

Wycombe Wanderers finally gain permission to build a training pitch

BUILDING work is not set to start on the multi-purpose training pitch at Adams Park for at least a year.

"We have got to look at lots of things, such as funding. And we need to talk to the Football Trust," said Wycombe Wanderers' chairman Ivor Beeks this week. "We know where we must go from here, with the conditions of planning, so we must sit down and discuss it."

He added that Wycombe's priority is to win the Vauxhall Conference, which they lead, to secure promotion into the Football League this season.

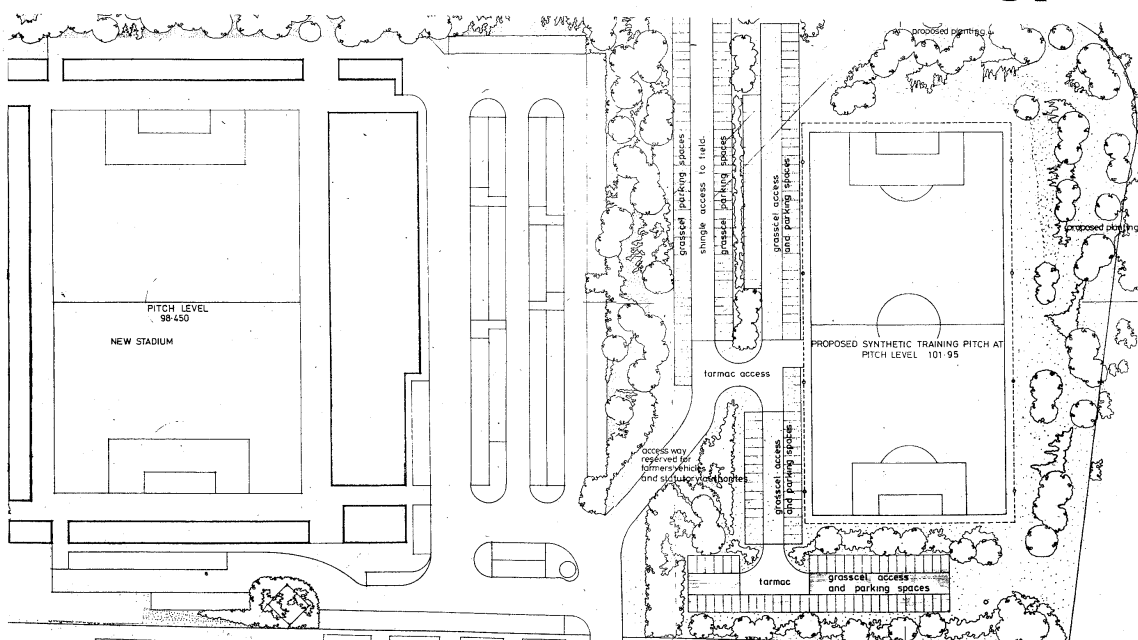
But he said: "We will be looking beyond promotion, once we have achieved it. This training pitch should, hopefully, be a community sports facility."

Residents who battled against the training pitch and car parking plan will continue their fight, although the scheme has been passed.

Stephen Billingham, chairman of Sands Residents' Association, admitted campaigners were surprised to lose the vote.

"But, we fight each battle as they come up. We have a new battle on our hands," he said.

Mr Billingham said residents will have a meeting before they decide their next course of action.



The architect's plan for Wycombe Wanderers' proposed new synthetic pitch to be built next to Adams Park, in Hillbottom Road, Sands

By **CLAIRE NASH**

WYCOMBE Wanderers Football Club was celebrating this week after winning a three-year planning battle to build a training pitch.

Club chairman Ivor Beeks was stunned, but delighted, after councillors voted 12-9 in favour of the scheme on Monday night. He first applied to build the training pitch in 1989.

"I am absolutely thrilled. It was a very close vote. I think the local authority have come to realise that it will be in the interests of the community as well as the club. It could be used for hockey and rugby as well as football," he said.

Wanderers' manager Martin O'Neill said: "I am delighted for the club. I was beginning to doubt it would be built in my lifetime."

But residents near Wycombe's Adams Park ground in Sands were shattered.

"We are very disappointed by the vote. We firmly believe building a training pitch and car park won't help residents at all. I think Wycombe District Council has shown contempt for its own planning regulations," said Stephen Billingham, chairman of Sands Residents' Association.

Councillors conditionally approved the plastic training pitch plan and 224 extra car parking spaces after an hour-long emotive debate. It followed lengthy contentious discussion over five previous pitch-plan applications during the past three years.

The council's planning and development committee was split over the pitch's intrusion into the green belt



John Pusey and Clare Martens

and the welfare of residents, balanced with the needs of the community.

Cllr Clare Martens (Lab, Marsh and Micklefield) was against the scheme and paraphrased assassinated American president John F Kennedy: "Let us ask not what the district can do for Wycombe Wanderers but what Wycombe Wanderers can do for the district."

But fellow Labour councillor John Pusey (Oakridge and Tinkers Wood) said: "Wycombe Wanderers have basically done more in a short space of time than Wycombe District Council can do in years. The improving image of this area in the media has been achieved by Wycombe Wanderers being successful," he told councillors.

"They have then reinvested in this community. They use the training pitch at Cressex. And they ran various training courses for youngsters there in the summer."

Cllr Derek Slowe (Con, Bowerdean and Daws Hill) pointed out that councillors could not turn the plan down at this late stage.

"I feel that Wycombe Wanderers have been led to believe that this application would be acceptable. They

have reduced the sprawl and reduced the height of the training pitch. To go against it at this stage, the strength of feeling against this council would be quite fierce."

But Cllr Valerie Letheren (Con, West Wycombe and Sands) said residents have already suffered enough from traffic and pedestrian congestion around Adams Park on match days.

"The quality of life for residents has gone down and down. We all feel very proud of the football club but I think I would ask everyone of those considering this, how would they feel living in Sands?" she asked.

She added that floodlights were still too high and would invade residents' privacy.

Her Conservative ward colleagues Cllr Andrew Green and Cllr David Turner also voted against the pitch and parking plan.

But Kathleen Peatey (Con, Green Hill and Totteridge) was in favour because she said it would provide an urgently-needed all-weather sports surface. She added that she was taking an unusual personal step supporting a project in the green belt.

A planning inquiry into an earlier scheme was postponed last June when Wycombe Wanderers consulted planners to reach a compromise.

The club have had to agree to conditions governing layout and times of use. Fencing, floodlighting and lighting levels have to be approved by the council before the pitch is built.

The planning and development committee gave the final nod after the council's planning applications panel gave it preliminary approval two months ago.

Victory has taken almost four years since first application

March 1988

Wycombe Wanderers win a planning appeal for outline permission to build the Adams Park stadium, at Hillbottom Road, Sands, High Wycombe.

May 1989

The first application for a plastic training pitch is considered by the council's planning applications panel. It is followed by a second, amended, application.

Both are refused on grounds that they would be an eyesore because of their elevated position on the bank overlooking the car park and stadium.

In a statement, councillors said the scheme would detract from the character and appearance of a Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the elevated site went against their planning policy.

May 1990

Planning permission is refused for a grass training area for the same reasons.

August 1990

Wycombe Wanderers play inaugural game at Adams Park, a pre-season friendly against Nottingham Forest.

1991

Wycombe Wanderers lower the level of the training pitch after being advised to do so by planners. Their fourth application is for a plastic pitch and 224 car park spaces.

May 1991

Wycombe Wanderers win the FA Trophy at Wembley. Thousands of fans who packed High Wycombe town centre to congratulate the team, jeer the council for refusing to let the club build a training pitch.

July 1991

Planning permission is again

refused because councillors believe it would be too high, and would spoil the countryside.

Wycombe Wanderers appeal to the Department of the Environment against the council's decision.

January 1992

Wycombe Wanderers start training regularly on the Adams Park pitch because they cannot get regular bookings for Cressex School's plastic pitch and Beaconsfield United's ground.

February 1992

Wanderers director Alan Parry attacks district councillors in a Daily Telegraph sports column. The TV commentator accuses them of turning their backs on the club.

May 1992

Wanderers finish the season top of the Vauxhall Confer-

ence, on level points with Colchester, but miss promotion to the Football League on goal difference.

June 1992

Fresh talks are held between Wycombe Wanderers and council planners after the planning inquiry is suspended temporarily at the club's request.

November 1992

The planning applications panel considers Wanderers' fifth request for a plastic training pitch and 224-space car park. The height of the pitch is further reduced and floodlights are lowered. The panel gives preliminary approval.

January 1993

Wycombe Wanderers are given conditional permission to build a plastic training pitch and 224 extra car park spaces.

Mann on Friday

Pitch and radio victories give Mark two reasons to be cheerful

WYCOMBE Wanderers chairman Ivor Beeks and his merry crew will be celebrating this week after winning one of their hardest matches—against Wycombe District Council.

The training pitch saga has dragged on for years, with a steady deterioration in relations between the two parties. The council has been castigated by directors such as TV sports presenter Alan Parry.

Privately, things have been even worse. Now finally the two are at peace and the community can look forward to

enjoying the benefits of a training pitch, as well as the success of the club.

One man who must be insufferably happy is the Wanderers' sales and marketing manager Mark Austin. He was part of the Radio Wye consortium which won the community broadcasting licence.

The decision of the Radio Authority is heartening. The community radio licences were originally designed for local groups, but too many were given to commercial stations, who just sent out the same pop pap with a minor acknowledgement to the area they served.

I wish Radio Wye every success and look forward to what they produce.

MEANWHILE, over to another local football club, this time in Chesham. I happened to be reading two articles in a local newspaper. One was about the cuddly Chesham United chairman Tony Aplin and the other was about a new director being appointed to the club.

Both articles were extremely insipid and I expected to see the byline of Uriah Heep. It was a minor miracle how the author managed to squeeze so many

superlatives into one sentence.

Even more amusing was the identity of the new Chesham director: None other than David Pembroke, former chairman of Chalfont. He and Mr Aplin have something in common. Both have issued writs against this newspaper.

Dynamic David's attempt at High Court glory fell when his business, Mark Scott Construction, went into receivership. Tiger Tony's race for damages is still up and running.

Perhaps Tony is hoping to fill that £150,000 gap in the club's finances.

I AM sick of reading about the Government's planned Press controls. Let them get on with it. Life was far more exciting at the end of the last century when editors were regularly jailed and newspapers were far more scurrilous than they are today.

Too many of our national papers are mere propaganda sheets already.

I BET Thames Valley Police wish they could bring in Inspector Morse to solve the cases of David Martin and Mohammed Riaz. Well if they can film in our newsroom, perhaps ...

Charles Mann