

16 Colchester Road
Wivenhoe

Cllr Bob Richardson

June 1995

Dear Bob,

Re Broad Lane, Wivenhoe

Herewith a few notes, thoughts and ideas regarding the proposed acquisition of this site which will be discussed again at the next meeting of the CBC Policy and Resources Committee on Tuesday.

The proposal to acquire the 10.5 acre Broad Lane site is strategically important for Wivenhoe as well as important to the Football Club. Sadly this proposal has tended to be presented as a proposal simply as a scheme to save the Football Club. In my view it is much more important than that.

The proposal is:

- for CBC to buy the land and buildings for ø80,000 (its commercial value judged by CBC Estates Office although the buildings would easily cost £250,000 to construct)
- for the Football Club to find the balance of ø70,000 (or whatever lesser amount it can agree with David Watts to allow David Watts to agree to sell the land and buildings to CBC for ø80,000)
- for the site to be leased from the CBC by a newly created charitable trust - The Wivenhoe and District Sporting Facilities Trust - whose objective will be to run the site for the benefit of the community in Wivenhoe and the surrounding district
- for this Trust to grant a tenancy to the Football Club as their permanent home providing they accept the need to broaden the use of the site
- and in return for this tenancy the Football Club to pay a rent to the Trust of £5,200 p.a. being an amount equal to the annual lease cost from CBC.

Whilst there remains some doubt in my mind as to whether the Football Club will actually raise the whole of the £70,000 and therefore David Watts may have to settle for a slightly lesser sum than the £150,000 he is holding out for, although he has already come down from his original £250,000. However the University have pledged £10,000; the Wivenhoe Town Council £2,500; private individuals £25,000; the Football Club itself nearly £10,000 leaving the balance to be met by a brewery loan which is not seen as a problem by the Club from discussions already held with the brewery with whom they have had a long standing relationship.

If the CBC approve their part in the transaction then these other elements can be finalised. Neither CBC or Wivenhoe Town Council will part with any money until a complete package has been agreed by all parties and conducted properly via solicitors.

From the Football Club's point of view whilst they secure their home and their future although under this proposal, they have had to accept that despite finding a substantial sum of money themselves towards the deal, they will not own anything and they must pay £5,200 a year rent to the Trust and must accept other people / organisations moving in. In some ways this last point is not a difficult one because this has been something the leading members of the Committee have been keen to see happen for some time.

From my point of view, and that of the Town Council, it is the wider aspect of the plan which is much more important.

We have the opportunity to develop a sporting facility there for the wider community, providing the Borough Council will work with the Trust in the future and consider some capital grant aid.

Already the site is used by, apart from the semi-professional Wivenhoe Town football team and the reserve team, two 16 - 18 year old teams, and a Ladies football team. The Wivenhoe Youth Football Club with nearly 200 playing youngsters and who own the adjacent playing fields, use the car park and changing rooms of Wivenhoe Town Football Club. I believe that there is a good chance that they will be encouraged by the change of ownership to join forces in some way because of the charitable trust, where they have kept their distance previously. The attached letter from the Wivenhoe Tennis Club highlights their problem and makes them a prime candidate to benefit from this scheme.

Given that the National Lottery is producing so much money for sporting organisations, the charitable trust, with the support of the CBC is I feel likely to attract grant aid to finish the stadium, build tennis courts, install an all-weather playing surface and maybe a fitness gym as the next priorities.

Already several hundred people use the site, counting the Football Club and the Youth Football Club together. It is a substantial base from which to grow, and provided it retains the support of volunteers to run the facilities there in order to keep the running costs as low as possible, the most important source of revenue to meet the CBC lease cost as well as general overheads will be the Bar. Thus, as I believe the Trust must at some stage directly take a proportion of bar turnover when there are more than just Football Club members using the facilities there, encouraging more people to use the facilities will make the Trust less dependent upon the financial viability of the Football Club.

Another point not to overlook is the implications of the growth of the student population at the University which has been steadily reducing the availability of sporting facilities to residents of Wivenhoe and Colchester.

Your agenda papers should include a copy of the proposed objectives for the Trust. These have been accepted by the Football Club and clearly demonstrate a desire to turn this site into a much more general purpose sports centre. The majority of the nine Trustees will

not be Football Club officials and include three Wivenhoe Town Councillors. The Trustees would be willing to submit an annual business plan to the Council together with a copy of their accounts, and indeed see it as important to work closely with the Council in the overall development of the scheme.

In respect to the payment of the lease cost to the Council, the Football Club has been used to paying £100 per week rent already and therefore do not see it as a problem to continue making these payments in the future. Also in the agenda papers I believe should have been included a letter from the Club President and the Acting Chairman confirming that they will ensure that this payment gets priority over other potential expenditure of the Club. It is not after all in the Club's interest to default on the rent. As other users are attracted to the place, so the burden of rent will be spread and the Trust will be less dependent upon the Football Club as its principal source of revenue.

I have passed a copy of a letter onto Graham White from the Tennis Club outlining their present difficulties and their wish to join in with the plans at Broad Lane.

Whilst the financial situation of the Football Club is not entirely clear, there are several points to bear in mind:

1. The Club has survived financially without support from David Watts for four years (that is, even before he formally decided to sell or close the Club down at the end of 1993).

2. Whilst the Club has played at the bottom of the Premier and 1st division during the last two seasons, in this current season the semi-professional side should be playing at the top of the second division and therefore likely to win more matches and thereby draw a bigger gate.

3. The morale of the Club has been low during the last 18 months due to the uncertainty over its future.

4. The Football Club is not just the semi-professional team but four other teams as well.

5. The second match of the Club, played last Tuesday, attracted a paying gate of 141 people (there more in attendance overall) and the Club has based its forecasts on 120.

If the only sticking point from members of the Committee is the lack of a guarantee of the payment of rent by the Football Club to the Trust, so that the Council can feel confident that the lease cost will be paid, Harry Welsh and Dave Whymark will be prepared to guarantee the Club's annual rent. It is intended that they will also be Trustees of the Trust.

Hopefully the Committee will now instruct the Director of Administration to acquire the Broad Lane site and enter into a lease with the Wivenhoe & District Sporting Facilities Trust to operate the site along the lines contained in its objectives, leaving it to the discretion of the Director of Administration to take whatever steps are necessary to conclude the transaction.

I also hope that the Council might express a wish to work with the Trust in the future to assist in the development of the site as a more broadly based sporting centre. This would be consistent with the recent decision of the Arts and Leisure Committee following the review

of the Wivenhoe Facilities Group report in which enhancement of sporting facilities in Wivenhoe was seen to be necessary and could be achieved at this part of Wivenhoe.

You should also be aware that the timetable is tight. The Football Club have negotiated an extension of time with David Watts until 30th September. This however presumes that approval of the deal by the Borough Council is gained by the beginning of September leaving a 3 weeks or so for the solicitors to get contracts drawn up etc. so that David Watts is paid on that date at the latest.

With thanks in anticipation of your help,

Yours sincerely,

Cllr Peter Hill