

Jon Gosling
Supporter Director, Brentford FC

Dear Jon

I am writing on behalf of the Bees United board in response to your open letter, which the Board discussed at our Strategy Day on 25 November.

Overall the Board recognises that there are many things to be improved in relation to both the short-term operations of the trust and the long-term stability of the trust and the football club. At the strategy meeting we discussed and agreed our priorities and we are communicating these in the newsletter posted to members this week. I will respond briefly to the main points in your letter but in general the Board believes that 'actions will speak louder than words'.

You expressed concern at both the direction and performance of Bees United.

Direction

The newsletter sets out our purpose/mission, vision and priorities and we believe the medium to long-term direction is clear. The challenge is to find ways to survive in the short term and create the opportunity to prosper.

Performance

All Board members, however, recognise that the performance of the trust in terms of the service and communications for our members have suffered in the past year. We are addressing this by the appointment of the new team of officers with specific roles and responsibility for developing and implementing action plans. The past few months have seen the appointment of a completely fresh team of Deputy Chairman, Finance Director, Society Secretary, Membership Secretary and Communications Director. They will now provide leadership in their respective areas.

Taking each of your detailed points in turn:

Refinancing

As explained in the newsletter, our monthly standing order income is being used to repay the £250k loan from Barclays. In addition to this, Bees United is due to repay £550k to 'investors' in January 2009. At the last board meeting Stephen Callen outlined a scenario whereby if the level of standing orders can be maintained we could have the option of repaying the Barclays loan in January 2009 and then use standing orders to underwrite a new loan which could be used to repay at least some of the investors. The balance of the £550k will be financed either by investors rolling over their loans or from the proceeds of the fundraising efforts.

In the case of the debts to be repaid by Brentford FC (BFC), it is the job of the BFC board to deal with this. As you are aware, the BFC plans are being worked on to improve the situation but there are some practical and legal issues that will have to be resolved before these can be finalised and made public.

Fundraising Plan

Following the election of Natasha Judge in September, the Board approved her proposed fundraising strategy in October and the Fundraising Group is now up and running again. The group is open to anyone who has an interest, Natasha is leading it enthusiastically and the results will depend, as always, on the level of commitment, imagination and energy that volunteers can find the time to put in.

New Stadium

Far from a culture of "secrecy", there have now been two quarterly reports on the stadium project, including a 2-page newsletter sent to every Bees United member just before you published your letter. The Fans Forum in November was also given an update about a decision to make an improved offer to buy the Lionel Road site that had been made in the BFC board meeting immediately before the Forum.

On the question of community involvement we are discussing with Hounslow Council how we can best build on their own consultation process, about plans for the site, which took place earlier this year.

Annual Accounts

You were present at a Trust Board meeting on 11 November when the auditor told the Board that it would be possible to publish the accounts the following Monday. On Monday this reversed and we were told that they wouldn't be signed off until the audit of the BFC accounts was completed. I agree the last minute change of plan put us in a embarrassing situation and that that the various inconsistencies between the timetables and requirements for BFC as a private company and Bees United as an Industrial & Provident Society, both with limited resources, will have to be better managed in future.

In answer to your point about accountability I would point out that the Trust now has a new Finance Director.

No Action Plan from last years members survey

I agree that it is unfortunate that no-one else picked this up when you stepped down from the Board in February. This is now clearly the responsibility of Allison Franklin and Mark Chapman.

Poor representation of Supporters' views

It would be helpful to discuss at the next board meeting what you mean by this point. As one of the Trust's nominees you do an excellent job representing supporters' views on the BFC board. The Trust Board needs to understand how it should play a more active role and put in place the means to do it.

Can the Trust model of ownership work?

You are right to flag up this issue, which is the subject of a healthy debate following my comments at the AGM. The supporters trust does not subscribe to the 'sugar daddy businessman' model, which has failed to bring sustainable success in the past. In the current climate in the football industry it will not be easy to make the Trust model work, because we are not competing on a level playing field. But we must step our efforts to explain to everyone why we think it so important that it does.

Decline and relevance of the Trust

Given that this year membership numbers have increased and standing order donations maintained, we cannot accept that the Trust is in accelerating decline. Its relevance is that it is now the majority shareholder in BFC and as such controls the destiny of Brentford football club.

As a voluntary organisation it is always the case that the Trust is only as good as the individuals that put themselves forward and take responsibility. As I commented at the AGM we must continually seek fresh people, ideas and energy. All three of the recently elected Board members have key roles and as mentioned above, apart from the Chair, we now have an all new team of officers. We must have confidence in their commitment and ability and do everything possible to support them.

We all look forward to continuing to work with you to achieve the aims that we all share for the Trust and the Club.

Best wishes for a very Happy Christmas and New Year.

Brian

Brian Burgess
Chairman