



■ Attendances at  
Eastern Counties  
matches are steadily  
falling.

Picture: NICK BUTCHER



# Clubs must tackle declining crowds

## Chief's stark message to Eastern Counties teams

### NON-LEAGUE

**Ed Colman**

[edward.colman@archant.co.uk](mailto:edward.colman@archant.co.uk)

Twitter @Edward Colman

Non-league football clubs are being urged to do more and think outside the box to help tackle declining attendances.

The message comes from Peter

Hutchings, chairman of the (Thurlow Nunn) Eastern Counties League, the region's biggest Step Five and Six competitions.

"As a league we try hard to help clubs in every way we can, but clubs have also got to play their part and do more buying into what we are doing to help increase attendances," said Hutchings, just days after Norwich City's 100th anniversary.

"Walsham-le-Willows had a great incentive to increase attendances by

handed out half a dozen eggs to the first 50 paying supporters and that is the sort of thing that we need to see clubs doing more of."

Many of our region's teams have seen their attendances decline over recent seasons but, as we reveal inside, it is not all doom and gloom.

See page 62 for a full report into the attendance figures of non-league clubs.



## NON-LEAGUE

## Lowestoft is too far for fans to travel

Ed Colman

edward.colman@archant.co.uk

Lowestoft Town will have racked up more than 6,900 miles travelling to games in the National League North.

By the same token, Crown Meadow is a very long way away from nearly all the club's in the division and club secretary Terry Lynes believes a lack of supporters travelling to the Trawlerboys has seen attendances level out.

He said: "We do not expect to see our attendances rise at the moment because clubs are coming from so far away and you don't see the same amount of away support that we had in Ryman League."

"Also we are not helped by where we are geographically, we are at least two-and-a-half hours from a major motorway and our local derby is now a 190-mile round trip to Boston."

Lynes went on to say that he felt that it is harder to attract crowds at a higher level because supporters judge whether to come on results.

"When we were in the Ryman League pushing for promotion, supporters were used to seeing us win the majority of our games and consistently being towards the top of the table," he said.

"However, at this level we have to accept that given our resources and the quality of sides in the league, the best we can hope for is a mid-table finish."

"It is difficult to increase attendances when people are making the decision on whether to come and watch or not based on results and obviously the higher you go the harder it is."

Southern League Premier Division outfit King's Lynn Town have also seen their attendances decline slightly over recent seasons and media officer Mark Hearle has called for more money to filter down into non-league football.

He said: "The Premier League TV rights deal is the most expensive it has ever been but we don't seem to have noticed any increase in the money which filters down to our level."

"We are always looking at new ways to attract new people to the club but all the schemes to try and increase attendances cost money."

"Really, I think it is very wrong that one week's wages for some players could see this club solid for the next 10 or 12 seasons."

■ Crowded on the pitch - but what about the stands?



■ Non-league action - it can be a dangerous game.

Photos: DAVID HARDY

# Clubs must do more to encourage fans, warns league chief

With attendances continuing to fall in the Thurlow Nunn Eastern Counties League **ED COLMAN** reports on how clubs must do all they can to meet the problem head-on or face the consequences

**T**he issue of falling attendances in non-league football may not be a new problem but it continues to be a growing concern for our local clubs.

The Eastern Counties (Thurlow Nunn) League has been trying to implement several schemes to help clubs improve their gates over recent seasons, but just days after Non-League Day the league has called on clubs to work with them and play their part in helping to address the problem.

"Obviously the league will do all it can to help clubs increase their attendances," said Peter Hutchings the league chairman.

"But people are not just going to come without encouragement and clubs need to be doing more to encourage supporters. We have tried running several schemes to help clubs, such as the allowing of sides to move their matches to a Friday night if the two clubs agree."

"We have also put on 'ground hopper' days and taken part in Non-League Day, but we need clubs to work with us and buy into what we are doing. We do try hard to help clubs and that is what we are there for, but we are all in this together."

However, Gorleston manager Ricci Butler believes that more needs to be done to help semi-professional clubs by those responsible for the game's governance.

A total of 2,415 people packed the club's Emerald Park ground when they played host to Norwich City

back in July but despite a record breaking attendance, the Greens are hard pushed to find any long term positives. Butler believes that part of the problem is that clubs are being made to feel alienated by those facilitating football across our region and has called on people to remember their roots.

"We have seen no long-term effects of having Norwich here in the summer and it is easy to see that there has been a massive decline in attendances across the east over recent seasons," said the former Great Yarmouth Town manager.

"Football at this level is all about volunteers and that is what keeps clubs like us going. We have people that come up and help out week after week but the league and county FA are not playing their part."

"Our gate is one of the biggest sources of financial income for us, yet we are constantly at risk of picking up £25 fines for things such as a late team sheet, which are often out of our control. If a club is getting it wrong every week then yes the league and county should take action. But people are human and every so often time sheets might be entered late but by fining clubs the first time it happens, all they are doing is putting people off."

"Also we are now losing a very high proportion of our income just on fees for match officials. We have already had officials from as far away as Peterborough who have been which obviously costs us a lot of money and I think the league should be doing more to ensure we can



■ Ricci Butler says clubs need more help from governing bodies.

local officials. There are people who are involved in the governance of the game, that have been with a non-league club and have experienced the struggles of grassroots football, but as they have progressed they have forgotten where they have come from."

"I think that all clubs would really benefit if people returned to their first club and asked what they can do to help and remember where they came from."

Butler went on to say that there is a lot of financial incentive for clubs to progress to higher levels but due to the money on offer from the

He added: Because of the financial incentive that the FA Cup and the FA Vase matches bring with them, there is now added pressure on us to do well, especially when you filter in having to pay for the opposition's travel. We all want to do well in these matches, me and lads want to do well because we get the chance to progress and possibly get to Wembley, but also the committee know that the money makes a big difference.

"We are all in football because we love it and want to help our clubs but we need people to help us."

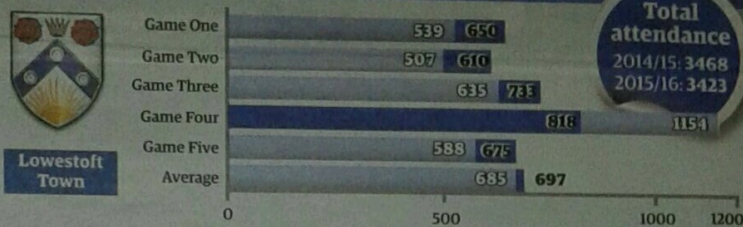
The Greens are away to Godmanchester Rovers this Saturday, kick-off 3pm.

■ Do clubs do enough to encourage fans at grassroots level? Should the game's governing bodies do more to help clubs tackle the problem? Let us know - e-mail [netalksport@www.stoik.com](mailto:netalksport@www.stoik.com)





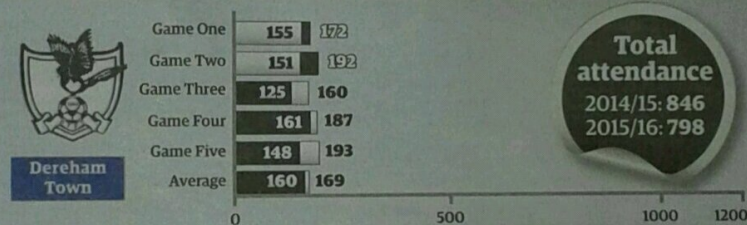
### How do this season's attendances compare to last term?



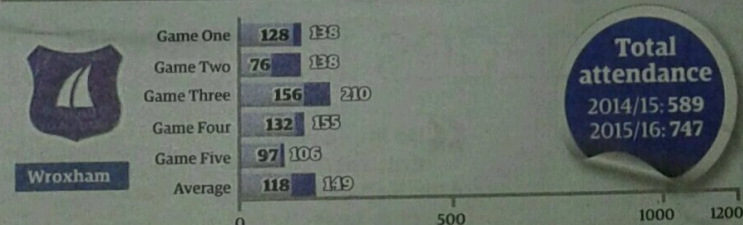
KEY 685 - 2014/15 ATTENDANCE 697 - 2015/16 ATTENDANCE



KEY 537 - 2014/15 ATTENDANCE 568 - 2015/16 ATTENDANCE



KEY 160 - 2014/15 ATTENDANCE 169 - 2015/16 ATTENDANCE



KEY 118 - 2014/15 ATTENDANCE 149 - 2015/16 ATTENDANCE

Graphic: PHILIP BANYARD

### NON-LEAGUE

## Generation game worry for Magpies

Ed Colman

edward.colman@archant.co.uk

Dereham Town chairman Ray Bayles admits that unless attendances and income increase at Aldiss Park, the club would have some difficult decisions to make if they were in a position to be promoted at the end of the season.

Despite a successful 2014/15 campaign the Magpies have seen their crowds decrease slightly so far this term and Bayles admitted that without an increase in attendances – or a different source of additional income – the club would have to consider their options to be able to finance promotion to Step Three.

"If we were in a position where promotion was possible, we would have to look carefully at the situation and consider all our options," Bayles said.

"We have to cut our cloth according to our income and unless the attendances were to increase or we were able to source additional income, we would be forced to look at reducing expenditure."



■ Matt Henman's plans depend very much on gate receipts at Aldiss Park.

"Other sides have been forced to withdraw their reserve and under-18s sides, due to the lack of attendances at these games, and the cost of facilitating these sides but I think it is really important to do all we can to keep these sides as it is important to have that progression for our players."

"We want to support (manager) Matt (Henman) and give him the best resources which we can, but again we are operating with limited income and we can't spend money that we don't have."

The Magpies chief also insists that the club are looking to try and attract younger supporters to try and build a future fan base.

"When you look around the age profile of supporters is the mature side of young and we do not seem to have a young fan base coming through," he said.

"I wish I had the answer, but every club is asking themselves the same question and sadly we just can't compete with the razzmatazz of professional football which younger fans want."

## Canaries' promotion has helped Yachtsmen increase crowds

For many local sides attendance growth is a thing of the past, but that is not the case for Wroxham who have seen their attendances rise significantly compared to this stage of last season.

The Yachtsmen enjoyed an excellent 2014/15 season, which saw them beat their local rivals and Ryman League North counterparts Dereham Town in the final of the Norfolk Senior Cup at Carrow Road.

But club secretary Chris Green doesn't believe their increased attendances are entirely down to their promising campaign.

"Reaching the senior cup final certainly helped generate interest in the club," he said.

"And while you always see an increase in attendances when



■ Wroxham celebrate their Norfolk Senior Cup success last season.

you're on a bit of a run and winning games, I do not think that is the reason for the

increase we have seen this season.

"Instead I think the fact that

we have been able to work with the league to try and avoid our home matches clashing with Norwich City is very important.

"It is great having the club back in the Premier League as they play more Sunday and Monday matches meaning supporters are more likely to come out to a local club on a Saturday."

"Yes, we still clash with Dereham at times but to avoid clashing with Norwich has made a big difference to us."

"We have seen an extra 30 or so people attending our games so far this season and that makes a real difference to us and it is important now that we try and do everything we can to maintain that level of support."

attendance increase compared

Processed by FREE version of STOIK

Mobile Doc Scanner from www.stoik.mobi