

An Update from the Shrimpers Trust (8th March 2023)

On Wednesday 1st March 2023, a Winding-Up Petition served by HMRC against Southend United FC was dismissed in the High Court. A short statement issued by the Club pre-empted this scenario, but further communication has not been forthcoming. The Shrimpers Trust have been asked a number of questions relating to the Club's future, and we have attempted to answer these below.

What is the status of the Shrimpers Trust loan, and when do you expect it to be returned?

The loan was not repaid by Southend United Football Club by the original deadline. We were informed in advance and are working with the Club to agree a reasonable extension. The loan was provided to help pay staff salaries. At the time of writing, we do not believe all staff salaries are fully up-to-date and therefore would consider it unhelpful to those staff if we were to try to force the Club to make a repayment at this time.

What was the outcome from the letter to the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for Football?

The Trust met with a representative of the APPG to help raise awareness of our issues. We provided a written timeline which showed the stark reality of the last 20-plus years under the current owner. Our submissions were well-received and we intend to remain in contact with the APPG. Further to this, representatives of the Shrimpers Trust will be attending the Palace of Westminster next week to participate in a think-tank session entitled 'Playing by the Rules: The Governance of English Football' as a follow-up to the recent UK Government White Paper.

Has the Shrimpers Trust had any correspondence with Southend United FC since the Winding-Up Petition was dismissed?

We have spoken to Club CEO Tom Lawrence several times and a long-delayed Liaison meeting has now been arranged. A request is currently outstanding for Ron Martin to meet with representatives of the wider supporters group. Club finances remain a significant concern.

Why is there radio silence from the Football Club?

This is a matter for Southend United FC to address. Last week we requested, alongside the other supporters' groups, that the Club provides urgent clarification on whether the 'working capital' mentioned in their short statement is sufficient to meet and maintain obligations to playing and coaching staff, Academy personnel, backroom staff, local suppliers and other creditors, as well as carrying out urgent remedial work at Roots Hall to provide a basic level of comfort to spectators. This clarification is yet to be provided and we urge the Club to address this in the strongest possible terms.

Have non-playing staff at Southend United FC now been paid?

Please see above.

Has the Shrimpers Trust spoken to Southend City Council and are there any safeguards within the planning permission for the Roots Hall and Fossetts Farm sites should Southend United FC ever cease to exist?

The Trust met with Council representatives along with Anna Firth MP on 23rd February. There are several covenants regarding when certain stages of the development can proceed relating to the existence of a football club, but our understanding is that there are no legal safeguards in existence to protect the current Southend United FC.

When are the financial issues at Southend United FC likely to resurface?

The financial issues have not been resolved by the 'bridging finance'. Loans have not been repaid, suppliers are not being paid and there is no evidence or suggestion that any remedial work is being planned on Roots Hall.

Has the Shrimpers Trust received communication with regards to the embargo imposed on Southend United FC by the National League?

During the course of dialogue with the Club, it has been disclosed that the embargo will hopefully be lifted "soon" and the Club are working towards this goal with the National League.

Has the idea of a phoenix club now been abandoned?

Whilst the establishment of a phoenix club was explored whilst Southend United FC were threatened with liquidation, this would not have been formed until such time as the current entity was no longer in existence. Work was undertaken to understand the regulations that would be applicable to the creation of a phoenix club, and there is now a fluid document in place concerning its formation as part of the Shrimpers Trust's Emergency Action Plan.

What is the Shrimpers Trust's opinion on Ron Martin?

The Trust does not consider Ron Martin to be a suitable owner and custodian of Southend United Football Club. However, it is our belief that the best prospect of a sustainable future for the Football Club is the delivery of a new stadium at Fossetts Farm. Ron Martin must be held accountable for his actions whilst he remains in role, but we would like to work with him to map out an exit strategy which would be in the best interests of all parties in the long-term. We recognise the right of our members and Southend United supporters to protest lawfully against the owner during this period.

What are the next steps?

The Trust has a Liaison meeting with Club scheduled for Thursday 23rd March. The minutes of this meeting will be published on the Trust website as soon as possible afterwards. Dialogue with other supporters' groups will continue. As well as requesting a meeting with Ron Martin, we will be seeking further clarification from Southend City Council on a number of matters linked to the outstanding planning application, and we are looking to arrange an open Fans' Forum at the end of the season. We will not let the pressure drop; it is our belief that Southend United FC is still in peril despite a temporary reprieve.

How can I contact the Shrimpers Trust?

If you have a question for the Trust, you can contact us via our website, www.shrimperstrust.co.uk, via info@shrimperstrust.co.uk or our social media channels. We'll aim to continue providing regular communication during this period.