

PLANNERS PUT BOOT INTO THE BLUES

THE future of Wycombe Wanderers' hoped-for training pitch hangs in the balance after planners rejected the club's latest proposals for their new stadium site.

Club director Brian Lee refused to be drawn on whether officials would push once

By ANDREW NEISH

more for the plan's acceptance by Wycombe district councillors but said: "I don't think we have decided whether we will try again."

He added: "We have tried again before but we have been turned down at every point. I am very disappointed."

"All we want to do is make

others see that we are trying to provide the club and its people with decent facilities for them to enjoy — nothing more."

The club's latest project for the town's Sands site included a real grass pitch instead of a synthetic surface and officials had pointed out there would be no flood-lighting.

But councillors, residents and conservation groups opposed the pitch, saying the Green Belt area should not be altered and claimed the plan would spoil a section of the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Tory councillor Val Letheren told colleagues at a planning meeting last week: "The club is now in the Green Belt and they must realise what putting this in the Green Belt means."

But Mr Lee said: "I think we have enhanced the area very much. We're not out to ruin the place. Obviously the plan isn't acceptable but we have to respect the council's decision and think again."

Councillor Len Hampton supported the club and said of the pitch, which would be available for youth training sessions: "It won't spoil the valley. It's an asset to the district."

Other councillors pointed out that the site lay next to factories but others won the day with a plea to preserve the area as untouched Green Belt.

COMMENT

Blues' pitch battle becomes farcical

THE argument about whether Wycombe Wanderers, the area's premier football team, should be allowed to have a training pitch next to their new stadium in Sands is turning from controversy to farce.

Originally, Wanderers wanted a synthetic surface, but this was deemed unacceptable by Wycombe District Council's planning committee. Changes were made in the scheme, but the second application was also rejected.

Then the soccer club jettisoned the plastic pitch altogether and applied for permission to construct a conventional grass pitch.

Last week, the planning committee voted down the idea by a narrow majority because of its apparent intrusion into the Green Belt. The decision, in this newspaper's opinion, was arrant nonsense.

As Cllr Len Hampton, perhaps the most experienced member of the committee, told his colleagues: "All we are doing is replacing a little bit of Green Belt with another bit of green. I can't see anything wrong in that."

Neither can we. If the club doesn't have a training pitch, its capacity for expansion will be severely limited. Further, it will be hampered in its admirable plans to encourage the young of the community to become more involved in its activities.

The council must think again — and quickly. The dream of Wycombe Wanderers to win promotion to the Football League proper, is a dream shared by all who recognise the additional prestige and prosperity it will bring to the town.