

# Bucks Free Press

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Covering Wycombe, South Bucks, Chilterns and Aylesbury since 1856

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PAGES 26-27

## Frogfest in the frame

Picture special



PAGE 4



Disgraced footballer told rape victim: 'You'll live'

The top 10 best spots for a roast



PAGE 52

# MP heads to beach, not election trail

Tory accused of 'giving up' on tight seat

By Eleanor Burleigh

STEVE Baker has been accused of 'giving up' after sticking with his holiday plans despite the Prime Minister calling a general election.

The incumbent MP for Wycombe is in Greece and last week said he would not cancel his trip, as the campaign gets under way.

He has been accused by fellow Conservative and former cabinet minister Rory Stewart of 'giving up' after acknowledging that he is 'widely expected' to lose his seat.

Rishi Sunak confirmed that King Charles had granted his request to dissolve Parliament ahead of a general election on Thursday, July 4, in a statement made outside Downing Street last Wednesday.

The date was earlier than many in Westminster had predicted – with a contest in the autumn widely thought to be more likely – and some have been left scrambling to cancel their holiday plans as election campaigning kicks into gear.

Full story: Page 7



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## Golfer is rising to course's challenge



Nelly Korda

NELLY Korda believes she will have to tame a "beast" of a course to maintain her incredible run of form and win the US Women's Open.

Korda is a massive favourite to secure her third major title at Lancaster Country Club after winning six of her last seven events.

The world number one has beaten a combined total of 883 players in that stretch, losing to just six by finishing seventh in the Cognizant Founders Cup and is 74 under par for her six strokeplay tournaments.

Korda's dominant run includes her second major victory in the Chevron Championship but she is expecting a tough test in Philadelphia, with the course revised and lengthened to a par-70 of 6,583 yards since it last hosted the US Open in 2015.

"It's a beast of a golf course," said Korda.

"Off the tee, if you don't hit it into the fairways, it sinks down into the rough. These greens are small and very, very undulated.

"It's going to test every aspect of just your golf game and even your mental game because it's a major championship.

"You can get ahead of yourself, get lost in the moment. If you make a couple of mistakes here and there, sometimes it can get away from you, but it's going to test every aspect of your game out there.

"Visually it looks so much shorter than it is. There's bunkers that you see that you think you're going to carry that you end up maybe 10 yards short of.

"I need to give 100 per cent of myself every single day to, not just my golf, (but) my family, my workouts, life outside of golf. For me, that's the number one thing for me."



The rematch between Oleksandr Usyk (left) and Tyson Fury will take place on December 21 in Saudi Arabia

## Historic boxing rematch date set

THE rematch between Oleksandr Usyk and Tyson Fury will take place on December 21, according to the chairman of Saudi Arabia's general entertainment authority.

Usyk added Fury's WBC belt to his WBA, WBO and IBF titles with a split-decision victory earlier this month in Riyadh, which made the Ukrainian the first undisputed world heavyweight champion

for almost a quarter of a century. With an immediate rematch clause written into the fighters' contracts, it was expected they would clash again in October, but a December date has been announced instead.

"The rematch between the Undisputed Champion Oleksandr Usyk and the Champion Tyson Fury is now scheduled on the 21 of

December 2024 during Riyadh Season," Turki Alalshikh wrote on X, formerly Twitter.

"The world will watch another historical fight again."

Fury was convinced he had won the initial fight on May 18 and indicated there were no thoughts of retirement, despite having earned in the region of £100 million for facing Usyk.

## Littler proves too popular for venue

By PA Sport reporters

BARRY Hearn says the World Championship's future at Alexandra Palace is "under discussion" because of the Luke Littler effect on the sport.

Hearn has likened the 17-year-old to Tiger Woods and says he is "the gift that keeps on giving" after bursting onto the scene and taking darts into the mainstream.

After announcing his arrival with a record-breaking run to the World Championship final at Christmas, Littler followed it up by winning the Premier League last week and is now one of the most famous sports stars in the country.

Ally Pally has hosted the premier tournament since 2008 and is considered the home of the sport, but the 3,200-capacity venue is limited and tickets sell out in July before even hitting general sale.

Matchroom president Hearn, who is facing a similar dilemma in



Luke Littler

snookey with the Crucible, is considering extending the size of the tournament, but insists the Professional Darts Corporation is keeping its options open.

"Do we need a bigger venue? The bigger hall at Ally Pally needs a lot of work done to it but it could handle 6,000 people per session," Hearn told the PA news agency.

"So there is the potential. But the other side of it is the game of darts around the world is getting so huge

I actually need to make the World Championship longer.

"If I have got eight extra sessions I have got 25,000 more tickets to sell. But inevitably in the end we are going to be looking at what we are going to do.

"It is one step at a time, I am not a gambler, but sometimes you get a curveball like Luke Littler and you have to rethink your strategy.

"We reckon we could sell 250,000 tickets for the World Championship and they wouldn't fit in the Ally Pally.

"It's one step at a time, we are looking at the big hall but it needs a lot of work done. We are keeping our options open because we have learned that you sometimes can't see what is coming.

"It's under discussion with everybody."

Littler has already transcended the sport, appearing on Saturday night chat shows and high-profile podcasts while also presenting a Brit Award.

## UK players wiped out of Open



DAN Evans and Katie Boulter were both beaten in the first round of the French Open to complete a total British wipeout.

Evans fell to Holger Rune in straight sets before Boulter suffered late-night heartbreak against Paula Badosa.

They joined Jack Draper, Andy Murray, Cameron Norrie and Harriet Dart through the exit door to complete a British challenge as miserable as the Paris weather.

Evans declared himself "fed up with umpires" after he suffered another first-round defeat at his least favourite grand slam.

The British number three had a furious row with umpire Jaume Campistol after the Spanish official had two lengthy discussions with the lengthy Dane in the third set.

## Racist post 'appalling'



GRIMSBY have begun an investigation after being "appalled" by a racist comment directed at new signing Tyrell Warren.

The Sky Bet League Two club are working with authorities, including a designated football police officer, following the post on Facebook.

Defender Warren, 25, a former Manchester United youth player, joined the Mariners on Tuesday after leaving rivals Barrow.

"Grimsby Town strongly condemns any form of racial abuse and have a zero-tolerance stance," read a club statement on Wednesday.

# Overweight men shed 200 pounds playing football

A football club in Aylesbury, specifically aimed at aiding overweight and obese men towards better health, has assisted 23 elements of the local community shed an extraordinary 200 pounds over the last year.

MAN v FAT Aylesbury is held every Monday evening, with its organisers presently in search of new players to join.

The club's system is quite unique. Prior to the matches, the players are weighed.

After this, they partake in a 30-minute game of six-a-side football where additional goals are awarded based on the team's collective weight loss.

The final scores from the matches and weight loss results then determine the league positions of the teams.

According to Buckinghamshire Council, approximately 60 per cent of the adults in the county, equating to perhaps as high as 39,000 in Aylesbury alone, are considered overweight or obese.

Moreover, recent data from the National Food Strategy review has indicated that each point gained on an individual's body mass index may raise the UK's healthcare costs by £16 annually.

Andrew Shanahan, unsatisfied with weight loss classes primarily targeted at females, established MAN v FAT Football.

Laminn-Thaynt McMahon, the coach at Aylesbury MAN v FAT, explains: "In addition to achieving weight loss, doing so with the no-pressure enjoyment of playing football in a welcoming environment for those of all abilities, age and levels of overweight is really important."



The Man vs Fat Aylesbury team

"It provides men with a social connection and friendships that we know improves mental wellbeing."

Across the UK, over 150 MAN v FAT leagues operate for a total of nearly 8,200 players.

In total, the players belonging to MAN v FAT leagues have lost an extraordinary sum of more than 650,000 pounds.

It has been established to aid men with a BMI of above 27.5.

Laminn shares the aspirations for the club in the next year: "We are looking to prioritise a health and fitness mind-set over and above just playing football."

"This means more focus on diet and lifestyle improvements and making use of the Dugout, online facility available to members with lots of resources including an online gym and a mental wellbeing app."

Off-the-pitch, members receive a variety of resources including meal ideas and general fitness tips.

They also have access to an online gym where they can work out at their convenience.

Richard Crick, MAN v FAT Football Head of Football, champions what the clubs are doing for the men involved: "The men involved are genuinely changing their lives by improving their physical and mental health, while making new friends and having fun."

"We encourage body positivity and losing weight at a healthy, sustainable pace."

"The programme is perfect for men who want to get back into playing football and improve their fitness gradually."

Finally, he adds: "We're looking for new players to join our club, so if you think MAN v FAT might be for you, get in touch."

The Aylesbury club has grand aims for the coming year with plans for growth and more team additions.

## FOOTBALL Chesham reveal five friendlies

Chesham United have confirmed five of their seven pre-season friendlies ahead of their historic campaign in National League South.

Cruising to the Southern League Premier South division title with 90 points last season, preparations are well underway for their campaign in the sixth tier next time out.

Big clubs such as Torquay United and Maidstone United, as well as the return of local derbies against Hemel Hempstead and Slough Town, will make it a season to remember.

The Generals get their work underway at Uxbridge on Tuesday, July 9, before hosting Wealdstone at the Meadow on Saturday, July 13.

Travelling to Chertsey Town on Tuesday, July 23, Hungerford Town host Chesham at the Bulpit on Saturday, July 26.

Pre-season proceedings will close with Brackley Town visiting Chesham on Saturday, August 3.

The club are appealing for opponents to visit for warm up matches at the back end of July, with July 16 and July 30 put aside and teams to be named at a later date.

Home friendlies are included in the season ticket or tickets can be purchased from the ticket store online.

The early bird offer for season tickets ends on June 16.

## CRICKET Cricket for Gaza

The East Berkshire branch of Palestine Solidarity Campaign will be holding a cricket match at Burnham Cricket Club on Tuesday, June 18.

The event, getting underway from 5.30pm, will feature stalls selling Palestinian merchandise and food products as well as cakes and crocheted items. Entry and parking will be free.

East Berkshire PSC would like to thank the officials and volunteers at Burnham Cricket Club for making this event possible, and Anderson Estates who have stepped forward to act as sponsors. Further thanks go to Adnan Shabbir - Burnham Cricket Club Chairman

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## HORSERIDING

# Riding team qualify for national competition

DISABLED horse riders from South Bucks have qualified to compete at a national level after 'smashing' their round at a qualifier this month.

Competitors from the South Bucks Riding for the Disabled Association (RDA) took on other regional groups in Dressage and Countryside challenges in beautiful sunny weather on Sunday, May 19.

The team "smashed" the qualifying round, which was held at Berkshire College of Agriculture, and will now go through to the National Riding for the Disabled national competition at Hartpury in July.

A spokesperson praised the local team for their hard work and described the qualifier event as a "special day".

The Riding for the Disabled Association is a charity whose southern branch covers Buckinghamshire, Berkshire, Hampshire and Oxfordshire, with 42 groups across the four counties.

Instructors are trained to high safeguarding standards and work closely with physiotherapists to "ensure that every individual participates as fully as possible and obtains a sense of achievement from" riding or carriage driving activities.

\* This coming week, June 3 until June 9, is National Volunteers' Week - A time to celebrate the amazing contributions RDA volunteers make to communities across the UK.

On Monday, June 3, the National Office are hosting an online evening event to kick off Volunteers Week. To learn more, visit <https://southregionrda.com/>.



Riding team qualify for national competition Image: RDA

## Sport

## FOOTBALL

## Chesham United's Under 17 double win

CHESHAM United's under 17 squad pulled off a remarkable cup double on Friday, May 17.

The WSBMFL Division 2 team snagged the League Cup and Referee's Cup, defeating three Division 1 teams along the way.

The win was secured under the floodlights of the Greenfleets Stadium, the team's home ground, following a 2-1 victory on 28th April and a 4-1 triumph in the

Referee's cup.

The team's stars shone, with Dillon Higgins netting twice and Javi Atteen and Woody Johnson each contributing a goal. "George Beddoe's corners created two goals and were a consistent threat," the commentary highlighted.

Woody and Rory Conner received accolades for formidable defensive performances. The winning Chesham Squad featured Alfie

Clifford, Joe Hitchman, Woody Johnson, Rory Conner, Ted Sussum, Dillon Higgins, Rudraksha Ahlawat, Javi Atteen, Sacha Hall, George Beddoe, Billy Dawson, Max Wilkins, Veer Bhagat, and Oscar Dawson.

Such an accomplishment bodes well for next season.

\*Chesham United Under-13 Girls team won a tournament hosted at Beaconsfield Town, beating Didcot Town 3-0 in the final.



Chesham United U17s

## Haddow hattrick for High Wycombe

Buckingham Town won their first Home Counties Premier Cricket League match of season in a low-scoring Division One game against Slough last Saturday.

Buckingham were dismissed for just 121 after they had looked well placed at 72-2 in the 20th over, but even that low total proved beyond Slough, as they could only reply with 114, having been 78-4, leaving them with a seven-run defeat.

James Gear claimed five wickets for 37, his last two coming off the final three balls, while Rahil Zaman took four for 35.

It was Buckingham's first win of the season.

Stoke Green were dismissed for 226 and lost to Thame Town by two wickets.

\* Datchet suffered their third successive defeat in a Division One game where High Wycombe bowler Conner Haddow took a hat-trick.

Put in to bat, HCPL champions Wycombe posted a useful 50-over total of 302-7 with Cameron Hemp, Elliot Callis and Teddie Casterton all being dismissed shortly after they had reached their half-centuries.

There were also useful contributions from Henry Chapman, with 38, and Billy Dodds, 30.

Sulaiman Akhtar was the pick of the Datchet bowlers, with three for 49 off 10 overs.

Datchet reached 42-1 in the seventh over, but then disaster struck. With his fourth ball of the over, Haddow had Hd Ward caught by Max Uttley for 21. His next delivery sent back the stumps of Calvin Dickinson for a first-ball duck, and Haddow then trapped Steve Naylor leg before wicket to complete his hat-trick. He went on to dismiss Rahim Akhtar to leave him with final figures of four for 38 off 10 overs.

Dewald Botha, Sulaiman Akhtar, both with 37, and Celeb Falconer, with 34, improved Datchet's score, but they were all out for 241, leaving them with a 61-run defeat.

This Saturday, Datchet are away to Henley who have won two of their three previous games.

\* In the Thames Valley League, Windsor could only make 124 and lost by eight wickets to Kew, with opener Daniel Lewis remaining unbeaten on 63, which included 10 boundaries. The wickets fell at 60 and 83.

Slough 2nd made it three wins out of three in Division 2b when defeating Aldershot 1st by eight wickets at the Eddie Thompson Oval. They dismissed the visitors for 148, with Alim Dhanani and Aashir Zaib each taking three wickets.

## Great Marlow School wins prestigious rowing regatta



Great Marlow School Women's Junior age 15 coxed squad won the National Schools Regatta. Credit: Julia Pendlebury

## By James Earnshaw

Great Marlow School, a state secondary school in the town, has a championship winning rowing team in their ranks.

The Women's Junior age 15 coxed squad won the National Schools Regatta at Dorney Lake on Friday, May 24.

They competed against 45 other

crews from all over the country and their closest competitor in the final was Marlow Rowing Club.

Students in in Year 10, they train eight sessions per week on both land and water.

This crew have won two other national championships this season, with both Marlow Rowing Club and Great Marlow leading

the way in the age category

On Saturday, May25, the boys in the same age category- four but this time without a cox- have also taken home the gold for Great Marlow School.

Julia Pendlebury, a mother of a student at the school, commented: "In a sport which is presided over by fee paying and grammar schools, GMS have achieved

something quite incredible since their new coach Lewis joined the boat club.

"I think the school's ability to develop this talent should be shouted about and be recognised.

"It's is the biggest event of the year for this age range and these Great Marlow School crews have worked so hard."

# Who is new Chairboys chief Mikhail Lomtadze?

**M**AY 4 is usually a significant date reserved only for those with birthdays or anniversaries that fall on it, or even Star Wars fanatics due to its similarity to 'May the Force be with you.'

However, May 4 2024 proved a significant date for supporters of Wycombe Wanderers as it is the date that Georgian billionaire Mikheil Lomtadze confirmed his acquisition of the club.

A technology investor and entrepreneur, his company, Blue Ocean Partners, now own 90 per cent of the club and had been in discussions with the club since autumn.

The multi-billionaire joins the club's board alongside Eduard Vyshnyakov and Dan Rice, with the Couhig family selling their shares after four years of unprecedented success at Adams Park.

Described by former chairman Rob Couhig, who will remain in place for a handover period, as 'exciting', Chairboys could hardly contain their excitement at the prospect of 're-opening and building a leading high-performance academy' after a recent controversy with neighbours Reading and a potential purchase of their Bearwood Park training facility.

But who exactly is Mr Lomtadze?

A 48-year-old graduate of Harvard Business School, Lomtadze is said to be one of the most influential individuals in Kazakhstan.

Formerly a private equity investor at Russian-focused fund Baring Vostock, he is currently the CEO of Kaspi- the



Is there a bigger pot of gold at the end of Wycombe's rainbow? Credit: PA

leading digital payments and banking service in Kazakhstan, where Forbes estimate over 50 per cent of the population use the app.

Highly decorated and successful, from 2018 until 2021, Lomtadze was recognised as the best CEO in Kazakhstan according to the Kazakhstan Growth Forum while from 2017-2021, he was recognised as the best business leader of Kazakhstan; according to the respondents of the PricewaterhouseCoopers study.

2020, the year in which Covid-19 hit the world, the new Chairboys chief was awarded the People's Gratitude medal for a significant contribution to COVID-19 pandemic response in Kazakhstan and was even named Businessman of the Year by Forbes Kazakhstan.

Worth an estimated \$5.7b according to Forbes, his words have certainly filled supporters with lots of hope for the future. "To the Wycombe fans, I do not and will not take lightly the responsibility for the Club in

front of its fans, staff and players," he told the club website when announcing his arrival. "Our goal is to achieve long-term success both on and off the pitch whilst building a financially sustainable club. The football world is evolving very fast and our priority will be to integrate data analytics and technology to elevate the Club's performance to new levels. I am also a strong believer in youth development and it will be fundamental to the Club's vision.

"We aim to re-open and build a leading high-performance academy which will become an essential part of our long-term strategy of developing a club that consistently performs at the top level. We are looking forward to working with the Wycombe Wanderers Supporters' Trust as we together take the club into its next chapter. I'm excited to get started and I look forward to seeing everyone down at Adams Park for the start of the 2024/25 season."

## Wycombe bring back fixture day breakfast

Wycombe Wanderers are bringing back their Fixture Release Day networking breakfast for local businesses.

Always a key date for supporters up and down the country, Chairboys fans start mapping out their year around where and when they will be playing.

However, Wycombe have made it a big day for local businesses and corporate clients too by inviting them to Adams Park for a networking event.

From 8am until 10am on Wednesday, June 26, businesses are invited to attend the Fixture Release Day breakfast free of charge.

The annual event gives guests the opportunity to hear from guest speakers within the club and enjoy breakfast rolls and Krispy Kreme doughnuts.

They will also get a sneak peek at the fixtures for the upcoming League One campaign a few moments before they are announced publicly at 9am.

Email [ben.brown@wwfc.com](mailto:ben.brown@wwfc.com) to register interest.

## Wheeler and BNU team up

Wycombe star David Wheeler teamed up with Bucks New University to showcase the sustainable work conducted by the club.

Wheeler, who scored three goals in 41 appearances last season, is the PFA's first-ever Sustainability Champion and looked at the Chairboys' green credentials.

The video was filmed and edited by students from the university's Film & TV Production module, namely: Daniel Charlton, Patryk Smus, Tomasz Wojtunek, Samuel Mayne and Luke Amatruder.

Speaking to the club media, Wheeler commented: "I felt - together with the club - that we needed to tell the story of the great work that has been carried out across the club over the last few years to improve our sustainability and we were delighted to collaborate with Buckinghamshire New University students to bring the idea to life.

"We launched our first ever sustainability strategy earlier this year and are pleased to now be able to demonstrate a lot of the recent developments and how they have benefited the environment as well as the club, in terms of reducing our emissions, energy consumption and costs."

The 33-year-old thanked the students for their work and hopes supporters 'give extra attention' to the environment.

## Joe Low receives his latest Wales call-up

Wycombe Wanderers defender Joe Low has received his latest call-up to the Wales senior squad after impressing for the Chairboys.

22-year-old Low, who left Bristol City after a decade to move to Adam's Park in the summer, has impressed in his debut campaign with Matt Bloomfield.

A regular in Buckinghamshire, Low appeared in 41 matches across all competitions, including featuring in 34 out of 46 League One fixtures.

Having featured for his country at Under-17, Under-19 and Under-21 level - scoring twice in five appearances with the Under-21s, the defender made his full debut for Rob Page's side in October 2023, playing the full 90 minutes against Gibraltar.

Wales, defeated in the play-off's for Euro 2024 qualification, face two

friendlies in June against Gibraltar and Slovakia.

Bolton Wanderers' Josh Sheehan and Reading's Charlie Savage are the only other call-ups from the third tier, while youngsters Fin Stevens, Charlie Crew and Lewis Koumas have received their first call-ups from the youth sides.

Stevens experienced promotion success with Oxford United while midfielder Charlie Crew captained Wales at last year's UEFA U17 EURO finals. Liverpool forward Koumas made his debut in February for the Reds.

It is expected that Page will use matches as an opportunity for younger squad members to gain experience ahead of their UEFA Nations League campaign in September.



Joe Low played regularly in his debut campaign

# SPORT

0963-2336



## Wycombe Wanderers release season ticket details



Adams Park season ticket details have been confirmed. Credit: PA

Wycombe Wanderers have confirmed that their season ticket prices for the 2024/25 campaign will be the 'same standard price as before'.

The Chairboys revealed the cost of a season subscription on May 24, whilst also outlining what the money will be spent on.

For an adult aged between 26 and 63, the most expensive season ticket is £514 in the Frank Adams Stand, whilst the cheapest for someone in that range is £362, if you opt to stand on the terrace.

The cheapest price for a child aged

11 or under at £39, if they were to sit in the Family Stand.

A segment on the club's website reads: "We're facing rising costs across the business, but our commitment to keeping you alongside us on our journey means that - where possible - we don't want to pass these costs on to you at this time.

"Instead, we're keen to generate new revenues by attracting more fans to become season ticket holders, by holding the best possible price."

The club also spoke about the new Sky Sports deal for the upcoming

season, which will see numerous EFL games across the country be streamed via the service.

The club continued: "We recognise that the new Sky Sports television deal means it's likely that our fixture schedule could be more variable than in previous years, as a consequence of more games being broadcast than ever before.

"This - coupled with the availability of live streams online or on TV - might tempt you to stay at home for some games, which is why we're eager to ensure you retain the best possible

value for money, with a season ticket representing up to seven games free for adults, and between nine and 15 games free for children, compared to buying individual match tickets.

"Whereas in previous years the club has issued an early bird discount on season tickets, there is just one consistent price on season tickets throughout the summer, as we recognise that fans may wish to wait until closer to the start of the season to make their purchase dependent on the fixture schedule and television selections."

## Wycombe make their first summer signing

**E**XETER City defender Alex Hartridge has become Wycombe Wanderers' first signing of the 2024/25 League One season.

25-year-old Hartridge, a vastly experienced third tier operator, has ended his eight-year association with the Grecians to make the move to Adam's Park.

A central defender with eight non-league loan spells under his belt, Hartridge made 154 appearances for his boyhood club in League Two and League One.

Opting not to extend his stay, the Devon native played 35 times last season as Gary Caldwell's side finished 13th in League One.

His most prolific campaign came in 2022/23 as he made 43 appearances in Exeter's first campaign back in the third tier.

He will officially join Wycombe on July 1 when his contract expires at St James' Park, subject to EFL and FA approval.

The defender is the first arrival of the Mikheil Lomtadze era at the club.

Having spent 17 years on the books with the club, it was an emotional exit for Hartridge and the staff at Exeter.

"It's always a sad moment, but a proud moment at the same time when academy players leave," Caldwell commented when Hartridge confirmed he was departing. "Hopefully they go into the wider football world and have fantastic careers as there are so many success stories from our Academy.

"The flagship story is Ollie Watkins in terms of what he is doing in the Premier League.

By James Earnshaw

Archie Collins is in a play-off semi-final this week with Peterborough United, Jack Sparkes won promotion with Portsmouth and Josh Key has had an amazing season with Swansea City in the Championship.

"All these players that leave the Academy are going on to have fantastic careers and hopefully Alex and Harry will go on and do that."

Wycombe boss Bloomfield could not contain his excitement at securing the deal, labelling the defender a 'main target.'

"Alex has always stood out when he's played against us and he was one of our main targets for this transfer window, so I'm delighted that he's chosen to join us at Wycombe Wanderers as I know he had interest from elsewhere as well" Bloomfield told the Wycombe Wanderers website.

Hartridge himself spoke to the club media and commented: "It feels really good to have it sorted. It's been something that has been on the cards for a few weeks now so to have it sorted and be able to focus on an extended period of time here is really good.

"It was a big decision to leave my hometown club and find something new but I felt quite clear in it being the right thing for me and it's led me to a new experience of looking for where the next step is. I'm really confident and happy to have found Wycombe. I think it's the perfect fit for me."



Alex Hartridge battles for the ball at Derby County. Credit PA

## Chairboys rated Silver for family excellence

Wycombe Wanderers were awarded Silver Family Excellence status following their two 'mystery shopper' visits last season.

The EFL's Family Excellence Scheme assesses the family experience Clubs provide, and rewards them with Gold, Silver and Bronze status for the quality of their match experience across a range of touchpoints including ticket purchase, matchday entertainment, accessibility, facilities and communications.

68 Clubs received either Gold, Silver or Bronze - a record high for the scheme this season.

Of the 68 achieving Family Excellence status, 13 were recognised as 'Gold Award' winners for the exceptional family experience they provide for supporters on matchdays. 28 Clubs received Silver, while 27 received Bronze.

The Chairboys scored 8.0 out of 10 based on their two 'mystery shopper' visits with the panel highlighting "strong evidence of family engagement at Adams Park". They said "in particular, the matchday staff, from the stewards in the family stand to the mascot and all involved in the half-time activities created a memorable matchday experience, although the excellent ticket purchase and retail experience were also very highly rated."

Plymouth Argyle were voted the Family Excellence Club of the Season.

EFL Chief Executive, Trevor Birch said: "Plymouth Argyle are a brilliant example of a family-friendly Club and worthy winners of the Family Excellence Club of the Season. From their Fan Zone at Home Park to their fantastic mascot Pilgrim Pete, they are a Club that goes all out to create a positive experience for supporters that keeps them coming back.

"Attendances across the EFL are at a modern day high and it's really encouraging to see more than one million junior supporters attend an EFL match for the third season in a row, highlighting the great work being done by EFL Clubs to encourage young people through the turnstiles."