

Agenda Item 3

For information – Update on programme to protect Badgers Hill stadium as a community asset & next steps

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Summary

FTC has achieved a key milestone in its programme to protect Badgers Hill stadium as a community asset. The combination of our freehold ownership, the 25-year lease granted to the Frome Town Community Benefit Society (FTCBS) who will run and manage the site and the licence to Frome Town AFC (the Club) means that this resource will be retained for the community of Frome. Some early success has also been achieved in securing external funding for repairs and improvements. Provisional approval has been given by the Government under the Community Ownership Fund for a grant of £364k and an application for £150k from the Premier League Stadium Fund is also in progress.

In addition to delivering repairs and improvements, the FTCBS have a responsibility to engage further with the community with a view to encouraging and enabling greater community use of the stadium and facilities.

Progress review for programme to protect Community Assets – Badgers Hill stadium:

Project	Update	Status
Secure debt redemption and charge with possible ownership of land and ground as first step	On 15 July 2022, FTC paid off the Goldchevron loan and entered into an option agreement with the owner of Badgers Hill stadium, Frome Town Holdings Limited and Frome Town AFC Ltd (the Club). FTC secured a first legal charge on the site. By doing so, we averted potential repossession and closure of the site. The Council's option was exercised on 18 July 2023 and completed on 3 August with FTC becoming the freeholder of the site. At the same time, a 25-year lease was granted to the new Frome Town Community Benefit Society (FTCBS) and a licence to the Club.	
Ensure town is aware of possible problems and advantages of approach through press statements and continuing engagement	Our involvement has been shared widely with the community through all channels including on 11 August 2023, a combined statement on community ownership of the stadium by FTC, FTCBS and the Club. The news was front page in the Frome Times on 17 August. But there is more to be done by the CBS	
Set up Football Club Panel internal to council and then wider involvement to start campaign for community owned club	Councillors, staff, representatives of the Club and Football Supporters Association met to explore the potential for community ownership in September 2022. On 3 October 2022, a public meeting was held at the stadium attended by 120 people to share progress and discuss next steps. A large majority supported the establishment of a community benefit society to protect the long-term future of the ground and ultimately to enable local "one person one vote" control of the Club.	
Visit examples of community owned clubs and identify lessons	Lewes, Peacehaven and Chippenham were visited earlier this year and there has been desk top research too. The lessons learned were fed into planning for FTCBS.	
Work with the club to develop a new strategy	Whilst FTC's primary aim was to protect the site for community use rather than just save the football Club, a working group bringing together the Club, FTC and external advisors met in August and September 2022 to complete a financial review of the Club and recommendations were made to the company's Board around ways to strengthen its financial position. Since then, the Club has recruited new Board members who have attracted new sponsorship and other income, but work is still in progress led by the Club's new Financial Director.	
Agree the approach to community club and if necessary, start a share issue campaign. Ensure maximum public engagement and generate excitement	FTC facilitated project work involving community stakeholders to consider governance issues, facilities and funding and community engagement. FTCBS has now been formed and Board members have been recruited to the Board. As agreed by councillors on 18 January, we paid for the services of a consultant, Johannes Moeller to help FTCBS become established and raise funding. It is	

<p>across the town and in the immediate area</p>	<p>now down to FTCBS to generate the excitement that we hoped for, but it is hoped that the recent publicity around community ownership of the stadium will help.</p>	<p></p>	<p></p>
<p>Develop a plan for delivering new facilities that can be enjoyed by both the club and the wider community</p>	<p>There are plans to make urgent repairs to the Clubhouse and other buildings and the installation of new changing rooms and meeting rooms/classrooms to be enjoyed by the Club and wider community. Some external grant aid has been provisionally approved to help fund this work.</p>	<p></p>	
<p>Ensure that we see a return on our investment to enable us to invest and/or support other valuable community assets</p>	<p>A 25-year lease has been granted to FTCBS with 5 yearly rent reviews. It is expected to generate in the region of £400k in rental income over the term.</p>	<p></p>	

What is a community benefit society and what roles will Frome Town Community Benefit Society (FTCBS) play?

A community benefit society is a type of legal organisation that's registered with the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA). It is a not-for-profit business model which makes it attractive to funders who offer grants and set aside land and assets for not-for-profit bodies. Membership of a CBS is organised on the principle of one-member, one-vote.

FTCBS has emerged from discussions between the Football Supporters Association, Frome Town Council, the football club - Frome Town AFC and dedicated volunteers from the wider community.

FTCBS' current relationship with the football club is as landlord, holding the long lease on the stadium and granting a licence that enables the club to operate. For the moment, the club operates independently of the FTCBS, but this may change in the future.

The current roles of the FTCBS can be summarised as:

- managing the stadium and enabling repairs and improvements
- developing football in Frome
- creating broader community benefit

Further details on FTCBS and the background to its establishment can be found at <https://badgershillnews.org/>

Next steps

Now that Badgers Hill stadium is in community ownership, attention has turned to the task of delivering urgent repairs and essential improvements to the site and encouraging and enabling community use of the stadium.

Repairs and improvements

The lease to FTCBS is a full repairing one. In addition to routine checks and maintenance, responsibilities of the tenant set out in the lease include:

Within 3 months:

- Immediate improvements to the hot and cold-water systems within the changing rooms and Clubhouse and replacement of the boiler
- Improvements to fire security within the Clubhouse

Within 12 months:

- Major repairs to the Clubhouse including roofs, lighting and the installation of new doors and ramps that will enable disabled access
- Installation of new changing rooms, first aid room and meeting rooms
- Repairs to boundary walls and repairs to car parks and roads on site
- Repairs to turnstiles
- Repairs to the Club Shop roof

Within 18 months:

- Completion of an assessment and costed plan for lighting improvements across the site

To help raise funding for repairs and improvements, FTC paid for the time of Johannes Moeller as consultant who worked with FTC's Deputy Town Clerk and the FTCBS Director of Fundraising to prepare two grant applications for submission by FTCBS. The first of these, an application to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities (DLUHC) under the Community Ownership Fund (COF) was successful and £364,114 has been provisionally approved, subject to legal documentation. Of this sum, £50k is for revenue (to cover professional fees including those of an architect) and the balance for capital funding and requires a 50/50 match. It is intended that the match will be provided by FTC in-kind in the form of a discounted rent (which councillors have already agreed) and funding from the Football Foundation (FF). An application for a grant of £150k to FF under the Premier League Stadium Fund is in progress.

Community objectives

When this project was last reported on at the April 2023 Council meeting, it was noted that we would ensure that the FTCBS would create an asset that means something to the wider community alongside the football teams that use the stadium. It was agreed that authority would be delegated to the Deputy Town Clerk in consultation with the Business Manager to finalise the terms to be included in the lease. Cllrs Mel Usher and Lisa Merryweather were consulted as part of this process.

The FTCBS have agreed that they will enable the whole community to enjoy the facilities at the stadium and will actively create opportunities for those that are underrepresented or disadvantaged. They will prepare an annual report describing how the community has been engaged and benefitted from the activities of the FTCBS and how improvements have been made year-on-year. Each report will include:

- The projects and activities of the FTCBS and how the wider Frome community has been involved either as direct participants or in new community engagement activities (alongside men's football)
- An equality impact assessment
- A report on the active membership of the FTCBS including how members are involved in the running of the site
- How the FTCBS has worked to improve the quality of community facilities
- The involvement of wider community interests on the Board – as a minimum, representatives of youth and women's football will be invited to join the Board with FTC stepping in if this proves to be unsuccessful
- The number of hours dedicated to subsidised community use in the Clubhouse
- A summary of how the FTCBS is working to achieve net zero and encourage active travel to and from the stadium
- A summary of how the FTCBS is working to make the stadium the hub of footballing in the town
- A summary of the ticketing policy being implemented for footballing activities that recognises the needs of disadvantaged and underrepresented sections of the community

The next step will be the preparation of an Operating Agreement between the Council and the FTCBS which will build on the objectives outlined above. This will be reported at a future Council meeting.