



Your Town, Your Club

TrustSTFC Newsletter

Issue 9
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Thank you! CG motion passed

Thursday November 18th will hopefully prove to be a historic day in the history of Swindon Town Football Club - that was the day when Swindon Borough Council voted unanimously to support a motion to explore ways of working with the club to redevelop the County Ground, thanks to your support! This is no small measure due to the wonderful support we received in our campaign from fans who signed the petition (4000-strong when handed in), wrote to their councillors, or wrote to the Advertiser supporting the motion. You know who you are and thanks are due to you all - give yourselves a huge pat on the back!

While there's still a lot of work to be done, no-one should underestimate the importance of this breakthrough, particularly so

In this issue:

- County Ground redevelopment
- Fans' Forum
- Ticket prices (again!)
- New manager?
- Save the Town End
- Red Army Fund Update

soon after the low point in relations between club and council over the summer. We are told by the councillors we have worked with that it is a major achievement to secure cross-party support for any motion on a council that is usually so divided, so we are especially pleased with this achievement. Without wishing to blow our own trumpet, if anyone has ever questioned why we need a strong independent Supporters' Trust, this is a classic case. In this instance, the Trust have been able to broker an agreement to get the club, the council and other interested parties around a table and talking about the future of the club and the stadium, something which would have seemed all but impossible just a few short months ago. Again, we could not have achieved this without the help of the very many Town fans who signed the petition in their thousands, wrote to their councillors etc so many thanks to you all.

So what happens now? At the time of writing the club and council officers are in discussions about how to take the redevelopment of the County Ground forward - basically, the club explain what they would like to do, and the council officers explain what they think can be done. Obviously, there's a lot of to-ing and fro-ing still to go, which is why as yet there are no firm details as to what form any such redevelopment would take. However, early indications are that the discussions have been positive.

Meanwhile, the Trust have been continuing to work hard behind the scenes to smooth the way by, for example, meeting with other groups with an interest in the County Ground to ensure their views are taken on board as early as possible, so as to avoid the kind of "nasty surprises" the club ran into with the Shaw proposals over the summer.

Obviously, all Town fans want to know what shape the new proposals will take (and have their say on them!) and we are pleased to be able to say we have organised a Fans' Forum for Thursday January 13th (see notice below). The forum is open to all Town fans: Bob Holt together with Justin Tomlinson, the lead councillor for Swindon Services

(Continued on page 2)

(Continued from page 1)

your questions and listen to get an early idea of what (which is the main arm of your suggestions. The fo- the future holds for the the council involved in the rum will be held in the Win- County Ground and to have discussions) and a repre- ners' Bar at the County your say! sentative from St Modwen Ground, starting at 7.30 will be on hand to answer pm. This is your chance to

Ticket prices—the true cost

We make no apologies for “banging on” about ticket prices again—with the club’s recent admission that this season’s lower gates have cost over £200k so far this season, this remains an important issue. We’re not daft — we know that gates are more complex than just a simple price factor and that the gates don’t immediately go up by 2000 if you reduce the price by a fiver. If the football’s good, gates will rise, if it’s bad they’ll fall—that’s true whatever the ticket price, but the fact remains that the exorbitant cost of watching Swindon Town play 3rd division football over the last two seasons has been a major “tipping point” for many in going from regulars to picking and choosing games or simply stopping going altogether. The article below was written for the Trust website in November, so is slightly out of date but the broad points it makes still stand. And will continue to stand until matchday prices are set at an affordable level.

Four months into the season the impact of another round of unpopular ticket price rises is starting to become clear with a substantial reduction in the club’s revenue.

The 9 home games played so far have been watched by an average of 5,895 fans about 2,000 down on last season’s average. Of the 5 home games against sides that were in this division last year, all five have seen substantially lower attendances this time around. Take for example, the match against Peterborough this season on 11th September

which was watched by just 5,777 fans. The same fixture last year, played at an almost identical stage of the season, was watched by a crowd of 6,767, almost 1,000 more.

Even with the higher prices, overall ticket revenue is down substantially from last season. A rough calculation puts the drop in revenue for the Peterborough game alone at between £15,000 and £20,000 compared to the same fixture last season.

So why are 1,000 fewer fans coming to the games? It is difficult to see any other reason than the rise in ticket prices from the already steep £21 to now £23 for all seats apart from the Town End. The quality of entertainment last season was better than for many years, with the first genuine promotion challenge since 1996.

Certainly the Town End is just as full as it was last season and according to statements from the club in the summer, season ticket

sales were up on a year ago with the club claiming 500 new season ticket holders. The drop would appear to be almost exclusively in match day sales in the Nationwide and Arkells stands.

Last season’s attendance against Peterborough was not exceptionally high either. In fact, there were only 5 smaller attendances last season, and none at all after the visit of Wycombe at the start of November. This season seven of the first eight home attendances have been lower. Only the visit of Sheffield Wednesday has attracted a higher gate, and then only by about 200.

Comparing Swindon’s prices with other clubs in the division shows just how expensive the County

(Continued on page 3)

(Continued from page 2)

Ground now is. Considering wing/enclosure type seats, the average price for the division is around £17 (This is for most expensive category games with no pre-booking discount, i.e. equivalent to the £23 tickets at the County Ground).

Of the other teams in League 1, only one other club (Bristol City) charge over £20 for these seats, but that price only applies to top category games and City also offer a more generous £3 discount for early purchase, meaning that it is often possible to sit in a decent seat at Ashton Gate for £16, whereas the cheapest you will ever get in the main stands at Swindon is £21.

Of course, ticket revenue isn't the whole story. Fewer tickets sold also means fewer fans in the club shop, fewer programme sales, and less revenue from food and drink sales inside the stadium. Less support also creates less of an atmosphere during the games.

Despite having no accounts

How prices compare

Barnsley £19
 Blackpool £16
 Bournemouth £18
 Bradford £18
 Brentford £17
 Bristol City £21
 Chesterfield £18
 Colchester £14
 Doncaster £15
 Hartlepool £17
 Hull £19
 Luton £17.50
 MK Franchise £17
 Peterborough £16
 Port Vale £16
 Sheff Wed £19
 Stockport £19
 Swindon Town £23
 Torquay £15
 Tranmere £15
 Walsall £17
 Wrexham £14

** Prices are for wing/enclosure seats (i.e. not behind the goals). If matches are categorised, the most expensive category has been used. Pre-booking discounts have not been allowed for.*

for the last three seasons, it is no secret that the club's financial situation remains

finely balanced, and it is easy to understand the motives of the club in seeking to raise extra revenue from their paying customers, but the simple truth is that the pricing policy, as well as eroding the fan base for the long term is costing the club thousands of pounds at every home game. The club cannot afford to ignore the more than 1,000 supporters who are now voting with their feet every week.

Reducing match-day prices may be unpopular with some season ticket holders, but with season tickets in the Nationwide and Arkells stands working out at around £16 per match (for the vast majority who took advantage of the "early buy" discounts over the summer) there is certainly some scope for reducing match day prices without unduly undermining the extra value of a season ticket. Reductions at least for the wing/enclosure areas should be top of the agenda for the board.

The Real Invincibles

Regular readers will know we have something of a soft spot for AFC Wimbledon (and an implacable hatred for the MK Franchise who stole their League place). So we'd like to offer our warm congratulations to the Dons on smashing the record for

most games unbeaten in English senior football. The Dons' unstoppable football machine produced an astonishing **78** league games unbeaten on the trot.

Apparently around the same time, some North London outfit also had a tilt at the

record but choked before they even reached 50 games unbeaten. Never mind, lads, better luck next time— guess you'll just have to admit the Dons are just too tough an act to follow. Arsene who?

County Ground Q & A

OK, so the motion's been passed—but what does it mean and what next. Here's some answers to some of the more common questions we've been asked about the County Ground redevelopment

So what is this County Ground motion?

On November 18th, Swindon Borough Council unanimously passed a motion calling on the council to talk to the club and the New Swindon Company about the possibility of redeveloping the County Ground. The motion also calls on the council to review all Borough-owned land to find a suitable site for a new stadium should redevelopment of the County Ground not prove feasible.

Why do we need to redevelop at all?

STFC, like a lot of football clubs, cannot survive on matchday revenue alone – how many other businesses can you think of that could survive on 25-30 busy days a year? So the club need the facilities to generate non-matchday revenue, whether that be through a hotel, a conference centre, a sports village or whatever. Without that extra revenue stream, the club simply cannot continue – as it is, it is only due to Sir Seton Wills stepping in several times in the past few years that the club have not folded already.

Why the emphasis on the County Ground?

We have emphasised redeveloping the County

Ground as the preferred option because:

- it's just common sense – the club are already there which means less upheaval for everyone and the support infrastructure is already in place

- the central location makes it very easy for the majority of fans to get to on foot or by public transport which means less trips by car (very important in council planning terms!), and the same applies for additional facilities there – if, for example, a conference centre is developed there, being on the edge of the town centre makes it an attractive location for business as they have the advantages of being near town centre without getting snarled up in the town centre itself; likewise if community sporting facilities are planned, it's no use putting them somewhere where the community can't easily get to them. The County Ground is an ideal location in terms of accessibility for the majority of likely users: football fans, local users of community facilities, and business users

- we believe a football club should be in the heart of the community which forms its base, not stuffed

on the edge of town like a plastic supermarket (no offence, Reading)

- the County Ground is the club's historic home – no-one wants to move unless we have to. We found when collecting the petition that the overwhelming majority of fans want to stay at the County Ground if at all possible

- there's already a football club there so we don't face the inevitable howls of protest from residents in another area faced with having a new stadium plonked on their doorstep

But I thought we couldn't redevelop the County Ground? What's changed?

Nothing's changed as such, but previously people had only looked at the site in the very narrow terms of the actual land occupied by the football club. If you only look at the land used by STFC, then it's correct that there simply isn't the room to allow the club to redevelop; but if you look at the whole site, it's about the same size as "phase 3" of the Shaw Forest area where the club had drawn up revised plans to site a sports village following objections to the initial scheme to use the land of

all three phases of the Shaw Forest area. So there's more scope for redevelopment if you look at it that way. Then too, if you look at the County Ground as being potentially the gateway to a redeveloped town centre, that also widens the scope considerably – the town centre regeneration project is a 10-year, £1 billion plan. Tie redevelopment of the County Ground onto the edge of that and the whole picture becomes a lot bigger than just rebuilding bits of a football ground, and a lot more exciting for both developers and local and regional government.

All well and good, but what are the exact details of the plans?

The straight answer is we don't have detailed plans at the moment. However, what we have achieved is something that seemed impossible just a few months ago – to get the club and the council round a table and talking. Obviously even at this stage there are a lot of suggestions – e.g. local businesses are crying out for a decent conference centre in the town and the County Ground would be an ideal location; or in another direction, “partnership schemes” between club, council and community groups at other clubs have built community and sporting facilities, funded by a mix of “paying public”

revenue and government money aimed at social projects; or a mix of commercial and community facilities. Until everyone's sat down talking and working together to achieve that, we won't know what ideas will come up. It's not for us to pre-empt these discussions by coming up with “take-it-or-leave-it” answers on a plate. We don't believe there are such easy answers – but we do believe that there are a lot of wonderful opportunities for such a prime location as the County Ground to build something really special we can all be proud of and that together we can do it.

Isn't this just pie in the sky?

No – neither the club nor the council would be wasting their time talking to us if this wasn't possible. Both are genuinely excited about the possibilities of this initiative – as we said above, as yet there's no fixed plan in detail but the initial feedback seems very positive.

What if redeveloping the County Ground isn't viable?

As stated above, it would be wrong at this stage to prejudge any of the possible outcomes and although we believe a viable solution can be found at the County Ground, if it turns out the County Ground is a no-go, that is why the motion also includes provision for the

council to survey all Borough-owned land to find a suitable location for a new ground. Simply put, we look at the County Ground first, but if that's a non-starter the council are committed to helping us find a new site within the Borough.

But won't the council just back out again?

It would be nigh on impossible for them to do so – the whole council voted unanimously in favour of a motion proposed by all three party leaders in favour of this scheme. This cross-party backing is vital as it means the motion is seen as a measure that is good for the town as a whole, rather than just another party political point-scoring exercise. The Shaw proposal foundered because the club thought they had been made promises in private by a couple of leading councillors who didn't really have the authority to make any such promises (which, to be fair, they deny making). Whereas now, the motion being passed makes this council policy and is a firm mandate on the council's officers to implement that policy.

So what happens now?

At the moment, the club and the council are in discussions about how to move the proposal forward. First to see if it's viable to redevelop the County Ground

(Continued on page 6)

(Continued from page 5)

and also to negotiate over what can be done. If all goes well (and the early indications from both sides are positive), those discussions will lead to an initial proposal, followed by a period of public debate and consultation – starting with the Fans' Forum on January 13th.

What's this Fans' Forum about?

TrustSTFC are organising a Fans' Forum on the County Ground redevelopment on January 13th (see back page). By that stage discussions between the club and the council should have progressed far enough that they'll be able to give us an initial outline of what they're proposing to do. Bob Holt will be there to answer your questions, as will Justin Tomlinson, lead councillor for Swindon Services (the arm of the council dealing with this) and we also hope a representative of St Modwen, the club's development partners, will be available on the night to answer any questions you may have. This is a golden opportunity for fans to have their say on how you'd like to see the County Ground redeveloped direct to the guys who will be making it happen! Don't miss out - come and make your voice heard on the future of our ground and our club!

Wrexham need you!

Most football fans will be aware of the desperate situation Wrexham are in and they are appealing for help from true lovers of football everywhere in their struggle to remain in existence, despite the best efforts of the club's owner. Briefly, for those who are not aware of the awful events at Wrexham, the club was bought by a property developer, Alex Hamilton, who is now trying to drive the club out of existence so he can cash in on the selling off the Racecourse ground for developing as housing. Wrexham have come within a few hours of being wound up on more than one occasion this season, have had their electricity cut off, and their bank account frozen. Many clubs have endured financial hardship in recent years and far too many have stumbled on the brink of going out of business (including our own!), and they aren't the first club to have greedy developers investing with the sole intention of cashing in on the ground, but Wrexham are perhaps unique in that it is their owner who seems hell-bent on putting them out of business. Because then, with the inconvenient matter of the football club out of the way he can concentrate on the real business of selling the ground off for a fat profit. Along the way, Mr Hamilton has described the club's fans as being "worse than Muslim terrorists" for having the temerity to speak up for their beleaguered club. Wrexham's directors have put the club into administration in the hope that this would at least provide some kind of break on Hamilton's "death march", for which they have been deducted 10 points and are now in a relegation battle on top of everything else. Wrexham are one of the oldest clubs in Britain and as football fans we cannot stand by and watch the club raped for the sake of a fast buck on a property deal. The Wrexham Supporters Trust have established a fighting fund to save the club and have set up a "Wring for Wrexham" phone line—all you have to do is call 0904 043 5000 to donate to the fighting fund. Calls from landlines will cost £1.50, of which a minimum of £1.12 will be donated to Wrexham Supporters Trust's campaign to save Wrexham AFC and the Racecourse Ground.

More info from <http://www.wst.org.uk/>



Red Army Fund

The Red Army Fund, the Trust's initiative to raise funds for new players and/or loan signings continues to grow apace. At the time of writing, the fund stands at nearly £6,500 and by the time you read this, it will have swelled even more. As yet the club have not yet asked for funds from the RAF to strengthen the playing squad, but the money is there should Andy King need it.

While £6,500 isn't going to enable us to be signing Ryan Giggs any time soon, we understand it would be enough to pay for a three-month loan for a "fringe" Premiership player looking for first-team experience (for example, someone like Jimmy Davis). Obviously each deal is different (and the details quite rightly confidential) so you can't put an exact price tag on such a loan deal, but it's certainly in the right area for that kind of loan, which could prove crucial if we're "one piece short of the jigsaw" when we're pushing for promotion come the end of the season and the normal playing budget is running short.



New! Red Army Fund offers low cost pitch-side adverts for local businesses

Right from the outset, the Red Army Fund has offered local businesses the opportunity to back the team and promote their business with low-cost advertising signs in the concourses of the main stands. Now, new for this season, we are delighted to be able to offer pitch-side advertising in the Town End, facing back into the seated area (i.e. sign is visible from the Town End only, not the pitch). Standard pitch-side signs are 10' x 2' and you can choose to take a full,

Shirt auction—own a piece of Town's Premiership history

We are Highest bid on each shirt gets to own a slice of Swindon history! Please include your name, address and both daytime and evening telephone numbers. We have not yet set reserve prices on the shirts, but obviously we won't be letting Fraser's shirt go for 27p and a toffee!

bid to the PO Box address to arrive no later than 28th December or bring them to the Trust office on the 28th (home game against Brentford).

Shaun Taylor Premiership (away)
Brian Kilcine Premiership (away)
Fraser Digby Premiership (away)
John Sutton 2nd Division (2003)

New Manager needed!

No, we're not joining in the "King out" debate - we need a general manager on the admin side of the club to fill the gap left by Mark Devlin's departure. Since Mark Devlin resigned as Chief Executive in the summer, Bob Holt has stepped in as Acting Chief Executive and has done sterling work in filling the breach. However, Bob Holt has had to combine this role with his existing business interests and with the best will in the world, he can only spread himself so thin. While he has undoubtedly steered the club through some ups and downs since the summer (not least working with the Trust and the council on the County Ground redevelopment proposals) and done a good job of doing so, he cannot do the job full time. We're not trying to criticise the work Bob Holt has done - if nothing else, he has been doing the job for free so he has been excellent value for money! And in this regard it's worth bearing in mind the club's financial

circumstances - if the club had been paying for a full-time Chief Executive would we have been able to afford Christian Roberts, for example? However, we believe that there does need to be someone in overall charge on a day-to-day basis, to take care of the bread and butter running of the club. Whatever you think of Mark Devlin's time in charge, most fans agree that one thing he did do was to restore some stability to the club and get things "ticking over" properly. It would be a shame if that progress were to be lost - but perhaps we can combine the best of both worlds. So that is why we are suggesting the club consider formalising Bob Holt's role as Acting Chief Executive to deal with the "high-level" issues he has been handling since the summer, but with a General Manager working under him to ensure that the smaller, but no less important, day-to-day issues are also dealt with.

TrustSTFC Fans' Forum on the County Ground

Do you want to know what's going to happen with the County Ground redevelopment?

Do you have urgent questions to ask or a great idea?

Come and have your say at the TrustSTFC Fans' Forum on the County Ground redevelopment proposals and found out the real answers from the men who know:

- Bob Holt, Acting Chief Executive, STFC
- Justin Tomlinson, Council "cabinet" member and lead councillor for Swindon Services
- Representative from St Modwen, the club's development partners

Thursday 13th January, 7.30 pm
Winners' Lounge at the County Ground

The Fans' Forum is open to all Town fans

TrustSTFC AGM

The TrustSTFC AGM will take place immediately prior to the Fans' Forum on Thursday 13th January, 6.30 pm in the Winners' Lounge at the County Ground. The AGM is open to Trust members only.

If you wish to stand for election to the Trust board, you should notify the board in writing (enclosing a brief resume of why you should be considered) by 1st January 2005. We would encourage all Trust members to consider standing for the board—although it can be hard work, it's also good fun and a real opportunity to help the Trust get vital work done. Should sufficient candidates for the Trust board come forward for an election to be necessary, all members will be notified in writing as soon as practicable after the closure of nominations on 1st