

A decision - not appeal wanted on Loakes Park

ANOTHER appeal has gone out to Wycombe District Council to avert a public inquiry into plans to build a DIY superstore on Loakes Park and move the football club to a new ground at Sands.

This week the property company behind the deal, which would bring Wycombe Wanderers much needed cash and a modern football ground, spoke openly about its plans.

Westbruton, a small private company based in London, has the full backing of Wycombe Health Authority chairman Peter Land.

Director Martin Gossage called on Wycombe council to take action before the public inquiry on July 14 and allow the Blues to move to Green Belt land at the end of Hillbottom Road, presently owned by Sir Francis Dashwood.

Delay caused by a lengthy public inquiry, he said, would hold up expansion plans for the hospital.

And as no alternative site has been found for the football club, now keen to move out of its sloping site, with its old-fashioned stands and facilities, Sands is the only option.

Timely

Mr Gossage said one of the big four DIY chains, Great Mills, was lined up for the Loakes Park site. And, at a timely moment, with the council elections due on May 7, he outlined the following advantages the scheme would bring:

- It would be a town centre shopping attraction, bringing people into the centre.
- It would provide much needed car parking both for the hospital and public.
- There would be better access into the hospital, and the whole site would be landscaped to look far more attractive than the existing tatty football ground.

"The hospital and I are working together, and I think we have solved the problem," said Mr Gossage.

As for residents' protests at Sands, he pointed out that the club would be at least half-a-mile from the nearest houses.

"There has been great difficulty in finding a site in High Wycombe, and this is the only possibility. I know it is in the Green Belt, but exceptions can be made for

recreation or hotel use. We believe these are exceptional circumstances.

"It's poor agricultural land, and we will provide three acres of landscaping around the ground," he said.

Turned down

Wycombe council turned down the new ground at Sands in July on Green Belt and environmental grounds. But at the same meeting they gave approval for new beds for the elderly and mentally ill on 3½ acres of Loakes Park.

Plans for the other half of Loakes Park came before the council's planning committee in March and councillors dismissed the warehouse scheme as speculative.

But while the majority of councillors feel that all of Loakes Park should be for community or hospital use, several, including Tory group leader Bruce Holland and planning chairman Len Hampton, believe that commercial reality should dictate a compromise.

This middle ground position has been taken by health authority chairman Peter Land.

"The hospital cannot expand unless it can get onto this site, and I am desperate to spend the £4½ million I have been given," he said.

"I see nothing incom-

patible in having for neighbours a well-built, modern retail development, and I am sure that town planners have sufficient control to ensure that it is not unpleasant." The shock news that Wycombe Wanderers wanted to sell their home of over 100 years to a property developer hit the headlines in January 1986.

A surprised Wycombe Health Authority reacted instantly, and persuaded the football club to sell half of Loakes Park to them, if the developer could have the rest.

Thousands signed a petition calling for the hospital to be allowed to expand to provide beds for the care in the community programme, as St John's was closing.

Agreement

But since then, it has been stalemate, with Wycombe District Council caught in the middle. The hospital, football club and developers are in agreement, with only council planners standing in the way.

Will it go to a public inquiry in July - with the inspector taking the final decision away from a relieved Wycombe council? Or will the politicians make a quick decision to save months or even years of delay?

Second bid for a Sands ground

WYCOMBE Wanderers Football Club has once again put in plans to move their ground to Hillbottom Road in Sands.

Why are they resubmitting plans when they are still waiting to appeal against the refusal of planning permission last July?

After such a big majority of councillors against a football ground at Hillbottom Road it would be more constructive of the club to look for another site or to stay where they are.

While I sympathise with the hospital for wanting the land, why should the residents of Sands put up with the rowdy football fans, the increase in traffic and worse of all, that feeling that you don't want to go out on Saturday because there is a football match on?

If any of your readers feel strongly about keeping the football ground out of Sands could I urge them to write to the council planning offices at Queen Victoria Road. The more objections we get the better it will be. We have only until May 1. — Mrs Sheri Pitteway, Lane End Road, Sands.

AT the Planning Committee of Wycombe Council on July 30 the proposal to site the Wycombe Wanderers football ground in Sands was decisively rejected. The club appealed and this appeal is set for July 14, 1987. Can we be told, either by the club or the council, why another planning application has been lodged only marginally different from the previous application?

Can we also be told the alternative sites considered and why they were found to be unsuitable? — Anne Stenner, Chapel Lane, Sands.

Residents oppose the Sands site

THE scheme to move Wycombe Wanderers' football ground to a new site in Sands does not look set to go ahead without a fight.

Sands' residents are organising petitions in a bid to keep the Green Belt site at the end of Hillbottom Road undeveloped after a new plan was submitted last month.

They say the extra car parking spaces in this latest application makes no difference to their opposition to the scheme, which got a similar plan turned down in August.

The petition organiser is Sands' resident, David Wilmot, who says he and his helpers are getting near 100 per cent support and locals are writing in force to the council in opposition.

Many firms based in Sands Industrial Estate, who fear hundreds of fans passing their premises could interfere with dangerous chemicals stored there, are also opposing the scheme.

Support

But, despite his opposition to the scheme, Mr Wilmot, of Rydals Way, Sands, says he is in full support of the hospital extension.

"It is the siting of the new

football ground that the developers have got wrong," he insists.

Mr Wilmot said: "We whole-heartedly support the hospital in having Loakes Park. My wife is a midwife there and I know what the problems are.

"But I'm saddened by the misleading statements to the effect that the people of Sands don't care. We don't want the football ground because it is an exceptional piece of land, near an industrial estate, and the scheme will cause a bottle-neck. These are two separate issues."

Mr Wilmot says he is certain there must be other sites, which would be more suitable in Wycombe that would not require access through an industrial estate.

Fears

He says he has spoken to all the firms in Sands and many fear they will see theft and vandalism increase if the football ground is in Hillbottom Road and that chemicals stored there could put locals at risk if interfered with.

The West Wycombe and Sands Conservative Party is also opposing the scheme as the Hillbottom Road land is Green Belt and in the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

They say extra traffic will be created as the Sands site is so far from the railway and bus stations and that the roads are not wide enough to take the extra cars. They also fear too few parking spaces have been allowed.

SANDS BATTLE

It's contrary to policy

WYCOMBE Council, the people of Sands, and the manufacturers on the Sands Industrial Estate, deserve the support of the whole community in resisting the plan to seize beautiful Green Belt countryside for the brutal intrusion of a football ground.

A development company wishes to make a great profit by gaining possession of a large part of Loakes Park to build yet another D.I.Y. warehouse. This would be completely contrary to the council's policy for the ground and for the protection of the Green Belt.

The council's wish is to permit hospital and residential use. The ambitions of the club management to bring about calamitous changes must be resisted until a sensible alternative solution is found.

The vast majority of the local population support hospital use for the ground, but it is surely unacceptable that this should be achieved by supporting the plans of the development company. We hope the council will maintain its stand and that the townsfolk will provide maximum support.

—J. Scruton, Secretary, High Wycombe Society, London Road, High Wycombe.

Too high a price

REMARKS made by Mr Gossage, director of the development company, which wants to occupy Loakes Park, demonstrates his total lack of concern for the residents of Sands, who, clearly do not want the football ground in their area.

Mr Gossage states that he and Wycombe Hospital are working together and that between them they have solved the problem. It is, in fact, not so. The whole of Hillbottom Road Industrial Estate is against the proposed development. Football grounds and hooliganism are synonymous. The possible repercussions are quite evident but Mr Gossage plainly wishes to ignore them because he is determined to achieve his real objective of making money.

The council has made it clear that it does not wish to see further large D.I.Y. chains in the Wycombe area. Mr Gossage appears to incite otherwise which seems to be that whatever Mr Gossage wants he says everyone else wants. I am all for helping Wycombe Hospital, but not at any price!

—Arthur J. Mount, Lane End Road, Sands.

Handy Cross best

I WOULD like to reply to Wycombe Health Authority chairman, Peter Lord, and West Bruton director Martin Gossage.

At last July's planning meeting, which I and many Sands residents attended, the council decided Wycombe had its fair share of D.I.Y. stores and warehouses and also pointed out that a warehouse was not a suitable place next to a hospital and so close to the school.

I am sure hospital patients would rather look out over a football ground rather than a warehouse development.

That July meeting was also told the Health Authority and not intend providing money for extra car parking people would agree that the most suitable place for a football ground would be Handy Cross.

We all want to see the hospital expand. We all signed the petition, but please rethink the site for the football ground.

—Mrs S. Chivers, Lane End Road, Sands.

DANGER to plans to extend Wycombe Hospital on the Loakes Park soccer ground is to be found in the new cash crisis confronting the Oxford Regional Health Authority.

General manager Ron Darby sounded the alarm bells yet again this week when he pointed out to Wycombe Community Health Council that the £3million allocated for the project and lying idle for want of an agreement could so easily be diverted elsewhere now that the Region's funding of its capital programme through land sales had hit a number of snags.

Yet with Sands residents, with Wycombe Council in support, holding firm against a soccer ground near their homes, and the council either unwilling or unable to suggest an alternative, there seems little likelihood now of any change in the situation before the hearing of an appeal in July.

club's move to Sands, the current voting pattern is likely to be very tight indeed and some of my informants even suggest that now there could be a slight vote in favour.

It is not that the planners want to offend Green Belt principles, for there is considerable danger of copy-cat applications in doing so, but they have failed to come up with an alternative ground – although some suggest they haven't tried over hard – and they so want Wycombe Hospital to expand to provide additional services for the district.

Yet some councillors are inclined to look upon the football club application and retail warehouse application by West Bruton as separate issues. They are not. The football club is relying on both the land deal and the additional largesse from West Bruton to finance its move. One cannot take place without the other.

That situation might come to the rescue of the Sands residents, who, like the folk at Stokenchurch, appear to be batting on a crumbling wicket.

THE public debate that has gone on in our columns and elsewhere since Wycombe planners turned down Wycombe Wanderers' application to move from Loakes Park to a Green Belt site at Hillbottom Road, sands, hasn't done the Sands residents much good.

For my information is that whereas last time around there was a majority against the football

Charles Mann

Emotional blackmail

I AM struck with disbelief and saddened by the very strong impression that Mr Martin Gossage, of the Westbruton Company, is indulging in emotional blackmail in claiming that; and I quote, "as no alternative site has been found for the football club . . . Sands is the only option".

I am sure I am stating the obvious here but you won't find it if you don't look!!

There is much debate at present about what to do with agricultural land released under EEC regulations, to reduce surpluses and diversify.

There is agricultural land in plenty within the 125 square miles of Wycombe district well away from residential and industrial areas and near to through roads.

There is no magic about having the football ground within the town boundary. — **Daniel K. Wilmot, Rydall Way, High Wycombe.**

No fan trouble

TIME is running out for Wycombe Council yet again. Never has the opportunity been as great as it now is for Wycombe Hospital to buy land and expand their already fine hospital.

Will they miss the boat again? Only the council can answer that question.

The football club is in the same position as many home owner's find themselves. When a home is no longer suitable you move to another.

I have been a lifelong supporter of the 'Blues' and can count on one hand the times their has been spectator trouble at Loakes Park. You have only to ask the residents of Suffield Road. Apart from the obvious parking problems there is no sign of trouble..

As a footnote to your article about the proposed service area at Stokenchurch service area, I am sure the very same football fans and drug traffickers the residents are worried about will still be able to leave the motorway and visit local pubs, with or without the service area. — **C. R. Avery, Ford Way, Downley.**

Sites for soccer

TWO weeks ago a letter asked the District Council to explain what sites, other than Hillbottom Road, had been looked at as possible replacements for Loakes Park.

The ensuing silence is typical of the arrogance with which the council treats the public in Wycombe. So perhaps I could be more specific.

Why were the following possibilities rejected. Ground behind the John North Hall of Residence; Land to the south of

the M40 at Handy Cross; and Kingshill Road. I am sure there are other sites in the district.

I also agree that we do not need yet another DIY warehouse in the town centre. The whole of the Loakes Park site should either be used for hospital and residential development, or hospital development alone.

If the Health Authority cannot buy all the ground then perhaps we should make an appeal to the always generous Wycombe public, and local companies to raise the money by public subscription.

The greed of property developers and local landowners should not be allowed to run our town. — Ann Stenner, Chapel Lane, Sands.
