

Hospital on attack in soccer ground row

Sign up for our team!

HEALTH chiefs are calling on the people of Wycombe to stop Loakes Park football ground being turned into a site for warehouses.

They want the ground as a hospital extension catering for the sick, elderly and handicapped.

Plans were submitted

**By Alan
Cleaver**

by Westbruton Development Company for warehouses on the site after they found

Wycombe Wanderers a new home at Sands.

But Wycombe Health Authority have now launched a campaign to stop the warehouse plans. They are circulating a petition in the district and hope to attract 100,00 signatures.

First to sign the petition was Wycombe mayor

Councillor Reg Goves. He said: "I feel sure the people in the district are wholeheartedly behind the hospital plans."

The health authority have formed an action group to co-ordinate their campaign. The chairman, Dr Winnifred Gray, said: "It would be a disaster for the future health service in the whole of this district if the hospital was not allowed to take over the site."

Their campaign includes full-page adverts in newspapers (see page 16) and letters to all of the Wycombe councillors who will vote on the planning proposals on February 26.

They have written to Wycombe Council objecting to the warehouse proposals on the ground it would "end for all time any scope for the extension of health services at Wycombe Hospital."

Dr Gray said: "We have got to stop permission being granted for the warehouses. If we don't stop that we've had it."

John Goldsworthy, secretary of Wycombe Wanderers said: "We cannot make any comment until we have official notification from the health authority or council on their alternative plans for Loakes Park."



● High Wycombe mayor Councillor Reg Goves kicks off Wycombe Health Authority's petition to stop warehouse plans for Loakes Park. Also pictured are members of the health authority's action group and, far right, deputy mayor Councillor Roy Sherwood.

Why hospital needs the soccer ground

HERE are Wycombe Health Authority's views on the proposed development of Loakes Park.

● WYCOMBE Health Authority became aware late in 1985 that negotiations had been taking place for several months between Wycombe Wanderers Football Club and commercial developers for the sale of the football ground at Loakes Park. The Authority immediately contacted the football club and, within the two weeks deadline set by the club, made an offer for the ground. However, this was subsequently rejected in favour of the commercial developer who would now appear to have an option to acquire the site, subject to planning permission being granted.

● THE developer has submitted to Wycombe District Council a planning application to turn the football ground into a development of 'non-food' retail warehousing. Linked with this is a second planning application to convert a Green Belt site at Hillbottom Road, Sands into a replacement ground with new club facilities.

● THE Authority has submitted an outline planning application to develop a unit for the elderly, comprising 48 beds for the elderly mentally infirm (EMI), 32 day places also for EMI and a 24 bed geriatric ward. It is

WITH the future of Loakes Park football ground, High Wycombe, still in the balance the Wycombe Health Authority is stepping up its campaign to buy the site.

The authority is fighting plans by Westbruton commercial developers to use the land for warehouses and promoting its own scheme to use the land for extensions to Wycombe hospital.

also proposed that two wards currently located at Booker Hospital would be reprovided on this site. Both of these projects have been approved as part of the Regional Strategic Plan and money is earmarked within the Regional Capital Programme for them. Acquisition of the site will also give scope for various other potential developments, including a unit for the younger disabled and a hospice, together with additional parking.

● THE football club has given three principal reasons for rejecting the Authority's offer – price, an alternative site for the football ground and potential delay. In response to these the Authority has said:

It is conscious of the value of that site and is prepared to make a fair offer to the club.

As far as the Authority is aware the Hillbottom Road site will be available if either the Authority or the developer were to purchase the football ground.

If the Authority bought the site it would conclude

the sale as quickly as possible. The Authority could make early finance available to enable the football club to build a new ground prior to their move from Loakes Park.

● THE Authority has mounted a campaign to gain public support for its objections to the use of Loakes Park for retail warehousing and its alternative use for hospital developments. A public petition has been raised for this purpose and will be submitted to the District Council at the end of February 1986, prior to the planning committee considering the applications on 5 March 1986.

● THE Authority's objections to the commercial development of Loakes Park are:

The building of warehouses on that site will end for all time the extension of Wycombe General Hospital. Additional health facilities are urgently needed to cater for the increasing elderly proportion of the population.

Retail warehousing and its use seven days a week

The authority has issued a statement of its case which is published here. The Star has offered Wycombe Wanderers a chance to reply but club secretary John Goldworthy has declined to comment.

Meanwhile members of Wycombe Wanderers met last night with the club committee to discuss the situation. The Star's offer of space for the club to reply is still open.

during trading hours will be environmentally disturbing to the hospital and surrounding areas.

There will be a loss of car parking, not only that on Queen Alexandra Road but also the 88 spaces currently rented from the football club.

Commercial development will significantly increase traffic congestion in that area close to the main junction – Marlow Hill/ Oxford Road/ Queen Victoria Road.

● THE Authority's reasons for seeking Loakes Park are:

The present Wycombe General Hospital site is already severely congested and has reached its limit for further development.

Expansion of health services is required urgently to cope with the needs of the elderly and the Town's growing population.

Loakes Park is the logical and ideal place for extension of hospital services, giving ease of access in the town centre and enabling the Authority to make best use of all the services provided by the District General Hospital. This was recognised in the High Wycombe Town Plan, published by the Wycombe District Council in November 1983.

Write to Readers' Letters, The Star, Gomm Road, High Wycombe, Bucks, HP13 7DW.



Soccer club's views about future of Loakes Park

What the Blues say



LAST week the Star published a statement from Wycombe Health Authority on its reasons for wanting to acquire Wycombe Wanderers' site at Loakes Park. We offered the soccer club space to reply and here is its statement:

1. WYCOMBE Wanderers Football Club has never offered Loakes Park for sale to anyone; however, it has over the past fifteen years received a number of relocation proposals.

2. The club's only real asset is the freehold of Loakes Park. As is well known by the members, the club's income is very hand-to-mouth, relying largely on the proceeds of a lottery and other non-football activities.

3. Automatic promotion is now available from the Gola League to the Football League. The club is ambitious and by moving from Loakes Park can put itself on a sound financial footing, as well as meeting the necessary playing and safety standards. The move will

also provide a modern, well equipped ground with improved facilities for club members, supporters and visitors.

4. Various possibilities have been considered over the years, including relocation to Kingsmead, Holywell Mead, Cressex, Booker, Gomm Valley and Terriers; a planning application for the latter being refused in 1973.

5. The provision of an alternative site for the club has always been a prerequisite of any sale of Loakes Park. In recent years the site at Hillbottom Road has been suggested by successive planning officers (Mr Hold and Miss Day) and was therefore viewed as being an obvious option.

6. The club received its first serious offer for Loakes Park

in 1985 from Westbruton Limited, together with the provision of a new site at Hillbottom Road. The developers would also provide a new floodlit pitch, stands, covered enclosures, clubhouse and car park. Terms were thereafter agreed with Westbruton Limited and an option to purchase entered into in respect of Loakes Park.

7. The Club Trustees have a clear duty to ensure the continuation of the club in accordance with the wishes of the late Mr Frank Adams, who gave Loakes Park to the club in 1947. All the various options open to the club were carefully considered and in the best interests of the club it was unanimously decided that Westbruton's offer be accepted.

8. As regards the possible extension to Wycombe General Hospital, the Regional Health Authority has been talking of acquiring Loakes Park since 1970. Many high level meetings took place, particularly in

the 1970's, attended by county and district council planning officers and various health authority officials, but



● WYCOMBE Wanderers chairman Brian Lee.

little or no progress was made because of the lack of a suitable alternative site for the club. No further approaches were made by the health authority (since 1973) until December 1985.

9. It is significant that in the meantime the health authority did not seek to acquire the former bus garage abutting the hospital when it was for sale, instead proceeding with the much publicised development of Amersham Hospital. In recent years the club, on two separate occasions, has offered the hospital a parcel of land adjacent to the hospital and fronting Queen Alexandra Road for use as a car park. Neither offer was taken up.

10. Why now the sudden interest from the hospital after twelve years of silence? Indeed, it was also apparent that the council planning department had no knowledge of any hospital proposals when the retail warehouse scheme was discussed at recent pre-planning application talks.

11. Certain proposals were put before the Trustees by the health authority on December 1985; however,

these were of an uncertain nature, i.e.

● No guarantee could be provided regarding the alternative site.

● They could not meet the completion date for the new ground of 1987.

● The price could not be considered as firm since it had not been agreed with the District Valuer.

In contrast, the offer from Westbruton satisfied all these vital conditions and was therefore accepted in the interests of the club.

12. In addition to the real benefits for the future of the club, the proposed redevelopment of Loakes Park with retail warehousing would provide some 150 new jobs and complement the existing retail facilities in the town. The proposals also include the provision of a number of new car parking spaces for the hospital's exclusive use.

The Trustees believe they have taken a bold initiative to secure the future of the club. The alternative is to remain at Loakes Park and be saddled with the very heavy expenditure envisaged if the Popplewell Report is implemented; such expenditure

would be beyond the resources of the club, particularly having regard to the existing facilities; the wooden stand and ageing "shed". The survival of the club on such a basis would clearly be in doubt. Even the everyday maintenance at Loakes Park is proving to be ever more costly.

Those who knew Frank Adams will believe that he would have been one of the first to recognise the need to progress with the changing face of football with the same foresight that prompted him to secure Loakes Park for the club.

The club recently met council officials and has requested Westbruton to talk to the health authority in the hope that a compromise solution can be reached that will satisfy all the parties concerned.

It is now hoped that with this statement of the facts much of the unwarranted criticism which has been levelled at the club, particularly by the local health authority, will be dispelled and that Wycombe District Council will be allowed to consider the various planning applications now before it.

Brian Lee, Chairman, Wycombe Wanderers Football Club, Loakes Park, High Wycombe.

TELL us what you think by writing to Readers' Letters, The Star, Gomm Road, High Wycombe, Bucks, HP13 7DW. This week's letters are on page 17.

5,000 sign Loakes Park protest petition

MORE than 5,000 people have signed a petition in support of using Wycombe Wanderers' football ground for developing Wycombe Hospital.

Wycombe Health Authority wants to buy the land for developments for the elderly, mentally ill and mentally handicapped patients.

But it faces opposition from commercial developers who have submitted plans for building warehouses on the Loakes Park site.

The health authority claims members and hospital staff collected 3,000 names in six hours in Wycombe town centre on Saturday. More names were added to the petition in Amersham, Chesham and Princes Risborough.

The response was very encouraging, said Wycombe Health Authority's general manager Roy Darby. "There was obviously very strong feeling in support of our case."

Copies of the petition will be handed to the district council before its planning committee

meeting on March 5. The meeting will consider both the application for warehouses and proposals for hospital expansion on the Loakes Park site.

"Members know that this will be our last chance - and High Wycombe's last chance - to get comprehensive hospital facilities on one site," said Mr Darby.

The health authority's next meeting is at Amersham Hospital next Wednesday.

● **Wycombe Wanderers state their case. Please turn to page 8.**

Hospital needs soccer ground

THE Labour Party councillors on Wycombe District Council are totally opposed to the sale of Loakes Park for retail warehouse development.

It must be used for the hospital extension which is so desperately needed. Community needs must be put first on this occasion, as they were not when the London Country bus garage was sold some years ago. There are sites on the edge of the town perfectly suitable for retail warehouses.

The second issue is whether Hillbottom Road is a good replacement site when Wycombe Wanderers do move. The present Sands Industrial Estate despoils what was once a beautiful valley, a football ground would serve only to ruin the beauty that is left.

Once again, there are other sites in the Wycombe area that could be used. There should be consultation between Wycombe Wanderers and the local authorities to see if land could be provided for a multi-purpose stadium to serve the whole community, rather than restrict it to a club that uses the ground relatively rarely.

Local people can act by writing to the local papers, signing the petition circulated by the hospital authorities and contacting their local councillors. The Labour councillors will certainly be fighting for the needs of the community.

B R Stenner, Councillor Booker and Castlefield (Wycombe District Council), Chapel Lane, Sands. On behalf of Trevor Fowler, Janet Ridington, Betty Barratt, Jim Tanner and Bob Filer.

enough to find someone willing to transport them, they have to be set down at points which necessitate a long walk for out-patient treatment, making unwarranted demands on their health and comfort.

Since it would appear that the authority is prepared to offer a fair price, to conclude a quick deal and to assist the football club to acquire a new ground, it does seem hard to understand why the authority's plans to develop the hospital have been met with opposition.

It is to be hoped that the efforts now being pursued to develop the hospital development scheme will succeed, and that humanitarian considerations will prove to be the dominant factor, as against purely speculative commercial interests.

**Chas R. Sonnex
Chairman
Seer Green Over Sixty Club**

Patients must come first

I AM a wheelchair bound patient and have attended Wycombe Hospital ever since it came into use. I have to attend this hospital on a weekly or monthly basis.

I have to visit top specialists and five clinics. Without all this very close attention it would be quite impossible for me to carry on my life.

I feel very strongly that no-one should be allowed to buy Loakes Park when the hospital needs so many more wards for different departments and patients.

I am only one patient needing so much attention. I do trust that you will print my letter for the sake of myself and so many needy cases not just in High Wycombe alone.

**Betty Batting
Pack Street
High Wycombe**

Long walk for the old folk

I WRITE on behalf of the Seer Green Over Sixty Club's 75 members to add our support to the Wycombe Health Authority's endeavours to secure the Loakes Park Football Ground for extensions to Wycombe Hospital.

Many of our members have experienced difficulty due to the inadequacy of the parking arrangements.

Even if out-patients are lucky

Fight to save ground hots up

WYCOMBE Hospital's battle to ward off property developers is hotting up.

Health authority chiefs take to the streets with a petition tomorrow (Saturday) seeking support for their campaign to save Wycombe Wanderers' football ground for hospital development.

The football club wants to sell Loakes Park to a developer for warehouses in a deal it says will finance a climb into top league soccer.

Roy Darby, general manager of the health authority, says the sale would seriously affect patients, ending any expansion of Wycombe Hospital to provide more car parking and beds for the elderly.

Both the developer's plans for two DIY warehouses, and the health authority's expansion plans come before Wycombe district council for planning permission on March 5.

Signatures

About 1,000 signatures were written on the petition in less than a week.

Local company S. Smith (Electrical Fittings) is urging other companies to follow their example by sending letters of protest to Wycombe council. Twenty employees of the Abercrombie Road company have signed a letter urging Wycombe council to turn down the plan to build warehouses on Loakes Park.

● Lane End Parish Council is backing Wycombe Hospital on the issue.

"We have really got no alternative but to support them if we want the hospital to expand in the future," councillor Pat Plumridge said.

Councillor Doug Pullen said he had supported Wycombe Wanderers for many years, "but in this case I have to back the hospital."

Hospital needs Loakes Park

WE must have Loakes Park football ground for our hospital.

During the two years that my husband was being treated for leukaemia at Wycombe Hospital, he often had to walk from the centre of Wycombe in order to have his daily injections because there are no parking facilities for outpatients at the hospital. This in no way improved his condition.

I cannot understand why the Loakes Park site was not compulsorily purchased when the club was offered a site at Handy Cross.

Mrs Jean Commons
Rugwood Road
Flackwell Heath

Help organise a petition

THANK you very much for highlighting Wycombe Hospital's desperate need for expansion.

The housebound and elderly may find it difficult to get out to sign a petition or even post a letter, so why doesn't every street or road organise a door to door petition to sign, and send it to Wycombe council.

Come on Wycombe people, help a most worthy cause. You may be the next person to need our hospital's facilities. Hurry because we have only until February 26 to win this battle.

Name and address supplied.

READERS letters are welcomed on any subject but they may have to be edited for legal or other reasons.

● Wycombe Health Authority's campaign to stop the commercial development planned for Wycombe Wanderers' football ground at Loakes Park takes a new turn this weekend when the petition launched last week comes to Amersham and Chesham tomorrow, Saturday.

Members of the authority will be collecting signatures in both town centres between 10am and 4pm. Already both Chesham and Amersham town mayors, Fred Mason and Jean Archer, have pledged their support for the campaign.

Speaking after Monday evening's meeting of Amersham Town Council's amenities committee, Councillor Miss Archer said there was an obvious need for the expansion of Wycombe Hospital.

"The people of Amersham have been forced to use the casualty department at Wycombe. But there is an obvious need for more car parking space in the vicinity of the hospital," she said.

"In the longterm, I would like to see the re-establishment of casualty services at Amersham General Hospital, but health is such a pressing concern that one must always be concerned about all aspects of the subject."

At Monday's meeting, Councillor Michael Ansell urged his council colleagues to support the Wycombe Health Authority campaign.

Soccer fans loyalty

I WAS disgusted with Brian Lee's remarks that he is not worried if he loses Wycombe Wanderers' fans because of the planned move, because he expects gates to increase anyway.

Thanks Mr Lee. We fans are the people who have supported the club through the bad times as well as the good.

This move will cost the club more than lost supporters. They hoped for entry to the Football League will turn the club from a thriving respected non league club into a near bankrupt team like the majority of league clubs.

Brian Lee can only be described as the Margaret Thatcher of Wycombe Wanderers, forcing his opinions on us and not listening to reason.

League football will bring segregated terraces and barricades.

Let us keep our non league club and our friendly old ground, where it is safe to take our children. Let's have a new, less ambitious chairman instead.

John Hutchinson, Lines Road, Lane End

Secure ground for the hospital

THE members of our Women's Institute wish to add their voice to the mounting cries of objection to the proposed sale by Wycombe Wanderers of the Loakes Park ground to commercial developers.

The urgent need for this site by Wycombe Hospital for the provision of desperately needed car parking facilities for patients and visitors and the development of further health facilities for the Wycombe area must far outweigh any commercial consideration.

This site is Wycombe's last chance to improve its hospital facilities and its disposal affects, or will affect, every single resident in the area. It is therefore vital that every effort be made to secure this site by the Health Authority for its use, and this Institute has sent a petition and letter to the Chief Executive of Wycombe Council and the Planning Committee registering its objection to the proposed commercial use and urges everyone who feels similarly to do likewise. — Susan Griffiths, Lane End Evening W.I., Wheeler End.

THE prospect of Loakes Park becoming another DIY centre in High Wycombe is daunting. When London Transport vacated the site it was assumed that the available space would be used for hospital expansion. This did not happen.

With Wycombe Wanderers being rehoused in another part of the town, surely the Loakes Park site must be used for future hospital development. High Wycombe's population is growing and the hospital's need for additional accommodation must take priority over any other consideration. — Alan Page, Elm Road, Penn.

AT last an opportunity for the people of Wycombe to show the cynical outside property developers and greedy local landowners that they want more amenities, not more warehouses and offices. I refer, of course, to the proposed sale of Loakes Park.

So shake yourselves from out of your normal apathy. These type of people rely on your indifference so go and sign the petition organised by the local Health Authority and, perhaps, even write to your local councillor voicing your disapproval.

Show them that you care about Wycombe, for who knows that piece of open space or pleasant field or woodland near you has already been earmarked by the land vultures for warehouses or offices or maybe even a football stadium. — R. Sarney, Pinewood Road, Sands.

Council unsure about Loakes Park

A COUNCIL is in a quandary over whether publicly to support Wycombe Hospital in its bid to secure Wycombe Wanderers' football ground for car parking.

Chiltern District Council is calling on its sister authority, Wycombe District Council, for advice over the raging Loakes Park issue.

Chiltern Council chairman John Cresswell summed up the position when he told a planning committee last week that he would not want one authority to be seen trying to influence another.

At the centre of the argument is Loakes Park, the home of Wycombe Wanderers since 1901.

Wycombe Council has received plans for DIY warehousing, and plans from Wycombe Area Health Authority for car parking on the site.

The football club aims to move to a new ground at Hillbottom Road, Sands, to herald a jump to top league soccer.

Last week Chiltern councillor Pamela Crawford was positive the council should publicly condemn the warehouse plan.

"I would like to see us formally object to this plan because it is people from this area who use the car parking at Wycombe," she said.

But other councillors were more reserved over the question.

Hugh Wilson said there were a number of issues to be considered and the council should get the background and details of plans before taking a stance.

But councillor and Chiltern representative on Wycombe Area Health Authority Michael Batt called the warehouse plan the "Unacceptable face of capitalisation".

Compromise bid on soccer ground

A COMPROMISE solution could save the day and end the dispute between Wycombe Wanderers and the hospital over the future of Loakes Park football ground.

The football club has asked the developers, Westbruton, which wants to build DIY warehouses on the ground, to talk to the health authority, which wants it for new wards, "in the hope that a compromise solution can be reached that will satisfy all parties concerned."

So far, both the developers and the health authority have submitted plans to Wycombe District Council to build on Loakes Park. The developers, in turn, have applied for permission to use land at Hillbottom Road as a new football ground.

Now, for the first time, it looks as if both sides concerned are prepared to sit round a table and thrash out a solution where both the developers and the hospital may have a stake in the future of Loakes Park.

Meanwhile, Wanderers this week issued a lengthy statement answering critics of its recent actions.

It says the club has never offered anyone the ground, its only real asset in the

by Lucy
Tennyson

hand-to-mouth world of minor league football.

Only by building a modern, well-equipped ground can the club put itself on a sound financial footing, and pave the way to promotion to the Football League.

The club also needs to improve safety and fire standards after the recent Poplewell report into the Bradford disaster.

Wanderers say that the first serious offer for Loakes Park came from Westbruton, and that no approach from the health authority has been made since 1973.

The new site for a ground at Sands had been suggested by Wycombe Council in the past, but Westbruton was the first to offer to provide floodlights, a clubhouse and stands.

The club says the hospital has in the past lost the chance to expand on to the former bus garage site, now occupied by Sandfords DIY, and that more recently it failed to take up an offer of land fronting Queen Alexan-

dra Road for a car park.

Wanderers say the health authority could not match the developers for price, completion date or an alternative site.

The club trustees believe they have taken a bold initiative to secure the club's future, one which they think Frank Adams, who gave them Loakes Park, would have approved.

● The petition calling for the use of Wanderers' ground for hospital expansion now has more than 5,000 signatures, including 3,000 in six hours in Wycombe on Saturday.

The health authority wants Loakes Park for new wards for the elderly and mentally ill, and a car park and has asked district councillors to support it when plans are considered on March 5.

The health authority says it can offer a commercial price and match the developer for completion.

Health boss Roy Darby said the developers should have known of the hospital's interest in the ground, as it was outlined in a strategic plan given to the district council.

Protest petition gaining support

MORE than 8,000 people have signed a petition supporting plans to use Wycombe Wanderers' football ground for hospital development.

That's the claim of Wycombe Health Authority which will be collecting more signatures in the town centre this Saturday.

The authority wants to buy the Loakes Park site to improve facilities for elderly, mentally ill and mentally handicapped patients.

But it faces opposition from commercial developers who have submitted plans to build warehouses on the land.

"The people of the district are giving us magnificent support," said the authority's general manager Roy Darby.

The petition will be presented to Wycombe District Council next Wednesday in time for the planning committee meeting on Wednesday March 5.

Abridged report

AS the Town's leading newspaper I should have thought it was your responsibility to fairly inform the public in this matter, particularly when they are being asked to petition about the development of Loakes Park.

In your brief report you refer to a lengthy statement by the club and one must ask why you did not report it in full. After all, you have given considerable editorial and leader space in support of the hospital's need, so why not print a view from the other side? —

Carl Stratford, Well House, Penn Street.

Editorial note: While the statement was abridged it contained all the relevant new detail and answered the criticism that has been levelled at the football club.

THE Big Match — Lee has passed to the hospital committee. They are being tackled by the DIY consortium. What a game this is!

Now the council won't put the boot in for fear of an own goal. And the hospital buildings and surrounding area are in danger of being smothered of a toxic fire from DIY materials at both ends of the park. Chaos could erupt any time. We're sitting on a time bomb here at Loakes Park folks. So abide with me. — E. C. West, Eaton Avenue, High Wycombe

MAY I be permitted to make a positive contribution to the Loakes Park saga.

Why not provide a basement car park for the hospital over the whole site and rebuild Loakes Park on top of this car park to include an all-weather pitch. — J. D. Chamberlen, Stonefield Road, Naphill.

Time to think of the future

I AM sure that if Mr Frank Adams was alive, it would be a certainty for Wycombe Hospital to have the Loakes Park ground.

Over the years, the football club have been offered other sites, but they were turned down, or not considered.

The club have been very

Readers' Letters, The Star, Gomm Road, High Wycombe, Bucks HP13 7DW.

lucky to have such a great benefactor, who gave them the ground and I and many other supporters would feel that a gesture in his memory would be for the hospital extension which is so badly needed.

If this is not so, and warehouses rear their ugly heads, I really feel for the future of Wycombe Wanderers Football Club, if they move.

The public have long memories. This is very important to the people of High Wycombe, who must take a firm stand on this for the future generations.

Mr A Copping, Beech Road, Wycombe Marsh.

Loakes Park talks

THERE are hopes of a compromise over the battle for Loakes Park, home of Wycombe Wanderer's Football Club.

Wycombe District Council are delaying considering the planning application for warehousing on the site, originally set for next week.

The delay is to give time for talks being held between the development company, Westbruton, and Wycombe Health Authority who want the site for extensions to Wycombe General Hospital. See story page seven.

Clash of loyalties?

YOUR headline said "Whitney boost to donor scheme". What a pity it didn't also say "Whitney boost to securing ground for the hospital".

The "Carry a Card for Kidney Donations" is a wonderful scheme, which deserves the backing of everyone but costs Ray Whitney nothing in terms of political or economic support.

Support for Wycombe Health Authority's Campaign to purchase Loakes Park would. As Junior Minister of Health Ray

Whitney's Governmental position on National Health land and property is one of selling, such as nurses homes, not one of purchasing land for future use. That would clash with the ultimate object of dismantling the Health Service.

In this instance there is a clash of interests between an MP representing his constituency and a Minister defending monetarists policies of his Government and it is going to be left to the public to show that someone cares for Wycombe. — Ted Collins, Sunnybank, Marlow.

NEW MOVE IN FIGHT FOR LOAKES PARK

IN the latest round in the battle for Loakes Park, Wycombe Health Authority and Westbruton Ltd, have forced Wycombe District Council to delay the deciding planning meeting.

The health authority and the London-based developers met secretly to see if a compromise could be reached over the future of the home of Wycombe Wanderers.

"Meetings have taken place that have given grounds for optimism," said Wanderers chairman Brian

Lee.

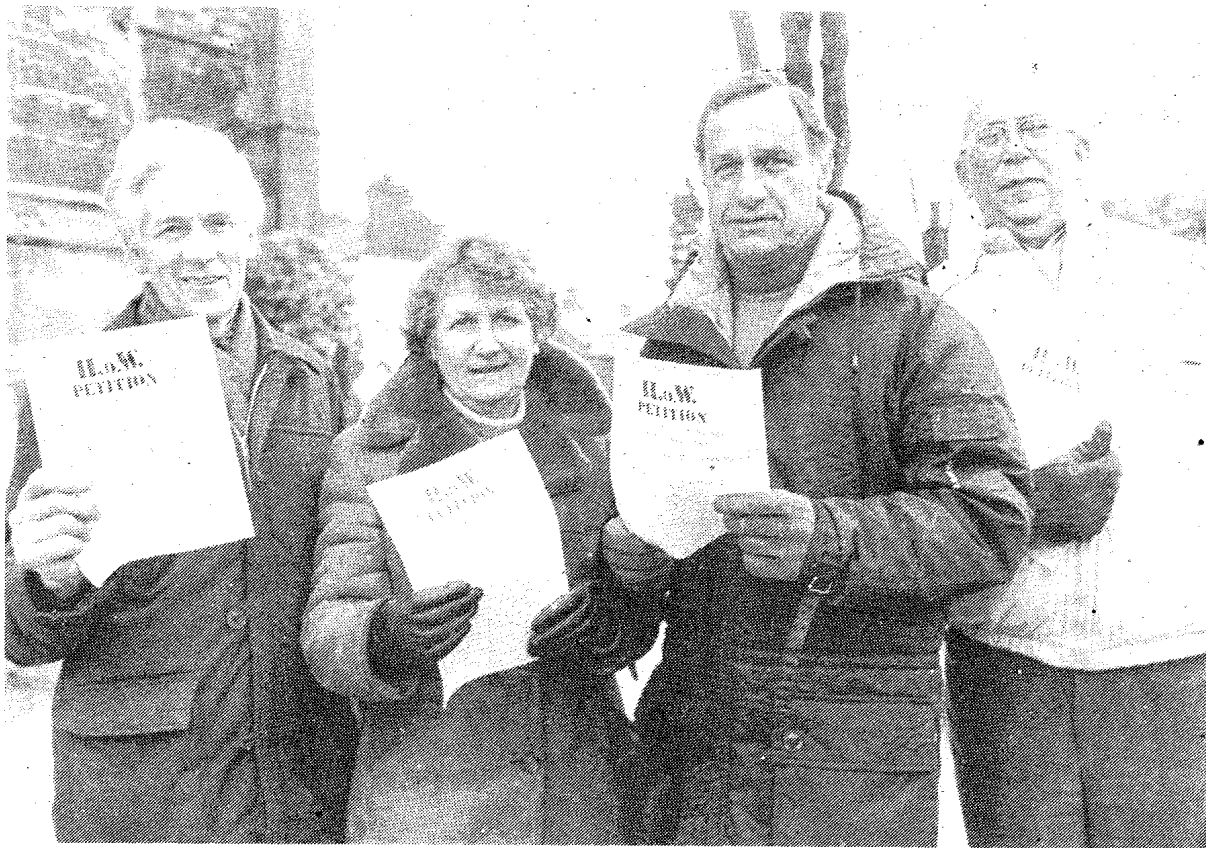
"We hope a compromise solution for the future use of Loakes Park can be found."

But Health Authority chiefs are keeping quiet about the talks.

"Our objective is to secure some of the Loakes Park land for hospital expansion and that has not changed," said district general administrator, David Griffiths.

No date has been fixed yet for the planning meeting.

Wanderers will be moving to a new site at Sands within the next few years.



Actor joins the protest

ACTOR Geoffrey Palmer has joined more than 27,000 people in supporting a bid to buy Loakes Park football ground for Wycombe Hospital.

The star of TV's *Hot Metal* comedy, who lives at The Lee, signed a petition being organised by Wycombe Health Authority in the town centre last weekend.

The authority wants to buy Wycombe Wanderers' ground to extend Wycombe Hospital with units for elder-

ly and mentally ill patients. But it faces opposition from commercial developers who have submitted plans to build warehouses on the land.

The petition was handed in to Wycombe District Council this week and will be presented to the planning committee.

Pictured with Geoffrey Palmer are Ronald Slade, of Wendover Street, High Wycombe, and Raymond and Eileen Lunnon, of Marlow Road, High Wycombe.

MORE than 27,000 people have signed the petition calling on Wycombe District Council to save Loakes Park for Wycombe Hospital. And this mammoth public support may have paid off already, because talks have started which may produce a compromise solution.

Faced with intense public pressure, Wycombe Wanderers' Football Club has asked the property developers, Westbruton, to talk to the hospital authorities about the future of Loakes Park.

Westbruton wants to build two DIY warehouses on the site, whereas the hospital says it is the only means of expanding and providing more wards for the elderly.

Both had submitted planning applications to the council, but these will not now be considered at the March 5 meeting of the Planning Committee.

Tempting

Both applications remain on the table to await the outcome of joint talks. It is possible that at a later date both sides will withdraw their applications in favour of an alternative plan for Loakes Park, which would satisfy all parties, the developers, the health authorities and the football club.

Wycombe Wanderers have stressed all along that they have never offered their ground to anyone, but that Westbruton approached them with a tempting financial deal.

The football club's only asset is its ground, which it would sell to pay for a move to a new pitch at Sands, and a climb into top league football.

A spokesman for Wycombe Council said that with the situation in a state of flux it was difficult to comment at this stage.

But it was clearly the most suitable way forward to consider all the possible alternatives at one meeting, the date of which would be some way off.

Meanwhile, the protest petition, which was collected in only three weeks, has been handed into Wycombe's Council's planning department this week.

"The people of the district have given us magnificent support," said general manager Roy Derby.

COMMENT

WYCOMBE planners will not be called upon to deliberate on the future of Wycombe Wanderers' football ground this week as was thought.

Both the developers' plan for warehousing and Wycombe Health Authority's proposals for hospital use have been set aside while the two sides try to strike a good old British compromise.

The Health Authority goes into the negotiations with the upper hand. A 27,000 petition was presented last week, backing its proposals. It's the developers not the Health Authority who are keen on a compromise.

But the important question to be asked is will a compromise solution meet the approval of the district council and, more importantly, will it be seen favourably by Wycombe people.

Wycombe Council has been known to frown on warehouse schemes, such has been suggested.

Those who signed the Health Authority petition were asked Warehousing or Hospital? The question was not Warehousing and Hospital? If the Health Authority uses the strength of the petition to support a compromise solution it will not be truly representing the views of many who put their names to it.

For most people the issue is clear cut. The Health Authority, for years demanding more land for expansion in the service of good health, now it has that opportunity. It should not be deviated from such a worthwhile and vital purpose.

We're
No 1 for
news

Sands storm!

Residents riled over Blues ground move

FURIOUS Sands folk are trying to get Wycombe Wanderers' plans for a new ground on their doorstep booted into touch.

Special
report by
**JULIE
PORTER**

They are angry that whatever happens in the battle over Loakes Park, the club will move to Sands come what may.

London-based developers Westbruton want to develop the present site for warehousing, while Wycombe Health Authority wants to extend hospital facilities to the soccer ground.

But Sands residents are not taking it lying down. Already they have handed petitions in at Wycombe District Council opposing any possible move.

Worried

"They haven't even acknowledged that they had received them," said Michael Lynch, of Carisbrooke Road, Sands.

"We sent them two weeks ago. People are very worried about the prospect of having Wycombe Wanderers down here.

"I took the petition down my road and every single person I asked signed it — not one refused."



FUTURE: The proposed new site at Sands

The residents are angry about how the whole episode has been handled.

And they have put forward four points on their petition to illustrate their anger.

"The first is that the proposed land is green belt," said Michael.

"We are also worried about the noise and nuisance with hundreds of people, coming and going to the games.

"The car parking plans are totally inadequate — they have only allowed 226 spaces. If they get big cup games, everyone will be parking in the streets.

"And they haven't even consulted us."

Mann on Friday

WESTBRUTON, the developers who had high hopes of building retail warehousing on the Wycombe Wanderers football ground, are now intent on saving at least something from the wreckage of their plan.

Their planning application was to have come before Wycombe planning committee this week. Instead the plan has been set aside while talks are held with Wycombe Health Authority, who want the ground for hospital extensions, in search of a compromise plan.

Wycombe Health Authority go into the talks holding all the trump cards. There can have been few planning applications carrying the endorsement of 27,000 petitioners and conversely 27,000 people against the developers' warehousing plan. And, if all else failed, the Health Authority could acquire the ground by compulsory purchase.

Little point in talking?

Yet surely these talks will be little more than academic for is a compromise was to result from them, with the developers and the health authority agreeing to sharing the ground it is unlikely that Wycombe planning committee would approve.

Many share my view that the Health Authority should be seeking a joint venture with Wycombe Council and Bucks County Council, not the developers, to provide hospital extensions for geriatric services and facilities for the elderly mentally confused linked to a council old aged persons complex.

Hospital to blame

AFTER reading Wycombe Wanderers statement in reply to the local hospital's allegations, any fair minded person would see the hospital authorities have been deceitful and haven't had the decency to say why, when they had the option, they didn't take advantage of the Sandford site or the offer of more car parking facilities from Wycombe Wanderers.

After reading that hundreds of staff and auxiliaries are leaving hospitals in the Oxford region because of lack of money, instead of spending millions on buying Loakes Park shouldn't any spare cash be spent on putting the existing facilities in order? — G.B., High Wycombe (Name and address notified).

We don't want this stadium

YOUR LETTERS

AT last, there's a paper concerned with the people.

I am a resident of Lane End Road and the way the other papers put it, the new Wycombe Wanderers football ground is as good as being built.

Look at the trouble we had with the FA Cup match recently and all the damage caused by opposing fans. I disagree totally with the football ground being at Hillbottom Road and signed a petition to that effect.

I understand that

the police are all for the new proposed site because they say that if there is any trouble they can contain it within Lane End Road. Big deal!

What happens to the residents of Sands when there is a full-

scale riot going on?

Take also the way it would spoil the beautiful outlook of Sands village. We already have an industrial estate.

There has been another site proposed, at Handy Cross, which

would be more sensible.

I know I speak for most of the residents of Sands when I say that it has a wonderful village atmosphere and a community spirit that is second to none.

Please don't spoil it by putting a football ground here where it is not wanted.

May I praise the Observer again for taking the time to listen to the people of Sands which, if this football ground goes ahead, will have a lot of unhappy residents.

Sheri Pitteway,
Lane End Road,
Sands

A winning team...

I AM writing to thank you for all your help with the health authority's recent "Hospitals or Warehouses" Campaign for the Loakes Park site. The final total of signatures on the petition was 35,614, and this confirms the overwhelming public support we have had for future hospital development on the present football ground site.

Dr W. Gray, Shrubbery Road, Wycombe