

Minutes of the Blackburn Rovers Fans' Forum Ewood Park, Monday 18th July 2011 – 7.15pm

Present – Fans' Forum

Martin Haworth
Julie Wilkinson
Gordon Ormerod
Tristan Stock
John Billouin
Tom Marsland
Ben Pirraglia
Neil Duckworth
John Wareing
Steve Birtwell
Andy Robinson
Glen Pegden
Pauline Perkins
Andy Neill
Mark Hitchen

Present from BRFC

Paul Hunt
Greg Coar

Apologies

Ben Sumner
Ray Williamson
Duncan Gardiner

1. **Apologies for absence** - accepted

2. **Paul Hunt – new Deputy Chief Executive**

PH apologised to the meeting that he would only be able to stay for a very short time as he had been involved with meetings regarding the pre-season trip to India all day and had still to talk to the club's owners. He offered to use the time most profitably in answering members' questions.

ND asked why he had been appointed to the title of Deputy Chief Executive when the club did not have either a Chief Executive or a Chairman. PH replied that he came into the role with plenty of experience in football but none at the Chief Executive level. The intention both from himself and the owners was that he would grow into the Chief Executive role over time. Everyone also recognised that the role of Chairman also need to be filled.

MartinH stated that one of the main problems currently was the lack of clear communication between the club and fans. PH acknowledged that there had been problems and that some still do exist. The new

management team was still being pulled together, but communications were gradually improving. It was planned that PH and Steve Kean would be going out to India about once a month and that hopefully this face to face contact would improve general understanding of the owners' vision for the club.

SB said that the fans wanted to hear from the owners. The Fans Forum had written to the owners after the takeover and had not as yet received a reply, for example. PH said that he would raise the issue on his next trip to India. Communications were improving – the statement issued earlier in the day was the result of collaboration between the owners and the management team at Ewood.

TS stated that a lot of experienced staff had recently left the club and PH was asked if the club would be ready for the coming season. He replied that he was 100% confident about the fresh approach. There were still some roles to be filled but he and his team had the full support of the owners and that the key was to continue to build up trust. Following the departure of Dr Batty to Manchester City, a new doctor had already been selected.

AN expressed concern that little appeared to have happened or at least been communicated to the fans, which was fuelling the fans' anxiety. Whilst JB was keen to give the new owners a chance, MarkH was worried about some of the new owners' media comments, particularly about marquee signings. PH replied that there had been issues about statements to the media in the early days after the takeover as the owners adjusted to the higher media profile that came with owning a Premier League club, but that things were improving now.

PH was sympathetic to the fans' frustrations with an apparent lack of progress on new signings. The club some priorities which were being dealt with but sometimes these took time. He stated that the number one priority for the club was to complete the new contract for Junior Hoilett and the player was also keen to renew.

MarkH asked about recent reports of problems with the club's bank wanting to recover some of the capital loaned. PH replied that the club has a good strong relationship with the bank (and that this was key) and that he was comfortable with the situation.

GP stated that the unofficial fans website brfcs.com had generally had a good relationship with the fans and offered his help to continue to work together where appropriate, whilst recognising the website's independence.

PH left the meeting.

3. Tom Finn

MartinH wished to put on record the fans' appreciation for the long and distinguished service of Tom Finn at the club, following his recent departure. He was particularly instrumental in making the Forum such a success over the years.

4. Matters Arising from the last meeting 23rd May 2011

a) Electronic cigarettes

GC reported that John Newsham has confirmed that they are not permitted. This policy is due to the fact that they look like real cigarettes and there would be a perception of inconsistency, that the stewards were not doing their job and thereby may encourage others to smoke.

5. 2011-12 Season Tickets

GC stated that the new season ticket packages had been well received by fans. Sales were at a decent level. Given the current climate and the experience of other clubs the club were reasonably happy with the current level of sales, which was running a little under sales in 2010 at the same time. Last year had seen a lot of sales in the period between mid-July and September so it was hoped that there would be a similar pattern this year. A comprehensive marketing campaign was planned for the weeks leading up to the start of the season. Sales in the Darwen End were slow, but this probably reflected the point that there was no need to sign up by the retain your seat deadline as seats were unreserved.

AN expressed thanks for the new 19 game season ticket for the Darwen End, which the club has introduced following a request from the Fans' Forum. In response to a question from BP, GC said that there would be discounts for NUS members for match day tickets.

6. 2011/12 Shirt Sponsorship

GC stated that there were a number of interested parties considering a shirt sponsorship deal, but that nothing had as yet been signed. In the interim Venkys would be the sponsor for the Asia Cup games.

7. Pre-Season

GC recognised fans' concerns about the lack of advance notice of the club's pre-season programme. GC replied that circumstances had greatly complicated plans this year, but that this was not unusual, as the programme was always subject to the team's football priorities. There was considerable concern over the club's planned brief visit to India, because of security issues.

GO stated that the double fixture at Morecambe with games against the home team and Accrington Stanley had been very successful. Although it had come about because of problems with Accrington's home pitch, he wondered whether it might be repeated. GC agreed to feedback the positive comments.

8. Any Other Business

a) Reserve Games

MartinH asked about plans for the reserve team. GO replied that there were again changes to the format. A European reserve league was being set up and four clubs had been invited to enter this. It was not clear yet whether they would therefore not be playing in the English league. There would be a northern league and a southern league and clubs in each league would play every other team in their league home and away and teams in the other league once. Rovers would be playing their games at Leigh again, except for one game in March 2012 against Swansea, which would be at Brockhall but open to the public. Many other clubs had opted to play their games at training grounds in the afternoon behind closed doors.

b) Special Meeting

As PH had been unable to stay for most of the meeting, it was agreed that a special extra meeting of the Forum would be arranged in the next few weeks – date to be advised.

10. Date of Next Meeting

The next regular meeting will be held on Monday 12th September 2011, with the pre-meet in the Fernhurst pub on Monday 5th September 2011.

Members should contact John Wareing at roversfansforum@hotmail.com or on 07984 085474 with any queries about the Forum or to give their apologies if they cannot attend a meeting.

2011 Meeting Calendar

Monday 12th September
Monday 7th November