

The Football APPG
Chair Mr Clive Betts, MP

Wednesday March 1st 2023 marks the celebration of the completion of Southend on Sea's first year as a City, but it also stands to become the darkest day for one of its most treasured institutions - our 116 year-old football club, Southend United FC.

With an impressive average attendance this season of c. 5700 of which 3200 are season card holders, plus hundreds regularly travelling to away games, SUFC is part of the network of capillaries through which the lifeblood of our nation, the game of football, flows. We therefore welcome the publication of the John Woodhouse research briefing, continuing the important work of the Football Governance Inquiry and subsequent fan-led review, and hope to be in existence to see its implementation.

For over 20 years, we have been facing a change of home from the hallowed Roots Hall (built by the hands of our own supporters and local community, opened in 1955), to a new development on Fossetts Farm. This drawn-out process has coincided with extreme financial difficulties for the club including mounting debts and cash flow crises, amid repeated setbacks to the planned construction of the new stadium. Transfer embargoes, suspended points deductions and unpaid players have not helped matters on the pitch and in 2021, Southend United was relegated out of the Football League for the first time in over a hundred years, representing a new low for our club.

The current climate is bleak, with creditors (including St. John Ambulance, backroom staff and players) mounting. Our current home is decaying and whilst it will eventually regenerate into Southend City Council social housing stock, we cannot move into an unfinished new home and the threat of extinction is all too real. The situation is so dire that in November 2022, The Shrimpers Trust made a loan of £40,000 to cover a serious shortfall in wages due to non-playing staff and this was matched by the club's main shirt sponsor, PG Site Services. A further £20,000 was contributed via a GoFundMe fundraising initiative to pay backroom staff.

We welcome the support of the Football Supporters Association and other clubs who have been in a position similar to ours, and have also had productive meetings with our local MP Anna Firth. We would very much appreciate having the benefit of your depth of knowledge and understanding and invite the APPG to meet with us urgently to discuss our current plight. We have faith in our Parliamentarians to help us navigate a complex ordeal, but time is tight and the approaching "final" winding-up petition hearing is a serious concern, for both us as fans and the City.

As the players fight for Southend United FC on the pitch, we need substantial support off it to survive. There is a genuine fear of this all being too late for us, but we share your same hope that independent regulation and fan engagement will allow the national sport to continue to thrive for generations to come.

We look forward to hearing from you soon,

The Shrimpers Trust Board.