



Please reply to :

STAR Chair
5 Chapel Lane
Riseley
Reading
RG71QU

Tel.: 0118 9888678

Email: chair@star-reading.org

19 April 2022

Dear Dayong Pang

The 2021-22 season is nearly at an end and thankfully we look almost sure to have retained Championship status. But our relief at this outcome must not overshadow the distress we have had on the journey.

We are extremely concerned about the future of the club that we all love and support. By many key measures we are, and have been for some years, in decline:

- Fighting relegation in 4 of last 5 seasons
- Deducted 6 points for breaking EFL restrictions
- Player wages way in excess of income
- Club no longer owns stadium
- Transfer policy expensive and ineffective when compared with our direct rivals
- Loss of Academy talent like Loader and Richards for no benefit while relying on loan players
- Attendances and season ticket sales down
- Little comms from the executive team in updating fans on future plans
- Fan sentiment deteriorating (latest results from EFL survey awaited)
- Fan experience deteriorating – food offer / parking prices / no match programme
- Fan protests about the way the club is being run
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We do appreciate the high level of investment made by the owner and the creation of Bearwood as an important and lasting asset for the club and its Academy. We do appreciate that in the short-term that

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the club has had to change its player recruitment policy – and this has brought some advantages. And we do appreciate the level of contact that STAR has with the club’s departmental managers. **But these positives do not offset the decay the club has fallen into and the consequent lack of interest in it from both former and potential new supporters.** If crowds go below 10,000 this club cannot operate effectively – in terms of transport, stewarding, match day food offers etc. We are at a crossroads.

It is important for Reading fans to understand the key decisions being made at the club so that they are engaged and are able support the club through good and bad times. In addition, it is always helpful to feel the passion that the owners and CEO have for the club – so we can understand that we are all in this together. We have had little or no communications over the last few years to demonstrate this.

As an example, please listen to the this (<https://podcasts.apple.com/gb/podcast/utas-meets-paul-barry/id1350441726?i=1000557455095>) podcast from Cambridge United owner Paul Barry – who talks to all these points in minutes 20-47. What you will hear there is real engagement from the very top of the club (the owners) with fans and fan groups which engenders a positive and realistic attitude throughout the club. For a second example here’s Paul Barber (<https://podcast.sport-social.co.uk/podcast/1871/>), CEO of Brighton, a club that until recently we regarded as a direct rival, highlighting the need for and value from regular communication forums on changes and even unpopular changes between the club and fans.

The government fan led review (published November 2021) has been broadly welcomed by the EFL and the majority of its clubs. It is an ideal opportunity and means for Reading FC to reset its relationship with its supporter base. The review recommended that a “Golden Share” should be introduced at each club to ensure that the club takes on board the view of fans on key issues such as stadium ownership, club location, team name and first team colours. STAR is in favour and this would be an excellent signal of change.

The government fan led review also recommended that a “Shadow Board” (consisting of fan representatives) should be introduced at clubs, in order to aid positive decision-making. The fan experience at our stadium has declined in recent times. Reading have ceased production of a matchday programme, the only club in the Championship to do so without any replacement comms put in place – seemingly just a cost saving exercise. The quality of the food offering outside the stadium is in sharp decline with many younger fans now eating/drinking in Reading before the match and arriving at the stadium just before kick-off. We have an increasing pattern of fans complaining about beverage availability and pricing, car park issues and pricing and stadium maintenance issues. All seemingly bought about through a focus on cost saving which impacts on fans and their desire to attend matches. An active Shadow Board can influence decisions on these matters in the right way, whilst simultaneously making fan engagement genuinely credible.

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We would ask that the Club Owners / CEO:

Attend the final home match within the Club 1871 area to better understand our fans passion, desires, and aspirations.

Provide a written response to this message.

Record an interview with STAR representatives on one of the Reading social media groups (e.g. Tilehurst End) to discuss and explain this and also hear about an improved transfer policy to make better use of the investment in the Academy.

Agrees with and engages with STAR to put in place a shadow board and golden share for the start of next season, following a formal structured dialogue meeting on the subject of the Fan Led Review

Yours sincerely

Paula Martin
STAR Chair

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