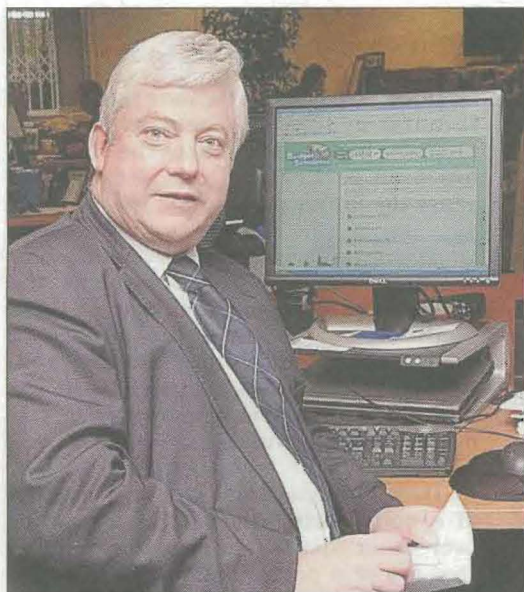




Don't miss YOUR chance to comment

NEARLY 2,000 people have responded to a public consultation on plans for a new stadium and sports village for Wycombe Wanderers and London Wasps.

Anyone wishing to add their voice to the debate has just days left to do so, as the consultation on planning options for the stadium comes to an end on Friday.

The results will be reported to cabinet members at Wycombe District Council in early 2011.

The proposed stadium would have a 17,500-20,000 capacity, and would also include a cricket pitch, five-a-side pitches and athletics facilities. New commercial space, a hotel and connected residential development could also form part of the project, should the plan

become a reality. Wycombe District Council has longlisted 19 sites for consideration, before whittling it down to three short-listed sites – Booker Air Park, Abbey Barn and Adams Park.

Cllr Tony Green, deputy leader, *right*, said: "This has the potential to be an exciting project which could benefit the community, but we appreciate that it involves many complex issues."

"The comments that we've had so far have all been helpful and we would remind anyone who hasn't yet submitted their comments to do so by Friday, 29 October, as this is when the consultation closes. While we are committed to trying to facilitate a new community stadium, no decisions have yet been made as to

whether we progress with the project.

"The comments that we receive through the consultation will be used to help us decide which option to progress and in turn, which site would have the best potential for that option. A decision will be made early next year and, if the project is to proceed, will be subject to further public consultation."

Copies of the consultation document are available from the council offices in High Wycombe, Marlow and Princes Risborough and at libraries across the district. You can also submit an online response form via the district council's website:

See

wycombe.gov.uk/communitystadium

'No to Booker' website ■ Campaign to stay at Adams Park

AN online campaign rallying against the prospect of the community stadium coming to Booker has been set up.

'No to Booker' describes itself as "a campaign against the rehoming of Wycombe Wanderers Football Club".

A statement on the website says: "The cost of this could be our beloved Wycombe Wanderers which we are not prepared to allow and take laying [sic] down." It asks for people opposing the move to contact the website to lend their support.

The campaign is planning to distribute leaflets opposing the proposed move to Booker at Adams Park on Saturday, when Wycombe Wanderers plays Lincoln.

The campaign group, at www.noto-booker.com was unavailable for comment yesterday. It is not known how much support this group has.

Last week Booker Common and Woods Protection Society called plans for the 17,500-20,000 seater stadium a "white elephant".

It believes Wycombe Wanderers and London Wasps should finance any such scheme and the project was to finance Wasps' aspirations.

It added Adams Park is "more than adequate" for the needs of Wanderers, whose fans "don't want a stadium".

The society will hold a public meeting for residents with Wycombe District Council bosses at Cressex Community School tomorrow evening at 7.30pm.

The Chilterns Society said it is to submit its opinion on the plans 'in due course', but has highlighted issues to people so they can "make up their own minds".

It said the additional traffic created by sporting and non-sporting events at any stadium would put pressure on existing roads, and any new transport infrastructure may impact upon the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

It added that should the project be built at Wycombe Air Park, it would restrict "fixed wing activity", caus-

ing "various impacts on aircraft noise and on aviation-related employment" and spectators would also "spend less time" in other areas of the district.

However, Wycombe Hockey Club has come out in favour of a new stadium and sports hub, which it describes as an "exciting opportunity" for the club and its members.

The Cressex club said its growing membership was putting "increased pressure on available pitch space" and the mooted stadium and sports village would provide an "excellent site" to house a hockey centre of excellence.

Buckinghamshire New University has also come out in favour of the stadium bid. Pro Vice Chancellor Prof Chris Kemp said earlier this month it would form a one-stop site to play sports and could attract bigger universities to use the facilities.

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Comment: PAGE 12

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IN TODAY'S Bucks Free Press Midweek Mike Brooks, Chief Executive of Wycombe Sports Developments Limited, concludes readers' questions about the plans for a new community stadium and sports village in Wycombe. The questions were submitted to WSDL earlier this month and we present the responses as they were sent to the BFP. The public consultation on the stadium comes to an end on Friday.

For more information and to submit your comments, go to www.wycombe.gov.uk/communitystadium.

Questions submitted by Malcolm Keep:

Q: The new stadium is expected to provide an "enhanced matchday experience". What is lacking currently, and what evidence is there to suggest that improvements other than team success will generate greater attendances?

A: Adams Park was built 20 years ago and the current facilities provide very limited opportunity to expand or grow.

There are restricted views from some of the corporate hospitality areas and the existing dug outs are too small for both sports – indeed Wasps are fined every year by the RFU for inadequate changing facilities. Spectators and officials can not be separated appropriately without loss of capacity and medical and press facilities are sub-standard.

Only 46 disabled spectators can attend each game – far below the expected 1% of capacity and the stadium is also not DDA compliant. Our Training Academy and office facilities are also too spread out.

Access to and egress from the current ground is seriously constrained as you know and fans have to queue for long periods to enter or leave the stadium, which seriously inhibits the match-day experience for most people.

A modern new stadium offers the opportunity to transform the match-day experience, with unrestricted views, better seating, better toilets and catering facilities, bigger bars, improved access and more parking. We believe our fans and visitors would welcome this and that it would also lead directly to much greater attendance.

Q: If the new scheme will provide more modern sporting facilities for the region (replacing older outdated facilities at various other locations in the region), although there are some savings to be made by placing these alongside a new stadium, isn't locating additional facilities plus a stadium together foolhardy because of combined access problems on rugby/football match days?

A: No. We believe there are lots of mutual benefits in locating the new community stadium alongside a sports village. It will provide more opportunities for participation in new sports and will see elite sportsmen rubbing shoulders with aspiring young players. Wycombe Air Park at Booker has multiple access points and is perfectly located – it already has three entrances and exits and there is the potential to include a fourth link which would be an important part of our plans and would help take traffic away from existing local roads. At the same time there would be new park and ride schemes, a new bus network and the potential for more than double the amount of parking for fans than we currently have at Adams Park.

Q: A major selling point is the provision of other sporting facilities to benefit the region. Has any study been undertaken that suggests the general sporting cur-



PARTNERS: Mike Brooks, left, with Bucks New University's Professor Chris Kemp at Adams Park for the launch of the Community Stadium project earlier this month

rent facilities are overused and/or inadequate? If not, how is provision of additional facilities justified?

A: Wycombe does need better sports facilities for the benefit of all of the community and the District Council can explain the needs assessments better than us and has done specific studies into this as part of its Sports Facility Strategy 2008. However, we have not limited ourselves to just a stadium, but have taken the opportunity to consider how this can best benefit the district, which is why we are supporting the idea for a linked sports village and indeed we already have a plan in place with Buckinghamshire New University. Modern new facilities would encourage sports participation and healthier lifestyles. It also means that the community schemes from both clubs can be expanded further.

Q: Grant Thornton highlights the fact that other hotels are planned in the area and suggest that careful evaluation of the viability of any new hotel must be made. How confident are you that a hotel linked to the stadium will be financially viable and provide the required revenue?

A: A hotel is just one of our ideas. However, it is early days and until a site is selected, we will not be able to progress with our plans in more detail. If Booker is selected, we will work with our team to look at the best uses for the site that will compliment the community stadium and other sporting, leisure and education facilities as well as be of greatest benefit to the clubs and to Wycombe. However we do believe that a new hotel next to the stadium and other facilities is likely to be viable.

Q: Previous plans by the same management have aimed to secure promotion/success on the field. Given that these have failed, is it right to use the proposed future success as an argument in favour of a new stadium?

A: We have to plan for the future. We cannot let the fact that we have not been promoted to the Championship before now allow us to stop trying. A new community stadium will provide us not only with a top level playing ground but also on-site training, space for our academies and community programmes helping us train the stars for the future and will help put WWFC in a better financial position which can only be a good thing for the club's on-pitch performance.

We also need to recognise that football finance has changed beyond all recognition in recent years. We cannot just continue to do things as we did before.

Question submitted by Reg Rundle:

Q: Is the road and transport system adequate for the preferred move to Booker

airfield? Major shopping areas and entertainment/sporting areas are already at peak levels at weekend and Bucks County Council is planning additional usage of Cressex Road for refuse disposal.

A: Yes. If Booker is selected as WDC's preferred site, we will carry out detailed transport assessments as part of our planning application.

However, compared to Adams Park, where there is just one access/egress route, Wycombe Air Park at Booker has multiple access points and is perfectly located. It already has three entrances and exits and there is the potential to include a fourth link which could be an important part of our plans and would help take traffic away from existing local roads.

Questions submitted by SMBU (a Wycombe Wanderers' supporters' website):

Q: Why haven't you polled Wycombe Wanderers fans to see how many are 'Backing Booker'?

A: We want to hear from all WWFC fans now so that we can take these plans on to the next stage so please visit www.wycombecommunitystadium.com and let WDC know what you think. There will also then be multiple avenues for further consultation later in the project.

Q: What is the biggest threat to the stadium not going ahead?

A: Lack of public support is the biggest threat to the stadium so if you want to see this vision go ahead and a more financially stable future for the club then get involved now by visiting www.wycombecommunitystadium.com and letting WDC know what you think.

Q: What's the thinking behind the WSDL logo?

A: The creative team were briefed on designing a logo which encompassed football and rugby and this was the design we selected from a number of options.

Questions submitted by Chris Newman:

Q: Beyond anecdotal reports about fans for both Wasps and Wycombe Wanderers, what research has been undertaken to ascertain the potential fan base and therefore stadium usage?

We accept that Wasps had good attendances for their match against Leicester and large European matches but at a neutral venue this was largely attended by neutral fans from outside of the High Wycombe area and these fans are unlikely to return to the Booker Stadium on a regular basis.

Wycombe Wanderers (the town's club) has had a peak attendance during their most successful era of just over 6500 people. Cup games cannot be factored into

any projections as they are not a true reflection of fan base.

Q: Does WDC recognise that this project favours a limited company with a nomadic history and makes the club that has been part of our town for over 100 years the junior partner?

Q: What research has WDC done into existing facilities in the area and the impact of a new sports village on these facilities, for example the pitches at Cressex and Handy Cross? Do they consider them to be over-subscribed at the moment and therefore more capacity is needed in the town?

Q: Does WDC consider the development of a new sports village to be a priority over other sports and leisure facilities that are of a poor standard, such as the swimming pool at Handy Cross?

Q: Has WDC got legally binding assurances from London Wasps that the club will not once more move onto another town, as they have done so many times before and as their owner has threatened to do? If they have sought these assurances, are they financially supported by the owners of London Wasps?

Q: Has WDC made a true business plan for the sports village based on any worst case scenarios such as either tenant going out of business, being relegated or leaving the area?

Q: Beyond the sense of local pride in having a new sports facility on the outskirts of our town, does WDC consider this to be a financial priority considering the cut-backs that are currently being made?

Q: Does WDC think it is insensitive that business and families are struggling while they are supporting a wealthy individual to achieve a personal ambition?

Q: Would WDC be prepared to have an independent adjudicator research both the validity of the plan and the market and financial research that has been undertaken to support their decisions so far?

Q: Is WDC confident to enter into an agreement with a company that is run by an individual with such a catastrophic record of business management in the sports industry?

Has WDC sought any personal guarantees from that individual as result of his management of London Wasps and Wycombe Wanderers and the losses he has driven them both to making?

Q: What is the total cost of the stadium project? This figure should include fees, interest, business relocation costs, building cost, infrastructure costs as a result of required improvements to the area and any other likely areas of expenditure. How will this cost be accounted for and over what period of time has a return been factored in? Based on the true total cost and the revenue streams to achieve a return, what best and worst case analysis work has been undertaken?

A: We believe the answers provided to other questions asked by fans have answered the parts of your question which were directed at WSDL.

For the other parts, which seem more directed at WDC, we suggest that you refer to the council's website which should provide the answers.

'It's right and proper that we make our voices heard'

Clubs defend their actions after Lib Dems hit out at email campaign

WANDERERS and Wasps have strongly hit back after Liberal Democrat councillors claimed they tried to influence the public consultation to an 'unacceptable level'.

Steve Guy, the Lib Dem leader on Wycombe District Council, said he was concerned by an email sent out by Wycombe Sports Development Ltd (WSDL), the organisation set up by the clubs to oversee the project.

Last month the clubs announced they wanted a new stadium at Wycombe Air Park in Booker.

The email was sent to those registering with WSDL to hear more about its plans.

The email urges people to take part in the consultation and adds: "Please join us and back Booker now".

It also includes a link to the council website and instructions to "select option D 'sports village'" and "When

you go to Question 4, select the option for Wycombe Air Park".

A press release from the Lib Dems quotes Cllr Guy as saying: "I have been contacted by a resident who received this email and they were concerned at what is a clear attempt to skew the results of the consultation in favour of the Booker site."

But Mike Brooks, of WSDL, hit back saying at no point had WSDL attempted to skew the consultation and added: "To suggest this is untrue and unfounded."

"When people have registered on our website, we have asked them to support our position and directed them to the council's online form to fill in if they wish to do so."

"At the same time we have explained how to show their

support for our plans, again if they want to do so."

"This is an open public consultation process and it is right and proper that we make our voices heard so that the stadium and sports village proposal can progress to the next stage of design and further consultation."

"Since the council short-listed three sites we have been clear in all our communication that only Booker allows for the community stadium and sports village."

For the latest local news
bucksfreepress.co.uk

Picture: ANN PRIEST



EXHIBITION: Phil Taylor, stadium project officer, explains the plans to visitors at Court Garden

Timeline

January: WDC agree in principle to invest into a new stadium for Wycombe Wanderers and London Wasps, Cabinet minutes from November 2009 reveal.

The documents states that the authority would meet "most of the cost" of a new stadium and associated infrastructure up to an undisclosed sum.

February: WDC earmarks £140,000 for feasibility work for the 2010/11 financial year. £80,000 was set aside in the 2009/10. £500,000 was earmarked as a total spend over the 'coming years'.

March: Wasps, Wanderers and WDC hold a joint press conference to announce plans for a potential community stadium and sports village. The council says it will also invest a further £250,000 into the scheme, taking the total council spend to £750,000.

WDC leader Cllr Lesley Clarke hails the project as the town's "new Eden". Steve Hayes says the clubs need to move to compete with their sporting rivals.

April: WDC leader Clarke is urged to justify the Conservative council's "eye-watering" investment into the stadium by Lib Dem Cllr Steve Guy.

She hit back by saying people wanted a stadium and the costs were not "insubstantial".

July: WDC leader Clarke hits out at the Lib Dems for "peddling lies" about the stadium in pre-General Election leaflets.

Council bosses are slammed later that month by their own party members for publishing a 'totally unnecessary' long-list of 19

potential sites for the stadium – with some sites deemed 'not sensible' by the council's planning boss Jerry Unsworth.

The council is forced to apologise to the Bucks Free Press for not releasing a key planning document to the BFP following a Freedom of Information request.

September: Councillors give the go ahead to a public consultation on the stadium plans, which started on September 17 and will run until October 29.

A report, prepared by financial advisers Grant Thornton, states the stadium proposal could cost more than £67m, rising to more than £87m with a sports village.

The clubs' preferred location was confirmed formally as at a press conference, when Wycombe Sports Developments Ltd announced Wycombe Air Park as its site choice.

October:

A series of public exhibitions and meetings outlining the stadium plans get underway. There are heated scenes at an extraordinary meeting of Lane End Parish Council, attended by 250 people. Residents express concerns over the possibility the stadium could be built in Booker, which they feel is too close to their village.

Wycombe District Councillor Darren Hayday announces he will not stand for election again next year, and is quitting over the stadium plan.

The consultation is set to end on October 29. A final site decision is expected in January.

Arguments FOR for a new stadium:

1. A new stadium would see London Wasps make High Wycombe their permanent home. Many towns and cities bigger than ours would be proud to have a top-class rugby club such as Wasps.
2. Wycombe Wanderers lost £1.5 million last year. A new ground would allow the clubs to generate significant extra income, especially from commercial activities on non-match days. This would help Wanderers achieve their ambitions of playing Championship football.
3. Access to a new stadium is likely to be a marked improvement on the current arrangements at Adams Park.
4. A new stadium with more uses would create new jobs and could deliver a significant boost to the town's economy.
5. The new stadium could provide thousands of youngsters and other community clubs with top-class training facilities.

Arguments AGAINST a new stadium:

1. There is risk attached to any taxpayer investment in the new stadium. The project may not deliver all the benefits envisaged.
2. A new stadium could cost beyond £88 million. In the uncertain financial climate is this the right time for the clubs to be expanding?
3. Wycombe Wanderers' average home attendance is about 4,000. A new stadium would hold up to 20,000, which could leave a lot of empty seats.
4. Wasps would gain a permanent home, but the sale of Adams Park would see Wanderers lose ownership of their ground.
5. The location of a new stadium could be on Green Belt land and is likely to meet opposition from those living near the site. Wycombe Air Park in Booker, the clubs' preferred location, is within the Green Belt and has already been opposed by villagers in Lane End.