# Minutes of the Blackburn Rovers Fans' Forum Ewood Park, Monday 29<sup>th</sup> July 2013 – 7.15pm

#### Present - Fans' Forum

# Ste Birtwell John Wareing Ben Sumner Simon Barnes Neil Duckworth Jennifer Lewis Alan Birkbeck Ray Williamson Rob Parker Tris Stock Jim Holden

#### **Present from BRFC**

Derek Shaw Greg Coar Stuart Caley Supt John Puttock

# 1. Apologies for absence

Glenn Pegden Andy Neill Gordon Ormerod Terry Crawford Annette Birkbeck

# 2. Away Game at Burnley

SC and JP joined the meeting to update the Forum on plans for the away game at Burnley. SC stated that the club had already had meetings with Burnley and the police. Given the number of arrests at the games last season compared to other fixtures the police felt they had no choice but to recommend that bussing of away fans to the games continue this season, which both clubs had accepted. They did however want to make this necessary inconvenience as palatable as possible for fans.

Burnley had suggested making defined areas of the away stand for family groups, with separate coaching as well. It was not yet clear whether this could be made to work at Turf Moor because of restricted access from the concourse to seating, but it was agreed that separate coaching would be arranged in any event and that these coaches would be the first to leave.

Forum members suggested that giving fans start times for their particular coaches would help relieve the frustration of waiting for long periods on coaches before departure. The club agreed to consider the practicality of

this.

AB asked about what the arrangements would be for the prioritising of ticket sales to Rovers fans. GC replied that exact criteria had not been set yet but he expected that attendance at away games last season would be used. In any event, given that all tickets were only just sold for this fixture last season and that this year's game was live on TV it was likely that season ticket holders who wanted to attend should have no problems.

SC stated that there would be changed arrangements for the home game with Burnley later in the season to counteract the difficulties that had occurred in the Riverside stand last season. These were likely to include the netting off of seating areas in the Riverside and Jack Walker stands nearest to the Darwen End, as well as more netting in the Darwen End itself.

#### 3. Use of Flares

SC raised the issue of the use of flares in grounds. There had been incidents at the games at Preston and at home to Everton, which had caused concern. He felt that it was only a matter of time before these flares created an injury and he informed the Forum that he would be publicizing to fans that considerable bans would be placed on any Rovers fans found in possession of flares at games.

# 4. Matters arising from the Minutes 24<sup>th</sup> June 2013

#### a) 2013/14 Kits

GC stated that sales of the new kits had been the best for a number of years, which coincided with Forum members' views that the new designs had been well received by fans.

# b) Academy Category 1 Status

The club was pleased to confirm that the academy had now been granted Category 1 status and was one of only four clubs in the Championship to have this.

#### c) Residents' Car Parking Area

Following the complaint at the last meeting, GC confirmed that the residents' parking area between Bolton Road and the Jack Walker stand had been tidied up.

AB stated that there were still areas behind the Darwen End that had not been cleaned following the Everton game.

# 5. Management Structure

JW asked what the management structure now was at Ewood following the departure of Paul Agnew, the absence of Shebby Singh and the

imminent departure of Karen Silk. DS stated that he was in regular contact with the owners and had met them with Gary Bowyer the previous day in London. A search for a replacement Finance Director was underway, but otherwise the club was running well under the current heads of departments. The football side of the business was being managed by DS and Gary Bowyer. It had recently been decided to appoint two new scouts to improve the quality of future signings. They recognised the need to make changes to the playing squad but were hampered by the contracts of some of the senior squad and the pending effects of the Financial Fair Play Regulations.

DS informed the meeting of the continuing investment in the club by the owners. In excess of £1m had been spent on the Academy with the new all-weather pitch and upgraded electrics and kitchens. The club were also addressing the issue of excessive costs. For example pre-season in 2012 had cost the club around £90,000 net. Thus year's programme was expected to break even.

#### 6. Season Tickets 2013-14

GC stated that he was very pleased with sales of season tickets so far. Sales were already well over 90% of the original sales target, which was to beat the previous year's sales. The club now had realistic hopes of reaching a total of 11-12,000 season tickets. There had been 1,500 new applications. Around 20% of tickets had been sold online, a small increase on last year.

BS asked if there was an issue with match day ticket sales, as none were yet on sale. GC stated that he expected tickets for the Nottingham Forest game to go on sale on 30th July. Match ticket prices had been frozen at last year's figures.

GC was asked about issues with the declining of direct debit applications, as had been reported in the Lancashire Telegraph. He replied that the issue had been exaggerated with a misleading headline in the paper and that a small computer issue had now been resolved. Ultimately there had been less than 40 fans whose credit had been declined and these were for understandable commercial reasons.

GC undertook to have statistics on season ticket sales available for the next meeting in September.

# 7. Asset of Community Value Application

SB asked if the club had any feedback to the application to grant asset of community value status to Ewood Park, which had been made by the Rovers trust through Blackburn Council. DS replied that the application was with the club's lawyers for advice.

# 8. Any Other Business

- a) JW asked whether it was possible for the club to sell shirts with ladies' fittings. GC agreed to check with Nike but he expected that we would not meet minimum order levels.
- b) In response to a question from JW GC stated that there was no truth in a rumour that Radio Rovers would not be commentating on home games this season. No changes were planned to the service and if fact the station would be celebrating its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary in October 2013. There had been no service at the Everton game as the radio license only starts at the start of the season.
- c) AB asked if there was to be an increase in the price of beer at the ground. GC stated that there would be a small increase to cover increased costs but that the club's concourse pricing was extremely competitive for the sector.

#### 13. Date of Next Meetings

Pre -meet Main meeting
Monday 2/9/13 Monday 9/9/13
Monday 14/10/13 Monday 21/10/13
Monday 25/11/13 Monday 2/12/13

Pre-meets are held at Ewood 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 <a href="mailto:roversfansforum@hotmail.com">roversfansforum@hotmail.com</a> 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.