

It's time the council played ball with us

THE letter from Cllr Val Letheren in the Bucks Free Press (August 17) headed Parking Problems Blight New Stadium should have read Local Authority Blights New Stadium.

It is not my practice to write letters to the local press as it has always been my opinion that the underlying reason for such letters is to either satisfy a personal ego or to see your name in print.

However, at times it is necessary to stand up and be counted, and the time has arisen.

The letters from Cllr Letheren in the Free Press (August 17) and the Midweek (August 21) are nothing else than political humbug and hypocrisy, when the facts are known.

The humbug is to the extent that "we love you Wycombe Wanderers but please go away and play your matches in the remote highlands of Scotland, but if you are successful please let us know so that we can jump on the bandwagon."

The hypocrisy is that the council granted themselves planning permission for a golf course club house, floodlit driving range and car park in the green belt (or area of outstanding natural beauty) but opposed the football club being located in the green belt.

If Mrs Letheren is honest with herself, she will admit that the paramount reason for her persuading her committee to refuse planning permission for the football club to be re-located at Sands was on the grounds that the proposal was an unsatisfactory incursion into the green belt. This is in spite of the fact that the paid professional staff of the council recommended approval of the scheme.

Let us consider some facts. If you are a developer and are contemplating a project, the first thing you do is to study the local planning criteria, next before involving yourself with architects and other fees, you brief your architect to hold preliminary discussions with the council's planning officers. Based on their reaction you make a decision whether to make a formal planning application or not.

If you decide to proceed you are then involved in architects fees and a fee to the local authority to consider your project. The fee to the local authorities can be quite substantial, and in the case of Adams Park, probably well over £1,000. Obviously without a degree of encouragement from the planning officers one is not going to outlay this fee and pay architects fees to receive a refusal.

It must be borne in mind that the council engages fully-qualified professional staff to advise the lay members of the council. However, at the end of the day it is the councillors who make the decisions and this is where emotion can overtake sound professional advice, and personal whims and fancies enter the arena.

Sometimes I wonder whether the outlook of the council extends beyond the M25 in the east and Stokenchurch in the west. Perhaps I am wrong, after all the council has twinned the town with Kelkheim in West Germany. By comparison the football club have spread the name of High Wycombe through their tours to Cyprus, Yugoslavia, Greece, Italy, Tunisia, Spain, Gibraltar, Jersey and Portugal, and played in such major cities as Nicosia, Athens, Monza, Lisbon, to name but a few.

This football club has done a great deal for the town of High Wycombe, but what has the Wycombe District Council done for the football club? I am aware that the football club has made at least a dozen proposals for re-location (whereby freeing up Loakes Park for hospital extension) all refused by the local authority. Not one suggestion of a site for re-location by the council! Some of those sites, Mrs Letheren, would not have caused traffic problems, of which you now complain.

You know and I know, Mrs Letheren, that no-one wants a football ground in their locality, but please don't hide behind the issue of car parking to justify your council's planning refusal of Adams Park when it was in your powers to have the car parking increased.

Instead of trotting out the hackneyed cliché, I told you so, please try and be more positive. The football ground is there, accept it, because it will not go away, and come forward with some positive proposals to help alleviate the problem that so concerns you.

Two suggestions I would put forward to you Mrs Letheren, and I am not being facetious:

1. The council build a multi-storey car park for a 1,000 cars on the existing car park at the football club ground. The income would easily meet the loan charges.

2. The council subsidise a continuous shuttle service of buses from the town centre.

Also please remember that Wycombe Wanderers is a non-league club, not Liverpool and Manchester United or Arsenal and should they gain their goal of football league status it would only be in the Fourth Division where attendances are no higher than those currently appertaining to the league in which the club are now playing.

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