

Farewell and bad luck, Maidstone

FORMER Conference champions Maidstone finally bit the dust this week but the Third Division will soldier on with 22 clubs.

Fixture scheduling was stalled earlier in the summer as the Football League waited on clubs' financial futures.

If two League clubs had followed Aldershot to the gallows in June, Wycombe would have joined Conference champions Colchester in the new Third Division.

Although collapse was avoided at that stage, the Stones, with no ground, only two registered players and debts of £650,000, finally went down this Monday.

O'Neill said of the League: "They are left with a bit of egg on their face now."

Walsall are among the Third Division clubs now seeking compensation for further lost fixtures.

The Blues chairman Ivor Beeks said: "I'm frustrated we didn't go up last year but I've got over that now. I'm looking forward to a new season and trying to win promotion."

O'Neill was interviewed on BBC Radio Four on Tuesday. He explained that while the Blues, with average gates of 3,600, were in a better position than Maidstone to survive the increased costs of promotion, he could not guarantee gates would rise sufficiently for the club to break even.

O'Neill told the Bucks Free Press: "We're doing well in the Vauxhall Conference, we want out of it, but I can't say average crowds would go from 4,000 to 6,500 if we went up." A full-time wage bill would presumably double with players giving up their jobs.

"If we'd gone up into the Football League, obviously big discussions would have taken place over the summer."