



# SOUTHEND UNITED SUPPORTERS SOCIETY LIMITED LIAISON MEETING



Thursday, 18<sup>th</sup> January 2024  
Roots Hall Stadium 16:00

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1. **Present and Apologies:**

Those in attendance were Tom Lawrence (TL); Rylee Doe (RD) and April Smith (AS) on behalf of SUFC, Paul FitzGerald (PF), Paul Yeomanson (PY) and Kay Fogg (KF) on behalf of the Shrimpers Trust.

Apologies received from Shane Chapman (SC).

2. **Matters Arising from the Minutes of the Meeting held on 20<sup>th</sup> June 2023 which were still relevant and not covered elsewhere on the agenda:**

- Shrimpers Bar urn – TL advised that he would order this imminently.  
**ACTION – TL to order urn**
- Junior Blues – spreadsheet of Junior Season Card Holders had been supplied but was unusable because too many parents have placed orders in their name rather than the child, and several other over age people on the list. It was agreed that it was too late to do anything for this season, however, AS advised that, from next season, there would be improved data collection to include Equality, Diversion and Inclusion, and she would work with the ticket office to ensure the necessary data is captured correctly going forwards.  
**ACTION – AS to report back**

3. **Update regarding pending takeover, including repayment of £40k loan:**

TL reported that the takeover is progressing, Contracts have been Exchanged and we are all waiting for final ratification from Southend on Sea Council which will take place at Cabinet meeting. It was hoped that this would take place in February/March, but the timing is outside our control.

It was noted that the Consortium have taken a “leap of faith” as they continue to support the Football Club ahead of their formal take over.

Following on from discussion led by Justin at the Shrimpers Trust AGM at the end of last year, PF advised that the Trust would be holding a surgery with its members to discuss the outstanding £40,000 loan on 4<sup>th</sup> February.

4. **Issues within the ground including Shrimpers Bar (and glass washer):**

TL advised that the Consortium members would be presenting their high level plans for the ground as part of the upcoming Q&A session at the Cliffs Pavilion on 25<sup>th</sup> January. It is anticipated that some work to improve facilities would begin at the back of the West stand at the end of the season. Ultimately it is likely that the rear concourse of the West would be demolished and replaced with a series of kiosks for drinks, food etc and the toilets replaced. It is hoped that a roof might be incorporated to cover the rear area.

It is also hoped that the South stand might have a kiosk reinstated and that netting might be employed to protect the seats from wildlife. They are investigating the possibility of adapting the North West corner into an area for away fans and to returning the North Bank to home fans. This would be particularly useful for the interim period while the East Stand is demolished before it is re-built. Safe standing remains on the table for the future. TL cautioned that Safety Advisory Group advice and approval would be required before this initiative could be actioned.

With specific regards to the Shrimpers Bar, a number of issues were raised. The current limit on numbers is not helpful and TL confirmed that a review of capacity levels had already been sought and that he anticipated receiving advice imminently. With it having five exits, the Trust feel that this is one of the safest venues within the Club.

PF said that the condition at the Shrimpers Bar is not conducive to the Trust holding events there, and that pressure has been applied from people asking for other venues to be used. PY mentioned that the heating currently in there is inadequate, with the panel heaters either ineffective or not working and neither of the two blower heaters above the doors working either.

TL agreed to obtain quotes to replace the toilets and sinks and to look into freshening the whole bar up. Trust representatives agreed that the Trust would be happy to help with this – having had the carpets cleaned and it all re-painted several years ago.

TL will also look into sourcing a glass washer for the bar, with figures having been provided by Trust Board Member, Clare Campbell, to both buy and to rent.

AS also asked if options to secure the bar itself could be looked into.

**ACTION – TL to source quotes regarding the glass washer and replacing toilets and sinks. TL to also look into current safety limits in the Shrimpers Bar. Trust to then plan for assisting with deep cleaning and possibly re-painting.**

#### **5. Academy plans moving forwards and Trust sponsorship:**

The Trust have been the main sponsors for many years now and PF sought clarity on plans regarding the Academy going forwards.

TL advised that the Academy could not be fully resurrected until such time as the Club returns to the EFL for two reasons principally; (1) we have lost EPPP funding and (2) until we get back in the league, we will not have any meaningful compensation for players we develop which move on. However, the U19s do exist and the Club is fully committed to getting the Academy back. Everyone connected with the Club would be happy for the Shrimpers Trust to remain as official shirt sponsors, although the current deal finishes at the end of this season. PF responded that the Trust is flexible about the current deal and happy to negotiate.

**ACTION – TL/RD to discuss potential new deal with PF/PY**

#### **6. Rebuilding relationships – some ideas:**

KF emphasised the importance of repairing the Club's reputation locally and put forward a couple of ideas:

- Reinstating the Southend Utd v SOSEMT cricket match – it transpires that one of the new Trust Board Members is the secretary and bar manager at SOSEMT,

and is keen to get this fixture back. KF explained how this had run in the past and how well received it was by our fans and cricket fans too. After some further discussion, it was thought that this might actually work as a potential alternative to Meet the Blues Day temporarily, and KF agreed to introduce Clare Campbell to AS and RD to help move this forward.

**ACTION – KF to email AS and RD**

- Picnic on the pitch at the end of the season – similarly to that held at Fulham’s ground, RD advised that this idea is already in hand, as is the potential to have cinema evenings when the new scoreboard is in place.

**7. Club shop:**

It was acknowledged that there had been numerous complaints about lack of stock and poor stock levels in the shop. This has not been within the Club’s control and they were examining results from the recent supporters survey in connection with this to move forwards. TL provided some colour to the situation stating that the Club had not been a great partner for Macron over the last three years – in and out of the insolvency courts and Macron had adopted a cautious approach to stock levels. The feedback on the quality of the merchandise is good and people like the shirts. A review is ongoing.

It was noted that the staff in the Club shop deserve credit for the way they have dealt with queries and complaints.

**8. Junior Blues:**

KF reported that things had been quite positive with the Junior Blues, with this year being the best for renewals as numbers continue to rise. As previously reported, Junior Season Card holders could not be included because of the issues with the database.

The Christmas event had gone off very well, and it was agreed that we would look into another crazy golf session at Easter, with a possible increase on numbers, depending on Adventure Island.

The gift for the new season has been agreed as a rucksack, and the cost of these mean that the Trust will not have to subsidise it as it has for the last two seasons while we tried to attract members. PY has already ordered these.

Some discussion ensued on how to counteract the no-shows at the Meet the Players Day, with considerably less people attending than had been booked. The idea of a £5 booking fee to be refunded on the day was mentioned.

**ACTION – RD/AS to liaise with Adventure Island and Kevin Maher regarding potential dates for an Easter event**

**9. SUEPA:**

PF noted how successful SUEPA continues to be and mentioned the forthcoming Evening with Peter “Spud” Taylor.

The first planned monthly drop in sessions for ex-players will be on 13<sup>th</sup> March at the Club, with new Board Member, Michelle Gargate hosting this and providing sponsorship covering costs of hot drinks via the Blue Boar.

10. **Any Other Business:**

- AS advised that SUCET would be planning to host specifically targeted supporters' forums, with three planned aimed at ladies, then disabled supporters initially.
- PF mentioned the funds which have recently been raised via ShrimperZone to "thank" the players and all staff, and which has been inadvertently misplaced in America, saying how helpful Dale Spiby had been in trying to help recover the money.
- Matchday parking – KF asked about the recent experience in parking as it had been quite problematic in its implementation. TL advised that this would need to continue for the time being, as it resulted in vehicles being turned away who regularly had parked on matchdays with no authority to. A new system will be in place from February.

KF also asked if the gates to Fairfax Drive behind the North Bank could go back to being opened once away fans have cleared to help ease the congestion post match as, at the moment, everything is being funnelled out of two exits, complicated by vehicles trying to get in at the same time. TL commented that the police had asked for these gates to remain closed. PY then asked if that was the case, could the police look into putting a box junction on Victoria Avenue to make it easier for traffic to exit Roots Hall at the main entrance.

- TL asked about the monies raised for the Hardship Funds, whether recipients had repaid their loans and to the Trust's plans for the remaining funds. PF advised that some loans had been repaid, although the paperwork made it clear that there was no obligation to do so. He also said that the Trust would be looking into where the remaining money would go. It was noted that the Trust would contact York City owner, Matt Uggla, about his sizeable donation, and that there are several options being considered, including using it as a starting point for a centrally controlled fund for similar situations or possibly local charitable donations.
- An Evening with the Consortium on 25<sup>th</sup> January will be filmed but it will not be possible to stream it.

Next Meeting: TBA but sometime in March