

BRENTFORD FOOTBALL COMMUNITY SOCIETY LIMITED

CHAIRMAN'S STATEMENT FOR THE
YEAR ENDED 30TH JUNE 2020



Introduction

Just like the Bees on the pitch, Bees United has made excellent progress in recent times but there is still important work to be done. At this year's Annual General Meeting - our first ever 'virtual' annual gathering- we will reflect on what's been achieved but also keep moving forward. In this statement I report on progress during the year ending 30th June 2020, the developments since then and what we hope to achieve at the AGM at 7pm on March 31st 2021.

Impact of COVID-19

When we last gathered, on 7th March 2020 at the club's new offices next to the new stadium, there had been just 50 cases in the UK of the new coronavirus, COVID-19 but no deaths. As we moved on later that day for the game against Sheffield Wednesday who would have predicted that the 5- 0 victory would be the last time we gathered together as a full crowd of Bees fans either at Griffin Park or, as yet, at our new stadium. And who would have imagined that a year later over a hundred and twenty thousand people would have died in the UK after contracting COVID-19. Among those we mourn are Miriam Waterman, wife of BU Board member and Bees historian Greville Waterman.

The disrupted season saw Brentford achieve its highest position for 73 years. The Bees scored 80 goals, more than anyone else in the league and conceded only 38, a record bettered only by champions Leeds United. But we faltered at the last, losing the final scheduled league game to Barnsley and then the Play-Off Final to Fulham. This year we hope that automatic promotion will avoid the need for a return to Wembley.

Membership

Last year I reported on our progress on two priorities;

- to build the database of those members who receive our newsletters
- to merge that list with legacy databases of past and present members.

Since then we have had remarkable success: in January 2020 there were 459 BU members on the newsletter database, there are now more than 2,280. Our next ambition is to pass 2,500. Every month these members receive our newsletter and, even better, we can tell from the stats that most of them read it and some email us to say how much they enjoy it.

The growth in members has been achieved in two other ways; firstly remarkable work by our Membership and Technology Secretary, John Scott, who has tirelessly worked through all our membership records and has been able to reconnect with about 1,500 fans where we had lost contact. This task has also included getting in touch with fans overseas and we now have 142 BU members outside the UK. This process has also enabled us to meet the privacy requirements of GDPR. I want to formally record our thanks to John.

Secondly the publication of our book 'Bees, Battles, Buckets and Ballot Boxes; How Brentford Fans Paved The Way from Griffin Park to Lionel Road'. Sending a free printed copy of the book in time for Christmas to 1,889 fans for whom we had a postal address became a significant logistical challenge. But judged by the positive feedback from West London to California and New Zealand it proved well worth it. The book recorded the role of Bees United in particular and Bees fans in general in creating the new stadium. In addition our success in producing and distributing it reflected our ability to meet the high standards we have set ourselves. The editor of the book, Greville Waterman, was a calm pilot throughout the journey. Together with the creation of the free digital book 'A Last Season to Remember, Every League Match in Brentford's Farewell to Griffin Park Season', we created a further reason for Bees fans to join and support BU. We will continue to use both books in our recruitment drive.

Bees United Communications

Our monthly newsletter and associated articles on our website continue to be our principal communication with our members. We create new content which has not appeared elsewhere and also provide a guide to online articles and video about the club that members may not have seen. Last season we provided a match report from every home and away game, a service we started when coverage of the club in the media seemed to be declining. This season we have suspended that because of the logistical problems of getting to every game and the fact that as the reputation of Brentford has grown so has the coverage in the media.

AGM arrangements

The creation of a full digital database allows us to save money on postage when communicating with members. The BU Board therefore recommends that this will be the last AGM when we send out paperwork in the post about the meeting. In future it will all be done by email and online.

BFC Governance

At Bees United we use our seats on the BFC Board of Directors and BFC Audit Committee, our 'special share' in BFC and our BFC director's role as Adjudicator on supporters complaints to try to help set the highest possible standards of governance at the club.

Brentford has adopted a form of what's known as 'structured dialogue' with supporters groups, in this case Bees United and BIAS. We look forward to engaging with the club management on a regular basis. In addition I wish to record my personal admiration at the way the owner Matthew Benham, the Chairman Cliff Crown and the CEO Jon Varney have steered the club through these difficult times created by the global pandemic.

Rules

Bees United will be 20 years old in June. BU began as a pressure group, bought majority ownership of the club, and then created a partnership with Matthew Benham which led to him becoming the owner. The BU Board decided that this would be a good time to review all our rules in order to take account of the changes and developments over those two decades. Two Board members, Jon Gosling and Don Tanswell, have worked through all the detail of the 120 rules. Their recommendations have been considered by the BU Board and a new set of 84 rules has been drafted which we believe update, simplify and clarify them. The most important changes are those redefining what Bees United wants to achieve, known as the 'objects' of BU.

These recommendations are being presented to members for their consideration and it is hoped they will be approved at the AGM.

Jamie Powell

Bees fans often talk about the 'Brentford family' and there was a special example in 2020 when many parts of that family came together to support one of our own, Jamie Powell, who is a BU member. His fundraising target was reached to enable him to get specialist medical treatment in America. BU was pleased to be able to contribute.

BU Board

Every member of the Board has contributed to the success of recent times and I want to take this opportunity to thank them.

This past year we welcomed back as a co-opted member Christine Powell who helped start the Supporters Trust with her husband Bruce Powell.

Under BU's constitution 'No person can be a member of the Society Board who has been a member of the Society Board for 12 consecutive years'. Andre Sawyer is completing his final term as a Board member. Andre was part of the group of Bees fans who helped the club survive during the years before Matthew Benham became the owner. He was one of the few who was working full time while on the Board, and he also managed the rota that allowed BU members to visit the Griffin Park boardroom on match days. Many thanks Andre for all you have done.

Owing to his personal circumstances one other Board member, Greville Waterman, is standing down after many years of valuable service on the BU Board, but I have invited Grev to become our first 'Contributing Editor' which recognises both the importance of our publications and his role as a contributor and an editor. The quality of his work on both books we published in the past year is testament to his professionalism. I am pleased to report that he has agreed to take on this role in the 'BU family'.

Stewart Purvis

Chairman of Bees United

Dated 8th March 2021