

STOCKPORT COUNTY SUPPORTERS' CO-OPERATIVE AND STOCKPORT COUNTY FOOTBALL CLUB

Meeting Notes

to be held on Monday 8 April 2019 at the Fingerpost Hotel
commencing at 6.30pm

ATTENDANCE

Present (SCSC): Pete Towey (Chair), Andy Burt, Caroline Burt (Independent Secretary), John Giles, Ed Keane, Steve Murray, Andy Plant

Present (SCFC): Steve Bellis, Simon Dawson, Leon Berry

Takeover

1. What is the latest on the potential takeover?

There is still no change in the situation since the last meeting, but the interest is still there. Timescales are being dictated by the interested party. Once things progress to an appropriate stage they are keen to meet up with the Co-op.

In the meantime, the Board are planning for next season and can afford the transition to the National League.

Jim likes the hybrid system we have at the moment, the players who live further distances away are trusted to do their personal training on their own, and you know if they have been working hard enough due to the technology the club is using.

2. Can the Club update on the progress against the 5-year plan against the goals stated and also when will the next one be produced? They previously said it wasn't seen as a good idea with buyers waiting to come in, but if the takeover doesn't go through, can we have the next one please? This would outline how they intend to support the required structure to enable SCFC to actually become a full time run professional club in either Lg6 or Lg5 next season.

Until we know who our owners are going to be for the foreseeable future, there is no reason to refresh our five-year strategic plan as any new commitments may not be in line with the new owners' plans and forecasts. It could potentially send out the wrong message - i.e. we're not interested in seeking new investment; and detractors would pounce upon it as a signal that the existing owners are sitting tight.

Therefore, until such time as the ownership situation is clarified, everyone at the club (staff and directors) all maintain our own internal KPIs and measure ourselves against agreed short-term goals on an annual basis, but this is very much a tactical approach that any organisation would take. Until the ownership is resolved one way or the other, we will continue to benchmark against our existing five-year strategic plan. However, I am very keen that we do produce a new document once we have a clear indication of future ownership and levels of investment, whether the existing directors remain involved or not. It has certainly been a useful touchstone over the past 48 months.

If, for some reason, we suddenly discover that the takeover is dead in the water, then I think it would be appropriate to draft a new strategy document, building on our existing plan.

Looking back and measuring against the existing 2015 plan - we have already achieved many of our goals in terms of our ambitions off the pitch (schools/commercial targets/media engagement/political support/etc) but we have missed others including our longer-term aims of securing a permanent training facility and we are behind on our promotion targets but this largely reflects that Jim Gannon was not in charge for the first two years.

We also stated that we want to own our own ground (and we still do), but the deal struck with the Council has helped to alleviate some of our earlier concerns of being beholden to a private landlord.

We cited four top-line aims:

- Stability
- Sustainability
- Stadium
- Success on the pitch

We believe over the past four years we have made significant progress in all of these areas, but we are clearly not going to sit back - there is still a huge amount of work to be done to return the club to where we think it should be, and certainly out of Division Six, but the level of interest in Stockport County as an investable proposition is encouraging and indicates that externally people are recognising the work that has been done to turn this club around since the dark days of 2013.

The biggest indicator that our five-year plan is working is the success we have achieved on the pitch, improving year-on-year to the point where we are now challenging for the title, but also generating significant investment interest from outside.

Ticketing

3. There are rumours that the tickets from the Chorley match were received before the ones for the Chester match, but the club wanted to sell the tickets in order of the matches being played (i.e. the Chester tickets before the Chorley tickets) - Can the board confirm if this is true? And if so, why the tickets weren't put on sale at the same time? This would have made things easier for fans buying tickets?

The Chorley tickets arrived 48 hours before the Chester tickets. It was decided to sell them in date order to avoid confusion in the club shop – every away club has different procedures regarding tickets e.g. taking stubs, circling certain words, etc. As there is a limited number of staff, it was easier to do it this way.

4. Could the club consider putting tickets for high profile games on sale at more accessible times than midweek afternoons?

We are looking at later opening times. Obviously this would push operating costs up, but it is clear that we need at least one late night for the convenience of the fans.

5. Do the club have any plans in place - membership scheme, database records, etc...? to set up any sort of loyalty/membership scheme so regular non-season ticket holders also get some priority for matches where demand for tickets is likely to outstrip supply?

There are no plans at the moment, but this is mainly due to a lack of resources. Leon is currently only working two days a week at the Club.

Going forward we would have some of this information on Eventbrite, but it isn't that easy to export it in a logical way. Some work would need to be done on how to extract the relevant data.

6. Can the club clarify the situation with regards to numbered tickets? Some fans have been advised they can ask for a specific seat and/or must sit in the specific seat on the ticket - other fans have been told that it is unreserved seating apart from season ticket seats? This needs clarifying one way or another before the Curzon Ashton game.

We suspect that some of the confusion has come from the cup games and staff have been advised different things depending on whether it is a league game or a cup game. For cup games, the season tickets seats were taken off sale which meant the season ticket holders weren't able to buy a ticket for their seat.

For clarity, people should sit in the seat their ticket says.

7. Last Saturday my brother and I bought two tickets in the Cheadle End from the ticket office. Just after we had sat down two people came and showed us their season tickets for the same two seats. This is the second time that this has happened to me this season. I know there is a new ticketing system in place but it should not be that difficult to record the seats that have been allocated to season ticket holders in it.

This will not happen again. Eventbrite have updated their platform which means people can now pick which seat they want to buy.

8. Has there been any word from Nuneaton regarding ticket arrangements for this game? There are rumours of (and Nuneaton fans appear quite happy/gracious/accepting of) normal "segregation" being reversed and County fans being given the home end a-la Halifax in 1990.

The rumours are true! Nuneaton would normally print off the tickets and send them over to us. Sadly, due to the situation they are currently in, they aren't in a position to do this so County have taken over the organisation and management of the ticket sales.

We have been allocated:

1,200 (covered standing)

1,000 (uncovered standing)

300 (seating in the Main Stand – for the over 55 and disabled)

The tickets will go on open sale in about a week and tickets will be available to buy online. County are taking their own turnstile staff with scanners to get everyone in the ground.

9. It's very positive to see that the Club has launched on-line ticketing. Is there a date for season ticket holders in the Cheadle End / Main stand to be issued with a swipe card to gain access on match days?

Swipe cards will be issued to all season ticket holders for next season.

Cash turnstiles will not be available next season. People wanting to pay cash will need to go to the ticket office to buy a match ticket.

Leon has been working very closely with Lincoln City who introduced their online ticketing system a few seasons ago. 95% of their tickets are now sold online.

10. Is it possible to pay cash at the turn stiles at the railway end of the ground to allow fans to sit in the main stand?

Unfortunately not as the safety certificate won't allow it.

11. Would it be possible to have all the turnstiles in the Cheadle End open for the remaining matches?

That is the intention. If it doesn't happen it will be due to staff not turning up on the day.

Travel to away games

12. If we do achieve our stated aim of promotion we will likely face a number of lengthy trips - to the likes of Torquay etc. These will likely put a strain on the finances of travelling fans, as even booking well in advance train costs for such trips are hefty. In light of this would the club consider getting involved in arranging official supporter travel to away games (at cost of course)? Almost every game now available coaches from usual sources (Fingerpost and Peels on Wheels) sell out and people are left trying to arrange lifts

This is not something that had been thought of, but there is no reason why not as the club operated coaches when we were in the league. It will need serious consideration if we get promoted.

Community Ticket Initiative / Healthy Living Scheme for schools

The Co-op have conducted a survey based on the Community Ticket initiative and will share the results at our meeting.

Note from the Co-op - Only 30 responses have been received so far, and these have been from the coaches and managers. It doesn't look as though the e-mail has been forwarded to the families themselves. We want to wait for more responses before sharing the information and we have a fuller picture.

13. Will the Club support the community ticket initiative next season? Also the Healthy living/schools programme?

The simple answer is yes. Richard Park went into one of the schools on Wednesday to see the healthy living presentation for himself and he was extremely impressed. Also, John Giles provided some excellent feedback on the scheme for the SCFC Board meeting on Thursday.

The scheme clearly works, for example one of the football clubs came to watch a match with free tickets, then on the back of that bought circa 200 tickets for the Spennymoor game.

The Club thanked the Co-op – and especially John – for all his hard work on the Community Ticket scheme. The Club also thanked all the supporters who donated to the Community Ticket scheme.

14. It is important for the Club to maximise revenue from visitors on the community ticket scheme.

If the Club can receive £2 per ticket from the Co-op, plus £4 to £5 per head from the sale of programmes, catering, 50/50 ticket sales and merchandising, free tickets

become more attractive financially. Furthermore the Club will benefit from visitors that enjoy the experience and return as paying customers.

Can the Club look to ensure that sufficient resource is made available to realise this revenue?

There is a lack of 50/50 sellers and they aren't given enough tickets to sell (running out by 2-30pm to 2-45pm). Programmes regularly sell out all over the ground. There are long queues for catering. We don't sell merchandise within the Pop Side.

Merchandise is available in the Family Lounge and we had the highest ever takings for the last home game.

There is a meeting taking place with the 50/50 seller in the coming weeks to talk about increasing sales.

We are looking to get some form of semi-permanent roof / canopy over the concourse at the back of the Vernon Stand we could have stalls, face painting etc.

15. Do the Club run similar surveys for the Healthy Living scheme for schools?

We do ask for feedback but it isn't as comprehensive as the survey done for the Community Scheme, so we are looking to enhance this next season.

Summer Concerts

16. The Co-op have recruited around 11 people who can help for at least 1 of the concerts, and expect to be able to gather some more nearer the time. We do not have enough personnel to lead a project, but we are happy to support Help the Hatters. What time would the Club require volunteers each day?

What duties are volunteers required to do?

Simon Bellamy has had a meeting with the waste providers and it is going to be a bigger job than anticipated. It is expected that there will be 15 tonnes of waste. We also need to provide for street cleaning up to Mercian Way. This will need professional equipment.

Nearer the time, Simon will come to the Co-op meeting to talk about volunteers on the day. We will need litter pickers for the duration of the concerts to pick up litter as the evening goes along.

Pricing

17. Can the Club consider holding prices for under 16's and students for the forthcoming season? A junior ticket price of £5 is around the maximum for the National League and it is very important we encourage junior support.

We can confirm that junior prices will be frozen again next season regardless of which division we are in as it is crucial that we encourage our supporters of the future.

18. Is it possible for the Club to consider holding prices for over 65's on low incomes? This could be done via the Leisure Key scheme, which runs across Stockport, Tameside and the High Peak.

It is something that needs looking at. It was a scheme that was run in the 90's and it worked well. This will be discussed by the Directors at the next board meeting.

Ground Safety

19. I attended the game v Fylde last week and sat on the Pop Side. As I tried to exit the ground at the end of the match the large double gates appeared to be padlocked shut and the queue of people trying to leave were forced to exit through one small gate. I cannot understand why the large double gates were not opened; in the case of any emergency evacuation, there would have been a major problem.

To clarify, the gates weren't locked, but the steward failed to open them. This has been addressed by the Safety Officer and it will not happen again.

20. For the recent few home games, the bar accessed via the Cheadle End (Sapphire Suite?) only opens the minute the referee blows his whistle for half time. In the meantime there is a big crowd of County fans waiting to get in, blocking the gangway outside. On asking the steward we were told it was because the bar was short staffed. This must be a health and safety issue?

This isn't an issue that we were aware of, and it hasn't previously been raised with the Safety Officer. It will be looked at for the next game.

Catering

21. Can we please have an update as to the current catering arrangements?

Unfortunately, Malcolm Cooke couldn't make the meeting today, but he is continuing to monitor the situation. Small improvements have been made, but more work still to do.

A fan with 25 years of experience in this field has come forward to and offered to help so we will be meeting with him in the next couple of weeks.

Programmes

22. Once again, County v Fylde, programmes `sold out` well before kick-off time, leaving large numbers of spectators without one. The Club should be well enough aware, in advance of any approaching match, whether a larger crowd than usual is expected, and thus should be able to cater for the numbers involved by producing more.

Can this situation be resolved please to avoid a repeat in the important home games to come?

This is something that will be passed to Gary Burton who is responsible for Programme distribution and sales. We are conscious that they have been selling out too quickly and he is looking at increasing the numbers for the remaining two home games.

DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING

Monday 20th May 2019