

Trust Statement – 19th July 2024

The Shrimpers Trust is pleased to welcome the consortium led by Justin Rees, the new 'Custodians of Southend United', as the owners of our football club.

We thank the members of COSU for their patience, their diligence and their determination to acquire Southend United FC over the past nine months, and we are excited about the prospects of a brighter future together. Like many of the club's players, coaches, staff and supporters, they have not walked away during extremely testing times, and we appreciate that commitment.

Over the past five years, our phenomenal fanbase has been forced to endure more than most. Set against the backdrop of a crumbling stadium, failed property deals, winding-up petitions and registration embargoes, a hundred years of participation in the English Football League was concluded by twin relegations, the first on points-per-game and the second witnessed largely on computer screens due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The route out of the EFL to the National League is increasingly well-trodden, and despite our frustrations and the effect on the mental health of fans, we recognise football supporters were far from the worst affected by the pandemic. But since returning to Roots Hall - for all but a few thousand spectators at a level two below the previous match they had witnessed in person - fans have needed to carry out tasks we never envisaged would be necessary.

We have been required to loan the football club money to ensure wages were paid; to crowdfund for staff; to set up a hardship fund for those at the club in the greatest need; to prepare our ground for the 2023/24 season and ensure it received a safety certificate; to publicise our plight to the local and national press; to lobby our local Members of Parliament and Councillors to take up our fight; to hold up our club as an example of the requirement for independent regulation in football; to speak to insolvency experts about administration; to explore the establishment of a phoenix club; to protest in the stands and on the streets against the now former owner and convince him his time was up.

None of that would have been possible without the support of our members, of the fanbase as a whole, of the combined supporters' groups and of the wider football family. The counsel of the Football Supporters' Association and Fair Game, in particular, deserve to be highlighted. We cannot express our gratitude enough to you all.

We have spoken to colleagues at so many other clubs that have suffered, some in situations similar to our own and some in completely different circumstances, but all with huge skillsets and all of whom giving up their time freely and willingly. In particular, our thanks to friends at Blackpool, Crewe Alexandra, Reading, Scarborough Athletic, Scunthorpe United, Torquay United, Wrexham and York City for the amazing support you have provided to us as we sought to safeguard the future of our club.

There are still matters to resolve, but they can now be completed in a place where the existential threat towards Southend United has been removed. Ron Martin and his family still hold possession of the club's major economic asset, Roots Hall, thanks to its separation from the club under his stewardship 25 years ago, and the stadium is in vital need of the investment of millions of pounds to be released under the terms of Southend-on-Sea City Council's de-coupled deal with the Martin family.

For months the Shrimpers Trust has held up Ron Martin to the media and the UK Government as the poster child of bad football ownership; a man that wanted to take a culturally-significant local institution and exploit it for the financial gain of himself and his family. Now, with renewal on the agenda, there is again potential for Southend United to be held aloft as an icon, but this time for collaboration and community instead.

For helping to provide that potential, we recognise the efforts of our local politicians and councillors. Last week we thanked Anna Firth, the former MP for Southend West & Leigh, and her case-worker, Emrys Davies, for her role in saving our football club.

This week, we add the Leader of Southend-on-Sea City Council, Daniel Cowan, who has committed significant time and effort in the first two months of his period in the role to re-imagining the deal that had been agreed between the Council and the Martins and driving that forward, negotiating with the National League and liaising with COSU to ensure the best possible future for Southend United and the city's residents, whilst keeping supporters informed.

We also thank the former Leader of the Council, Tony Cox, who recognised the cultural and heritage position of the football club within the local community and enthusiastically attempted to broker a deal with the Martin family, as well as Alan Richards and Joe Chesterton and the numerous Council officers involved in the process.

In addition to this, we would like to recognise the support provided by all those who amplified our cause, including the Southend Echo, BBC Essex and many other local and national media companies. In particular, the efforts of Chris Phillips - the Southend United correspondent for the Southend Echo and a lifelong supporter of our club - in chronicling this period deserve significant gratitude.

We have already seen a glimpse of COSU's vision for the future, unveiled at the 'Evening With The Consortium' event held in January. We have seen their desire to work with supporters, and they have already announced plans for a Fans Advisory Board. We now have an opportunity to form a relationship based on collaboration with the club's ownership, not contempt.

There is a famous line of commentary where Southend United is hailed as a club that refuses to die. Over the past couple of seasons, despite the incredible achievements on the pitch of Kevin Maher, Darren Currie and Mark Bentley and their playing squad during a period of incredible adversity, we have come too close to that scenario off the field.

That we have not suffered that fate is due to the outstanding efforts of everyone, united against the Martin family, and with supporters at the forefront. We have utilised every inch of the soft power we possess, and we now have genuine aspiration that those efforts may be recognised by a more formal role in the club's future. Southend United Football Club has the chance to thrive and rise again on a sustainable and collaborative foundation, and we look forward to playing our part.

The Shrimpers Trust Board.