

Coalition group to fight stadium

Protesters join forces against Booker proposal

By Simon Farr
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PROTESTERS have merged together to form a coalition group to fight controversial plans for a new 'community stadium' in Booker and Abbey Barn South.

Groups Against the Stadium Proposals (GASP) was officially formed on Monday and is currently comprised of 16 associations, parish councils and interested groups.

The campaign coalition, which represents about 13,000 members, states that while each group has "individual agendas", they share the same "ultimate aim of preventing the stadium".

It says it "bears no ill intent" towards Wycombe Wanderers or London Wasps and pledged to help the clubs find ways to improve their current home at Adams Park.

The clubs announced Wycombe Air Park was their preferred site for a 17,500-20,000 seater stadium and sports village.

Wycombe District Council has backed proposals for a stadium and sent it out to public consultation, which 8,500 people responded to. Results are due in January.

GASP member Keith Francis said: "There were a lot of groups expressing that they were fundamentally against the stadium and it was felt we needed to bring everyone together to ensure that we don't get picked off individually."

"Individual groups will continue to campaign for their own benefits, but as a group we are working together and fundamentally saying 'no to a stadium', everything should stay where it is as we don't believe there is any need for the project".

Each interest group has supplied representatives to work on the GASP project, with those then split into specialist teams - ranging from planning and finance experts to political hot-shots - pulling together to "expose flaws in the project".

Mr Francis, who is chairman of the Booker Memorial Hall where the coalition will meet, said the door is open for other groups to join the campaign.

He said: "We are getting groups coming to us continuously all the time and any groups or individuals that are interested in joining should get in touch. I hope not to tempt fate, but we are very confident we can prevent the plans, as we believe there are flaws in various aspects of the project, and

The full list of GASP members

- | | |
|---|---|
| ■ The Marlow Society | Bottom OPAG) |
| ■ The Chiltern Society | ■ Chiltern Conservation |
| ■ Flackwell Heath Residents Association | Board |
| ■ Claymoor Park Residents Association | ■ Little Marlow Parish Council |
| ■ Booker Gliding Club | ■ Marlow Bottom Residents Association/ Parish Council |
| ■ Booker Common & Woods Protection Society | ■ Notbackingbooker website |
| ■ High Wycombe & District Rifle & Pistol Club | ■ The Link community magazine |
| ■ Great Marlow Parish Council | ■ Lane End Action Group |
| ■ Valley Plus (Marlow) | ■ NotoBooker.com (Wycombe Wanderers supporters site) |

having got everyone together, I now believe we have a very good chance."

Mike Brooks from Wycombe Sports Developments Limited, said: "We are aware there are some groups currently opposed to a new stadium but we believe that we can address the vast majority of people's concerns and that it is way too early to be adopting rigid positions."

"The benefits of a new stadium and sports village are clear. It can deliver exceptional sports and educational facilities and bring substantial inward investment into the district. It would secure the futures of both clubs and create modern new facilities of which local people would be proud."

"To rule out these benefits before any plans have even been shown would be damaging to Wycombe. It would also deprive young people and others of the potential for new sports and educational facilities which I am sure would be extremely well used. The alternative would be stagnation and decline at Adams Park, with Wasps likely to leave the area altogether."

"As I have said before, these plans are still at a very early stage and I simply ask that people retain an open mind. We will shortly find out the results of the council's consultation and there is a lot of time for further consultation and discussion."

"In seeking to make this happen we will be sensitive to local issues and plan this in a way which maximises the benefits for all. We are delighted by the strong support we have received from across the community. There is still much more work to be done before any of this becomes a reality but we have a real opportunity here to benefit both clubs and the community at the same time."

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More information and updates at
http://groups.yahoo.com/group/GASP_News/

'We won't be gagged'

LIBERAL Democrats will ignore official instructions on talking to the public about the proposed community stadium and will not be "gagged", Cllr Steve Guy has declared.

Cllr Guy and his party will disregard council bosses' advice that commenting publicly on the project is "inappropriate" after the consultation closed.

Councillors and officials have been instructed to send a standard letter as a response to all enquiries about the hotly disputed stadium proposal for Wycombe Wanderers and Wasps.

But Cllr Steve Guy, leader of the Lib Dems at Wycombe District Council, said he and his colleagues will continue speaking out against the plan.

He dismissed the 'Members Update' email from WDC Chief Executive Karen Satterford, saying he will not be "gagged".

"We're not taking any notice at all, they're not telling us what we can and can't do," he said.

"I don't know whether this is directed at Conservative politicians but as the official opposition it is our job to scrutinise and criticise when we think appropriate and we won't be told what we can and can't say about it."

"We have always felt as a group that it is our duty to reflect the views of residents and with the overwhelming part of the postbag full of people who are against it, it is our job to reflect those concerns."

"People are quite rightly asking how can you spend money on this when you have been asked to cut back as a council?" The email, sent to all



LIB Dem councillor Steve Guy (centre) held a ballot at Adams Park over the stadium plan

councillors, tells members it "would be inappropriate to engage in detailed debate" while analysis of the consultation takes place.

It sets out a "protocol" for staff which "involves a single approach to how the council communicates in relation to the stadium project."

The standard response reads: "The council has agreed to examine siting the stadium complex at one of three possible locations and via the consultation process, has asked the community for their views."

"The consultation is now closed and the data is being analysed. It is therefore inappropriate for individual Councillors or members of council staff to make public comments at this time."

Cllr Guy also hit out at the treatment of the gliding club at Wycombe Air Park - the preferred site of the clubs.

"They just feel that they are being run over and that nobody cares about them," he said after taking an "amazing" flight in one of the gliders.

Club members told Cllr Guy and fellow Lib Dem Cllr Julia Wassell they will be forced out if the stadium is built at WAP, ending forever their 68 year association with the site.

Response to criticism

COUNCIL bosses have defended its public consultation over the stadium plans.

In a weekly planning bulletin emailed out by Wycombe District Council, planning officers, responding to criticism about the process, stood by the consultation. Around 8,500 people took part with the findings due out in January.

The email states: "There has been much said about the reliability of the statistics that may come out of this exercise. It needs to be emphasised that, in common with other planning consultations, this was not how the Stadium consultation was structured."

"What is important is the logging, understanding and response to the issues raised, having regard to evidence available and the stage of the project."

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Public can go to the polls over this issue

RE: "Snap Poll Rejects Stadium", BFP, November 12

THE Chief Executive of Wycombe Sports Development Ltd claims that an online survey is not a reliable way to discover the views of local people on the proposal to plant a mini-Twickenham stadium in the green belt in Booker. He has a point.

May I suggest that a wholly constitutional and convincing way to gauge public opinion on

this matter would be to run parish polls in the affected parishes? The Marlow Group organised a highly successful

parish poll in Marlow in 2006 which was extensively reported by the *Free Press*.

Our poll overwhelmingly rejected (with a 93% majority) the proposition that land owned by the Sawyer family in Marlow should be the subject of a compulsory purchase order by Wycombe District Council to enable a supermarket to expand.

A parish poll is simple to run and not expensive – in Marlow it cost about £2,000. It is paid for by the parish council. The parish is the civil parish, not the church parish. A parish poll may be called by any ten electors. The demand for a poll must be made at a parish meeting.

The electors who call the poll decide the wording of the

question, or questions, to be asked. Once the poll has been demanded in accordance with the law, the district council is under a statutory duty to run it.

The poll is like a scaled-down version of a general election.

The rules governing parish polls come from the Local Government Act 1972. I would be more than happy to assist councillors or residents of affected parishes who might wish to demand such a poll.

Remember, it only needs ten registered electors to demand a parish poll in the prescribed manner and the poll must be held. I would suggest that the electors of Lane End and Booker, for example, may have strong views and could benefit from calling such a poll.

Mike Post (pictured), for the Marlow Group, Bisham Road, Marlow

This beggars belief

THE arrogance of Mike Brooks, Chief Executive of Wycombe Sports Developments Ltd (12/11/2010), beggars belief. He scornfully dismisses the results of the *Free Press* online survey, overwhelmingly rejecting the planned Booker stadium, with the words: "We do not believe this survey is in any way a reliable indication of the views of local people."

So much less "reliable", of course, Mr Brooks, than the "overwhelming support" garnered by Wasps from openly soliciting the backing of fans from as far afield as London – areas wholly unaffected by the immediate and lasting

environmental impact the proposed stadium will have on the residents of Booker, Lane End and Marlow Bottom.

Wycombe already has a 'Swan'. If Steve Hayes gets his way, it'll soon have a 'White Elephant' too.

Peter Kemp, Ragmans Close, Marlow Bottom

What an opportunity

RE: 'No to Booker' campaign.

I RESPECTFULLY share anxieties on all the points raised but I don't see any benefits in stopping the club wanting an ambition. What an opportunity for every sport and facility in High Wycombe. I not only support a new stadium if that is the chosen route, but also the benefits of a whole sporting-based village. You only have to read the *Bucks Free Press* to see what high standards there are in all areas of sport eg. rugby, hockey, athletics, cricket, bowls.

Booker has easy access to a motorway and with the inclusion of Wycombe District Council, and our council tax, at least we will know that some of our money is community based.

There's no guarantee by playing safe that Wycombe Wanderers will even stand still. Do we want the constant struggle of balancing the books as a small club or do we aspire being like West Ham, Norwich or Charlton? As they say, "you decide".

Eddie Ball, Shrimpton Road, Booker

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