

Public backs air park as stadium site, says council

WYCOMBE Air Park will be recommended to council chiefs as the site with the 'best potential' for a community stadium – after it gained most responses in a public consultation.

The site at Booker received more than 70 per cent of the 8,376 written responses received by Wycombe District Council's six-week consultation, according to an embargoed press release given to the *Free Press* on Wednesday.

However, despite repeated requests, the *BFP* was refused advance access before our deadlines yesterday to the full report – which is available to the public on the council's website today and in hard copy form at its offices.

Officials said the press could not see it before it was handed to members yesterday.

BFP editor Steve Cohen said: "I am hugely disappointed that the council should only hand us an advanced press release summary of such an important report instead of allowing us the chance to give readers an independent view of the full document. Not everyone will be able to get access to it."

The findings of the consultation will be put before the council's Cabinet on January 17, where councillors will decide the next stage of the project.

WDC leader Lesley Clarke said: "The consultation showed that the majority of people who took part thought a new sports village and community stadium should be located at Wycombe Air Park, a location which could allow for a project comparable to any other facility in the region."

Air Park has 'best potential'

Report outlines 'support for plan'

WYCOMBE Air Park has the "best potential" for a community stadium, according to findings released today from a council's public consultation into the plans.

More than 70 per cent of 8,376 written responses received by Wycombe District Council were in favour of the site at Booker, with 71 per cent saying they supported plans for a sports village.

The authority said that just 19 per cent of residents that responded to the consultation voted for Wycombe Wanderers and London Wasps to remain at their current home at Adams Park, or a "Do Nothing approach".

However, the above results were obtained from an embargoed press release handed to the *Bucks Free Press* on Wednesday and not the full

report available to the public today. A "Do Nothing approach" is not an option on the consultation form, although respondents had a chance to vote for "none" of the options presented to them. WDC Leader Lesley Clarke said the report shows "the big picture" that a stadium would boost the local economy and raise the profile of the district.

She added that protesters concerns are "summarised" in the report, and vowed that further public consultation would be held prior to a planning application.

She said: "The report identifies that the stadium project is about much more than just a new stadium for Wycombe Wanderers and Wasps.

"The big picture which has been revealed

RESULT: Officials from Wanderers, Wasps and the council



shows that the project could give the local economy a significant boost, raise the profile of the district and encourage wider participation in sports.

"We are taking seriously issues raised about infrastructure and the environment and they will be looked at very carefully at every stage of the planning process."

The six-week consultation also included results from six focus groups from across the district. While about 1,400 people attended two discussion forums and three public exhibitions organised and hosted by the council. The consultation's findings will be put before the authority's Cabinet on Monday, January 17, where members will decide on the next course of action for the plans

...But we are denied access

THIS edition of the Bucks Free Press is today unable to provide a detailed report on the consultation's findings as we were denied access to the full report until after the paper had gone to press.

The BFP was invited to a media briefing at Wycombe District Council's offices on Wednesday evening in which it was handed a five-page, embargoed press release written by the council's media team.

But, despite numerous requests, the authority would not issue the BFP with a full copy until council members received their copy of the report on Thursday night.

In a statement, WDC said: "We are pleased to be able to provide the *Bucks Free Press* with a copy of the cabinet report at the same time as our elected members receive their copies."

Editor of the *Free Press* Steve Cohen said: "I'm massively disappointed. This has prompted more emotion

and more debate than any other issue that I have faced in my 22 years at the *Bucks Free Press*."

"We have a hugely intelligent public and although they will be able to view the report in full today, it would only seem fair to allow the independent press to have a look at the full report before it was released, especially as the council released certain information to us before the report was published."

The consultation's findings will be made available to the public on the council's website from today, with copies also available from WDC's offices in Queen Victoria Road in High Wycombe.

Visit the *Bucks Free Press* website today for updates on this story and the BFP Midweek on Tuesday for more reaction.

See
bucksfreepress.co.uk

The press release in full

COUNCIL CABINET TO CONSIDER NEXT STAGE FOR NEW COMMUNITY STADIUM AT AIR PARK

Wycombe District Council will be considering the next stage for a new Community Stadium at Wycombe Air Park, following the results of a Public Consultation.

Today (7 January 2011), a report, which will be made available to the public on the council's website, will recommend to the Cabinet, who are meeting on 17 January, that plans for a new Community Stadium at the Air Park site, should proceed to the next stage. The Cabinet meeting will then resolve to the next stage whether the new Community Stadium Project should move forward.

The Cabinet report recommends that, following an extensive public consultation, Wycombe Air Park is the site with the "best potential" for the development. It also recommends that it should include community sports facilities alongside the new Stadium, potentially a "Sports Village". This also follows the results of the consultation which showed that the public responses favoured this option.

The recommendation has been reached following considerable technical analysis by the Council's Planning Team and a careful analysis of nearly 8,400 written responses to the public consultation. The responses indicated strong support for a "Sports Village", featuring a new Community Stadium and extensive sporting facilities at Wycombe Air Park.

The report is also informed by independently convened focus groups, across the District, which also pointed to a new Community Stadium with a Sports Village at Booker.

The Cabinet report only looks at planning issues, examining the basic merits of the project and which potential sites offered the best potential. No decision to proceed with the project beyond the planning stage has yet been taken and the issue of Wycombe District Council's potential involvement as a partner in any Stadium project will be considered quite separately.

The report recognises the public consultation identified concerns around the project. However, it recommends that the new Community Stadium project is worth proceeding to the next stage because of the potentially wide and long term economic and social benefits which a Stadium and Sports Village could offer the District.

"Throughout the consultation process, the Council maintained a neutral stance on this project. We asked local people for their views on options and if they wanted a Community Stadium and Sports Village," said

Councillor Lesley Clarke, Leader of Wycombe District Council.

"The consultation showed that the majority of people who took part thought that a new Sports Village and Community Stadium Project should be located at Wycombe Air park at Booker, a location which could allow for a project comparable to any other facility in the region.

"The report identifies that the new Community Stadium Project is about much more than just a new stadium for Wycombe Wanderers and Wasps. The "big picture" which has been revealed shows that the project could give the local economy a significant boost, raise the profile of the district and encourage wider participation in sports," said Lesley Clarke, Leader of Wycombe District Council.

She continued, "We are taking seriously issues raised about infrastructure and the environment and they will be looked at very carefully at every stage of the planning process."

"The Cabinet report summarises the many concerns which some people have about the project, including those who may be impacted upon if the project went ahead at Wycombe Air Park.

In recognition of this, the report points out that work remains to be done around issues about local transport, the environment, the Green Belt and with users at the Air Park. It also highlights that there should be more public consultation prior to any planning application.

What happens now?

Plans to proceed with the new Stadium Project will be discussed by Wycombe District Council on Monday 17 January. This would pave the way to begin preparations for a planning application for the development at Booker and kick-start the project.

If a developer decides to proceed with the project, they will be expected to carry out a consultation of their own, canvassing local opinion before they submit an official planning application.

"The main reason why the Council has decided to respond to the results of a public consultation is that this is an issue of importance to the District as a whole and the council wants to see this project expedited and the public kept informed in a timely manner," said Councillor Tony Green, Deputy Leader of Wycombe District Council.

A Cabinet Meeting of Wycombe District Council is due to take place on Monday 17 January at the Council Offices in Wycombe.