

Minutes of Aldershot Town Supporters Trust AGM

EBB Lounge, Aldershot Recreation Ground, Aldershot
Thursday, 12 December 2019

PRESENT: Tommy Anderson (TA), Sean Chambers (SC), Mick Lee (ML), Robin Carder (RC), Nick Bond (NB), Laura Smart (LS) and a quorum of members (9).

Tommy Anderson welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced the top table.

1. **Apologies:** Apologies for absence were received from Mike Pusey, Alan Hilliar, John Ragan, John Hewitt, Richard Petty and Terry Owens.
2. **To approve the minutes of the 2018 AGM:** Eleven votes on the night in favour of approving the minutes. Members unable to attend the meeting had had the opportunity to vote online or by post and 23 members had voted in favour. 0 votes against in total. The minutes were therefore approved by 34 votes to 0.

After the vote, Bob Green queried inconsistent reporting of the Golf Day expenditure in the prior period accounts. Mick Lee took an action to review the discrepancy.

Simon Stevens queried the timescales in terms of Trust representatives' resignation from the club board. This had happened very quickly after last year's AGM, where no indication of any tension had been made public (as per the minutes above). TA stated he would cover this in his Chairman's report.

3. **Chairman's Report:** TA's report covered: Resignation from the Board; General updates, and thoughts on the events of recent weeks. Following this, he would take open questions on all sections.

Resignation from the Board

TA acknowledged that members were looking for clarity on this topic. He expressed regret at having signed a Non Disclosure Agreement (NDA); this restricts full disclosure of many incidents. However, TA was able to give 3 anonymised examples to help members understand some of the frustrations:

- a) Appointment of the CEO: The vastly experienced Alan Bird and Bob Lambert were already in the role at a low cost. Alan was managing the finances for the board, providing regular cash flow reports and frequent updates on creditor payments, while Bob Lambert was operating the club on a day to day basis as General Manager overseeing the whole operation of the club. Despite this, the decision was taken to appoint a CEO for the start of the 2017/2018 season, without either a board vote or formal interview process. TA knew nothing about the process until the board were told of who had been appointed.
- b) A first team staff member asked for a pay rise. TA and the majority of the Board voted against this motion. TA believed the matter to be resolved. He was shocked to learn in subsequent weeks that the pay change had still been authorised regardless of the board vote against this motion just weeks before.
- c) Treetops (the Club's accountants) issued a serious warning to the Club around accounting practices and recommended changes. The Club chose to ignore the advice given. TA felt this was the final straw, as it could potentially leave him personally liable for the failings of the company (the Club). As a young man, with a future career ahead, he did not feel this personal risk was worth taking, particularly since neither he nor others were being listened to.

TA explained that calling an EGM had been considered at the time, but what he would have been able to discuss with members would have been so vague that it was felt that a discussion would not have been beneficial.

Three weeks after the resignation the Trust Board met with the Club Board. The Club had offered a “calm and professional” meeting but, whilst the Trust delivered on this, we felt that certain members of the Club Board failed to engage on this basis.

General Updates

Since the resignation, the Trust has been in a transitional period. A lack of volunteers meant that we could focus only on certain areas:

- Cash for Shots and Lucky 7s continue to be run at a good profit and much enjoyed by all – and thanks were given to Dave and Janet.
- Player of the Month/Season: The Trust continues to run the votes, although we note that the new Supporters Club is offering a similar benefit. TA said he would engage with the new SC to work through this.
- Away Travel: this was organised whenever financially viable, and coaches ran to Dover and Leyton Orient. A coach is planned for Boxing Day’s game at Eastleigh.

Ground Redevelopment: TA stated that the overall aim is to ensure the “once in a lifetime” opportunity is used to the greatest effect. It should benefit the club and community as a whole.

TA made it clear that we want a transparent process throughout, and expressed a belief that a Planning Brief for the site should be in place. This would provide guidelines and requirements for the redevelopment following a public consultation.

TA confirmed that he would like alternatives to be considered and the question of the appropriate site for ATFC needed to be considered and evaluated publicly. We need to verify that the best financial stability is offered by staying on this site. Ultimately the Trust wants to ensure that any plan is put forward is supported by all interested parties, i.e. Council, Club, Supporters and Residents.

TA confirmed that the Trust had made the council aware of our many concerns. It was felt that sometimes those close to the redevelopment were getting carried away and not looking at the bigger picture. As an outcome of the council conversations, the Council have encouraged the Club to sit down with the Trust and share ideas, as well as generally improving supporter communications around the project.

Recent weeks

Supporters Club: TA stated that the Trust did not agree with the need for a new Supporters Club. Nevertheless, he intended to open communications with the Supporters Club to align the two groups.

Cash for Shots: TA explained that he had approached the Shots Foundation and had agreed on a deal which would have made them the main recipient of the profits. However, before a formal press announcement could be made, the Foundation backed out and refused to accept donations from the Trust. TA stated that we would come back to the topic of Cash for Shots later in the meeting.

TA went on to give special thanks to Dave Donovan (for his work running Lucky 7s); Mick Lee (for his excellence in accounting), and Janet Guess for many years of excellent service. The Trust Board, old and new, were thanked for their resilience in a very tough year. Likewise, all members were thanked for their ongoing support to the Trust.

Questions

TA invited questions on any part of his update:

Q. Did Tommy and the board have any subsequent regrets about resigning?

A. Absolutely not.

Q. Could the Board expand on their views on the new lease?

A. Clarified that the Board were fundamentally in favour of a new lease, but only after due consideration had been given to all options. The Trust wanted a planning brief agreed for the site; greater overall transparency; the establishment of checks and balances to protect the solvency of the club, and better overall dialogue between the parties. These were the reasons for making representations to the council. The Trust raised concerns that the financial benefit to the club (both the one-off figures for redevelopment and the annual income) seemed to be already at the lower end of an acceptable/worthwhile range and as such had little room for contingency.

Q. What are the Board's views on the Club scheme, seemingly an exact copy of Cash for Shots, albeit at twice the cost?

A. The Board agreed that it seemed like a clear imitation. In regards Cash for Shots, Richard Llanwarne spoke clearly and strongly about the original intentions of the scheme (as discussed recently on ShotsWeb). He said that the scheme was set up to run independently, the intention being to raise money for special projects. Some general discussion around Cash for Shots followed as well as some dispute as to the meaning behind Shahid's words at the recent fans forum in regards this topic.

Q. Bob Green asked if the Foundation had identified particular projects for the proposed funding?

A. No – that was pending. There followed some discussion of the Grants available to the Foundation and how easy/hard it may be for the Foundation to benefit from such grants.

Q. The question was asked regarding the use of the word "percentage" of funds to be shared with the Shots Foundation.

A. RC clarified that the agreement was a monetary amount upfront, followed by regular amounts that represented the majority, if not all, of the projected profits for the coming year. Obviously with subscriber numbers changing it was not possible to be exact in citing a percentage figure, but the plan had been that the Foundation would have taken the vast majority of any profits. Board explained that they would have been willing to expand that commitment had the relationship flourished.

The Trust Board at this stage (RC) clarified their intent and next steps in regards Cash for Shots. This involved writing back to the Foundation to double-check that they would not change their mind. If they still refused funding, then Cash for Shots would revert to its original purpose, i.e. it would be maintained and run separately by the Trust. We would expect the Club to propose suitable projects for which funding could be released. Projects would only be agreed on a fully transparent basis (eg declared costs) and if it received the full support of both Trust and Club. Additionally, the Trust intended to donate small sums quarterly to local Aldershot charities and good causes.

With no further queries or concern from the members present, the AGM agreed to release a public statement the next day to this effect.

Q. Bob Green stated that the Boost The Budget account had just over £3,000 in remaining funds and asked what the Trust intended to do with the money?

A. TA advised that the Board were aware and, with the agreement of members, would be writing to Danny Searle the next day to offer him the remaining funds (as the money had been provided by fans for BTB in prior seasons).

4. Treasurer's Report: main points

- a) ML explained that the accounts represented the period from July 2018 to June 2019, so there was no easy read across to the previous 18-month period accounts. The recent year also reflected a period where fundraising for Boost The Budget was fading due to challenges on and off the pitch.
- b) ML gave an informative and straightforward explanation of the accounts, explaining that there had been a loss of £5,023 over the period. The period saw the conclusion of the Boost The Budget scheme which had contributed circa £45,000 over previous seasons. The £3,000 remaining in the account, as previously discussed, would be offered to Danny Searle.
- c) At the point of the accounting statement, there were 261 members.
- d) ML confirmed that he had written to all BTB members to confirm the termination of the scheme. One contributor remains unidentified.

- e) ML stated that the Trust owned 10,000 shares in the Club but had received a share certificate for only 100 shares. A longstanding request with the Club to issue the share certificate for the remaining 9,900 shares had been consistently ignored. Bob Green committed on behalf of the club to issue the share certificate by 21-Dec.

Questions on the accounts:

- a) A member queried whether the £18,000 in the bank should be earning better interest for the Trust. The general response from board and other members was that interest rates were so low that earnings would be nominal and probably not represent a sensible use of time and effort (to maintain/move to another bank).
- b) A member queried the profits from the Poppy Badge sale. After some discussion and a quick show of hands it was agreed that the Treasurer would transfer the profits of £88 to the Royal Legion.
- c) Bob Green asked where the Cash for Shots money appeared in the accounts. ML/LS confirmed that Cash for Shots had circa £9,000 in a separately maintained account but that it was their intention (and as an outcome of LS taking over its administration) that this would in future be included within the main Trust financial report, beginning with financial year 2019-2020. Members, including Bob Green, felt strongly that this was the right move.
- d) A member asked if there were any immediate plans for the balance of funds in the Trusts' accounts. Board confirmed no immediate plans.

5. To approve that the Financial Statements continue to receive an independent check - The Trust accounts had been independently checked at no cost by Mike Greenwood, a qualified accountant, as the turnover had not exceeded £25,000 per annum. ML expressed the Trust's thanks for this. It was proposed and seconded that they continue to receive an independent check. Members unable to attend the meeting had had the opportunity to vote online and by post and 24 members had voted in favour and 0 against. On the night 15 votes for, and 0 votes against. It was therefore agreed to continue with an independent audit (39 to 0).

6. Election of Directors – TA explained that Janet Guess had resigned from the Trust Board and was thanked for her long service. Tommy introduced two new directors who were to be elected, unopposed, due to lack of overall numbers.

Laura Smart: Laura explained that she was a recently retired Civil Servant, living locally. Her career had been in finance and audit-related topics. Through a mutual friend, she met TA and was impressed by his passion and commitment to the Trust. Laura has agreed to come on board to administer Cash for Shots, assisted by her partner Michael – despite neither having watched a match! She looks to continue Janet's great work and despite joining at a complex time for the scheme, she looks forward to growing the membership.

Q. Richard Llanwarne queried how the weekly draw was made?

A. Confirmed that Mike Pusey does the draw on a Friday morning. As scheme administrator, Laura will not take part in the scheme.

Nick Bond: Nick explained he was from Fleet and a long-time supporter of the Shots (40 years of history!) who has now lost faith and no longer watches. His group had lost faith with the Club and the Club board; he used the analogy that, if you were spending £20 on a bad warm pint in a pub, you wouldn't go back. He was also impressed by Tommy's enthusiasm, and decided to come on board as the lease topic came up recently.

He was amazed that no-one from the Club had chosen to attend the recent council meetings to represent the Club's views on the lease. He stressed the importance of the lease to the long term future of the club, and he hopes to build a bridge with the Club to ensure the fans are represented. Nick also wants to open discussions with other Trust-run Clubs, to share experience and see if we can learn any lessons.

As outlined in the Trust rules, a third of the Directors resign each year. This year, Mick Lee and Sean Chambers had resigned but had indicated their intention to stand for re-election. Because the Trust board was still 6 or under, Mick and Sean were automatically re-elected alongside new directors Laura and Nick.

7. Objectives for the forthcoming year: RC explained a slightly different approach this year around a number of objectives to be voted on. This was intended to give the Trust Board guidance from the membership on what was important.

Item 7a: A primary objective of the Shots Trust is to ensure the voice of the Fans is heard by the Football Club.

Did not require much discussion or debate. 23 members voted for this via online or postal votes with a further 10 in the room. With just 1 against and a small number of abstentions, this was agreed and passed 33 to 1.

Item 7b: A primary objective of the Shots Trust is to oversee and assure the healthy redevelopment of the Football Ground.

Did not require much discussion or debate. 22 members voted for this via online or postal votes with a further 8 in the room. With just 2 against and a small number of abstentions, this was agreed and passed 30 to 2.

Norman Gray noted that he had abstained – he observed that the animosity and division between the various groups at the Club didn't seem beneficial. He stressed again how important the lease was to the Club. Simon Stevens noted that the Trust needed to be careful not to undermine or operate against the Club in a public situation such as the council meetings.

Item 7c: A primary objective of the Shots Trust is to minimise our own Fund Raising initiatives whilst an active Supporters Club is operating.

Greater time was given to debate this one. The thinking was that a cause of friction around the various Club entities was fighting over the same "disposable income" from the same small fanbase. As such the proposal was to step back from fundraising whilst a Supporters Club was active, to allow them a greater chance of success. RC confirmed that any such mandate would be active until at least the next AGM but could be reviewed then.

Richard Llanwarne highlighted that voting "for" the option was a clear blocker on fundraising, whereas a vote "against" kept the options open. If the vote was rejected it did not mean the Trust had to go and aggressively fundraise (indeed volunteer numbers may prevent that). But, it did leave the option open if the Board felt it was appropriate.

14 members voted for this via online or postal votes with a further 1 in the room. With 22 against this (10 in advance, and 12 in the room) and a small number of abstentions, this was NOT passed 15 to 22.

9. AOB: Norman Gray asked whether the board was concerned about a social media posting that had been seen and subsequently deleted. The Board were unsure as to the meaning of this cryptic question but no further elaboration was offered.

TA was asked if he still intended to resign as previously indicated at the end of the year. TA stated that he had reversed that decision; largely to support the new directors that were now involved.

In response to questions about the Supporters Club – TA agreed to contact Ray (SC Chairman) to arrange meetings between the two bodies to co-ordinate efforts. Richard Llanwarne commented that the Trust should not feel forced to step back because of the new Supporters Club. His advice was to find a way to work together as best as possible.

The meeting closed at 9.15 pm.