

Cash is there for players and seats

Wycombe Wanderers celebrated this week after making a healthy £200,000 profit from their first season in the Football League. CLAIRE NASH asked financial director Graham Peart where the money's going

WYCOMBE Wanderers' twin priorities of team building and ground development can be achieved in tandem, believes the club's financial director Graham Peart.

Wycombe successfully made the transition from part-time to full-time status by making a profit of £217,379, which was announced this week.

Indeed, the club, perhaps deservedly, proclaimed in an accompanying statement this week: "This is probably the first occasion that a newly-promoted club has managed the transition without incurring a loss."

The Football League has certainly taken notice. "We are delighted that Wycombe have made such a transition so successfully and long may it continue. I am sure all clubs coming into the League would like to emulate their achievement," said a spokesman.

It was unlikely that gloomy scenarios on the scale of Barnet's near collapse last season, after their first League season, and Maidstone's demise the year before, would impinge on Blues' determined attempts to prosper on the pitch, thanks to sound financial planning during the past five years and obviously Martin O'Neill's continuing success.

But questions remain as to where Wycombe go from here.

The bottom line, that is what their progression depends upon, is how the team performs week-in, week-out.

They have made assured, albeit, topsy-turvy progress thus far, in Division Two. Cries, nay demands, that the club buy better players have been fuelled by the emphatic nature of some of the defeats they have suffered at this higher level.

A grand purchasing gesture has been expected by supporters since Wycombe sold Keith Scott to Swindon for £300,000 nearly a year ago. The fee accounts for a £100,000



Moneyspinner: Keith Scott's £300,000 transfer helped swell coffers

surplus in the player transfer department. The rest helped cover operating costs which increased by nearly 50 per cent.

However, O'Neill will not spend any of his means, which this £217,379 figure represents, although it does not include the £150,000 fee for winger Steve Guppy, unless he believes the player is better than any of the personnel he already has.

If, at this moment in time it is a very big if, Blues win promotion this season, they have just three years to convert Adams Park into an all-seater stadium. Plans are

being set in motion to start this process by putting seats in the Woodland Terrace, leaving just the Bucks Free Press End and the Hill-bottom Road End for standing.

Graham Peart believes that Wycombe can press on without jeopardising any of the cash earmarked for strengthening the team.

Fellow director, and sports commentator, Alan Parry suggests in the current issue of Blues News that perhaps a conflict exists between the two.

He said: "Those who run the playing side of the club will argue they need the cash to build a bigger

and better squad, but those who manage Wanderers' business affairs will insist that providing better facilities will attract bigger crowds. Basically the dilemma can be summed up with a question: would you rather have new seats or a new centre forward?"

But Peart said: "We have got to develop the two elements in tandem. What we will try to achieve is to strengthen the team and also build a new stand which we can get largely paid for by grants."

A planning application for the new stand, it is set to cost up to £2million with an increase in capacity of no more than 2,000, is set to be submitted to Wycombe District Council within the next six months.

But Wycombe will need to act fast if they want to acquire a grant from the Football Trust, which they already qualify for. The Trust can pay for 70 per cent of the new stand, with Wycombe looking elsewhere for the shortfall.

But the introduction of the National Lottery could put a lot of Football Pools firms, which fund trust organisations, out of business, and thus suck out a lot of clubs' lifeblood.

"If the Football Trust money dries up we can never develop the stadium. We have got to take the money when it's there," said Peart.

The club would only have to dip into their own funds when they redevelop the car park, which they received planning permission for two years ago, and is set to cost £400,000. They have got a restriction of five years in which to complete it.

Peart emphasised the point, though, that Martin O'Neill has no restriction on his scope to spend what is available.

"Martin's had money available for 11 months. In that period he has not really spent it. It has not gone away. It is up to him to seek for the proper recipient.

"I can't answer for him, but I think the difficulty is that it is quite easy to spend £½million on a player. There are plenty of those around and it is not that much money for a Premiership club.

"But there are not so many players in the £100,000 bracket. A lot of these players think they are worth more than that.

"Martin is looking for three players like this. There's nothing wrong with that. But still, we are fourth in the League and looking good."