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## FOOTBALL: Club confirms exits by mutual consent



Neil Gibson and Lee Jones celebrate Wealdstone's survival

Image: Jon Taffel

# Stones start search for new management team

WEALDSTONE have confirmed that manager Neil Gibson has left the club by mutual consent after a deal was struck between the two parties to part ways.

Gibson, who narrowly kept the Stones in the National League for another season after a final day win over Halifax Town, leaves Grosvenor Vale alongside assistant Lee Jones.

A club statement read: "Wealdstone FC can confirm that First Team Manager Neil Gibson and Assistant Manager Lee Jones have left the club by mutual consent. This decision follows a number of challenges that have made continuing in their roles increasingly difficult.

"In particular it has not proved

By TOM NORTON

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possible for Neil and Lee to relocate from Wales to Ruislip given the current cost of living. These circumstances have made it particularly hard to operate as a full-time management team based locally, something the club has always seen as vital for success and cohesion at this level.

"Additionally, the club has taken the difficult but necessary decision to reduce the first-team playing budget for the 2025/26 season in order to ensure long-term sustainability. While efforts to secure investment in the club continue,

no new funding has yet materialised. The financial reality means we must live within our means and not put the future of Wealdstone FC at risk.

"Both parties recognise that in light of these financial constraints, it would be increasingly difficult to meet shared ambitions on and off the pitch. As such, it was agreed that a mutual parting of ways was in the best interests of both the club and the management team.

"We would like to express our sincere thanks to Neil and Lee for their commitment and professionalism during their time at Wealdstone FC. We congratulate them on securing our National League status for the 2025/26 season, fol-

lowing the dramatic 3-1 victory over FC Halifax Town on the final day. They leave with our deepest appreciation and very best wishes for the future.

"The search for our new management team begins immediately, and the Board will provide further updates as and when appropriate."

The announcement will come as a shock for most Stones supporters, given the club achieved their goal of staying in the National League last season.

However, club officials insist that while securing a new management team is of huge importance, financial cuts to the playing squad with a view to protect the long-term position of Wealdstone take priority.

## Goode says goodbye to Saracens

RUGBY UNION CLUB STALWART  
CONFIRMS RETIREMENT



Alex Goode in action

Image: PA

SARACENS' veteran full-back Alex Goode has confirmed he is to retire after the club's final game of the season this weekend.

The 37-year-old, who clocked up his 400th appearance for his boyhood club earlier this month, will hang up his boots following Saturday's Gallagher Premiership clash with Bath at the StoneX Stadium.

Goode has won six Premiership titles and three European Champions Cup crowns during a lengthy career spent almost entirely with Sarries. He also earned 21 England caps, featured in the 2015 World Cup and was named European player of the year in 2019.

His only spell away was a one-year loan stint at Japanese club NEC Green Rockets after Saracens were relegated for salary cap breaches in 2020.

Goode, a graduate of the Saracens academy, told the club's website: "Nothing prepares you for this moment, it's overwhelming - the emotions, gratitude, pride, sadness.

"After 19 incredible seasons wearing the Saracens jersey, I am saying goodbye.

"Saracens has been home for my whole adult life and helped me grow as a person. Never in my wildest dreams did I think I'd have the privilege of playing for my country and representing this club over 400 times.

"To do something you love and call it a job is unique, and I feel so lucky for that experience."

Director of rugby Mark McCall paid his own tribute, adding: "There are few words left to truly capture the impact someone like Alex Goode has had not just at Saracens, but on the game of rugby as a whole.

"He will undoubtedly go down as one of the most successful players of the professional era."