

LIBERAL Democrats will boycott council chairman Peter Cartwright's end-of-year party – because it is being held at Wycombe Wanderers Football Club.

The Liberals described Cllr Cartwright's choice of venue as grossly stupid. They say Adams Park is a bad choice because of a series of controversial planning applications which have angered many people living near the football ground, in Hillbottom Road, Sands.

Steven Billingham, chairman of Sands Residents' Association, has written this week to

By ROBERT MENDICK

all 60 Wycombe district councillors asking them not to go to the chairman's reception, on April 30.

Liberal Democrat leader Jean Gabbittas had already advised her colleagues not to attend because of the planning applications – firstly for the building of Adams Park itself and secondly for the building of a training pitch.

She said Liberals had branded the choice crass.

So far, six Liberal Democrats have declined the invitation.

Only two Liberal Democrats – Cllrs Wendy Dickinson and Jim Campbell – are expected at the reception along with more than 300 civic dignitaries.

Cllr Cartwright defended his venue choice. "I don't think my decision is stupid.

"Wycombe Wanderers are the best ambassadors for Wycombe at the moment. They put over a very positive image to the whole of the country.

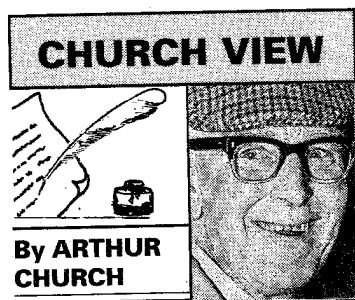
"Adams Park is the envy of every league club in the country. Why keep on decrying it?"

Cllr Gabbittas said the reception should have been held at the refurbished town hall. But

she admitted the decision not to attend was a difficult one: "It was quite a dilemma but I felt nevertheless it would be most inappropriate and unfeeling towards the local residents."

Mr Billingham, a Liberal Democrat candidate in the county council elections, denies his letter is politically motivated. "The two things are coincidental and not related," he said.

Labour councillors will attend the reception. Cllr Clare Martens said: "We don't believe in gesture politics. We do agree, however, with local residents that a more appropriate venue would be the town hall."



Lady luck smiles down on the Blues

IT should come as no surprise that my thoughts turn to Wycombe Wanderers, since I have been following them from the days when, at the top gate of Loakes Park, I waited expectantly with other schoolboy chums for a chance to carry the bag of a Blues player.

It gave us a warm glow to walk alongside one of our heroes – while at the same time gaining free admission. It was a time when one of the most legendary and respected truly amateur sides, the Corinthians, held sway. They later merged with another famous side of the day to become Corinthian Casuals and have since, under the growing tide of semi-professionalism, been buried – though not without honour – in the lower reaches of the small-league scene.

It was in those days when Wycombe were mini-giants in the old Spartan League and when they aspired to, and gained, admission to the Isthmian League. I am remembering some of their greatest players of that era, one or two of whom turned professional.

Those were the days when the Berks and Bucks Cup was more highly regarded and when Amateur Cup matches attracted many thousands. Those were the days, too, when all 11 first-team players were truly local, and when Wycombe and Marlow were bitter rivals.

I remember chaps like Archie Gomm, a stopper (and how!) centre-half, goalie Jimmy Wicks, Reg Boreham, Klon Smith, Joey Grace, the lithe Billy O'Gorman, the lanky Timmy Hinton, who in season 1923-24, when the Blues entered the Isthmian League, scored four hat-tricks and once won one four-goal tally in the first seven matches.

And hat-tricks were harder to get then. They had to be netted without any other player scoring in between.

"Those were the days when Bucks and Berks Cup was more highly regarded and Amateur Cup matches attracted many thousands."

Perhaps the best remembered is Frank Adams, who served the club as player, captain, and committee man and became a prominent member of the FA Council. No-one nowadays needs to be told that he gave Loakes Park to the club, becoming patron, and that his son Jack now has that honour.

The club's subsequent winning of the cherished Amateur Cup and their later successes and advanced status are well-known to all but today's tiniest tots.

But as the present chairman, Ivor Beeks, contemplates what looks like an even rosier future he will not be unaware, I'm sure, of the great tradition which has been handed down to him. The weight of his responsibilities will doubtless be lightened by the knowledge of the past shining hours in the history of Wycombe Wanderers.

Knowing him as well as I do, I am sure he will be turning some new glorious pages in future club history. With his strong team of officials he'll be beaming into overdrive. I'd be proud to carry his bag any time.

For Martin O'Neill, the turning of near-disaster into resounding triumph to reach the final of the FA Trophy yet again must have been like having a shot of Ecstasy.

The Vauxhall Conference championship, denied them last season on goal difference, is almost in the bag and I am not sticking my neck out far to forecast a Trophy win.

What makes the Blues' campaign so great, in my view, is that they have been battling against some hefty kicks in the teeth by that unpredictable Lady Luck.

No club goes through a season without injury to some key players. But the Lady has really piled it on since Christmas. She could hardly have been more tiresomely difficult. All that has done, though, is to strengthen the club's resolve and to make players and management even more determined to bite the bullet and overcome the obstacles.

Since we all, in our personal lives, have sometimes to suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune we might look upon Wycombe's stirring battle against odds as an example well worth following. See you at Wembley.