

# Our Town, Our Club

## All Change at STFC

As was expected, the EGM on the 7<sup>th</sup> December 2001 resulted in an interim board being elected until a full AGM is held sometime in February.

Following the resignation of Roy Evans and the subsequent re-appointment of Andy King, a great deal of unrest was evident amongst fans old and new.

The consensus of opinion seemed to be that with the previous Board, there was ambition, a promise of money and a high profile manager that had improved the football, if not the results. The interim Board brought with it doom and gloom, no money, and a manager that was perceived by many as having taken us within one loss, by Bristol Rovers, of Third Division football.

With ears ringing from the many requests from

Trust members, and non-members, as to "What the Trust were doing about it?", several meetings were convened with club Board members, to try and understand some of the facts behind the headlines of their first four weeks in office, and to ascertain what actions TrustSTFC should take.

What did we find out? Well you will need to read the articles on pages 2 and 3, but it's safe to say that following the club's flirt with Mr Brady and his property developers, that the financial plight of the club is as perilous as it has ever been.

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## One Step Closer for TrustSTFC Board Representation

During the meetings held with the interim Board, we discussed the steps needed, and terms, to achieve TrustSTFC representation on the STFC Board.

We have been pleased with their positive acceptance of the need for a TrustSTFC representative on the Board, sooner rather than later.

At this time, we believe that representation on the Board could be achieved before the end of this season.

Whilst terms are still a long way from being agreed, good progress is being made on this front.

We can not be complacent though, and need to continue to grow the TrustSTFC membership, donations and Loan Fund, to ensure that our recognition as a fans group is solidified with both the club and Swindon Borough Council.

## Eight Nominations Received for TrustSTFC Board

A total of eight nominations were received for the eight elected Board members for TrustSTFC.

As having eight nominations will not result in a 'contest', it has been decided that there is little point in incurring the expense of running a ballot, and therefore the 'result' will be formally an-

nounced at the AGM in February, along with the structure of the Board and roles to be undertaken. The list of nominees for the TrustSTFC Board, along with their short résumés are provided on page 4 of this newsletter.

## The Fight for Survival

The first task for the interim Board was to get to grips with the financial situation at the club, and to understand exactly what the state the club was really in.

With the current understanding of the debts and commitments, the Board are projecting a loss for this financial year of £2.2 million. This loss includes the income from the transfers of Steve Miltenhall and Matthew Collins and from the sell-on clause for Peter Thorne.

To see the club through to the end of the season is going to need a cash injection of between £1.2 and 1.4 million, which excludes repaying the Corporate Voluntary Arrangement (CVA) that was entered into when the club came out of Administration at the end of 2000.

The £1 million pounds from the consortium has yet to be made available, but will be following the AGM scheduled for the 12<sup>th</sup> February.

One of the more challenging tasks faced by club Director Bob Holt, was that of facing the Inland Revenue and Customs & Excise.

On 13<sup>th</sup> December 2001, less than a week after the interim Board took office, the Inland Revenue informed the club that they were beginning legal recovery of outstanding liabilities, including £1,200 in penalties for failing to lodge a Corpora-

tion Tax return, despite reminders.

A stay of execution was agreed with the Inland Revenue and Customs & Excise, provided that:

- All future liabilities are paid on or before their due date
- All future Returns are lodged on or before their due date
- All outstanding Returns/Accounts are lodged by 31<sup>st</sup> January 2002
- The arrears since the CVA be paid in full on or before 28<sup>th</sup> February 2002

*Projected loss for  
this financial year of  
£2.2 million*

As for what is owed to them within the CVA, they are expecting £150,000 in August, with the remainder paid in six equal monthly instalments following that.

The club has almost certainly used all its goodwill with the Inland Revenue and Customs & Excise.

There is no doubt that in failing to meet these terms, they would carry out the threat in their last letter to Bob Holt that "...without further notice, a Petition served for the company to be wound up."

## Why is the Club in so much Debt?

When Colin Todd was appointed, the initial flurry of transfer activity and the ongoing cost of the playing staff made a significant dent in the club's fragile bank balance, particularly as the incoming funds from Bryant Homes, via Swindon Town Properties Limited, had been budgeted as working capital and to cover the CVA. Additional funding for players was expected via Mr Brady and his partners, but this was not forthcoming.

This position has been further worsened by a number of bills or payments that are either unsubstantiated, or questionable as to whether they should have been paid by Swindon Town Football Company Limited:

1. A total of £175,000 has been invoiced for consultancy services which relate to items such as the funding package from Bryant Homes and gaining outline agreement with the council for preferred developer of the 'front garden site'. Whilst these services may have been provided, the responsibility for their payment should lie with Swindon Town Properties Limited.
2. An invoice for computer related services, including web design, for £5,500, was paid in mid-October, with no evidence to prove

*(Continued on page 3)*

(Continued from page 2)

the service was or will be provided in the future. This was strange because this service is currently provided by another company.

3. A payment to Dainton of £42,000, authorised by Ian Blatchly and Danny Donegan, for which there is no corresponding invoice or purchase order.
4. A payment to Danny Donegan of £39,000, authorised by himself and Ian Blatchly, for which there is no corresponding invoice or purchase order.
5. A payment of £23,500 to Daffodil Trading Limited for consultancy services between October and December 2000. There is no knowledge of what these services were.
6. A payment to Castle Trust of £60,000, authorised by Ian Blatchly and Danny

Over £180,000 of  
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Donegan, for which there is no corresponding invoice or purchase order.

Whether any of these debts incurred and paid by the football club will ever be adequately explained, or potentially be recovered, is yet to be seen. However, as over £180,000 of payments

were made against these questionable invoices during October, it does not appear that the interim Board are prepared to sit back and ignore them and are actively seeking an explanation from the club's auditors.

It's also interesting that these last payments were authorised at all, as by then both Danny Donegan and Ian Blatchly were aware that they

were not properly authorised Directors, and the payments were made in preference to other creditors, such as the Inland Revenue, Customs & Excise and the CVA creditors.

## STFC, Swindon Borough Council and a new Stadium

The interim Board have met with Swindon Borough Council to find a way to clear the club's current arrears of over £195,000, which is primarily rent arrears from March 2001. Whilst an arrangement for clearing the arrears has yet to be agreed, the club have committed to pay monthly instalments of rent and business rates from 1<sup>st</sup> January 2002.

Fundamental to the future viability of the football club is the ability to generate profit from non-football activities. This can only happen through the development of the County Ground, which appears unlikely, or the building of a new stadium, with associated facilities, which can financially support a football league club.



*Home for How Long?*

The Board are active with a number of property developers, trying to find an appropriate long-term solution, and have the support of Swindon Borough Council, which in a letter dated 20<sup>th</sup> December 2001 stated, "In relation to future development of the existing stadium or the provision of a new facility elsewhere, the Council has previously stated its support (obviously subject to Planning considerations), and officers will consider any proposals which may come forward from developers

which could help secure the future viability of the Club."

## Just a Load of Bankers

NatWest Corporate & Commercial Banking have requested that the Club "find alternative banking arrangements". As the branch banked with is in Essex (know anyone from there?) this is more likely to do with not understanding the glorious Wiltshire accent! With unauthorised overdraft

interest rates of 29.5% APR, in March last year, who wants to bank with them anyway!

Seriously though, the interim Board are already in the process of moving back to Barclays, who were the Club's bank prior to the Donegan and Blatchly tenure.

# Résumés for TrustSTFC Board Nominees

## Tony Norris

As one of the original working party members, I have become the chairman of the working party. This role has developed into being responsible for the Trust communications, including talking to the media. I have been able to use skills that I use in my work.

I continue to be evangelical about the Trust movement and the difference the supporters can make in a club's future. Being involved in the Trust start up although been a lot of hard work has been an enjoyable experience, and I hope what I have learned during this process can help in furthering the Trust's cause.

## Andrew Ratcliffe

I have considerable experience in business management, having worked for several large companies in the construction industry. For the last 12 years I have run my own company, which supplies and services commercial catering equipment.

I have been a fan of Swindon Town since I was a teenager, growing up watching Bobby Smith's Red & White Army. Since then I have enjoyed the highs and suffered the lows alongside everyone else. I became an 'active' fan as the Editor of the Magic Roundabout fanzine and more recently as vice-chairman of TrustSTFC. I am also a supplier to STFC and, unfortunately, a CVA creditor.

## John Tayler

I have been an ardent supporter since 1946 and would now like to help in some way to ensure a future for STFC. Prior to retirement I was County Consumer Advice Officer with Wiltshire County Council.

My work was varied, but much of it involved advising consumers and traders following a complaint about goods or services. I think that I could put my negotiating and arbitration skills to good use if elected.

## Anna Tuersley

My first game supporting Swindon Town was against Fulham; my second season saw that classic first game against Arsenal which we won 4-3 on our way through to the final four of the League Cup; and my third decade saw more ups and downs of demotion, promotion and relegation.

As Anna Merriman, I was editor of 'The 69er' fanzine, which ran for over 30 editions from 1993 to 1998, covering five seasons. Born locally, I live and work locally. My collection of Swindon Town shirts runs from 1985 to the present day. This is not a sign of my dedication to the club, because that makes it sound like I have a choice. Supporting Swindon Town is not a choice, it's in my blood. So it's right for me as a supporter to get involved, voice opinions and have a say in how the club is run and the Trust is one way of enabling us to do this. I want to make a contribution to the survival of the club if possible, however small it is: if it's speaking up or speaking out that needs doing, I'll be right in there.

## Mark Ratcliffe

I was born in Swindon and have supported the club all of my life. I am 38 years old and married with three young children, so for the moment a season ticket is out of the question.

The next year promises to be challenging for the club on and off the pitch and I think that high-level fan involvement will be vital over the coming months if Swindon Town is to survive and prosper in the long term. I have many memories of some of our happier days, from the 80s and early 90s, and hope that one day Swindon Town will return to the glory days with a stadium and team that befits our ever changing town. I am currently a member of the Trust Working Party and with my Brother was instrumental in getting the Trust started, from just an idea between two supporters, up to the launch.

There is much work to be done, battles with the council and the new Board, and of course funds to be raised if we are to make the Trust a viable part of Swindon Town. Given the trials and tribulations of the last 8 years I can think of no other business that would dare to treat it's customers and shareholders in the way Swindon supporters have been treated. I can't promise miracles, but with your support I promise to do all I can to take the Trust forward and to ensure that we as supporters are given the respect we deserve and a club of which we can all be proud of.

## Peter Woods

I live in Gloucestershire and have supported Swindon since 1970. I have been an active member of the Trust Working party since its creation and have seen and been involved in the tremendous amount of work that has been put in to get the Trust up and running. In standing for the TrustSTFC Board, I hope that I can play a further part in driving this initiative forward. I believe that the Trust movement is the only way forward for Swindon and many other clubs.

The financial realities of football in the 21<sup>st</sup> century will force many clubs to take hard decisions about the future. The need for positive input into club affairs from the fans at the this time could be the difference between success and failure. I look forward to being able to contribute to the process of building an effective and democratic organisation; that can represent the fans views at boardroom level and rebuild the club's standing in the local community.

## Leigh Collett

I was born in Swindon and have lived in the town for the majority of my life. The first game I saw, as a boy, was in the Anglo-Italian Cup in 1970, and I have followed the Town ever since. Despite the painful realities of the performances on and off the field over the last decade, like many true fans I find it very difficult to find alternate entertainment on a Saturday afternoon.

I have been involved with TrustSTFC since its formation, because I passionately want this club to survive as a successful league club, for our and future generations enjoyment. I believe I have significant experience to offer the Trust, having founded and sold a successful network and communication services company, and from involvement in the community as the governor of a local school.

## Justin Tomlinson

I would be delighted to help TrustSTFC play a crucial part in Swindon Town matching its undoubted potential. Swindon as a town deserves a football team playing at the highest level, with an excellent stadium and facilities to match. As a devoted football fan (just ask my suffering fiancé!), I understand that we all need to play a part, no matter how small to help Swindon Town head for 'calmer waters'.

I am a partner in TB Marketing, which is a: printing, clothing, web-page and marketing company, based in Old Town. I am also the youngest elected member of Swindon Borough Councillor, representing the Abbey Meads ward. ([www.abbeymeadsintouch.com](http://www.abbeymeadsintouch.com))

I am currently on the committee at Bracknell Town FC. (Ryman League). I became involved with the club, having formally lived in Bracknell for a short time. As part of the committee I have been able to gain excellent experience of running a football club. As well as the general duties of the committee, I have been extremely active in the commercial and promotional activities. It is these experiences that I hope will prove beneficial to the Trust.

*A Fan is for Life, not just  
a season ticket*



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