

VIEW FROM THE TRUST

Why Are Supporters' Trusts needed?

It is probably an accurate observation that interest in the activities of football club Supporters Trusts is directly related to the amount of concern on the terraces.

Having been a supporter of my hometown club since the beginning of the 1972/3 season, like many others I enrolled as a member of the newly created Bolton Wanderers Supporters Trust when the true nature of our perilous financial standing became apparent. Ongoing concerns subsequently motivated me to attend last July's AGM to learn more about the workings of the Trust and whether I could assist in helping bring these to a wider audience. I am pleased to advise that my offer was accepted!

If any reminder were needed, it was just around 3 years ago that the on/off loan deal for Rajiv Van La Parra heralded the beginning of the most tortuous time in our great club's long and distinguished history, with seemingly daily revelations underlining what a serious predicament the club faced, threatening its very existence as a professional football team. The imposition of a transfer embargo, winding up orders and the impending sale of the club undoubtedly affected performances on the pitch as the team began the almost inevitable descent into the football wilderness of League One.

Worrying times for supporters who seemingly had little option but to helplessly watch events unfold from the sidelines as the Whites slid ever closer to insolvency and all its associated negative consequences.

Some supporters, however, took another option, galvanised to follow the examples at Portsmouth, Exeter City and clubs in the highly successful Bundesliga in establishing a Supporters Trust at Bolton. The aim was to provide an independent supporters voice in the running of their football club thereby helping to bring a measure of stability and continuity in club affairs, as well as strengthening links between the club and its community, and many supporters parted with a modest £10 annual membership fee to become a Trust member following its establishment in January 2016.

Events at BWFC

Since then, the club survived its 11th hour brush with administration in February 2016 and then bounced back from relegation to League One at the first attempt, whilst resolving ownership issues that had continued to threaten future progress. Further positive news around renegotiated contracts and more realistic wage structures are evidence that the club is striving to better live within its means, all no doubt convincing some that the worst has passed and perhaps that a Supporters Trust is now of little relevance.

As a club, we are hopefully slowly moving towards better times. However, the threat of winding up orders has persisted and questions that the Trust posed about the source and sufficiency of the funding at the time of the 2016 takeover remain largely unanswered, although an unprecedented players' strike and our latest September brush with administration have again signposted a worrying lack of financial stability. This is further compounded by the fact that administration was only avoided on this latest occasion due to a loan from our previous benefactor who has since sadly passed away.

What has BWFCST achieved?

All this surely reinforces the need for an effective Supporters Trust that represents the club's loyal supporters, making sure that our voice is heard in the running of our club. While it is fair to say there is some way to go in this respect, since its inception the Trust has worked effectively with the club's Community Trust in its support for the Academy and the Ladies team and the arrangement of the

Legends game, as well as continuing to develop its plans for an independent fan zone and a Memorandum of Understanding to underpin future dealings with the club.

Its two most important achievements, however, are undoubtedly having the stadium listed as an Asset of Community Value which helps ensure that the Whites can't have their ground sold from under them without warning like Coventry City, and the recent creation of Bolton Wanderers Community Interest Company, which is a vehicle which could be used to secure a community takeover of the club, should the need arise.

Moving Forwards

These are very practical measures that the Trust has taken to help safeguard the future of our club should the worst scenario unfold, but with just over 3000 members accounting for around 20-25% of our average home gate, it could be argued that it is not a representative mouthpiece for Bolton's supporters and so used to justify limited engagement with the club.

There are many wide ranging views on the need of a Supporters Trust at Bolton and on its effectiveness, but surely the majority would find it hard not to agree that;

- There is no doubt that a club in Bolton's precarious financial position requires an effective Supporters Trust.
- There is no doubt that increased membership with the Trust representing a greater proportion of supporters would make it much more effective in its meaningful and structured engagement with the club.
- There is no doubt that loyal supporters do have other options than railing helplessly on the sidelines in times of crisis.

It is a well repeated cliché, but players, owners and managers of football clubs come and go, but the loyal supporter invests a lifetime in their club. Bolton Wanderers Football Club Supporters Trust needs you as much, if not more, today as it did in 2016.

.....and you can join via the Trust's website here.

Peter Holden – BWFCST Member