STFC Supporters Parliament meeting, Tuesday 8th November 2016

Venue – Prince of Wales in Belle Vue

Start time 7pm.

Present: Brian Caldwell, James Hughes STFC Director (part of meeting), Jamie Edwards STITC, Mike Davis, Martin James, Roger Groves, Chris Wynne, Josh Wynne, Barry Davies, Neil Handley, Simon Moore, Paul Buckley, Paul Coyne, Rob Lewis, Rachael Dilloway, David Allsopp, Adrian Plimmer

Apologies: John Lumley, Ian Payne, Marian Lane, Malcom Lane, Sheila Downes, Steve Price, Stewart Price, Lyn Price, Selwyn Plant, Chris Smith, Ian Jones, Jill Lucas, Richard Price, Glyn Price, Peter Nottle, Will Butler, Connor Davis, Rob Jones.

**Agenda items**

**Welcome to Paul Hurst**

The Supporter’s Parliament wishes to congratulate STFC on the appointment of Paul Hurst as the new manager of our first team. It has been met with much positivity and widespread approval by the fan base.

In welcoming Paul, and his assistant Chris Doig, we would like to wish them every success and we would also like to invite them to a Q and A session open to all fans, but preferably without outside media presence, at a time, date and venue to suit their earliest convenience, but before Christmas.

Brian Caldwell said that a Q and A was definitely possible, but he thought it should be open to all, including the press and other media. Some may listen on the radio as they cannot attend. He will sort a date.

Brian revealed that Paul Hurst was STFC’s number one target. Other names had been expressed on social media that were not on the club’s agenda. It was the first time STFC had to pay compensation to another club for a new manager. It took time to settle the negotiations.

1. **Concourse decoration update**- Jamie Edwards was pleased with the response to the new murals in the South Stand. NCS students and the graffiti artist had worked hard to produce some stunning pictures. The next stage is to get further funds raised through the SP to work on the other walls of the South Stand. The work on the Family Stand and the South Stand had so far cost in the region of £2,000.
2. **Lidl update** – Roland Wycherley and Brian had met with Lidl two weeks previous. Lidl advised the Club that their feeling is that they have ticked all of the planning consent boxes following the last part being queries from Highways dept of SCC. The planning meeting is the 24th November. If granted it will be a 30 week project to build the supermarket and surroundings. As soon as permission is granted this would allow STITC to be able to use the present training pitch at GM for Community use when the first team move to the Training Ground. The Club have also applied for a variation to the present 106 agreement to move the community use from the existing grass area to the training pitch as part of the Lidl planning. Jamie can then consider submitting applications for potential funding for a new Astro pitch. STFC have suggested that the strip of land they are retaining between the end of the Power Leagues and the supermarket could be established a new walkway from and to Oteley Road.
3. **Stadium maintenance update** – The issue with steelwork paint is subject to a legal challenge with the sub-contractors of Halls Construction who built the stadium. STFC have been advised not to touch the problem areas as they may then be seen to have compromised the Club and Halls position. Brian could not put a time-scale on getting a resolution.
4. **Super Blues Way lighting update** – the solar lights trial failed. A recent quote for digging a trench and cabling with lights was circa £1,500 plus materials and lighting etc. The meeting requested the Club looked seriously at sorting the lighting as the pathway is under Club ownership. It was suggested that the Super Blues could be approached to see if they would look upon this as possible funding opportunity.
5. **State of the ladies toilets** – the state of the ladies toilets, poor lighting, lack of seats, cleanliness, resistance of ladies and children to use them were all raised at the meeting. There have been a lot of public comments about this. Brian said he would look into the lighting being improved and a number of the ladies toilets in each stand being fitted with seats.
6. **Signage for away fans at the ground and on the approaches to the stadium** – comments had been made to home fans about the lack of signage both to the stadium on approach road routes and around and in the stadium precinct itself. Since his arrival in post Brian had noticed the lack of signage and had spoken to various bodies but kept hitting silences and brick walls. This has been ongoing since April/May and he was frustrated by the length of time Highways England (who are responsible for brown tourist signs) had taken to respond to his requests for facts and figures on numbers and costs of signage at similar clubs to us. He has now put in a second FOI (Freedom of Information) request to Highways England of charges to 3 similar clubs to us who have signage (including Walsall & Northampton) they have 28 days to reply. Highways England quoted the cost of 7 brown signs erected for the Ricoh stadium was £98,000! Brian will keep pushing for a solution and will look at the signage to the away stand within the stadium precinct.
7. **Kit design competition** – up and running details are on the club social media. The Club want the supporters to submit designs from which 5 will be selected for a public vote. All of this has to happen within the next few weeks as the lead in time to production of the shirts is set by the suppliers.
8. **More ideas for use of social media to promote STFC** – put back to a later date. Brian said that he would be pleased to welcome the supporters who have ideas on social media to contact himself or Ian Whitfield at the Club to discuss rather than wait the 2 months to next Club meeting.
9. **Junior membership** – Hub feedback, ideas for future attractions, Christmas present push - Jamie Edwards said it was too early to judge how successful the Hub was being on a Saturday though in the first 6 home games attendance had been variable, but low. It would be better to look at figures after 12 games. The players have been attending playing video games with the kids and generally interacting. Bar takings had been very poor and this had proved not to be cost effective to open the bar so instead teas and coffees would be available for parents and a cold drinks machine was being provided in the hub. The Junior Membership would make a loss this year as last year’s membership were given free membership for this. Jamie asked for support for the Junior Membership from the fan base, with Christmas coming up Junior Membership is an attractive gift for kids who come to football. There are 227 junior members now which Jamie wants to grow to 500 in the next two seasons. GAME are providing 6 PS4 machines, two for the Hub, 2 for the South Stand and 2 in the Family Stand before Christmas. Information about Junior Membership is given out at the club shop, ticket office, the Hub and every place the Community Trust operates. The Club is looking at free tickets for local junior football clubs and youth groups such as the Scouts. It was suggested to have a ’Schools Day’ at a selected match. Brian suggested having sponsored flags for the kids to wave on match days. The Club Shop has Christmas items on sale.
10. **Barnet Cup ticket prices for children - a missed opportunity?** - Brian said that prices had to be agreed between the two clubs. A special effort had been made to give season ticket holders an offer which had gone down well. Barnet agreed that Under 8’s should be admitted free. He now has to speak to our next opponents and hopes to agree similar adult prices and will look at children’s prices which were cheaper than normal match day prices.
11. **Fan Zone ideas and sponsorship opportunities** – Brian had spoken to a brewery regarding the sponsorship of a marquee and supply of beer at the start of the season. They were only interested in the beer supply. A number of supporters had concerns and agreed with the Club that the issue is how much it would be used as just match days would not cover costs. There would need to be 7 days a week use. The Brooklands has just announced its new owners will be developing an STFC sports bar which will attract both home and away fans on match day and will be open 365 days a year. With that bar and the PowerLeagues being used on match day could the Club compete with this competition? Brian says for the supporters bar to work it would need to be used on non match days to make it viable.
12. **Community area within a main stand, sponsorship opportunity** – Walsall FC have a Community Stand with two sponsors so the Club were asked if this could be replicated at STFC. Jamie said that at Walsall the Community Trust have to pay the club around £25,000 for the sponsorship of that stand. He would much rather be able to put that sort of money, which has to be raised, into projects in the community.
13. **Club membership pack (reference Man City supporter tin)** – deferred to the next meeting with the Club.
14. **The future direction of STFC** – open Q and A at the request of members of the fan base – James Hughes had left earlier to go to another meeting. Concerns have been voiced by many fans from across the fan base about the future of STFC after the Chairman’s tenure. There has been much praise for his stewardship of the Club, its financial stability after many years of difficulties, the move to the new ground and League One football. However, supporters are concerned as to who is coming in to take over the Club after RW as he is blue and amber through and through and has delivered progress over his tenure? Will they be the right people? How will his legacy at the Club be safeguarded? But like all Chairmen he will at some point relinquish his role within the club. A lot of supporters who have a vested interest of course in the Club share their concerns about what happens after RW leaves. One supporter at the meeting had concerns with Greenhous, long –term sponsors of the Club pulling out. Brian explained that the Club had been in a very unusual and fortunate position with the long term relationship with Greenhous, even far bigger Clubs have not had that long term relationship with sponsors. There was always going to come a time when Greenhous didn’t sponsor STFC and the Club were extremely grateful to Derek Passant and Greenhous for giving as much notice as possible to give STFC time to get new sponsors.

At the Northampton match supporters frustrations about the poor team form and the lack of manager spilled over into some vocal criticism of the Chairman. As a result of approaches by a number of supporters, the SP wrote to Brian asking for a meeting with the Chairman to talk about what the plans are for the future. Brian stated that there are other Clubs up and down the country that are in the same position as STFC in that one major shareholder and the Chairman could have sold the Club at any time over the past 20 years. Brian gave examples such as Carlisle whose major shareholder is 80+ yet there appeared no pressure from their fans to disclose long term plan for the Club. Brian pointed out that the Chairman had given him direct and full responsibility for the running of the Club. He was making the decisions on a daily basis and it frustrated him that there was so much negativity about the Club even though progress had been made on several fronts. He was informed by the meeting that many years of frustration on the part of the supporters with the Club, especially since it moved to Oteley Road, had left many sceptical and negative and these views would take time to change.

Over a question of lack of engagement from the Club, Brian passionately defended the Club and his record at STFC over the past 9 months. He has attended all of the SP meetings he was invited to and had been honest and open in his dealings with the group, putting things into action to make a difference. The SP stated their thanks and appreciation for all of the good work he and Jamie have been doing.

Brian felt that criticism of the Chairman was misplaced. The opportunities for new investors are there, not just for the stadium and shirt sponsorship. With Greenhous freeing up these sponsorships he was sure that other local businesses would step in to take advantage of the PR opportunities they attract. The Club want to talk to new sponsors and potential major investors as with Greenhous not renewing beyond this season this was an opportunity for new and/or existing new sponsors to take up the opportunities that have become available for the first time in a while.

**AOB**

Jamie Edwards mentioned that the Community Trust is starting a Dementia Workshop and he was looking for items of memorabilia of STFC to be used with the clients. It was suggested that items from a previous Memorabilia Event were signed over to the Shrewsbury Museum and this would be a good place to ask. Jamie asked that if any supporter had any items they would like to donate or loan could they contact him at the Club.

The Away Supporters Football Team has not played a match this season. It was asked if there could be a possible trials day arranged at the Club to engage with new members. Brian asked for something to be sent to him so it could be put out on the Club media channels and email database.

The STFC newsletter was being e mailed out on a weekly basis to 15 to 20 thousand addresses. Brian asked for feedback which was positive from the meeting. Members of the meeting being pleased to receive more insight into things happening at the Club, not just offers.

Brian was asked about the Club relationship with the Shropshire Star. He said it had improved a great deal and the Star reporter was building a good relationship with Club staff.

An update on the training ground – the buildings are being stored at the ground whilst planning permission was being sought for where they could be placed at the training ground. Once this is sorted the groundworks can be completed and the buildings put in place.

The meeting ended at 9.35 pm

Date of next meeting scheduled for Tuesday 6th December for supporters only.