

Transcript for Culture, Sport and Tourism meeting on 1 April 2003.

Chair: Welcome to this meeting of the London Assembly Culture, Sport and Tourism Committee. I'm Meg Hillier, the Chair of the Committee, and I'm joined by my colleagues Len Duvall and Mike Tuffrey. Danny Myers is the Committee Scrutiny Manager and Saba Master is the Committee Administrator. This is our second enquiry into the future of football stadia in London.

Chair: There are nine witnesses here this evening; three from London's football clubs, three from supporters trusts and supporters, and four from residents' groups. Thank you very much for coming.

Charles Koppel, please briefly outline why you saw the only future for Wimbledon FC to move to Milton Keynes?

Charles Koppel: We did a considerable amount of work over a long period of time to find alternate locations for the club. A lot of that was done in partnership with Merton council, looking at sites within Merton. We also contacted approximately 35 other boroughs in and around South London and we appointed a leading planning and property firm to undertake a research report on our behalf. After all that came back with no options we realised we needed to look elsewhere. The Milton Keynes opportunity came along and we felt it appropriate to pursue it.

Chair: You spent 12 years without a ground. How far a field were you prepared to go out of London?

Charles Koppel: I've only been at the club for three years so I can't speak for the previous nine, but it was a big issue for the club. Having left the borough and not having an opportunity to develop in the borough in the early 1990s led to the position the club was in.

The old site for the club, Plough Lane, was sold. Subsequent to the move to Milton Keynes I found out that site was not deemed acceptable for development by the football licensing authority in terms of stadium requirements for top tier professional football clubs in today's environment.

Chair: When the club is up and running in Milton Keynes, what will it be called?

Charles Koppel: It remains Wimbledon Football Club. That's our history and tradition of the club. A lot has been said as to whether it should be Wimbledon but we're still the same club moving forward. The difficulty in finding an appropriate location should not take away from the club its history and tradition.

Chair: The Panel appointed by the football league to look into whether Wimbledon FC could move said the ruling permitting you to leave was unique and not a precedent for franchises. What was unique about Wimbledon's situation?

Charles Koppel: A variety of issues. We'd left our conurbation 12 years ago and ground shared in another conurbation with Crystal Palace who'd been there since 1925. We did not have an opportunity to return to Merton. There's been a lot of debate on this but we did not have the opportunity to return to Merton.

We've also seen a change in the approach of the football authorities in respect of clubs moving today. When the club left Plough Lane in 1991 no obligation was placed on the club to return. We ended up isolated and outside our borough with no obligation on anyone to find a solution for the club because no obligation had been placed by the authorities or the council, in partnership with the football authorities, to put a time limit on the club, or penalties that might have been incurred by the club had it not returned.

Over the last few years the football authorities have looked very differently at the manner on which clubs may move on a temporary basis. When Wimbledon left Plough Lane it was deemed to be on a temporary basis. The football authorities now impose obligations. Recently with Brighton, ground sharing with Gillingham, and other clubs looking to get permission from the football league to move outside their conurbations, the football league has said there must be an obligation and security to guarantee the club will return with groundsharing. Therefore the ability of another club to end up in the position we were in is limited.

Chair: Are these changes a good move? Would you, as a club, have been happy to move back to Merton?

Charles Koppel: If you have the right community partnership then it is good. The difficulty is that the building of any stadium is lengthy and expensive and, in today's environment, cannot be undertaken exclusively by the club shareholders. A lot of clubs are struggling financially and going into administration, even in the premier league. The onus on shareholders to always provide for the club in terms of meeting losses and building for the future is onerous. If we're not cautious as to how we approach that, we will lose the interest of potential shareholders in football clubs to fund the clubs moving forward because the financial requirement and burden will be too significant. There has to be a middle road found to allow clubs to move forward because the amounts of money are becoming far too great for clubs to be reliant on one or two people.

Chair: We heard from Arsenal that it was over £300 million to redevelop Highbury. Would there have been any measures that would have helped you to find a ground and stay in Merton or South London?

Charles Koppel: The difficulty is the difference between the politics of realising an ambition and the planning issues pertaining to realising an ambition. From my experience those two are far apart. The planning realities of delivering a stadium in Merton were clearly identified by Savills and Drivus Jonus in a feasibility study, which both Merton council and us provided information to. The difficulty comes in accepting the reality of planning versus political ambition because they are so different. More openness and honesty in the problems we face could go a long way.

I've personally taken a significant amount of blame for the club moving and not finding a home which I don't think is fair but I'm prepared to accept that because it was, in my opinion,

more important to find a future for Wimbledon Football Club than to worry about who took the blame for the failure. Politics undoubtedly made a significant role in undermining the reality of what we were trying to achieve.

Chair: I'm sorry I forgot to ask if Members had Declarations of Interest.

Len Duvall: I'm Vice-Chair of the London Development Agency and a season ticket holder for West Ham United Football Club.

Ron Noades, what was your relationship between you and the supporters and why did it break down?

Ron Noades: The supporters need to have a grasp of the problems and you can't always make public your negotiating position. I used to own Wimbledon Football Club and also bought Milton Keynes Football Club with a view to moving Wimbledon to Milton Keynes, long before Charles took over. I decided not to move and went to Crystal Palace. Merton council moved to support Wimbledon after they'd left the borough. When I was there they didn't help us at all. Councils only seem to want to help when you left.

My strategy with Hounslow was to leave the borough to get them to do something for us to return. Our supporters campaigned to stay in the borough and tried to prevent me disposing of the ground until we had another ground in the borough. That meant, unless I could find a ground in the borough, we couldn't move, and as we had no resources to find one without selling our ground, it was impossible to do anything. The club was slowly losing £500,000 a year which was coming out of the resources we might have from the asset value of our ground. It's difficult to get that across to supporters who are actively canvassing for something they passionately believe in which in effect is detrimental to the end game we're trying to achieve as a board of directors for the club itself.

Len Duvall: So trust and confidence clearly breaks down. There is commercial confidentiality but it must be more than that that breaks down relationships between those managing affairs and grass root supporters. What are the strategies for building up trust and confidence?

Ron Noades: With one group of supporters at Brentford, the Supporters Trust, we've built up confidence but with another group, the Bias group, they're canvassing to ensure we have another ground before disposing of the existing one. That's almost impossible unless a developer comes to us with a ground to offer or the local authority offer us one, where the developer builds new the stadium and then builds on ours. Costing in the interest factor and the chance that a developer might have a ground, you're talking about impossibilities. It just isn't going to happen.

If we're to get a new stadium site in the borough of Hounslow, the local authority has to drive that because they're the only people that can identify and give us planning consent for a ground in the borough. We found two and each one they've withdrawn.

Len Duvall: How do you consult and communicate with supporters regarding redevelopment or relocation plans?

Ron Noades: Because of tax implications, roll over relief etc, we sold the freehold from the old company that owned the stadium to the present football club for £1.8 million. We also offered the local authority to put the sale proceeds - and we could make the ground worth £15-19 million - into trust to go to a new stadium. No Chairman in the country would willingly do that and then offer the club to the supporters for £1 including the asset of the stadium. They didn't even pay £1.8 million. That was loaned to the football club, interest free, to achieve the roll over relief which we couldn't get if it stayed in the original company. I effectively passed the stadium freehold to the present football club - which was originally a public company gone private - and then offered to put all the proceeds money into trust.

I couldn't have been more honest with the supporters but all the mistrust has been on their side regarding the sale proceeds of Griffin Park. On that basis I'm not prepared to be mistrusted by the supporters and have them working with the local council against what I believe to be the only strategy that will see Brentford prosper and be a decent sized and viable club.

Charles Koppel: When I took over at Wimbledon I had regular meetings with supporters and we had a reasonable dialogue. In terms of the work undertaken with Merton council, the Wimbledon Supporters Organisation was part of that process and was involved in meetings with Merton council.

The difficulty is facing up to the reality of the club's position and the emotional desire to achieve a certain aim. That is a difficult hurdle to overcome. The original rumour of Wimbledon moving to Milton Keynes came out in late 2000/early 2001. I had been approached by Milton Keynes, we were still conducting in London in looking at alternatives and I wasn't prepared to have a discussion at that time. The Wimbledon Supporters Organisation asked me to give an undertaking that we would never consider moving to Milton Keynes and in every single meeting I said I would not be prepared to do that because I cannot give a guarantee if that's the only solution for the club which keeps us alive. I have to have that alternative. I was open and honest with them from day one that I would not reject that as an alternative.

It was only after the work with Merton council and others was conducted we determined it was appropriate to move forward with Milton Keynes. After we made the announcement in respect of Milton Keynes I contacted the then Chair of the Supporters Organisation to meet to discuss the announcement implications and he said that he'd discussed it with his committee members and they felt until we gave an undertaking that we would not pursue Milton Keynes, they would not enter into a dialogue with the club.

So we were in a position whereby I couldn't reject the only alternative the club had to secure its future and the Supporters Organisation felt that unless I did that they couldn't enter into any dialogue with the club. It's a standoff and the relationship goes from bad to worse very quickly.

Lee Hoos: First of all, you have two Chairmen here who can reflect their clubs views. I'm a Board Member so the opinions I give are my personal opinions but facts are facts. My Chairman unfortunately couldn't be here.

Fans are not a homogenous voice. There are a lot of different people with different opinions so trying to get a broad mix of opinions is difficult. We use supporters club meetings and

focus groups - because if we speak just to the supporters club then non-members don't necessarily agree. We use the programme, the website, letter drops, Chairman's letters and press releases to communicate one way to supporters because that's how most supporters read the information.

In terms of getting information from fans, they're not shy about putting opinions on the website directed to us or sending letters. The focus group has been good because we pick people at random and bring them in and we get a much better mix of people that way.

Len Duvall: Ron, why hand over the club to the supporters?

Ron Noades: I've taken over three football clubs, Brentford was my fourth. They were all virtually on the point of liquidation when I took them over. 17 years at Crystal Palace and the only time it was ever solvent and viable was during my time there, and I built two stands. We had trading losses year by year and a transfer market where we covered our trading losses. We built the stands by player sales.

Now the industry has lost the ability to sell players and bring in transfer fees to offset trading losses. All of us here are probably losing money. The only way to cover that is to sell players or put the money in once your overdraft facility is reached.

The local paper in Brentford's inference is the local authority isn't cooperative because they can't deal with me. I believe that's just an excuse because I've never had a problem negotiating with Hounslow until very recently. I'm only interested in top grade football for a club I'm involved in. If I step outside the Bees United Supporters Trust have an opportunity of having a community club - not a big club - but it could be a good community club. The best chance of getting the local authority to support the club is for the supporters to run it and it is a community club. It remains to be seen whether that happens or what happened to me on two previous sites happens again with the third site that the local authority are now steering our supporters groups into considering. If that third site is withdrawn in a year's time for any particular reason on planning, we'll have gone through the process three times and the club's no further forward except it's closer to total liquidation because it's eaten up more resources and no longer has the ability to fund a further year's trading.

Len Duvall: What are your views about football trusts? Can their representatives be an honest broker sharing commercial confidentiality in a way that would gender some confidence from supporters about what you're trying to achieve?

Ron Noades: I supported the establishment of one. Boards of directors are no different to supporters; they're supporters with the business acumen to become a director. It's always a "them and us" situation between the terraces and the boardroom.

When I look at Bournemouth, it doesn't take long for the same abuse to be directed at whoever's in charge representing the football trust, who's replaced the Chairman who represented himself previously.

I also don't believe supporters have the football knowledge - which I believe is vital between chairman and manager, to understand the decisions a manager wants to make are in the interests of the club. Clubs have problems because managers spend money and nobody knows

if it's being spent wisely. How many people in those trusts have the knowledge to control a manager? How many go to watch the reserve and youth teams? Most watch the home and away matches and only look at the first team. They don't know if the club's being run right for the 9 year olds and the youth coaching.

So I don't have a great deal of confidence that the trusts can run the clubs. All the trusts I've seen, I've not seen a success story yet.

Len Duvall: Not to run the clubs though but as a provision of information? If they've been elected by the supporters and you can be sure confidential information is not shared widely. Some of the supporters I've come across seem to have a good insight into the boardrooms.

Ron Noades: We're all football supporters and it's easy to talk really good football on the terrace. We've already had criticism at our trust in Brentford of the Chair and he's not even in charge of the club yet! There's always animosity towards whoever is in charge, whether it's me or the Supporters Trust Chairman.

Lee Hoos: From a club standpoint we have no opinion to offer. Personally, more than happy to engage in dialogue with the supporters club, they are a legitimate stakeholder.

I wouldn't call it animosity as such but you can always do somebody else's job better than they can! It's helpful to share facts with supporters and they come up with a reasoned opinion. There are some sensitive facts that you can't share but, in terms of stakeholders, I think clubs should be engaging with them.

Charles Koppel: At Wimbledon we were supportive of the Dons Trust which was set up just prior to the strained relations between ourselves and supporters. We gave them a platform through the club programme to get their message across to other supporters and they represented their supporter interests in the process we went through with the commission hearings on our relocation. They ran and organised themselves very professionally and well. There's no doubt they've been successful in the short term since they themselves set up and set up AFC Wimbledon.

Long term, I think they'll end up in the same position. Over a period of time the very nature of football means that the questions will be asked of those in charge by those on the terraces and the supporters trust will be questioned by the supporters as to the decisions they make in respect of the club's future. How they handle it, from my perspective, the jury is out. A lot of these trusts are new and it will take time to see what transpires and whether there'll be a greater level of trust between supporters and supporters trusts because of their ownership in it, versus ourselves where we have a stake in the club and maybe are perceived differently. Time will tell. My personal opinion is they will find themselves in a similar position in years to come that we find ourselves in today.

Chair: Ron, you talked about big clubs and community clubs as though they were different things. Do you see the two as mutually exclusive?

Ron Noades: Football in the lower divisions will tend to become community clubs. The only viable clubs are going to be in the premier league. The upper echelon of division one will fight to get into the premier league because of the riches it brings. Other than that, we're all

running community clubs really and simply trying to be viable and trade without losing money.

We all provide a community facility. One of our planning conditions is the local authority is desperate for us to continue our football in the community scheme. We can only do that if we're viable as a business yet because we're a business they say they can't help us. They're expecting that business to provide, free, from our own resources, throughout the borough our football in the community schemes, yet we're still losing £500,000 a year.

Chair: Lee, you talked about consulting supporters. What about having a trust member on the board? Would you have a problem sharing decisions with a trust board member?

Lee Hoos: In terms of a club decision, we've never discussed that so I couldn't comment.

Mike Tuffrey: Local authorities have been mentioned in terms of planning powers and other support. Key stakeholders for them are of course their constituents. How do you keep local residents informed both about major redevelopment and the day-to-day management? What actions do you take?

Ron Noades: From Brentford's point of view we've had good relations with local residents. We've had meetings with them on our planning process and planning application and were probably in agreement about most things outside of the committee room. There were areas that we both agreed on and the local authority would seem to be opposing us.

One of the local authority clauses is they want 50% social housing unless we relocate in the borough of Hounslow, but our local residents don't want 50% social housing either which may give them a problem with property values.

The other thing is the public open space requirement. They don't want an open space that would be subject to vandalism. We know there's an open space provision and there has to be a design therefore that gives the open space requirement that the local authority require, but won't encourage vandals, and can be monitored and controlled and has some security for those living next to the stadium.

Brentford's a bit unique because it has no commercial facilities and therefore is really used once a week or once a fortnight. So our ground is very compatible with our residents. When I was at Selhurst Park it was totally the opposite. It was a seven day week operation which can upset local residents although it's necessary for commercial reasons. It's difficult to get happy residents and a viable football club. I believe we should be outside the densely populated residential areas.

Mike Tuffrey: I will gloss over your remarks about social housing without debate!

Charles Koppel: I've had limited dealings with residents because we didn't have that issue in Selhurst Park.

The only encounter I did have with residents was a resident's association living adjacent to Plough Lane. They contacted the club on the basis that politically the message being sent out was that Merton council were in favour of Wimbledon Football Club returning to Plough Lane

and a redevelopment of Plough Lane. The local residents were not as comfortable about it as the council had made out and wanted to express their opinion. They'd contacted the council and the council didn't respond. They contacted other organisations and no one had responded. They contacted the club and asked if I would attend a meeting, which I did do. Unbeknown to myself and others at the meeting the supporters organisation attended the meeting with a hidden recording device to record the meeting and they used it for their own PR purposes afterwards. There were approximately 35 people at the meeting.

The reality is that the residents around Plough Lane were not in favour of the club returning and the redevelopment of Plough Lane and they wanted to express that opinion.

I am entitled to discuss that matter with them and to give views on that and I can be sympathetic to residents who live close to a ground, have faced the realities of having football there historically and wonder what a redevelopment of that site would do for them.

It is a difficult issue because the impact of a football stadium on local residents is one we try to avoid. There are parking, traffic and public transport issues and we can't assume that just because residents live adjacent to a stadium site they're supporters of that club and the redevelopment of that ground.

The difficulty we had was the local residents as groups are not well organised. We were fighting a significant campaign with Merton council who were on an almost daily basis attacking the club in the press and there was a great deal of public animosity and accusations flying back and forth. Merton council had stated the residents were in favour of the redevelopment of Plough Lane and, in fairness, we assisted the residents in putting out a press release expressing their view. We didn't do that because we wanted to undermine the process but we felt that if you are in a position where you are looking to achieve a result, you cannot sweep under the carpet the views you don't like. Because we put the local residents' views into the process we got accused for doing that. That's highly inappropriate. Residents were being dealt a blow by the council and those who wanted a redevelopment of that site whereby the express implication was your views are irrelevant and we don't care. We have to acknowledge that residents have a lot to say and they're very important in this process.

Lee Hoos: I agree with Charles, residents are important, but people who live a couple of miles from Fulham will have an entirely different view to those who live directly opposite the stadium. Even if you are a fan and live across the road, when you come home after work and Fulham are playing and you can't get a parking space, you're not going to be happy.

Mike Tuffrey: None of you mentioned practical things like newsletters and committee consultations.

Lee Hoos: We did have newsletters, flyer drops and a hotline concerning the new stadium for residents and supporters with questions. We developed an initial model of the stadium at Craven Cottage and invited residents and supporters to look. Also signs and bulletin boards to keep residents informed of the stadium development, when the next game is and other issues that might be bothering them.

There are a lot of different interest groups involved, for example, the sailing club has a vested interest in one part of the stadium, but the residents from Fulham may have an issue and the

residents from Putney may have another issue. We did try to meet with all the various interest groups. Also English Heritage because we have a listed site. It was an extensive and difficult process.

Mike Tuffrey: How does it work now at Loftus Road?

Lee Hoos: It's done jointly with the people at Loftus Road. Last week we sent out 10,000 flyers alerting residents to a Sky game on Monday night.

Mike Tuffrey: Practical things like parking schemes on match days. Are you all actively working on those issues?

Lee Hoos: We're not. Parking schemes are down to the local borough. We would be happy to assist in any way but it's not within our powers to do anything in terms of parking schemes.

Len Duvall: Was the escalation of costs from £60 million to £100 million to develop the Cottage to do with the issues around UDPs?

Lee Hoos: I don't know about UDPs, I wasn't involved in the planning process. Original estimates for the costs were in the region of £60 million on a pen and paper estimate which increased to £70 million when the architect arrived and by the time the process was completed it was £100 million. That's due to various factors; 106 orders implemented as a result of planning permission and access. We're surrounded on three sides by water, a park and residential flats so the only access route is via narrow residential streets and trying to use the river but it's tidal so difficult in terms of logistics and planning. Costs of any construction project tend to escalate.

Len Duvall: One of your colleagues at Arsenal provided the local authority and the GLA with access to books when they applied for their new stadium. Most big developers now take this open book approach. Would Fulham or Brentford have been happy to do the same about a future application for support from their local authorities or others? Obviously it would be commercially confidential.

Lee Hoos: Sounds an interesting concept, yes.

Len Duvall: It's not a new concept.

Ron Noades: We've already done it. Brentford's administration details, financial position, cash flows, profit and loss, everything's been sent to the local authority. We have a supporters trust member on our board and perhaps understand now a little more about how difficult it is to run the club. There's nothing confidential at Brentford.

Len Duvall: And that still hasn't enabled you to move forward in terms of the things you alluded to earlier?

Ron Noades: It's probably worked against us because it's given the local paper the opportunity to criticise everything about the club and the local authority don't believe we're likely to go into administration and need help from them or we'll cease to trade. They think it's something we're saying in order to obtain something.

People have the attitude that we'll carry on trading and someone will put the money in. It'll keep going and we don't need help.

Len Duvall: Have the conditions attached to the sale of Craven Cottage or Griffin Park proved a barrier to securing the long term solution to your problems, in terms of planning issues?

Lee Hoos: Craven Cottage hasn't been sold so I don't know.

Len Duvall: What work has gone on with the adjoining boroughs to identify sites?

Ron Noades: To be fair, nobody wants a football club in their backyard. At one time we were trying to link a new stadium site with the planning application on Griffin Park. As soon as you do that you set up another group of protesters on the new site that don't want you there and are fighting to stop the planning consent on your existing site.

You've got to take it out of the planning process in the local authority's hands because you starting coming up against people with a vested interest. Every councillor acts for the constituency they represent. If we go to Feltham, three councillors are acting on behalf of the residents of Feltham and they don't want us in Feltham. Somebody really has to designate where we can relocate to, where we can share and where we don't need a planning committee where the council's planning officers might support permission but the planning committee, as individual councillors representing voters, turn it down. This has just happened to AFC Wimbledon's planning application to return to the borough of Merton. Merton council turned down AFC Wimbledon's planning application to play at Bishops Road, Mitcham. I can't believe that after all the noise they've made about trying to get Wimbledon to come back to the borough.

Charles Koppel: When we looked at alternatives for Wimbledon we took a 25 mile radius from Plough Lane - which is the entire area of London within the M25 - and excluded metropolitan open land, areas of conservation and other areas prevented from stadia or other development. We contacted every single local authority within that 25 mile radius of the areas that were left and we went from there to the outskirts of Brighton. Every single one wrote back with a no.

Len Duvall: You're not advocating taking it off the planning process completely, you mean someone has to be above some local interests?

Ron Noades: Yes.

Len Duvall: How do you balance the local interests?

Ron Noades: If we look at the M25 around London there's plenty of opportunities for stadia sites to be designated to serve London. Perhaps we can have transport other than the car to those sites. There's plenty of sites that can be designated without interfering with any residents at all.

My supporters want to play in Brentford. I don't. I believe football's future is out with motorway access. I've travelled Europe looking at grounds and the best examples are in Germany. Usually there's a small stadium alongside a large stadium and you walk for 10 minutes to those stadiums. You don't walk through residential houses. The best example in England is the National Sports Centre at Crystal Palace. Yet when I tried for Crystal Palace to play there, the GLC were happy, they handed it over to Bromley and Bromley offered me only 30,000 capacity, didn't want football there at all, and put every obstruction in the way.

Chair: One of the issues we're looking at is transport issues to stadia and we may be making recommendations to the Mayor. Lee, can you give any reassurances that a situation similar to Wimbledon won't occur with Fulham?

Lee Hoos: We're looking at all options at the moment including a revised scheme for Craven Cottage. The biggest problem was we never had a fall back plan. Our plan was always Craven Cottage. It's no secret we have looked at alternative sites but within the borough of Hammersmith and Fulham and that's been our prime focus.

Chair: Just within the borough?

Lee Hoos: Yes. 30% of our fan base is in the south west of London, the A3 corridor, going out to Surrey. We've just surveyed our fans and had 1,500 respondents. Of those, 80% were born in Fulham and subsequently moved out of the area.

Charles Koppel: On the community aspect, the difficulty we faced was with everything surrounding the club and its desire to move back to Merton, we only had 640 season ticket holders who came from Merton. When you look at the community aspect of a club is it the original ground, the place where it originally started, or is it a part of a fan base that it exists for? If it's only 640 people and the rest lived in much wider areas, you have to question the implicit desire or obligation to return to an area which doesn't service the majority of fans. It's idealistic but it did mean Merton, along with all the other boroughs we contacted, became an impossible dream for the club.

Chair: What was the total number of season ticket holders?

Charles Koppel: Approximately 3,500.

Lee Hoos: I have no idea what percentage of the 1,500 were season ticket holders or Fulham members.

Chair: We may pursue you for that information.

Len Duvall: The support for the club and grounds are important to supporters. You keep the brand name Wimbledon and relocate to Milton Keynes. The nearest similarity I can think of is rugby league moving down to Cheltenham.

Charles Koppel: You can't realistically suggest that Wimbledon Football Club, ground sharing with Crystal Palace at Selhurst Park in Croydon for 12 years, has not already eroded significantly any identity the club might have had with Plough Lane. It was suggested the club would move to Dublin or merged with Crystal Palace, and talk about that with QPR. This is

not a new issue for Wimbledon Football Club, this has been going on for an extended period of time. It wasn't that I became involved, sat down and thought how can I create the most amount of trouble for myself, the club and the shareholders? I'll move to Milton Keynes! That was a last gasp effort.

The alternative was to close the club. We had a majority shareholder who was not prepared to fund a club on the basis of its existence at Selhurst Park. With the very public debate and media coverage on the move to Milton Keynes, not one single person approached the club and said, "We'll buy it and find an alternate solution". Not even for £1. No one ever came and wanted to take the obligation and find a solution.

The easy part was to walk away. The hard part was to try and secure the club's future.

Len Duvall: Was the South London location not an issue, rather than moving to Bedford?

Charles Koppel: The club had no identity at Selhurst Park, that was eroded on a daily basis. When I first became involved at Wimbledon the supporters websites had a ticking clock and it said 3,442 days since a home game. That clock was on the website until the Milton Keynes issue came about and that was then forgotten about and the issue became about Milton Keynes. It was an issue for them. It was never their ground. No one ever enjoyed the club being at Crystal Palace. It was branded in their colours, their stadium, their logos and their staff. They received all the catering revenues and revenue generation out of the stadium. The club was significantly prejudiced there over a long period of time. The estimate in lost revenue to the club in terms of its tenancy is in excess of £50 million over its tenancy there.

Chair: If it's been a problem from the beginning, why has it crystallised at this point? Why wasn't it raised years ago?

Charles Koppel: In fairness it's easier for me to say because I've seen the work but a significant effort was made over a long period of time to find the club a solution. Every now and then the more fanciful ideas of Dublin and other things came along. Some might accuse the Milton Keynes idea as being similarly fanciful. However the reality is that solutions were sought for the club going back a very long time. The last time Wimbledon Football Club had support in the borough of Merton was in the late 1980s and that was Conservative support. When the political landscape of the borough changed, that support changed with it. If I'm correct Merton council has remained Labour since the late 1980s or 1990, and that support has never returned.

Merton council never had in its planning framework the desire of seeing a possible development for a football stadium in the borough. Milton Keynes, without any football club, had it as a planning intention, over a significant period of time, to build a stadium. That's the difference between a council looking to find solutions and opportunities versus those not looking to create an opportunity.

Chair: We have written evidence from Merton which we'll pick up on in our report. We've heard of unhappy experiences of ground share. Do you think it can ever work? It does work in Italy where it's built from the beginning to be a ground share.

Ron Noades: At Selhurst Park I've had a ground sharing arrangement with Charlton and Wimbledon. It helped Charlton because it enabled them to reacquire the Valley because the landlord at that time was being difficult so they moved away. This comes back to my earlier point.

Ground sharing is marvellous for the club owning the freehold, the home team, that's earning the revenue that Wimbledon, for instance, has not been able to get whilst at Selhurst Park. Ground sharing only works long term if a new stadium is built and two clubs move to it. It's a short term solution for Brentford, say, to go to Loftus Road. It isn't something our supporters or Loftus Road supporters would accept, but if we both built a new West London stadium both sets of supporters probably would go with that. You have to have a new ground.

Lee Hoos: The Italian model that you talk about is very different to England because the municipality owns the stadium and two teams share, the same as in Germany. My personal opinion, not a club opinion, is an Englishman's home is his castle. Nobody wants to rent from anybody else; it's good to have your own place.

Chair: Do you think it's reasonable to insist on an all seater stadium when you can rise and fall very rapidly between different divisions?

Lee Hoos: That's really a health and safety question. Legislation is pretty clear that all premier league and first division clubs that have been there for three years have to convert to an all seater stadium.

Chair: Do you think three years is long enough? If you get promoted and have to get all the plans together for redevelopment or location within that time period, is that feasible?

Lee Hoos: I don't know. I think it's difficult. If a club now were in the same position as Fulham were in five years ago, where you've rapidly gone from the second to the first, to the premier league, under premier league rules now we wouldn't have been able to do it because we wouldn't have met the criteria. We got promoted after two seasons in the first division and premier rules state you must have an all seater ground to participate in the premier league. Taylor report aside, that becomes even more difficult.

Chair: Is there anything we as a Committee can say to the Football Association?

Lee Hoos: It's a league rule, not a FA rule. The health and safety concerns are valid and I wouldn't want to ignite that whole debate of terracing versus seats again.

Chair: Were any sanctions threatened to you at any stage in terms of improving the ground?

Lee Hoos: No.

Chair: Thank you very much for giving your evidence.

The Chair: You've heard what the clubs said about communicating with supporters, would you like to each expand on that and give us your experiences of club and supporter discussions?

Kris Stewart: In our old relationship with what was Wimbledon Football Club, over the time I've been a supporter, communications between the club and supporters has never been fantastic. Charles Koppel mentioned the fanciful schemes concerning the relocation of our club. Previous owners took the view that they were the club.

Essentially the club spent its time looking for different ways to talk to supporters because they didn't like what the supporters thought. When the Independent Supporters Association gave the wrong answer, they widened the net. When the Official Fans Forum that they set up gave the wrong answer, they stopped communicating with it. When the Supporters Trust gave the wrong answer they withdrew the initially supported attitude. That's the communication with the club as it was.

With its name change to AFC Wimbledon, the club is its fans, as every football club should be. There are 2,600 members of the Trust, owning the club 100%, and making the big decisions together. A group of people come together to run a club for the benefit of the supporters and for the communities around.

John McGlashan: Communication's been wonderful in the last 24 hours! It's fair to say the club in recent years had a desire to communicate with us. The problem was that the club and supporters didn't agree with each other, rather than not communicating. That hasn't always been the case. The existing supporters groups were founded because of a problem between the club and the supporters and there was no communication at all at one point. It's different now and I hope it's going to be different in the future as well because of the changes that are being experienced at the club now. There is a culture change at the club and I think in football too.

Tom Greatrex: I think part of the reason I'm here and Back to the Cottage exists is because the communication between club and fans has effectively broken down in the past year or so. That's a sad situation. Lee Hoos was talking about communicating one way and that characterises the position we're in. The club's chosen route of communication seems to be the Evening Standard or press officers from Harrods. That means there's a huge gulf in trust existing between fans and club. Ron Noades was talking about the level of acrimony that exists and part of the reason there's some degree of acrimony at Fulham is that the trust has broken down.

It's not helped by the fact - detailed in our written submission - that the club says in August 2002 we're going back to Craven Cottage after two years, or the escalation from £60 million not being true, in November 2002 we're 99% sure of going back to Craven Cottage, and then it transpires that in September 2002 a contract was signed for the option of selling the Craven Cottage ground for £15 million. It's not surprising there's unease and not surprising communication is the thing many supporters think has been lacking, particularly in recent times, and when there are comments of the tenor that people questioning the club are "so-called supporters", my view is it's exactly the opposite. It's because fans are so committed they're in a position where they're asking questions and scrutinising the club. I hope that supporters trusts give fans a vehicle to engage properly with the board. Fulham fans don't

want to be in conflict with the club. We want to be working with the club to make sure it's successful and viable in the long term.

Chair: There often are tensions between supporters and residents. Do you have liaison or could there be a better approach to dealing with that link up, because you obviously have some shared interests as well as differences?

Tom Greatrex: It depends what you call a resident. If you call a resident someone who's involved in a pressure group which is formed for a particular purpose and includes the same people involved with pressure groups with different names a few years before, whose basic standpoint is they don't like the football club being there, then there's not a huge point in engaging them. Various different groups have existed around Fulham stadium in the last 15 to 20 years when there's been doubt over the future of the club, and been united in one thing; they don't want the football club there, despite the fact it's been there for 100 years and was there before any house or resident was there.

If you mean residents in terms of the community and the wider residents within Fulham, we know from the planning process that went on in 1999 and 2000 that there was a considerable level of support amongst Fulham residents for Fulham Football Club and the club staying in Fulham, and therefore redeveloping the Craven Cottage site.

John McGlashan: Our experience is the people of Brentford are proud to have the club in their area. The residents around the ground itself appear to feel the club is a good neighbour, but our ground is only used really once a fortnight and nothing goes on during the week. If the club were to submit plans to the local authority to convert it into a seven day a week stadium that would cause a problem to local residents because the area couldn't cope. The residents' views are probably reflected in the use the stadium gets.

Kris Stewart: People in Wimbledon have always been proud of their football club and the strength of that feeling always surprised us in terms of when we did work in the local community and people identified with Wimbledon Football Club, despite the club having made no effort to identify itself with Wimbledon for 12 years.

We did some work with ICM to find out feelings in the local area and found overwhelming support for a return to the borough. As far as people in the borough were concerned, Plough Lane was a suitable site for a football stadium.

It's sometimes difficult to engage with residents and football clubs and supporters have never done it particularly well over the years. What happens is there are various groups of residents and it's difficult to know how representative they might be of feeling in the local area. You need a positive engagement with people generally in the local area rather than your football club Chairman telling secret meetings of local resident associations that football supporters are not the kind of people you want on your doorstep and encouraging them to oppose a return back to the borough and paying for them to put that out to the public, that's not going to build links with the local community.

Chair: How easy is to get a united front amongst supporters? We've heard scepticism from the clubs about the ability to get support for directors or management of a club if it's run by a trust. Can it work?

John McGlashan: We don't know if it's going to work. We laid the foundations for our supporters trust five years ago and we're now very successful. The problems that other club's supporters trusts have had is they've been formed in times of crisis. Wimbledon and Fulham are perfect examples.

We had a totally different approach and it's been a softly, softly approach. We've evolved over a long time. The benefit to us is that our supporters know who we are and we gain experience over a long time about how a club runs itself and we're probably in a better position than many supporters trusts around the country. Lincoln City and Chesterfield have both been run by their supporters. Chesterfield was formed in times of crisis and their supporters are, I believe, doing a reasonable job, as are the supporters at Lincoln City. I hope York City is also successfully and we can draw on all their experience.

Kris Stewart: In any 2,500 group of people there'll be different opinions but if those people have the platform and opportunity to express their views then that's a different situation from club and different groups of supporters having entrenched positions among themselves.

Up to now with local business people running football clubs and the financial disasters in England football, that hasn't been successful and we need to try something else. Supporters clubs have often taken over clubs in times of crisis so not with a clear playing field to start with. In those difficult circumstances I believe they've performed magnificently, and York City is another example of that happening.

Tom Greatrex: Fulham is not the biggest club in London and never will be. London is a unique situation where there are currently 12 premier league clubs so it's different to one club towns.

The last couple of weeks have shown a change of emphasis from Fulham Football Club and we want to work with the club on that because we need to look at where we're heading and where we should be, and rather than being the Manchester United of the south, I think Fulham's secure future lies in being the Charlton south west London. Charlton has gone back to its own ground after a period away. Charles Koppel mentioned an identity being eroded whilst a club is ground sharing but Charlton have come back from the abyss on that. They had very low crowds even when in the top division. Going back to the Valley, rebuilding the stadium and redeveloping the community feeling of the club gives them a healthier position and they made a paper profit in the last season.

In terms of a trust working or not, I don't know. We're just establishing trusts and we hope to be a constructive part of the relationships that make up a football club.

Len Duvall: Tell us what you think of the view that you're not up to the job and don't understand the game? Charlton has a bit of trust in their board. What would be the situation you'd look for in trust and confidence eroding the difference between "us and them"? You obviously want the club to do well on the pitch and financially. What are your aspirations for the club?

John McGlashan: The traditional method of running football clubs with businessmen as directors, I don't have a problem with. I'd like to see those same business men work in

partnership with the supporters. Then you get the benefits and disadvantages from both sides. We started off talking about communication and communicating is very important and is going to solve our problems.

Kris Stewart: If you're comparing with the way football clubs have been run up to now we're on to a winner to start with as what's happened up to now certainly hasn't worked. You have huge numbers of professional people in supporters trusts; accountants, lawyers, surveyors, stadium architects and planning experts, which we've found very useful. There are also people with communication skills and PR and advertising experience etc. There is a tremendous wealth of business and commercial experience as well as the game of football as it's been played from the ISMAN league up to the premiership.

Chair: What are the ambitions of a club if the supporters are running it and providing the investment as compared to big business? Does that scale down the ability to perform on the pitch because of the purchase of players? Is there a correlation between the two?

Tom Greatrex: I don't think there's a reason why a big club and a community club should be at different ends of the spectrum. The Charlton experience has done both. That's a model that most London clubs should be looking towards achieving.

Since Back to the Cottage has started we've realised the amount of ability, expertise and skills that exists among Fulham's fan base is immense; in law, planning, media, finance and all across the spectrum. Whilst Ron Noades might be right to say they don't have the experience of running a club, it doesn't mean they don't have the capacity to be able to do it and that doesn't preclude them from having an opportunity to do it either.

Kris Stewart: We haven't yet had to pay a transfer fee so we're not in that situation just yet. At the moment Wimbledon's situation is we're putting money into the bank or possibly into the purchase of a long lease at our current stadium rather than spending it on players. Obviously we're different to clubs in the league.

Is the ambition lessened by the money coming from supporters? To be honest, where does all the money come from? Sky TV money and gate money comes from football supporters. People sponsor football because they think football supporters will buy their products. All the money comes from supporters anyway, whether it's directly or indirectly, the money still comes from the same place.

Football finance is in a mess and there are things football authorities should be doing to address that, but there's no limit to the ambition except the depth of the supporters' pockets.

Chair: John, you sent us Bees United's proposals concerning stadium development. Did you have any input from the GLA or Transport for London into those plans? If not, could they help further with those plans?

John McGlashan: The input came from us, not the other way. We took our proposals to the local authority originally and we asked them if they could arrange for us to meet various other bodies, which we have done. We met the London Development Agency and the Council met jointly with the LDA and Transport for London. I've met Dave Wetsall from Transport for London and Tony Arbour from the GLA and our local MPs have pushed the project forward

for us. We've tried to keep a flow of information going in to the various authorities. We haven't had much come back to be honest.

Chair: What would you like to see? We've heard about transport implications of stadia.

John McGlashan: Our proposal originally was the stadium should be built at a railway junction at Kew Bridge, on the mainline from Hounslow and Reading, and also a junction on the North London line. We were looking a perhaps the opportunity to share our ground with another club, not a football club, and we felt the railway could be used around North London because it ran round to Stratford where it could link up with the new fast trains to the continent. We proposed a mono rail which was to run out initially to the M4 where they'd be a park and ride facility and it would relieve traffic congestion along the M4 and the A4, but also to extend it out to the airport as well. We were looking to convert the site into a transport hub and have our stadium as the centre point.

Chair: On ground share, Wimbledon is about to be on the landlord side, having been on the other side for nearly 13 years, how are you going to structure the relationship so they're not in the same position as you've been for 13 years?

Kris Stewart: The situation at the moment is we've been advised to buy the long leasehold interest at Kings Meadow which is where we play at the moment, sharing with Kingstonian FC, under landlords that are neither us nor them so the technical legal situation for Kingstonian wouldn't change and they'd continue to be tenants at the ground. It's their ground although it's called Kings Meadow and none of the seat colours or access routes etc will be changing.

It's very important to feel at home in the ground you're playing football in. The experience for most of us at Selhurst Park was it never felt like home, even for supporters who came along after 1991 and we'd left Plough Lane. Not only what the stadium looks like but who works there and how they work, how they behave and how supporters are treated. Knowing money spent on the stadium is helping your club. These are all very important to us. Having been on the wrong end of it for so long we know how not to do it.

Kingstonian football supporters are currently working on setting up a supporters trust and the Dons Trust is doing what we can to help them. That will give us a representative, open, democratic body to come to those agreements which really is the only way you can share a stadium and keeping supporters of both clubs happy.

Chair: Do you think ground share can ever work? Would it be preferable to continue ground sharing or to move outside the M25 if you were presented with those options?

John McGlashan: We've talked a lot about community and clubs in the community. It seems a bit bizarre to move a club out of its community and expect it to be a community club.

Moving our club outside the M25, I don't really see it's going to attract Brentford's own supporters out of Brentford, they won't travel.

Chair: So if the option were that or ground share?

John McGlashan: It depends where the ground share is I suppose. We've been offered a couple of ground share opportunities over the last couple of years. One was outside the M25, the other was at Kingston, which is not a long way from Brentford but the people who support Brentford don't want to travel somewhere else to watch the club. They want to watch them at Brentford or as close to Brentford as possible. Kingston is not close to Brentford in London terms and it's not easy to get to. Travelling around London is difficult. I don't see any prospect of clubs' supporters in London easily accepting a ground share.

Tom Greatrex: Ground sharing at Loftus Road isn't working in the sense that crowds are down. Even though you could say Loftus Road is within the borough of Hammersmith and Fulham so it's local to Fulham, there's a distinction in the identity people have. The borough of Hammersmith & Fulham is an artificial boundary. As Lee Hoos said, the A3 corridor is where the Fulham fan base lives but where they come from is Fulham and the identity many fans have is with Fulham as a place which has a significance within their own family history. That's an important issue. Any relocation away from Fulham puts the club in jeopardy because a big part of the identity of the club disappears.

With a lack of alternative sites within Fulham, there's only one site to build a stadium and that's Craven Cottage which has had a ground on it for 100 years. The way forward for Fulham is to look at building a stadium there which is realistic within our ambitions and what our ambitions should be and is more cost effective. No supporters have £60 million or £100 million to spend on a stadium, but it doesn't mean you can't build up a stadium gradually and develop your club in those routes.

Moving outside the M25 I'd have thought would be in opposition of the GLA, considering the London Plan and the GLA's responsibility to look after, develop and keep going London communities. Football clubs play an important part in the community. Some residents might suggest it's tokenist, but the residents of Fulham know about the football club and it's part of their area, borough and community. Moving it away puts you in jeopardy of losing the identity of the club altogether. Ground sharing somewhere else or moving outside the M25 I don't think is an option enabling the football club to survive in the long term.

Chair: So it's better to stay where you are and limit the expansion and growth opportunities than to move at all?

Kris Stewart: Better than to move out of your area, if that's the choice.

John McGlashan: Yes.

Tom Greatrex: Absolutely.

Chair: Thank you very much indeed.

Mike Tuffrey: Can you give us your perspective on what you've heard? I'm surprised we haven't heard more about the clubs trying on a day to day basis to be good neighbours. What more could be done?

Matt Harmer: We've always found that it's been us as a residents group taking the lead with the club and getting together with them to work out problems. We started a few years ago dealing with basic things like car parking and litter collection after games. When the planning process started at Griffin Park we found a lot of mistrust from the club towards us. They wasted nine or ten months thinking they knew what we wanted without asking us. There was a small amount of mistrust between us and some of the supporters groups which we got over straightaway by making sure we met with them and lines of communication were open. Very early on we realised we were moving towards the same objective.

Robert Scott: So far as Arsenal is concerned it's probably atypical in that it's a very big club and an international brand name. Fundamentally such clubs don't need local supporters and the local residents don't need the club, there's no financial or economic benefit or dependence on having the club in the area, so there's no particular reason for the club and the local residents to interact, except of course when the club wants something out of the Council and it tends to push up the PR and put out a few more leaflets and make signs of engaging.

At the same time, if you happen to be interested in football then I think Arsenal does engage and there are lots of local people for whom Arsenal is enormously important and who feel they get a lot from it. It's easy to exaggerate, however, the numbers. Around Highbury is an enormously diverse population and very large parts of it are simply not interested in football so wouldn't really wish to engage with the club particularly.

Roger Weston: As far as the residents in the neighbourhood of Craven Cottage are concerned, our relationship with the club of late has been good. We've met and discussed issues - not necessarily agreed with them - but there's been a dialogue and it's been constructive.

Concerning supporters groups and local residents, what you've heard tonight about local residents' views is wrong. I've been Chairman of Bishops Park Coordinating Group for ten years and the group's been around longer than that. Our issue is not about the club staying there or not, it's about the stadiums they want to build. That's what we opposed and that's what the Fulham Alliance opposed. It's regrettable they take that view and express our views when they're not accurate.

Mike Tuffrey: I'm intrigued that there's no need. Surely good neighbourliness should apply. We've heard in some instances there is regular dialogue. Why in Islington there isn't this outreach as a normal way of doing business?

Alison Carmichael: ISCA represents a lot of community groups around the football club site in Highbury but it was set up particularly for the planning process of Arsenal's very large development.

We get leafleted very regularly and comprehensively prior to matches and we're told when match dates are changed. This has only happened in the last year and a half or so. It's hasn't been going on for a long time. Same with Arsenal's relationship with schools in the neighbourhood. This has really been bulked up in the last year and a bit in tandem with their requests for planning permission from Islington council.

Because it is a large premiere league club it doesn't have to engage with residents. The teams don't live in the area, they don't train in the area. There's no focus for the team in the area.

Mike Tuffrey: Are there ways to institutionalise good neighbourliness, so it doesn't get turned on when there's a need?

Robert Scott: It's difficult. As part of the planning consent there were enormous numbers of 106 agreements and it has put into those that there should be a formal liaison committee comprising various representatives of the community and the club. I don't know when this is going to happen or how it will happen. It's some months since the 106 was in place and we haven't heard any more about it.

A lot of the resident and community groups are quite reluctant to get drawn into this process, partly because they see it either as ineffectual tokenism or, if they do have a real and genuine input into what happens, they're quite nervous about being held responsible for what the liaison committee might say, because of the ramifications over a large area. This issue came up during the planning process and the majority of the 15 or so residents' groups at the informal discussions between the club, supporters and residents groups didn't want to have any part of a formal liaison committee.

I'm sure it wouldn't apply in smaller, more local clubs but it certainly applies where Arsenal is concerned.

Matt Harmer: We formalised our liaison committee about six years ago. We make sure it's held every three months, it's chaired by one of our local councillors and the people who attend are relevant to the problem, i.e. council officers to do with litter collection, car parking and community police officers. The purpose of the meetings is to find out, if something's gone wrong, why, but the focus is on making sure it doesn't happen again. Most meetings are now over very quickly because any problems are dealt with quickly and we move on.

Mike Tuffrey: What about the accusation that you're not representative of opinion in your areas and you moved to the area knowing there was a club there and these problems go with the territory?

Matt Harmer: Griffin Park is smaller than Highbury but anybody can come to our meetings and if they disagree they will say so.

Yes, everybody did know they moved to an area with a football ground but these are simple problems that can be solved. It's not insurmountable to make sure there's a litter collection after a match. It's simple. Sometimes it needs pushing through to make sure the process is in place.

Roger Weston: We've held public meetings and tried to gauge local opinion, particularly when the last development first came out and the architect and the club were invited to tell us what they were planning to do. My group has a meeting at least once a year, this issue always comes up, and our concerns continue.

Mike Tuffrey: Moving on to the big redevelopments, do you think there's a tendency that because this is football the councils are more prone to give permission than if it was a supermarket or office block?

Matt Harmer: Our case is different in that our interest in the planning process is what the football club wanted to build on Griffin Park after they'd left. It therefore doesn't apply directly. I think our objections were with what Brentford Football Club wanted to build there rather than the general principle of them leaving and going. We got a fair hearing from the local authority.

Mike Tuffrey: Did you feel the councillors were adopting a not in my back yard approach or could they see the interests of the borough as a whole?

Matt Harmer: They followed the recommendations of the planning officers. The majority of people living around Griffin Park liked the football club and wanted them to stay. The decision we took was that even though the majority would prefer the club to stay, we can't make them stay, legally or morally, so our focus was always on working with the other stakeholders, the club itself, and the supporters groups to find a solution that would enable them to get what they want; to release the value of Griffin Park, and we could get what we want; to see a development that benefited the people who live there and the area as a whole.

Roger Weston: The situation in Fulham is clear and the borough has been very supportive of the club. It's one of their objectives that it stays there. It has a site policy in its UDP which protects it for sport recreational use. That's been their policy. For the stadium we were asked to consider there were a number of other policies the borough had. These were clearly summarised in the officers' report, and on balance, because of the objective of keeping the club there, they overruled the issues of conservation area, listed building, encroachment on the river and all those things that were against it. The borough had a view and stuck to it. To that extent the club's been fortunate the borough has a site policy in place and kept to it.

Alison Carmichael: As far as Arsenal's development plans are concerned we felt there were many policy breaches, particularly to do with employment, height of buildings, density, lack of open space and amenity space. It wasn't just a football club, it was a multi-use entertainment complex to be in use seven days a week throughout the year.

As far as the major event frequency was concerned, it was going to be an increase from 26 times a year to possibly 45, according to the Arsenal planning consultant at the planning meeting.

Would a supermarket development have had approval to completely remove over 60 businesses from a protected industrial site employing over 2,500 people? I doubt they would without the Secretary of State calling it in for a public enquiry. We felt, and were supported in our view by all the other support groups as well as Arsenal fans and season ticket holders and bond holders who support the objection to the stadium development, that Arsenal was getting favouritism in the planning process. We still believe that and we are concerned at what we see as a complete and utter disregard for planning policy, from the council policy through to the Mayor's draft London Plan policy up to planning policy guidance.

Chair: On the ground share issue, what would your view as residents be? Potentially it's a way of solving the problem but it at least doubles the number of games at a ground.

Matt Harmer: We've already got it. The London Broncos play at Griffin Park and their season runs from February to October. They managed it extraordinarily well in terms of consultation. Before they announced the plans to come and play they leafleted and wrote to all residents around the ground. They're always communicating if fixtures get changed. There's free tickets if you want them. They've gone about it the right way. It is added disruption but they've sugared the pill very well. It could work if communication lines stay open.

Robert Scott: ISCA's position in relationship to Arsenal's proposal for Ashburton Grove is that transport is not going to work well anyway for such a large number of people and that 38,000 coming into the area 26 or 28 times a year is just about acceptable. A lot of people enjoy it, despite the disruptions. Our feeling is that 60,000 people on a not significantly improved public transport system will be lucky to mitigate the impact. To have the number of events going up from, say, 28 to between 40 and 45 events a year is going to be an unacceptable impact. If we're right then 60 events a year through sharing with, say, Spurs would be very difficult. If though ISCA's analysis of the transport, economic, commercial and amenity impact on the area is wrong, and it all works splendidly, if it can work 45 times a year then it can probably work 60 times a year.

This would have benefits for two large tenants of a single ground. The fixed price of building this stadium, if it gets built, will be high and is going to lead to a lot of indebtedness. If you can split that amongst two tenants then there are obvious advantages to those tenants.

However, there are all the problems about ownership which earlier speakers have referred to. If Arsenal is going to build an Arsenal stadium with Arsenal logos and seats and so on it seems quite clear that that would be unlikely to work there.

On the more general point, we do think public transport is the key to finding suitable sites. The public transport has to work. You also need to find sites which provide a buffer away from the residents, the buffer size being relevant to the size of the stadium. We feel putting it down in Ashburton Grove is not appropriate because of the density of the residential population. But, in principle, given the shortage of sites and the economic advantages to ground sharing, if a way can be found to build neutral grounds in appropriate locations, it seems to have a lot of strategic advantages in planning terms so, yes, in principle, in the future, a very good idea.

Chair: What do you think an appropriate location is?

Robert Scott: I haven't studied the map of London as obviously a lot of these football clubs have. The evidence has been before us that finding anything which is remotely likely is very hard, especially for the larger clubs.

The transport has got to work, whether by car, train, bus or by tube. The tubes carry the most traffic most easily. On the other hand you have to look at where your supporter base is coming from. Half of Arsenal's comes from outside the M25, relatively small amounts come from Islington and the City area. The main focus of fans is near the M25 so that might be

possible. I don't know. Maybe it's not economically possible. Transport is one essential thing.

The other essential thing, depending on the size of the club, is to find a site which is not surrounded by housing and that includes not funding the stadium by putting up houses around it, as Arsenal is proposing to do. Also, in our view, it's important to keep big stadia away from vibrant commercial and shopping centres. The two don't mix well in our view.

Roger Weston: Craven Cottage is surrounded by narrow streets, the tube station's some way away. When Fulham played at home there was always congestion. I'm sure residents will be concerned about doubling the number of days of congestion. I'm happy to agree with the supporters.

Chair: The supporters seem keen to stay at the same ground. Is that what you as residents support? A small club staying at the site. It's expansion that you have a problem with.

Matt Harmer: Sharing with a rugby league club means less games as their season is shorter than the football season so it's about an extra ten games overall, and the crowds are smaller. I wouldn't want to see expansion of the ground to support sharing of another team, especially in a streetscape like ours which are very small and cramped streets.

As a football fan of another club that's been through a ground share it's a fairly abhorrent situation that doesn't benefit the sharing club at all.

Alison Carmichael: Arsenal, once again, is slightly different because it already has a 38,000 seater stadium, and it appears to be doing well. We would be very happy, as residents, if Arsenal stayed where it was. We don't think expansion beyond 40,000 is possible for such a densely populated urban environment.

Roger Weston: The site is very restricted. The chances to expand are limited. If someone came up with a scheme, that would be interesting, but looking at the saga that's gone on on that site for 15 years with property values being the main points on the agenda, it seems to me, regrettably, a pipe dream.

Chair: We had some written evidence about problems with match day parking. What are your views on match day parking and whether it could be done better?

Alison Carmichael: Arsenal has a match day scheme which surrounds the Highbury stadium. One of the important points to note concerning match day schemes as opposed to normal CPZs is that a match day scheme kicks in for a very concentrated period of time, four or so hours, when that area is not allowed to have certain types of car, i.e. supporters' cars, and they try to restrict it to residents cars. Residents' cars have a permit but those residents can't have visitors so essentially it's a siege mentality. You have a match day scheme which is meant to prevent an influx of cars but it also prevents normal social interaction.

Does it actually work? We have a huge amount of fraud; fraudulent match day permits and commonly disabled badge abuse.

Chair: Would you rather not? --

Alison Carmichael: There's an inherent difficulty with match day schemes. They work up to a point but if you extend it over a wide area you are creating problems for residents in that they have a restriction to their social interaction; their visitors, plumbers and decorators etc. At the same time you do need it. It's a catch 22 situation. It works up to a point but there are inherent difficulties.

Chair: It's a restriction that people would be aware of in advance.

Alison Carmichael: People would be aware of it. If the Ashburton Grove stadium goes ahead the plan is to extend it to a one mile zone all round the stadium.

Robert Scott: It's nearly seven square miles. It's a very large area. It will be interesting to see whether it can be made to work without inputting enormous amounts of money. You have a very short period, the people coming in are highly motivated to arrive by that particular time, and if there are four or five in a car, perhaps the threat of a 15% or 20% chance of a £40 fine is not a great deterrent. It will be interesting to see if it's possible to police such a large area sufficiently intensively, and on an irregular basis. At the start of a season the principal matches are flagged up but matches get switched at relatively short notice. If you're not into football, as a resident, it is quite difficult to know when there's going to be a match at short notice. The irregularity is quite difficult for residents and the enforcers. They have to hire people from adjacent boroughs to do the enforcing. Whether it will work on a large scale I don't know. On smaller scales with smaller stadia I think the evidence as far as I know is that on balance it's a good thing, although it has serious drawbacks.

Chair: We will be looking at that general issue.

Roger Weston: We had controlled parking introduced about three or four years ago in Craven Cottage area and it helped but it was a borough wide scheme, not a match day scheme. As Lee Hoos said, it's the council who decide these things and we tried to engage them in developing a more sensitive scheme but it's difficult to manage and now it's become academic until the club returns.

Matt Harmer: There's no parking scheme at Brentford at all or restrictions for most of the games. Our stance has always been to integrate any CPZ on match days with a CPZ for the area as a whole. I don't think you can treat the stadium as there just on match days. Bring it into the community. If there is to be a CPZ, if that's what most people want, manage match days as you'd manage the rest of the week.

Chair: Thanks very much indeed for coming. We've had some very good written evidence as well. We do appreciate the effort you've gone to and it's very helpful. We now will go away and mull over what we have. We'll be producing a report at the end of May which will be available on the website and elsewhere. We'll make sure witnesses are sent a copy of that. We may need to pick up a few points with various witnesses outside this meeting and we may be in touch again with all of the witnesses we've heard from today. Thank you very much, it's been an interesting evening. I now close the meeting.