

AN INDEPENDENT FANS' ORGANISATION AT BRFC

1. INTRODUCTION

This document aims to provide a summary of the discussions that have taken place over the last week or so with regard to an independent fans' organisation at BRFC. It incorporates discussions that took place at the Gas Trust's Open Surgery on June 5th and other feedback received via the Alternative Forum.

2. ORGANISATIONAL MATTERS

The majority view was that a relaunched Trust was the best way of going forward as there is a framework already in place which covers the broad range of objectives that people want to see from an independent fans' organisation. However, in order for it to be successful the following things are needed:

- **A New Name (And Logo):** A new name will be necessary as people need something new to get behind without any baggage attached. Because of what has happened in the past, the Gas Trust is seen as "damaged goods". One way to market the new organisation and achieve inclusiveness right from the outset would be to have a competition to choose the name and design a logo.
- **Effective Supporter Representation:** There was a view that the word "Trust" makes people think they are going to be paying into something in exchange for ownership of part of the FC (this may be worth bearing in mind when thinking of a new name). While there should be an underpinning aim of slowly gathering funds to acquire a significant stake in the club, the main aim in the near term should be to establish an organisation that acts as "a voice from the fans, for the fans", namely representing fans' issues and scrutinising the Board's actions. In order to do this effectively, there would need to be an effective mechanism for capturing fans' views so that they can be dealt with/addressed.
- **Effective And Concerted Leadership:** There is no shortage of people with the necessary skills to lead such an organisation – in order for it to appeal to the maximum number of supporters, the aim should be for the leadership to be as broad a church as possible/rainbow coalition etc. A number of people have already expressed their interest in taking this initiative forward and at the Open Surgery meeting a number of other names were put forward and they will be contacted.
- **Membership Drive/Good PR:** A serious and sustained effort will be needed to bring together a group that is large enough to really make its voice heard and not be dismissed as just "50 internet warriors". The Board and the local media will not be able to ignore a body that has significant public support.
- **Good Planning:** In order for a relaunched Trust to be successful there will need to be a clear strategy for what the organisation wants to achieve and a plan for achieving the key aims.

3. KEY ISSUES THAT NEED TO BE ADDRESSED

- **Poor Communications:** The handling of the whole stadium regeneration project has been poor – the events of the last week or so just represented a new low. However, communication is poor generally (e.g., marketing of the club – see below). There needs to be a change of philosophy at Board level – proactive communications rather than reactive. Be honest and open – if there are issues

then let the supporters know. Stop blaming everyone else. Resurrect fans' advisory groups.

- *Stadium*: The need for a change in philosophy with regards to communication is most acute in relation to this project. Create a fans' advisory group specifically for the stadium regeneration project in order to enhance its credibility.
- *Board/Fan Mistrust*: Perceptions of board secrecy - a bunker mentality – resulting in a 'them against us' attitude. Talks of bridge building by the new chairman not materialising. Directors saying that they don't communicate any more because they get abuse when they do.
- *Perceived Manipulation Of The Local Media*: Banning users from the Official Forum, Evening Post getting rid of columnists, not talking to Radio Bristol because they read out some uncomplimentary texts etc. etc.
- *Fans Directors*: not fulfilling their roles
- *Marketing Of The Club*: Poor advertising of forthcoming matches, failure to use database to market the club in the way that Bristol Rugby and City do. General air of complacency – sitting back and hoping things happen.
- *Pricing Policies*: Criticism of pricing for families and the lack of innovation with regard to season ticket sales compared with the likes of Bradford, Swindon and Huddersfield.
- *Incentives For Floating Fans And Part Time Support*: Needs to be a co-ordinated plan of initiatives for the whole season rather than fire fighting style initiatives.
- *Non-Match Day Revenue*: Should be doing more to make use of the bars etc. to increase revenues. Doesn't currently seem to be a co-ordinated plan for doing this.
- *Training Facilities*: Lack of progress re. Filton pitches.
- *RAfC*: Large parts of the *Rovers Agenda for Change* document that was released in November 2006 have not been progressed. A lot of the outstanding issues are already covered above but there are a number of other areas which could be progressed.

4. OTHER OBJECTIVES

There are five main objectives set out in the Gas Trust constitution. They are:

- To promote constructive dialogue between the club and those concerned with its future, to strengthen the bonds between the club and the community which it serves and to represent the interests of the community in the running of the club;
- To be the vehicle for the democratic election to the board of the Club of representatives of the Society to represent the views of supporters;
- To provide a forum for discussion of issues relating to the Club and the game of football in the area;
- To provide a positive image of the club to the media, local community and general public, thereby reinforcing the Club's identity and heritage and fostering support for the club;
- To further the development of the game of football in the area and the upholding of its rules.

As stated in section 1, the main aim of the organisation in the short/medium-term should be to represent fans on the key issues set out in section 3. However, there are a number of objectives relating to building links with the community and developing the game of football in the area that could provide some potential

activities for a relaunched Trust. For example, the recent Alternative Forum Dinner raised £500 for the Community Department – a series of events like that could raise much needed funds for areas like the Community Department and Centre of Excellence and in doing so help boost the club's reputation in the local community, attract the next generation of supporters and find future talent for the Rovers first team.

5. NEXT STEPS

The key next step is to quickly establish an organisation that can achieve the success criteria set out in section 2 and thereby effectively represent fans on/drive forward the key issues set out in section 3. The discussions so far have highlighted the following things that need to be done:

- **Establish a working group that can drive things forward:** As stated earlier, a number of people have already expressed their interest in helping out and at the Open Surgery meeting a number of other names were put forward who will be contacted. A mailing list has already been established so that discussions can take place without everyone having to be in the same room but a schedule of meetings will also be developed.
- **Set into motion a competition to develop a new name and logo.**
- **Agree a “manifesto” of what we want to achieve over the next 2-3 years:** The Agenda for Change document can form the basis of this as many of the issues set out in section 3 are already included in it.
- **Get the Working Group to devise an action plan for driving the achievement of the key goals set out in the manifesto**
- **Agree the name change**
- **Set up a relaunch event:** The aim would be to do this to coincide with the start of the new season.
- **Carry out a major membership drive** to meet one of the key success criteria set out in section 1.
- **Begin delivering on the action plan**

6. POTENTIAL TRUST ACTIVITIES

As would be expected, the discussions that have taken place so far have raised a wide range of ideas for representing fans and getting Gasheads' voices heard on the range of issues set out in section 3. These will need to be discussed and developed via the action plan mentioned in section 5 but would include lobbying of the Board, PR campaigns, Fans Forums, fundraising events etc. Protests and days of action obviously also figured highly in the discussions that have taken place. In respect of this, it is generally felt that:

- Protest is a legitimate means by which to push the views of fans but it needs to be well organised, peaceful and have a well stated aim so that people know what they are protesting for. In view of this, it should come within the action plan detailed in section 5 so that it is a part of a co-ordinated plan.
- Under no circumstances should there be a call for a boycott of matches as this would be completely counter-productive. In addition, we should make sure that any action differentiates between support for the team and disenchantment with the Board.