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There is, of course, a possible solution to the ills threatening the health of football in Liverpool.

I know the passionate objections to sharing a new stadium. And I know a certain Shankly - two teams on Merseyside... Liverpool and Liverpool Reserves - would have been the first to object.

But a lot of those objections are founded in nostalgia, in history.

And as Henry Ford, whose company was once an industrial pillar of the city, said: "History is more or less bunk. It's tradition. We don't want tradition. We want to live in the present, and the only history that is worth a tinker's damn is the history that we make today."

History does have a part in the football clubs of Merseyside.

But it is the history of the team that counts. The spirit of the team.

History, nostalgia, tradition, rivalry aside, there are many practical arguments against ground-sharing.

But at least have a sensible and detailed discussion about it. If it means the city regains its place at football's very top table, it is worth considering.

Come together, suggested local boy John Lennon.

Despite the hysterical reaction, it might not be the worst idea.

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Gerrard

Premier League clubs revealed to have spent £70m on agents



Zahavi

- Figures published for last two transfer windows
- Manchester City pay out most in fees at £13m

The first publication by the Premier League of the amount its clubs spend on agents revealed that more than £70m was paid out in the year from 1 October 2008 to 30 September this year. That period takes in transfer windows in January and this summer. The figures also included any amounts paid to agents on deals done in previous years.

Manchester City, who spent around £170m in transfer fees during the year, under the ownership of Sheikh Mansour bin Zayed al-Nahyan, were by some distance the largest spenders, paying out £12.9m in agents' fees. Chelsea were the next highest, having paid £9.6m, while Liverpool, surprisingly given Rafael Benítez's relatively quiet transfer dealings, paid £6.7m. Other big spenders were Tottenham Hotspur, at £6.1m; Wigan, at £5.5m; and Arsenal, at £4.8m.

All the clubs were asked by the Premier League to publish their figures on their websites but few were accompanied by detailed explanations and none included breakdowns of the total figures or named individual agents or deals. The Premier League explained that the payments were made by clubs directly to agents for bringing players in, renegotiating their contracts or for

facilitating their sale.

Payments to agents for negotiating salary packages must come out of the players' wages, under Football Association regulations, but clubs can pay the agents on the players' behalf as an administrative service. The Premier League made it clear that the total included such payments made by clubs.

City issued a fuller statement than most other clubs - their spending largely explained why they topped the list. City's chief financial officer, Graham Wallace, said the figure related to payments for 35 players and included instalments paid on deals signed in previous years.

"The level of player acquisition over the past year has been unprecedented as we have sought to rebuild our playing squad," Wallace said. "Squad building at this level and within such a short time frame is unlikely to be repeated."

Chelsea issued a brief statement but declined to make any further comment or provide an explanation. Most clubs similarly issued details on their websites, as agreed with the Premier League, but despite the publication of the list, none contained an explanation of how the level of agents' payments is arrived at.

The Football League has been pub-

lishing the amounts paid by its clubs to agents since voting to do so in September 2003, in a move aimed at promoting transparency and reducing the amounts paid. Premier League clubs are understood to have been motivated by similar considerations now. The overall figure is certain to raise concerns about financial excess in England's elite league and questions about what agents actually do for their money.

The Premier League clarified that the £70.7m represented the total instalments paid on 803 separate transactions carried out by its 20 clubs, but released no further explanatory detail. As with the Football League's method of publication, there was a club by club list of amounts paid to agents, but no breakdown of payments according to which deals they related to, or which agents were paid.

All transfer fees and payments to agents must be made through the FA, but almost no detail finds its way to the wider public. Of the deals done during the period, only the £900,000 which Chelsea said was paid to Pini Zahavi when Wayne Bridge moved to Manchester City in January has been publicly confirmed.