

Police aim to make football the winner during local derby

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by **STEVEN RAWLINS**
and **MARTIN BOOTH**

THE HORNETS take on fierce local rivals Luton Town on Sunday, with Hertfordshire Constabulary, Bedfordshire Police and Watford FC hoping that months of work and planning will ensure both sets of fans enjoy the game in a well-behaved manner.

The police presence will be the largest and most visible seen in Watford for some years. There will also be more matchday stewards on duty at the ground, and pubs in Watford and Three Rivers will not open until after the final whistle has blown.

Authorities do not want a repeat of the violence that marred Luton's most recent visit to Vicarage Road in September 2002. Kick-off in the First Round Worthington Cup tie was delayed for 15 minutes, after rival supporters fought running battles on the pitch.

Police said there was also an "orchestrated" and "arranged" fight outside the Moon Under Water pub in Watford High Street before the Tuesday evening match. More than 25 fans of both teams were arrested.

A total of 22 men were later jailed at Luton Crown Court for between seven and 15 months and banned from all football matches for up to seven years.

Intimidating or violent behaviour at Vicarage Road on Sunday will not be tolerated, warned Superintendent Iain McVie, match commander in charge of the game.

With the fixture of such importance in Watford's battle for promotion, fans are reminded that although emotions on the pitch may run high, in the stands supporters should not get caught up in the heat of the moment.

Supporters are being advised to use pre-arranged transport to get to the town, as car parking is extremely limited, and they should arrive at the ground in plenty of time, as security checks to get in will be lengthy.

The game is a sell-out and supporters without tickets will be turned away.

Superintendent McVie said those attending will be treated "firmly but fairly" by police.

He warns unruly Hornets fans that they could be banned from attending future Watford games. In

and around Vicarage Road on Sunday, policemen from Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire will act as "spotters", to identify known hooligans.

Intimidating or violent behaviour occurring inside or outside the stadium will result in immediate arrest.

Superintendent McVie said: "There will be thousands of people at the game, so it is important that people are considerate and respect their surroundings and fellow supporters. There will be a considerable police presence on the day."

Pubs and clubs have agreed not to open until after the game. Off licences and supermarkets have also agreed not to sell alcohol to football supporters during the morning and early afternoon. By removing its supply, police hope to ensure that alcohol "does not get into the hands of the small percentage of people determined to cause disorder".

Paddy Flavin, Watford FC's director of services, said: "We are committed to making this game an occasion where football is the winner – for both sets of supporters. We are taking prudent and responsible measures to ensure the occasion is not marred in any way."



Police are keen to avoid a repeat of the violence which broke out during Luton Town's last visit to Vicarage Road. Picture W37231: JANE PARR