

Bucks Free Press
COMMENT

Track decision is a victory for integrity

THE victory this week for residents in their fight to stop an athletics track being relocated to Hazlemere may well have dented a major part of Wycombe District Council's strategy. But councillors have achieved something far more worthwhile with this decision – they have proven beyond doubt that the integrity of the planning process is entirely intact. Many people, including the *Free Press*, questioned the wisdom of allowing the council to decide upon the planning merits of its own application. In other words, councillors were judge and jury for their own controversial plan which seemed a bit unfair considering the local opposition to it. It seemed particularly unfair given the fact it become known that council officers deemed the success of the track application as vital to the project to build a coach park at Handy Cross. The council, however, assured us that the planning process was independent of these considerations and the application would be considered on its own planning merits. On Wednesday night, the planning committee proved this to be correct when they rejected the project by seven votes to five. This may have torpedoed a golden opportunity for the future, but it proved the planning system in Wycombe is fair and just for residents – and we believe this principle alone is actually worth more than the possible promise of a coach station.

MANN ON FRIDAY
WITH CHARLES MANN

Am I alone in my election despair?

I LOVE democracy with a passion but sometimes, just sometimes, I wish we could do away with it all and go back to the times of monarchs with absolute power. Naturally, that is a wicked retrograde thought crime and I deserve to be thrown in the stocks for it. But there would be one benefit of living under such tyranny: it would avoid the need for painful General Elections. Forgive me for this because I am aware people in less-privileged societies are giving up their lives fighting for the ideal of having free elections. And yet, I often wonder if the system we have here is worth all the effort. Power rotates in this country between two hugely ineffective political parties. We see sleaze and ineptitude at every twist and turn, we see failing services and injustice around every corner, as taxes and crime rise while standards of morality decrease. The upcoming General Election will comprise mainly of vague promises, insults about the other parties and annoying door knocks from strangers we will probably never see again. A large part of our population will stay in the pub rather than vote, while most of the others will despair at the scant choice they have at the ballot box. We have a rotten system nationally, and although we do get a democratic say, our powers to change things are still very limited. Naturally, it's better than living in a fascist dictatorship and for that we should be grateful. But am I alone in my despair, and will I be the only one in hiding during the election period when the madness descends upon us?

THIS WEEK'S TALKING POINT: PLANS FOR HUGE SPORTS COMPLEX

But what do residents think of this stadium?

I HAVE two major concerns about the way things are developing around the possible new site for Wycombe Wanderers and London Wasps. 1. The way Mr Hayes [owner of the clubs] has been handling the project. We are constantly being told no site has been earmarked but the one place that is most often mentioned is the green-belt area of Wycombe Air Park – the Air Park which used to be called Booker Air Park. Wycombe District Council changed its name but it is still located in Booker, which is part of the Great Marlow Parish Council and NOT directly politically controlled by Wycombe District Council, although they do own the land. The parish council does exist and Booker does not come under Wycombe as the first line of responsibility.

Mr Hayes complains about people who have written anonymously on websites and to newspapers and have not contacted the club directly. Has he contacted the parish council or the local community to discuss any point? Perhaps he thinks everyone should go to the feet of his great clubs. Are we going to see the same debacle of non or late consultation that we saw with regard to Waitrose in Marlow?

Booker Air Park is in green belt, the people who live in Booker – which is a rural community – are the ones that are going to be most affected. Mr Hayes referred to the fans being supportive. What about the people most affected, the people who live in the area? Are they supportive?

2. Wycombe Council [which is committing up to £750,000 to investigate the various options] spends our money like it's going out of fashion, but who is going to question them? They also state they will be bringing in outside consultants. At what cost?

Make contact with the local people from all the real areas being considered for development (not the ones thrown in to make up the numbers) before you bring in highly paid consultants to do your job for you. This could at least help to reduce the cost. Do not forget, it is not the Wycombe councillors who pay, but us the electorate, we pick up the bills.

I would love to see a list of the expenditure over the last five years for using consultants in ALL the various departments of Wycombe District Council to help make their decisions for them.

Janet Pritchard, Daw's End, Marlow Common, Marlow



STADIUM PLAN: Officials from Wycombe District Council, Wanderers and Wasps meet last week to unveil the proposals. They said there is no preferred site at this stage for the new stadium

Air park has caused nuisance and misery

WITH regard to the possibility of a stadium and sports village at Wycombe Air Park (WAP). Today's situation with the Air Park is a long way removed from the 'spirit' of the original lease which was aimed at trying to prevent the use of the land from causing a 'nuisance' to those in the surrounding areas.

The current activities at WAP could never have been envisaged when the original lease was granted.

The Air Park is managed for profit and there are something like 100,000 aircraft movements annually.

On certain days this means there is an aircraft taking off every 45 seconds, making it busier than Heathrow. There is a major helicopter training centre which could never have been envisaged under the original lease – this is surely a breach of the 'no nuisance' covenant if it is built into the deeds for WAP.

The nuisance and misery inflicted on residents by the Air Park's activities is immense. There is no cap on the number of movements, there are no formal restrictions on opening hours, there are no restrictions on repetitive circuit flying or helicopter activity. They refuse to fit silencers to their aircraft – even though these are standard in other EU countries – local residents have even offered to fund the fitting of silencers but this offer was rejected by WAP.

There are thousands of noise complaints lodged with the Air Park annually by local residents whose lives are negatively impacted by the selfish behaviour of the pilots from Wycombe Air Park who overfly their homes and gardens.

A large and growing group of residents, exasperated by the lack of response from the Air Park management, filed an

application with the Department for Transport (DfT) to have DfT and the CAA take over accountability for the licensing conditions and operations at WAP. This is the second time such an application has been made.

The previous application was made by WDC in 1988, and WDC are also supporting this second application by local residents.

WDC owns the prime 200 acre site at Booker and leases it to WAP for a reported peppercorn rent of £42,800 per annum.

Whatever happens to this land, no matter whether it is a location for a hospital, residential housing, school, playing fields, running track or community based stadium, any possible nuisance caused to the surrounding area will never come close to the misery being caused by the current commercial flying activities through its use as an Air Park.

Susan Pratt, Spring Coppice, Lane End

Bring it on please

IN reporting the new stadium plans, last week's *BFP* page 11 quotes a part of the Air park lease which was blacked out by WDC when asked for details under the Freedom of Information act. It says the park cannot be used for noisy noxious or offensive trade or business which may become a nuisance, damage or annoyance.

The irony of this is not lost on the residents of Sands and Booker who have had their homes and gardens regularly overflown by old-fashioned noisy aeroplanes, nor to anyone walking in the Chilterns AONB.

Moving the stadium to a properly serviced and connected ground would rid the area of traffic, inconsiderate parking and curb the air activities at the same time. Bring it on!

Nigel Phillips, Pinewood Road, Sands

Can it incorporate the athletics track?

IT is very interesting to read about the New Eden, as council leader Lesley Clarke puts it, for the new stadium for Wanderers and Wasps (the present Eden is not that wonderful).

I read that there is also going to be a 15,000 to 20,000 seater stadium at the heart of a sporting complex? As well as possibly incorporating the training grounds for Wanderers and Wasps is this including the training ground that Wanderers already have/plus bars, and so on, and so on? Also a hotel may be considered as well. All very very good.

So why not incorporate the planned athletic stadium at Sir William Ramsay? Cannot this be considered to go into this planned multi million pound scheme and leave Hazlemere alone? Or am I being facetious in thinking of this?

One other point that comes to mind and most serious of all is the road system. Is there going to be provision made for ingress and egress onto the motorway, or are the planners thinking of sending more vehicles up to Handy Cross, which will no doubt cause more congestion once the Park and Ride is moved.

Den Biscoe, Elm Road, Booker

Adams Park is good

I WAS surprised to read last week it was felt the away end facilities at Adams Park were not good and that the stadium was outdated. On a sunny day, I think it is cosy and welcoming.

Fans visiting the ground have adequate cover and the huge megaphonic effect which drowns the home supporters and makes us feel like we are at an away match. There appears to be no restrictions on standing up or rushing to the barrier when their team scores! This week we were entertained by a mass of red balloons and an enormous flag. The goalie was wearing an attractive fluorescent green outfit which toned with our stewards. Having said that, the stadium is a good family ground, with helpful stewards.

I do understand that there is a need for a new stadium to accommodate the enlarged crowd of Wasps' fans, but no one wants it near them.

Lynne A Pearce, Harman Walk, High Wycombe

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