

Ground sparks debate

FORMER Wanderers manager Mike Keen spoke last week of his dismay over the club's departure from Loakes Park.

Keen, the Blues' longest serving manager since Brian Lee in the early 70s, reflected the split in opinion when he told the Free Press: "I'm not very thrilled.

"If there were training facilities and astro areas available for the community and the kids, then perhaps I could see the point.

"Other people tell me the new ground's great, but what is there? I hear about conference rooms, and worry. And you've got to get to the ground first!"

Keen was in charge at Loakes Park for four years at the start of the last decade, and has childhood memories of playing a school cup final on the slope in 1951.

"Loakes Park was excellent. There was something about it. This is progress for you.

"Personally, I would have liked to see them develop Loakes Park, but I don't know about the financial situation: it probably wasn't possible.

"This is a sad day, personally. I've now seen five local sports grounds disappear."

While the consensus view on moving from Loakes Park appears divided, between fond nostalgia and a pragmatic need to conform to new regulations, Keen is in no doubt.

"I can't personally see the point of moving the club outside the town."

"If you are to progress, with today's legislation, you have to take these measures," said director and ex-boss Brian Lee.

Jim Kelman is another ex-manager who feels some sadness over the departure.

"The new stadium might be beautiful, but it will be like the others dotted around the country.

"The pitch will be flat, and we will have lost our uniqueness. That's sad."
