

Arthur Church



CHURCH
VIEW

Planners must prove their loyalty

VIEWED dispassionately, it is hard to understand why a proposal to enable a crowd of football supporters to be seated rather than to have to stand should be any kind of problem – still less for it to lead to controversy.

Yet, surprisingly, this is what has happened at High Wycombe.

As you probably know, Wycombe Wanderers FC have submitted an application to the planning authority to convert a covered spectator terrace running along one side of the playing area into a seated stand, with appropriate facilities, all within existing confines.

It does not take in any Green Belt land and it does not add to the number of people permitted to see a match. It should, if anything, enhance rather than diminish the appearance of Adams Park, home of the Blues. On a proper understanding of the facts those Sands residents who have opted to oppose ought immediately to withdraw.

Let us examine, if we must, the background to the proposal. Some years ago a national report initiated far-reaching proposals for crowd control and safety. Since then, the football authorities have imposed, in the main rightly, further obligations and rulings on

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Football League clubs aimed at bringing grounds up to an acceptable standard.

Unless teams like Wycombe comply on seating, they may well find themselves unable to progress. Indeed, in the worst case scenario, they might slip down the ladder. For an ambitious, progressive club like Wycombe this is unthinkable and this, as I understand it, is what has led to the present proposal.

So why, you may well ask, should there be any doubt about the outcome. Simply that the planning authority's decision meeting has been twice deferred already and is now to be taken later this month. Aware that the record of past councils has not been very supportive, the Blues have mounted a campaign to present a petition backing the move.

In its remarkable progress from non-League soccer to the higher reaches of the Endsleigh Football League, with full professional status, Wycombe has brought much sporting honour and good publicity to the town.

Wycombe District Council has a department which actively seeks to promote the interests of the area and to attract more industry and commerce to the town. A year or so ago they took advantage of Blues' promotion success to highlight the achievement in national newspaper advertising. Rightly so.

In the current club programme, the council has a half-page advert with the prominent heading "Who's the most loyal supporter in Wycombe?", superimposed on a picture of a Blues fan. In the text it claims: "When it comes to loyal support to sport in Wycombe District it is difficult to beat Wycombe District Council" and goes on "just like the Wanderers, we're heading for the big league."

That's fine. In its consideration of the present planning application from Adams Park, our new council has the opportunity to show that it really means what it says. They should bear in mind, too, that the club has the offer of a grant towards the project, which could easily be lost, unless work gets under way soon.

New manager Alan Smith regards planning approval as vital to continued status within the present division and to further progress in League football.

One last thought for those who think only along Green Belt lines, if indeed that is the issue here at all. A schoolboy could easily kick a football from the ground into the adjacent industrial estate!