

Minutes of the Blackburn Rovers Fans' Forum Ewood Park, Monday 16th January 2017 – 7.00pm

Present – Fans' Forum

Tris Stock
Neil Duckworth
John Wareing
Bharat Parmar
Jim Holden
Terry Crawford
Gordon Ormerod
Jennifer Lewis
Savio Mathias
Ben Sumner
Rob Parker

Present from BRFC

Paul Senior
Lynsey Talbot
Gary Robinson BRFC Community Trust
David Dunwell BRFC Community Trust

1. Apologies for absence

Alan Birkbeck
Annette Birkbeck
Ray Williamson

2. Blackburn Rovers Community Trust

Gary Robinson, CEO of the Community Trust and David Dunwell, Funding Development Officer joined the meeting to update the Forum on the work of the Trust and to discuss an opportunity to work together.

The Trust operated independently to the club and had recently seen an increase in its funding to over £1m a year, almost the level when the club was in the Premier League. It operated in four specific fields, Health, Education, Sports Participation and Inclusion and worked in the most deprived areas of Blackburn with Darwen. The club provided 150 tickets for every first team game at Ewood Park, which the Trust targeted to poorer areas in the town.

The Trust was currently engaging with more people than at any time in its history. They received money from Sport England and some from the Premier League (not associated with parachute payments).

The work was not restricted to football but worked across the community. Sport England had given a grant of £75,000 specifically to engage with the BME community in Blackburn with Darwen and to target inactive girls in the community.

It was generally agreed that most fans were not aware of the excellent

work being done by the Trust. The Club were working closely with the Trust in order to ensure the fans were aware of the positive work being carried out in this area.

The specific reason for attending the meeting was to consider an application from the Trust to apply for a grant from the Premier league Fans Fund Small Grants Scheme. The scheme provided up to £20,000 for projects to improve the relationship between fans and their clubs, the way fans engage with each other and fans' experience of the game. Any application to the fund needed to demonstrate the support of fans in some way and the Trust wished to do this with the support of the Fans Forum.

The Trust's proposal was to set up a Junior Supporters Club, which would build on Team Rovers, but provide a more immersive experience for children for several hours on match days. They also wished to associate a fans football team with the Trust.

The Forum agreed to support the Trust's application to the fund and JW agreed to provide an email to this effect when required as the application progressed.

3. Matters Arising from Minutes of the Previous Meeting 11th July 2016

None.

4. Senior Management Appointments

Paul Senior was welcomed to the meeting as the new Director of Football. Rovers was his 6th club after work at Crystal Palace, Tottenham, West Ham, Charlton and Sheffield Wednesday. He had worked with 20 different managers, players in 80 different countries, had signed 200 players and subsequent sales had made £200m of profit.

Paul would be responsible for all football matters at the club including the first team and academy. Whilst Owen Coyle and his team would report to Paul he accepted that he could not do his job without very close co-operation with Owen and he had every faith in his abilities as a manager.

TS asked what plans PS had for the January transfer window. PS replied that he was in talks with a number of players but that there was a process to go through with both departures and arrivals.

TS asked whether PS was aware of the current protests by fans against the club's owners. PS stated that the club would go into immediate administration without the current support of the owners. He accepted that of course better results on the pitch would help the situation. He was confident that the team would climb the Championship table.

GO stated that Southampton's recruitment policy was to continually be lining up replacement players in every position for the first team rather than to react to developments. PS replied that they had an excellent set up at Southampton. His preferred method of operation was to work 2 or 3 transfer windows in advance in planning in much the same way as Southampton, although obviously having just arrived at the club he was currently fully focused on the current window.

JH asked whether PS saw any opportunity for players to move up from the Academy. PS stated that the Academy facilities were of the highest level and the staff were an excellent team. He thought that there were a number of good players currently in the Academy but no one at the very highest level that he was aiming for.

BS asked whether PS had contact with and authority from the owners to spend on new players. PS stated that he spoke frequently to the owners and he had authority although had to report any spend.

BP raised the situation with Scott Wharton, who it was widely rumoured was unable to play again for the first team without triggering extra payments under his contract. PS replied that there was no contractual restriction on Scott playing for the first team. He was a good prospect but the club had good cover at centre back. He was dealing with enquiries about Scott going out on loan for experience.

In response to a question from JW about whether there were any other positions that PS felt needed strengthening in the current transfer window, PS stated that he could not be specific about particular positions.

PS confirmed that Marvin Emnes had returned to Swansea but that he was still talking with them about a possible extension.

PS stated that there were plans for him to talk to local media in the next week or but that the current priority was the transfer window.

LT had recently been appointed to a new post of General Manager, dealing with day-to-day management of the non-footballing side at Ewood and providing support to Mike Cheston and the Board.

LT also stated that Suhail Pasha's role was to act as a bridge between the club in the UK and the owners in India. It had never been intended that he would liaise with fans and was never part of the initial job description.

LT also discussed the idea of appointing some voluntary Supporter Liaison Officers. These roles would act as support to Rovers fans at away games and to provide a welcome to away fans at Ewood. She

realised that it was not appropriate to look for these appointments at the current time.

5. 2015/16 Accounts

LT stated that the 2015-16 accounts for the football club had been signed off and sent to the EFL in November. They confirmed that the club had been Financial Fair Play compliant. She expected that the accounts would be printed and distributed to shareholders in the next few weeks.

GD asked whether there would be an AGM this year. LT replied that it was not a requirement to hold an AGM under the new club structure but would check if the club would be running a Q&A session as they had done in 2016.

6. 2016/17 Half Season Tickets

LT stated that, as half season tickets were still on sale, that she could not give figures about sales at this time.

7. Undersoil Heating

JW stated that there had been a number of rumours about the undersoil heating at Ewood failing and that it was not being repaired and asked for clarification. LT stated that the system's boiler, which had been installed in 1989, had failed. A replacement part was ordered but had to be specially manufactured, which had taken time, particularly as this happened over the Christmas period. The club had taken the precaution of buying £20,000 worth of plastic sheeting to ensure the Newcastle game could go ahead. In the end the sheets were not required and the boiler had now been repaired.

8. Public Wifi

JW asked what the situation was with a public wi-fi system for Ewood. LT replied that an agreement earlier in the season for wi-fi and an app had fallen through. A proper upgrade to provide a wi-fi system inside the stadium would cost £200,000 and could therefore not be justified in the current climate. However, the FLi website contract was currently out to tender and this might bring some benefits.

9. Any Other Business

a) SM stated that the traffic control after the Newcastle game had been a considerable improvement over other games this season and asked if whatever had been done could continue. LT agreed that everything had gone very smoothly and that it had been because the

traffic lights at the motorway junction had been adjusted on this occasion. This change was the responsibility of the Council's traffic managers and not the club but representations would be made to do this for every game.

- b) GO asked why, when it had been necessary to change the kick-off time of the home game with Preston in 2015-16 to 12.30, the away game this season at Preston had kicked off at 17.30. The home game this season was also currently scheduled for a lunchtime. After some discussion it was agreed that JW would contact the police to ask them for an explanation.
- c) BS stated that there were already rumours of further closures of stands for next season, particularly the Riverside. LT stated that discussions on plans for next season had not even started yet.
- d) JW asked on behalf of AB, whether a live feed could be set up in Blues for the forthcoming cup game at Burnley. LT replied that the cost that Burnley would charge for the feed would be prohibitive given the modest income that it would generate. She did, however, confirm that a full recording of the game would be loaded on to the website with free access on the same day.
- e) BP and BS stated that they had contacts for the provision of a replacement flag for the club and questioned whether funding would be available. LT suggested that this might be able to be funded through the Community Trust bid.

10. Dates of Next Meetings

Pre -meet	Main meeting
8/3/17*	13/3/17
8/5/17	15/5/17
3/7/17	10/7/17
4/9/17	11/9/17
6/11/17	13/11/17

* Pre-meet moved to Wednesday 8th March as the under-23s are at home to Fulham on Monday 6th and the first team at home to Cardiff on 7th.

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 or 07984 085474 to give their apologies if they cannot attend a meeting.

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