

STAR AGM 2024 - CHAIR REPORT

This AGM marks the end of my first year as Chair of Supporters' Trust at Reading. Thank you for your support and confidence throughout these last twelve months.

What a year this has been as a fan of Reading Football Club. It has been one of the darkest years in our history and yet we have somehow remained united as a fanbase and in our support of our team more than ever before.

Last July the STAR board voted in favour of fan action and of joining the "Sell Before We Dai" campaign. This was a combined effort between The Tilehurst End, Elm Park Royals and Club 1871. Several board members including myself, Caroline Parker, Dave Stevens, Nick Houlton and Matthew Batten have been fully engaged in this project throughout the year. My thanks to them for all their tireless efforts and for giving up their free time for months. Hours were spent devising ways to protest that allowed the majority of fans the opportunity to join in and have their voices heard. There were high points and very low points in the campaign. My personal high point was the march - an incredible (and somewhat scary) feeling to have so many Reading fans together with one goal. "Sell Before We Dai" has shown us the power of working with all fans and the strength we have when we work together. STAR will no longer work in isolation but will include as many others as we can.

We raised significant sums of money in under 2 weeks to enable the club to pay the wage bill. No mean feat - thanks to Sacha Lidiard for her help with this. We also focused on improving the fan experience by paying for live music in the fan zone, with two singers and a DJ. We will continue to focus on this for the season ahead and, to raise money, we are starting a lottery,

with the proceeds reinvested to enable us to do more. More details to follow soon regarding this.

We have built incredibly strong relationships with key stakeholders. The EFL has at times enjoyed daily calls from me, the Football Supporters Association has been incredibly supportive, our local politicians from across the political spectrum have been championing our club and our community. We have built allies throughout the football community, learning from Trusts' that have suffered these types of ownership problems before and using this experience to help others. As STAR moves forward, we will look to do more of this. While we want to beat our rivals on the pitch, we are still a football family at the end of the day. We have had open dialogue with the football club throughout this year and look forward to this reset leading to a more formalised relationship going forward. Together with Club 1871, we worked through options to change the entry conditions for the stand this season, ensuring the club landed in a moderate and pragmatic position and hopefully leading to an improved experience. We helped write the service contract for the new catering company. We have contributed extensively into the Independent Football Regulator conversation - including appearing on 2 Westminster Forums and in the House of commons as a witness. What an experience that was!

We have tried to improve our communication - with thanks to Simon Day, Johnny Hunt, Matthew and Nick. We have grown our twitter followers this year and have sped up getting communications out quicker across all platforms.

STAR has started a Disabled Supporters Association, led by Simon and Jack Simpson. We look forward to seeing the positive change this will bring for supporters.

We have supported Talking Royals, led by Johnny, with helping to get people talking. We know that statistically men are less likely to reach out and ask for help, so a talking group who share the love of football is a good starting point - although anyone is welcome and meetings do tend to have a very diverse and friendly feel. We also have encouraged a positive lifestyle change, with our step challenge. Our thanks to Johnny for all the work he does in this area.

Our coach service continues to flourish under the watchful eye of Mel and Colin Bishop. We have continued to develop the online travel system and are making alterations to make the system more automated going forward. Mel and Colin are supported by a team of volunteer stewards who do an incredible job. Our thanks to Dave and Steve Benton for all the IT work they do behind the scenes to save work for other people.

Our membership system is working well and Sacha, with the help of Jonathan Hall, is always looking at improving communication systems and dragging us into using other ways to send out information.

Adam Aust has been leading a project to change our in-house communication. Vicci Elliot keeps us on the straight and narrow managing all the finances. Teresa Hicks expertly secretariats for us. Matthew has kept us up to date with policies, not a glamorous job but very necessary. Matthew is always there to correct me and push me in the right direction - and for this I am grateful. We have an independent Election Sub Committee who also play their part in keeping things moving - we thank them for all the work they continue to do to support us.

STAR board is a team - we all have different opinions and ideas but we have one aim to improve things for Reading fans.

At the end of the day, we are all volunteers. We devote our time to STAR because we love the club. The same reason every member is part of STAR - whether you are a long-standing or new member, whether you are here to add to the voice we can present to the club or for coach travel, or both.

Our work within “Sell Before We Dai” has shown some of the best of what we are capable of through open engagement and accepting help. There are lessons that we will take forward from this. One is that we want to build a wider support network from our membership, volunteers who can help us to deliver on our ambitions. At the end of the day we only have so much capacity, which means we can only deliver so much. Another is how we represent our membership. If we are not listening to you, we are not representing you. If you think you could be a volunteer to assist STAR, if you have ideas of how STAR can enable things to improve the quality of experience for members, or any other idea, please let us know. We want your help, so let's do this together.

Sarah Turner