

Midweek



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STADIUM CONSULTATION

Over these two pages we look at the results of the controversial stadium consultation and bring you the first public reaction

Campaign group plans to demonstrate over consultation

A CAMPAIGN group against plans for a new community stadium in Booker says a public consultation was 'skewed' and it will stage a demonstration later this month.

Wycombe District Council released on Friday a 145-page report into its findings from a six-week consultation over controversial plans for a 17,500-20,000 capacity stadium and sports village.

Of the 8,376 responses received, 74 per cent backed a community stadium at the Wycombe Air Park site.

However, almost half of those supporting the Wycombe Air Park site in Booker live outside the district, the report states.

A spokesman for GASP – a coalition of Groups Against the Stadium – said it was "shocked and appalled" by



TAKING TO THE STREETS: Campaigners against the stadium

the council's headline figures.

The group said the consultation was 'flawed and unrepresentative' and pointed to a recent poll on the *Free Press* website, which indicated most were against the Booker bid.

The campaigners added that of 358 consultation papers collected in Lane End,

86 per cent wanted Wycombe Wanderers and London Wasps to stay at Adams Park.

GASP complain that "students were given consultation forms and encouraged to vote in favour of the new stadium so that they could get more sports facilities".

The group also pointed out

that Wycombe Wanderers and Wasps, as well as ex-player Lawrence Dallaglio, had emailed people advising them how to fill out the document.

The campaigners are now inviting people to Wycombe District Council's offices on January 17 at 5.30pm to demonstrate against the stadium proposals.

GASP said it would prepare a full response to the consultation results, but listed other initial concerns.

It noted the use of 'opaque language', such as 'enabling development' was used instead of 'up to 2,000 houses would have to be built on Green Belt land to pay for it'.

It also listed concerns over the length of the consultation and questioned if checks had been carried out to ensure responses were genuine.

'Outside influence affected the score'

By SIMON FARR

ALMOST half of all written responses 'backing Booker' in a council public consultation were made by people who live outside of the Wycombe district.

On Friday Wycombe District Council released a 145-page report into its findings from a six-week public consultation into controversial plans for a 17,500-20,000 capacity community stadium and sports project.

Of the 8,376 responses received, 74 per cent backed a community stadium at the Wycombe Air Park site, according to the full report.

Of that 74 per cent figure, 35.43 per cent of respondents gave an address in the Wycombe District, while 31.71 gave a location from outside.

The remaining 6.89 per cent did not specify an address.

The complete document also states that 71 per cent of those who took part in the written consultation were in favour of a Sports Village development.

The report states that respondents were critical of the council's financial involvement and

concerned about the detrimental impact on the Green Belt and Chilterns AONB, should the scheme go ahead in Booker.

The findings will be put to the Cabinet on January 17, where councillors will be advised to proceed to a plan-

ning application stage.

For the latest local news
bucksfreepress.co.uk

Your guide to the consultation report in close-up

The Figures:

SEVENTY-FOUR per cent of respondents chose Wycombe Air Park when asked which site offered the best potential.

Of those behind Booker, 35.43 per cent were from residents who gave their home address as within the Wycombe District.

Meanwhile, 31.71 per cent were from people residing outside the district – and a further 6.89 per cent of responses which listed Booker as their preferred site did not specify an address.

Broken down, the results show that 60 per cent of those in favour of the development at Booker, and who gave an address within the district, live in High Wycombe.

Some 7.9 per cent were specified by the report as living in the 'rest of the district', Marlow residents made up 1.73 per cent of these responses.

The option to remain at Adams Park gained 14.69 per cent – with 8.43 per cent from inside the district, 4.08 per cent from outside and 2.2 per cent from elsewhere.

The consultation didn't ask whether they support the idea of a new stadium development – which was noted in the report as a concern from the written responses.

A graph based on the results to question two, 'which broad option – A, B, C or D – do you support in principle?', revealed 71 per cent want option D, a stadium and full sports village.

Some 34.18 per cent of the respondents that came from inside the district, 30 per cent from outside and 6.82 per cent had 'an unspecified address'.

Option A, to retain Adams Park and seek

improvements, gained 14.74 of the vote.

The Comments:

The report states that great care needs to be taken in interpreting this general expression of support.

The cabinet report states in its summary: "There's a message emerging from the consultation that the project represents a real opportunity but that it should only take place if clear community and economic benefits can be demonstrated, a sustainable scheme delivered, access issues addressed and care taken to minimise adverse environmental and other impacts."

The report states that written response and focus groups point to general support but consultation events and public meetings tended to highlight the negative.

The document goes on to say: "A major concern from the public consultation centres on the financial involvement of the district council, both to date by funding this consultation and feasibility work, and in the future if the council becomes involved as a landowner in some way."

"The issues raised by the public about the council's financial involvement will have to be addressed when the council considers its property role."

Other concerns raised include the timing of the project given the economic downturn and other respondents believe the scheme should be funded by the clubs. Others feared Wasps' commitment and the impact the project may have on Blues' finances.

Fears were raised about the effect any development would have on existing facili-

ties, including Air Park operations, while transport infrastructure was also a concern.

The feedback shows that some respondents criticised the consultation process and "expressed the opinion that staying at Adams Park probably wasn't an option."

The Next Step:

The Cabinet report will be put before councillors on January 17, with a recommendation that the council should "proceed by means of a planning application".

It adds that any application would be a departure from the current development plan but officers believe there is good potential for a case to be made that the project could get the go ahead at planning – despite the fact it would be sited within the green belt – subject to strategic issues being investigated further.

Further issues – including the future of the Air Park, an assessment of the economic, community and transport implications, and detailed transport modelling – would also have to be explored.

WDC leader Lesley Clarke said "We've not finished by any stretch of the imagination, there is a lot more to do before this is anywhere near finished."

"We want to tell your readers and residents who feel we aren't listening, that we are and understand their concerns."

"Now we have got to the site, we now have to work out if it is economically viable, is it supportable, and there will be more public consultation."

For full WDC reports go to:
wycombe.gov.uk

'Wasps can forget Abu Dhabi if they want a new ground here'

By JAMES NADAL

WASPS' matches in Abu Dhabi, or anywhere outside Wycombe, should not be allowed as part of any community stadium agreement, a Liberal Democrat councillor says.

The Premiership side announced English rugby's first ever professional competitive game overseas last week, but Cllr Trevor Snaith says the clubs should commit to playing all games in Wycombe if a new stadium is built with help from Wycombe District Council.

He said substantial revenue, one of the key reasons for the council supporting the project, would be lost if the club were to play some of their matches in other countries.

He said: "My position is dead simple. If they're getting this level of investment put in at



BREAKING NEW GROUND: Wasps director Lawrence Dallaglio and owner Steve Hayes announce the club's plans to play in the Middle East

some point they should be ensuring that every penny possible is finding its way back to the Wycombe District area and the people of this district.

"I'd personally be looking for Wycombe District Council to button down in any arrangements they have with Wasps and Wanderers that all of their

fixtures and matches are played in the area as a condition of the serious amount of investment they're looking for.

"I'm looking for them to ensure businesses in this town benefit from the traffic going through to the matches.

"I would be concerned of any idea of any match playing outside the area when and if they have the new stadium here."

He said every event involving the clubs must be held in Wycombe so as much money as possible goes back to the community.

Conditions should be put into any agreement, he said.

He added: "It's sheer madness to have a big investment and then start playing away."

Former High Wycombe Mayor Ted Collins, Labour, who is against the proposed new stadium, questioned whether an agreement to tie

down the clubs to play in Wycombe would be legal.

He said: "I think Wasps could say it was a restraint of trade. Legally I don't think you can lay down a condition saying you've got to have 80 per cent or whatever percentage of games in Wycombe."

He added: "Maybe Wasps will have to compensate other sports in the community or something like that."

Cllr Tony Green, Conservative, was unconcerned at the announcement last week, saying: "I can't see many (games) in Abu Dhabi to be honest."

WDC Leader Lesley Clarke said it was a matter for the clubs when asked if she had any concerns.

Wycombe Sports Development Limited said it would provide a response later this week.

Consultation was 'flawed'

LIBERAL Democrats have delivered a withering assessment of the community stadium consultation, calling it 'skewed' and 'flawed' due to the influence of people outside the district.

And Conservatives were warned not to ignore the strength of feeling against the project – or it could hit them at the ballot box in May.

It follows the announcement that a clear majority of those who took part in the survey backed Wycombe Air Park as their preferred choice for a new ground for Wasps and Wycombe Wanderers.

The Tories hit back, accusing the Lib Dems of electioneering and short-term thinking.

Tory-controlled Wycombe District Council said the results – with 74 per cent showing 'broad' support 'in principle' for the Booker site – were conclusive.

But Cllr Steve Guy, Lib Dem Leader at WDC said: "Frankly, I don't believe that at all. I don't accept that. I don't think the people who live outside the district are the ones we should be listening to."

"The consultation is very flawed and unreliable."

He forecast problems for the Tories at the May elections.



UNHAPPY: Cllr Steve Guy

He said: "I think the Conservatives are playing a dangerous game. I've never seen this strength of feeling over anything."

"I think they are taking a huge chance if they go against the public opinion because they have to face the people in May."

Lib Dem colleague Cllr Trevor Snaith called the consultation report "aspiration and spin".

Various concerns raised in the council's own report, particularly financial and economic, show further work is needed, he said.

He thinks a district-wide refer-

endum should be considered.

WDC Deputy Leader Cllr Tony Green said: "We are certainly not playing a dangerous game, we've done a huge consultation, had a result and are moving forward with that result."

"I think the Lib Dems are electioneering because they are desperately trying to find something to fight an election on."

"I think it underlines their short-termism. I suspect with Cllr Guy and the Lib Dems perhaps they'd never be bold enough to do any large projects."

"We take a different view – we are elected to improve and look after the district."

He said the consultation was run by experienced professionals who were impressed by the level of the response and the results were statistically correct 'within two-and-a-half per cent'.

He said no other polls so far carried out, like the *Bucks Free Press* online ballot, were restricted just to Wycombe residents.

The results of consultation responses were "mirrored both within and outside the district", he said.

The figures, using only those within the district, showed about 69 per cent 'broad support in principle' for Booker.

Clubs are buoyed

WYCOMBE Wanderers and London Wasps say they have been 'buoyed' by the results of the public consultation into plans for a new stadium.

A report on the consultation said more than 70 per cent of respondents backed plans for a new stadium Booker.

Wycombe Sports Developments Ltd, a shell company set up by the clubs to oversee the plans, said the results "strongly back" the view that Booker is the best site.

Chief executive Mike Brooks said: "We are delighted that the consultation for a new community stadium and sports village in Wycombe has generated such a high level of response."

"What's even better is the overwhelming support that Booker has received as the location for this."

"Of the nearly 8,400 responses from the questionnaires and local focus groups, over 70 per cent of these were supporting a new stadium and sports village at Wycombe Air Park at Booker."

"We have been Backing Booker right from the start because it is the only site in the district that will enable our

vision for a community stadium linked to a sports village to be delivered. Not only will it maximise the benefits for both clubs but it will also bring new facilities and opportunities to the communities of Wycombe."

"The consultation results strongly back this view and shows that the majority of people think that a new sports village with community sports facilities should be located alongside a new stadium for Wanderers and Wasps and that the site with the most potential for this is at Booker."

"However we now need to wait for the council to meet on January 17 and decide whether to accept the recommendation to proceed to the next stage, as set out in the cabinet report."

"Until then we would like to take this opportunity to thank all those people who have backed our campaign – local residents and businesses, community groups, WWFC fans, Wasps fans, students at BNU, sporting organisations and many, many more."

"There is still a long way to go but we are buoyed by the results of the consultation and the huge amount of support we already have for a new stadium at Booker."