

Trust Statement – 19th September 2023

Community Ownership Fund – Expression of Interest Submitted

As part of its efforts to help secure the future of Southend United, the Shrimpers Trust has been exploring potential pathways to fan involvement forming part of the club's future ownership structure. One such pathway could be community ownership of Roots Hall.



Image courtesy of Football Stadium Photography

Community Ownership

The Shrimpers Trust, which represents over 1000 supporters of Southend United Football Club, has today submitted, after discussions with Anna Firth MP and Southend-on-Sea city councillors, an Expression of Interest to the Community Ownership Fund (COF). This fund, administered by the UK Government's Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC), could help us to bring ownership of the freehold of Roots Hall Stadium and its facilities into the hands of those who value it most – our local community of Southend-on-Sea.

This is not just about securing Southend United's future. The Expression of Interest will let DLUHC and the Government know that our community is serious about keeping and enhancing Roots Hall, about fulfilling its potential as a pivotal community asset, and about realising all of the opportunities and positive influence that it can bring to the health and wellbeing of the local community and economy. It lays out how this could happen and what those opportunities look like and, if successful, the partners will be invited to make a full application for financial support. This forms part of an extensive project to explore all avenues available to increase the role that supporters play in the security and long-term sustainability of Southend United FC.

The result of forthcoming Government legislation related to football governance should be that clubs like ours no longer become a burden on their communities with their facilities suffering from a lack of investment. The legislation also calls for mechanisms that allow greater fan involvement, and we are grateful for the support from policy officials within the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and the Football Supporters' Association (FSA) in working with us to investigate and highlight the issues blighting Southend United FC as well as exploring pathways to help our club and others in similar situations to turn things around.

What is the Community Ownership Fund?

The COF has 4 strategic objectives:

- to provide targeted investment for communities to save and sustain local assets for community use when they would otherwise be lost
- to strengthen capacity and capability in communities, supporting them to shape their places and develop sustainable community businesses
- to empower communities in left behind places to level up
- to strengthen direct links between places across the UK and the UK Government

Programme outcomes

For the purposes of this Fund, community ownership refers to the ownership and management of local community assets by a community organisation, in order to deliver benefits for the community and place.

This could be that the community outsources operations to the football club/a 3rd party as part of a secure, long-term lease agreement. This will also allow the community to explore other grants and investment opportunities that might aid further refurbishments/essential developments.

The fund provides up to £2m of capital match funding for the purchase of assets, refurbishment of assets and for feasibility studies for future investment opportunities.

What this might look like at Roots Hall

There are multiple success stories involving greater fan ownership and community stadium models, with the most well-known and recent being Brentford FC's Brentford Community Stadium. The Expression of Interest allows us to work with DLUHC, bid writers, specialist consultants and to call upon the fan base to bring their skills and resources to the table. It will allow us to actively explore how fan investment models could help form a new ownership structure for Southend United, and how community involvement in the stadium might benefit not only the club, but the wider City of Southend-on-Sea.

Does this mean that the community will own Southend United Football Club itself?

No, the expression of interest is the way to kick off the process of potentially utilising Government funding for Levelling Up and enhancing communities like ours to bring Roots Hall and its facilities into community ownership. This will, of course, have a positive impact on the club itself.

As things stand, The Shrimpers Trust does not intend to attempt to buy the football club, and we have no desire to block the pathway for anyone that would deliver a fit and proper ownership model.

We do, however, believe that meaningful fan involvement should form a crucial part of that future ownership model. We encourage you to have your say in helping to shape this approach as and if it progresses. You can do this by joining the Shrimpers Trust if you have not done so already, and by participating in upcoming surveys so that we can build upon the research already undertaken in previous monthly member surveys to further explore how this approach might look.