

MILLERS' bosses should go back to the future in their hunt for a "new" home, according to heritage campaigners.

Rotherham Civic Society believes that Rotherham United chairman Tony Stewart should hold talks with the club's former landlords, the Booth family, about the possibility of a return to Millmoor.

But yesterday Mr Stewart poured cold water on the idea, restating his determination that the club will never go back to the Masbrough ground.

"Modern football stadia have moved on and Millmoor does not fulfil the criteria," he said. "We had five weeks of intensive talks with the landlords before we left and they broke down because we could not reach an agreement. "There is no point in going back and opening up old disagreements. "Football grounds aren't just about a pub and a hot dog stand any more. They have to meet the needs of the community by housing facilities for health, education and so on. "Our stadium will have to be a seven-day-a-week operation to generate the income and revenue required to meet the aspirations and ambitions of Rotherham United."

The 'Millers have been in exile at Don Valley Stadium for more than a year after a rent dispute with the Booths turned into a full-blown court battle which ended with them leaving their home of more than 100 years.

But the Civic Society believe that moving back to Millmoor could still be the club's best option and have publicly called for Mr Stewart and Rotherham Borough Council to broker a deal with the scrap metal tycoons.

Plumping for this route rather than spending £15-20 million on a new community stadium would make good financial and environmental sense, the society claims. Secretary Peter Hawkrigde said that the council should consider making a compulsory purchase order on Millmoor if it helped to bring hopes of a complete stadium for the Millers to life.

"Given the lack of progress on finding a suitable alternative site, we believe it is time for reconsideration of the Millmoor option and sustain-ability is at the heart of our reasoning," he added.

"The council should be concerned about the waste of natural resources and embedded carbon which would result from the demolition of the main stand so soon after it was constructed.

"It is no coincidence that Millmoor was for so many years the home of Rotherham County and then Rotherham United.

"It is a very good location for a football ground, being within easy walking distance of the transport interchange and the railway station and close to many principal bus routes.

"There has been talk of spending up to £20 million on a new stadium plus public infrastructure costs, which would saddle the football club and the council with debt for a generation.

"Millmoor, on the face of it, could be turned into a decent stadium by completing the main stand, laying out the car park and rebuilding the Millmoor Lane stand.

"The society understands that the council has the legal power to incur expenditure on what is broadly categorised as promoting the economic, social and environmental well being of the area.

"The regeneration of Millmoor and its surroundings would score on all of these.

"It may be a quicker solution to undertake a CPO and complete the refurbishment of Millmoor than to acquire a new site, establish its planning status through the myriad of environmental and traffic impact statements and then build the stadium.

"Has anyone spoken to the Booth family about the potential for reorganisation of their property and the likely financial benefits of a major regeneration of the area?"

Mr Stewart said that he could not see any benefit from pursuing compulsory purchases order, adding: "Even if there was a compulsory purchase order, it would take two years and we haven't got that amount of time to play with."