

JUST FAN-TASTIC!
Luton fans invaded the Welling pitch after their side's 2-1 victory

WHEREVER WE LAY OUR HAT, THAT'S OUR HOME!

Luton chief: New ground is a priority now we're up

BY COLIN MALAM

LUTON fans have been told that a new ground is a major priority as the club plans ahead for a future back in the Football League.

The same fans will also be sceptical about the chances of success, because the Hatters have been seeking a replacement for hemmed-in Kenilworth Road for 56 years.

But managing director Gary Sweet insists that he and his board are actively seeking a solution to this long-running problem – the Holy Grail for them.

Sweet revealed: "We're working vigorously on the question of a new ground. The one thing I'd say is that if it was really easy to do it, it would have been done in 1958 when it was first mentioned.

"However, we have completed the first phase of a feasibility study. There's further work to do, but we know the

landscape. We know what is possible and what isn't."

One big problem, as Sweet points out, is that land of a suitable size is in short supply within the boundaries of Luton Borough Council, who now lease Kenilworth Road to the Hatters.

But the council are giving the club "a fair degree of support", he insisted, following Luton's promotion from the Skrill Premier League to League Two.

"This promotion does raise our profile," admitted Sweet, "and it does demonstrate that we've got the support base.

"One thing we mustn't do is rush into what would be the most crucial project in Luton's history.

"In any case," he added, gesturing at Kenilworth Road, "this old girl here can last a little bit longer."

That affection for

Luton's rich history runs right through the group of wealthy fans who put their hands deep in their pockets to save the 129-year-old club from the wreckage left by previous owners.

Financial irregularities had caused the loss of 40 penalty points and sent the former First Division club plunging down through the tiers and into the Conference.

That was five long years ago. Then, for three years running, Luton just failed to climb back into the Football

League after losing in the Conference play-offs.

But Sweet now acknowledges that trying time to have been a valuable learning curve for himself and his board, rookies in the business of football administration.

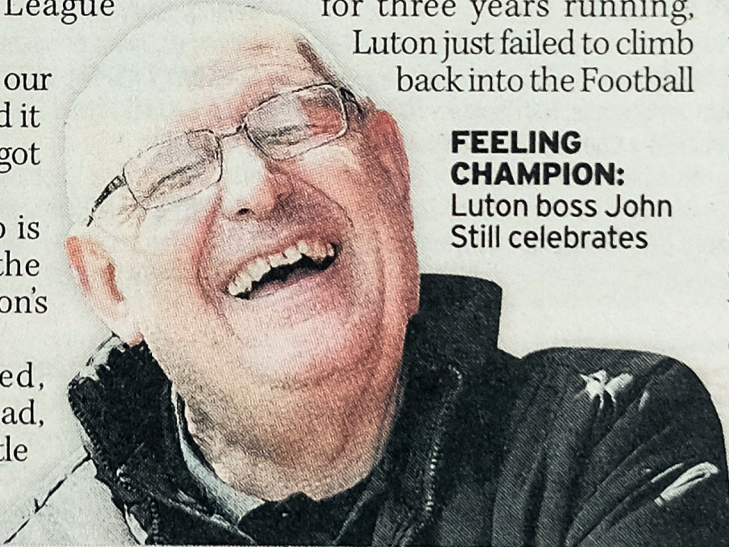
"My latest programme notes," he continued, "are about how much we learned by being beginners, or newcomers, to the world of football.

"We've been able to rehabilitate in the Conference because it forces you to become lean and healthy, cut out fat, be efficient, work harder, be more committed, more dedicated.

"Which ultimately establishes what our aim was – stability. We believe stability in the boardroom provides a very appropriate foundation for dynamism on the pitch."

Luton's promotion to the Football League will be worth about £1million to them next season and they have budgeted carefully for the purchase of new players.

FEELING CHAMPION:
Luton boss John Still celebrates



... AND A TONDERFUL FINISH IS STILL ON!

WELLING 1 Lafayette 80	
LUTON 2 Cullen 28, Gray 72	

By **DECLAN WARRINGTON**
at Park View Road

LUTON celebrated being crowned Conference Premier champions with a comfortable victory which kept them on course to smash the 100-point barrier.

Goals from wide men Matt Cullen and Andre Gray ensured the

promotion party continued, leaving Luton on 95 points with two fixtures, at home to Forest Green and Hyde away, remaining.

Playing for the first time since second-placed Cambridge's defeat at Kidderminster gave them the title, Luton began sluggishly at Welling and had to wait almost half an hour for Cullen's opener.

The lively Gray played a long ball over the top of the hosts' defence, Cullen ran clear, controlled, and calmly finished into the bottom left corner beyond United keeper Lee Butcher.

Welling were on top after

the break but Luton's Gray should have scored twice before finally netting what proved to be the winner in the 72nd minute.

The hosts scored eight minutes later when Lafayette curled into the top right corner from just inside the box, but it proved only a consolation.

Luton boss John Still, who watched fans raid the pitch in celebration at the final whistle, said: "It's been an amazing week. There must be a word that means more than hectic, and that's the word.

"It's been absolutely amazing, but this is what

this club has waited for. Just after the start of the second half, our average age was 21-ish. That's what I want to encourage, I felt so proud.

"We've still got things to achieve. We can get 100 goals, we can get 100 points, we can get a record clean sheets. It'd be good to look back on this season and not just say we were champions, but break records as well."

Welling manager Jamie Day added: "Credit to Luton, they've not come out and been in party mode. We were hoping they'd have an off-day."



GRAY DAY: Luton's Andre Gray celebrates his side's crucial second goal at Welling