

# Football club call for 'level playing field' after playing match behind closed doors

Council told United to play FA cup tie without supporters but then allowed hundreds of spectators to watch junior competition at same venue

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Report by **Henry James**

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SKELMERSDALE United Football Club are calling for a "level playing field" after they were made to play their match behind closed doors on Saturday, yet hundreds of people were allowed to watch a junior league competition at the same the venue the following day.

United's home FA Cup tie against Lancaster City at the JMO Sports Park on Saturday was played with no supporters present on the orders of West Lancashire Council due to the rise in Covid-19 cases in the region.

The club accepted the decision and withdrew the 150 match tickets they had already sold, refunding supporters at a cost of £1,400.

The next day, however, the sports complex hosted a junior league competition with hundreds of spectators attending.

The club is now calling for the council to be consistent in its rules for holding sports events.

The club had originally begun selling tickets in line with FA and Government guidelines, and had worked to a capacity of 250 which was then reduced to 150, before the council told them not to allow any spectators in at all.

Skelmersdale United chairman Paul Griffiths said: "The council told us they had made the decision about our matches because of a rise of Covid-19 cases in the borough and I have no argument with that.

"However, I drove past Blaguegate on Sunday, and there must have been more than 300 young people and adults taking part and watching the Skelmersdale Junior League.

"Why can this happen, while we have to play behind closed doors? There needs to be a level playing field here.

"We have followed all the guidelines and are stewarded properly."

When contacted by the Champion, a council spokesperson referred to the advice given for attendance of spectators at sporting events on its website.

It states: "As we are seeing an increase in the number of positive cases in West Lancashire we cannot support any public gathering which includes spectators to attend adult sporting



Skelmersdale United chairman Paul Griffiths

events at any level.

"One parent or guardian per child may attend a child's sporting events for safeguarding reasons but must keep a safe distance apart from other parents."

● Burscough's scheduled league match at Bootle on Saturday was postponed as the home club have voluntarily ceased all activities for two weeks due to the rise in Covid-19 cases in the Liverpool area.

Both Burscough and Skelmersdale's scheduled home fixtures for yesterday (Tuesday) were postponed due to Covid-19 restrictions.