



BRENTFORD FOOTBALL COMMUNITY SOCIETY LIMITED
CHAIRMAN'S STATEMENT
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30 JUNE 2023

Introduction

It is my pleasure to issue my first report as Chair of Brentford Football Community Society Limited ("Bees United") having taken on the mantle from Stewart Purvis during the financial year.

Our membership continues to increase as our plans and ambitions for Bees United grow over the coming years. I hope you will all be excited by and support us where you can! I share some reflections and updates on all that we have achieved and what we are trying to achieve below.

We are uniquely the sole Premier League football club with a supporter director and it is your membership and support of Bees United that ensures that fans are protecting the key asset of the Club (the stadium) and have a voice at BFC board meetings.

I would also like to thank every member of the Bees United Board for their contributions, every member of which is a volunteer and also to thank those of our Members who have also contributed their time and expertise to initiatives throughout the year.

Membership

Bees United is first and foremost a members' organisation. Without you we would have no pool of talent from which to elect our BU Board and most importantly, without you there would be no Bees United.

We remind ourselves that the BU Special Share in Brentford FC (which grants Bees United a veto over a sale of the stadium in certain circumstances) only subsists while Bees United exists. If Bees United were to cease to exist the BU Special Share would disappear and so would those veto rights.

In October 2023 our 3,750th member joined Bees United which was the target set at the last AGM. While we think there is merit in every Brentford fan being a member (and we will continue to strive to show the benefits of being a member of Bees United), we will continue to our next target of 4,000 members and build from there. These numbers continue to reflect the fact that BU remains the largest Brentford formally established supporters' group with a regulated and democratic structure.

Increasingly, with the Club's growing global profile through events like the Premier League US Summer Series this year, there is also a growing international membership. We thank Fran Carroll (Irish Bees) giving international representation on the Bees United Board and we have also made new global friends over the year with John Kenkel and Charlie Corr prominent as part of the growing US contingent and we continue to welcome all Brentford fans as Members.

I would like to thank John Scott for the continued dedication to his role as Membership Secretary, for his personal connection to members and also to ensure we remain in compliance with data protection law.

Bees United Board - changes

We started 2023 with a full board of 15 members following the elections after our AGM and through the year there has been some change to the board composition, with Jeffrey Roy stepping down in June and we now have the end of tenure for other



colleagues. Our rules require that members stand down after a maximum period of 12 years consecutive service. Sadly, we are to bid farewell to Chris Tate who has worked tirelessly during his tenure on the Board in the key role of fan liaison, most recently, amongst many other roles during his time and to Ron Cooper who has been a passionate exponent of the heritage and history of the Club.

Chris will be well known to many of you as a dedicated and long term fan (having been one of the "Walk from Brighton" crew back in the day when we weren't even sure we would have a football club to support) and we are grateful to have been able to have him with us and for all his wise words. We look forward to continuing to see him on match days as well as continuing to be a BU representative on the Fan Advisory Board. Ron, meanwhile, will be well remembered by many of you for the key role he played in the "Farewell Griffin Park" exhibition highlighting his drive to keep heritage at the heart of what we do. He is a passionate and committed fan who is steadfast in his wish for us to remember where we have come from as a club, and I thank him for ensuring we have never lost sight of that.

Christine Powell is also standing down and many of you will know Christine either personally or through her husband Bruce (himself heavily involved in the initial years of Bees United) as keen, committed, passionate Brentford fans and regular away match travellers. Having served on the board and contributed consistently, she feels it is time to stand down and let others come forward and offer their own insight and energy. We thank Christine for her contribution and I have no doubt we will see her and Bruce cheering the Bees on every week!

We also have come to say a farewell to Jim Walsh, also standing down from the BU Board and in his role as Bees United Treasurer. Jim has diligently managed our BU finances professionally and has ensured our accounting process is smooth and effective. Jim will also be well known to a many as a regular home and away fan and he has helped ensure that we remain an organisation that remembers where it has come from and why it exists. The minutes of the first BU AGM meeting in 2001, recorded that Jim was one of those in attendance! The words of thanks we give to Jim can only scratch the surface of what he has brought to Bees United with his knowledge, balance and contribution.

With Jim asking to stand down as Treasurer we required to replace his skills to ensure continued good financial management. We have therefore been fortunate that [Graham Hancock](#) (*embed link to election statement*) put himself forward to take on that role and he has been working with Jim – having been co-opted on to the Board – to provide smooth transition. With Graham up for election to the Board at the AGM I hope that by the time these accounts are filed that he will have been confirmed formally as a member of the Board and that we might look forward to him taking on this important role.

There has also been one other change to the Bees United Board following the decision that we should appoint a Deputy Chair. It is with my personal thanks and gratitude that Sharon Wright agreed to take on the role and was unanimously endorsed by the rest of the board. Bees United will be the richer and my thanks go to Sharon.

Fan Engagement

Following completion of the 'Fan-Led Review' in 2022 conducted on behalf of the Government by Tracey Crouch MP, the recommendation to set up an independent regulator for football was adopted in February 2023. While we await much of the detail as to the exact remit of a regulator and the role it will play in football, I am heartened by the fact that Brentford FC and the engagement it has with Bees United and its wider fan groups, has been seen as a beacon of how good governance and care for a unique community asset such as a football club, can work collaboratively.

The "BU Special Share" that we have in Brentford FC has been particularly noted as being a practical, real world approach to how the balance of fans interests with that of the owners who put the money and capital into clubs.

We may see soon, the detail about the independent regulator but the Premier League has already implemented the creation of Fan Advisory Boards (FAB) which is now established at BFC and is jointly Chaired by Bees United and BIAS. A [Fan Engagement](#)



[Plan](#) has also been published outlining BFC's approach to fan engagement in more detail including the ways in which fans are involved in key decisions at the Club and priorities for the season.

Bees United Communications and events

Our monthly newsletter has continued to be the core of our communications with our members and we have developed new features, begun member surveys and strengthened our output on social media for which I would like to thank Colleen Wong for her experience and energy in this regard. [Our website](#) has new functionality and a search engine which means our extensive library is now accessible for all to read. BU events continue to be virtual as we engage with more and more Bees supporters worldwide and those not in reach of London TW8. Last year at the AGM, we had the privilege of Stewart Purvis hosting a fantastic live interview with Thomas Frank and this year we are thankful to welcome Christian Norgaard, Brentford Club Captain to a live audience in January for our AGM.

I would also like to thank Matthew Benham for giving up his time to grant us an [exclusive interview](#) on his time at FC Midtjylland. It will be no surprise to Members that any interview with Matthew is amongst the most read (if not the most read) items we have produced. It is testament to his continued support of the Club and his understanding of it as a fan, that he makes himself available for such interviews.

A core part of the Bees United strategy during 2023 was to ensure that we are seen, as an organisation, as a true participant in the local Brentford community. With that in mind, the Board approved us joining the West London Chamber and Brentford Voice as well as contributing to the BFC Appreciation Day at the Steam Museum and the Canal Festival. We have also sponsored the Summer Camp of the dynamic and growing charity, [Planet Penguin](#) and announced a partnership with [HerGameToo](#). My thanks go to our Deputy Chair, Sharon Wright for taking the lead on so many of these community events.

Compliance and BU Governance

Led by our Secretary Don Tanswell, BU continues to meet the high levels of compliance required of a Community Benefit Society registered under the Co-operative and Community Societies Act 2014. One of the four pillars of the [BU Vision](#) is Management which states as its ambition "Maintaining first class governance and financial management of Bees United with a view to growing the membership." With thanks to Don, in particular, for all of his hard work in ensuring that we are meeting our ambition of first class governance as a board and organisation.

History and Heritage

When I became Chair of Bees United, the Board agreed that it was timely to consider afresh the purpose of Bees United today. Our Vision, now summarised as our "[Four Pillars](#)" on our website is of Management, Representation, Sharing, and "To Promote and protect the history and heritage of the Club."

There was keen support amongst the Board to see how we could give meaningful expression to, and a definition of, promoting the heritage of Brentford FC. We participated in the BFC Appreciation Day at the Steam Museum this year and soon after we were at the [Brentford Canal Festival](#) which celebrated the journey from Griffin Park to the GTech in a healthy way for children to have fun and exercise too,

Importantly, we set about a much longer term project when we became custodian of the BFC archive, respecting this collection as a small museum with standards of protection and recording compliance recognised in that sector. We are blessed to have a committed, dedicated and expert team of Brentford historians who have willingly given their time to share their knowledge of the Club and to help us build a new, comprehensive catalogue of all of the heritage items that we have. This is the start of a more ambitious project to digitise the entire archive and create an online, searchable database of our memorabilia.



Finally we also brought history alive on the ground, literally, in Brentford TW8, this November when when we mounted and unveiled a plaque to celebrate the location of the first meetings which took place, to agree the foundation of Brentford FC. This was preceded by a stunning event at the stadium celebrating the heritage of the Bees in a variety of ways before an audience of 150, treated to an insight on the Club's history by Jonathan Burchill and the history of the club's shirts from Brendan Nevin, as well as speeches from myself, Club Chair, Cliff Crown and the Mayor.

Finance

In the financial section of our reports our Treasurer Jim Walsh records how BU has managed its finances this year. In his report, Jim states, "In June, the Football Club repaid BU £180k of unsecured loans". The Board had discussed during the year the fact that BU was about to undertake some extensive expenditure in the context of its heritage projects and that it would make sense to enter discussions with the Club to have some of the outstanding unsecured BU loan balance repaid, so those monies could contribute towards these projects. Reduction of our loan balance was discussed with the Club – and the Club readily agreed on the repayment of £180k so that the outstanding balance owed to Bees United by the Club is £500k. The BU Board feel that this strikes a sensible balance of continuing the financial ties with the Club and keeping the link back to the days when it was BU monies that helped keep the Club afloat. We are in an entirely different financial universe now but retaining that connection we feel remains important.

The decision has also been taken by the board to implement a simple treasury plan where we have placed tranches of monies (with the most ethical providers we could identify with savings options for organisations such as ours) on different fixed term deposits to maximise the amount of interest that we can generate from reserves. As I mention above, we are very grateful to Jim for his guidance and service as we continue to enjoy financial stability.

Our strong financial position is only possible because of the donations which our members make, and everyone at BU thanks each and every member who is able to continue to financially support our work with regular donations. We have also continued to highlight a relatively simple and cost free way that members might also support BU by giving via retail purchases through the [Easyfundraising](#) website.

I will close by thanking again all who have served on the BU Board this year, and also to thank all of those Members who have supported BU either through a donation or by giving their time to help with our campaigns and initiatives, and also to thank BFC for the continued engagement it has with fans through the FAB, and of course to wish Thomas Frank and his coaching team the best of luck for the rest of the Premier League season, and Brendan Macfarlane and his B team our full support as he and his coaches work with the B team players to try to add more names to the Robert Rowan First Team Debut Board and finally we will continue to cheer Karleigh Osborne and the BFC Women's team on to what we hope will be a successful promotion season!

Stuart Hatcher
Chair
January 2024