

Minutes of meeting of Shadow Board March 14, 2023

Present: James Errington, Derek Daniels, Matty Davies, Mellony Shepard, Dan Pearson, Len South, Gill Shepherd

Club representatives: Gavin Baldwin, Shaun Lockwood, Liam Hoden

Apologies: Patrick Queen, Lizzie Robinson, Paul Mayfield

1. Minutes from the previous meeting (January 24, 2023)
 - a. The minutes from the previous meeting were agreed as a correct record.
 - b. Matters arising - procedure for the sale of tickets for the Harrogate Town away fixture due to limited allocation.
 - i. SL said a request had been made for larger allocation but this was rejected and will remain around 600 tickets. Consideration was given for different options but it was felt that the fairest method would be on a first come, first served basis with season ticket holders retaining primary priority. Tickets would be limited to one per season ticket holder but it was expected that there would be a sell out within the first week of sales.
 - ii. DD said JE had a proposal for implementing a different sales method in such circumstances but understands this would not be brought in midway through a season. The proposal will be presented at a future meeting.
 - iii. SL said he felt season ticket holders should remain the priority as they are the supporters committing finances to the club to the greatest extent.
 - iv. MS raised the issue of the 9am on-sale time being potentially problematic to those at work. SL said it was difficult to find a time that would suit all
 - v. DP asked if individual fans had to be present in order to buy tickets or if someone else could buy multiple tickets as long as they had individual supporter IDs for all. SL said he had no issues with that. JE explained the process of linking supporter IDs via the ticketing website.
 - vi. MS asked about the on-sale times. SL confirmed online sales for this fixture had been switched from 12.01am to 9am to ensure parity across online, phone and in-person sales.
 - vii. MD asked if people could buy online/phone and collect at Harrogate on the day. SL said that was usually procedure but he would check with Harrogate to confirm it was possible.
2. Non-disclosure agreements

- a. DD said all members had signed and returned the non-disclosure agreements.
 - b. DD said anyone joining the Supporters/Shadow Board from this point on would be required to sign the NDA before attending any official meetings.
3. Shadow Board election process
- a. DD said the proposed process for electing members had been made available to all current members following multiple meetings on the issue between he, SL and JE, plus consultation with other supporters boards including Cambridge United, Lincoln City and MK Dons.
 - b. DD said no feedback had been provided from members and there was no feedback during the meeting.
 - c. DD conducted a vote with the adoption of the proposed election process passed unanimously.
4. Operations update from SL
- a. Safety, including the safety certificate
 - i. SL discussed general operations and said the department had suffered from staffing issues in the last few months which meant issues were being addressed but not with the ideal haste.
 - ii. SL outlined the safety team and their roles, including assistance with the safety certificate.
 - 1. The club was 85 per cent through the latest safety certificate process and still required a full structural report, emergency lighting testing, turnstile testing
 - 2. Members of the Safety Advisory Group had visited for the AFC Wimbledon matchday and were satisfied with the progress made
 - 3. SL said the fire risk assessment had been carried out and received a good report
 - b. Cleaning
 - i. SL acknowledged that stadium cleanliness was an issue
 - ii. SL explained cleaning was outsourced and that the club were meeting with the company involved.
 - c. Catering
 - i. SL revealed the club is set to sign a new catering contract imminently.
 - 1. SL said the deal was not the best one on the table in financial terms for the club but would allow for greater decision-making powers. He said decisions would be brought to the Shadow Board for consultation.
 - 2. SL said the previous contract gave no power to the club on operational decisions over catering. The fact the

contract had passed between four companies over the ten year lifespan ensured the approaches from the first year to the last were very different and ultimately unsatisfactory for the club.

3. DD asked if there was any indication over decisions that would be made by the new partners in terms of provision. SL said the process was not at that stage yet.
4. SL said the club's mindset would be a 'fan-first' priority but said there would need to be decisions taken to determine what 'fan-first' meant. Would it mean greater choice and quality are priorities or cheaper prices?
5. SL said the partners and club are both keen to engage with local suppliers across concourse and hospitality provision plus street food.
6. SL said the new agreement feels like a genuine partnership.
7. LS asked if catering outside the stadium will continue. SL said he hopes it will expand under the new partners.
8. JE asked if supporters will have the opportunity to taste test, as has been done previously. SL said timing might be an issue due to the contract starting at the end of May and requiring a quick turnaround in order to be ready for the start of the season. SL said the club will explore options
9. DD asked about the length of the contract. SL said five years with a break option after three. SL said the club did not want to be tied in for too long a period, particularly given the current League Two status and the hope to be higher in the pyramid in the next few years.
10. GS asked if the contract was taken on by another company, would the club have the power to block that. SL said no but the new contractor would be obliged to honour the contract. SL explained the difficulty in trying to break a contract based on finding faults with the service.
11. GS asked if the club will have control over pricing. SL said price control is something that will be examined. He said there is a determination to protect supporters but current food inflation of 20 per cent must be acknowledged.
12. MD asked about the new partners' experience of stadium catering. SL said they had worked with clubs across the EFL among others. SL said the liaising member of staff had previously worked for Premier League clubs.

13. MD asked about the possibility for bespoke items such as the 1879 beer previously sold. SL said he had hoped such items would continue but that was with previous caterers. He hopes bespoke items will be possible.
 14. DD asked if catering was separate to hospitality. SL said no. The partners would oversee catering for kiosks, hospitality and non-matchday provision.
 15. MD queried the hygiene rating reports on the caterers at the stadium and the stadium itself which had been published in the local press. This was discussed at length **(NOTE - since this meeting the 5* status has been reinstated)**.
 16. MD asks if renovation work costs will be sourced from the first team playing budget. SL said the playing budget will be protected. He gave the example of the stadium PA system, which is not fit for purpose. A quote several years ago for a new PA system was £100,000. He said if that amount of money was available, it would go to the first team.
 17. DP said he believes supporters would be willing to see money invested in improvements to the matchday experience instead of the first team in the short term and that improvements could bring in more supporters and therefore more revenue.
 18. DD asked if the club would receive a flat fee for the catering contract. SL said it was on more of a profit share agreement.
 19. SL confirmed the details of the new catering partnership should remain private at this stage and that an announcement would be made in due course.
- ii. DD brought a question from PM regarding the lighting on the exterior of the Belle Vue Bar and the potential safety risk. SL said the issue was on the to-do list of the new maintenance assistant who, as a qualified electrician, would be able to carry out the work himself.
 - iii. LS brought up a potential safeguarding issue regarding ticket sales. He asked if the club were selling away match tickets to under 18s without parental permission. SL said the terms and conditions of away ticket sales were determined by the host club and Rovers must abide by those.
 1. LS said the Supporters' Club coach travel policy required under 14s to be accompanied by an adult and this could clash with the club's way of selling away tickets. SL said the Supporters' Club had been advised to implement the

- policy in order to protect themselves and reiterated Rovers have no control over away ticket policies.
2. SL directed LS to liaise with Kirsty Cavanagh at the club over safeguarding issues.
 3. GS suggested those young supporters buying away tickets should be made away by Box Office staff of the Supporters' Club coach travel policies to try to help avoid any issues. SL said that would be possible
 4. MD suggested the club taken control of bookings for away coach travel. MS said this would take away the flexibility of bookings that supporters enjoy.
 5. LS said he would take up the issue outside the meeting.
- iv. MD asked for a progress report on the item found inside the stadium. SL said a blade had been discovered in a toilet on a matchday that was not there as part of pre-match checks. This had led to an increase in searches prior to supporters entering grounds and this would continue for the remainder of the season. SL said he believed it had been an isolated incident as no further items had been found since, either as part of checks or supporter searches.

5. AOB

- a. DP asked whether the follow-up questions to the Meet The Owners event would be made public as advertised. SL said that was on his desk and would be published but strains on operations had caused a delay.
 - i. DP said he felt his question on Terry and David's support for the football operation had not been answered sufficiently. He asked if the owners currently invested money into the club. GB said no but Terry Bramall would and recently had covered cashflow shortfalls.
 - ii. DP asked about future funding of the club. GB said he was engaging in conversations with the owners. He said he felt an essential need for investment in the team and maintenance. He also said Terry Bramall was receptive to the ideas presented in the conversations.
- b. DD said surgeries held between him, SL and JE were very valuable and helping to progress Supporters' Board business.
- c. JE asked if there would be season ticket sales between the early bird deadline of April 1 and full price on sale date of April 17. SL said there would be no official sales.
 - i. JE asked if a period of no sales was common practice. SL said yes it had been something the club had done previously as it allowed the club to assess sales and pricing. SL said it would

not be wise to have set prices decided months in advance which allowed for no consideration for changes to circumstances.

- d. MD asked for an update on season ticket renewals. SL said current sales were tracking behind where he had hoped they would be at this stage but only by 50-60 sales. He felt it was too early in the process to give a proper answer and that while sales were not where he had hoped, he was not too concerned by the situation.
 - i. DD asked what sales the club were targeting overall. SL discussed existing levels of sales and forecasts
- e. MD asked for an update on the 23/24 season kits. SL confirmed the manufacturers and sponsors would remain the same.
- f. MD asked what the plan was for the broken scoreboard in the north west corner of the stadium. SL said the current scoreboard was irreparable but a replacement was on order. He said the hope was the new scoreboard would be in place for the Northampton Town fixture (March 25) but it was stuck at customs at Leeds Bradford Airport. He believed the Crewe match (April 1) was probably more realistic.
- g. DP asked about the lack of events booked in for the stadium in 2023. SL said the stadium had not been chosen as a venue by the concert promoters used in 2022. He said the club would extend the play-on-the-pitch window to help boost income in the summer. He said any shortfall from the lack of events would have to be budgeted for. GB said talks were ongoing with the Football Association over the hosting of England age group matches. GB added that the Paul Heaton and Jacqui Abbott concert fell in the current financial year.

Meeting closed