

Trust Statement – 17th January 2024

Shrimpers Trust Reiterate Call For Independent Regulator

Football, by its nature, is a business of ups and downs. This is a natural part of the game; we are accustomed to the highs and lows of promotion and relegation, of victory and defeat. It is what makes football great. For too long, this sporting life has added a new rollercoaster to this mix: ownership.

In 2019, after the collapse of Bury FC, the Government, rightly, decided it was finally time for matters off the pitch to be reviewed. It started by asking the fans what was important to us. Supporters across the country spoke in their thousands, via surveys, focus groups and via our representative bodies. Conclusions led to white papers, debates, more focus groups and cross-party work in Parliament.

It is within this spirit of crossing the traditional lines of division that we contribute again today. The football family has seen its collective lives dominated by those off-field matters for too long. We need a break. We need to get back to supporting our teams and enjoying our Saturdays.

In December, the Sell Before We Dai group highlighted the plight of at-risk clubs on an advertising board outside the Houses of Parliament. We stand with our friends at Reading FC in this time of crisis, mindful that situations at Everton, West Bromwich Albion, Morecambe and Sheffield Wednesday are not far behind. For too long, unregulated ownership has ripped the heart out of communities and it can go on no longer.

We urge all political parties to come together, not just for the health of the national game, but the health of its citizens. Now is the time for Parliament to realise the important role it has in society, and to offer us the hope and security of allowing all football fans a chance to experience the on-field ups and downs without our lives being dominated by matters off the pitch. Fans will always be the first line of defence and we are proud of the collective efforts across the country, but we need a place to turn, that has teeth and that has our best interests at heart.

We want to look forward to the future, with the hope that this moment in time shapes a bright future for fans and communities alike. Now is the time for significant and meaningful change. It's time for a regulator to step in, with our best interests at heart. We are close, but this cannot go on any longer without detriment to the long-term wellbeing of the game and, more importantly, its fans.

At Southend United, we know the pain our counterparts at Reading are going through. We have suffered at the hands of our owner, seeing us lose our EFL status after a century at that level, the ownership of our ground separated from the football club, a 15-month registration embargo put in place and a ten-point deduction imposed by the National League. Those sanctions hurt players, coaches, club staff and supporters; they don't hurt owners.

The football industry has proved itself to be chronically incapable of self-regulation. We urge Parliament to urgently and smoothly establish an independent regulator. This must happen without delay to prevent not just the potential demise of Reading FC, but of all football clubs that remain at risk whilst this remains an outstanding piece of legislation.

We implore this to occur before Reading FC, a community asset in Berkshire for over 150 years, dies and it is the supporters that are again left to pick up the pieces, just as they did at Bury. We will be judging whether lessons have truly been learned by the actions of our Parliamentarians in the coming days and weeks.

The Shrimpers Trust Board.