

## **The challenges for STAR in 2016-17**

Among the challenges STAR faces in 2016-17 is countering the assertions, made by a few critics in online forums and real life, that we are pointless, do-nothing lickspittles, always in the Club's pocket. So, here's our counter-argument. Over the past three years STAR has:

- Had the Madejski Stadium registered as an Asset of Community Value by Reading Borough Council
- Run a consultation process about Royal Elm Park independent of that undertaken by the Club and its developers
- Used that feedback as part of the evidence in making a formal objection to the Council about the (transport) plans for Royal Elm Park
- Been threatened, albeit briefly, with legal action
- Personally represented a number of fans in trouble with the club / police / football authorities
- Agreed with the Club a protocol for future representation of supporters
- Launched the STAR Reading FC Hall of Fame, independently of the Club
- Provoked the very recent meeting between the co-owner, ourselves and other fans
- Successfully lobbied the Club to award as many Royalty Points for attending away matches as home matches

Yet, and this is the beauty of it, we have a better working relationship with our Club than most Supporters Trusts do with theirs. Both within the Football League and Supporters Direct the relationship between Reading FC and STAR is seen as something of a model to emulate.

STAR Board members meet with the Club's senior management team every six weeks and we can raise whatever subjects we want and, subject to a degree of editing, report these meetings on our website. On demand we can, and have had, meetings at a higher level with Club directors, particularly with regard to ownership issues. Each year, together with STAR member and accountant Dave Hunt, we sit down with the Club Finance Director to produce and publish an analysis of the Club's financial situation. We may have lost the right to attend the Club's AGM (due to the re-structuring of the ownership and loss of shares) but we will be pressing hard for a "Structured Relationship" on the lines advocated by the Government's Expert Working Group of football governance. Our members get the chance to listen to and question the team manager and other key members of Club staff at our Fans Forums. As supporters we should be grateful for this relationship and the part that Reading FC willingly plays in it.

If you're not even a little impressed at this point then you must know of a few Supporters Trusts who are doing better. Please tell us who they are and what they do – and stick to the ones who, like us, don't have a financial or controlling stake in their club. If you want to see a full list of 'what has STAR ever done for us?' please go to <http://star-reading.org/index.php/star/> .

We are happy to take on board constructive criticism, particularly from our members, and to follow good practice examples from trusts and supporters' organisations elsewhere. But it's no help to say STAR is useless when people won't point to other fans' groups doing better. Manchester United have a vast worldwide army of passionate and inventive supporters, several different groups of them, but they don't seem to have laid much of a glove on the Glazers yet.

Yes, we do salute successes elsewhere, like the Cardiff City and Hull City fans' groups who have taken on their owners to protect their club's heritage, but they are notable by their rarity.

The other word we often hear is that STAR lacks bite, almost as if there should be some swirling angry mob that storms the directors' box when times get bad and has its demands instantly answered. There is a place for that in English football culture but it ain't gonna happen on a fortnightly basis and nobody would want to run a football club if it did. The point about having 'bite' is you need to get near enough to your quarry to use your teeth. There's no point howling in the distance. What we're about is developing a relationship as a 'critical friend' of the Club. It takes time and trust. To take one small example – 20 years ago we (as RFSC then) were banned from giving out our questionnaires at the turnstiles because some of the possible answers might have reflected badly on the Club. Now we get to see – on an anonymous and confidential basis – the Club's own fan survey data.

From time to time people have talked about having an “independent” supporters' club – meaning one that essentially does not work co-operatively with the football club nor offers its members any tangible benefits or proper accountability. Such organisations may briefly flourish in a time of crisis but often subside into small talking shops of fewer than 50 members.

Our ambition for STAR is greater than that. We would like 20% of the match-attending home support to be members. Our numbers depend to a large degree on the success of the team so last season we were just over half that target. We have reached that 20% figure in the recent past but we do see that very much as a maximum figure. Most supporters don't take football as seriously as we, or the readers of TTE, do; most people are not joiners of societies. We're comfortable with that as a fact of life. Nevertheless we feel there's room for another thousand STAR members.

Unlike some trusts we're not going to give membership away for free because that simply means more administration for us without any gain in participation from the fan base. But if you like the cut of our jib, as expressed above and in the website link, can we please ask you to consider one of three options.

- Sign up via [www.star-reading.org](http://www.star-reading.org) at no cost for our regular (about fortnightly) email 'STAR Bulletin' which will keep you in better touch with what we're doing
- Better still – join STAR. Express your support for about the cost of a couple of pints (at stadium prices!). You can see the benefits and sign up on-line at [www.star-reading.org](http://www.star-reading.org) or at STAR Base opposite Gate 7 on match days
- And if you're already a member and want to do something for your fellow supporters or give us the benefit of your particular expertise or spend some of our money on a project you can persuade us into – come and talk to us about becoming a co-opted STAR Board Member. We have a few vacancies.

Roger Titford, Deputy Chair, STAR.