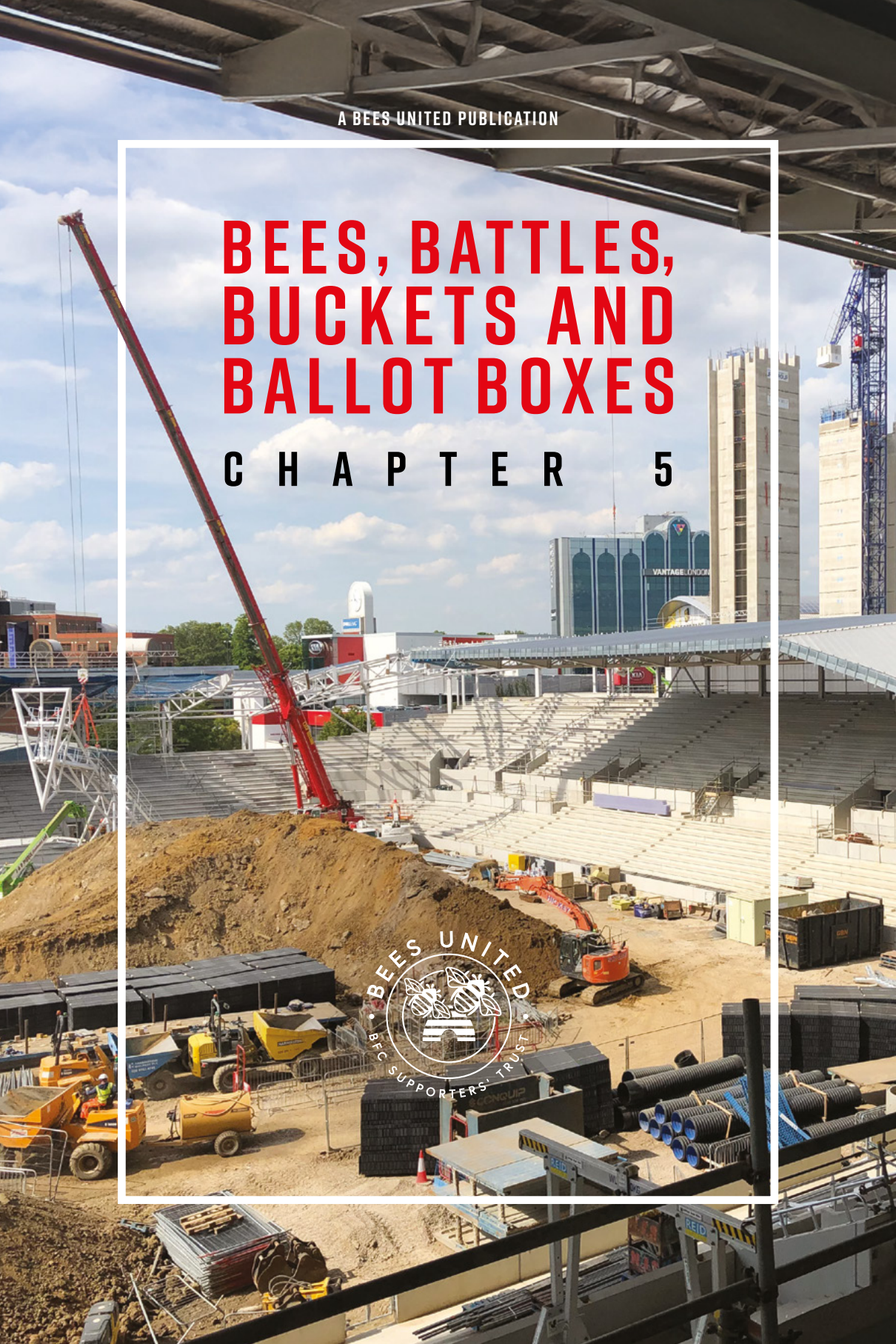


A BEES UNITED PUBLICATION

# BEES, BATTLES, BUCKETS AND BALLOT BOXES

## CHAPTER 5





*Cliff Crown speaking at an event to mark the ground-breaking ceremony as construction began in March 2018.*

I took over from Greg Dyke as Club Chairman in June 2013 and later that year I wrote in our annual report that there was 'a target date of playing our first game in the new stadium at the start of the 2016-17 season'. We have finally got there four years later but that was largely because of the need to re-appraise the project design and business logic underpinning the original proposal.

My first involvement with the Club was back in November 2010 when I became Chief Financial Officer at Matthew Benham's company Smartodds. One of the first things he asked me to do was take a look at the club finances and see where all the money was going! Thanks to Brian Burgess and Chris Gammon the stadium train was already out of the station and running but there was still a long journey ahead.



**CLIFF CROWN**  
HAS BEEN CHAIRMAN OF BRENTFORD  
FC SINCE 2013



*Cliff Crown holds the 'Golden Bolt' at a ceremony in May 2019 to mark the final piece of steel frame being put in place. With him are the club board and management team. The Chairman of Lionel Road Developments Limited, Conor Hayes, is third from left.*

I joined them in the negotiations with Barratt Developments regarding the purchase of the land in Lionel Road and Brian, Chris and I attended numerous meetings with lawyers over the next 18 months which resulted in a deal finally being consummated and signed on 28 June 2012, the same day that Matthew took control of the Club. I advised Matthew that it made sense to complete the two transactions simultaneously, to avoid being left in a position where he had lent significant sums to Brentford yet someone else could take over the club. Having bought the land we then had to obtain planning approval and the work done by our lawyers, advisors and consultants was both substantial and significant.

I remember seeing all the boxes of paperwork that were delivered to the Hounslow Council offices before that big night in December 2013 when we were granted (provisional) planning permission. I was one of the team of five who spoke on behalf

of the Club, we had four minutes each to make our presentation. We were told in no uncertain terms we could not go over 20 minutes, I was the last of the five speakers and we finished our submission on 19 minutes and 59 seconds. It was a great night in front of over 500 of our fans supporting our application and celebrating our success.

There were still plenty more challenges ahead: it was very clear to us that in

order to fund the stadium a developer would need to build a sufficient number of flats to make the deal work financially. We'd received planning permission for 910 flats so we had to find a developer to build those as well as the stadium. After careful consideration of a number of proposals we chose Willmott Dixon as our developer and they set about preparing themselves to commence the works and raising the necessary funds. That was clearly a challenge, which was still ongoing, and so in early 2016, Matthew decided that we should reassess the whole scheme and make it more cost effective and deliverable.

We were introduced to Conor Hayes who was brought in to reassess the project. This resulted in a re-design of the stadium, with a markedly different internal design and a re-appraisal of the business proposition which had originally been set out. That process took the best part of two and a half years as we entered into a fresh Section 73 Planning Consent for a new and modernised Stadium design until we finally signed an amended development agreement in August 2018 with Eco World who in the intervening period had acquired a majority stake in the Willmott Dixon development arm.



Brentford FC's speakers at the Hounslow Planning Committee meeting in December 2013. L-R Brian Burgess, Chris Gammon, Donald Kerr, Cliff Crown, Lee Doyle.



Some of the hundreds of fans who attended the meeting celebrate the vote for 'Yes to Lionel Road Community Stadium'.

---

## CHAPTER 5 CLIFF CROWN

---

Without a new planning consent, a revised design undertaken in 2017/2018 and crucially Eco World's substantial funding, the stadium project would not have happened. The updated plan had been to move from Griffin Park to the new stadium in the middle of the 2019-2020 season but because of the considerable delays that occurred at Spurs and the complications of moving mid-season we decided to delay the move until the end of that season. There was a financial cost to this but giving us that leeway to allow for stadium build delays turned out to be extremely helpful because it meant that we could cope with the final twist in the story which was COVID-19. Fortunately, there wasn't an enormous amount of work left to be done when lock-down started in March.

The contract we negotiated with the developer meant that the cost of the stadium was effectively their responsibility based on the agreed specification. We did not have any additional liability in relation to the costs of building the stadium, and they had to fund it before they could complete on the sale of any of the flats. Obviously we have made some changes to the agreed revised plan along the way, which have created extra costs for Brentford but they have been very well managed and controlled by Conor and they are within the realm of what we had anticipated.

Major construction projects are a long drawn out process but I think our project has gone as well as we could have hoped despite all the challenges we have faced. We've designed and built a stadium that I think the fans will be very proud of and I know all of us who have worked on the project are very delighted with the new home that we have created. My grateful thanks go to all of our advisers but especially Will Whitby, Barry Winterton, Richard Arnold Richard Jones and Adam Marks, as well as key members of the BFC stadium team including Operations Director Alan Walsh, Sally Stephens and David Hayes.

The stadium is the culmination of about 16 years work by a very committed team of people. There have been ups and downs along the way and the club has spent a small fortune in professional fees during that time, funded entirely by Matthew who has supported and trusted the team to deliver the vision, and what we now have is a fantastic new stadium that is Premier League ready.

---



---

Whilst many people deserve huge credit for this, some of whom have already been mentioned, my personal thanks go to Conor Hayes who over the last four and a half years has worked tirelessly and with incredible attention to detail to deliver our new stadium, largely on time and on budget. That, let me tell you, is no mean feat!

I do hope you will all enjoy it for many years to come.

---



*Jon Varney, a Brentford fan who was appointed Chief Executive of the Club in January 2019 surveys the progress on construction in May of that year*