

AFTER the glorious 70s, Wycombe Wanderers are moving into the 80s in a mood of adventurous optimism, tempered with astute realism.

They are beaming their way into the new decade with improved floodlights and with the formation of a company, limited by guarantee, — a step undreamed of when 70 was ushered in. And with forward-looking plans for a modern, purpose-built club and social centre.

Every club, no matter how great, has its high peaks and low. It is when the lows come that its strength is tested — and when the character of its management, its players and its supporters counts most.

The final months of the 70s have seen Wycombe in a down table position to which they have rarely, in their long and great history, subsided, with the terraces all too often looking forlornly and depressingly empty. But this has happened to some of the great clubs of the Football league.

A TIME OF CHALLENGE

As I see the situation at Loakes Park, it is a time of challenge which is going to be tackled in strength and with enthusiasm, and with no little business acumen. As one official told me 'You can't live in the past, no matter what the traditions. You have to plan and build for the future.'

That is the mood which is taking the club into the 80s. And since soccer is all about people and the way they identify themselves with it is up to the town to back management with all-out and massive support.

As clubs everywhere struggle to keep their financial heads above water the basic problem is one of money. That is why Wycombe Wanderers are forming — or will have formed by the time this is in print — a company to administer its affairs, with a group of shareholders, none of whom will be able to hold more than one share.

The scheme is so structured that no one man will ever be able to control the club. There will be six directors, one of whom will be chairman and there will probably be a non-elected management committee from the shareholders. The club, under this scheme, become owners of the ground and will have collatorial.

Formation of the company is the first step in a programme of major develop-

By Arthur Church

ment, with the installation of the new floodlights as project one. The need for responsible and quick action is uppermost in the board's thinking.

What of the new social centre? It will be to a large extent independent of the playing side of the club and hopefully will become a focal point for many of the town's organisations. Run by a manager, it will need to be identified with the town's development and closely linked with the family unit, the council and commercial and industrial interests.

Already, the plans have been drawn up and the necessary approvals given. On paper, the scheme is at an advanced stage. Now the club has to tackle the main hurdle — the matter of arranging the finance.

The main room of the centre will accommodate some 200 people for a major function and there will be a smaller suite with its own bar facilities, suitable for smaller receptions or meetings.

Because of the problems of hooliganism and vandalism — happily not much in evidence in Wycombe, but the possibility cannot be ignored — the centre would not be open on match days, except of course earlier in the day for something like a wedding reception or for a function later in the evening. But the present clubroom and bar would be maintained in operation.

The mood is that the club will be ready to enter into anything which is profitable and with which the club can reasonably identify itself.

THE WAY AHEAD

From what I can gather, the club sees its 80s decade future in non-Football League soccer though it will strive for a flexible, open-minded approach to such opportunities as may occur.

Bearing in mind the costs of travel, for instance, the Wanderers would not seek to enter the ranks of the Alliance League. All the signs are, as Wycombe reads them, that non-League football will continue to reorganise and re-shape itself.

The Berger Isthmian League is likely to grow in stature and it is not unlikely that economic pressures will force some Football League clubs out of their present sphere into the ranks of the semi-professionals.

Anything which comes out of the FA consideration of possible developments and changes will be watched closely by the Wanderers.

In general terms, it is when a club side is not doing so well on the playing pitch that it most needs support — and that, unhappily, is usually when it doesn't get it. And when there are hysterical calls for heads to be chopped!

Men who have led the club to past greatness do not become 'duffers' overnight. In a letter to the Free Press recently one saddened supporter declaimed 'I feel it is time the committee got off their backsides and did something.'

A noble sentiment — or grossly unfair? For my part you can take your pick, but I would only point to the truism that, strive as they may, not all the clubs in the league can be at the top at the same time, and certainly not one of them all the time.

All indications are that the club is gearing itself to move forcefully into the 80s, though perhaps for a time we will need the virtues of understanding and patience, especially in the build-up of playing strength.