



SOUTHEND UNITED SUPPORTERS SOCIETY LIMITED LIAISON MEETING



Thursday, 27th April 2023
Roots Hall Stadium 16:30

1. Present and Apologies:

Those in attendance were Tom Lawrence (TL) and April Smith (AS) on behalf of SUFC, Paul FitzGerald (PF), Paul Yeomanson (PY), Shane Chapman (SC), Clare Chapman (CC) and Kay Fogg (KF) on behalf of the Shrimpers Trust.

Apologies received from Rhys Ellingham (RE) and Rylee Doe (RD).

2. Matters Arising from the Minutes of the Meeting held on 15th December 2022:

Follow up on actions not otherwise covered in Agenda items:

- The proposal from SUCET to discuss data relating to Junior Blues is ongoing.
ACTION – PF to arrange to meet with Dale Spiby and PY
- The surplus stock of clothing has now been disposed of via the One Love charity, Macron having requested that the old stock not be sold (as per the contract with the Club).
- Shrimpers Bar urn has still not been replaced but is not a necessity at this moment, it was suggested that this be revisited in about 6 months or so.
ACTION – TL to order in the Autumn
- The rehabilitation donation has made some progress though the item is still outstanding. The Shrimpers Trust reiterated that they are still willing to fund the items requested to the sum of £3,500 inclusive of VAT. TL will arrange for the items to be ordered, the Trust can then pay, if there is VAT reclaim, we can discuss how to deal with that.
ACTION – TL to arrange for the order to be placed, the Trust will then pay for the item and we can discuss the VAT at the next meeting.
- It was further emphasised how disappointing stock levels and items have been in the Club shop, and particularly the need to make sure there is a variety of stock available for “pocket money” purchases. TL confirmed that he had discussed with Andy Dyer at Macron and reported back (on behalf of Macron), that there had been a number of high quality items available at the start of the season, but these had not been taken up, so they had therefore reduced the quality and quantity. Comparisons were drawn with Gillingham and Colchester, who both partner with Macron, but who have a better stocked shop. TL confirmed that, in the case of Gills at least, the shop was run by GFC (who had a free rein to sell items that do not compete with Macron products) in the shop. SUFC outsource the shop to Macron – they determine what’s stocked. It was agreed to set up a Zoom call with Macron’s Andy Dyer and members of the Trust at a date to be agreed.
ACTION – TL to facilitate

3. Club Finances, including Bridging Loan, Embargo, Late payment of Wages and Trust Loan (further including Club for Sale and New Stadium items on Agenda):

The Shrimpers Trust had very recently received a proposed deed of variation relating to the loan issued from the Trust to the Club. This references a repayment date of the end of August. PF questioned the August date on the Trust’s behalf as the understanding was that the repayment date was the end of July. TL confirmed that he included the August date (when drafting) as that was his recollection of the agreed date. The Trust were reasonably relaxed about the date but thought July had been agreed. PF also asked why the document

didn't include a Personal Guarantee from the Chairman. TL explained that the Personal Guarantee would be a separate document. Once the variation Deed had been agreed, TL can produce a Personal Guarantee in short order.

Wages are still outstanding for March for Club staff, not playing staff. TL is working hard to remedy this, but he is having to prioritise payments to operationally critical suppliers and football staff. The Football Department would be receiving their April salaries on the due date. TL went on to say how much the shortfall in season ticket sales has hurt the Club's finances. The supporter group statements actively encouraging supporters not to purchase Season Tickets appears to have worked and as such, the Club's ability to meet its financial obligations to staff, suppliers and HMRC has been adversely impacted. That's not apportioning blame it is just a factual statement. A "lively" discussion followed where the Trust suggested that the reduction in Season Ticket sales was more likely to be as a result of the state that the football Club is in, i.e. Obvious lack of funding; Embargo since September and no guarantee of actually starting next season.

The extension of the "Early Bird" discount has meant that the Club has now sold about 2,000 season tickets, which is over 1,000 down on the previous season, equating to an approximation of £200,000.

CC pointed out that many people are holding back from renewing until the Chairman leaves. TL accepted that there were potentially many reasons why supporters had held off purchasing; cost of living crisis, embargo, Ron's departure etc, but he believes that the supporter group statements encouraging supporters not to purchase Season Tickets has had an adverse impact on cash flow.

Despite having discharged the petition debt, the Club still owes money to HMRC. The sums owing accrued between the petition being issued and the petition debt being discharged (just before the hearing in March). The debt is not growing and payments were being made to HMRC to reduce down the balance, the consequence being that HMRC were prepared to standstill. Unfortunately, the Club were not able to keep up with those payments. The embargo is still, therefore, in place. Players are all under contract until 30th June and will be paid throughout that time, however, the embargo means that we are, presently, unable to secure the players who are out of contract at the end of June, nor can we sign any new players. We have 14 players under contract for next season.

PF asked what the realistic expectation of a sale is, whether there are seriously interested parties out there? TL replied as best as he could, bearing in mind confidentiality issues. There are credible parties who are exploring the opportunity via GSW and Ron. TL confirmed that the new owner would need to work with the Chairman in relation to the Fossetts stadium, albeit the Chairman would not be involved in the operation of the football club.

TL said that now Ron has decided to sell, we should all work together to help facilitate a timely exit for the Chairman.

TL confirmed that two years' accounts are still outstanding, a third year will soon be due. The auditor has been instructed to remedy this position ASAP – end of May is targeted for July 20 and 21.

4. Memorandum of Understanding:

PF confirmed that the bodies which oversee Supporter Trusts are very much in favour of Trusts having a Memorandum of Understanding and that the one which has been shared with the Club is a template.

He added that recent communication from the Club to the Trust as well as supporters generally, had been poor. TL referred to item 4 of the minutes dated 15 December 22 - which states otherwise. PF said that was four months ago. TL acknowledged that, and said that since that meeting, the Trust had published statements made by the combined Supporter Groups which have been unhelpful.

TL said that communication is a two-way street, TL always responds to calls and tries to keep on top of emails. TL said it would have been useful, from his perspective, to have been given a little advance warning before the Supporter's group statements were published. He was not, for example, aware that the Trust/supporters' groups were running a supporter consultation in the middle of March. TL said that he acknowledged that temperatures had been running high, but he did not believe that the statements were in the spirit of the MOU or the Trust objectives. PF said that he didn't accept that damage was done by asking supporters to delay purchasing. TL said, it's water under the bridge now and both the Trust and TL agreed to work harder on communication to bring things back on track.

There is a specific point in the Memorandum of Understanding on finances (page 2, first numbered paragraph) which refers to financial information being shared. TL would like to know what the expectation is on that. This needs further discussion and will be taken back to the Trust Board.

ACTION – PF to revert to the Trust Board

5. Junior Blues:

KF reported issues are still ongoing with membership forms being taken in at the ticket office, with money going missing, and, in some cases, card payments being taken (which then go to the Club and not the Trust) and then forms going missing. She estimated probably about a dozen in the last year have been affected.

The new Shrimpers Trust website will be launching very soon, and people will have the ability to sign up online there. It was agreed that the Ticket Office staff should all be made aware that they are NOT to take anything relating to the Junior Blues until further notice.

KF, PY and RD have been looking into and pricing items for the sign up gifts for the next year. The Macron version of the preferred item come in at a price of £9.60, which is prohibitive if we want to keep the price of membership as it is. PY has a quote from the suppliers of the Trust's items, which comes in at £6.06 per item. TL couldn't see this being an issue as it wouldn't have the Club badge on but agreed to confirm with Macron and report back.

ACTION – TL to discuss with Macron as to whether the Trust can source clothing away from them for the Junior Blues

Finally, KF brought up the recent Adventure Golf event for the Junior Blues in the Easter holidays. It had been very frustrating to be promised 6 players to only have 4 turn up. This is not the first time this kind of thing has happened. It was noted that the players were given an unexpected day off on the day in question, but KF pointed out that the date chosen had been one chosen by the management. She added that it is of the utmost importance that, when parents are paying for their children to attend an event, that we do have good player representation. This was no slight on the four players who did attend, who were all excellent with the children. AS explained the difficulties presented by plans being changed but it was agreed that this would be conveyed to the players and management.

ACTION – TL to speak to the management ahead of next season to explain expectations relating to the Junior Blues

6. Shrimpers Bar:

Aside from regular issues in the bar, particularly relating to toilets, it was noted that at the last home match, there were a large number of children in the bar (probably about 20 or so), and

that this impacted on the number of regulars who were denied entry because of the current restricted numbers. It was also noted that these children had not been well supervised and had made a real mess with crisps, which was not then cleaned up before the Trust Quiz Night in the Shrimpers that same evening. AS responded that these children were on packages with the Club, having paid money for the same. It was not known what else could be done as they were encouraged to go into the ground early.

CC brought up the issues with the dishwashing facilities and the use of plastic cups in the Shrimpers Bar. It is well known that there are issues in the bar. The Trust agreed to research and possibly source something which could be used through existing contacts.

ACTION – KF to research further

7. South Stand and West Stand issues:

TL confirmed that ground staff do try and clean the stands, particularly with regard to the issues with foxes in the South Stand. The Trust described the smell as horrendous. TL said that he had been quoted £50,000 + VAT by one company to come in during the Summer months and professionally clean the stands! This is not viable, and alternative quotes will be obtained. It was pointed out that there would likely be numerous volunteers who would be happy to come in and help clean and prepare during the close season if the Chairman's exit could be hastened.

KF added that the amount of fox poo on the concourse in front of the South Stand had been dreadful, making it very tricky walking the Junior Blues back after flags. She asked if this could be raked by the ground staff on match day mornings.

ACTION – Trust and TL to walk around Roots Hall for a thorough check at the end of May

8. Safety Certificate for Roots Hall:

This check is imminent, and concentrates mostly on things which are not structural – electrical testing, legionella checks etc. TL is not aware of any significant issues (from a safety certificate point of view), but that is not to say things won't come out of the woodwork when the SAG walkaround. TL thought that the Trust statements about concerns regarding obtaining a safety certificate were unfounded and premature. Yes, the stadium is deteriorating and will need a lick of paint and patching up, but there is nothing, at this stage, to suggest that obtaining a safety certificate will be an issue.

9. Quid A Goal:

The Trust's Quid a Goal scheme had done well this season, it was suggested that this money might be put to resolving the issues in the Shrimpers Bar with regard to dishwashing facilities.

10. Shirt Sponsors:

TL confirmed that PG Site Services would be continuing as main shirt sponsors next season. The Club is grateful to Dave Goodger and all at PG for their support. The relationship between the Club and the sponsor is fine.

11. Academy:

Funding for the Academy ends at the end of this season if we do not get promoted. The Club can, however, continue to run an Academy under National League rules although the cost to do so would be significant.

It was noted that the Academy had not been as profitable in producing talent to sell on in recent years, as it had done under Ricky Duncan.

Issues around the Academy will be discussed by the Board once the season is over.

TL confirmed that we would retain compensation on players who are scholars and the NL academy scheme, albeit under a different system.

12: Any Other Business:

- **Government White Paper**

TL asked what the Trust's views were on the White Paper, he said it would be good to have a high level discussion now, and an in depth discussion at the next meeting. TL thinks it would be good if we could get ahead of the curve. TL said that, in relation to what is said in the White Paper (in relation to the involvement of supporters' trusts), we are already doing a lot, but it would be good to discuss what more could be done.

PF advised that the Trust had already been proactive alongside our local MP, Anna Firth. The Trust had been to London to meet with officials to shine a light on Southend and what the Trust say is an example of how not to do things.

There was some discussion about a "golden share" which would give supporters, for example, but not limited to, the right to prevent a change of nickname or colours. TL suggested that it might be that some of the provisions regarding the golden share could be incorporated into the Memorandum of Understanding. TL is supportive of the underlying principles.

Next Meeting scheduled for Tuesday 30th May

To include walk round Roots Hall identifying issues.