

The long road to compromise

THE LOAKES PARK decision is one that has been a victory for compromise after Wycombe Wanderers first announced it wanted to move to Sands.

The only people to lose face is Wycombe District Council, which attempted to maintain the strict Green Belt boundary, and which will now be in-tingered by the new stadium.

But the club has been left happy as it hopes the new ground will help pave the way to Football League status.

Wycombe Hospital is happy because it can now expand, which it has desperately wanted to do for some time.

And it opens up the way for Westbruton to build warehouses on Loakes Park, which will finance Wanderers' move.

The fire of controversy was first lit in January, 1986 when Westbruton submitted plans for two warehouses on the Loakes Park site.

Wycombe Hospital immediately put plans in for expansion on the site and tried to match the developer's money offer for the site.

Public feeling was strongly behind the hospital and more than 6,000 people signed petitions supporting the health authority.

Finally a compromise was reached with the Loakes Park site being divided between the hospital and the developers.

Although those agreements were reached the plans still had to be passed by Wycombe District Council.

No objection was raised to the hospital plan, the warehouse scheme was deferred by the council, but it turned down the plan for the footballers to move to the site at Hillbottom Road, Sands.

The club claimed it needed to move to pave the way to league football and at the same time put the club on a sound financial footing.

The hospital needed to expand. Dr Chris Foote told the planning inquiry last year that planned operations were being cancelled at the last minute, and emergency cases were being turned away.

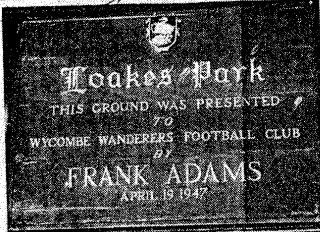
Now, if all goes well, that will be behind the club and the hospital.

Loakes Park. What choice?

A reporter appointed by Environment Minister Nicholas Ridley left Wycombe on Friday after a four-day public inquiry into the resting of Wycombe Wanderers Football Club.

Colin Thompson had been listening to evidence and cross-examination of witnesses and critics who had been using their opportunity on the universal issue of how a new football ground should be built in a town. The inquiry was called a development.

Westbruton appealed against Wycombe Council's decision to turn permission for the club to relocate at Sands. The plan is for the site to move.

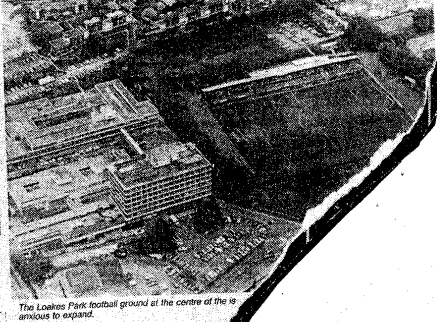


Leaving Loakes Park free to be developed, half with badly needed new roads for Wycombe Hospital and half with a retail warehouse.

The issue will pose a

difficult dilemma for the inspector who has to decide whether the need for the hospital to expand overrides the need for the hospital to protect from development the

Sands site which is both in the Green Belt and the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Reporting from the inquiry is SARA CADENHEAD.



The Loakes Park football ground at the centre of the is anxious to expand.

THE ARGUMENTS FOR

... AND A

The Free Press examined all the arguments last year.

Countdown to success

JANUARY '86: Wycombe Wanderers submit plans to build a new football stadium at Hillbottom Road, Sands. Westbruton development company submit plans to build warehousing on Loakes Park, which the football club see as the means to finance its move. A row breaks out as Wycombe Hospital learns of the plans because it desperately needs to expand. The health authority submit plans for car parking and a unit for the elderly on the football ground.

MAY '86: Following discussions between Westbruton and Wycombe Hospital a compromise is made. Westbruton submit plans to build on 3.48 acres of Loakes Park, and Wycombe Hospital submit plans to build on

3.26 acres of the site.
JULY '86: The crunch decision. Wycombe Wanderers plans to move to Hillbottom Road are turned down by Wycombe councillors. Wycombe Hospital's plans are 'not opposed' but Westbruton plans are deferred.
JULY '87: Four day public inquiry is held into the football club's plans and those of Westbruton after they went to appeal.

MARCH '88: Wycombe Wanderers are given permission to build the new ground at Sands - its road to the Football League. Westbruton is given permission for the warehouse scheme at Loakes Park.

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We expect a good dividend

TAKE a look at the current Vauxhall Conference league table on our sports pages this week and you might wonder what there is for Wycombe Wanderers to celebrate.

Languishing near the foot of the table, the club has played more games than the teams around them and will need to improve on recent performances if they are to escape the ignominy of relegation for the second time in three seasons.

Yet the flags are out at Loakes Park this week, following the Environment Minister's decision that the club can move away from their famous sloping pitch to a spanking new stadium and first class facilities at Hillbottom Road, Sands.

Management, who entertain high hopes, some would say dreams, of an exciting and ambitious future for the club, stretching possibly into the Football League, have plans to start work on the new ground this summer. Next season could be the last full season for soccer at Loakes Park.

Also over the moon this week is the Wycombe Health Authority with a £3million Government cash allocation for Wycombe Hospital extensions on the soccer ground burning a hole in its pocket.

The Authority can now look forward to finalising its proposals to improve facilities at the hospital for the elderly and the mentally sick as well as providing health care for some areas that up until now have had to look elsewhere.

As in all these situations it's not been a joy week for everyone. There are many Wanderers' fans reluctant to say goodbye to the past triumphs and the memories born out of the terraces at Loakes Park. Why move from Loakes Park and the town centre to a smaller, if better equipped, stadium on the outskirts is their argument. And who wants football league soccer, anyway?

Sands residents are equally disappointed to be saddled with a soccer ground and all that could mean in terms of today's hooligan element.

Wycombe councillors, who have tried to be all things to all men over this issue, are not enthusiastic about having retail warehousing in the town centre, which will follow Wanderers' departure from Loakes Park.

The decision having been taken, we are required to think positively. What has the town and the non soccer fan to gain from all this. The town's unswerving, and for the most part unearned, loyalty to Wycombe Wanderers has led us in the past to look at this matter through the wrong end of the telescope.

On past performances the town will gain little from the football club's good fortune. In environmental terms the town will lose little. Retail warehousing on the soccer ground will neither add to, nor detract from, the present aesthetic values of this part of the town centre. It is in health care that the town and the surrounding district will score.

That is our good fortune.

All parties in this partnership benefit, or, at least, think they will. Even Sands residents will share the improved hospital facilities. The town's profit and loss account show this to be a sound investment, likely in the long term to produce a good dividend.

Football club wins new home

SOCCER bosses and health chiefs were celebrating this week after a Government inspector overruled a local council decision and allowed Wycombe Wanderers to build their new football ground a mile away in Sands.

It means the hospital will be able to use land at Wanderers' current Loakes Park ground to build a badly-needed extension. Space will also be sold off for retail warehousing.

But the news dismayed protesters in Hillbottom Road, Sands, who raised thousands of pounds in a bid to scupper the new stadium. Councillor Andrew Green who backed the campaigners said: "I am disappointed but not surprised. We sent letters to 500 houses in Sands and the overwhelming majority were against it."

Work on the new football stadium will start in the summer ready for the club to move in time for the 1989-90 season, while the new hospital building is expected to cater mainly for elderly care.

BLUES ON THE MOVE!

It's goodbye to the slopes of Loakes Park

AFTER many months of uncertainty, delighted Wycombe Wanderers learned this week that they will be up, up and away.

Patient Blues' players and management heard that the Environment Secretary has approved their application to move their headquarters to a new £1.5 million site at Hillbottom Road, Sands.

As the 100-year-old club celebrated, talks were already under way on ideas to make it a venue for the whole family.

Now hopes are high that the move from the old cramped location at Loakes Park, next to Wycombe Hospital, will see the Blues win promotion to Division Four.

"It is great news for the club and a major step forward," said commercial manager, Allen Robson.

Safety

"We are aiming for the League but they have high standards we need to achieve.

"Priority will be put on safety. We will always do better than minimum standards."

Planning the move has not been easy. Over the past two years the club have battled a strong resi-

By **SARA WRIGHTMAN**

dents' lobby against siting the ground in Sands.

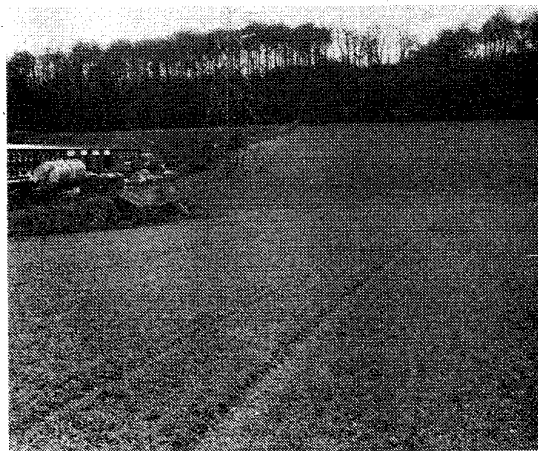
Work on the new ground will start in the late summer. The club hope to play on the new pitch during the 1989-90 season.

The old ground will be used for a warehouse and expansion by Wycombe Hospital.

Ron Collins, deputy administrator at Wycombe Hospital said the old ground would be used to build new wards for the elderly/mentally ill; 32-day places and 24 geriatric beds. Work should be finishing by 1992.



NEW SITE:
Wanderers
will have a
new ground
here by 1990



DECISION has been taken on the Loakes Park saga. Few would have remembered that Wycombe Wanderers have been wanting to desert their famous sloping pitch for 25 years, but that is what the Free Press highlighted last week.

Well, everything comes to him who waits and the Government inspector's decision on the club's appeal means that the club gets to move to Sands, Wycombe Hospital gets land for improving facilities for the elderly and mentally ill, West Bruton gets land for its retail warehouse, and Wycombe Council gets rid of

a hot potato it couldn't find the courage to solve itself.

Invariably where there are winners there has to be losers and this time its the environmentalists, yes again, and Sands residents, who fear they have been saddled with a never ending hooligan and traffic problem once the Wanderers move into their new premises at Hillbottom Road.

The Government Inspector, who did a very thorough job as indicated by his final report on this issue, felt that the hooligan fears had been overstated and called on the authorities, council and police, to consider possible traffic snarl ups.

The inspector also took on board the concern of traders, who felt a retail warehouse would attract custom away from town centre shopping. He has imposed selling restraints on West Bruton to meet the traders' objections.

It would seem that the Wanderers can't get out of Loakes Park quick enough. After all it has been a long wait. They plan soccer at Sands sometime next year.

Charles Mann

Wrong idea of an arts centre

LUCKY old Wycombe Wanderers and the hospital, too - a quarter of a century of planning has paid off.

Good on them but the poor old Arts Centre, forty one years on remains a dream. Not even a foundation stone. It doesn't even have a name and I feel that is the problem.

The very words arts centre are a switch off. One thinks of the predictable Hadyn concerts, amateur dramatics and a gallery full of pretty pictures of Windsor Castle, Marlow Bridge and Burnham Beeches.

It will allow for so much more than the existing commonplace events. If the 1000 seat auditorium can be emptied of its tiered seating in minutes by the press of a button we could witness domino bashing contests, mud wrestling and Elton John all at different times in the same day. Why not International snooker/chess in the day, followed by the Chicago Symphony at night? In the gallery bring on the Andy Warhol/Elgin Marbles and Gerald Scarfe cartoons - one at a time of course.

Compare, if you will, the Sports Centre, warts and all, plus leaking roof. People use it, pity it's not twice the size and yes it is possible to get into the main pool and swim 20 laps in comfort but when is my secret.

The arts centre is going to be bang in the middle of town and people will use it. So please Wycombe Council get on with it.--
Sheila Mawhood, Brands Hill Avenue, High Wycombe.

Off to a fine start

ADRIAN Mann made his debut for Wycombe Wanderers last Saturday and scored two of the three goals!

The Blues went on to beat Welling United 3-1, with Mark Boyland scoring the other goal. Adrian signed up on Thursday with Lawrence Osborne from Newport County.

Osborne has been suffering from flu but is expected to re-start training this week. John Ray who was thought to have appendicitis has been given the all clear and played in Wanderers' 4-1 win at Dagenham in the Capital League on Tuesday.

The club are having talks with Kingstonian with a view to Alan Myers going on loan until the end of the season although Wycombe will still have first call on him.

On Saturday the Blues travel to Bath City in a crucial match both clubs face relegation and like the match with the Welling the result is worth six points to the winner. Bath won 3-1 against Weymouth on Tuesday which will have given them a big confidence boost making Wycombe's job that much harder on Saturday.