

Standing on the terraces should be given new lease of life



BAKER'S BLUES

WITH
IAN BAKER

THE Kassam Stadium, home of Oxford United, is a pretty miserable place.

Last Saturday saw my first visit (I missed the match on New Year's Day as I was watching cricket in South Africa) and, some good football and a reasonable result apart, I didn't enjoy it. The ground is miles from anywhere, has only three sides and a dreadful atmosphere. Thank goodness we don't have to play there every week.

Many clubs have moved to out-of-town stadiums, which they seldom fill. Do the clubs really consider the requirements of all supporters? Can the fans get there easily? What about the ones that cannot drive? Maybe fans wish to stand?

FA rules state that any team in the Premiership or Championship must have all-seater stadia. It is a requirement stipulated by the Taylor Report after 96 Liverpool fans so tragically lost their lives.

Recently, I have been closely following the progress of the National Campaign for Safe Standing at Football (www.safestanding.com) and would like to see this law changed.

I cannot see how organised standing areas at football would be dangerous. It would certainly be safer than 60,000 people jumping up and down in tight spaces at rock concerts.

At Wycombe we have those who wish to sit and those who wish to stand. It is my personal view that if the terraces went, we could lose several fans with it. On a smaller scale, the Supporters Trust recently gained a victory when we helped persuade the club to change their decision to close the terrace for the friendly with Wolves.

The Supporters Trust, along with the Founders Trust, are fighting hard to represent the views of all fans.

The standing debate will re-appear in the months to come, as the Wasps groundshare factor comes into the equation (RFU rules state they need a 12,500 capacity). I have no doubt that the trusts will be heavily involved.

On the pitch, we have started well. On paper, our next three league games (Bury, Shrewsbury and Cheltenham) are winnable. How we fare could well shape our season.

I am obviously most looking forward to the trip to Gay Meadow, a traditional ground by the river and close to the town.

It is our last visit there, as Shrewsbury move to their new out-of-town ground later in the year.

Ian Baker is on the Board of Wycombe Wanderers Supporters Trust. For further details about the trust and how to join, see www.wwst.org