

Huge response to our stadium survey

HUNDREDS of readers have flooded the *Bucks Free Press* offices with responses to our survey on controversial plans for a new community stadium.

The *Free Press* received more than 550 responses following the launch of the independent survey in the *Bucks Free Press* and the *BFP* website on Friday.

The huge response follows a turbulent week in the stadium saga, as a decision made by members of Wycombe District Council's Cabinet to move forward with the proposals was 'called in' for review by the authority's scrutiny committee.

Meanwhile, the previous Mayor of High Wycombe, Cllr Julie Pritchard, has added her voice to the list of rebel Conservative councillors against the proposals.

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Complete the form online at
bucksfreepress.co.uk

Hundreds of readers respond to BFP stadium survey

HUNDREDS of readers have already taken part in the *Bucks Free Press*' survey on controversial plans for a new community stadium.

The *Free Press* received more than 400 web-based responses over the weekend following the launch of the survey on the website and in Friday's *BFP*.

Readers who are yet to take part in the *BFP*'s independent survey have until Friday, February 4 to take part.

Some readers have not submitted their personal details, however, meaning their vote is void, as set out in the terms and conditions accompanying the form.

The *BFP* consulted parties from all sides of the stadium debate – including WSDL, GASP and Wycombe District Council – in an effort to create an independent yet thought-provoking survey.

The survey is not intended to replace the council's own public consultation, which concluded with Wycombe Air Park being named as the site with the "best potential" for the project.

Editor Steve Cohen said: "We want to give readers another chance to contribute to this crucial debate, and we will feed your views back to the people who matter.

"I'm sure that all further views from the general public will be welcomed."

To take part in the *BFP*'s stadium survey, simply click the appropriate Yes or No box next to the questions, and leave any further comments or reasons for each answer in the space provided.

You **MUST** provide your full name, address and contact telephone numbers with the form – this is purely so the *BFP* can check and verify every entry, your details will not appear in any story or be passed on to any third party.

If you do not supply your full details, or your details cannot be verified, your votes will not be included in the results of the survey.

The *BFP* is limiting the survey to one vote per person. The closing date for entries is Friday, February 4.

Take part in the online survey at
bucksfreepress.co.uk

Plan is called in for extra scrutiny

CONTROVERSIAL proposals for a new community stadium have been 'called in' by Wycombe District Council's independent scrutiny committee.

Cllr Alex Collingwood, chairman of the council's Improvement and Review Committee, requested for the contentious plans to be 'called in' on Thursday.

Councillors can call in a decision if they believe it is contrary to the policy of the council. If it goes ahead the decision would be effectively frozen until it can be given further consideration by the full council or the scrutiny committee.

It comes after Cllr Collingwood told a cabinet meeting last week his task force had spent 250 man hours looking over the plans, and "as we stand, there are no very special circumstances which overrides Green Belt policy for this project".

WDC said it is unsure at this time whether the call-in request is for part or all of the decision made by cabinet on January 17 to move to the next stage of the stadium scheme.

By the close of play on February 3 this request must be confirmed and at least three of the following criteria satisfied, as set out in the authority's constitution before it can be called in:

- The Cabinet's decision is outside agreed policy or budgets.



REVIEW: Alex Collingwood

- It proposes expenditure in excess of £100,000.
- It affects at least a quarter of the wards of the district.
- The request is made by at least five members of the Improvement and Review Commission, excluding the chairman but including at least two political parties.

- The decision is not supported by at least one local ward member (two in a three member ward).

- The consent of the chairman of the Improvement and Review Committee has been obtained.

Committee members must now consider the call-in request at their next scheduled meeting on March 16, unless a special meeting is called.

If members agree the matter should be looked at further, members need to notify cabinet. If committee members choose not to call in the project, the cabinet's original decision is put into action.

Cabinet members may still decide to proceed with the original decision or an amended version on receiving the scrutiny committee's decision – unless the committee has asked for the decision to be referred to full council.

That decision will then be published in accordance with the protocol on decision-making, unless cabinet decides to bring the proposal before full council.

A proposal may only be called in once – unless the plans are substantially amended in such a way that the committee's members had 'not considered, nor could reasonably have foreseen, to the extent that in reality it is a different proposal'.

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MP Baker won't take sides in the stadium debate

WYCOMBE MP Steve Baker is staying out of the community stadium debate, telling *Midweek* his role is not to "escalate matters".

A number of senior Tory councillors have spoken out to oppose the plans for a new 17,500 capacity ground for Wasps and Wycombe Wanderers at Wycombe Air Park.

But Mr Baker said he strongly backs the government's drive for decentralised power, encapsulated in this week's Localism Bill in Parliament, and it would go against this to step in.

He said: "The reality is that the stadium proposal is entirely within the authority of Wycombe District Council: I have no authority over the matter."

"Furthermore, this week, the Localism Bill passed through its Commons second reading."

"That Bill is intended to empower radically Councils and local people, not MPs."

"As I said during the election, I am a keen supporter of the decentralisation of power. People must have more control over their own lives."

"That is why I will be staying out of the debate over the stadium: for localism to work, it is vital that decisions are taken at the local level."

"Much as I live here too, we can't have MPs – whose responsibility is to represent local people on national and international issues – stepping into council matters: we need local power and accountability."

He said: "As MP, I am acutely aware that people who would potentially be affected by the stadium have strong views and these must be heard."

Mr Baker's Wycombe constituency includes Marlow Bottom – where two of the dissenting councillors this week come from.

But he said: "My role is to ensure that the Coalition Government's plans are carried through to deliver more local power, control and transparency."

"It isn't to escalate matters which can and should be settled locally."

He added that decentralisation of power is a "key part of the Government's agenda" and issues like the stadium must be settled by residents and councillors.

Meanwhile, Mr Baker has been named as one of the four Tory MP 'newcomers of the year' by the Conservative Home blogging website.

He was picked out of the 147 new Conservatives in the House of Commons by blogger Harry Phibbs who highlighted "his deep philosophical belief in the freedom of the individual combined with his grasp of detail in such important areas as banking and financial regulation."



STAYING NEUTRAL:
MP for Wycombe
Steve Baker

Another Tory breaks ranks over stadium saga

By SIMON FARR

HIGH Wycombe's previous mayor has become the latest Tory to break rank in opposition against a new stadium.

Cllr Julie Pritchard believes the plans for a new 17,500-20,000 capacity home for Wycombe Wanderers and Wasps is a "white elephant".

She doesn't believe the project should go ahead amid hordes of council cuts, and fears Wasps will play their big games outside of the district even if a new stadium is built.

Wasps will play their LV Cup clash with Harlequins on Sunday in Abu Dhabi and have also played numerous matches at Twickenham.

Cllr Pritchard said: "I just think we are going to be left with a white elephant."

"London Wasps don't bring their biggest games to Wycombe, they play them in London or in Abu Dhabi, so why would that change with a 20,000 capacity stadium?"

"Wasps say 60,000 fans

watch them at Twickenham but how many of them come here? What makes the club think they will come to a new stadium in Wycombe?"

"It doesn't make any sense, in an economic climate in which we are cutting services that improve the lives of people, to plough money into a huge stadium."

"Wasps don't bring their biggest games to Wycombe, they play them in London or in Abu Dhabi, so why would that change with a 20,000 capacity stadium?"

Steve Hayes, owner of both clubs, has previously said a new stadium is vital for both clubs to continue to grow on and off the pitch.

Cllr Pritchard is the latest in a growing list of rebel Conservative councillors to break the party line in opposition to the stadium plans.

Fellow former High



SPEAKING OUT: Ex-Mayor Julie Pritchard

Wycombe mayors, Cllr Val Razzaq and Cllr Jean Teesdale, both said they would not back the scheme earlier this month.

Cllr Darren Hayday also announced in October that he would not stand at the next election in protest.

Two-time ex-chairman of both Wycombe District and Bucks County Council, Cllr Richard Pushman attacked

the project last week – as did senior county councillor Bob Woollard, who said there was not a "worse place to have it" than Wycombe Air Park site in Booker.

Tory councillors Ian McEnnis and Dominic Barnes attacked the plan at last week's cabinet meeting, where members decided to move to the next phase of the project.

Deputy leader of the council, Tony Green, told the meeting: "We don't know yet what enabling development is required or what road infrastructure is required surely it's reasonable to cross each hurdle at the time. If we can't then this will not go ahead I agree with you."

On the accusation Booker was a 'done deal' all along, Cllr Green said: "It isn't. This is the first of a number of decisions that have to be made."

"Please let me assure you that there's a lot of work to be done and all members will be involved with that in one way or another."

Will Lesley share power with the Guy from Lib Dems?

MY ignorance knows few bounds when it comes to the world of politics, but I must confess to being more confused than usual when it comes to the make-up of Wycombe District Council.

Forgive me for my naivety, but I don't understand why the Tories and Lib Dems seem to dislike each other so much.



NICK CLEGG

After all, Cameron and Clegg share power in government and genuinely look like they were separated at birth.

Unity and coalition are the buzz-words in Westminster, and yet here in Queen Victoria Road, they are still slugging it out in unreconstructed party politics.

Most simpletons such as me thought the parties had virtually joined forces, but that's not the case in Bucks.

I mused on this when 'Ryemead Focus' dropped through my door last week. It's a newsletter on behalf of the Liberal Democrats, namely district councillors Ray Farmer and Trevor Snaith.

Ray and Trevor – both chaps I know well and like – highlighted the wonders of Nick Clegg's performance in the coalition government twice under the slogan: "Now the Lib Dems are delivering."

But they were also pretty uncomplimentary when it came to their non-coalition Tory partners in Wycombe.

In particular, they made two pointed, and I assume controversial, references to the "Conservatives' Rugby Stadium" plans which they went on to criticise.

The Tories talk up the project as being a 'Community Stadium' and 'sports village' which would be shared by both Wanderers and Wasps. I have no doubt the Lib Dems' casual use of the rugby stadium label would therefore cause outrage among Tory high command.

Clearly Cllrs Farmer and Snaith are trying to ram home the accusation – shared by some critics – that the rugger would subsume everything else.

And fair enough, they can say what they like, because they would argue their job in a democracy is to oppose and to show up the ruling group's policies.

But I'd like to know one thing: what will happen if the council is hung in the May elections? Would these Lib Dems join forces in a coalition with the Tories they so steadfastly rebuke? And would the Tories be prepared to join forces so they could hang on to some form of power? If so, who would compromise on Holywell Mead pool and the stadium?

You could call this party merger an absurd prospect if you like, but no one would have thought Cameron and Clegg would team up like they have.

I will hand over this column next week to any Tory or Lib Dem, or both, who wants to enlighten us on this possible local coalition in May.

And I'd be pleased to know whether or not the *Midweek* can look forward to a photo opportunity showing Tory leader Lesley Clarke clasping hands with Lib Dem chief Steve Guy as they prepare to rule our council for the next four years.