



## Bradford City Supporters Board – Meeting Minutes

**Date:** 28<sup>th</sup> March 2024

**Venue:** Microsoft Teams

**Attendees:**

Tony Bates (TB) - Chair, Jonnie Carrington (JC), Adam Baker (AB), David May (DM), Steve Gorringe (SG), Ian Taylor (IT), Ryan Sparks (RS) - BCAFC, Marco Townson (MT) – BCAFC.

**Apologies for absence:** Wayne Robinson, Christine Tarren

### 1. Welcome and Introductions

The chair opened the meeting at 7.00pm, welcomed members present and noted apologies.

### 2. Review of Minutes/Actions from previous meetings

The minutes from the previous meeting held on 15<sup>th</sup> February, were circulated prior to this meeting and were accepted as a true and accurate record. Matters arising from the action log were as follows:

a) Action 57. Draft comms approved. TB to upload to website

### 3. Fan Discontent with Current Situation at Club

The Chair opened the discussion with relaying the breadth of feedback the Supporters Board has received since the last meeting. This was broken down into 4 key themes which are the current Ownership situation at the Club, The levels of Communication from the club, the continued up and down form for this season, the recruitment for this season plus the impact on the 2024/25 playing budget of the potential drop off in season ticket sales for the coming season.

The statement released earlier today on behalf of Stefan Rupp ([linked here](#)) was also discussed at length during the meeting

RS covered the build up to his visit to Germany to meet with Stefan Rupp in advance of the statement from the owner. A large focus of this was the Clubs current priority of 'sustainability' versus having the ability to compete and develop as a Club on the pitch. Stefan agreed he needed to communicate more with the fans and authored the statement during this visit with an aim to address a lot of points which have been raised. The outcome of this emergency meeting and the changed approach from the owner is that the Club can now go into the 2024/25 season with the means to challenge more than would have been possible with the trajectory prior to this meeting.

TB asked what will feel different from a fan perspective following the statement and change of approach. RS explained that because Stefan's first language isn't English he never feels massively comfortable in open communication in a public forum away from his first language. Stefan will be over before the end of the financial

year and will look to do some form of media briefings as part of that visit. The Plan would be that he would also communicate with the fans through statements a couple of times minimum each season. There are things coming down the road for the club which will need more input from Stefan Rupp, this will include the stadium situation so supporting him to build a relationship with Gordon Gibb. The aim is that Stefan will be more engaged with the wider Bradford City business and as a result the supporters. The hope is that this is the start of a different approach. Stefan has set a sharp list of points which he needs to deliver on, and he will have accountability on those points. These commitments include budgets and the conversations regarding the stadium too.

TB asked if Stefan has willingness at the present times to meet with the fans. The expectation is that a fans forum with Stefan was present may not be positive for any parties. There have been examples of other clubs having similar events which have descended into slanging matches. There is a possibility that he may be willing to meet with recognised supporters groups such as the Supporters Board on his next visit, but this would need to be addressed nearer the time. The key points from RS perspective is that Stefan has made clear commitments to the Club which are captured and now need to be delivered on.

AB asked that whilst the statement is broadly what the fans have been wanting to hear is there a genuine sentiment behind this from the owner or is the timing of this deliberate because of the recent form and increased discontent from the fans and the potential supporter protest at tomorrow's game. RS explained that the proposed plans for next season prior to the emergency meeting were the driver for the emergency meeting. What will be will be with season ticket sales and the statement wasn't done to try drive those up either. RS explained that season ticket sales wise the Club are currently only 400 tickets behind where they were at for this stage last season, at the time of meeting. Those figures are likely to be different now. The increased price of tickets seems to have coincided with an increase in direct debit (currently close to 48% of tickets sold). An Attempt to purchase Valley Parade may be explored as a viable option based on the options around new rent prices. Valley Parade does need serious work down to maintain it and that is a challenging situation to fund serious repairs in a ground the Club does not own.

Communication was discussed. At previous meetings RS has explained that despite fan discontent in the 'amount of communication' from the Club, this season's communication approach has been a replica of last season with the same amount of interviews, statements, etc. TB asked that if RS has reflected on this position over the season because replicating the previous model in a more challenging situation was a mistake. RS explained that this is something they would reflect on, but there is a balance to strike with not being too reactive with communication either as that can cause more issues and has been something which the fans have also criticised in the past.

The form of this season and its impact on recruitment plans for next season was discussed, the expectation is that changes in playing staff will need to be made so we can hit the ground running which is well built prior to pre-season as much as possible so the squad can fit the playing style of the Club going forward.

The budget for 2024/25 was discussed and whilst exact numbers were not discussed RS confirmed that because of conversations with Stefan the playing budget has to be improved further (and not just maintained at current level) to be competitive in the division. An example of this which would be considered would be the ability pay higher transfer fees if required to be competitive.

JC asked the impact of lower season ticket sales on Financial Fair Play for the club. RS explained that they are not expecting this to be an issue in the coming season due to a combination of other factors helping such as academy player sales and other revenue streams.

#### **4. Atmosphere Section move**

There have been far more contact to the Supporters Board over the last few weeks related to the move the Atmosphere section move. The theme of these points have been the new landing location for the fans. The impact on the fans already seated there and not wanting to be in a location directly next to the drum and also persistent standing. Whilst no section would be ideal, why was a block in the lower kop decided for this move

rather than back in the traditional home of the K block in the Upper Kop, and also what will the Club do to support those fans who may feel they need to be displaced from a location they have been in for many years? RS explained that a driver behind this move has been persistent standing. The safety bodies have told the club if they don't control persistent standing in upper decks of the stadium then they may face a lower capacity being forced on them which meant it had to be in a lower stand. The new location was chosen based on that guidance and also the amount of empty seats currently. No fan is being made to move by the Club to accommodate this change.

TB asked if the Club would be willing to support a short priority window of seat swaps prior to general release based on those impacted by this change in Blocks A, B, and C in the Kop so they have a better chance of finding suitable alternatives with the friends and family who they currently sit with. RS agreed this seemed a good option and will take offline with MT to look at implementing.

## **5. Football Governance Bill**

The Club are supportive of this Bill in principle and there is a meeting in London next week where further details will be discussed. The Club will not consider making any statements on this matter until after these further discussions.

## **6. Supporters Board Bulletin**

This was approved and will be published

## **7. Updates from club not captured on agenda**

RS commented that the club are finalising some very good commercial deals which will be announced in due course. Some relate to online and infrastructure enhancements which will significantly benefit the supporter experience.

## **8. Questions raised by Supporters**

### *a. Condition of Pitch – How to minimise chance of recurrence after this season?*

There have been a variety of factors impacting this seasons pitch, obviously that includes weather and playing some games in close to freezing conditions. One factor which was discussed which contributed was the delayed maintenance because of reaching the playoffs and the company leading most of the groundwork not promptly starting the work after the final home game. The date of the pitch being replaced is much earlier this year and also there will be further drainage work being performed to have a further preventative measure.

### *b. Ticketmaster change – General feedback on how this change has gone, plus question on accuracy of loyalty points since move of platform*

A key driver behind this change was the fact that the clubs previous ticket provider ceasing trading. Broadly the move to Ticketmaster has been well received but there have been some teething issues which have been addressed. This includes some issues with loyalty points not being immediately transferred

### *c. If season ticket sales are lower next season, would club consider Flexi-Cards again?*

No. These will not be considered for the 2024/25 season.

### *d. Date of next fans forum?*

Planning for this will start in coming weeks so date and attendees will be confirmed at that point.

e. *Can club look at increasing links with disability fans and teams?*

The Club have reached out to disability fan groups recently with this same aim but haven't had a response. TB to forward the email regarding this matter to MT so he can reach out directly

f. *Announced Attendance – is the figure tickets sold or fans who attended?*

This is the same for our club as it is all others. The announced attendance is the number of tickets bought, not the number of people through the turnstiles

g. *Graham Alexander – mention of other issues in a recent interview – what did he mean?*

RS hasn't heard the interview personally but when he picked this up with Graham afterwards and this was related to the balance, fitness and makeup of the squad rather than other issues

h. *Speakers in Midland Road stand*

Testing was done recently but they will ensure that Midland Road is tested again in the off season

## **9. Community Foundation partnership update**

No update at this meeting

## **10. Working Group Update**

Carried forward to next meeting

## **11. Any Other Business**

- a) Tidying of the fan zone during the game was discussed. There are bottles and glasses left out which are still there at the end of the game. RS taking that back in house as no reason this area couldn't be cleared before full time
- b) Scoreboard. Feedback that the print on the scoreboard can be too small to be read from the Kop. MT to pick up with Lewis and do some testing during the week
- c) Annual collection for Burns Unit at last home game. Look to be better organised this season and explore option of using contactless payments as an option too. RS to speak to Paula about this
- d) Thank you to the Club for a recent training day experience and how welcome made to feel by the management team.
- e) Missing Flag. Steve raised that a large England flag which was funded by supporters groups a number of years. This apparently has been lost. RS to take this back to the Club so they can look to find it.
- f) Is the Upper NWC being used next season? Only the first 8 rows will be used as a routine next season and the upper chairs will be covered.
- g) Altercation on Midland Road at recent home game at full time. An ongoing conversation with the council regarding more road closures.
- h) Thank you to the Club for finding the time to participate in this meeting and also the candour throughout.

The meeting concluded at 8.45pm

**The next meeting is to be arranged.**