CHAIR REPORT FOR ANNUAL ACCOUNTS

Introduction

This is now my third report as Chair of Brentford Football Community Society Limited (or Bees United as it is generally referred to), delivered during a period of significant change at Brentford FC, across football, and within our board. But, before I jump in to the report I do want to thank all of the Bees United members who have engaged with us via calls, emails, letters, social media or in person and also particularly all of the members of the Bees United board, as I feel it is important to re-iterate and recognise that every board member gives their time freely on an unpaid, volunteer basis and do countless hours of unseen work by members, and so they are due recognition and thanks.

Membership

Bees United remains Brentford FC's official supporters trust and we continue to benefit from the historic and ongoing generosity of members via both donations and the contributions they make of their time and expertise in relation to various campaigns and events that we run. While we may not be that organisation rattling buckets to try to save the club from going out of business, ongoing donations remain vital to Bees United's role in the community and in safeguarding the club's stadium. We remain grateful and in no way complacent for the support we get – whether financial or otherwise – from all of our members.

We continue to be the largest supporters group (as well as the official supporters trust) and our ambition is still to remain the largest group representing the widest number of fans and voices and to continue to build membership. So if you are reading this and don't know if your fellow Bees fan friends aren't members of Bees United then ask them and get them to join if they aren't!

I can't complete a membership section without a thank you to John Scott for his continued diligence as Membership Secretary and the interaction that he has with members – and particularly in this day and age for ensuring that even the few members who do not have emails were able to participate in our recent elections by way of postal vote. Thank you John!

Bees United Board - changes

Once again, we have had a squad refresh with Bees United and have had to say our thank you's and goodbyes this year to Fran Carroll who has throughout his tenure been a sterling voice for international fees (with his involvement in the Irish Bees being notable), Keith MacInnes who has a passion for the club second to none and an ability to recollect historical events and matters that is up there with the best of them and who has willingly shared that knowledge (as well as his insight into Bees memorabilia and collecting) and also Jeff Dent who is probably the busiest retired man I've ever met and who has thrown himself into every event and campaign that we have run that he can possibly do! They have all brought their own insights and perspectives to the board and we thank them for all their time and commitment and they leave us all as friends of BU who we hope to see involved in the future!

Jonathan Burchill was also co-opted on to the board and has now been formally appointed as a director at the last AGM, and he has been particularly valuable in relation to our continued focus on "History and Heritage" as one of our four pillars at Bees United.

And in mentioning postal voting, I must say a quick welcome to Ben Bland, Steve Hammond and Peter Turner who were all successful in their applications to become our newest board members following the election and I look forward to working with them on the board. Equally important is to say thank you to the many people who enquired about standing for election. If it is any consolation to the members who were not successful in the election, I can happily report that a number of members have said to me that the quality and calibre of candidates proposed was impressive and meant it was hard to choose who to vote for and they could easily have said "any 3 of the 5". We hope that all those who expressed interest and particularly those that stood for election in particular will remain firm friends and be able to be involved in future plans!

Brentford FC changes – and BU Special Share

In addition to the changes to the BU Board, there was one very notable and major change for Bees United this year. We were asked to assist Matthew in respect of a modernisation of the ownership of Brentford FC with a view to future investment into the club and as a result we agreed to swap the BU Special Share for a Protective Rights Deed.

This new Protective Rights Deed effectively replicates the BU Special Share and means that Bees United retain a veto over the sale of the Gtech Community Stadium unless certain criteria are in place as regards a replacement stadium and also sets out our right to have (still uniquely in the Premier League) an independent director on the board of the club. This was a big step for the club in relation to the ownership structure but as regards the rights that Bees United held via the BU Special Share there is, in reality, no real change to those rights (and we also validated this fact with a formal legal opinion from a King's Counsel expert in company law). Accordingly, the BU Board was happy to agree to make the change and agree to help with the restructure in this way as we consider it a benefit for the future success of the club. We look forward to working with the new investors in the future and we will endeavour to ensure that the fans voice remains heard.

Fan Engagement

The Fan Advisory Board (FAB) continues to meet on a regular basis and remains jointly chaired by Bees United and BIAS. While we are all fans of a club that are extremely fortunate to have an owner who is a fan and who intends to do the right thing by Brentford as a community club that won't forget its past, it does remain important that the dialogue between club and fans remains that of a critical friend via the FAB (and of course at Bees United I do also sit on the club board itself). I would therefore encourage you all to ensure that you do follow the summary of the meetings that the club publishes: https://www.brentfordfc.com/en/the-fan-advisory-board and to raise any matters that may concern fans with any member of the FAB so that it might be discussed with the club.

Football also reached a historic milestone this year with the establishment of an independent regulator. This development potentially marks a fundamental shift in governance of the game – with the possibility that changes may occur in relation to safeguarding the game's integrity, financial sustainability, and connection to its communities. We will wait and see what the regulator actually means in practice for fans and for football but in the meantime we appreciate that we are one of the clubs that has least to be concerned about as regards the engagement and involvement of club and fans.

Bees United Communications and events

Our monthly newsletter continues to be well received based on feedback and discussions I have with members and it is of course one of the most important means we have of communicating with our members, as well as sharing content via our website and social media.

This year of course has included a number of crucial updates and, as mentioned above, particularly around the changing of the ownership structure of Brentford FC which involved a dedicated comms plan to ensure fans were aware of what the changes met for the club and for Bees United (see announcement here: https://mailchi.mp/da6943dd13b2/members-announcement). We will continue to work on how we can best engage with all our members in relation to important events that affect Bees United, our members and fans more widely.

Our members survey earlier in the year (which over 800 of our members completed) gave us interesting insight into our members views on a number of topics – including any pricing of tickets (which remains a hot topic of debate – perhaps more so at other clubs than at Brentford but we will not be complacent). Watch this space for future members surveys and also the possibility of some more specific member events.

History and Heritage

The focus of our history and heritage pillar ("To Promote and protect the history and heritage of the Club") remains and there is ongoing, mostly unsung, work on continuing to catalogue our memorabilia and also to collect in new donations and try to ensure that we have a fresh and interesting collection that capture these years as well as historic ones. On the particular note of current years, I do have to thank Bob Oteng (or Kitman Bob as most people seem to affectionately know him) as when we raised the question of getting old shirts or boots from players, he has stepped up and helped source some lovely items for the collection (we will perhaps overlook that the boots of the 3 players he gave to us are players who all left in the summer and so we might need to think hard about who we ask for donations from this year…), but in all seriousness these are wonderful items for us to be able to collect and in the future curate for events.

Special mention must go to Paul Stembridge for all of his efforts on supporting history and heritage as he now steps back from day to day involvement. Without Paul's efforts in completing the checking-off of the originally 'recorded' items in the collection and without his dedication, diligence and precision and his knowledge of (and understanding of) each item, each person and their specific Brentford contexts, we would not be where we as regards the memorabilia we hold. I must also credit Jonathan Burchill and Don Tanswell for their tireless efforts and countless trips to our storage facility – they just keep things moving along! Brendan Nevin also deserves mention for all of his contributions to the memorabilia and history of items and particularly his extensive knowledge of the club kits and badges over time. One final mention amongst many is reserved for Paul Briers and his years of work relating to those who played for Brentford and were lost in the world wars which has meant that we now have a poignant plaque commemorating them, and once again we had the occasion to mark Remembrance this season ahead of the Newcastle game in November 2025. Without all of those named – and others – who have either spent time in storage or shared their research and knowledge we would not be as well placed to continue to enhance the heritage and understanding of Brentford FC's place in the community throughout history

Finance

Our financial position is possible because of the donations which our members make and BU thanks each member who continues to support our work financially with regular donations.

The overall level of donations has shown a small decrease compared to the prior year, by approximately 7% both in number and in overall value, this trend has been the case over recent years as the number of ceased recurring donations is more than new donations.

We have continued with the cost-free way that members can support BU by giving via retail purchases through the Easyfundraising website[1], this is shown as other operating income.

A significant element of one-off income is shown this year of £6,000 relating to the write-off of loans to BU from members due to three long-standing loans kindly being waived by members as explained in note 6 to the accounts.

The vast majority of the cash balances are on fixed term deposits across a number of different banks in order to maximise the amount of interest. This is the first time that we have benefited from the full-year effect of this strategy and hence the interest income has increased on the previous year. We expect this interest income to be of a similar amount in future years as long as the overall cash balance remains at a similar level, it is of course subject to bank interest rates which have reduced slightly over this year. This interest income is subject to tax and hence the tax expenditure has shown a similar increase.

The levels of expenditure have reduced this year on the previous year. Heritage expenditure is lower due to the previous year having had a particularly high level of activity and more expenditure on storage equipment. Non-heritage expenditure has been maintained at broadly the same level.

I will finish by reflecting that it feels that we are in a period of change as regards the support of our great club, Brentford FC. We have had practical change at Bees United at board level and elections to bring new people in and swapping the BU Special Share for the Protective Rights Deed. The club has meanwhile seen Thomas Frank and a number of the coaching staff leave to join a different London team, the loss of a goalkeeper, a captain, a striker and also a fan favourite in Bryan Mbeumo who I think we have all cherished seeing him play for us since he joined us in 2019 as an 18 year old. Changes were also announced with our excellent AGM guest of last year, Academy Director, Stephen Torpey also being lured away – and added to that incoming investors and a new company ownership structure being put in place it feels like a lot of change but of course Brentford then did "a Brentford thing" and appointed the free kick coach, who had never been a manager, to take over the reins and I think we all wish Keith Andrews continued success as he steers the team through this Premier League season.

I'll finish by referencing a Phil Giles quote that I think captures the Brentford ethos (be it fan or club perspective):

"I don't think you can sit here and say that 'being where we are now is special enough'. … As soon as you do that, that's where we'll start to fall backwards; you always have to aspire to the next level.

[1] https://www.easyfundraising.org.uk/panel/