li> </ul>                                                                        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Existing Stadium and/or configuration is increasingly obsolete and hence irrelevant / unattractive to a growing portion of the Gravesham community</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |

|                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|---------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Address the threats of antisocial behaviour | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ongoing threat to financial viability unless a step change in approach and facilities can be delivered.</li> </ul> <p>Vandalism of buildings and equipment.</p> <p>Antisocial behaviour and crime.</p> <p>.</p> <p>Slow decline in demand and use without a step change in provision.</p> |
|---------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

### **The Proposed Facilities**

The proposed Northfleet harbourside seeks to:

1. Create a Place and precinct of a multi-use commercial, leisure, retail and residential development in which the Stadium will be the heartbeat for the new and existing community.
2. Deliver a new 8000 seat boutique stadium that will retain the home of the football club in Northfleet in perpetuity on the site the club was founded and has traditional occupied.
3. Provide residential housing to assist the borough in achieving required dwelling targets and to provide revenue and funding to support the construction of the stadium and community areas.
4. Provide conference and event space in a severely under-supplied market for the local community and business community. Also providing on-going non-football related revenue for the football club to survive and flourish with in the future.

### *Financial Viability*

- Club season ticket levels are stable and growing slowly, but they are well below the expected levels considering matchday attendance and non-football related visitation to the club. Without change and regeneration, bringing the club into the modern era in terms of facilities, the season ticket market will stagnate and begin to decline as other better equipped, modern options for leisure and disposable income continue to grow in the greater London area.

- The proposed Northfleet harbourside project will allow the club to change its entire model, bringing it into current and future best practice sustainability standards, modernising and upgrading the facilities making it relevant and attractive to new adults and children of both genders wishing to attend football, or other major events at the stadium, or to simply visit the restaurants and shopping areas or community events in the precinct.
- The proposed development and scale of the retail, commercial and residential aspects of Northfleet Harbourside will allow the club to fund the new stadium, whilst also making the site viable to advertisers and sponsors for naming rights and other digital and commercial advertising options.

## Conclusion

Ebbfleet United is a traditional model of a football club. It has historically been dependent on private investment as its majority income and has mirrored so many traditional clubs in the UK over the years. The industry is changing, and the club must change with it.

Event and leisure experiences, and the expectations of the communities and families who attend large events, have changed, and the club is no longer in a home that can cater for those expectations of safety, comfort, and flexibility.

At the same time the club exists in a very strong community and in an area that has been devoid of significant investment for decades. As a club we are unable to provide spaces and services for the community that are needed due to the limitations and age of the current site.

It is true however that upgrading and installing new facilities comes at great financial cost. Our local government and borough are unable to fund community regeneration having stewarded the area through the pandemic and great financial cost.

Northfleet harbourside provides for a new community stadium and home for the club, solving the challenges and issues laid out above. It does this by also solving the need for regeneration in the area with residential, commercial and retail provision which will produce and release the required funds to construct the stadium and event facilities the club and community need.

Without the development and the facility upgrades the new stadium will deliver, the club is non-compliant with EFL standards, and will also fall short of the National League standards of this level and below. The outcome is stark, the club will not be granted a license to compete in the National

League or EFL in future should it now have a viable plan to rectify the ground and facility failings and bring the stadium up to regulatory standard.

The club would be required to decline any future promotions, and also still rectify the shortfalls in facility standards or risk being demoted year on year. The result of such action would be catastrophic for the supporter base and local area and the club would be unviable as crowds and season ticket sales would decline rapidly given the lack of future and ambition such events would represent.