

There are fleeting moments, Trevor Stroud says, when he asks himself if the offer is too good to be true. The chairman of Sky Bet League One Wycombe Wanderers, fan-owned since 2012, says the club has two options. "Cut our cloth accordingly, and find our level, which I believe would be the National League," Stroud, who also chairs the Supporters' Trust, says. "Or find a 'partner'. And I think we've found one."

For the past three months, Rob Couhig, a 70-year-old American venture capitalist, and the 132-year-old football club have, essentially, been involved in a mutually beneficial "try before you buy" arrangement.

Twelve games into the season and, with Couhig and his team's investment, plus the ever-impressive leadership of Gareth Ainsworth, their inspirational manager, The Chairboys are second in the table and at Adams Park there is a crackle of excitement in the air.

Couhig's offer would result in the Trust retaining a 25 per cent stake in the club, two elected supporters on the board of directors and, crucially, the title deeds to Adams Park. But here's the rub. Couhig's proposal requires 75 per cent of Wycombe's 875 legacy members (season ticket holders for three or more years) to vote in favour for the deal to proceed next week. "That, originally, was a defence mechanism," Stroud says. "But it could come back to bite us."

It is a familiar conundrum. "The average League One or Two club loses between £500k-£600k a year," Stroud says. "Last year we had the third lowest budget [in League One] and were still losing money. As a fan-owned club we're asking supporters to fund that deficit every year. But we just can't keep doing that, and the price of football is going up and up all the time."

Ainsworth, given the recent plight of Bury and Bolton Wanderers, accepts that "it's a real double-edged sword", he says. "But you want ambition and success in football — fans want that. And I believe [Couhig] is genuine, that he has the best interests of the club at heart."

In the summer the picture looked different. A relegation battle this season loomed after a deal with a previous group of investors fell through in May and Ainsworth, who led Wycombe to a 17th-place finish, was informed his playing budget was being cut by a third to £1.2 million — a figure smaller than several National League clubs.

Instead, Couhig's arrival furnished him with a budget of about £2 million with which 11 summer signings, including Fred Onyedinma from Millwall and Rolando Aarons and Paul Smyth on loan from Newcastle United and QPR respectively, added strength to a threadbare squad.

New smart turnstiles and a fans' village, with live music, in association with Rebellion, a local brewery, have been introduced and there are plans to spruce up the training ground and Adams Park.

After the gripping 3-3 draw against Peterborough United on Saturday, Couhig's nephew Peter, an ebullient, football-loving 46-year-old who has left his wife and three children back in Louisiana to oversee the club's day-to-day running, explains how a conversation with his uncle over Thanksgiving dinner a few years back sowed a seed that would lead to their investment in English football.

After a deal to buy Yeovil Town collapsed in May the Americans looked at several EFL clubs including, Peter says, Bolton and Bury. "It took five and a half minutes to figure out how f\*\*\*ed Bury were," he says. Wycombe's location half an hour from London, though, and the Supporters' Trust's involvement piqued their interest. "Essentially, we're hoping to become partners with a community," he says. "And, the football side is under control. Gareth is a f\*\*\*ing legend. He's one of the best people I've met. The way he puts his changing room together, it's kind of magic."

The irrepressible Adebayo Akinfenwa, one of three team "Generals", along with Matt Bloomfield and Joe Jacobson, who scored a 95th-minute equaliser from the penalty spot on Saturday in his 150th game for the club, agrees. "I've been in a lot of changing rooms in my career, but the culture and the togetherness here is amazing — it's rare," he says.

Ainsworth, who moonlights as lead singer in The Cold Blooded Hearts and Peter Couhig, whose family owns music venues in Louisiana, share a passion for rock'n' roll. "He grew up in New

Orleans,” Ainsworth says of Peter, “I grew up in Blackburn, but we were both listening to Guns N’ Roses, Motley Crew and classic rock. It’s amazing the connection we have.”

At full-time Ainsworth soaked in the adulation of the home support with The Troggs’ Wild Thing — Ainsworth’s moniker during a playing career as a swashbuckling winger for Wimbledon and QPR, among others — ringing in his ears. The players have chosen their own goal celebration songs, although if Akinfenwa’s choice — DMX’s Ruff Ryders — made it on to the sound system it was drowned out by raucous stoppage-time celebrations.

Last week, The Cold Blooded Hearts even recorded their own version of Dion’s The Wanderer, the club’s unofficial anthem, in the Woodlands Lounge at Adams Park, which could soon be added to the match-day entertainment. Ainsworth, to rephrase the Sixties classic, may be a Wanderer, but he is the type of guy who likes to settle down.

Last month, the 46-year-old rebuffed the overtures of Lincoln City, the latest club to covet his services, and celebrated seven years in the job, making him the second longest-serving manager in the Football League behind Morecambe’s Jim Bentley. “It would take something extra special for me to go, because of what I’ve built here, what I have here,” Ainsworth admits.

It has been quite a journey but despite windfalls from FA Cup ties against Aston Villa and Tottenham Hotspur, a League Two Wembley play-off final, promotion to League One and a sell on clause in Jordan Ibe’s transfer from Bournemouth to Liverpool, debts of almost £2 million — which Couhig would clear as part of the deal — have accrued and so Wycombe are approaching a crossroads.

“We were staring down the barrels in the summer,” Stroud says. “And if there’s a “no” vote, those barrels will very quickly come back up, and we will be staring at them again.”