

# READING MATTER

£1

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Spring 2019

## Together



### THE UNVEILING OF THE ACADEMY HONOURS BOARD

Ms Xiu Li Dai, Nigel Howe, Simon Church, STAR, Tom McIntyre, the Vice-presidents, the Former Players Association

**INSIDE: TOUGH LEAGUE \* FINANCES \* JOSE GOMES \* CLUB 1871 \***  
**JOHNNY WALKER \* READING'S FIRST EVER HOME DEFEAT \***

# STAR Chairman's Notes



We are in a similar position to last season, with every game being very important as the team aim to keep Reading in the Championship. I said around Christmas, that we would end up fifth from bottom. I still hold to that prediction but it is not good for any Reading fan's well-being.

## Another battle

It is obvious to say that I don't want another battle to stay up staring us in the face next season. It raises a question with me, as to whether this is the level for Reading FC. I believe the club can move on to a regular safe position in the Championship, let's

hope I am proved to be right.

## Very impressive

It has not been all doom and gloom. Until he got injured, Andy Rinomhota has been very impressive in his first season in the 1<sup>st</sup> team. It was a pleasure as STAR's chair to be part of the project alongside Reading FC, Reading Former Players' Association and the Vice Presidents to have the Academy Honours Board boldly acknowledging all those Academy players who have reached the 1<sup>st</sup> team.

## Strong messages

I encourage STAR members to give your opinion on what you want from your Trust and what we have done. It's to every member's advantage if STAR can send strong messages collectively to the club's hierarchy. Despite team performances in the early part of the season our membership numbers have held up well but I would encour-

age you to get your friends to join next season. This will increase the power of our message and our credibility both inside and outside Reading FC.

I want to thank STAR members for their various contributions during the season.

**Ian Maynard**

## Every year we have elections to the STAR Board.

This year there are 6 vacancies. We very much welcome members who have not stood before.

We have changed the nomination process to encourage more people to come forward – see pp10-11.

- It can be done entirely online now
- You need only two members to support you
- Your statement can be as brief as 200 words

# From the Editor

The Championship is one tough league. No other “second” division in Europe plays as many as 46 League games; nor does any other stop for international breaks too; nor does any other contain four winners of European trophies either. Nineteen of the 24 clubs competing this season have been in the Premier League and eight are receiving PL parachute payments, varying from substantial to massive.

## Getting tougher

And it's getting tougher. When we were relegated from this level in 1998 (with Manchester City!) we finished below Bury, Port Vale, Crewe, Stockport, Tranmere and Oxford. This season the only “small” clubs punching above their weight are Rotherham and Brentford.

And the money involved is making it more unstable. Clubs like Huddersfield and Bournemouth have shown you can come from nowhere to the Premier

League and amass a fortune, which may or may not be spent wisely. Potential investors in football the world over will have looked at Leicester rising from the third tier to the English title and the Champions League in just seven seasons – and thought, I could do that!

## I could do that

Problem is, there are about 18 owners each season in the Championship who think that and only three promotion places. So consequently we see more problems of over-investing without success leading to Financial Fair Play issues and very short managerial lives. There's no chance of steadily building a team over three years, given the typical length of players' contracts now.

It all makes for a packed, exciting, unpredictable and turbulent division with immense pressures on those who own and manage the clubs. When we came up under Alan



Pardew in 2002 we adapted quickly and reached the play-offs.

## Top half

Since then we've liked to regard ourselves as a top half of the table club, at the very least, but the last few seasons have shown it is a struggle to maintain that level, especially when much is uncertain behind the scenes and the division as a whole has become tougher.

But it's better here than below, so let's hope we can escape the drop and build a more stable future as we approach our 150th birthday.

**Roger Titford**

# Where are we now?



**The biggest change at the club since our last edition a year ago has been the removal of CEO Ron Gourlay and the return of a degree of realism.**

Whilst we are still at the wrong end of the Championship table it looks at the moment if things are turning for the better. Jose Gomes has brought positivity, Nigel Howe has a real feel for the club, five loanees have come with talent on the pitch rather than the need for treatment off it and Club 1871 have brought some noise.

It was clear that something was seriously wrong at the club and STAR has called for greater visibility from the new Chinese owners and, in October, for some kind of dramatic act to get us out of the rut. The calls were answered. In STAR's view Ron Gourlay was not a

good fit for our club. His experience was with international and commercial giants like Chelsea and Manchester U and his eye was more on the promise of the Premier League than the danger of League One. Paul Clement came across as a decent bloke and the least pretentious manager we've seen in a while but the results and the passing were going nowhere special when Howe removed him days after his return to the CEO seat. The appointment of Jose Gomes came as a surprise – and an increasingly pleasant one.

All this however has come at a cost. The club accounts to June 2018 look ghastly and it's needed swift action from Yongge Dai and

the Board to keep us on the right side of Financial Fair Play. He has injected money as share capital. Of more concern the ownership of the Madejski Stadium has passed from Reading FC Ltd to Renhe Sports Management (the holding company). STAR had placed an Asset of Community Value on the stadium but it doesn't apply when the transaction is between related companies. The club will now pay the holding company an annual rent of £750,000.

After the era of Anton and his missing wallet and the Thais and the disappearing car park we are now blessed with an owner who's in mild danger of spending too much! Honestly, we shouldn't complain. Bearwood should be fully open next season and is a massive investment in our increasingly successful Academy. Bacuna and Illori were sold in the January window while Aluko went on loan to Renhe Beijing. The first team squad was reduced in numbers which helps pay for the five loanees in Jan 2019. These owners are not, as some initially thought, totally hands-off. They have realised the need for some personal presence and have not allowed the situation to get worse.

The disruptions caused by the several changes of ownership, the loss of some important club staff, and the changes in CEO have meant that we at STAR have not felt as closely involved with the club at the highest levels. Now hopefully we are in a more stable era we can get that closeness back. We're seeing it in various club media involve-

ments, in running Player of the Season and our Hall of Fame. But to make the relationship more concrete we're pressing the club for STAR to have an officially recognised 'Structured Dialogue' with the football club. This is basically a government / PL / EFL backed protocol to ensure that responsible and democratic fans' organisations are properly engaged by the clubs on key strategic issues at least twice a year. Hopefully we'll have something to announce on this before next season.

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#### **STAR'S Hall of Fame 2019 Inductees**

1870s – James Simonds

1880s – Stanley Hayward

1890s – Stan Justins; Johnny Holt

1900s – Ernie Watts; Billy Henderson

1910s – Jack Smith

1920s – Bert Eggo; Alf Messer

1930s – Billy Butler

1940s – Joe Edelston

1950s – Jimmy Wallbanks; Jimmy Wheeler

1960s – Maurice Evans; Colin Meldrum

1970s – Bobby Williams

1980s – Stuart Beavon; Steve Richardson

1990s – Keith McPherson; Mick Gooding

2000s – Nicky Shorey; Dave Kitson; Ivar Ingimarsson

2010s – Alex Pearce; David Downs



## If ready cash were green grass

**STAR's resident finance gurus take a look at the recently published club accounts for year ending June 2018**

We're sure that you are all aware of Birmingham's recent 9 point deduction (shame it wasn't more to help with Reading FC's relegation fight) in relation to breaching Financial Fair Play Regulations (FFP). With other clubs being investigated too it may have come as a concern that club recently published accounts to the year ended 30 June 2018 showing a £21m loss. This can be mainly attributable to £13m decrease in broadcasting and media income and £5m decrease in match day receipts. We benefited from PL parachute payments and play-off income in the previous season. The club's net liabilities (debt) is now just shy of £60m and is very substantially being funded by the current owner.

FFP was established to prevent clubs spending more money than they earned in the pursuit of success which ultimately could impact upon the future survival of a club. Clubs are able to make losses but are restricted to the level of these losses. Clubs can spend up to €5m (£4.3m) in excess of income over a period of 3 years although this can be extended up to €30m (£25.8m) if the additional loss can be covered by the owners. We are aware that Reading's owners have recently done this. Any costs linked to promote investment in stadiums, training facilities, youth development and women's football can be excluded from these calculations.

To keep the show on the road, let alone to make it competitive, takes a lot of money and effort and it seems likely to us that this is being provided. The owner has increased his share capital by £15m – an investment in the club. However, inevitably as a supporters' organisation, we are prone to worry about the longer-term implications of some of these dealings and will be seeking reassurance from the club.

STAR is pleased that the accounts have been made available in such detail and we have highlighted some key points of interest below.

Renhe Sports Management now owns 75% of the football club. We reported last year it had 90%. We're unaware who the new shareholders might be.

The stadium has been transferred from the club itself to its parent company so even though the ownership has not changed: what was the reasoning behind this? Where would this leave the club if the owner decided to sell the football operation?

Were the £13m decrease in broadcasting / media income and the £5m decrease in match day income budgeted for or merely a result of the poor performances on the pitch?

Wage costs, in the year Ron Gourlay was in charge, have risen by £6.6m and now represent 197% of turnover – one of the highest ratios in the division. Can this be sustained or is there a new strategy? It's noted the equivalent figure for 2017

was 76%, so was last season just "the perfect storm" - which included paying off Jaap Stam?

The club received £592,000 from London Irish rugby. If their move to Brentford goes ahead, what is the club doing to replace this income or would the pitch be made more available to the U23s or Reading Women FC?

We hope to meet with the club soon and provide more feedback to supporters via our website.

## Deaf team chasing trophies again

The STAR-sponsored Reading FC Deaf team are again chasing trophies on many fronts. In the EDF South League we beat St Albans 4-0 on 7 April to win the South League. As the EDF League is split into North and South divisions the winners of each league have to play each other in a final to find the overall National winner.

In the BOBi League we are three points behind the leader in 3rd place. There are four more rounds of four games to go. We are happy with this progress after winning the league again last season.

As for the EDF South League Cup, the BBC Get Inspired FA People's Cup and the South East Region 11 v 11 Disability Cup, we are through to the finals in all these competitions. Some of these finals do not take place until late May or early June so keep an eye on the STAR website or STAR Bulletin and we will keep you up to date with kick-off times, venues and results.

**Pete Vickery**

## **What's STAR done this season?**

I was talking to a bloke in the pub about STAR and he said I know you arrange the away transport but that's about it. Yes, we have transported 1766 people on 40 coaches (up to Ipswich match) but we're also involved in so much more. Here are some highlights in chronological order. **Kevin Lenton**

### **August**

Dan Rook gave a presentation to the STAR Board about the Disability Programme at RFC with a particular focus on the Reading Deaf Team and thanked us for STAR's continued sponsorship and support.

STAR will also support and sponsor the Reading & District Sunday League cup competitions for a second season.

The Board congratulated Paula Martin on winning the inaugural Supporters Direct Jacqui Forster Memorial Award.

### **September / October**

STAR assisted the Under 12s Academy head coach with their planned World War I trip.

STAR attended a Conservative Party fringe meeting in Birmingham focussing on the regulation of English football.

STAR now receives regular reports from Companies House to track the ever-changing structure of the various companies related to the club.

STAR attended the RFC Fan Engagement Panel Meeting which focused on aspects associated with fans' match day experience.

### **November / December**

The STAR's open letter to RFC Owners about the lack of direction generated quite a lot of interest and was generally well received with many positive and supportive comments.

STAR liaised with RFC to organise and coordinate the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary (of end of WWI) Remembrance Service.

STAR spoke at the unveiling ceremony of the Academy Honours Board installed in tunnel to the main reception which we have part-funded, along with the FPA.

### **January / February**

STAR organised a walk to the ground before the Aston Villa game to raise mental health awareness – MIND is now the EFL's nominated charity.

The new, mobile-friendly, STAR website went live and significant improvements were made to the content and frequency of social media updates.

### **March**

The fourth STAR's Hall of Fame event took place with 25 more inductions.

# Can YOU run STAR?

**Well, yes, maybe, in time.**

**It's certainly possible and relatively easy to become part of the 15-strong Board that does run STAR.**

Like any volunteer organisation we're always on the look-out for new talent and energy.

In the past couple of years Andrew Wearing has joined, whilst still a student, as our Exiles co-ordinator, Johnny Hunt contributes on community and social media issues and Sam Stevenson of Club 1871 has been co-opted: all are championing younger fans. Sacha Liddiard, our Facebook guru, and Jon Hall, who looks at governance / finance and assists the women's team are also recent recruits.

STAR is a strong supporters' trust with nearly 1200 members this season, money in the bank and good relationships with the club and the wider football community. There is scope for individual board members to push their own ideas or connect with campaigns such as safe standing or fairer ticket prices. Equally we're aware of the need for STAR to become more tech- and social media-savvy.

Our Board meets monthly, on the second Thursday of the month, from



8-10pm at the stadium and we're on the edge of enabling remote conferencing participation technology .

We organise away travel and events like Fans Forums and Hall of Fame, represent members and supporters to the club, the media and national supporters' organisations and keep a watchful eye on the past, present and future of the club we love and support.

To put yourself forward for the STAR Board you simply need to be a current member aged 18 or over and nominated by two other STAR members. The formal 'terms and conditions' you'll find on the next couple of pages of this issue.

**Have a think about it, please.**



## BOARD MEMBERSHIP OF STAR

### Co-operative & Community Benefit Societies Act - Board Elections

STAR would welcome members putting themselves forward for election to the Board of Reading Football Supporters' Society Limited (trading as 'STAR'- Supporters' Trust At Reading) at its next Annual General Meeting in September 2019.

In order to stand for election you need to be a fully paid up member of STAR and be aged 18 or over. You must be proposed and seconded by two other fully paid up STAR members. No STAR member may propose or second more candidates than positions to be elected.

#### Eligibility

*Please refer to Section 6 of the Election Policy (available on the STAR website). By submitting a nomination, candidates will be deemed to have accepted this Election Policy, the Society's Rules, and any other policies and rules adopted by the Society Board and the membership and agree to be bound by them.*

The completed Nomination Form is to be forwarded to: The Hon. Secretary, STAR, 156 Kidmore End Road, Emmer Green, Reading RG4 8SP.

You can also submit this Nomination Form by email to: [secretary@star-reading.org](mailto:secretary@star-reading.org). Either complete the Nomination Form in full and send as an email attachment, or complete your candidate details and arrange for your proposer and seconder to send separate emails in support of your nomination.

#### Election Statement and photograph

You must also provide an election statement of between 200-1000 words, which should be typewritten, either on a separate sheet of paper or, if your nomination is submitted by email, as a separate attachment. This will give you an opportunity to set out your platform for standing, your interests and ideas you would like to implement if elected. STAR will truncate any statement over 1000 words.

You may also submit a photograph of yourself for publication with your statement. All statements will be made available to STAR members with the voting forms and will be published on the web site.

**Closing date for receipt of nominations is 31<sup>st</sup> May 2019.**

*Receipt of your nomination form will be acknowledged by email or telephone.*

#### IMPORTANT – DATA PROTECTION

In completing and returning this form, you authorise STAR to process the personal data that you have provided for the sole purpose of administering an election to the Board of STAR in accordance with the rules of the Society. The Data Controllers will ensure that the data you provide is processed and protected in accordance with the STAR Data Protection Policy. The data will only be disclosed to those authorised to receive it for the stated purpose.

**NOMINATION FORM**  
**BOARD MEMBERSHIP OF STAR**

## **Six positions to be elected**

I confirm that:

- a. I wish to stand as a Candidate in the STAR Co-operative & Community Benefit Societies Act Board Elections.
- b. I agree to abide by the Society's rules; policies and resolutions (see Section 6.1 of the Election Policy).
- c. I am not disqualified from acting as an officer of the Society under one or more of the conditions outlined in Rule 58 of the Society's rules.
- d. I confirm I personally submitted this form.

**Closing date for receipt of nominations is 31<sup>st</sup> May 2019.**

<b>Full Name:</b>		
<b>STAR Membership No:</b>		
<b>Address:</b>		
<b>Post Code:</b>		
<b>E-Mail Address:</b>		
<b>Telephone Number:</b>		
<b>Signature:</b>	<b>Date:</b>	

We, the undersigned, being fully paid up STAR Members for the year to 30th June 2019 nominate the person above as a candidate for election. (No STAR member may propose or second more candidates than positions to be elected.)

	<b>PROPOSER</b>	<b>SECONDER</b>
<b>Full Name:</b>		
<b>STAR Membership No:</b>		
<b>Address:</b>		
<b>Post Code:</b>		
<b>Telephone Number:</b>		
<b>Signature:</b>		
<b>Date:</b>		

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What? Again?



Tradition, mate.



Still?



Yeah, not even room  
for a can of Carabao.



Put all the play-off final  
highlights on here then!



They just did.



's not exactly a blank  
page now, is it, eh?



Nah, it's a Blanksy!





## Jose Gomes at the Fans' Forum on 28 Feb 2019

*"It's a dream for European and South American coaches to work in England. We are in the football country. I've never felt this passion from the stands, the intensity of the play."*

*"The Championship looks like different rules sometimes. There's a lot of blood around compared with other Leagues!"*

*"Sometimes I am frustrated, we move the ball around the box and no-one shoots. The*

*three big things we are working on are more shots, a higher defensive line and controlling the game more with the ball."*

*"We want to control the ball. We train six different ways for the goalkeeper to distribute, give him more options. Our players receiving the ball must have a good body position, to turn as they receive the ball....Yes, sometimes they make my heart jump!"*

# Coming soon-ish

## Summer 2019

The first team should be in and training at **Bearwood**, the new purpose-built facility on the site of the old golf course. The club's training base has been at Hogwood since 2005 but Bearwood will be wholly-owned and right up to the necessary Category 1 Academy standard. It may even be used as a training base for Euro 2020.

The 120 acre site was identified in 2013, bought in 2014, planning permission was granted in April, clearance work started in 2016 and then in earnest in October 2017. It's a massive project which has managed to survive three changes of ownership of the club!

## Late 2019

Allegedly the **Green Park Station** on the Basingstoke line is due to open in late 2019. Balfour Beatty are undertaking this £16.5m project. Whilst it will be a huge benefit to supporters from Basingstoke, Bramley and Mortimer the 15 minute walk might deter fans from the town centre. The frequent £2 return F1 bus service from Reading Station is now working well.



Royal Elm Park

Que sera, sera

## 2021 at the earliest

There's not much to say on **Royal Elm Park**. In August 2018 the Council approved a number of documents relating to the residential units but nothing official has happened since. STAR is given to believe nothing much will for a couple of years at least.

Since the project was launched by the then Thai owners in October 2015 the environment has changed considerably. For one, they no longer own the club. The EU referendum result was a surprise. House prices are falling. Crossrail keeps getting delayed – now end of 2020. The Reading Gate retail 'park' has opened on the old HP site, offering competitive venues.



## Remembrance Service 2018

Under torrential rain on 10th November, ahead of the match v Ipswich Town, Reading FC, STAR , the Former Players Association and others gathered to pay respects to the fallen on the 100th anniversary of the end of WWI. Over the past four years STAR has marked the centenary of the death of each of the 15 Reading players with a wreath.

STAR is planning another war graves trip in June 2020. Please contact us for details.





## The passing of a legend

In 2016 we were delighted to induct **Johnny Walker** into our Hall of Fame. Sadly, Johnny passed away in March 2019. He was our skipper, right back and penalty-taker in the late 1950s and early 1960s. More than that he was a well-loved character, a true Glaswegian who nevertheless spent two thirds of his life in Berkshire and much of it in Theale from where the funeral cortege departed, the shopkeepers shutting up as it passed by to form a guard of honour.

A Scots piper piped him into the Henley Road chapel in Reading which was overflowing with mourners, many of whom stood outside for the hour-long service. The card was in the design of a 1950s Reading programme. David Downs was among those who paid tribute to a true Reading legend and the wake took place at Theale Social Club where Johnny had worked for many years. **Colin Bishop**

## WHAT IS STAR?    WHAT IS READING MATTER?

For the benefit of any non-members or new members reading this, here's a very brief explanation. STAR is Supporters' Trust At Reading, the independent, officially recognised body that represents supporters of Reading FC. It is a democratically accountable Community Benefit Society administered by an elected Board of volunteers. Reading Matter is our annual newsletter. For newbies, page 12 is a very slow, long-running gag.

# STAR Annual General Meeting 2018

**Summary of 16<sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting  
6 September 8pm at the Madejski Stadium**

The Minutes of the 15<sup>th</sup> AGM held on 13 September 2017 were approved and signed as a true and accurate record of that meeting. There were no matters arising.

## Elections to the Board

Five candidates were standing for election. Peter Matthews, Chairman of the Election Sub-Committee, proposed each candidate in turn and all were duly elected. Jon Hall and Johnny Hunt were elected, for the first time.

## Chairman's Report

- 1166 members at the end of the 2017-18 year (a fall of c700).
- Coach travel as usual to all away grounds - 1935 passengers in total to 25 destinations.
- Representation at RFC's regular Senior Management meetings, a meeting with the Thames Valley Police Football Liaison Officer for RFC, attendance at Safety Advisory Group meetings and continued affiliation with external groups such as the FSF and Supporters' Direct.
- Two Fans' Forums.
- Supporters' Player of the Season – organisation of the card vote.
- One issue of Reading Matter was published; regular STAR Bulletins were sent out; Facebook and Twitter followers continue to increase.
- Hall of Fame – 25 new inductees at the third Hall of Fame event.
- Donations to several causes including to the RFC Community Trust, sponsorship of the RFC Deaf team and the Reading & District Sunday League cup competitions.
- The Chairman gave members details about some of the priorities for the 2017-18 year:
  - To establish a structured relationship with RFC's new CEO, Ron Gourlay and the owners.
  - To launch a new, more accessible and user-friendly STAR website.
- Predictor competition: First prize was awarded to Mark Wellsteed, second and third prizes to Alan Wellsteed. Gareth Pritchard won the prize for best entry before the season started.

## Treasurer's Report

Vicci Elliot gave her report and presented audited accounts for the year ended 30 June 2018.

The Chairman closed the meeting. A Fans' Forum followed with Paul Clement, club manager, as the guest speaker.



## The Reading Derbies, No.6 in the series

### Reading v Reading Hornets

**3rd April 1875 - Our first ever home defeat**

**Or was it?** On paper Reading were undefeated at home (King's Meadow) for over three years since the first game in February 1872, a run of 16 matches, and the score line of one-nil to the Hornets created serious post-match controversy. But the Hornets were as much a twin club as a rival.

Reading had won the previous two encounters and in this game they "completely penned their opponents in the first half". In the second half Gilbert Sillence, the Hornets skipper managed the rare feat of going past full back Edward Haygarth, the Reading star who had just been capped by England.

Then late in the game the marvellously named Napoleon Day, the Hornets' keeper, scored the only goal with a freakish long shot "totally surprising ... everyone else on the field". We have only Reading's words for this as, contrary to the custom, they, as losing side submitted the report to the newspapers. Sillence objected strongly to this "most

unfair report" written with "unmerited sarcasm" and calculated "to destroy the good feeling and honest rivalry between the two clubs".

His grudges didn't go too deep as he later became an important player for Reading. Day, too, was among many of the Hornets who also played for Reading. The Hornets were the first team from the town to enter the FA Cup in 1876 and included in their team that day two senior Reading players.

In the only surviving picture of the Hornets (above) they appear to be wearing the same strip seen in the very first Reading FC team photo. So not only did the two clubs share the same players and the same pitch but also perhaps the same kit! Should this therefore be considered a real home defeat?!

*Details taken from 'The Lost Years of Reading FC' by Roger Titford*

## Curiosities of Yesteryear - Two portraits of Elm Park



Above, a painting, and below, a photograph, both created in the last season at Elm Park





# “C’MON READING”

The initial Club 1871 plan was to try to put fans in an area where away fans weren’t the focal point. In Germany fans back their team for 90 minutes, so we wanted to try and cultivate that style of match day experience and bring back some good feeling to the MadStad.

We started out with a few hundred v Derby and saw that rise and fall as the season progressed. After speaking with groups at different clubs who had tried something similar we had realised it would take some time for people to come around to the idea.

A few weeks ago we decided to reward those who had been part of the stand’s short history by offering them two free beers. Heineken actually offered to give beer to anyone who came through the turnstile, which resulted in a huge influx of fans. It gave us a great opportunity to show the new comers what we were about. We had a great day, making loads of noise. It seems the fans felt the same way too, as they have been returning in their droves ever since.

Long term, the plan is to keep growing the project, with plenty of fan input and new ideas. We want to improve the atmosphere across the stadium, and this project isn’t just about one stand. We are not going away, we will continue to grow and work with fans to help create the best atmosphere that we can. **Sam Stevenson**

READING MATTER—Published on behalf of STAR

Reading Football Supporters’ Society Limited. trading as STAR

Registered Society under the Cooperative and Community Benefits Societies Act 2014