

Scarborough Athletic Fans Forum - 4/7/08

Conservative Club, Huntriss Row, Scarborough

In attendance:

Compare:

Al Ross

Scarborough Athletic Directors:

Richard Adamson

Tony Brown

John Clarke

Ben Courtney

Wendy Danby

James Hunter

Chris Rooke

Kevin Smith

Andy Troughton

Sandra Troughton

President:

John Fawcett

Team Manager:

Brian France

From George Pindar CSC:

Hugh Bellamy (Scarborough Town FC chair)

Tony Hackworth

Supporters in attendance (head-counted):

87

Apologies:

Simon Cope

Introduction given by John Fawcett – President of Scarborough Athletic:

Can I first of all say I think we should all congratulate the directors on the tremendous achievement of getting this club up and running and performing so successfully, it's a marvellous achievement.

And of course the most important decision is appointing the correct and appropriate manager, and I congratulate the board on appointing Brian and Darren. Also I congratulate them on the wonderful season they have given us on the field. It was a tremendous achievement to finish 5th in the league in our first season, and we would have finished higher had it not been for the points deducted.

Can I also welcome Hugh Bellamy, head teacher at Pindar School, and also chairman of the committee of Scarborough Town, and Al Ross our MC from Radio York. We are most grateful to you.

Lets give a warm welcome to the board of directors and Al Ross.

Round of Applause

Al Ross:

Before we get into questions I will pass the mike to Hugh Bellamy, but first we have a message from Simon Cope.

Statement read by Ben Courtney, Vice Chair

First of all may I extend a warm welcome to all Boro fans who have given up their time to come to this event. We are planning on holding open forums such as this four times a year from now on, and we want fans to make the best use of them. This is your chance to put your questions and ideas to the board and management team of the club. We will attempt to answer your queries as honestly and fully as we are able to in order that you may better understand where we are trying to take **your** football club. I would like to offer my humblest apologies for my absence from tonight's forum. Due to my wife giving birth to a baby girl only a few days ago, I am now well and truly outnumbered and under the thumb, so I have had no choice but to stay at home to look after my new family this evening. And yes, we have already filled out an application form for little Elena to become a junior member of the Trust!

I think we can all be rightly proud of what Scarborough Athletic has managed to achieve in its first year of existence. Our prime aim during 2008/9 was to establish a senior football team to be the successor to Scarborough FC, and I believe that we have done that. It has not been difficult with our enforced exile to Bridlington, and I think having such large attendances at a rival's ground 20 miles away is testament to how strongly Boro fans feel about their club. We must not lose sight however, on how important it is to the club's future that we have a suitable ground that we can call our own, back here in Scarborough. We have been working closely with the Council throughout our first season, and will continue to do so as the intended purchase of the Athletic Ground on Seamer Road draws ever nearer. We are still not yet in a position to make any promises regarding where we will be playing when we return, or even exactly when that will take place, but we will of course keep pushing for the best solution – not just for the club, but for the wider community as well.

I would also like to warmly welcome Hugh Bellamy in his role as both chairman of Scarborough Town and the Scarborough Academy. I am sure that many of you will have questions for Hugh regarding Town's position relative to our own – and that is exactly why he is here. We as a club have kept up a close dialogue with Hugh, and also Mitch Cook, throughout the season in an effort to create close links between the Academy and Athletic. As a result of this, seven Academy footballers have been invited to attend pre-season training with Scarborough Athletic. We would be foolish to ignore local footballing talent, and if the Academy players have the desire, and meet Brian's standards, then they will turn out in the red shirts of Boro – a fitting tribute to the efforts of Mitch and his team of coaches.

Enjoy your evening.

Hugh Bellamy:

Thank you. Can I take you back to just over a year when Scarborough folded, and try to explain where we are now as a college. When Scarborough Football Club was liquidated there was a big youth development programme run by Mitch and his team. As a college we spoke to Sheffield United and Mitch Cook, and looked at funding. We were successful in bringing in Mitch and his team as part of the college set up.

Sheffield United were interested as they are trustees of the school. Also they are keen to have the best players in the area themselves. Obviously Mitch has a big Scarborough interest, and Sheffield United, as trustees of the school and financial backers of the set up, want to do their best to provide football.

The provision at the moment has improved because of the link with Sheffield United, especially in that our coaches have had extra training to a higher standard. The cost of running this set up is into 6 figures, and there cannot be many colleges that have a set up like it.

So why has Scarborough Town been set up and what is it trying to do? Scarborough Town was set up as the next step up for under 19 footballers. Mitch's view is that those players lack football and personal maturity. He wanted to continue working and developing them so they are prepared for the next stage. The role of the academy is to get the players to their best possible level.

Scarborough Athletic is a key stopping off point for the youngsters that the academy will be providing. Mitch has a very clear view about Scarborough Town in that the youngsters playing at Scarborough Town will not cope at bigger clubs.

For me the role of Scarborough Town is actually very different from the reserves. Mitch and Brian have been having discussions about the separate roles.

Scarborough Town set up is a nursery and development set up. Are they a rival to Scarborough Athletic? Well not in my eyes, not at all.

When players become better and more mature they will be encouraged to move on. I will be very surprised indeed if they (STFC) were able to make their way up very quickly because they will always be made up of young players.

The senior side in Scarborough is Scarborough Athletic. There is no question about that. I suppose Scarborough Town could be a rival if for some reason Scarborough Town made progress through the leagues despite being made up of kids, and Scarborough Athletic didn't. Though I rather suspect that will never happen. Scarborough Athletic is clearly the senior side.

The biggest danger for Scarborough Athletic and Scarborough Town is actually people on the internet that appear on the forums who are misinformed. It is very damaging.

Sheffield United is providing extra support to Scarborough Athletic, through Scarborough Town. Kevin McCabe has said very clearly to me that our role is to be supportive to Scarborough Athletic, and that is very clearly what our role will be.

There are people within the set ups who don't get on but we have to look at what we all want to achieve, which is Scarborough having a football team at the highest level, and having an academy to support that. The other element of what we are doing is to run a 6th form side. I'll let Tony talk about this.

Tony Hackworth

My role is to work along side Mitch. We are looking to start a football development unit, running from Pindar School in conjunction with ourselves, Pindar, and Scarborough 6th Form College.

We are bringing plans to make a college side bringing players from the colleges to play in a better college league. It is an opportunity for players to play in the highest level.

It will be a different league with teams from bigger places but we are aiming to try and get to the top.

Floor is opened to questions:

Question:

What if some player comes through the system and is red hot at 19. Who gets access to him straight away? Will he be cherry picked by Sheffield or will he get to stay in Scarborough?

Hugh Bellamy:

Sheffield United look at our players, and look at the very best. If they are not better than what they have already they will not take them, but we are naive to think that if someone great turned up they wouldn't take them. However we are also naive to believe that great Scarborough players would want to play in Scarborough for very long.

Question:

If someone comes through the system can we make money out of them

Hugh Bellamy:

What Brian and Mitch are doing is that they are training together. Mitch is talking to Brian about which youngsters to look at. It will just depend on individual cases though.

Question

How will Scarborough Town be funded?

Hugh Bellamy:

Scarborough Town is part of the academy set up which is funded by a number of kittys. Funding comes from the college, from Sheffield United, and from a fundraising group. The fundraising group will be raising money similarly to the senior side.

Question:

Will there be any local money going in?

Hugh Bellamy:

We hope so. We will have to wait and see.

Question:

Why do we need two football teams in one town? Look at Harrogate Railway and Harrogate Town and the rivalry there. Why do we need two in one little town?

Hugh Bellamy:

As I already explained you will not have two teams. There will be Scarborough Athletic and academy team. They will not be a rival side. It is just the under 19s plus one. A number of those players may even be dual registered.

Question:

Why aren't the academy part of Scarborough Athletic then? Why does it have to be part of Scarborough Town?

Hugh Bellamy:

The academy is funded, and therefore run through Pindar. As the funding goes through them it has to be run by the college.

Question:

Why weren't you there at the beginning of last season to support Athletic?

Hugh Bellamy

We have been talking throughout the season with Athletic. Now is the time when we are continuing discussions when we are looking to work together.

Sandra Troughton:

Can I just say Sheffield United have also helped us (SAFC). At the beginning of the season when we didn't have anything Sheffield United gave us everything. We have raised £2000 through their support, and we haven't done anything in return for them. It is not a case that Sheffield United have been working with Pindar and the academy, they have been working with us too.

Question:

It is not clear to me why we need Scarborough Town.

Hugh Bellamy:

They are two completely different things. One is a senior team. One is a development squad. The youngsters at Scarborough Town have come in through the academy system and will be working with Mitch, and will continue to do so. They have two very different reasons for existence.

Question:

If you do not provide Sheffield United with the players they want will they pull the funding?

Hugh Bellamy:

We have no worries because we are a trustee school and they are our trustees.

Question:

What if they pull out of being trustees?

Hugh Bellamy:

That is unlikely as it is a long and complex legal process to do so.

Question:

Are they trustees of a lot of other schools?

Hugh Bellamy?

Yes they have a range of schools.

Question:

I cannot see what is in it for them.

Hugh Bellamy:

196 footballers have come from around this area, just 16 have come from Sheffield. It is good business for them to work here.

Question:

How many players from Scarborough have Sheffield had in the past? Probably none.

Hugh Bellamy:

I don't know.

Question:

If you have got a player who is 16 or under and they have never made a first team appearance but get picked up by another team other than Scarborough Athletic who gets the money from the sale.

Hugh Bellamy:

If they are 15 of 16 they are not contracted and anyone can come and take them so there will be no benefit locally, and that is the huge benefit for Scarborough Athletic in have a huge youth development that costs nothing at all. It is a no lose situation for Scarborough Athletic.

Question:

Is Brian on the management team within the process?

Brian France:

I have actually been talking to Mitch, though we haven't spoke enough yet. It is always good to have youth development. If we get a new player from them a season it will be a success. I am a bit worried in that I want first choice of them and I don't want players being taken away by other clubs. That is my only worry and I will talk to Mitch about that.

Emailed Question:

Have Scarborough Athletic got any plans to develop its own camp should relationships break down with Scarborough Town?

Brian France:

At the moment that is out of the question. We haven't even got our own ground at the moment.

John Clarke:

If you want to develop and academy you have to have a home base as part of the FA ruling , and as we don't have a home base that is out of the question to say that we could set up an academy ourselves. However at some stage I think that Scarborough Athletic may set up their own development programme when they have a ground because there is a lot of funding available that will help young players come through. There is a point when that might happen but it will be a lot of years from now. We need to get back into a ground somewhere in Scarborough. We then need to think about how we will structure the football club.

Ben Courtney:

For the foreseeable future we are very happy to work with Hugh regarding youth structure and see how that works. For Scarborough Athletic though we need to make sure that the benefits are there for us and make sure that the talented young players are coming to us. We hear what Hugh is saying we just need to demonstrate that it can work.

Break

Emailed Question:

In light of the fact that we play in Bridlington what steps are the board taking to ensure a larger community of fans?

Richard Adamson:

At the moment we have got a challenge because we are playing in Bridlington so it is very difficult to do anything, we are going to have to be creative. I am still developing a plan. The intention will be to try and encourage more schools in Scarborough to come down which will get them interested in the club. We have had press coverage in the Evening News and we set up a stall in the Brunswick Shopping Centre to raise the profile. We are looking at initiatives to encourage people who are disabled, or simply those who would not normally come down. We also have increased links with Scarborough businesses.

Question:

How long have we got playing at Bridlington before the FA moves us?

Ben Courtney:

We have got currently a five year agreement at Bridlington. We are hoping to be in Scarborough before that though. The five year agreement acts as a safe guard, we are not tied to it. If we need to, which I am sure we won't, I am sure we can extend it, however it is down to the league, not Scarborough Athletic.

Question:

What happens to that agreement if we get promoted?

Ben Courtney:

If we are still at Bridlington and get promoted to the UniBond we will have to devise a new agreement with Bridlington and the UniBond League. Bridlington's stadium is up to UniBond standard so it shouldn't be a problem.

Emailed Question:

Does the board have a back up plan to get the team playing back in Scarborough again?

Kevin Smith

Everyone realises that the future of the club is dependant on us coming back to Scarborough. So, if the negotiation with the council do not come to fruition then we would have to start looking at our own options. Although we are very grateful to Brid that novelty of travelling will soon wear off and we need to be looking at coming back here so we will create a plan B to see what we can do. We are still waiting to hear back from the council.

Emailed Question:

There was a rumour recently spread around by someone that Scarborough Athletic would have to register with the East Riding at the end of next season if they stayed at Bridlington. Is that true?

John Clarke

No, we will be a North Riding Club. The North Riding and the East Riding have had discussions and both agree we are staying as a North Riding Club.

Question:

Is the rumour true that Bridlington Town are for sale?

Sandra Troughton:

Yes, they were up for sale but it was not successful so they are now looking for help to run the club. We are helping them as much as they are helping us at the moment.

Question:

Can we not take a local team under our umbrella so there is a team in Scarborough playing in our kit as well? Surely it would not cost a fortune?

Richard Adamson:

I will be honest and say that we hadn't actually thought of that. What I will say is that we have only been up and running 12 months. We are still at the stage where we are setting up, but I promise that that is something we will talk about at the next board meeting.

Ben Courtney:

I am pleased that was suggested. This is what we have events like this for, to raise ideas. My immediate reaction is that as a town football club to pick out just one squad to sponsor, it is a bit unfair on the other teams in the area, but what I am more keen on is that we could go on from that and organise a full football tournament that brings together local football teams and we could sponsor the event and their trophies.

Question:

Do you think people will look at Scarborough Town, and then look at Scarborough Athletic and think that we are doing nothing?

Ben Courtney:

The aims of Scarborough Town are very similar to those of Scarborough Athletic. They want to use football in the community and develop young footballers. We want to be doing that as well and we want to be looking at effective ways of doing that but in no means in an competitive way. We will be looking at achieving our common objectives.

Question:

What plans does the club have to further links with Scarborough businesses, and is there any competition?

James Hunter:

That's a very good question. Usually if another team starts up people will think there are two teams wanting the same sponsorship. That is not the case here though. Last year we had a lot of money and help coming into the club. This season coming forward we are hoping to increase that. We are still doing our bit to get businesses in, and so far we have had a lot coming back to us wanting to sponsor players. We have already got sponsorship for six matches when last year as a whole we only had three. The business community is right there and is very aware of us. All things are coming together now.

Question:

Can we have a run down of the players?

Brian France:

In terms of training we have had an average of about 28 per session coming down. We have had plenty coming down to training and we have got three or four new signings. We still have a couple of injuries such as Woody who is waiting to see a sports specialist. Apart from that we are returning with a similar side from last year, and the new signings, who have all played at a good standard.

Question:

We have had an increased budget this season, how do you plan on spending it?

Brian France:

Right from the off last year I had players coming to me asking for silly prices, thinking Scarborough was a bigger club. I have got silly players asking for £50 a game. I have never busted a budget and I won't now. I have got to be sensible. If I am giving someone what I think is substantial then they have to earn it. I won't be giving anyone money for nowt.

Question:

Have we any plans to increase the fines given to our players when they are booked because last season we would have gone up if players kept their mouths shut.

Brian France:

To be fair I do fine them, and we see how serious it is.

Question:

We had a problem at the end of the last season with the crowd at one of the away games. Do we have any standing re-percussions for the start of this season?

John Clarke:

For that occasion [Pontefract away] we were fined £150, £50 had to be paid now and we are on a warning for the rest of next season and if there is anything else will have to pay the other £100, and probably a lot more.

Sandra Troughton:

The £50 that we incurred - the person responsible was brought before the club's disciplinary committee and was banned from a number of games. However he has offered to pay the club the £50 for the fine we incurred.

Ben Courtney:

We have got this issue with the league, they are finding it quite difficult to understand the lack of support that we have as to any minor incident going in the referees report. That is why we created the spectators behaviour policy report.

Question:

Is there any plans to ask Rossington not to bring their fans? Any plans to ban fans from the ground next season?

Ben Courtney:

No, I don't think we can ban any fans. I know what people can be like and all we have go to do is keep our calm. Fans from every club are different we just have to realise that. The police will look after that.

Chris Rooke:

All the stewards that had this and last season are doing it on a voluntary basis. So last season with Rossington those ten people who were keeping the fans in their area were just fans like you. All I ask is that we treat the stewards with respect because they are the same as you. They even pay to get in.

Question:

Was [SBC leader] Tom Fox invited tonight? He is the main person we need to get us back into Scarborough. Are you talking to him, and what is going on?

Ben:

Tom Fox wasn't invited. I don't think this is the sort of forum for councillors to come too. It was in the paper that Tom Fox will be in discussions with the council over the next six months. I feel we will have to await the outcome of that period. We do meet with them regularly, the last time being two months ago as the season ended. Basically they want to see what we want to see out of the stadium. They are very keen to get us back in to Scarborough, let me assure you that.

Comment from fan at front of room:

Let me tell you it is felt the deal is done with the sports centre on Filey Road. Part of that deal is that the developer has promised to provide an alternative sports facility, which Tom Fox can buy at any time.

Ben Courtney:

Thanks for bringing that up, and but aren't aware of any plans such as those.

Question:

I still don't see the feeling of this meeting, is everyone here happy to go along with the Scarborough Town proposals or not?

Ben:

It isn't a discussion about whether we go along with the proposals or not. We have no control over that. What we are trying to do tonight is to try and show how the system will work. There literally is nothing we can do about anything. There is nothing Scarborough Athletic can, or would wish to do about it. We want to make this work.

Question:

How are trust membership numbers coming along?

Ben:

It is going better than expected. The number is still hovering around the 550 mark. This time last year we took about 350 members. Out of those 550 members only 15 have expired, and they still have time to renew, which is a very good sign. I have a lot of cheques coming through my door every day. If we stayed above the 500 level I would be very happy indeed.

Question:

Who here believe the council are willing to put their neck on the line to get the McCain Stadium.

A show of hands from over half of those in the room.

Richard Adamson:

I know Tom Fox is determined he is going to get the team a football ground to the highest standard he can. The situation is that if the council buy the stadium it has to be used for sporting facilities. If they build houses on the land for example, they will get sued from all over the place.

Hugh Bellamy:

At the moment Scarborough Borough Council are putting the final pieces together of their leisure strategy which includes among other things a football ground. I understand that Filey Road will be sold and will provide the financing of that. They are absolutely committed that they will provide a football ground. There are no plans between ourselves and Scarborough Borough Council to increase the facilities at Pindar.

Question:

What are the goals for this season?

Brian France:

One at either end!! Seriously - to do better than last year, which I think we can. We had 87 come down for trials at Pindar school last year, and at this point we have seen a lot more and a lot better than last year. Now the goal is to do better and I think we can. We are always looking to improve and I am happy with the squad at the moment, but we are still looking for others and are talking to others.

Question:

Is the current squad good enough to win the league?

Brian France:

Last year we had a disastrous start, but I think we are good enough now. It has got to be done on the pitch though and we will be giving it 100%.

Question:

Which would you prefer? To win the league or a day out at Wembley?

Brian France:

Well, I've already been to Wembley! No, seriously I would like to do them both.

Question:

The bus on a Saturday - why don't we just have £2 for everyone and scrap the subsidies? It takes a while for fares to get sorted out and who knows who is what age?

Sandra Troughton:

I think one of the problems with that is that we are trying to be a community club and we do subsidise the bus and put on fares at that price. You don't want to make it that the children don't want to come on the bus.

Ben:

I think if it is a case of taking too much time to sort out fares, like you say then that is an issue for the board. We are always going to be looking to make subsidies for older and younger people. If it is becoming too difficult we have to look at ways to make it easier. However we are always going to be looking at ways to provide subsidies.

Question:

What positions do the new signings play?

Brian:

One is an attacking midfielder, one a centre back and will play full back, and the other is a centre back, and we also have another midfielder. If we look at goals last year we are not short of strikers.

Emailed Question:

If football comes home will the reserves be coming home too or will they be staying in Hutton Cranswick?

Tony Brown:

They will stay elsewhere until we get a ground in Scarborough. Once we are back in Scarborough then of course the reserves will come back to Scarborough. Currently we have players coming from Hull to play but they will just have to come Scarborough.

Question:

Can you update us on the financial position?

Kevin Smith:

I was hoping someone would ask. The financial year end for Scarborough Athletic was 31st March, but when looking at the full season up until the end of May turnover was 90k, profit was 11k and the cash balance was 18k. These figures are pre-audit and are subject to change.

The first season's revenue for trust membership included some well wishing people from outside Scarborough wanting to do their bit in times of crisis, despite best efforts to retain current levels of membership it is only prudent to factor in a reduction of this revenue stream. On top of this we have increased the playing budget for the forthcoming season, but despite both these factors we expect to retain the current levels of profitability during the current season. There are an additional 3 home league fixtures this season, we also expect additional sponsorship and advertising income this year so things are looking just as bright off the field as well as on.

Question:

What is the biggest area of expenditure?

Kevin Smith:

Given that we have a very favourable rent from Bridlington Town our overheads are relatively low, so the biggest area of expenditure is on the players wages.

Question:

Why isn't there a member of the supporters club board sat up there with you?

Chris Rooke:

The supporters club is here. Craig Patton is here, sat over there at the back. We have a really good relationship with the supporters club.

The thing is each supporter has to choose where to spend their money. We can't be telling you where to spend it.

The thing with tonight is it is a Scarborough Athletic fans forum. If we had the council here, and the supporters club here it would be detracting from what we want to talk about.

Question:

The one thing that worries me about Scarborough Town is say that you get people who go to games, and say that they cannot be bothered to go to Bridlington to watch us and stay and watch Scarborough Town instead. Why should we risk losing supporters to Scarborough Town even though they are a lower team?

Tony Brown:

To me if you are a Scarborough Athletic supporter then you will support Scarborough Athletic. To me if there was another team locally and my team were playing 20 miles away then I would go and watch my team, and I think that is how everyone conducts themselves.

Ben:

I think what you were meaning is are we concerned that fans may be taken away? I do think we have to be aware of that possibility and we have to do what we can to avoid that. We have to make the package attractive. We cannot get into a stage of complacency, we have to go onwards and upwards.

Question:

Who is responsible for the newly improved website. They have done a great job.

Ben Courtney:

Steve Smith did it. I agree he has done an excellent job. He does all the work for free. If you see him at any of the games do thank him in person.

Question:

Will there be more merchandise made available on the website?

James Hunter:

We will have an online shop but that is being developed currently. Eventually everything that is for sale in the club shop will be available on line. We are also looking at producing e-programmes which is a full programme that people can buy and read online in PDF format.

Al Ross:

Well if that is all the questions. I would like to thank the board of directors for inviting me here tonight. I know when you see a child growing up, this club is a bit like that for me. It is great to see how far the club has grown in a year. I never thought it would get to this stage so quickly and that is down to the board. A big thank you to Tony and Hugh, they didn't have to be here but they came down.

Ben Courtney:

Thank you all for coming. This is exactly what we wanted from this evening. I would finally like to sign off by saying good luck to Brian for the forthcoming season. Best of luck.