

'Lane End would cease to exist'

■ 250 people cram into angry meeting on stadium

AN EMPHATIC straw poll 'No' vote by Lane End residents landed the decisive blow at an angry parish meeting focusing on the Wycombe Community Stadium plans.

More than 250 people squeezed into the Youth and Community Centre for the hastily-arranged assembly as council chief Jerry Unsworth tackled people's concerns.

The gathered audience vented its anger that the village – which lies just one kilometre from the shortlisted Wycombe Air Park site – was not consulted earlier.

And after a heated question and answer session just two people raised their hands in favour of the controversial Booker site.

"Despite meetings in Princes Risborough and Marlow, there were no plans to consult us," said parish council vice-chairman, Michael Detsiny.

"We were not on the formal circuit, yet we would be wiped out by this – Lane End would cease to exist."

The argument that if a new stadium was not built London

Wasps would be forced to leave the district was drowned out by cries of "Good riddance".

Mr Detsiny added: "This has been totally driven by Steve Hayes (Chairman of London Wasps). I bet that if the club decided to move elsewhere this would all stop immediately."

One spectator argued that Wasps were "holding a gun" to the council's head in order to force the decision through.

But WDC's head of planning, Mr Unsworth, battled accusations that

the public meetings were a "sham" after London Wasps and Wycombe Wanderers announced last week they were "backing Booker".

He insisted that nothing had been decided and it was still very much up to the public to vent their opinions and assist the consultation process.

District councillors Jean Teesdale and Ian McEnnis asked those present to make their feelings known in the opinion forms provided.

Speaking after the meeting, former headmaster and resident Andrew MacTavish, said: "There is

a strong feeling that these consultations are merely paying lip service to the people and that a decision has already been made."

But Lane End residents of 23 years, Malcolm and Dale Dickens, feared the meeting was "hijacked by people" with vested interests who weren't from Lane End.

"There was angry and strong opposition to the proposal which puzzled me, as it is something which can only bring benefit to High Wycombe," said Mrs Dickens.

For latest updates on stadium plans visit bucksfreepress.co.uk

'The public's view will prevail' BNU backs 'one stop'

THE stadium was also the subject of controversy as Wycombe District Council rejected calls that it should not pursue the project in the current economic climate.

The Liberal Democrats and Cllr Trevor Snaith said the council should not be proceeding 'in a time of restraint'.

WDC leader Cllr Lesley Clarke told a full council meeting on Monday that as a "life-long Conservative, of course I don't agree with the Liberal Democrats".

She said the project "was about so much more than a stadium" and pointed to the employment and sporting opportunities that would be created by a sports village.

Cllr Clarke added the council

had "a proud record" of bringing in successful large projects into the district, pointing to the Eden shopping complex.

She reiterated deputy council leader Cllr Tony Green's pleas earlier in the meeting for residents to take part in the current public consultation.

Cllr Green had earlier been forced to defend the public consultation, after a member of the public asked if the council's head had been turned by WSDL's announcement that Booker was the clubs' preferred site and the process was a "waste of public money".

Cllr Green said the clubs were entitled to voice their preference

but the announcement "makes no difference" to the "full, open and transparent consultation".

He added: "There were people both for and against the stadium at the [public consultation] meeting... I don't think the money is wasted, and the more responses we get, the more accurate the results will be."

The public pushed Cllr Green about which party would "hold more sway" if the public consultation revealed that residents did not want a stadium.

He said: "This is a full public consultation, if the result of this is they do not want a stadium, that is the view that will prevail – it is their preference."

Picture: ANIN PRIEST



TOP CLASS HOME: WSDL's Mike Brooks and BNU's Prof Chris Kemp WY52933-p05

BUCKINGHAMSHIRE New University has thrown its backing behind the Wycombe Community Stadium bid – but it will not provide any funding for the project.

University bosses say they hold a "shared vision" with Wycombe Sports Developments Ltd, the company formed by Wycombe Wanderers and London Wasps, for a new 17,500-20,000 seater stadium and sports village.

Pro Vice Chancellor Prof Chris Kemp said the university was keen to continue its long standing educational partnership with the clubs, while a new stadium would 'finally give a top class home' to BNU's sports teams and students.

But he said the university would

not pump any money into the project, paying only for the facilities it were to use should the controversial scheme receive the green light.

He said: "The university is not putting anything [money] into the development and has no plans to at this time. All the facilities we use around the district, we pay for them."

"But it would make it so much easier to have a one stop, one place where you play your sport and imagine the bigger universities coming here."

"Instead of having to go to a pitch on The Rye which has one changing room, they will arrive at a stadium with Wanderers, Wasps, the council and university on its gates – they will know it's the university's home and imagine how our students will feel."

He added the university had been involved in the stadium plans "from the start" due to the long-standing partnership between BNU and the clubs.

He added that the university would 'back the bid in whatever form WSDL thinks it should be' and said "Booker would provide our needs".

Chief executive of WSDL Mike Brooks said the clubs were looking forward to building on their 11 year partnership with the university.

Wycombe District Council's public consultation over the stadium proposals shuts on Friday, October 27.

Get fired up!

Winter Draws On

NEW DANISH DESIGN

Lotus Sola S Soapstone:

5 - 6 KW

DEFRA Approved

Nordpeis Orion Wood Burner:

4 KW Perfect for Snug or Studio

Give us your views

If you've got something to say about this story, join the debate and log on to

www.bucksfreepress.co.uk



On Stadium capacity

Question by Steven Brown: My main concern is on the capacity of the stadium. Although I agree a sports village will benefit the town – Wycombe Wanderers have struggled to get a crowd of over 4,000 for two games this season and the proposed capacity of up to 20,000 is far too excessive. How will you enable the stadium to have any kind of atmosphere if we don't even fill it to 25% of its capacity?

Question by SMBU website: Why do Wycombe Wanderers need a 17-20,000 capacity stadium?

Question by Malcolm Keep: From a purely WWFC perspective, why is a new stadium required?

Answer: Our aspirations as a club and the experience we provide for our spectators are both severely limited by our current ground, where facilities are poor by today's standard and with access problems.

We have clear ambitions to move the club forward and be playing Championship football. Even in League One, the average ground capacity is 16,253 – and let's not forget that there were 18,000 Wanderers fans at the FA Cup semi-final a few years ago. If we do nothing, the club will just stagnate. The club already loses money each year and were Wasps to move elsewhere – which they would if there was no new stadium – then WWFC would need to find even more money to survive each year.

The new stadium offers us the chance to provide first class facilities, to generate a strong income from hospitality and other non match day revenues, to improve our academy and training facilities and enable us to push for long term success. As we move up through the leagues we also need facilities which can cope with much larger travelling support for away fans. We believe only a new stadium provides the club with the ability to attract new fans, improve the spectator experience and invest in our on-field performance.

Question by Ian Blackledge: Will there be a written guarantee that any new ground will have a standing terrace of at least the same size and/or capacity as the one currently enjoyed at Adams Park, if not greater?

Answer: It is absolutely in our plans to have a standing terrace at least the same capacity as the current one. We are some

way from finalising design as we still don't have confirmation of a site, but we want to ensure our new stadium complements the intimacy and atmosphere of Adams Park as well as offering un-restricted views and proximity to the pitch. A design of which fans and local people will be proud. A modern new stadium designed and built to today's standard can and will improve the match-day experience for all spectators.

A new community stadium will help WWFC achieve their Championship aspirations. Our vision also includes improved training provision with on-site training facilities for the clubs as well as modern academy facilities appropriate for a team which aspires to be playing Championship football. The only site that allows for us to deliver these opportunities for the club is Wycombe Air Park at Booker.

Question by SMBU: Which other stadiums have you studied as a measure of success?

Answer: We have looked at a number of stadia over a number of years and of course we are still very early in this process so have not come up with detailed designs at this stage. We want to take the best bits from all of the stadia around and incorporate it into our designs. We want to hear from fans as to what they want to see from a new stadium and there will be plenty of opportunity for fans to have their say in how the new stadium could look later down the line.

Question by SMBU: What average attendance for WWFC home games are WSDL predicting?

Answer: We are not making these predictions, especially at this early stage, and of course these attendance figures will change depending on the league we are in and other factors. But what we do know is that there is an element of 'chicken and egg' here. There is no doubt the current limitations of Adams Park do put some people off attending and attending regularly. We believe that providing modern new facilities, with

MIKE Brooks, Chief Executive of Wycombe Sports Developments Limited here answers BFP readers' questions about the plans for a new community stadium and sports village in Wycombe.

The questions were submitted to WSDL earlier this week and we present the responses as they were sent to the BFP.

The Q&A will continue in next week's edition.

better parking and access arrangements, would encourage more people to attend. Likewise having this as part of a wider sports village will mean more people from right across the community get used to travelling to and using the facilities around the stadium, which would further help boost attendance.

The average ground capacity in League One last year was 16,253 and we believe that planning for a stadium with a 17,500 to 20,000 capacity is right for a club with Championship aspirations.

Relationship between Wasps and WWFC

Question by Malcolm Keep: Why is the threat of Wasps withdrawal from the region being used to force WWFC to a new ground, which their attendances do not warrant and which as an individual club they do not need?

Answer: This is not a threat, this is an opportunity. This not about forcing WWFC to do anything, but in time and with more information, recognising the opportunities which exist for both clubs by staying together within a new stadium. There are significant financial opportunities for WWFC for sharing with Wasps and significant financial opportunities of being part of the sports village which will be able to be demonstrated further when we publish more plans. If this is not supported now, the opportunity to explore these options will be lost. We urge all WWFC fans to support this now so that we can take our plans to the next stage where there will be

further public consultation and a chance for fans to tell us what they want.

Question by Ian Blackledge: Will there be a written guarantee that Wycombe Wanderers will still have priority of fixture scheduling over Wasps at any new ground, as they currently enjoy at Adams Park?

Answer: As members of the Football League there is a requirement that Wanderers have priority of fixtures under the 'primacy of tenure' rules. We will continue to abide by this if and when we move to a new stadium.

Financial benefits / costs for WWFC

Question by Tom Cann: How will the move benefit WWFC, given it will be losing off-field income (such as rent from Wasps) and would now have to pay rent? Surely Adams Park is sufficient for a club the size of Wycombe Wanderers?

Question by SMBU: What are the financial benefits for Wycombe Wanderers?

Question by Malcolm Keep: How would WWFC's finances benefit when they would lose the rent from Wasps, and possibly other income from stadium services/refreshments too?

Question by Malcolm Keep: It is envisaged that Wasps would continue to

pay rent for the new stadium, much as they do now so lose nothing. WWFC will also pay rent, but in return they will lose their ground. How is this equitable?

Answer: The game of football has changed out of all recognition in the last few years, even at the lower levels. It takes a lot of money to achieve success but this has to be done in a sustainable way. We want WWFC to become sustainable without Wasps. In moving to Booker, we believe that this can be done – we don't want the club to have to rely on Wasps to survive.

At the moment the club loses money, even with a strong rental income from Wasps. Were Wasps to move elsewhere – which they would if there was no new stadium – then WWFC would need to find even more money to survive each year. We therefore need to generate more income as a club so that we can invest more in the team and in our facilities. This is simply not possible at Adams Park and if we do nothing the club will just stagnate.

A new stadium will allow us to generate increased income from hospitality and other non match day revenues and to have more gate revenue as more fans attend games, including visiting supporters. It will mean we can deliver far better team, training and academy facilities, which in turn will help us attract even better players. We can also derive additional income from non-match day activities through events and conferences as well as capitalising on the links with the sports village which are a key part of our plans.

In short the new stadium will allow us to dramatically move the club forward.

I completely understand that there are concerns and that some people will be reluctant to move, but this is all being planned in the best interests of the club to better enable us to deliver on our Championship aspirations in a sustainable way. The only site which will enable this to happen is at Booker.

■ See next week's BFP

**** MARLOW ****
GARDENERS'
SALE

LISTON HALL, CHAPEL STREET, MARLOW

Why choose Warwick?

