

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

Meeting Notes

held on Monday 22 July 2019
(rearranged from Monday 8 July)
at the Fingerpost commencing at 6:30pm

ATTENDANCE

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

Present (SCFC): Steve Bellis, Gary Burton, Simon Dawson, Jim Gannon

Takeover

1. What is the latest on the potential takeover?

The situation has not progressed. No offer has been made at this point and the timescales are still with the potential investor.

The Team

2. There is concern amongst the fan base around the lack of signings – especially after three key players left the Club over the summer. Whilst it goes without saying we have confidence in Jim, and we have been assured money is there, is there an issue with players being too expensive or not being available?

Jim Gannon answered this question and took the opportunity to address issues raised at the previous meeting.

It was an important part of our strategy for the forthcoming season to retain the majority of the squad who got us promoted last season to minimise difficulties with the transition this season. These players deserve a chance to step up a level and make an impact in this league. With the majority of last season's successful squad signed up for this season we felt that only a couple of immediate signings were necessary.

There are plenty of players available, but it is a different market in the National League. There are a lot of players who are on league money – wage demands are a lot higher with four figure wages per week quite common.

The players we have retained and looking to recruit offer greater value for money and I believe will prove more cost effective for us. Loan players also offer good value for money and can add effectively to a team. The Champions team of last season was supplemented with good loans and the side that got us promoted in 2008 also had good loan players in that side. We have retained a proportion of our budget for strengthening with loans over the course of the season. For clarity, we can have as many as 5 loan players in our 16, but don't envisage full use of that type of number.

We are going to be signing a left back on loan this week on a Youth loan for an initial period of 6 months.

3. Please advise why the Clubs previous commitment to revert to a Full Time playing status has been withdrawn. If, as suspected, finances are the motivating factor behind the decision please confirm what level of attendances we should strive for so that we can compete with other National League Teams on a level playing field (*question from 20 May*)

We *are* moving towards full time football, but until we have a full-time training facility this can't happen. Manor Farm would be the preferred option and Jim and Gary Burton have now taken ownership of this issue and are in consultation with the owners for next season. Currently there are other tenants using the facility so we have to be respectful.

We remain as a hybrid model this season, with five training sessions a week (three football sessions and two strength and conditioning). There are only two players who can't train on Monday and that is Hinchliffe and Palmer. Jim emphasised that both these players are very professional players. Furthermore, Hinchliffe has a personal trainer and is one of the strongest well-conditioned players at the club, and Palmer will be able to train on Mondays for the important first six weeks of the season as he is a teacher and schools are currently on holiday.

We have put a structure in place and players have signed for the Club on that basis. We have to respect the players and staff when any changes are made to the training programme and we are always consulting with players and staff about improvements and amendments. It is also felt that our structure and forward planning helps us to minimise the turnover of players and staff.

The benefit of going full time for our players is not as substantial as people think. We looked fitter and better than many of the full time football teams we played last season. There are also difficulties with the initial transition, for example, when Southport went full time then didn't win a home match for four months.

We have to plan and prepare any change towards full time and its transition very carefully. Jim has spoken to staff at clubs like Halifax and Boreham Wood about the transition to full time to fully understand both the difficulties and value of changing to full time status and the jury is out on what difference it makes on the same or similar budget We need make sure we are more effective each year and when we do make the move, we do it right. The provision of a full time training ground and growth in the finances at the club will help provide the type of full time structure that will be important in improving our competitiveness at this level and prepare for a future push for promotion to the league.

4. How many players currently at the club are on FT contracts for next season? (*question from 20 May*)

There is no such thing as a full time or a part time contract. Every player is on a National League Professional Contract. It is the same standard contract for the National League, and for the Conference North and South. What we do with each player and member of staff is agree their commitments within our structure and the potential future changes and growth of our structures to ensure they can move forward with us.

Within these League contracts Clubs are expected to pay for at least 39 weeks, some pay more, some pay for pre-season, and some don't. Every Club is different. Over the last three seasons we have moved away from 39 weeks pay and we are now moving quickly towards 52 week contracts in respect to the players increased commitments of players to the level that they are solely employed by the Club as contracted professional players.

How can we increase revenue from player sales? Can we identify key players to sign longer term deals so SCFC can generate money for developing players? (*question from 20 May*)

Why do we want to sell players? We have players here who perform for this club therefore bringing in cup money, promotion etc. Would we rather sell these players in January for a fee or keep them until May and reap the benefit of them playing for County and delivering play-offs and promotion? These are more valuable improvements in club income than any potential sale.

Many of our part time players last season didn't get offered long term contracts as there was a desire of the club to go full time and this meant those players would have to carefully consider their position in relation to their other employment.

Last season we started to recruit younger players who were more committed to medium/long term plans at the Club to go full time and play in the League. That policy continues as we sign young ambitious players here and the by-product of that is that they aspire to play at a higher level. We look to add value to every player at the Club. So when you lose players like Lloyd, Montrose, Ball etc., we don't feel their loss as the overall quality and improvements of the team continues to rise, and that has been reflected in the year-on-year improvements in performance and results as we have players in the squad who can step up.

5. I think everyone expected some increase in ticket prices for the coming season, but doesn't the club feel that increasing adult walk up prices by 20% is a risky strategy? (*question from 20 May*)

There are increased costs in this league, such as for the overnight stays and transport. Players have received salary increases as they are now National League players and it was important to retain as much as the promotion team as possible. Also, players and staff are committing to extra hours, and/or are losing time at work, and need compensating for that.

Finance

6. What is the profit / loss that the Club will be report to June 2019?

This has not been finalised yet, partly because we are still assessing the finances from the concerts. We expect to report a small profit, after the concerts are taken into account.

7. Why are the club advertising the Match Day Hospitality Host and Junior Supporters Club Lounge Host as voluntary, rather than a paid role? There is quite a lot of experience required for both positions.

It should have been made clear that these are roles we are looking to backfill which were previously positions held by volunteers. The announcement was released without going through the proper checks hence the rather mixed message. The club has a number of incredible volunteers in various roles that help to reduce our match day costs. .

8. How many season tickets have been sold for next season? Please provide a breakdown for adults, junior, students, leisure key, senior citizens, etc.

We don't have the breakdown yet, but we are ahead of where we were this time last season, and there has been a spike in the number of junior tickets sold. It is anticipated that the final figure will be around 1,900 when all the corporate packages have been included.

We will also be looking at re-introducing the Super 10 ticket much earlier this year.

9. Why have the Robinson's advertising signs been removed from the Main Stand? Are they still working with County?

Robinsons are still involved with County, but they have a smaller budget to work with these days.

The Main stand advertising sign has now been taken over by Project Solar and the sign will be going up on Wednesday 24th July.

There is a lot of work done being done surrounding sponsorship to ensure both sponsors and the Club are getting value for money, and there are no old signage boards around the ground that are not being paid for.

10. Steve Murray has still not all the information he had requested re the SCFC accounts for last year, despite having chased Sedulo repeatedly.

Steve was asked to e-mail Richard Park with the information required.

Concerts

The concerts have been a fantastic success and the club should be very proud of the professional organisation and management of these events.

11. Will the Club be holding concerts again next year?

We would definitely like to, but this would depend on the availability of bands and the support of the council and local residents..

Ideally we would like to hold them earlier next year to give us more time to prepare the pitch for the new season and enable us to have a pre-season friendly at home. Even if we made the play offs this season, Edgeley Park would be free from 4th May as the final is played at Wembley.

12. Many local Edgeley businesses benefitted considerably from the concerts over the three days, with one local pub taking the equivalent of 3 months takings in one weekend. Are these businesses being encouraged to sponsor the club and are they showing willingness to 'give something back'?

The local businesses definitely benefitted with the Friary running out of potatoes on the Thursday night! They have agreed to contribute financially this season in some capacity.

A number of local businesses have been approached, but to be fair a lot of them already support us.

13. What is the process for booking bands? Do they come to us or do we approach them?

In this case, if it wasn't for the Blossoms, this wouldn't have happened at all. They wanted to perform at Edgeley Park as part of their summer tour. This was arranged for the Saturday, then as Paul Heaton and Jacqui Abbott have the same promoter, it was agreed to have them perform on the Friday. When that sold out so quickly, a second night was added.

Promoters have already been in touch highlighting bands that could come to EP and sell 15,000 tickets.

The Council deserve a lot of credit for their help and input in getting this event on. Simon Dawson also deserves great credit for the amount of work he put into ensuring the concerts went ahead.

14. What is the financial cost of losing home friendlies during the pre-season?

We made £8-9,000 last year, but we made £13,000 the other year when we played the Man Utd under 23's. If you get the right team, you could be looking at £20,000. We don't get any money from the away games.

If we do this again next year we would ideally want to do both the concerts, and a couple of pre-season friendlies at home.

15. Can we have an update please regarding the condition of the playing surface at Edgeley Park following the recent concerts?

Could the Club also indicate whether the drainage system has sustained any damage during the extended operations surrounding the events which included the use of 2 large cranes on the pitch, and the estimated cost of any restorative works?

The pitch is looking in good condition. The only real damage done, was despite providing a map of where all the sprinklers were, one of the pipes was slightly damaged. This has now been fixed at a minimal cost and we can probably claim that back off the organisers.

Catering

16. What is the latest situation with the contract with CGC? Will the catering company be changed, so the long term issues of poor service on a match day can be addressed?

CGC have the contract until the end of the calendar year. Negotiations with them are ongoing and a tender process is also in place.

Community Tickets

17. Last season 2,600 youngsters and their families, 35 junior football clubs and 11 community groups took part in the Community Ticket scheme.

However, there were around 22 junior football clubs that didn't take up our offer. Can we discuss how we can encourage the following clubs to take part in our scheme this year?

John Giles provided the Club with the results of the Community Ticket survey. All of the comments were positive, with people vowing to return to EP in the future. The only negative comments surrounded the catering.

The Club has committed to continuing with the scheme for the coming season, but not for the big games such as Wrexham and Notts County as they will bring a large away following and there would be issues trying to house everyone in the Vernon Stand.

Match Commentary

18. Has the club also considered offering free to air internet access as other clubs, at this level, successfully do, via a variety of providers (such as Mixlr)? This could grow audience figures over the current subscription model while an increase in sponsorship opportunities (due to higher listening numbers) could help increase revenue streams (and cover any costs).

The commentary raises in excess of £10,000 for the Club and costs us nothing thanks to the generous sponsorship of John Whelan. Raising the same amount of money via sponsorship would be a big ask. Plus, there would be set up costs involved in starting a free to air internet stream.

There is also a concern that free commentary may deter away fans from travelling to EP.

DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING

Monday 2nd September (tbc)