

This is Yeovil, happiest town in the country

Bristol has a population of 428,100, Plymouth has 256,400 and Wolverhampton 249,470. All are sizeable cities with big football sides, writes Martin Hesp.

But now Yeovil (population 40,000) is in a higher league than all three and has duly been described by its mayor as the "happiest town in England".

No wonder they're calling the Somerset community "the town that punches above its weight" – but then, its indomitable football club has long had a name for being a giant-killer. In fact, that was the only thing worrying some of the thousands of supporters who squeezed into the town centre for the club's victory parade yesterday – some of the more cautious fans were pointing out that Yeovil could now be regarded as a giant that needed beating.

It was the only negative note to be heard amid the deafening throng as the open-topped double-decker bus, crowned with victorious players and staff, pulled into the town centre just after midday. Most people were talking up the future and what the club's

'Leeds United fans had T-shirts printed saying, *Where the hell is Yeovil?* They certainly know now'

Yeovil fan Roger Brimble

promotion to the mighty Championship and its big-name teams will mean for the area.

"This will bring a lot of money back to Yeovil – people will come here to see the town, they will see it's a nice place – and hopefully spend more money here," town crier Bruce Trigger said. "I shall be welcoming them – and they will enjoy their taste of Somerset."

Yeovil's mayor Manny Roper, who welcomed the team as the bus arrived to roaring cheers in the central Borough area, was also in a hugely optimistic mood: "This is the biggest and best thing that's happened to the town – we've been on the map for many years, but this has put us on the national stage, big time. We had 20,000 people going to Wembley – the population here is 40,000 – so you basically had half the town up there on Sunday. Now they're here with the other half today.

"We're hoping visiting football fans from the big Championship clubs will bring their families down when they come to play. Let's hope they like what they see – because Yeovil is central for the whole West Country. It is a win-win situation for the entire region. Yes, I'd say this is the happiest town in England.

"We are now the premier football town in the South West – it's a lot to take in really."



Rosie Joynes and Charlie McBain take a little time out during the Yeovil Town Football Club victory parade yesterday. The team's suitably-dressed bus crawled through the town's streets in a sea of green and white. Top right: Glovers manager Gary Johnson hears the appreciation of the fans after Sunday's dramatic events at Wembley stadium
PICTURES: FRAN STOTHARD AND PA

These sentiments were being echoed by a South Somerset District Council spokesman, who said: "Yeovil's Glovers are now the highest placed football team in the South West and their achievement is a terrific boost for the town and the South Somerset area."

Glovers fan Dave Trevett said: "This is going to give Yeovil the shot it needs. It's going to be good for tourism."

His friend Roger Brimble added: "This set of players has done everything it can – and now it is time for the council to pay them back.

"They've got planning permission in to try and improve the stadium. And everyone wants to know about Yeovil now – so let's all get behind them.

"Everything's changed after Sunday. Leeds fans had T-shirts printed saying 'Where the hell is Yeovil?' They certainly know now!"



Luke White, with his son Karl, four, and daughter Grace, three, watch their conquering heroes return to Yeovil on an open-top bus yesterday after winning a place in the Championship

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