

Please attribute the response to Alderman James Vos, Mayoral Committee Member for Economic Growth:

Athlone Stadium is not being taken away. In fact, quite the opposite is true.

The City's Economic Growth Directorate is inviting the public to comment on a proposal to make better use of a small section of the parking area facing Klipfontein Road. Not the field. Not the stands. Not the sporting facilities. This is about unlocking commercial potential in the surrounding area - bringing in businesses, shops, and economic opportunities that can uplift the community and support the stadium's long-term success.

Some critics have jumped to the wrong conclusion, claiming we're threatening the future of sport in Athlone.

We do not want to stifle the debate around improving the stadium experience - in fact, we welcome it. But let's base that debate on facts. One of the biggest reasons people don't attend events at Athlone is because the area around the stadium lacks supporting activity - there's no broader precinct experience. Contrast that with DHL Stadium, where the surrounding businesses, recreational areas, and vibrant atmosphere turn match day into a full outing. That's the model we want to replicate for Athlone: a vibrant, people-friendly precinct where sport anchors a wider economic and social opportunity.

That's exactly what this proposed development aims to deliver. We want to build a space where people don't just come for a match and leave - they stay longer, support local enterprises, connect with others, and enjoy a safe, welcoming environment. With more foot traffic comes more passive security, a stronger sense of place, and - most importantly - more local jobs and investment.

We intend to activate the Klipfontein frontage with commercial opportunities such as a sought-after call centre hub, gymnasium, retail and start-up spaces. This will allow the area to buzz with life even on weekdays when the stadium is not hosting sporting or cultural events. The goal is clear: unlock the value of this prime location in a way that directly benefits the surrounding community.

What we are doing is investing in Athlone Stadium with a series of upgrades aimed at enhancing safety, accessibility and functionality at the stadium. The pitch is also currently undergoing maintenance. This will continue and increase the hosting of high-profile events.

In the same way, the proposal is for the current parking to be replaced as part of the new development by optimising space and providing structured parking. The proposal therefore does not mean reducing the parking, but enhancing it as part of the new development. This means there will be no impact on the stadium's ability to host international events.

Beyond rugby fixtures like the U20 Rugby World Championship, Athlone Stadium is a proud venue for major football matches, including Premier Soccer League (PSL) clashes, and community tournaments such as the Bayhill Premier Cup - a fixture that has become one of the most prestigious youth football competitions in the country. The stadium also regularly hosts regional finals, local derbies, and cultural events that draw large crowds and create lasting memories.

The irony is that the loudest voices claiming to “protect” the stadium are the very ones standing in the way of tangible improvements. This proposal is about unlocking the full potential of the stadium precinct - with sport remaining at its heart.

A Land Use Management (LUM) application was approved in 2023 to align this vision with the District Plan. It paves the way for a dynamic mixed-use development that blends commercial and community spaces, strengthens the precinct, and creates real opportunities for those who live and work nearby.