

Club Chairman's Trust AGM Report – Julian Tagg

Despite and no matter what the capacity in which I am here, I am genuine in saying that it's a privilege and although I only hold the title of Interim Chairman I do feel qualified to deliver this report having served my Club as ball boy, player (signed by John Newman at 14) reserve team player, reserve team player manager at 23, and after a bit of a break, Coach of 1st ECFC U11's, 12s, through 16's, V/C for 12 years, CEO, and Interim Chair; this amounts to unbroken service now for 18 years.

The club has on the face of it had a traumatic year... avoiding relegation, problems of governance between the Club, Trust and its officers being aired publicly, and although financially sound, cash flow difficulties still torment us, although to put it into context it must be said that all of this takes place in "the football market place" an environment that is more akin to behaviour you might find in Las Vegas. However, despite these factors I believe that there is a very different story to tell...

FITC

Thanks must go to the unbelievable staff. Lead by Jamie Vittles, supported by Scott & Danny, they have done the hard yards on a daily basis, which has resulted in the likes of Exeter City Council and the Devon County Council, plus numerous other respected local institutions and businesses understanding the huge benefit it brings to all aspects of Exeter & the surrounding areas. FITC underpins and is the centre piece of our Club & Trust community ethos. Thanks also goes to the FITC charity board who quietly continue to help shape a part of the ECFC brand business that has increased its turn-over from £200k, just over 3 years ago, to just short of £500k now. (NB Turnover not profit – FITC is a charity and therefore everything it earns goes back into ECFC giving more to the community). Despite the accolades and the undoubted progress made there is much work required to consolidate and respond efficiently and effectively in an ever changing market place that reflects the ever changing community and environmental challenges and demands. The organisation and focus on succession planning, currently being worked upon, that lies beneath that day to day function of which we are so rightly proud should not be underestimated.

Academy

This is the area that is really my primary interest and in truth, area of expertise. Having held responsibility for this area for 18 years there is no doubt that continuity has ensured significant progress. Lead by Academy Head Simon Hayward (with us now for exactly 10 years) he and his very young, dynamic staff must take massive credit. The level of dedication on the ground has led to an acknowledgement across the country that the ECFC Academy is both exceptional and outstanding. The recent audit is written proof. Currently 6th in the country in the table for professional games played by home grown players, the last game of the season saw 9 youth players involved in the win at Hartlepool. I wonder what quote I might have been able to make if our Irish International, Jamie Reid, had not been injured.

The real proof is the 5 constants: Liam, Scott, Jordan, Matt & Christy; and the current crop of 5 young internationals all of which are real 'Home Grown', although I prefer the more technically correct 'Home Produced' representatives. That said, if the Academy is to further thrive and improve, the attainment of the current Category 3 the Academy recently comfortably achieved, it must now (The Academy) once again reset its targets and ambition towards Category 2, which in its simplest form will require as a minimum circa £200k in extra investment and an indoor 60x40 3G facility. Yes, a very tall order and a significant challenge but success in this goal can reap massive rewards once achieved, not only by providing the opportunity for our lads to play against Championship and Premier Youth outfits but returning a pound for pound grant investment....this ambition further highlights the need to address our facilities at the training ground. Built in 1974 as a temporary measure, superbly maintained by our volunteers, but none the less barely fit for purpose! My thanks go to the Academy technical board who have been working with me on these objectives, amongst others, for the last two years.

Club Board

It's been my further privilege to be on the board of the club, with colleagues as dedicated and determined as ever, for the last 12 years as Vice Chair. Only my first 4 years were unpaid and I have to say I would have loved to be earning some of the figures quoted as fact on EXEWEB over the last few years. For the job I have been doing for the last 12 years my current salary is £45k p.a. which covers my work with FITC, and the Academy, which as reported are going well and Football which is improving I'm glad to say, as well as the job of CEO which was previously standalone and paid to the role holder at £65k, and as Chairman paid at £15k.

Brazil

Without going into too much detail, I feel I should make reference to Brazil, and I know that there are contrasting views, mine is this: we did it right. Right by the history of the club, right by Fluminense and Brazil, we did it right by football and for the greater good of football; we all, but especially The Trust, did it right by the City of Exeter with a fantastic book, a magnificent play, and international publicity, but most of all we did it right by our

supporters, those who went and those that didn't.... and those that went, the players included, absolutely did it right by the club. I applaud Bruce Henderson who, despite immense personal difficulties throughout, made it happen. "At no cost to the Club"!!!! Little Club, massive project, worldwide audience, I'm proud to say: 'We did it right'.

Football

Our manager, supported by Steve, has been the subject of much discussion just about everywhere, be that the business world, national & international press, throughout the football world, or on EXEWEB. No matter where, he brings massive energy, positivity, originality, ability to transform and maximise potential in players young and old...(some very old), intelligence and decency; so much so that he buys into, as frustrating as that might be for him some times, what we are trying to do here on the resources we are trying to do it with. Most of all, as our most prominent ambassador and the longest serving manager in the FL, he brings to our small club a large amount of respect.

We continue and must seek further success, such as we have had in the past and we will have again, trying to *achieve* by approaching the business of football differently with a strong emphasis on affordable youth. Why? Because we have no back stop like 20 of the 24 other clubs in L2 to rescue us if there's injuries or no player sales to supplement the playing budget, last season being the first of the latter for some years, something that will change this year for better or for worse depending on your view.

Finance

We still have yet to find the answer to capitalising our club. Until a permanent solution is found our cash flow issues, soon to re-appear, remains the biggest and longest outstanding unresolved issue. I don't believe there are any of us that want our club to be run or owned in a different way, whilst the same goes that we all want to be able to both compete on the field but with the comfort of financial security off it. This is the conundrum which we are all wrestling with, the conundrum that most Trusts just give up and fold because of, but we must as a group remain resolute in our intention to seek a long lasting solution that satisfies all. In the mean time the efforts of all involved, lest we forget, continues to benefit hugely the fans and the community of this City & County.

Club & Trust

Back at the Club I should relate and thank Andy Gillard and Justin Quick and all of the very committed club staff who do a quite magnificent job on a day to day basis ... In the words of the auditor... 'for a business of this size you are overstaffed, for a business of this complexity it's considerably understaffed.....'. That said, the match day experience must continue to be a focus for improvement. In some areas it has just not been good enough but it is continually being addressed and re-assessed and I'm pleased to report that some improvements are manifesting themselves, if the recent plethora of positive letters and e-mails from supporters which is encouraging is taken into consideration.

With reference to the stadium development I am sure that everything said in this room will remain a secret, and I am aware of the number of false starts and hiccups that have plagued the development process so I speak with caution, but the secret I can share is, "It's going very well". As you might expect, we are bound by all sorts of confidentiality clauses but I very much hope, that in the not too distant future, to be in a position to communicate the news that so many have worked so hard for so long to achieve.

Last year and into the beginning of this, the supporters, our true owners, have clearly indicated and indeed driven changes toward new ideas, new blood and the evolution of the clubs governance, whilst at the same time paying reverence to what worked well in the past. All of this is currently well documented and being address by Club & Trust to deliver a more acceptable model of ownership and governance to our supporter owners with a view to developing a refreshed strategy and approach to build on what we know is good and works, and on what we are.

All of us concerned in the good of ECFC recognise that the Club is bigger than any one individual. The events of this summer show us that, and so too does the fact that many before us, in the Trust and the as a whole, have come and made their hugely valuable contribution and then have gone, leaving the Club in a better place. This process is evolutionary and we will all be undergoing that in the months to come. As we evolve so too therefore will I and my colleagues in order to most effectively meet the needs of the next phase of our future and make the best contribution we can.

What I will say in summation is a massive thank you to The Trusts trustees, those that continue to serve, those recently elected and those that put themselves up for election. Further thanks to every Trust member who puts in what they can afford from their "hard earned". The recent efforts to persuade those that can to invest a little more are commended if there is success then we will be a little less on the edge and that little bit less needing to borrow to support our cash flow from time to time.

Likewise, all our supporters and particularly the “massive” that is the Grecian Groups... you are all the life blood that runs through the veins of this club and the voluntary work that goes on behind the scenes is what makes us what we are.

Even though we are all City through and through we must never forget that no matter what happens for the good of the Club we must always remain United.