

Gravel baron reveals lifelong North Town vision



WAITING GAME: Rumours are circulating around Magpies fans over the future of the club's ground in York Road.

Magpies stay tight-lipped over plans

FANS of Maidenhead United know that the club has been looking to move from its York Road home for years.

Peter Prior's North Town vision sees Holyport FC and the Magpies ground-sharing a new stadium where the existing gravel plant lies, just north of Summerleaze Road.

However, both clubs remain tight-lipped on their future plans.

Peter Griffin, chairman of the Conference South division team, said that an announcement on relocation would be made to shareholders at a meeting tonight (Thursday).

"There will be a statement made on this issue but we cannot comment before. Our position will be clear after the meeting," he told the Advertiser.

The football club land, including the area occupied by Desborough Bowls Club, is considered to be significant for the future development of Maidenhead.

Bob Dulson, chairman of the Partnership for Rejuvenation of Maidenhead (PRoM), said the sites represent a 'tremendous opportunity' to regenerate the town centre, especially considering the waterway that runs through it and the central location of the land.

Peter Prior, who has masterminded the North Town plans, said it does not matter if the football club chooses not to join him in the massive project, which could still include a football stadium, neighbouring training pitch and conference facilities.

Many fans had mixed feelings about any move, as the ground 'buzzed with rumours' during Tuesday night's cup defeat to Windsor and Eton.

Club historian Mark Smith said that he has never been 'averse in the slightest' to a move to a ground with modern facilities.

But he wanted the club to have a freshhold or 999-year lease on any new ground as well as 'surplus money remaining in the bank after the move which would guarantee the long-term survival of the club'.

Murdo Macleod, who has been a Magpies fan for 20 years, just wanted to see something happen.

"Maidenhead has been saying they are going to move for the last 30 years. It comes to a point when they either improve the existing facilities or go ahead with a move," the 40-year-old said.

However, the North Town resident believes that not enough is made of the prestige of the York Road stadium, which is regarded as the oldest continually-used football ground in the country.

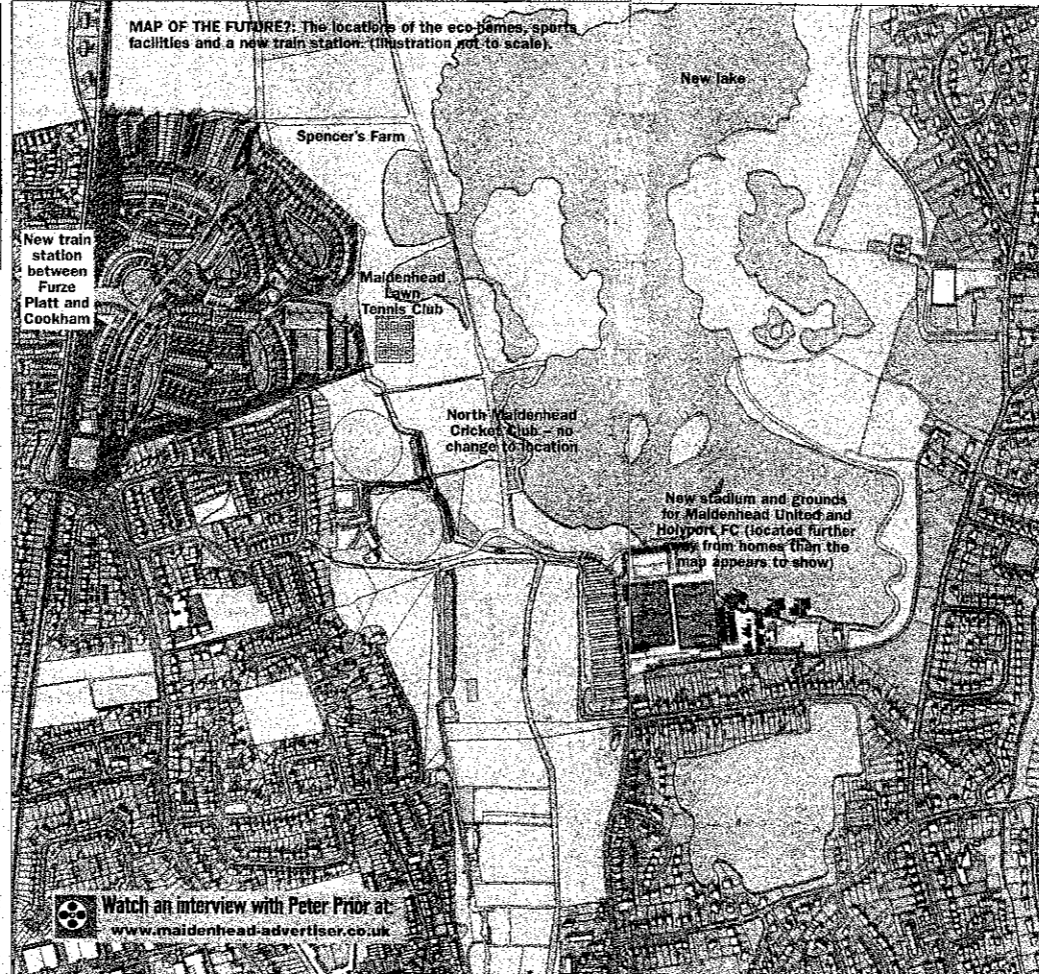
"I would rather see us stay in somewhere with a bit of character than some of the identikit grounds you see everywhere," he said.

"They have no appeal, they are absolutely soulless. I would hate it if Maidenhead moved somewhere like that."

The residents of the development would be served by a new train station on the Maidenhead to Marlow line.

Under the proposals new lakes could also be created to the north of the fields, alongside new pathways and a revitalised York Stream.

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Plans for 500 homes, shops, new sports facilities and train station

By Gareth McPherson
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A HUB of Maidenhead sports clubs will sit alongside hundreds of new eco-homes as part of an ambitious vision to build on to greenbelt land on the outskirts of the town.

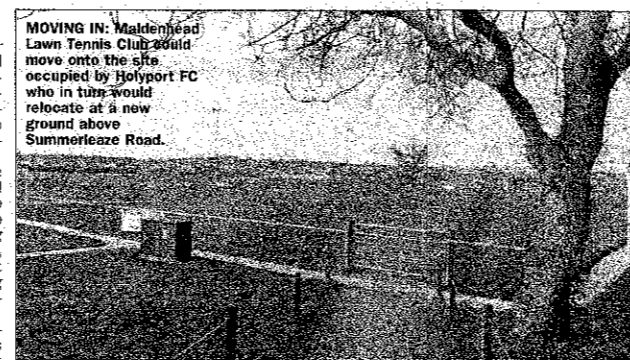
The proposals could see the town's football and tennis clubs relocate to the site in North Town to join the area's existing sailing and cricket teams, in a radical reshuffle that would require a redrawing of the Maidenhead landscape.

The plans include building more than 500 homes plus shops on greenbelt land alongside Maidenhead Road at the Spencer's Farm site, which was previously used for gravel extraction.

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which is set to be approved by the Government this spring, calls on the council to create 346 new homes in the Royal Borough every year until 2025.

But Cllr David Burbage (Con, Bray), leader of the Royal Borough, said that he did not want to see protected land being built upon.

"We are in a reasonable shape in terms of housing and we are committed to protecting the greenbelt," he said. "If a planning application does come in for a development we would have to see if it is compatible with aims and the objectives of the greenbelt."

Mr Prior said a planning application could be lodged within the year, though he accepted it could take up to five years before the scheme is ready to be submitted.

He accepts the radical ideas, for a greenbelt site close to the upcoming 450-home Badnells Pit development, are likely to rouse a passionate response from sections of the community.

"You are always going to get some people who don't like it," he said.

"You don't ever make any plans on this scale that someone won't object to. But if you're going to do something you should do it properly."

MOVING IN: Maidenhead Lawn Tennis Club would move onto the site occupied by Holyport FC who in turn would relocate at a new ground above Summerleaze Road.

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The plan is to provide the residents of the new homes, and the rest of Maidenhead, with a concentration of individual sports clubs and recreation facilities on their doorstep, which they argue would reduce traffic flow.

The South East Plan,

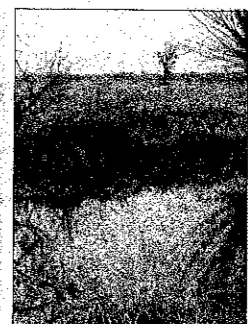
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Peter Prior's vision at a glance

- More than 500 eco-homes, shops and businesses at the 45-acre Spencer's Farm site, between Maidenhead Road and Gardner Road, powered by a wood-burning power station. A nursing home, community buildings, garden areas and sheltered housing could also feature.
- A new train station between Furze Platt and Cookham stations to service the development.
- A football stadium, with conference facilities and training pitch, on the site of the current Summerleaze plant in Summerleaze Road. It was initially envisaged to host both Maidenhead United and Holyport FC. Desborough

- Bowls Club could also feature alongside Summerleaze Lake, near to the existing Maidenhead Sailing Club.
- A tennis centre to house Maidenhead Lawn Tennis Club, where Holyport FC currently stands, with 12 outdoor courts and a grass roof covering three indoor courts. Neighbouring North Maidenhead Cricket Club would continue in its present location.
- New lakes across the Summerleaze land with surrounding footpaths and widening of York Stream. This could include the creation of bird hides and tree-planting. A new waterway route would be created through some of the land.



GRAND VISIONS: Spencer's Farm could house hundreds of new homes with a host of sports clubs just yards away.

Site 'ideal' for tennis club new home

ONE of the oldest tennis clubs in the country, Maidenhead Lawn Tennis Club (MLTC), has been looking to move from its All Saints Avenue home for years.

It has a two-year waiting list of about 400 adults and juniors and has completely outgrown its nine courts and mini-tennis zone.

Under Peter Prior's vision, the plan is to house the club in a building with a 'live' grass roof, on the site Holyport FC currently occupies, with three indoor and 12 outdoor courts, as well as a mini-tennis zone.

MLTC chairman Dave Scarbrough said the club has been in talks with Mr Prior about moving to his North Town land.

"We have been looking around for a new site for some time now," he said.

"We bid for the old Shire Horse Centre some time ago. We want to move in order to keep up with similar large clubs and provide the facilities that our members and the Lawn Tennis Association (LTA) will require in the future.

"This means having indoor courts and additional floodlit courts and we just can't do that at our current site."

There are currently 700 members at the club, which has been based in All Saints Avenue since 1925.

The chairman said the proposed site 'looks ideal' and there was feeling among club members that there is a real need for the move.

"The average waiting time to join the club is two years. If an adult waits two years then that is unfortunate and inconvenient," he said.

"But if a junior has to wait two years then they are missing out on a crucial development period."



MAN WITH THE PLAN: Peter Prior in front of the Spencer's Farm site where he wants to build 500 eco-homes.

The Advertiser says...

PETER Prior's ambitious vision unveiled today will no doubt attract a barrage of criticism for its suggestion of building 500 homes on the greenbelt.

Critics will also rubbish the idea of such development on the grounds that the roads and infrastructure to service it are not there.

But instead, critics should ask where are the alternatives visions for Maidenhead? Quite simply the town needs this kind of radical thinking to drag it out of its slow spiral of decay.

Even the masterplan for the town centre being drawn up by PRoM is struggling to escape from the straitjacket of old ideas that have come to nothing so many times before.

So perhaps it is time to think the unthinkable. Yes, the greenbelt should be protected. But at what cost? The future viability of the town?

If the infrastructure is not there to service the new homes, then surely it is not beyond us as a town to put it in place.

What would 500 homes mean for the town's economy? All those people with money to spend on food, clothing, furnishings and leisure.

Together with the houses planned for Badnell's Pit these extra residents might just help attract the quality of shops Maidenhead wants back to the High Street.

Maidenhead has had its head in the sand for too long. Only radical thinking can save it now.