

## 'Our Town, Our Team'

### Frome Town Football Club Meeting

Monday 3 October, Frome Football Club, 7–9pm

Nick White - Chair

#### **Speakers**

Jon Carver - Frome Town AFC

Cllr. Mel Usher - Frome Town Council (FTC)

Andy Walsh - Football Supporters' Association (FSA)

Jon Bickley & Oliver Holtaway - Bath City Football club

Cllr. Lisa Merryweather-Millard - (FTC) Break Out Session

---

#### **Chair Nick White**

Nick White set the tone for the meeting stating that earlier this year Frome Town Football Club and Frome Town Council made a deal to secure the ground at Badgers Hill, with the understanding that there would need to be a restructuring with a potential for community ownership. This meeting invited members of the community to come and hear about potential next steps and to ensure that both the football community and the wider community were onboard.

#### **Frome Town AFC – Jon Carver**

Vice-Chairman of Frome Town Football Club, Jon Carver was the first speaker. He identified financial issues that had brought the club to this position, spoke about the partnership with Frome Town Council, the need to increase community ownership and to raise capital to improve infrastructure.

He did reiterate that the club is run to a managed budget now but there was a need to change the model of ownership to attract investment. He stated that the directors wanted to broaden the offer of the club to the wider Frome community and identified ambitions for the club including financial stability, a 3G pitch and multi-use games area to enable the offer out to other clubs. He also spoke about the importance of engaging with experts.

#### **Frome Town Council (FTC) – Cllr. Mel Usher**

Councillor Mel Usher, lead councillor for the football club project at the council thanked the volunteers at the football club, acknowledged missteps and looked forward to new beginnings. He spoke to why the council is involved and stated that Frome Town Council paid off a debt of £370,000 because of a real threat to the club ground and now have a first charge on the

ground so that no one else can buy it. FTC also have an option to buy the ground for £1 going forward if the conditions are right.

He pointed out the significance of a football club to sport, fitness and health in the community and how integral it was to the town to retain its football club. He also stated that FTC don't want to run a football club but want to be part of a partnership and reiterated that whilst FTC have a good record of applying for grants there is no more money coming from the council and so change is necessary. FTC's ambitions for the club are aligned with Frome Town Football Club in that what they want to see is a successful, community engaged club, a community resource and on a sound financial footing.

### **Football Supporters' Association (FSA) – Andy Walsh**

Andy Walsh, from the Football Supporters' Association, laid out potential options for the club. He has a wealth of experience guiding over 40 Clubs through the community ownership process. He explained how it might work, beginning with the formation of a steering group to drive the club through the various steps required.

He explained that a community benefit society is a member-owned and democratically controlled corporate structure where every member has one share and one vote. The Football Supporters' Association are suggesting that Frome Town Football Club becomes a community benefit society with the ownership transferred to it as this can lead to a working community partnership, the development of facilities and ultimately more funding opportunities through grant funding and share issue.

### **Jon Bickley & Oliver Holtaway – Bath City Football club**

Jon Bickley & Oliver Holtaway spoke about Bath City Football Club's community ownership, now 5 years old. They stated that not dissimilarly, debts were mounting, and they needed to revitalise the club. They talked about how the opportunity arose and how they, as supporters, took a real stake in the club. This enabled new people with different talents, experiences and passions to get involved.

Their experience was that it led to a wider skill set, more advertisers, different types of sponsorship, and a more transparent journey to community ownership.

Jon said: "There is no doubt that it is hard work, but becoming part of a community owned Bath City is one of the best things we have ever done."

### **Football Club meeting feedback**

Following the speakers, Lisa Merryweather-Millard led a discussion session asking a series of questions; what does the club need; how can more people with the skills and experience needed be further involved; how can more financial resources be brought into the club; and what new, as yet unimagined, opportunities might present themselves?

The feedback was collated into four main areas of discussion. They included:

## **Strategic actions**

The need for good financial management and transparency was a recurring theme. Some participants were keen to explore further why the club was in such a dire situation and more information will be available on that matter, although an undue focus on this will deflect from concentration on future solutions. The following were seen as crucial:

- Partnerships with other sports teams, FCs (e.g., Bath City), FSA, Powerchair, veterans etc
- Developing greater links to schools, local businesses and markets
- Developing and promoting the club as a community facility for wider use
- Utilising unused space
- Develop youth teams, football pathways, youth outreach, women's teams

## **Income**

Suggestions for generating income have been split into three categories:

- Quick wins – events/initiatives that can generate an income with minimal planning/effort e.g., darts, skittles, bingo, hire of space
- Income opportunities requiring more organisation e.g., larger events, raffles, merchandise, catering, office space etc
- Fundraising – grants, sponsorship, hospitality boxes, hire of assets, stakeholder investment

## **Site development/management**

Development of the club and improvement of the facilities was mentioned several times as was moving the club and developing the land.

- Better clubhouse facilities including a gym and improved changing rooms
- Improve crowd and parking management
- 3G/4G pitch

## **Marketing**

Raising the profile of the club through marketing in different ways was mentioned multiple times including:

- better community awareness and engagement – including the use of the club as a community space
- outreach to schools
- improve website and social media
- improve marketing for events
- Improved links with the Frome Times/Nub News - as the town's newspapers

## **Outcomes**

The outcome from the meeting was that whilst accepting that there was a lot of work to be done to move things forward, there was a lot of energy in the room to form a steering group and to take the next steps toward a Community Benefit Society. Members of the public were

then invited to keep in touch and indicate if they were interested in becoming part of the steering group.

The meeting was well attended by over 120 people, and there was overwhelming support on a show of hands to take the next step to help secure the future of the club. Work is now underway to bring the interested people together.

A film of the meeting is available: <https://youtu.be/PrihTD6gNOQ>

And to sign up and receive further information: <https://tinyurl.com/Frome-Town-FC>