

Chester City Supporters Trust – Chairman's Annual Report May 2007.

I can't really believe that it has been a full twelve months since my appointment to the Trust Board as Chairman. It's been a steep learning curve for me personally - however thanks to help and support from the current Board Members the year has flown by and I believe we have made significant progress in pushing forward the profile and range of activities in which the Trust have become involved. Highlights of the year for me have been the WALK4CITY event, particularly the reception received from our magnificent supporters at Gay Meadow and of course the involvement of the Trust in providing the memorial plaque to commemorate the re-naming of the North Terrace, 'The Harry McNally Terrace', with a big helping hand from Roger Glanville, even if the match results on both occasions were not what we wanted.

This time last year the Trusts' shareholding in the Football Club was the hot topic. Thankfully the Trust is finally in possession of a certificate confirming our shareholding in Chester City Football Club. I would like to thank Kevin Jones for his diligence in pursuing this through numerous e-mails, telephone calls, letters and in-person journeys to The Saunders Honda Stadium.

On joining the Board I was determined that we would be active and would be inventive and creative in our activities, which I believe we have, however the Board and I realise that we still have a long way to go. What we needed was a vision and a plan to achieve that vision if we were going to achieve anything at all. After 4 or 5 drafts the Board approved a Business Plan that laid out what we stood for and what we wanted to achieve over the next three years. It is this that has formed the basis of our work to date and will be continually updated as we progress. The revised objectives are on our updated website for all to see.

The basis of these objectives is to make Chester City Football Club a truly community focused football club that has a strong bond with all those communities with which it engages. The vehicles for delivering this are the Football in the Community Programme (FITC) and the Centre of Excellence. We need the support of the entire community and the resurrection of the FITC is a huge step in the right direction. Involvement in schools and other grassroots areas is of major significance when building a rapport with people outside the 'die-hard' few.

From small acorns great oaks can grow and it is also the first step in the quest to generate a conveyor of home grown talent. The importance of developing our own players has to be the most sensible and financially viable way of securing the long-term future of professional football in Chester. Massive strides have been made in this area in the past couple of years, evidenced by the appearance of the Youth Team in the 4th Round of The FA Youth Cup after dumping Premiership Spurs out in Round 3.

Good causes, both nationally (*MacMillan Cancer Support*) and locally (*Countess of Chester Hospital B+ Cancer Project*) have benefited from the Trust fund raising activities this year. This element of the Business Plan is vitally important as we need to engage as many people as possible, especially those with only a passing, or no interest, in football and this will continue to play a major role in our plan for community engagement.

The Trust is continually working hard behind the scenes helping the Club to revitalise its communications with the fans through the Official Website – a big thanks go out to Campbell, Kevin, Nathan and Rob for their dedication and hard work in delivering such a quality site. We have initiated a wide range of fund raising activities, both large and small, including - our Foreign Coin Re-cycling Scheme (Change for Chester), a Partner Membership Card with the Co-operative Group, the WALK4CITY, an on-line Affiliates scheme, the launch of a new era in fan literature with 'On The Burgerline' – (thanks for this go out to Nathan Auty and Tom Jones for their efforts in getting this project off the ground) and of course the on-going work carried out by Campbell in providing the excellent Devatxt service. Going into 2007 there are new and exciting plans in place to drive even bigger and better fund raising events.

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Fundraising is always a thorny subject and near the top of our agenda each and every time the Board meets. We have managed to run a number of innovative activities, along with several simpler ones that have generated a lot of interest and more importantly cash. However this is where the hard work starts. We have done the simple things well so far and if we are to build on this foundation we will need to push harder to increase the membership and at improving the involvement of non-Board members in delivering Trust sponsored events.

If the City wasn't aware of the Trust this time last year, then thanks to Kevin Jones - Trust Press and Communications Officer - they are now. Our profile in the local and national media has been terrific. Through local press and radio we have managed to communicate our activities high and wide. This has undoubtedly helped deliver the results we have seen so far. I couldn't talk about radio without mentioning our feature on the BBC Radio 5 Live Breakfast programme in December on the back of the Bury FA Cup fiasco - I would like to think that we won the debate that day and ultimately helped influence the 'correct' decision made by the FA Appeals Committee! This illustrated that it was the Supporters Trust who were approached as the voice of the fans during this nervous and eventually historic period in the history of the World's most famous cup competition, showing how far we have come in putting the Trust at the forefront of the public attention.

We have built working and collaborative relationships with a number of other Trusts' over the last 12 months, particularly Shrewsbury, Wrexham and the Widnes Vikings Trust. These links are extremely important as they lie at the heart of what the Supporters Trust movement is all about. This will continue going forward as there are lots of issues that affect the wider football supporter community that need to be tackled.

The Independent European Sports Review, published in 2006 is a casing point. The independent review, which was completed at the end of May, aims to evaluate various issues affecting modern-day European football including: the central role of the football authorities; the ownership, control and management of clubs; the level of expenditure in respect of players; activities of agents; the system of player registration and movement; the distribution of revenues within European football; the provision of funding to generate opportunities for all people to participate in football; and investment in football stadia, with a focus on safety and security.

All of these issues will have an impact on all football clubs and therefore it's supporters.

The challenge for the Trust Board for the rest of 2007 and into 2008 and beyond is motivating more members to stand up and be counted by trying to enthuse the Chester City supporters in getting behind and involved in the Trust. Membership involvement is crucial to the well being of the Trust as, when all is said and done the Trust doesn't belong to the people who currently sit on the Board and run it, it belongs to all the members, all of you here tonight.

A strong Trust is vital given the rollercoaster ride we appear to ride on at Chester City. Murmurings of name changes and rumour and counter rumour of a move to Widnes must be addressed as the underlying reasons behind them do not appear to have gone away.

Brinkmanship still appears to be the normal approach to conducting business at the club, we appreciate that financial constraints may have a detrimental effect on cash flow and the ability to settle debts but what of the erosion of confidence in the club this causes?

The Trust must be ready to mobilize at a moments notice should there be any wholesale change in ownership; to this end we are re-visiting our strategies and approach accordingly.

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We look forward to the announcement of a new date for the club's AGM and we are concerned that no new date has been fixed.

Going forward into next season the Trust needs to concentrate its activities on making Chester City Football Club an integral part of our community. It will not be easy, nor will it be achieved overnight, but if the club is to have a successful and prosperous future it is vital that we succeed.

Feel free to speak to a Trust board member tonight or via email or via the website or at any of the games if you wish to or think you can help the cause in any way. We want your help and need you to tell us your ideas and what you would like to see your Trust doing. On a positive note as we are not what could be termed "a club in crisis" (although it feels like it sometimes) complacency is our greatest enemy. We need to do all we can to ensure our Chester City is safe and secure for many years to come.

Having a solid Supporters Trust that is ready and able to act should the need arise is crucial, just ask Wrexham. How the Trust grows is down to you, the members and supporters. We are here to help ensure and if necessary fight, for the secure future for **OUR** Football Club. This cannot be done by a few; it is the responsibility of all Chester City supporters to make this a reality. Just take a look up the A483 and there for the grace of God go we. As I have said, it will not be an easy ride and there will undoubtedly be highs and lows along the way, but with the end result being a safe, secure and successful future for Chester City Football Club it will have been worth it.

Thank you

Paul Reid – Trust Chairman