

# Haydons Bridge Residents Press Release

PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release - 8 January 2002

## HAYDON'S BRIDGE RESIDENTS ASSOCIATION STATEMENT REGARDING PLOUGH LANE

The Haydon's Bridge Residents Association, which represents householders surrounding the Plough Lane site, which used to be the home of Wimbledon Football Club, today reiterated their opposition to the club returning after an absence of more than ten years.

Mrs Paola Francia-Gardiner, the Vice-Chair of the Haydon's Bridge Residents Association, today said as follows. *"Last night, Mr Charles Koppel, the Chairman of Wimbledon Football Club, spoke to a meeting attending by the members of Haydon's Bridge Residents Association and a representative of Wimbledon Park Residents Association. He had been invited by the Association to discuss the possibility of constructing a new stadium for the club in Plough Lane. The meeting comprised approximately 20 residents who live close to the Plough Lane site.*

*Mr Koppel was extremely open with us. He made it clear that he would very much like the club to be able to return to Plough Lane but that there were overwhelming obstacles to this taking place. These included the cost of procuring the land and constructing the stadium, which were unaffordable to the club, and the difficulties in obtaining planning permission for a stadium on the site. We told Mr Koppel the following.*

*(a) Our Association has campaigned strongly for ten years to prevent planning permission being granted for Safeways' proposed retail development on the Plough Lane site. Originally, Merton Borough Council had been in favour of this development but we convinced them to oppose it. Safeways' planning application was finally rejected in December.*

*(b) Our opposition to a football stadium on the site would be even greater to that for retail development and that we would work hard to ensure that no planning permission was granted for this.*

*(c) Our opposition to a football stadium on the site was based on the fact that the site is simply not suitable in terms of transport connections and available parking facilities, noise and air pollution around the site.*

*(d) We believed that these views are shared by the majority of residents in the Plough Lane and surrounding area.*

*(e) We all wished the club success in finding a new home but did not think that it was practical for this to be in Plough Lane. We all (save for one person who left early) signed a resolution which reflected this.*

*There was no-one present at the meeting who expressed any support for a stadium in Plough Lane or who queried either Mr Koppel's or the Association's reasons for ruling this out. Today, the Wimbledon Independent Supporters Association ("WISA") issued a press release regarding the meeting last night. They can have done this only by having a representative or source present at the meeting who dishonestly claimed to have opposed the stadium development. I think that it is disgraceful that WISA were apparently prepared to deceive us in this way. I consider that this press release takes Mr Koppel's comments completely out of context and does not give a fair impression of the conduct of the meeting. Our impression of Mr Koppel was that he had great probity and honesty, he was understandably worried about the future of the club if it could not relocate to Milton Keynes and there was clearly nothing sinister in his motives for meeting us. Indeed, we were very grateful for his time. Also today, Andrew Judge has issued a press release regarding the statement attributed to Mr Koppel at the meeting that the reason that Mr Judge was so supportive of the return of Wimbledon FC to the Borough was because his girlfriend was a*

*supporter. In fact, what happened was that Mr Koppel was asked by a resident why Mr Judge gave such apparent support to the return of the club when it was clearly not feasible and contrary to the interests of the local people, as made so clear to Mr Judge in respect of the recent Safeways' planning application. All present seemed incredulous at Mr Judge's high-handed approach. It was only then that Mr Koppel stated that he had no idea but that it had been suggested that his girlfriend was a keen supporter and may have influenced him. Mr Judge also stated that "Mr Koppel selects one residents association, selects the audience brings along a prepared motion and gets them to agree to it."*

*This is not true. We invited Mr Koppel to speak to us and we invited the audience. It is highly insulting to us to suggest that we are unable to think and decide for ourselves. The Association would urge all supporters of the club to back the relocation to Milton Keynes and to work with Mr Koppel since this is clearly the only viable option for the club."*

Note to editors: Any press enquiries should be directed toward Sandra Clegg on 020 7396 3581.

[ED NOTE: Sandra Clegg works at Brunswick on the Wimbledon Football Club Limited account]