



# Bradford Park Avenue Community Football Club

18 August 2016

## Answers to your questions on community ownership

This short paper aims to answer some of the most frequent questions asked about the new arrangements for community ownership at Bradford Park Avenue Community Football Club.

- **The club has moved from private ownership to a Community Benefits Society. How will things be different?**

Previously, we had a single majority shareholder and a small number of shareholders with a significant stake in the club, in addition to some shareholders with smaller holdings. This put control of everything at the club into the hands of a very small number of people. The primary owner, Gareth Roberts, wanted to spread that decision-making power to a much larger number of people and this has been supported by the other shareholders, who have agreed to give up their holdings in return for standard membership of the club. Such membership will now be opened up to anyone else who supports the aims of the club.

By taking membership at a modest annual price - £10 for the current year (to May 2017) - each member will be entitled to one vote on who sits on the board and will be in a position to influence major decisions. Membership will be open to everyone with an interest in the club, from players and volunteers, supporters and sponsors through to other people who use the site or who live in the local community. That will ensure a range of views are considered when the elected board makes decisions. It will also protect the assets of the club for future generations because no one person can decide to sell off or close down the club.

A major advantage of being a CBS is that it opens up many sources of income that the club has not previously been eligible for, such as grants for site redevelopment and community initiatives. New, improved facilities will attract more people, maximising Horsfall's potential as a community hub that will retain some free, open facilities but also some additional ones that could potentially create opportunities for income generation. This money will help offset club running costs, with any profit being reinvested.

- **A lot of grants require matched funding from the organisation. How would we find that money just from the proceeds of our modest membership fees?**

Sponsorship will be more likely to come to Avenue when we are community owned rather than when we were a private company. Many sponsors want to support schemes that deliver benefits for local people and causes as part of their social responsibility aims. The club will be much better able to deliver that than it has been previously. We will work hard to generate support from potential sponsors.

As a CBS, we can also offer "community shares" for major projects – a type of "crowdfunding" - so people will be able to invest in the club, effectively loaning money to support individual initiatives so that we can raise capital in a cost-effective way rather than through commercial bank loans.

- **How much will it all cost to redevelop the site as suggested?**

We are looking at development options and will conduct a feasibility study of all the options, as well as discussing what is possible with the owners of the site, Bradford Council. A crucial element will be re-development of the stadium site to upgrade facilities and ensure we future-proof the ground for suitability to playing at the next level.

Until we work through the detail, we don't know the exact costs but we would expect to be looking at an investment in excess of £3 million in the next three to five years, funded by grants, sponsorship, capital investment and other income streams.

- **What happened to the investments of the former private shareholders?**

The losses in the club over several years were close to a million pounds and the club was close to going into receivership when Gareth Roberts stepped in as a benefactor to save it from going under. Sadly, the reality was that the current shares in the club had no real monetary value. As part of their support for the move to a Community Benefits Society, the board asked shareholders to write-off the value of their shares and this was agreed, though those shareholders have automatically become the first members of the community club.

- **How risky is it to make this change in ownership? We are not a very big club to undertake something so ambitious. Wouldn't it have been better to stay as we were?**

It was not a realistic option to stay as we were. Gareth Roberts' interest in Avenue has always been to help develop something as a legacy for the wider community, safeguarding the future of the football side along the way. We have to find a way to be big in our community and make people care.

Whatever we do in the future, the financial state of the club could not be worse than it has been in recent years. We can only improve things. We either had to look for a legal entity other than private ownership to give us a sustainable future, or we would have failed anyway. It is community ownership that will create opportunities for redevelopment, increased turnover, increased income and, ultimately, security for the club for the future.

Conversion to a Community Benefits Society is not something untried and untested. Many football clubs and other sporting organisations – both larger and smaller than we are – have gone down this route and made a success of it and we see no reason we will not also do that. Supporters Direct, who have worked with us to support the conversion, is an organisation that has assisted many clubs in this kind of change process and has a lot of experience to offer. The board is retaining them to advise us throughout the transitional stage of the process.

- **Who made the decision on whether the change of ownership was made?**

The club was a limited company and the only people who could change that were the shareholders. We are launching a membership scheme and it will then be up to supporters and other stakeholders to decide whether they want to be part of the club's future by joining the scheme each year in return for a vote on the make-up of a new, elected board and other issues. In the meantime, of course, the current directors will stay in place for some time to ensure a smooth and safe transition. No-one on the board is walking away from the club.

- **What role will volunteers play in the new structure?**

We will need volunteers as much as ever. The difference is that they will have a bigger stake in things and some influence on the decisions made. We expect to have a number of committees to run certain aspects of the business – such as a fund-raising committee or a community projects committee – and those groups of volunteers are expected to have some delegated authority from the board to get things done.

- **How will the changes in ownership affect the first team?**

It will be business as usual on the pitch and the first team management will still make the decisions they make now, with the board having oversight to approve things like new signings and budgets. We would not expect any detrimental impact on the footballing side of the club but we expect that the players will benefit, over time, from better on-site facilities and things like further improvements to the main pitch, facilities for all-weather training, better changing rooms and so on.

Another positive impact will be on our ability to develop other teams under the BPA umbrella. The club has focused very much on its first team to the exclusion of the juniors, the ladies and so on. The board does not feel this has benefitted anyone. We now have an opportunity to regroup and broaden the footballing activity at Horsfall on a permanent basis.

We see an increasing role for the first team in our community outreach work, building relationships with young people in local schools and in junior teams and so on, and we will continue to look for people who share an interest in such things and who are not in it only for their 90 minutes on the pitch.

- **What about the people who use the site for other sports?**

We are committed to expanding the range of sports that can be played or trained for at Horsfall and we have already started talking to people who use the site for some of those purposes. It is very much part of the board's vision that the site will provide better facilities for some athletics disciplines, for cricket, as well as for more informal fitness activity such as walking and running, and indoor training.

- **The adjoining playing fields are currently designation as open space. How will your plans impact on open access for local children to play and for dog walkers?**

For the time being, our main focus is on the stadium itself, which we lease from the council and, of course, any re-development will be the subject of consultation with the local community and other key stakeholders, and will need formal planning consent. This would not impact access to the upper playing fields which we do not currently lease. Of course we have to have some security for our buildings to protect our assets from theft and vandalism so there will need to be some facilities that will continue to be protected, but we are committed to retaining as much open access as we can, so that our neighbours can still enjoy the site. In fact, we think it would be better for them as we would consider what they need in any redevelopment plans and try to create safer, better maintained recreational space and pathways than is currently the case.

- **Would greater usage of the site and longer operational hours mean more of a nuisance for neighbouring householders in terms of parking problems and the intrusion of flood lighting?**

We want to provide as much on-site parking as we can as part of any redevelopment. We would also want to talk to operators of public transport systems about options for services to the site or park-and-ride schemes so that

users don't have to come by car. We agree it is important to avoid being a nuisance to our neighbours. They are part of the community for whom we want to make things better at Horsfall and many of them might well become members of the club and have a say in its future.

We may need replacement and additional lighting for evening use of the facilities, but we would avoid light pollution as far as possible by investing in modern, directional lighting that has a much lower impact on the surrounding areas and this would only be operated within certain hours. Overall, we think any redevelopment would be beneficial to our neighbours – bringing better maintained, improved and safer facilities - but of course all plans will be subject to scrutiny, discussion and comment as part of the local authority's planning process.

- **Much of the redevelopment is dependent on the co-operation of the local authority to grant a long lease for the stadium and the playing fields, as well as to be open to planning permission for any redevelopment. Have they made a commitment to that?**

We are still in negotiation with the council but they are very supportive of us taking a lease of the stadium for at least 25 years and we expect to agree the details in the near future. We will also look to work more closely with the local community to help improve the standard and facilities across the wider playing field site, which we see as critical to our objectives around community benefits. We will, of course, need to discuss and resolve these issues before committing to any redevelopment plans.

We would hope our ambitions for community ownership and facilities would actually improve the likelihood of success in the negotiations as we are demonstrating a serious, long-term commitment to the site and to bringing benefits to the people of Bradford. We also see them as having a key role as an enabler for access to grant aid for improving and developing facilities.

- **Does that mean that the football club will definitely stay at Horsfall?**

Yes, if we can secure the long leases that we are hoping for. If that doesn't happen within a few months, we will be forced to look at other options because the football authorities will not let us continue to compete in

competitions unless we have a long-term home. However, Horsfall is the board's first choice and we very much want to stay if the council and community are favourable to what we want to achieve.

We know some long-term fans had still hoped for a return to our original Park Avenue home but that has never been a very realistic aim and is really a very remote possibility since plans were announced for work to significantly upgrade the cricket facilities there to county standard over the next few years to include training wickets on what remains of the old football pitch.

**If there are further questions you want answers to, please send them to [joe.mosley@bpaafc.com](mailto:joe.mosley@bpaafc.com) and we will either respond to you personally or, if it's something suitable for sharing with other people, add them to the FAQs here.**