



STRATEGIC PLAN - 2019

Background

The TUST board first identified the need for a strategic plan during the uncertainty surrounding the early days of Clark Osborne's ownership. His reasons for acquiring the Club were unclear but certainly appeared to be motivated by residential and / or commercial development opportunities. The biggest concern was that he would acquire the freehold of Plainmoor from the Council and commit to the redevelopment of the site without securing an alternative ground. Such concerns were predicated on his apparent failure to deliver on previous promises to build new sports stadiums.

The Club's relegation to the National League South in April 2018 (its lowest ever level) only increased supporters' concerns. However, the dismissal of Gary Owers and appointment of the experienced and respected Gary Johnson as manager in September 2018 signified a watershed in the Club's fortunes and consequently fans' perceptions of the owner. Osborne has clearly made a significant financial investment in the Club culminating in the crowning of the team as league champions in April 2019.

This on-field success and accompanying improvements in the professionalism with which the club is run have been welcomed by the fan base, particularly after so many years' of downward trajectory. Furthermore, there has been no public mention of alternative stadiums for almost twelve months.

The environment in which this Plan has been prepared is, therefore, somewhat different to that when it was first mooted. The positive spirit running through the Club is to be welcomed and TUST has worked hard to compliment this with its initiatives for fan and community engagement.

However, given one of our core objectives is to ensure the long-term sustainability of the Club, we remain alert to the possibility of the owner withdrawing his financial support or seeking to capitalise on the development opportunity..

Structure of the Plan

TUST has a mission statement which it aims to achieve through five key objectives. Each objective has a number of supporting statements. This Plan takes each of these and adds flesh to the bones by indicating how the objectives will be delivered

or monitored. Specific actions are also shown where appropriate and these will form the basis of an on-going Action Plan.

MISSION STATEMENT

TUST promotes good governance and seeks to ensure the long-term sustainability of our club for the benefit of current and future supporters and the wider community.

OBJECTIVES

1 REPRESENTING SUPPORTERS: Being the democratic and representative voice of supporters and strengthening the bonds between the Club and the communities which it serves.

1.1 Owners, managers, players and staff come and go, supporters and their communities are permanent.

Whatever success they bring or future plans they may have, owners will leave at some point. We will constantly monitor the current ownership and prepare for any such change depending on the circumstances at the time.

Managers and players also come and go and we will not and should not have any influence over this but we will naturally monitor such matters as part of our general interest in the well-being of the Club.

We recognise the importance of other members of the Club's staff, some of whom make a significant contribution and may be in post for long periods. We will seek to build positive relationships with such employees and offer support where it is appropriate to do so.

Supporters and their communities are relatively constant. There is a nucleus of 1,500 – 2,000 supporters who will attend through good and bad times but a potential for the club to increase this considerably if the team is successful. Average league gates in the 2018/19 season were 2,537 with a low of 1,409 and a high of 5,351 (a record for the NLS). We will seek to encourage greater awareness of the Club and in turn higher attendances which is key to its future success.

In addition, there is a significant level of away support. This is particularly due to the number of exiled supporters who attend away games – a reflection of the high level of migration of local people to other parts of the country, mainly for education and employment reasons. We will seek to engage with such exiles through regular communication and opportunities for them to meet our board members or contribute to our activities.

1.2 We are independent from the Club and therefore have no conflict of interest.

We will always act independently from the Club. Whilst seeking to be supportive and constructive we will act in accordance with TUST's objectives as determined by our members.

Any actual or perceived conflicts of interest will be recorded in the Register of Interests.

- 1.3 We will be a critical friend of the Club and a force for change, where appropriate.

We aim to be positive in our support for the Club but are prepared to be critical where necessary, providing constructive challenge.

We will campaign, lobby and consider appropriate action to support this objective.

- 1.4 We wish to work with the Club at all levels to ensure its long term sustainability.

We want to build relationships with those involved with the Club from top to bottom, from the owner to the junior sections and volunteers.

We will work constructively with the ownership to consider and promote any plans to relocate the Club providing that such plans are transparent and realistic. We believe, however, that the Council retaining the freehold of Plainmoor is essential until any new stadium is completed and a binding agreement in place for the football club to have sustainable, long-term use of it.

We will not, however, offer opinions on or interfere in any team matters which are rightly the domain of the team manager and his staff. We have no expertise in these areas.

- 1.5 Our aim is continuous development as we build, maintain and strengthen community bonds with the Club.

We will strive to move the Trust forward by building on existing community initiatives, reaching out to potential new opportunities and strengthening the dialogue between the Club and the community.

2. PROMOTING SUPPORTER INFLUENCE: Achieving the greatest possible supporter and community influence in the running and ownership of the Club.

- 2.1 We seek ways for supporters to become positively involved in the decisions that are made by the owners of the Club, which may include board membership should this be appropriate.

By developing a positive and supportive relationship with the Club we will seek to ensure that the supporters' voice is heard.

This will enable us to provide a positive influence in the running of the Club by providing direct feedback from our members and the fan base generally.

We accept that TUST representation on the board is not a realistic aspiration at the current time.

- 2.2 We will aim to ensure that the ownership's motives and long term plans are in the best interests of the Club.

We will provide an independent view of the Club's direction whilst understanding that the supporters and owners may have different values and objectives. We recognise and understand that any owner is likely to seek a profit.

- 2.3 We promote regular and constructive dialogue and initiatives with representatives of the Club and with other supporter organisations, both at Club and national level.

We seek to maintain a meaningful dialogue with the Club in accordance with the principles of the Memorandum of Understanding (to be agreed between the parties) and via regular liaison meetings with appropriate Club representatives.

TUST is a member of the Football Supporters' Association representing supporters' groups at all levels of the professional game. We will engage with the FSA to gain from its knowledge and provide feedback of our own experience

We will also maintain good working relationships with the trusts of other clubs and provide support where such clubs are facing difficult times.

- 2.4 We will be prepared to act if the existence of the Club is ever in jeopardy and will do everything we can to find a way of ensuring its continued survival as a sustainable football club.

We see this as one of our main objectives but hope we will never need to action it. Many clubs at all levels have hit crises and we need to be prepared for such a situation, our biggest challenge.

We will endeavour to identify ways in which significant finance can be accessed at short notice if required to ensure the immediate and longer term survival of the Club. This may include identifying businesses and individuals with wealth who may be willing to invest in the Club and initiatives which enable funds to be raised from those of more modest means, such as Crowdfunding.

It is recognised that it is impractical and inappropriate to hold large sums of cash on account to address such crises but we will maintain sufficient funds to

facilitate intervention and rescue of the Club in such circumstances. A 'war chest' to meet the costs of legal, financial and other advice which will inevitably be necessary if we are to ensure the club's survival.

We will draw on the significant experience of the Football Supporters' Association and its professional advisors in such circumstances.

We will prepare a draft Business Plan for this scenario. Whilst recognising that this can only be of indicative value at present, it will provide a framework for assessing the potential of the Club should a rescue plan be required at any time in the future.

The priority is to be as prepared as possible for such circumstances by identifying sources of assistance, finance and professional advice including the experiences of other clubs which have faced similar circumstances.

It is worth repeating at this stage that ownership of the Club is not one of TUST's objectives and seen only as a last resort and probably only a temporary solution.

3. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT: Promoting responsible and constructive community engagement and encouraging the Club to do the same.

3.1 We will support the Club in becoming a successful community focused football club.

We see engagement with the wider community as essential to the future development and success of the Club.

We will not only seek to build strong community links and promote the Club ourselves but encourage the Club to do the same.

We believe transparent and open communication from the Club is critical to this objective.

3.2 We seek to develop and strengthen the relationship between the Club and the community, both within South Devon and further afield.

We will be proactive in building the Club's relationships with the community including the business sector, education establishments and the wider catchment areas.

3.3 We will keep supporters, communities and their representatives informed on critical off-field issues, ensuring they are sufficiently informed to influence decisions.

TUST is a non-political organisation.

We will, however, ensure that those with influence in local and national politics are kept aware of issues affecting the Club and its supporters and offer advice where we believe it is in the interests of our core objectives to do so.

We will also inform and consult our members on such matters of interest.

4. GOOD GOVERNANCE: Operating democratically, fairly, sustainably, transparently and with financial responsibility and encouraging the Club to do the same.

4.1 We promote excellence in governance to ensure the credibility of TUST.

We will follow best practice in our governance and be transparent and open to scrutiny.

We will maintain a suite of policies setting out our procedures for achieving this.

4.2 We will encourage good governance in all that the Club does.

We believe that good governance underpins the long-term success of any football club. There are numerous examples of clubs at all levels which have enjoyed short-term success but fallen foul of poor governance and subsequently hit difficult times.

We will hold the Club to account in this respect as we believe its reputation as a community focused club is built on its governance.

5. BEING INCLUSIVE: Being a positive, inclusive and representative organisation, open and accessible to all supporters of the Club regardless of their age, income, location, ethnicity, gender, disability, sexuality or religious or moral beliefs.

5.1 TUST is democratic and we're proud of that - every single member is as valued as the next and entitled to a position of equal standing, where collectively they vote on the trust's direction.

We aim to be seen as the principle representative body for Torquay United supporters with a strong identity as such.

Our Rules set out TUST's democratic principles and these are upheld by the elected board.

We encourage member involvement, both formal and informal, and will consult our members on all key strategic decisions.

The reality is that, in common with many similar organisations, only a minority of supporters are members of the Trust and only a minority of TUST members are active participants.

- 5.2 From the TUST membership there is an elected Board of Directors which holds regular meetings, minutes of which are published.

The board consists of up to 10 committed supporters from a variety of backgrounds who bring a complementary range of skills, many form a professional background. The board's business is conducted in an open manner with minutes produced in a timely fashion and published.

There will be rare occasions when, of necessity, the business of the board needs to be confidential but we endeavour to keep these to a minimum.

- 5.3 We aim to further the understanding of supporters and the community as to our purpose in order to encourage them to join us and work with us in making our great club a successful and sustainable asset to our community.

We will use a range of methods to promote the role and performance of TUST and to encourage membership. These will include networking with the business community, out-reach events, social media and promotional literature.

We will set membership fees at a level sufficient to support our objectives whilst remaining as affordable as possible to supporters.

- 5.4 We recognise the importance of young fans for the future of the Club and will actively seek ways to support and involve them, directly or through initiatives with the Club and other organisations.

We do not see direct involvement in junior supporter schemes as one of our activities but we are very keen to support and promote appropriate groups and organisations that work with and encourage the supporters of the future.

In particular, we will work with the Torquay United Community Sports Trust to support its TQ1 initiative for young football fans in the area.

We will provide financial assistance for such schemes where appropriate to deliver the TUST's objectives.

Review

This Strategic Plan will be kept under review by the board and updated on a regular basis with significant changes of policy or direction requiring the formal approval of the membership.

And finally, in summary;

We want long term sustainability and good governance for our football club so that we and our successors can enjoy supporting it for generations to come. It is that simple.