

Candidate Questions

Do you accept that the main (or only?) issue relevant for voters at this particular election is to ensure that the Trust acting in its capacity as controlling shareholder should exercise proper and effective control over the Club and prove to Members that it is doing this?

Mark Cordell:

I accept that this is one of the key issues however it should not be overlooked that the Trust offers much more as model. I would hope members of the trust would be open to voting based on more than one key issue.

Paul Farley:

Yes. I have always maintained that the Trust has a duty to its members to be a responsible owner. Since the change in structure of the Club Board in 2014 I believe that we have moved a long way in ensuring this happens. The matter of demonstrating this, to satisfy all members, is proving more difficult.

Terry Hall:

My personal opinion is that this is an absolutely key issue – however there are over 3,000 members in the Trust and I am sure each will have their own opinion as to what is the most pressing issue at hand. I would like to think however that by putting the right oversight and accountability framework for the club in place, this would address an awful lot of Trust members concerns.

Clive Harrison:

I was one of four candidates who issued the following statement on the Trust Facebook page: "It has become clear that a key theme of fan frustration in recent years is the apparent lack of accountability to which the Club Board has been held to, by the Trust Board. We have each outlined concerns to this effect within our individual manifesto's, but in order to best achieve a solution, we will need enough candidates seeking reform to be collectively elected. This is an important time for our club, so please consider the merits of each of the candidate's manifesto's, and if you share our concerns, then we would be grateful for your vote: Terry Hall, Clive Harrison, Matt Phillips & Byll Pulman."

We may not be the only candidates to feel this way, but we thought it important to share our collective view with members.

I believe and have outlined in my manifesto, having spoken to many Trust members and supporters, that accountability and inclusion are key issues.

Peter Holding:

I am not sure that it's the only issue but it is a key issue.

What is important is that not only does the Trust acting as owner exercises proper and effective control but that it does so in such a way, that working with the rest of the Club Board we drive OUR Football Club forward.

In particular, in terms of performance on the pitch, the Club's base business model being in order both cash and Profit and Loss wise ie fix any problems while the sun is still shining (because of the

breathing space the Grimes money in particular has given us) and that there is effective investment for the future including in the Academy and Club's infrastructure i.e. IT.

Getting to a base business model that works is a particular hobby horse of mine and involves people, processes, IT and culture.

Communication can probably be improved but sometimes this is difficult as either work is in progress, confidential or commercially sensitive.

By way of example, in relation to Governance. The Trust and Club have recently agreed a legally binding document which requires Trust approval to certain things before they can be effective. This has taken about 15 month's work, and myself Paul Farley and Laurence were integrally involved. During which period we obviously couldn't say anything and it would have seemed that nothing was happening on this front. There is more to be done and work continues.

Paul Lethbridge:

I do accept that we need to ensure the Trust exercise proper and effective control over the Club. The Trust board have all been elected to represent the members on important matters regarding the Club, therefore there should be a certain amount of trust that they are doing what they think is right for the Club. What we need to make sure is that the people representing us on the CB are the right people who will hold others to count as they are speaking on behalf of over 3,000 members.

Clive Matthews:

*No I don't. The main issue for voters at this or **any** election should be the long term viability of the Club. Everything else flows from that, including all governance issues.*

Matthew Phillips:

Yes, this is currently the most important issue, but it's not the only issue the Trust should be focused on. It's clearly coming as a result of general discontent, and if we were in a successful period on the pitch then I don't think this would be an issue being raised.

Without knowing the current situation of the Trust/Club relationship, not being a Trust, it is hard to judge but it is worth noting that any change will take time to implement and this will not be a quick fix, but hopefully by electing enough candidates who are focused on this issue, then it will be possible to get the ball rolling.

Byll Pulman:

Yes, I would say that is certainly the main issue and the principal reason I'm standing. There are however other issues like increasing member engagement and involvement that I also feel very strongly about. I feel that whatever the TB do, it's vital that the membership are kept properly and accurately informed on progress.

Martin Weiler:

Yes. This should always be the overarching issue.

The Club Board has not submitted an annual business plan to the Trust Board for at least the last three years.

Do candidates think it is important for the Club to have a written annual Business Plan with objectives and accountabilities and if so, how would they make this happen?

Paul Farley:

As a Club Director, appointed by the Trust Board, I can assure you that this work is being undertaken. It may be a work in progress but Directors and staff have accountabilities and objectives. For example, I am responsible for ensuring that the Club, Academy and FITC are compliant with Football League and FA regulations around safeguarding, inclusion and inequality.

Terry Hall:

I would agree that for any business to be successful, it should have a clear business plan, with someone responsible and accountable for each element of the plan. In plain English, everyone at the club should know clearly what their job entails and what the expectations are, and overall this should be properly co-ordinated to get the best possible outcome for the club from the staff that we have.

I think the best way to do this is by making sure we have strong and capable leadership with business experience at the very top of the club, clear job descriptions for all club employees, and regular appraisal of employee performance against measurable objectives, with the right oversight and accountability in place exercised by Trust Board representing the Trust as majority shareholder.

Clive Harrison:

Any successful business should have a clear understanding of what it is trying to achieve and how it will reach its goals. As a Trust owned club without the prospect of a wealthy owner providing funds this is even more important as every penny counts. A Business Plan should be used as a measure of performance and to pinpoint areas in which Trust funds can be best utilised.

As majority shareholders the Trust should not only be presented with a Business Plan but it should have an input as to where its contributions/donations are utilised. The Plan should then be signed off by the Club Board thus accepting responsibility for its implementation.

Peter Holding:

Yes, it's important and that objectives flow from that and budgets etc.

However, it is in my view more important that it is prepared properly and to do that requires the financials. Keith Mason has not been the Clubs Finance Director for that long but in that time has worked very hard to significantly improve the quality and visibility of the Club's financials. He has produced a budget and cashflow which have been projected forward for 5 years. The Board have also been debating and have just agreed a high level organisational restructure. Both of these things were required for the business plan to be produced.

The areas that needed discussion to conclude the Business Plan were discussed at the last Board Away Day, led by Paul Morris and it was agreed that the Plan would be finalised before the end of October. In this regard it is very important to note that this needs Trust approval before it can be said to be agreed under the new Club/Trust Agreement.

So yes, I wish we had had this for some while now but given where we started when Keith joined I think that we were right to take the time to do it right.

Paul Lethbridge:

I believe all businesses require a business plan to set out their vision over a given period of time, a football club would be no different. I would suggest that any plan set out should be over a period of 3 years in order for any changes to take effect and to see what has been successful or not. This will give the business a direction in order to achieve their goals.

Everyone must take their share of responsibility whether it be the success of the 1st team, the amount of academy players progressing into the 1st team squad to the amount of revenue being generated through the Commercial department.

How do we make this happen is difficult without knowing how the Trust Board operates? I would suggest that our representatives on the Club board need to be more vocal within the meeting by taking forward the opinion of the Trust Board and making sure we are listened too. Let's not forget 'We own Our Football Club!' and deserve to have a say in how it is run.

Clive Matthews:

As I stated in my manifesto, corporate finance is not an area I have any expertise in. From a layman's point of view, I think the Club should follow accepted business practice, unless there are good and compelling reasons not to do so. Our four representatives on the CB will of course be part of making any plan and the Trust as majority shareholder should then have sight of it.

Matthew Phillips:

I disagree with the idea of a formal 1-year business plan.

There needs to be a clear distinction made between a financial plan (which should be yearly) and the business plan, which I believe should be focused on the medium term (3 to 5 years), with yearly milestone targets which can be reviewed against. For example, if our medium term targets are L1 football and category 2 academy, our one year milestones could be play-offs and completion of a 4g pitch at the Cat and Fiddle.

Byll Pulman:

I certainly feel there should be a business plan but I would like to see us planning more than just one year ahead. I would prefer a business plan to be looking at at least three years. As for objectives, I believe the setting of objectives should come from us, the Trust, who should then task the club board, executives and senior employees with realising those objectives, and be accountable to the TB if targets are not met.

Martin Weiler:

Yes. The Trust Board has already put in place a number of measures that lay the ground for this including equal representation on the Club Board, an agreed Vision and Strategy, and a Governance agreement. There is already a commitment to a Business Plan.

Mark Cordell:

I was shocked to find out that no business plan had been submitted for the past 3 years, I would be even more shocked should it be that there was no business plan at all. I think a business plan is essential in any business, although depending on the content an annual plan may not be needed. For finances it would be, however if it focused more with on pitch progression then a 3-5year plan would suffice. I feel the recent state the nation press release was the closest we have had to a plan, unfortunately it was released reactively due to poor form rather than proactively at the start of the season.

In December 2011 the Trust Board voted to change the money provided by the Trust to the Club from loans to donations. We were told at the time that this was required because the Club was on the cusp of the rule which allows no more than 55% of income to be spent on the playing budget. Given that the Club no longer appears to be on the cusp of that 55% what is your position on the possibility of changing the donations back to loans?

Terry Hall:

I think the key thing here is the detail of the 55% rule. Any decision would have to be based on a principle that the Trust should take the course of action that delivers the best possible outcome for both Trust members and the club, without breaching the rule. It may be that this turns out to be a donation, it may be that this turns out to be a loan, but at the very least there needs to be a proper and documented (and to the extent possible, transparent) assessment of the circumstances. This should also be re-reviewed and documented on an annual basis to ensure we are consistently making the right decision for both the Trust and the club.

Clive Harrison:

The Trust Board should establish the current position regarding the 55% rule. If the need to make contributions as donations no longer exists, then future contributions should be made as loans. I believe that the club should be run without the need for budgetary inclusion of Trust funds. Instead the Trust should build contributions into a reserve to be used in times of financial stress, to acquire shares or for capital projects.

Club budgets can be increased within the 55% rule by the Club, as a business, increasing revenue.

Peter Holding:

Subject to us complying with the 55% rule I would be quite happy with this. I see no down side; in fact, I can see upside.

The Accountancy Rules are changing so that if things stand as they are the existing loan of over £800k will no longer be treated as a long term liability but a current liability, as such the Trust Board and Club Board need to engage in discussions about whether or not the structure of this is changed.

Paul Lethbridge:

Generally, I would welcome a return to loans rather than donations as it will make the Club more accountable to where the money is being spent. However, I wouldn't want to dismiss donations entirely as there will be times when that will be beneficial to both parties.

Clive Matthews:

Again, this has implications for the Club's balance sheet that I don't know enough about. Presumably there are implications for the Trust balance sheet also. When Clubs are the subject of takeovers, much of the "investment" a new owner makes is in the form of a loan and these Clubs then become hostage to the whim of that new owner. I'm not saying that ECFC should ever have to worry about that from the Trust, and the Trust should take steps to look after its own legal and financial position, but there certainly is a simplicity in the way we currently make our contribution to the Club.

Matthew Phillips:

This is a questions which is hard to answer without knowing the intricacies of the finances of both Trust and Club, and the full reasoning behind both sides of the argument.

Generally, though I don't believe that either are the best approach, and would much prefer the Club to have to bid for blocks of money, with business cases produced in each instance enabling the Trust to decide whether it is an appropriate use of cash.

Byll Pulman:

Until the comments I've just heard at this event (hustings), I'd never really heard a good argument either for or against returning to trust money being a donation, so my opinion, which has been that of someone lacking the necessary financial expertise to fully understand the reasons for the change to a donation a few years ago, has been that when I first joined the trust, I assumed that my subscriptions would be given to the club as a donation and was surprised to see that it was counted as a loan. Many people and I include myself, believe that the Trust should take the role of traditional football club chairmen, people who put thousands into their clubs each year, so I felt it would be hypocritical of me to expect my financial input and that of the trust as a whole to be given as a loan, so therefore I have not been personally concerned with the current arrangement. I am however open to hearing good arguments in favour of returning to loans, such as those made today.

Martin Weiler:

In principle I am attracted to loans rather than donations. In particular I believe these can act as a buffer to potentially hostile predators. As with all business decisions it is good practice to consider pros and cons and I would hope that the Trust Board will consider these to make an informed decision.

Mark Cordell:

I do not think this should change, whilst we are not near the cusp now we may be in the future should we fail to get any cup runs or player sales in future seasons.

Paul Farley:

The loan currently stands at approximately £800,000. This has meant that the Club has been insolvent for many years and has required a 'letter of comfort' from the Trust annually so that our external auditors can sign off the annual accounts and say that they have confidence that the Club is a going concern. Whilst I agree that there should be a level of debt that warns off potential predators, discussions need to be held to decide what level of debt we would consider adequate protection. I, personally, am not convinced of the need for it to increased.

What would the Trust do to bring kids and family back to Exeter City FC and why has none of the manifesto's been looking at the future support of the club we all love?

Clive Harrison:

I would point to my manifesto and especially its last paragraph: "I would also like to see further integration of the Trusts 300+ non-voting youth members, the future of our Club, through educational events and junior forums etc."

The Junior Grecians formally "The Red Army" is now run by FITC. I have been on its committee since it started over a year ago. We hold events throughout the year for members and non-members. Last season the Family ticket offer was introduced for selected matches allowing up to 3 U18s to attend matches with a paying adult. I promote this through the Junior Grecian website, Facebook & Twitter accounts.

While our Tweets are retweeted by the Trust and Club this is the only form of promotion undertaken by them.

We also produced a free kids programme "The Roar" which proved very popular and was short listed for a Football League award. As a free programme it relies on sponsorship and discussions are underway to allow publication later this season.

The Trust boasts around 3,300 members, just under 3,000 members are eligible to vote, leaving around 300 or nearly 10% of the Trust membership under voting age.

A lot more could be done, the ticket offer could be promoted more vigorously by the Club and the Trust. The Trust could sponsor "The Roar" and use it to promote its activities. FITC, the Club and Trust should discuss and plan Family events together while taking into consideration that while adult match attendance is based on performance, junior supporter's attendance is based on their match day experience.

Peter Holding:

The first point I would make is that for the Trust and Club to thrive as we would hope I believe we have to attract both kids and adults who are "non football".

A lot is already being done to attract Kids.

Junior Grecians are automatically members of the Trust. There is Trustee representation in all areas of the Club including on the Gates Committee who discuss ticket prices, special offers & promotions which obviously includes kids. Trustee representative on Club Board attends regular marketing meetings, ticket promotions to schools & local junior football teams, competitions in the press, support our Supporter There is interaction between Club and Trust in most areas, it is our football club, we work together to improve it in all areas.

That having been said not everyone has specialist skills in all areas and to be honest this is not my particular "bag". So I would support and offer help to those who are so skilled. Not mentioning it in my manifesto was in no way an indication that I don't consider this to be important it is but the manifestos are limited to 400 words.

Paul Lethbridge:

Youngsters are the future of our club and we need to encourage them to enjoy the match-day experience. The club does a great job with FITC and we should use the contacts that have been created to encourage schools and organisations to arrange to visit on match-days. Maybe we should look to introduce a Junior Trust membership for under 16's which offers other incentives.

Clive Matthews:

The latter part of this question seems particularly unfair on Clive Harrison, though you are right that other candidates don't expressly mention our younger fan-base.

For the younger element, we do have – Junior Grecians, our Ball Boys and Girls, the Welcome flag bearers and match-day mascots as prime examples. We also regularly witness pre-teenage children on the pitch at half-time with their penalty shootout competitions.

Both Trust and Club encourage supporters of ALL ages to become as involved as they wish.

Matthew Phillips:

I can't proclaim this to be an area of expertise, especially not being based in Exeter, so not always seeing what the Club does on match-days etc. but I do think that the Club generally underuse social media, and when it is used, it's not effective. Instagram and snapchat are the two most engaging social media platforms, but the Club's activity on these leaves a lot to be desired.

Byll Pulman:

With the number of empty seats at SJP on any normal match-day, I would like to see the club giving away tickets to school children. I have been told that Oxford United regularly give away up to 1000 tickets in this way. Not only does it help fill up the ground and create a better atmosphere, it also helps create life-long fans of the club.

Martin Weiler:

The Trust has already made a good start with its support for the Junior Grecians and the provision of automatic membership for those joining this growing organisation. Football demographics are changing with, for example, far more women attending matches than ever before. As a Trust we need to get more women involved in our work – the fact that all twelve candidates in this election are male shows we have a long way to go.

Mark Cordell:

As alluded to in my manifesto it is crucial we develop a club that future generations can support. If elected I would work closely with the club to ensure family fun days and open training sessions were re-introduced. It is important to engage with the young supporters and an opportunity to speak and have pictures taken with there on pitch heroes can go a long way at that age.

Paul Farley:

As a member of the gate committee, I continually fight for reduced prices for all full time students but don't always get my way. I think our family prices, child prices and junior Grecians offers are good. My argument is that the increase from an under 18 to over 18 is significant for those continuing in education. There are many students in the city who may well settle here long term, love football but cannot afford to attend regularly.

Terry Hall:

I think its fair to say that some of the manifestos actually do address this point to some degree. For my part I don't claim to be all things to all people and I have a very analytical mind which means I'm not always the best in the room when it comes to marketing or promotional events. I would also add here that I think a strong board of Trustees should include a broad range of skills and specialities.

That said, one idea might be that the club could donate a season ticket in the family stand for one parent and one child to local schools, and the school could then award the tickets for each home game to a child who has done something particularly noteworthy to deserve this (to then be accompanied by

a parent). That would not only boost the community links but is also a way to help encourage the next generation of City fans.

Do the candidates support the Trust purchasing assets for the Club and if so what might they be?

Peter Holding:

Fundamentally the Club's base business model should be such that such expenditure by the Trust is not needed but "helpful. By this I mean that without transfers and cup runs the Club does not make a loss or burn cash.

As such any such assets should be "helpful "to the Club as opposed to necessary as the necessary ones will have been budgeted already by the Club.

Subject to the above. Yes, I would support "excess" Trust monies being spent on capital assets for the Club but only where there is a thought through rate of return on investment and the Club have prioritised this expenditure i.e. upgraded electronic turnstiles in the new grandstand so that the Club can gain "customer data ".

Paul Lethbridge:

I not against the idea of the Trust helping in certain ways although I do believe the Club needs to be run within its means. Whatever assets are purchased must add value to the Club.

Clive Matthews:

As the Club are VAT registered and we are not, every pound that the Club spend would cost us an additional 20%. I would rather see the Club produce a list of 4-5 items that they would like financial support for, with the Trust then choosing which, if any, to raise monies for. Once one item had been ticked off the list, another could be added.

Our recent poll decided to spend the Trust Bucket collection from the PAFC game on Player GPS Systems. Light up the Park from a couple of seasons ago is another example of supporter power.

Matthew Phillips:

This relates back to question C. I have no issue with the Trust purchasing assets, as long as a sound business case is produced, and the Trust have final say.

Byll Pulman:

Yes, I support this. I am happy for the trust to buy pretty much anything genuinely needed by the club, but I would like to see the trust retain title of anything it purchased.

Martin Weiler:

Yes, in principle but subject to a business case in each case. Obvious assets would include buildings and land.

Mark Cordell:

I agree in principal with the trust purchasing assets for the club, however it is a fine line on what assets and what funds are available. I also promote that the trust should assist the club in liaising with firms that provide technology or items they require. This could be done with the provision of advertising space to secure reduced rates and presented back to the club.

Paul Farley:

Essentially, the Trust gives the Club money every month. This may go towards buying assets or enhancing the playing budget. If it makes business sense for the Trust to buy a new tractor, for example, then I would not be against this but, at the end of the day, providing Trust money is spent effectively, I do not mind how it is spent. If an opportunity arose for the Trust to obtain an asset that would benefit the Club, such as the freehold of St James Park, I would advocate acquiring it.

Terry Hall:

In principle I wouldn't be opposed to this as long as (a) the Trust had money available for the purchase, (b) there was certainty as to the need for the purchase, and (c) there was proper scrutiny to make sure the Trust (and by association the Trust members) were getting the best possible value for money.

Clive Harrison:

Yes, I support the purchase of assets for the club when these arise outside of the Clubs business plan and are of an urgent nature or that it can be demonstrated that the asset will improve team performance or Club facilities.

This is an area where members can be empowered by giving members a choice of projects to be supported or indeed if a project should be supported at all.

As with the BBC & MP's would the trust look to bring in open accounts showing what the Club Board is paid as well as the top management?

Paul Lethbridge:

I believe that there should be more transparency generally with regard to the Trust members. However, I feel some information requires to be kept confidential, the salary to top management being one.

Clive Matthews:

As I understand it, this would be fraught with danger for a small organisation such as ours. It would be improper - if not contrary to employment law - to reveal an individual's salary without their consent. Large organisations with many hundreds of staff are able to show remuneration levels within certain bands, and give an indication of the number of individuals within each of them, but my feeling is that it wouldn't be possible for us.....given our size.

Matthew Phillips:

I see no harm in encouraging directors to be open and transparent about remuneration.

I think it would be dangerous for management pay to be disclosed, as it could create a 'poachers charter' if wages are low, or unrealistic expectations for potential future employees if wages are too high.

Byll Pulman:

As far as I'm aware it is against our rules for anyone to be paid for being a club director. If however directors are paid for other services supplied to the club or are also employees of the club, then yes I believe this should be published. However, I don't believe that an employee should be allowed to simultaneously be a club director or be supplying services, as I feel this has to represent a conflict of interest. As for employees' salaries being published, whilst I can see the desirability, I feel it has to be all or no one and I'm not sure if its justifiable for employees of a private business as opposed to public employees like MPs.to have their salaries made public.

Martin Weiler:

Our instincts should always be in favour of openness and transparency. I am happy that this is explored but have to accept that it is not a straight forward matter and our situation is very different from the BBC and MPs.

Mark Cordell:

I do not think salaries should be released. Alongside the legal implications it would also put the club in a detrimental position moving forward if new post holders knew the previous salary.

Paul Farley:

I would like the Club to publish further financial information, including Directors' remuneration and related party transactions.

Terry Hall:

I don't think it's completely fair to compare the practices at a publicly funded body such as the BBC, or publicly elected officials such as MPs, to a privately run business such as ECFC. There would also be legal questions from a Data Protection perspective to making this information publicly available without

the consent of the Data Subject, e.g. every employee of a private company has the right to their privacy enshrined in law.

That said, the employer should absolutely have transparency and scrutiny of all employee compensation, and that should in my opinion include the majority shareholder – whilst it may not be possible to put this out in the public domain (although we should validate to what extent this could or could not be done), I would still expect that the Trust Board at the very least should have access to this kind of information, and should also be mindful of its own obligation to the Trust membership to make sure that the contributions made by members are being put to the best possible use.

The exception to this would be if a particular employment contract included confidentiality clauses but that in itself would really be a red flag that would need to be properly investigated in my opinion.

Clive Harrison:

Personally, I think the publication of Club Board payments may inhibit our ability as a Club to attract the best people for those positions in the future.

It is however very important that performance criteria are laid down within all club employment contracts and that these are regularly evaluated. The membership must be reassured that those who set and monitor these targets are themselves accountable.

Peter Holding:

I think Club Board remunerations should be disclosed as well as related party transactions.

Regarding 'Top Management' I think the effects of such disclosure by the BBC are as yet unknown.

We certainly can't do this without the consent of existing employees. For new employees at such a level provided we don't lose the people we want to employ then fine. I would make a presumption that any new employee should be asked to disclose but we have to be practical and if the best candidate doesn't want to I would question whether we really want to lose them over this?

What would candidates do to ensure the supporters had input into the 1st team playing kit?

Clive Matthews:

It should certainly be possible to organise a fan's forum to ascertain views on this and as long as costs were broadly similar between designs, it should be possible for supporters to express preferences of one design over another.

Matthew Phillips:

A vote could be held as we have had previously.

Byll Pulman:

A few seasons ago we were given the chance to vote for one of five (I think) possible kits. It was nice to have some input, and I think it's worth asking fans if they would like this opportunity again, but ultimately it's a matter of taste and even if the same opportunity were offered again its highly likely that a majority of fans won't like the kit that's chosen, so this is a matter I have no strong feelings about unless a significant number of fans and members make it known they are strongly in favour.

Martin Weiler:

The Trust should continually help create a climate where supporter engagement is the norm. I don't think it would be the best use of Trust time and resources to actually do the consultation on kit itself. But we should ensure that the Club is taking supporter views on board.

Mark Cordell:

This is difficult as there would be restrictions on what the kit manufacturer was able to provide. However, if logistics worked and the fans wanted an input then I would have no hesitation in opening a vote through the Express and Echo or other online forms. It would also be good to see another celebratory trust kit, this could be a 3^d kit and could help to raise additional funds.

Paul Farley:

I would like to reintroduce a vote, including various options, for Trust members.

Terry Hall:

Again marketing really isn't my strong point and I am sure that others will have far better ideas than I do here – I would suggest that the club can make use of social media and online voting / survey platforms to canvas supporter opinion on kit design.

Peter Holding:

The new Club /Trust Agreement means Trust Board consent is required before a change can be made to the colours and styles of the Club home strip.

Clive Harrison:

I think the Club has done a pretty good job with new kit designs in the last few years although it might well prove more profitable and also fairer to supporters to introduce new home and away kits in alternate years. I think supporters would be far more willing to buy one new kit per season.

Paul Lethbridge:

As is the case now, a vote takes place on various social and media outlets and I see no reason for this to change.

If elected what do the candidates see as their first and most important task as an elected Trustee?

Matthew Phillips:

As a new Trustee, my first tasks would be to get up to speed on the current position of the Trust, understand its practices, the interactions with the Club and the different roles it plays, the governance structures of both the Trust and Club, and also getting to know my fellow Trustee's.

Doing this will allow me to take a view on the current situation and try to work out with fellow Trustee's how we can move to an ideal position.

Byll Pulman:

To set the wheels in motion to ensure full accountability of the club board and employees by setting out objectives and measurable performance targets. We are the owners and its time we started acting like that by setting the agenda for the future and that time is now.

Martin Weiler:

The first task will be the vital job of appointing people to a number of key roles including Chair, Secretary, Chairs of the Trust Committees and Club Board Members. The most important task, as always, will be to discharge our duty as majority shareholder to ensure the delivery of the Club and Trust vision 'to be an outstanding community owned club playing football at the highest sustainable level'.

Mark Cordell:

The first job has to be unification of what could potentially be a very new team. There are several key positions to re-elect and the correct decisions need to be made promptly.

Paul Farley:

I believe that, as a Trustee, I am a custodian of the Club's future; responsible for its survival and success so that future generations will be able to support our Club. That is my first and most important task.

Terry Hall:

From my perspective, job one on day one would be to get both the Trust and Club to voluntarily agree to adhere to the UK Corporate Governance Code. This would then form the basis for the oversight and accountability framework that I feel is badly needed.

Another important job would be to introduce a conflict of interest register to properly document and manage the risk of any conflict of interest for any employee, director or Trustee – but this would also flow from the above.

Clive Harrison:

Following the election there will be twelve elected Trust Board members, five of those positions are already known. These being filled by current Board members who have at least a year of their three year terms remaining.

There are three current Trust Board members re-standing and one co-opted Trust Board member standing. Two Club Board positions are affected by this election.

The new Trust and Club Boards could be very similar or quite different after this election. There will also be positions to fill on the Trusts various working groups.

The most important task for Trustees will be to establish a consensus on how to meet the aims laid out in their individual manifestos and to fill vacancies with those most suited to achieving these.

For me that will mean ensuring that the Trusts is more inclusive, more transparent, communicates better and empowers its membership. It also means that the Trust ensures that the Club Board is more accountable to the Trust.

Trust rules already define how the Trust should operate in relation to this in sections 3.1 – 3.6.

Peter Holding:

The first task as others have alluded to is at the first Trust Board meeting after the appointment of the new Trustees to elect a new Chair, Club Board representatives and Working Group Chairs.

I already sit on the Trust Board, Chair the Trust's Finance and Governance Working Group and have had the privilege of sitting on the Club Board as a Trust nominated Director for the last two years. As such if elected after the first Trust meeting I would spend time getting back into the nitty gritty of the Trust Board and getting to know new fellow Trustees to ensure to ensure smooth working, of the Trust Board and Working Groups so we can push Our Club and the Trust forwards.

Paul Lethbridge:

I believe the most important task for the Trust board is to be more transparent to its member. This is the one of the main issues when discussing the club with fellow supporters. We pay our monthly subscriptions and, to be frank, get very little for our money. How many of the members are aware of the website? Could the minutes of each meeting be made available to members?

Clive Matthews:

Our first task would be to elect a new Trust Chairman, followed by the election of four trustees to sit on the Club Board. The most important task of those four, along the rest of the new Trust Board, is to continue to work in concert with the Club to ensure our long-term viability.

Do the candidates consider that the performance of the 1st team is the most important thing for the club moving forward or is something else more important?

Byll Pulman:

Absolutely. Exeter City is a business plain and simple, the product it sells is football. Like any other business, if your product is substandard, people won't buy it, the media will lose interest, the advertisers won't advertise, the club will be seen as an embarrassment to the city and it won't get the support of the council and you will soon get into trouble. It's vital to plan for the future and ensure that measures are in place to ensure that future is as bright as possible, but not at the expense of your business's primary function. Ultimately if you lose your customers, you lose your business.

Martin Weiler:

The most important thing above all is the financial state of the Football Club. We have to be sustainable. Obviously the performance of the 1st team is a key part of that but it can't be the sole factor. You only have to consider Clubs like Portsmouth and Blackpool who reached the Premier League (good performance) but then went into freefall (unsustainable).

Mark Cordell:

The performance of the first team is one of the most important aspects for the club to move forward. This has to be relevant though as we could double the wage bill to move this forward, however the financial instability that it would cause would guarantee the demise of the club.

Paul Farley:

Yes. We are a football club, and we exist to be successful in football.

Terry Hall:

Ultimately this is a football club and from that perspective, yes, the main purpose of Exeter City Football Club should be to win football matches. I do recognise however that there is an awful lot of work that goes on outside of the 90 minutes of play and don't want to understate that. To come back to the 2nd question, I think that every employee should have their own clear roles and responsibilities, and should know exactly what is expected of them.

Clive Harrison:

Exeter City is first and foremost a football club. Successful football clubs are built on their performance on the pitch. Successful teams attract larger crowds, more sponsorship, increased hospitality and retail income.

We are fortunate to have a successful academy that has provided both players for the first team and a windfall income from player sales. However, the academy will not continue to be successful if the first team performances are in decline. It cannot successfully showcase young prospects or attract quality young talent with a first team at the foot of the table or in non-league football.

A Club Business Plan should prioritise first team performance while steadily continuing to develop the academy and the club's infrastructure. Income will increase if the first team is successful.

Peter Holding:

Of course the 1st team performance is the burning issue and success on the pitch is key to OUR Club's success and attendances with inherent commercial revenue. However, a functional Board must be able to multi task. As I said earlier, the Club's base business model needs to be in order both cash

and Profit and Loss wise and there needs to be effective investment for the future including Academy and infrastructure, these are absolutely key to our long term future as well.

Paul Lethbridge:

Obviously the performance of the 1st team is very important, however the long term future of the club is without doubt the most important matter. I do agree with how the club distributes its money between the playing budget, infrastructure and a contingency pot. It would be great to be pushing for promotion year in, year out but the reality of the situation is all teams have natural cycles where some years are not as good as others. With others clubs having Chairmen willing to put in vast sums of money, maybe we should be open to outside investment whilst maintaining the Trust model.

Clive Matthews:

There is the balance of performance and results to consider.....and then two other things.

Are we looking for good performances that don't necessarily lead to results?

Are we looking for results above all else?

A difficult choice to make, and almost certainly one that will change as the season progresses. Paul Tisdale was slammed in some quarters when he suggested that the long-term viability of the Club and the welfare of the players were both even more important. I would agree with him, because without both of those as prerequisites, neither performance or results are possible.

Matthew Phillips:

To the fans, the performance of the first team is the most important issue, but it is difficult for the Trust and Club boards to have direct influence over this. As such, both bodies should be doing everything in their power to ensure that the best environment to facilitate improved performance is achieved, whether this be increasing revenue, improving training facilities etc.

The Trust is the majority shareholder of ECFC. What involvement and / or contribution should the other shareholders make?

Martin Weiler:

I see other shareholders as the same as any other stakeholders in our club – we look to them to volunteer their time and resources to help us prosper. I welcome the attempts to update our share register. When this is complete we will be in a much better position to target any approaches to other shareholders.

Mark Cordell:

Not being actively in the board currently I am not aware who or what the other stakeholders currently offer.

Paul Farley:

The next largest shareholder holds under 7% and has made a significant contribution to our club. Most other shareholders hold one or two shares only for sentimental reasons. I am not sure what contribution we could or should ask of them.

Terry Hall:

The full list of shareholders is available on the Companies House website and it makes for quite interesting reading – for example I wonder if Natwest Bank knows that they hold a minority shareholding in the club? Ultimately shareholders will come in all shapes and sizes, some will be more active than others, some may not even know they are a shareholder. Ultimately the only part of this we can control is what the Trust does as the majority shareholder – for the record my own opinion would be that I think the Trust should continue to seek to increase its shareholding in the club, for example by purchasing any shares that may be available from other shareholders that may wish to sell – but nobody has the right to tell any shareholder what they should or shouldn't do with their shares.

Clive Harrison:

There are 201 separate shareholders listed in the register accounting with the Trust holding 53.2%. There are just two other shareholdings of over 5% and just two further holdings of over 1%.

Both of those who hold over 5% have made contributions to the club and with the remaining shares held by such a large number of individuals and institutions perhaps the best contribution they could make, should they wish, would be in helping the Trust reach its stated aim of reaching a 75% shareholding.

Peter Holding:

I think there is a theoretical and practical answer to this.

In theory one would hope that all shareholders will make a contribution both in financial and other ways.

However, since I have been involved I have been unaware of any shareholder making any offer of any sort. I certainly don't remember any offers of financial help when we had to seek a PFA Loan!!

It has to be said that were we ever to have to go and ask for another PFA loan then we as your Trustees who would have by definition have failed to get the base business model right would have failed you in a major way.

Paul Lethbridge:

No response.

Clive Matthews:

As mentioned at last year's AGM, the Trust is in the process of trying to acquire some of these additional shares. My limited understanding is that it has proved/is proving to be no easy task, though work is on-going. Sadly, and as much as we would like it to be different, it's not for us to proscribe what involvement or contribution other shareholders should make!

Matthew Phillips:

The Trust is the majority shareholder of ECFC. What involvement and / or contribution should the other shareholders make?

Byll Pulman:

I believe 100% in fan ownership, I believe we should move as quickly as possible to achieving our aim of a 75% stake-holding, at which point I believe the other shareholders would release their shares. I therefore believe they are an irrelevance and do not want or expect any contribution from them.

O. Do you believe the TB should have a viewpoint on the first team manager's performance?

Mark Cordell:

I think it is inevitable that everyone will have a view point on the first team manager's performance as we are all fans. However, the structure is such that the club board hold the position to make such decisions, in my view this is the correct way for the position to be managed.

Paul Farley:

We are all fans so, naturally, we all do. Ask us to agree who should be in any starting line-up and we would never agree.

Terry Hall:

Simply put I think the Trust Board should make sure that the first team manager has a clear job description and knows clearly what the expectations are, with strong (and supportive) management in place to help them do the absolute best job possible.

Clive Harrison:

Every supporter will have a view on the Managers performance and Trust Board members will be no different. As a Board though it should be a view based on the its objectives.

While the Trust doesn't run the business itself rule 3.1 dictates that the Trust "should ensure that the Club is properly governed and takes proper account of the interests of its supporters and of the community, and that professional football continues in Exeter with the appropriate facilities;"

As I have previously stated, I believe that all club staff should be accountable for their performance and that applies equally to the football side of the business. Good performance should be recognised and rewarded and poor performance addressed.

Peter Holding:

Ultimately the manager is an employee of the Club and as such should be treated as such, albeit the most senior one and with the biggest budget of @over £1.5m and one with whom the reality is we as a Club and Trust need to work with at a different level than some other employees.

As with any employee the manager should have a target/s and be monitored on it /them. The Trust has an equal number of nominated Directors (4) as opposed to non Trust nominated (4). All Club Board Directors need to ensure that they understand the manager's targets, that he understands them, that they are monitored and performance understood. There may well be good reasons why a target is not met, for example I am responsible for collecting the Club's debt, if I (through no fault of my own) don't have sufficient resource to do so then that is a reasonable explanation for me to give when challenged.

In my two years on the Club Board I can say that the degree, openness and frequency of discussion on this issue has markedly improved.

So it is through the Trust's Club Board nominated Directors (who report regularly to the Trust Board) that the Trust Board have a view on the performance of the First Team Manager not the Trust Board itself.

Paul Lethbridge:

I do believe the Trust board should have a viewpoint on the performance of the 1st team manager. He is the most important member of our team and should be held accountable for the results the team produce. There seems to be a major issue over the rolling contract our manager currently holds. I don't believe in rolling contracts in any form of business, let alone a business which is so results driven as football. I appreciate that this is a difficult issue to bring to a head, but it is also one of the major issues being discussed among supporters.

Clive Matthews:

The Trust Board is made up of individual members who of course, just like all fans, have a viewpoint on the first team performance. As a body and when there is cause for concern, it is discussed and fed back to the Club Board via our four TB representatives.

It is the Club Board who manage the Manager.

Matthew Phillips:

Not directly. I believe that the Trust Board should only hold the Club Board to account, with the Club director being responsible for any failings within the part of the business that they oversee – judged against that director's performance targets.

Byll Pulman:

As I have already said, I want to see full accountability of club employees, I do not see how this would be possible if The TB has no expectations of the manager's performance, so yes I believe the TB must have a view on this.

Martin Weiler:

This is quite rightly a matter for the Club Board. The Trust Board should never micromanage football matters. However, the Trust Board has a duty as majority shareholder to ensure the vision of the Club is being delivered and so should in this context, when appropriate, take a strategic overview of our footballing performance.