

Notes of Structured Dialogue meeting 24 July 2020

Attendees:

Reading FC: Nigel Howe
Bryan Stabler
Jackie Evans
Mark Bradley

Supporters: Paula Martin – STAR
Steve Benton – STAR
Paul Ellix – STAR

1. Finance in post Covid-19 world

RFC stated that it was in cash conservation mode with no income and was “battening down the hatches”; budgeting for reduced revenue and reduced cost. Supporters will need to be prepared for some players being sold.

It stated that, in line with government guidance, it remained hopeful of getting crowds back in before Christmas 2020. But it is subject to the success of pilot schemes and the national virus outlook. A lot of work behind the scenes is being done to try to prepare for the safe return of fans.

STAR asked if there was any relaxation of EFL Profit and Sustainability rules

RFC responded that there may be adjustments but it is still to be defined by the EFL. May be calculated on a 2-year average with some mitigation to be factored in, but player sales remain vital to meeting profit and sustainability obligations.

It further stated that generally in the EFL:

- Player wages are falling;
- Transfer values are an unknown but could be expected to reduce by around 50%;
and
- Progress is being made towards a salary cap (which they support).

The transition to a salary cap for most Championship clubs would be difficult including RFC.

2. Recent share issue

RFC confirmed that the recent share issue was to convert a loan from the owner into equity in order to comply with EFL rules.

3. Club story and identity

A paper had been submitted to RFC by STAR in advance of the meeting on behalf of a supporter.

RFC indicated that it was interested in the suggestions in the paper; that it was already trying to do some of things within it (telling a narrative to express identity e.g. Tom McIntyre – local hero). It considered that the paper needed expanding particularly in laying out tangible actions (including new ways of engaging with supporters especially using other stakeholders).

STAR indicated that the paper had not been discussed by STAR but would be with a view to adopting it.

4. Safe Standing

RFC re-iterated that once the law has been changed it would like to move ahead with safe standing, but that the money it would require would be a valid consideration currently. The current managing of crowds at the Madejski Stadium is within the boundaries set by the Safety Advisory Group and indicates safe standing could work well.

5. Free Travel

STAR reported that free travel had a significant impact on STAR's income. Also, that the fact it was free seems to have led to significant "no shows".

RFC responded that the owner was initially happy with the impact of the free travel on away supporter attendances but acknowledged that the number of supporters travelling dropped off as the season advanced, citing a number of factors.

STAR suggested that if it were to be repeated then to give it some value by charging a nominal fare. RFC suggested a discounted fare may be more appropriate and suggested 50%. However, the scheme is unlikely to be repeated in the forthcoming season with no current club-wide preparations being made for away fan entry to stadia.

6. STAR membership

STAR reported that it was rolling over membership for those who were members in 2019/20 for free, on application before the STAR AGM in September. STAR stated that as a consequence of no income from membership it was not offering any membership benefits.

RFC indicated that it would not be averse to STAR offering the Fanstore discount to reward STAR membership, maybe online and urged STAR to consider how it might work.

7. Heritage Lottery Fund bid

STAR are co-operating with University of Reading and Reading Museum in bidding for Lottery funding for an exhibition of Reading Football Club with especial context of the

150th anniversary. Bid applications are currently closed so it is hoped that it can be pursued in October.

8. STAR's Reading FC Hall of Fame

STAR reported that the Hall of Fame event was being further postponed.

9. STAR's AGM

STAR reported that it intended to hold its AGM by Zoom. RFC questioned whether it could be broadcast from the stadium with a small group from the STAR board present.

10. Fans' Engagement Panel and Senior Management Meetings

RFC indicated that both had been curtailed by Covid-19.

11. Season Tickets

RFC indicated that before it could consider season tickets for next season, consultation was required with the safety authorities over a range of issues (e.g. entry and exit, social distancing, catering, away supporters etc.) RFC suggested that initial reduced capacity may be 27% - 33%.

RFC further suggested that priority may be given to those supporters who had opted to roll their outstanding 2019/20 credit towards the cost of 2020/21 season tickets, but emphasised that no decisions had been reached and that discussions to enable iFollow to be available were taking place. *Subsequent discussions clarified that the priority also includes those who opted for 'support' and 'credit'.*

12. Royal Elm Park

RFC stated that its Indoor Dome facility was in the process of being relocated to the Forest School in anticipation of repurposing the land on which the current dome sits. It further stated that all parties involved in REP needed to reach agreement with, potentially, one party buying the other out before progress on this could be made. It also stated that the planning consent will need amending but gave no details.

RFC completed the meeting stressing that in the current circumstances supporters will be more important than ever in their contribution to the club as soon as it is possible to attend games.

