

# **Minutes of the Blackburn Rovers Fans' Forum Ewood Park, Monday 16<sup>th</sup> May 2016 – 7.00pm**

## **Present – Fans' Forum**

Tris Stock  
Neil Duckworth  
John Wareing  
Bharat Parmar  
Alan Birkbeck  
Annette Birkbeck  
Gordon Ormerod  
Ray Williamson  
Anthony Corry  
Savio Mathias  
Jim Holden  
Jennifer Lewis  
Terry Crawford  
Rob Parker

## **Present from BRFC**

Mike Cheston  
Lynsey Talbot  
Greg Coar  
Stuart Caley  
Phil Hutchinson (Lancashire Police)

### **1. Apologies for absence**

Ben Sumner  
Mark Hitchin  
Ste Birtwell

### **2. Chief Inspector Phil Hutchinson – Lancashire Police**

Phil Hutchinson joined the meeting to explain more about how the police manage the public order and safety aspects of policing football matches. As part of the grading of the game (A being the lowest and CIR the highest) we look at the behaviour of the fans both home and away. This information is captured on our police Minerva intelligence system and grades the fans, both home and away.

Forum members had queried why the home game with Preston had been moved to a 12.45 kick-off time, when the reverse fixture had taken place at 3pm with no trouble. Phil stated that there had been two reasons for moving the kick-off time. There had been no intelligence suggesting the game at Deepdale would cause problems and Rovers fans both home and away are generally well behaved but, contrary to most fans' experience, there had been some running battles in the street after the game. Added to those incidents there was more of a risk associated with PNE fans away from home as opposed to at home. TS asked how many arrests had been made after the Deepdale game and Phil agreed to provide this information.

Local knowledge is always added to the details or a club's score on the

matrix. For example, a Southern team have a relatively high score on the matrix, but this is because of a high number of arrests at home games because of a lot of local derbies. Police are aware that this club will not bring a large number of fans to games to Lancashire and that there is unlikely to be any trouble.

Phil stated that the vast majority of Premier League games have a police presence and that this had been true when Rovers had been in the league. In contrast most games in the Championship did not have a police presence in the ground – this season there had been 16 such games.

It had been expected that the last game of the season with Reading would have been the 17<sup>th</sup> but plans had to change at the last minute. There had been a lot of social media comment about what might happen at the game, including calls for pitch invasions. SC stated that it had been necessary to bring in police and extra stewards. The club recognised the right of fans to protest but they needed to ensure that no crimes were committed inside the ground. This extra security had come at a substantial cost but he was aware that not spending this money could have left the club open to a situation like the last game of last season at Blackpool, where the game had had to be abandoned – for that game Blackpool had been fined £50,000.

### **3. Matters Arising from Minutes of the Previous Meeting 14<sup>th</sup> March 2016**

None.

### **4. New Club Executive Structure**

TS asked MC for an update on the club's senior management structure following the departure of Alan Myers since the last meeting. MC replied that he was now the only UK based full-time Director at the club and had agreed to take control of all operational matters. He stated that he had been happy to take on these extra responsibilities. He had 15 years experience in football before coming to Ewood and had a very capable team in place. In particular he had a strong experienced Finance team, which allowed him to spend more time on commercial and operational matters and fans could expect to see some changes in these areas over the coming months. He was also fortunate to have Alan Irvine and Rob Kelly providing invaluable help on the football side, whilst a new manager is appointed.

There were no plans to appoint any further Directors, although it was always possible that new appointments could be made in the future.

TS asked how the appointment and subsequent departure of Paul

Lambert had come about. MC responded that he had been as pleased as most fans about Lambert's appointment in November. Paul had given his reasons for resigning and MC did not wish to add to that.

ND asked how communications with the owners in India were working at the moment. MC replied that communications were good – he occasionally communicated direct to the owners but he had regular contact with Suhail Pasha, a consultant with international business experience, who worked directly for the owners. The owners continued to provide big financial support to the club, with a £100m interest-free loan. GC added that Financial Fair Play was also still a big factor in determining what the club could spend.

JH asked whether communications with fans could be expected to improve. MC stated that he was committed to improving communications at all levels and had already done some interviews.

JW asked what MC could tell the Forum about the proposed financial bid from Seneca. MC replied that he could not as any bid has not come to him and that he knew no more than what had been published in the media. He had not been asked to sign a Non-Disclosure Agreement so he assumed that little was currently happening.

## **5. New Manager**

GO said that MC had given the impression in his interview with the Lancashire Evening Telegraph that he had plenty of time to make a new manager appointment. MC replied that this had been misinterpreted – he had stated that there was not an immediate imperative to replace as it was the end of the season but at the same time he had stated that there was a need to make an appointment as soon as possible. No decisions could be made on the six players out of contract at the end of June or the players currently on loan until a new manager was appointed. The club currently had a shortlist and hoped to make an appointment quickly

## **6. 2016/17 Season Tickets**

GC stated that details of the 2016/17 season tickets would be released on Friday 20<sup>th</sup> May. Prices will still be some of the cheapest in the whole Football League. It was hoped that the TV gantry would be moved to the Riverside stand and as a result some prices in the Jack Walker stand will be reduced to increase numbers in the stand across from the cameras.

The Family Stand will be moved into the Blackburn End of the Jack Walker Lower stand. The aim was to improve the atmosphere by putting families nearer the pitch and the players. Strikers Lounge would still be available to families, although the upper tier of the Blackburn End would be closed unless there was demand for particular games. There were

800 season ticket holders in the Family Stand, eligible to be there within the criteria. The club would be writing to all season ticket holders in the affected area of the Jack Walker Lower advising them of their options.

JL asked whether a smoking area would be provided in the Jack Walker Stand given there would be more people in the stand. LT replied that she was unsure but would check whether anything was possible.

## **7. 2016/17 Team Kits**

GC stated that it was planned to launch the new home and training kits on 7<sup>th</sup> July and the away kits on 4<sup>th</sup> August. It was possible that the 7<sup>th</sup> July date could be moved to allow players to attend the launch (see item 8).

## **8. Pre-Season**

MC informed the meeting that the club had arranged pre-season tours in Austria between 4<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> July and Germany between 27<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup> July. Games would be arranged on both tours and full details of these were expected very shortly. It was also expected that the full list of friendlies in the UK would be released in the following week.

## **9. Reserve Games Location 2016/17**

AB asked if a decision had been made on the location of the club's reserve fixtures for next season. MC replied that an announcement would be made in the following week.

## **10. Location of Disabled Seating**

ND stated that some disabled fans had asked whether there could be some disabled seating on a raised platform as at many other clubs to provide a better view of the pitch and also rain cover. LT said that this was looked at every year but that the cost was prohibitively high for a retro-fit into the current stands. GC added that, although there were no current plans, that this would be done as part of any rebuild of the Riverside stand, as and when this is actively considered.

## **11. Any Other Business**

a) JL advised the meeting that Swansea City have developed an application on their website to allow online purchase of disabled seats and were offering it free of charge to other Premier League clubs. She wondered if this would also be available to Rovers. GC agreed to check.

b) GO asked whether the club were to retain their Grade 1 Academy

status. MC replied that an announcement had been expected last week, so it should be very soon. The club were looking forward to a positive outcome.

c)LT advised the Forum that the club had achieved the Family Excellence Award once again and they had also received another award for the Fan Zone and Strikers Lounge facility.

## 10. Dates of Next Meetings

Pre -meet	Main meeting
4/7/16	11/7/16
5/9/16	12/9/16
7/11/16	14/11/16

Pre-meets are held one week before the main meetings. The pre-meet is open to all interested fans to attend, providing they request to do so in advance by contacting John Wareing by email or phone as below.

Members should contact John Wareing at [roversfansforum@hotmail.com](mailto:roversfansforum@hotmail.com) or 07984 085474 give their apologies if they cannot attend a meeting.

Fans can also contact John regarding the Forum using the contact details above.