

24/01/2024. 19:30.

The first Taunton Town Supporters Association Fan Forum

Intro by Nick Rickards about conduct of evening and how to ask questions.

Interim chairman Chris MacLeod gave an explanation as to why the group had started setting up as an association rather than a trust - in short there is a lot of regulation and paperwork to be a trust, the main gain would have been that a trust can have the right to buy into the club but as this is not able to happen anyway with how TTFC is set up at present there is little point struggling to become a trust. As an association we will run in a similar way, but we can be set up quicker.

The idea for this being done has been discussed for well over a year and we hope shortly to be able to offer membership to you. We are independent of the club and hope to provide a link between supporters and the board of TTFC to bring forward your views and ideas and indeed will, in the future, be invited to attend board meetings.

Q. Sticky. Will this be advertised widely as I am not on Facebook?

A. Chris. Yes, once it is all ready, we will try and get information out to people on as many platforms as we can.

News shared that despite being invited and accepting the invite that the management team had messaged at 08:30 today to say they had Covid and could not attend. This is very disappointing as we were hoping to be able to allow you to ask football related questions to them - but this is beyond our control. Interim chairman of the TTSA Chris MacLeod did offer to the Head of Football to provide a statement which is as follows: -

"Apologies for not being there tonight everyone.

We understand the very difficult times at the moment for the club, losing a lot established players like we have was heartbreaking for all of us, and as you are aware none of the management team wanted any of the players to leave.

The survival of the club is obviously paramount.

Our focus is now on keeping us in the league which will be a big task with the players that are left, we are on a daily basis speaking to players agent and pro clubs for players that will fit into our reduced budget.

All we ask is to back the players on the pitch, all of them continue as the management group do to give everything for the club during these very difficult times."

Q. Ian Wood. There have been rumours about a breakdown in the relationship between Kev and Rob, is this true?

A. Kev. I have not fallen out with Rob, back in October I had to make it clear that all football related decisions had to be in written form, ie. by email as there had been some grey areas between what some people were saying and what was originally asked for or agreed. I was talking to Rob most days, but with Karl joining as operations manager and taking a lot of tasks on for me a lot has fallen to Karl, so he now has these contacts a lot of the time. I have no problem with Rob. A positive of having Westy involved will be that he will improve the football links between board and management even more.

Q. Andrew Cload. How much do we owe HMRC?

A. Kev/Alan. We owe just under £14k.HMRC scan for clubs that fall behind. What the image shared does not show is that we had recently paid a sum to them, or that adjustments we have been talking to them about need to come off the sum also. These orders are common in football, and this is nowhere near the amounts that some clubs run with. There is very little likelihood of this progressing any further. We have had good sponsorship income and if it had all come in as agreed then this would not be an issue at all. We also have ideas we are playing with such as a season ticket deal, 3 for 2 at today's prices.

Q. Andrew Cload. Why isn't the clubhouse run as a club again, if it was then surely, we would be making money from it?

A. Kev. The clubhouse does get used for external bookings, we have meetings here and there might be potential for events if they are ticket only.

Q. Steve Townsend. What were the goals set for the management team and were any penalties agreed if they didn't meet these?

A. Kev/Alan. We have talked about needing to cut the budget, the budget at the start of the season was the same as last year. Challenging at the end of last season when it came out that Rob had agreed bonuses for players if we won the league. We live and learn; we will not make mistakes like that again. When we went up we agreed a 2 year contract for the manager, which at the time seemed reasonable, again we learn, we need to be smarter with contracts. Players are only on 1 year contracts.

We have been learning a lot from other clubs, how they operate, contracts, loans, challenges of borrowing in football.

Q. Ashley Spurway. It seemed that at some points we had more coaches than players, do we need them all?

A. Kev. Rob asked back in October to bring Steve Philips in, was told that he could not have 2 coaches for same role. But somehow it has ended up with both here. Again, we are learning and we as a board need to be clearer and stronger in managing these matters.

Q. Rachel Coles. Is the board harmonious?

A. Kev. We are not always as one, but you need challenge on a board. The football club comes first, we may disagree, but we must come to decisions, some are difficult decisions, but TTFC and its future will always be our top priority.

Q.??? . For future managers will the contracts be tighter?

A. Kev. Yes, the board is very much looking at all decisions and things are coming to us first now. Contracts have been a learning curve, what was suitable at the lower level is not at the national league level. Some of the issues are because so many clubs at this level are full time so the football wages is those players only employment. We are getting more help with this going forward.

Q. ???. What's going on with Austin Booth?

A. Kev. Basically, he does not want to play for us and has had an approach from another club. We have not been approached though and as he is under contract; we would expect them to pay to get him. He can buy himself out but so far, he has not wanted to do this either.

Q. Ian Wood. Is the 2-year contracts hindering what we want to do? Sounds like the manager has been making decisions.

A. Kev. Again, the learning curve has been steep, with lots of competition locally for players we have had instances where what we were told had been verbally agreed got to the signing of the contract and then the players said that was not what they had been told. Being so close to the season starting has meant that we have been bounced into having no choice.

Q. So you should have said no! The manager and players should not be in control like that.

A. Kev. Agreed and we have learnt a lot for the future.

Q. Also we signed a goal scorer and then he sat on the bench, why was this allowed to happen?

A. Kev. It was not a good situation and very frustrating. Perhaps some player opinions were taken into account too literally but agree that should have been managed and the performance of the team and TTFC trying to win games should have taken priority.

Q. Sticky. You should be all over this as a board, if we can't afford it then it does not happen. Is the manager operating within budget?

A. Kev. The truth is we have ended up with too many contract players, the balance is out compared to other clubs in our league. The recent changes have started to sort this out and bringing in the college players will hopefully be a positive.

Q. ???. Communication, the webpage is the last thing to get updated, for those that don't do social media it is annoying as I don't even know if a game is on or off, can this be sorted out?

A. Kev. We can try but all the media team are volunteers so there is a lot of things they are trying to do.

Q. Where is Rob Dray?

A. Westy. The manager told me last night he wasn't coming. Not acceptable he should have been here. From what I have seen since coming back a few weeks ago there are two things we have to improve, trust and communication.

Q. Adam West. Who put the budget together? Was a cup run included? Did it assume a 1000 gate?

A. Kev/Alan. We put the budget together and it was shared with the board and then it has to go to the national league. This year's budget forecast did include a bit for a cup run, but we should expect to get through at least the first couple of games, shouldn't we? An impact on our gate has been Yeovil in the same league, a lot of Yeovil supporters had started coming here while Yeovil were not performing, that have now gone back to Yeovil. Yes, we have again learnt a lesson. Contact players as mentioned before having been too great, the Linton situation, questions should have been asked quicker. As a board we will become clearer and tighter with all agreements.

Q. Guiseppe Franchini. I have a paper I have shared with the board but not heard anything from them. ..????

A. Kev/Alan. The sponsor for the stadium had been lined up and all agreed, they had an issue, and, in the end, they have not come through with the sponsorship.

That is a £18k gap in our budget. If that had come off, then all the bills would be up to date. Our aim is to get all the debt paid by end of the financial year. We have actually made above our sponsorship target this year. Our other incomes have been pretty good, for the car park etc. Football is a very different business there are so many variables and uncontrollable elements.

Q. Ali Lang. Hoping that we stay up, but do the finances mean we are needing to be relegated?

A. Kev. If we can manage to stay up then no the finances will not force a relegation. Our playing budget is talked about a lot, but having spoken with clubs in our league last season we actually sat at having the 10th highest budget, this year we are 9th. So we are not trying to operate with a bottom 5 budget.

Q. Trev. I have been coming here for 40 years, a few questions if I may and I would like to hear form others on the board. How often have the team trained this year? What support are the board giving the playing side? What plans are in place for getting us to the end of the season? How can the board help?

A. Kev. (as others did not seem able to answer) We will have to do the best we can within what we have, we don't have extra money for more players. As I have said before, lessons learnt and budget will be tighter controlled next season. I don't think they have trained that much.

Q. Why didn't they train when a match was called off? Why don't we have bookings at a 3G?

A. Kev. There are not that many 3G's available locally and lots are totally booked up, so short notice getting one is very difficult. What the players do in respect of training is not a board decision.

Comment: Andy Cload. HMS Heron has a 3G and will probably let you use it for free. I can put you in touch.

A. Kev. Yep, sounds good please give me the details.

Q. We have a councillor as a director, with the councils all being in a financial mess is our ground protected?

A. Kev/Alan. The club owns the site outright, it was purchased back in 1972/73, it does have a covenant on it that restricts use to sport/recreation, so our position is very safe compared to other clubs who don't own their ground. Very few in the National league own their ground.

Q. Steve Jervis. Postponements are a problem, what is going on with the pitch?

A. Kev. The ground a mix of thigs, layers of clay, originally a landfill site, builders sand, soil and more clay and of course roots from the trees that cause movement. It would need at least a couple of million to sort it out. There is a lot of talk now around football that with climate change that we should perhaps be playing the season earlier and having a break in the worst months as even those with 3G have issues with freezing.

A. Kev. Can I address a rumour at this point please. I am not paid £40k or £26k expenses, both myself and Karl are doing far more hours than we get paid for, regularly up to 60-hour weeks.

Q. Claire Kirk. What is the 3-year season ticket you mentioned earlier? Surely this will mean money for next year will just be spent in advance and create a problem next year too?

A. Kev/Alan. The plan would be to allocate the funds to the future too, not all just used immediately.

Q. Ok, because we are all invested in TTFC and want to know you are doing the best for the club.

Q. Sticky. You need to be budgeting and forecasting taking into account months of poor weather.

A. Kev/Alan. As before lessons are being learnt and the move up has been challenging. Our plan is to remain in this league and adjust what we have been doing for next season.

Q. ???. Are there any plans to bring on Taunton youth team players into the side?

A. Westy. Yes, and the ones we have taken from the college recently are a good start. Historically there has been little interest in this from the manager, but there are some great young players out there and they would learn so much from any time playing here.

Q. Trev. Surely the board all need to understand football and we should be bringing people in that can help build partnerships for the club. What is the plan to see out the season?

Q. Rachel Coles. There is no social down here, would love to see youth playing a bigger part.

Q. Ian Wood. But we don't play the younger players we have had or have now!!

A. Westy. We have to unify. This supporters association is a step in the right direction. Trust and communication.

Q. Aaron Prettyjohns. What plans for the board going forward, how do we have more information from you?

A. Kev. The plan is to have a rep from the Supporters Association that attends the board meetings, you will have a link straight into the board.

A. Westy. That will help unite, bring your questions.

Q. Andrew Cload. The clubhouse should have been making money, it used to?

A. Kev/Alan. It ran at a loss most of the time. Analysis was done on all the numbers looking at opening costs and what was actually being taken, the maths just didn't add up, the only things that made money were the fruit machines, and match days.

Q. ???. What is the plan for the management team and what will the philosophy be for the next manager?

A. Kev. Our business of football is basically sales and entertainment. We have to play exciting football, try and win games and even if we can't always win, we must entertain the fans.

A. Westy. We can't afford to sack them due to contracts. When we go out for a new manager, I think you will be surprised at the quality of manager who will be interested.

Q. Aaron Prettyjohns. But how much will a proper manager right for this league cost, can we afford that?

A. Westy. They may be more expensive, but they won't need an entourage, if necessary, they will be used to standing alone and taking responsibility. The overall budget will be set, and they will have to shape the team, players and staff within that budget.

Q. ???. Is it true some of the coaches were sacked and then had to be reinstated? Why did the board not know they had contracts?

A. Kev. So yes, we did say they had to go because we do not have any signed contracts for them, they are saying they do, but we are investigating the situation. We only hold a signed contract for the manager.

Q. ???. We all want to be here in 3-years, but does everyone at the front want to be here in 3-years?

A. Kev. Yes, we have some issues and mistakes have been made, but I have invested a lot in TTFC and want to continue to fight for it and push boundaries.

A. Brian. Yes, but it is of course up to members to vote at the AGM.

A. Alan. Yes, I have also invested years to TTFC, I think I do want to do slightly less than I have been doing, want to do more cruises!

A. Rich. I will stay as long as needed/wanted. Believe change is always good on a board.

A. Derek. I think we need to consolidate; Taunton is growing and the club should be able to grow.

Q. Dave Webster. Travelling to all away games it is noticeable that our ticket price is one of the cheapest, do we need to review this?

A. Kev. Yes we probably do, although lots of clubs in the SE are more expensive the earnings there are greater, we have to be careful here not to out price what fans can afford. We are looking at increasing prices with online purchases offering a saving.

Thanks to the Board for their attendance. Thanks to the Association for setting up the forum. Notes have been taken and will be shared ASAP.

If anyone has questions for the management team please give them to the note taker and the Association will forward them.

Forum closed. 22:15