

PERSONAL STATEMENTS BY CANDIDATES FOR SKY BLUE TRUST BOARD 2014

RACHAEL BROWN

I have supported Coventry City for nearly 40 years and for most of that time I have been a season ticket holder unless, like many people, family commitments and money have made it impossible to go. I even worked on a tea bar at Highfield Rd for 3 seasons as it was the only way I could go so understand that sometimes people do not have the money or the time to go to football.. I have lived in Coventry all my life and work in Coventry.

I am a founder member of the Sky Blue Trust. I got involved in the beginning as I was concerned about the gap between the club and the supporters and although the Trust implemented the Joint Council which morphed into the SCG I still feel this is true and that is important that the supporters have a voice. Ultimately I would like supporters to have a place on the board and take part in the decision making process as they are the people that are most affected. Owners and footballers come and go, we are here for life. Football is not like any other business, we can't go anywhere else. Once you have chosen your allegiance that is it.

I was the first vice-chair of the trust and then became Chair . During this time I did the following:-

Helped to raise a petition with 4000 signatures to support the building of the Ricoh
Spent the afternoon of the council debate on the Ricoh doorstepping councillors and in the balcony of the Council House
Met with the club to stop them changing the badge
Founder member of the Joint council (SCG)
Ran the Academy Appeal
Had many meetings with members and employees of the Council and the Higgs Trust and established the relationships which the Trust still has with them.
Organised and chaired a public meeting with Supporters Direct attended by over 200 people

I stepped down as Chair in 2009 as I felt that there were people on the board who had more experience than me but was still an active member of the board until the trust went in hibernation .

I was reappointed to the board of the new trust and have served as Treasurer ever since. I have also helped organise both the marches and protested on the hill and am, likely everyone else, absolutely delighted we are back at the Ricoh.

As I said before my ultimate wish is for the supporters to have a significant say in the running of the club. It should be run for the benefit of the fans who are not just customers but the heart and soul of our club. This is what the Trust was set up to accomplish and I would not be happy to leave until that has been achieved. I also feel that is important that there is a woman on the board and would welcome more.

JOHN FLETCHER

Coventry City supporters have gained a major victory. Without their actions - demonstrating, protesting, boycotting and pressurising - it's unlikely the club would now be back at the Ricoh. The battle to get the Sky Blues playing in their rightful place has, apparently, been won.

But we should be under no illusions. The club owners are continuing with their legal case. The so-called "new stadium" is nothing more than a publicity plot. Their intention of distressing ACL and forcing a sale of the arena at a knock-down price has not changed. The club is still being used as a pawn in that game. Meanwhile, Sisu have piled more and more debt onto the football club: somewhere between £40m and £70m.

In these circumstances, it's important that the Trust:

- 1. Continues to challenge and expose what the owners are doing with the club,**
- 2. Reasserts its aim of acquiring a substantial stake in Coventry City so that supporters have a measure of control over its future, and**
- 3. Operates in a open and transparent way as a contrast to the methods of our owners.**

It's also important that we recognise that the situation Sky Blues fans and their club find themselves in is not an isolated incident. Events at Cardiff, Hull, Birmingham, Leeds and Hereford amongst others are also symptomatic of the way in which our national game is being run. The game needs fixing, and its governing bodies have shown themselves incapable of doing it.

We are in an ideal position to lead a campaign, with other supporters trusts and national organisations like Supporters Direct and the Football Supporters Federation, in support of moves to reform football governance so that the issues Sky Blues supporters have faced over the past year, can never happen again.

FRANK SMITH

- Those Sky Blue Trust members who campaigned and worked so hard in so many ways to help ensure CCFC's return to Coventry deserve the highest praise from all City supporters.
- So too do all those City fans who simply decided that enough was enough and decided to boycott home games to show the club's owners that their support could no longer be taken for granted. It should also be noted that a number of fans were boycotting home games long before the move to Northampton.
- The fact that the owners were forced to bring back the team to Coventry shows that football club owners can be forced to change their actions when enough "paying customers" decide to take action.

- In the general euphoria surrounding the team's return, we must not make the mistake of thinking that “the job's been done”. It hasn't because SISU are still the owners. The same people who didn't invest much in the team, sold off the more talented players every season leading to eventual relegation are still there. The same people who signed a rental agreement and then broke it. The same people who attempted to financially distress ACL to try to acquire the RICOH Arena and the development rights attached to it at a knock down price to the detriment of local taxpayers. And the same people who have (and still are) are attempting to use their great wealth to appeal yet again against their latest legal setback in this saga with the possibility remaining that we will have to pay for the huge legal bills.
- Despite all the effort, organisation and hard work we are in reality back where we were at the start of the 2012-13 season except that in the intervening seasons once again the best of the young players Wilson, Christie etc have been sold on, and we have become more and more dependent on loan deals. You cannot build success on this kind of short-termism.
- Given SISU's record over the last few years, I think that it would be a sad illusion to believe that they have changed their approach. Surely there must be very few supporters who believe that they have or will change their ways.
- If I become a Board member I will not fail to emphasise that the current owners have not been good for CCFC and that a change of ownership would be in the best interests of supporters.
- The return to the RICOH must not result in the SBT becoming nothing more than a Supporters' Club. It should continue to campaign forcefully for the policies the majority of its members endorse
- In order to make the Trust more democratic, we must look at how to attract new members and how to make involvement in decision making easier for members who cannot easily attend local meetings eg. because of work patterns or shifts, illness, disability or because they live a considerable distance away from Coventry.
- Finally we must ensure that democracy is the norm. The Board members must always attempt to involve the membership in the decision-making process, no matter how sensitive and important any issues may be.
- Frank Smith, Born April 1949 in Cheylesmore, Coventry

1st City Match: November 1956 (Reg Matthews last game for City). Brentford (H) 1-1

1st Away Match 1958 Lost 0-4 at Northampton.

BRUCE WALKER

The return of the Sky Blues to the Ricoh has been a wonderful boost, not just for us as City fans, but for our city as a whole. The role of the Sky Blue Trust (SBT) and its members in demanding and then facilitating this return, along with immense efforts of allied supporters' groups and campaigns, has demonstrated the impact that organised fans can achieve. Brilliant!

But we can't leave it at that!

Let's face it, the Ricoh return reflects a comparatively short term rental agreement between stadium owners and a football club whose owners have always been quite explicit about wanting to own the (a?) stadium in which the team plays, and, ideally, the associated revenues and surrounding real estate. Further, let's also remember that these are the club owners who unilaterally withdrew from rental (and, allegedly, other informal) agreements in the past, and are still taking the stadium owners to court on the grounds that those owners (effectively) own the stadium illegally. The people they are taking to court are also mainly made up of the representatives of Coventry tax-payers and if they are successful it is the tax-payers of Coventry (of whom I happen to be one!) who will pay.

So, if I am fortunate enough to be elected to the SBT Board, I promise you the following:

First, I shall seek to ensure that the SBT remains vigilant and proactive in working for a longer term and sustainable future for CCFC at the Ricoh. It's our Club, it's our ground, it's our city - let's safeguard that.

Second, and as important, I will work with SBT members to ensure that we pursue the longer term objectives of the trust. SBT was not founded to get Cov back to Cov! Naturally, that has been overwhelming priority over the recent past - and rightly so - but we also need now to re-energise and re-focus our efforts on achieving SBT's original objectives.

Remember what those objectives are?

First, they include the requirement for SBT to strengthen the bonds between the club and the communities it serves by, among other actions, achieving the greatest possible supporter and community influence in the running and ownership of the Club [Objective 4.2 of the SBT]. Are the existing channels and opportunities for engagement with the Club, such as the Supporters Consultative Group, really effective? Are they likely to give fans increased participation in, and influence on, the future decisions that will have to be made about the operation, development and the location of the Club? We need to consider once more the models that are available for progressing supporters' participation and to draw on the lessons can we learn from other Clubs about how to do so here in Coventry. What we also require is a thorough-going review of the current arrangements and a clear re-statement of what is needed to enhance and encourage supporters' participation in order to help shape the future of the Club.

In parallel with these actions, I believe that SBT needs to re-affirm and strengthen its own democratic credibility. To continue to be the democratic and representative voice of the supporters of the Club [Objective 4.1], SBT must consult more frequently with members and other groups through mail outs and surveys, and through regular, diarised meetings.

Meetings with all parties – Club owners, stadium owners and others with a legitimate interest in the current and future running of the Club – should be encouraged. However, other than in defined and exceptional circumstances, the fact that these meetings are taking place should be made known to members who, again other than in exceptional circumstances, should be informed of the outcomes of them. The SBT must never be open to the charge of being ‘too close’ to any party or group other than to the SBT membership itself! Only in this way can SBT ensure that they are operating democratically, fairly, sustainably [and] transparently and thus also encourage the Club to do the same [Objective 4.4].

As a City fan for over 50 years, I firmly believe that now is the time for SBT to take the lead once more in furthering the longer term interest of all Coventry City fans. This needs to be done both by developing existing methods and by finding new ways in which SBT can influence and then secure a sustainable future for our Club. If elected to the Board, I pledge to do my utmost to help the Trust, and thus the fans of Coventry City, to achieve this.

PUSB