

# Chester City Supporters Trust

## Chairman's Annual Report May 2008

When I was asked to prepare a statement from the Chair in readiness for the AGM it was really difficult to know where to begin. After the negativity of last season under Mark Wright it was hard to see how things could get much worse at Chester City Football Club. The appointment of Bobby Williamson and the early season performances rather than the actual results had everyone believing that this season was going to be one when we were not going to be fighting relegation as we have in each season since our return to the Football League.

However how wrong we were? In true Chester City style events conspired to put the club back where it was under Keith Curle. The stunning early season football was followed by a complete and utter collapse in December. Rumours abounded as to the reason, topped off by Billy Dearden's comments on the eve of our fixture at Field Mill. It was on the back of these comments that I wrote in a personal capacity to Stephen Vaughan asking him to explain how, given that we had released 8 players in January we were still in breach of the salary cap and whether he was going to publicly denounce Dearden's comments. In truth I really didn't expect a response. However I did and it certainly clarified a few things for me about the people running our football club. In a nutshell I was asked "who the \*\*\*\* do you think you are questioning how I run my football club & what's it to you if I'm not paying players on time?"

This stance around information was further enhanced at the club's first AGM since 1991. Once again a perfectly legitimate question was asked regarding the club's finances, particularly the identity of the debtors and creditors. The answer – "that's none of your business". As representative of the Trust as a shareholder I found it strange that this comment came from another shareholder who is not a board member of the football club. If he as a mere shareholder, had this information why was it not available to all shareholders?

This has been the tone for the season since the end of November. A number of bids have been made to buy the football club, debt free this season all of which have been initially encouraged and ultimately rejected. It is against these issues that Trust has spent an awful lot of time, resource and energy discussing and researching these bids, hence the perceived reduced visibility. Some of these discussions included meetings with Trust representatives from our near neighbours & fellow League 2 club, Wrexham, who have had their fair share of problems over past few seasons.

We also spent the first part of the season attempting to engage the club's community team in providing the Trust information to help with funding bids. Unfortunately as is the way with Chester City under the current regime, nothing was forthcoming, thus forcing us to abandon this particular route to help the club start to build a foundation for the future. The club certainly has not yet got a grip of how important community engagement is and the current disregard shown on a regular basis is both disappointing and unprofessional.

On a positive note the Trust has not been entirely inactive. Before the season began a race night was held at the Oaklands in Hoole attended by the then new management team of Bobby Williamson and Malcolm Thompson as well as Mark Newman & Sarah Smith from the club and Trust President Grenville Millington.

Funding of £438 was provided to the Centre of Excellence and another fundraiser was launched at the Barnet fixture in December that gave fans the opportunity to win a brand new Honda Jazz, kindly provided by Ron Saunders. This particular event took a substantial amount of time & effort in organising, however the support from City fans was to say the least disappointing. The lucky winner of the draw was unable to hit the crossbar to win the car but walked on the hollowed turf and took away a signed shirt as a consolation. It is events like this where assistance is desperately required. What is needed is a ground force of helpers to get more things in place to support the Board in implementing some of these initiatives.

On the subject of cars, the Trust also voiced its concern with the council over the traffic flow out of the Deva Stadium on match day after numerous complaints from City fans. However after a number of letters we are still awaiting their proposed solution.

Some other things, sadly that have had to stop this season have been DevaTxt, as it became financially unsustainable and the Trusts' management of the official website.

Going forward, I still believe passionately that the future of this football club must be secured with a clear business strategy that has the community at its heart. The vision for me would be to see Chester City Football Club as "Cheshire's preferred community club". The UK government has become increasingly concerned about the health, well-being and welfare of young people. Against this background football has a huge amount to offer. Hopefully this will include giving young people an active interest in the game and Chester City FC that will be with them throughout their lives. Football can play a significant role in the fight against discrimination and racism in all their hideous forms as well as providing an outlet for children to release their energy and in extreme cases help prevent anti-social behaviour.

How can this be achieved?

Well Chester City as a community club could provide high quality training and support to coaches, parents and volunteers at grassroots clubs in and around Chester as well as providing the same support to teachers in Chester's many schools. Football can provide the educational platform for basic human and social values, for example tolerance and respect for others. Chester City has a duty to, indeed a mission to contribute to the development of football in the county. They have to identify and then work in a collaborative partnership with key educational and welfare stakeholders to provide quality football and educational opportunities for all. A philosophy of education through football or put another way using the game as a tool to educate young people in ways to help improve themselves or others, is fundamental to any community engagement plan.

A basic business plan has to be written and then delivered, using core performance indicators to measure progress. This might sound like a lot of work but if the club is ever going to encourage more people to develop an affinity with it then it is vital, no in fact essential that this obvious gap in the strategic planning at Chester City is filled and quick!

On an issue closer to home there has been a certain amount of criticism levelled at the Trust in the past few months. Some of it valid, some of it not. I would like to answer some of this here and now. We live a democracy and in such a place people have individual choice in deciding what they are happy to support and what they are not. Support for something you don't believe in is extremely difficult and at times personal sacrifices have to be made. I doubt that not going to games is what those

staying away would like in an ideal world. Instead of doing nothing some people have chosen to try and do something to make SV sit up and take notice of their frustrations. Not necessarily right but at the same time not wrong either.

For clarity a supporter's trust is **duty bound to press for good governance at football clubs** and it is this issue that has led many to withdraw support for SV and his regime. Bad practice is the watchword at Chester City under SV and I regret in all honesty I have seen nothing to date that suggests that this is likely to change with him at the helm.

As he holds a 75%+ share in the club and refuses to sell or accept help for anyone, how else are people unhappy at his business practices expected to show their dissatisfaction?

Now here is my first challenge of the night to those people. If you are so interested in the activities of the Trust and are concerned about the way in which it is run and the people involved, do something about it. Instead of constantly criticising individuals and the Trust as whole why don't you stand for election to the board and make a positive contribution to securing a future for the club? But be warned that this will take personal sacrifice and will put demands on your time.

Sitting at home throwing stones from the outside is dead easy. What takes conviction, dedication and courage is to question things that you are not comfortable with and stand up for what you believe in, sometimes at personal cost.

So come on, if you don't like the way the Supporters Trust is run, stand up be counted and change it! Like I have said already it will take personal sacrifice and will put demands on your time. But if you feel that strongly about it why not use that energy in a more positive manner?

Finally, the Trust has also made progress in building closer working relationships with other City fans groups culminating in the CITY FANS UNITED event at the Wrexham fixture in March. However there is still much to be done. I believe that a club the size of Chester City is not capable of sustaining the number of different groups it has currently. Something has got to give and so my second challenge is to all City fans and that is the creation of ONE fans group that has louder and united voice. Fundamentally this is because supporters have more strength in numbers and to provide much needed clarity to supporters as who and what the supporters groups do and stand for.

Any hopes the fans have of changing the way governance of the club is managed can only be achieved if we are united and stand together. Apathy is not option and the success of this football club is the responsibility of us all.

Paul Reid  
Chairman – Chester City Supporters Trust