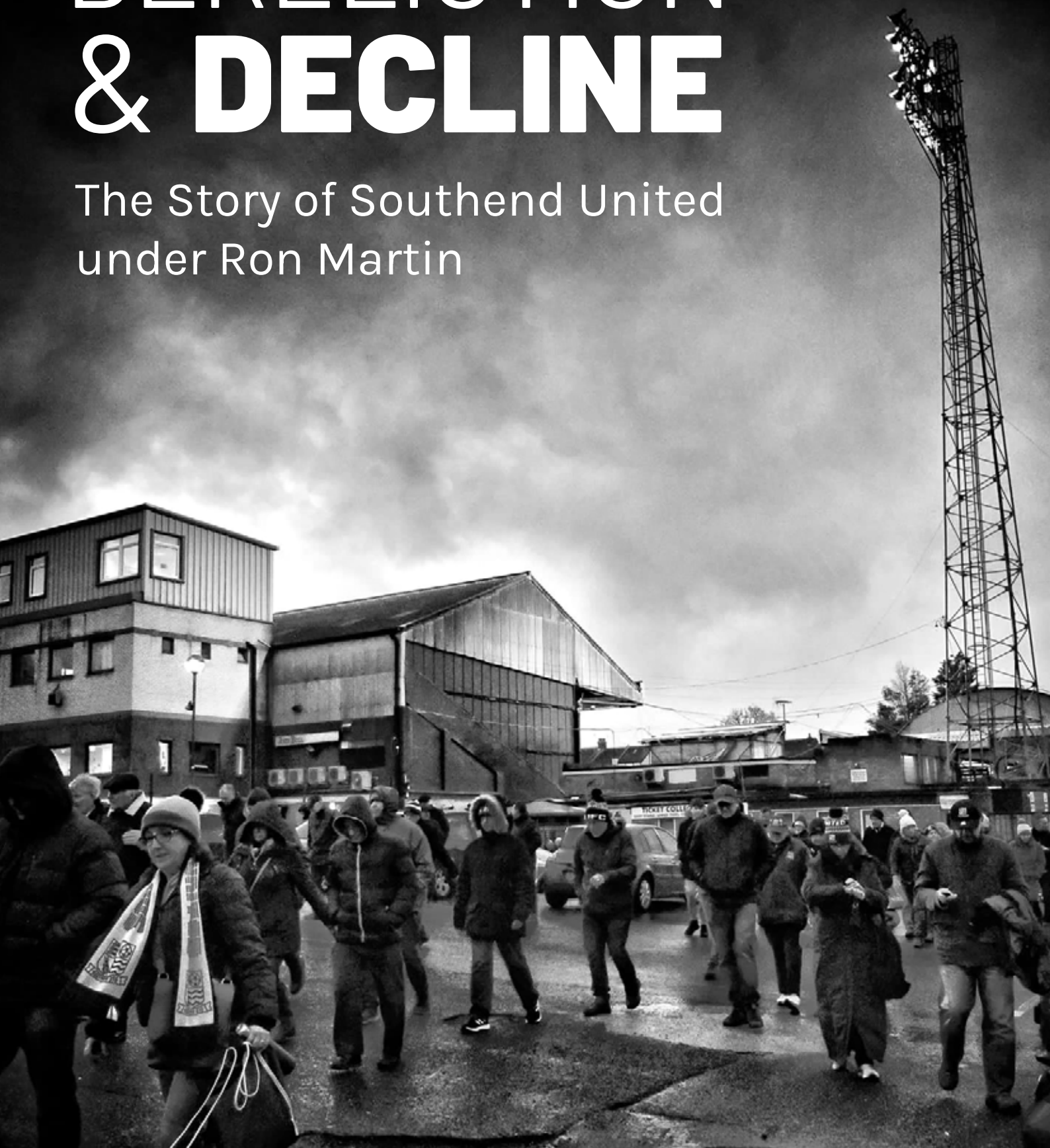


DERELICTION & **DECLINE**

The Story of Southend United
under Ron Martin



SHRIMPERS TRUST



The Story of Southend United under Ron Martin

Southend United Football Club has teetered on the edge of a precipice for much of the last 15 years due to a steady mix of winding-up petitions, transfer and registration embargoes and late payments to staff and creditors.

It is also an institution, a weekly tradition and a cultural asset. It forges friendships, passes through generations, widens horizons, and is the creator of untold amounts of ups and downs, highs and lows and winners and losers.

This is the story of how one man's stubbornness and ineptitude has gambled with the 117-year history and future existence of a proud football club; of a dereliction of duty, and the neglect and decline of a local institution and its facilities, and of how its largest asset - its fanbase - has worked to protect it for the community it represents.

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History of Southend United

Southend United Football Club, like many other clubs across the country, lies at the heart of the local community. The club's current location at Roots Hall in Prittlewell, is on one of the main artery roads into the city centre, Victoria Avenue.

Whilst the Blues have historically almost exclusively resided in the lower echelons of the English Football League (EFL), the club now finds itself in non-league football for the first time in over a century, but remains much-loved by many who spend their weekends cheering on their heroes just as generations have done before them.

And what heroes there have been, from Alan Moody, a veteran of over 500 games for the club, to goalscorers Roy Hollis, Billy Best and Freddy Eastwood. Local heroes such as Peter Taylor, Spencer Prior and Justin Edinburgh have gone on to ply their trade in the top-flight alongside the likes of Stan Collymore and Chris Powell, for whom the Blues provided a launch-pad towards international representation.

The club was formed on 19th May 1906 in the Blue Boar Public House by landlord Oliver Trigg and a band of fellow football enthusiasts. In 1920, the club was elected to the EFL as part of a new Third Division.

In 1979 Southend held European Champions Liverpool to a goalless draw at Roots Hall in The FA Cup, before 1980/81 saw the club claim the Fourth Division championship, a first title in the EFL. Later, consecutive promotions in 1989/90 and 1990/91 lifted Blues into the Second Division, thus providing second tier status for the first time ever, and a break from the yo-yo cycle of promotion and relegation between the third and fourth tiers that the club had been locked in since election to the EFL.

Southend remained in the second tier for six seasons, and would return there for a season after another double-promotion via the League Two playoffs in 2004/05 and the League One championship in 2005/06.

In 2006, the club famously triumphed 1-0 against Manchester United in the League Cup during a run to the quarter-finals, whilst there was a Wembley success in 2015 in the League Two play-off final.

However, a disastrous period at the end of that decade saw relegation from League One on a points-per-game basis in 2019/20 followed by demotion from the EFL in the ensuing season.

Southend United's supporters are united in their desire for the club to return to the EFL, about the necessity for improved facilities and in their quest for a sustainable future for the club.



The Current Situation

Owner Ron Martin's 25-year association with Southend United Football Club, and his relationship with the club's supporters, is probably best described as complicated.

When he initially arrived in 1998, he was equal co-owner (through his property development company Martin Dawn), alongside Delancey Estates, of South Eastern Leisure, the company which acquired Southend United from the previous owner Vic Jobson. He wasn't particularly fond of football, but admits that he has fallen in love with the game since then, having been installed as Chair a couple of years later. However, the decision to transfer ownership of Roots Hall to another company, Roots Hall Limited - 50% owned by Martin Dawn - for £4 million in November 1998 has had sizeable ramifications for the sale of the club a quarter-of-a-century later.

His tenure has coincided with some of our most memorable moments - a League One title-winning campaign ahead of local rivals Colchester United in 2006, a 1-0 League Cup victory over Manchester United at Roots Hall early in the following season and a Wembley play-off success to earn promotion back to the third tier in 2015 - but also some crushing lows.

The first flirtation with the High Court came in July 2000, when a debt to the Inland Revenue was paid off a couple of days before a winding-up petition was due to be heard. Ten years later, the Professional Footballers Association (PFA) became involved when players weren't paid amid further winding-up petitions served by HMRC which were finally settled in August 2010.

The club had suffered relegation back to the basement division of the EFL against that backdrop in 2010 and, when those financial problems resurfaced in 2019, the outcome was even worse. Players were paid late, the PFA were involved again, and again there were unpaid taxes owed to HMRC, with the EFL fining the club and imposing a suspended points deduction.

A succession of poor managerial appointments, from Kevin Bond to Sol Campbell to Mark Molesley and culminating in Phil Brown's second spell in charge, together with repeated transfer embargoes stifling their ability to strengthen the squad, meant the club were relegated into non-league football for the first time in over a hundred years in 2021.

The malaise and toxicity around the club was only exacerbated by supporters being unable to attend matches due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The fans felt distanced from the squad and the club, having been

forced to watch its demise through the EFL's streaming service and without an outlet to voice their frustrations.

Stan Collymore - who launched his career during a short spell with the Shrimpers in the early 1990s - has retained his love of the club, and he helped encourage Ron Martin to appoint a Chief Executive for the first time in five years in 2021. He then helped convince the owner to install former captain Kevin Maher as Head Coach alongside Darren Currie and another former player, Mark Bentley.



The relationship between the supporters and the squad began to be rebuilt, and results on the pitch have turned around spectacularly. From a dalliance with the National League relegation zone when they arrived in October 2021, the coaching team managed to turn fortunes around to the extent that the club missed out on a play-off place by just two points in 2022/23.

Despite that on-field success, many supporters find it difficult to forgive Ron Martin for being responsible for the club not being in the EFL, and this has been exacerbated by his inability to pay the taxman, local suppliers, players, coaches and hardworking non-playing staff on time.

Having arrived at the club with dreams of developing Roots Hall and masterminding the construction of a new stadium at Fossetts Farm, planning permission for which was initially granted in 2008, he has shown himself to have been incapable of delivering that ultimate dream alone.

The past 12 months have seen the club's problems intensify, with trips to the High Court arriving with ever-increasing regularity. Indeed, so dire has the situation become, the Shrimpers Trust made a loan of £40,000 to cover a serious shortfall in wages due to non-playing staff in November 2022, and this was matched by the club's main shirt sponsor, PG Site Services. A GoFundMe fundraising initiative then generated a further £20,000 contribution towards the wages of backroom staff later that month.

The club's reputation amongst players, other clubs and local businesses, not to mention football and Government authorities, has been tarnished and, despite the £2 million development of a new training ground (albeit without any permanent buildings) potentially opening the path for building work to begin on the site of the existing training facility, the club remains at a crumbling Roots Hall for now.



Bridging finance, reported to be around £5 million to settle an outstanding HMRC debt as well as ensuring the club, and Ron Martin's other companies, survived until the summer of 2023, was promised in "weeks not months" in a club statement in October. Having seen a winding-up petition adjourned in November and again in January, the next date at the High Court was marked "final".

Supporters established a working group to explore the possibility of setting up a phoenix club should Southend United FC be liquidated in March, but the money was found and so the winding-up petition was dismissed. However, there was already more money outstanding to HMRC, and the National League refused to lift a transfer and registration embargo as a consequence.

In March, statement signing Kacper Lopata requested to be released due to a breach of contract, a decision that was upheld following a club appeal. Shortly after seeing off the winding-up petition, Ron Martin publicly announced the launch of a strategic review and invited offers for a purchase of or investment in Southend United FC.



2023/24 season tickets were put on sale to supporters with the club having been served with yet another winding-up petition by HMRC for unpaid tax, and at the end of May Southend United had to go to the Insolvency & Companies Court to apply for its bank account to be unfrozen in order to pay staff. The National League imposed a deadline of 31st May for the outstanding 2020 and 2021 accounts to be filed in order for a conditional license to be granted, a deadline which was met with minutes to spare.

The summer continued with an air of uncertainty hanging over Roots Hall and the Shrimpers Trust establishing a hardship fund for staff, some of whom had not received their wages for four months. The fund has raised over £30,000 to date. July's appearance in the High Court saw a further adjournment to the winding-up petition, whilst the club again had to apply for its bank account to be unfrozen whilst the water supply was disconnected at the training ground and E.On took Southend United to court to apply for a warrant to take similar action in respect of unpaid electricity bills. 165 volunteers from the fanbase and local tradesman combined with just one week remaining until the start of the season to carry out essential work at Roots Hall to enable it to host National League football in 2023/24, with the league imposing a requirement on the club to bring all payments to Football creditors up-to-date and to meet all obligations to HMRC by the time of the next hearing in order to meet the terms of its license.

When that deadline was missed on 23rd August, with Judge Prentis explaining in adjourning the winding-up petition again that, without the particular attachment of the fans to the football club he would have been minded to have liquidated the business, the National League imposed a ten-point penalty on Southend United's players, staff and supporters.

The winding-up petition was finally dismissed on 4th October, thanks to the help of interested buyer Justin Rees, but his purchase of the club is proving to be a protracted process. Despite the dismissal of the most recent winding-up petition and the seeming agreement of repayment amounts and plans with other creditors, Southend United remains under a registration embargo from the National League due to further arrears to HMRC. This embargo has been in place since September 2022 and will remain until the ongoing sale of the club completes in full and the rest of the outstanding debt to HMRC is paid, which it is hoped will happen by the end of November.



Built by the fans, given to the Club

Roots Hall

Southend United had initially played fixtures at the site upon which Roots Hall is housed between 1906 and 1915, but was forced to move to a ground at The Kursaal following the First World War as the area had been designated for storage. Another move, to the Southend Stadium in Grainger Road in 1934, followed before a return to Roots Hall in 1955.

The new Roots Hall had been built entirely by internal labour with Sid Broomfield leading a small band of individuals in constructing the stadium we know and love today. The entire £73,997 cost of the stadium, save for a small grant from The FA, was met by the Supporters Club after an extensive fund-raising programme.

Following the construction of Roots Hall, the ground was donated to the Football Club by the fans, before subsequently being transferred from Southend United FC into the ownership of Ron Martin, via his Roots Hall Limited vehicle, in 1998.

A record 31,033 packed into the ground in 1979 to watch the FA Cup tie against Liverpool, but financial problems in the

1980s saw much of the land occupied by the massive South Bank sold for residential development, and a new all-seater but much smaller two-tiered stand was built as a replacement in 1994.



Other previous areas of terracing had seats bolted onto them during this period to conform with the recommendations of the post-Hillsborough Taylor Report, but since then the ground has been neglected, resulting in 165 volunteers helping to get Roots Hall ready for the start of the 2023/24 season just seven days before the campaign kicked off.

Plans intensified for a relocation to a new ground at Fossetts Farm in the late 1990s and were originally approved by the local councils in Southend-on-Sea and neighbouring Rochford in 2007, and by the Government in March 2008, but have yet to come to fruition.



The Stadium that never was

Fossetts Farm

After the sale of Roots Hall in March 1999 effectively set a timer on Southend's remaining four years at Roots Hall, a nervous six months followed before chairman John Main revealed in September 1999 that the blueprints on a 15,000 all-seater stadium at land off Eastern Avenue, known as Fossetts Farm, were almost ready to be handed over to Southend Council.

Progress hit a snag when the discovery of a Bronze Age burial site on part of the land where the stadium was to be built meant a delay while things were smoothed over with English Heritage.

Under the terms of the sale at Roots Hall, a 12-month rent free period was due to expire, but Main appeased fans slightly by confidently predicting that grace could be extended by another six months while the problems with the planning application were ironed out. It transpired that Southend United hadn't in fact bought all the land they required to build a new home - an important strip still belonged to Lansbury Developments. An agreement could not be reached and Southend Council had to be called upon to invoke compulsory purchase powers on the land, effectively forcing it into the hands of Ron Martin and co.

Plans were finally submitted in July 2000, with the stadium, now with a 16,000 capacity, forming just part of an ambitious, £46 million leisure development that included a hotel, cinema and restaurants. Martin said he hoped planning consent would be delivered by the Autumn, but in fact the council and the club both pulled out of subsequent planning meetings and it began to look like the project had stalled.

The club's future at Roots Hall was still uncertain, and a fans action group, Save Our Southend, had been set up aiming to prevent the club being made homeless. In December 2002, after more than two years of uncertainty, it was announced that Blues had reached an agreement with Lansbury Developments, and the short-term future at Roots Hall was secured.



In 2006, Ron Martin became sole owner of the club, buying out partners Delancey Estates' share in the club's parent company, South Eastern Leisure. Later that year, plans were drawn up for a new stadium at Fossetts Farm, holding 17,000. Ron Martin and the club encouraged fans to march to Southend's Civic Centre to support the scheme, with the plans being delivered to the council. Designed by Populous, who had delivered Arsenal's new stadium at Ashburton Grove, it featured the stadium at the north end of a large retail park. Roots Hall would become a supermarket, with Sainsburys planning to build a giant superstore on the site.

In January 2007, both Southend and Rochford Council (where the training facility was due to be based) passed the applications. However, two crucial elements led to these plans failing. First, the Government opted to call in the application due it being situated on green belt land. This resulted in a considerable delay to progress until the Secretary of State finally granted approval

in March 2008. Then, the financial crisis of 2007/08 meant banks were unwilling to lend the money. Initially the delay was anticipated to be a year. But the years went by, and no progress was made on the plans. For a time, progress was held up by the failure by Sainsburys to buy six shops on the Roots Hall site, near the corner of Victoria Avenue and Fairfax Drive. Eventually, in November 2010, Southend Council granted powers to compulsory purchase the shops, but not before owner Ron Martin had again called on fans to support him, launching an extraordinary campaign against those business owners.

In February 2011, Blues were granted permission to build their new home in two stages, a three-sided stadium holding 13,942 seats, and a main stand holding a further 8,000 people to be built later. The demolition of Roots Hall could not begin until the first phase of the new stadium had been completed, and Sainsburys were to fund the build of the first phase.



However, more complications, this time with land on the Roots Hall site owned by Prospects College, proved a barrier to progress as Sainsburys, who were planning to build a supermarket on the Roots Hall site, could not come to an agreement with the college. In July 2011, a 'frustrated' Neil Bates, chief executive of Prospects, said the deal for the Roots Hall site was dead. A deal was eventually agreed in 2012, for £2million, and progress was expected to follow.

However, as time went on, and again no progress was forthcoming, it became apparent that Sainsburys had gone cold on the idea of purchasing Roots Hall, with the public's appetite for large superstores appearing to wane. Football carried on at Roots Hall, and it appeared that the plans for a new stadium were, for the time being, on long-term hold.

In 2015, it was revealed that Ron Martin had brought real estate giant British Land to the table, and revised plans including considerably more homes, 245 compared to the 67 in the 2008 plans. The stadium was to hold 21,000 people. However, concerns remained about the potential impact on Southend High Street, with a retail element still present within the plans as well as a cinema and a hotel as well as numerous free parking spaces.

In April 2017, hoardings were erected around the proposed new training pitch on Rochford Council land, and a new, revised planning application was submitted. Sainsburys were out of the picture, but once again the plans were beset by delays while the club and council negotiated on elements of the proposals.

Finally, in April 2000, it was revealed that a deal had been struck between Thames Plaza, Citizen Housing and Southend Council to build 1,300 homes at Roots Hall and Fossetts Farm. The retail element was completely axed, which took away the concerns that the scheme would damage the town centre. The stadium would incorporate many of the homes in a 'wraparound' design. A hotel was still planned for the site, with Hilton said to be the operator. For the first time, Ron Martin's son Jack was connected to the plans, named as a director of Thames Plaza and Citizen Housing (which he owns 50/50 with Allied Commercial Exporters, founded by retail giant Jack Dellal). Under the plans, Southend Council would be involved in providing the homes on site for affordable rents.

Revised plans were granted approval in October 2021 with Homes England to lend £30 million for construction costs, 502 homes to be built at Roots Hall and a further 800 at Fossetts Farm, many of which are incorporated into the stadium in a 'wraparound' design.

In June 2022, it was revealed the club was to resubmit plans for Fossetts Farm, cutting stadium capacity to 17,000 and making other amends to the three-sided first phase of the stadium (the fourth, main stand would be built later).

With work starting on a new training ground in Autumn 2022 following a deal struck with White Horse Contractors, it finally appeared that the stadium plans might go ahead after all. However, the club's financial difficulties continued to cast a shadow. Work was slower than anticipated, and eventually Ron Martin resubmitted plans in March 2023, this time cutting the stadium size to 16,226 and cutting the hotel element from the plans, adding 42 more homes in their place.

To date, these plans have not been heard by the council, and it is looking increasingly likely that the plan to move Southend United to Fossetts Farm, which has underpinned the last 24 years of the club's existence, may finally be over.



The Social Impact of Southend United

The social impact of Southend United Football Club is worth £10.3m annually.

The social impact of Southend United Football Club is worth £10.3m annually, engaging over 100,000 people through the work of more than 65,000 staff and voluntary hours, delivering education and skills, community cohesion and improved health. Around 150 staff are directly employed at Roots Hall and hundreds of others through local businesses depend on it being open.

Football promoted through local charities and youth services radiating out of Roots Hall offers positive futures and engagement for young people. Losing Roots Hall would end existing outreach and engagement through our voluntary sector partners; adversely impacting marginalised groups and schools.

As the UK Government White Paper for Football set out, football clubs are community assets with cultural heritage value. In addition to the direct and indirect economic benefits they deliver to local areas, they benefit wider society. Clubs often engage in community initiatives, and contribute to civic identity and pride in

place. In the event of a football club failing, these contributions may be partially or fully lost.

Tracey Crouch's Fan-Led Review found that the loss of football clubs can 'hollow out' towns and communities. In addition to the social impacts, this can lead to long-term economic damage ('scarring') as local economies can no longer benefit from the positive growth multipliers associated with football clubs.



100,000

people engaged through education, skills, community cohesion and improved health

65,000

staff and voluntary hours



150

members of staff are directly employed at Roots Hall

100's

of people employed through other local businesses depend on Roots Hall being open

Southend United

Community & Education Trust

SUCET is incredibly proud of its affiliation with Southend United Football Club, but the Community & Educational Trust is about so much more than football. It was established as a registered charity in 2004, delivering approximately 25 separate programmes of work across Southend-on-Sea and South Essex.

The organisation strives to engage with, and enrich the lives of, people of all ages, abilities, backgrounds and interests. SUCET uses its varied Sports Participation, Health & Wellbeing, Education & Training and Community Cohesion schemes to reach people throughout South East Essex - offering something for everyone!

SUCET is driven by its Million Mission - a commitment to engage with one million people through the brand of Southend United Football Club between 2016 and 2026. At the start of that period, its social value to Southend, and South East Essex communities more generally, was £10.3m.

Programmes include

- Training courses from entry-level qualifications up to Degree level
- IT lessons for the elderly
- Regular outings for 'Senior Shrimpers'
- Players making motivational visits to various organisations including schools, holiday camps and celebration events.

Measuring the Impact of Clubs in the Community (2019 research)

People: 64,239 hours (8,565 days, 1,713 person weeks) per annum are spent on community-related work by the Club Community Organisation (CCO) and club staff, volunteers and supporters

Players: are involved in 319 community activities annually, including work in anti-racism, disability football, hospice visits, matchday experiences, social and community cohesion

Facilities: The club/CCO has access to one full-size grass pitch and three meeting rooms that it utilises for CCO and/or community initiatives, on occasion at subsidised rates. The facilities generate £2,500 per year for the club/CCO.

The Academy

Until the removal of EFL funding in the summer of 2023, Southend United operated a Category Three Academy under the Elite Player Performance Plan, which was introduced in 2012 with the intention to produce more, and improve the quality of, homegrown players.

Using data from 2017/18 to 2019/20, the Academy was ranked ninth in the EFL and second amongst Category Three Academies for productivity (and eighth amongst Category Three Academies over a 12-year period from 2008/09 to 2019/20).

Only one first-team fixture in the past ten years hasn't featured an Academy product in the matchday squad. This represents 572 of the past 573 first-team squads that has contained a former or current youth team player either on the pitch or on the substitutes bench.

Other notable achievements

- 61 Academy graduates have made a first-team appearance since 2002/03, with 24 of those players having been born in Essex.
- A total of 1626 appearances have been made by players who have emerged through The Academy during that period. This equates to roughly one-and-a-half Academy graduates playing per game over this period.
- The Academy has generated over £4 million in player sales over the last 20 years.
- Alumni include Michael Kightly (Wolves, Stoke City and Burnley), Daniel Bentley (Wolves), Glen Kamara (Rangers), Isaac Hayden (Newcastle United), Stephy Mavididi (Juventus and Leicester City) and George Murray-Jones (Manchester City).



The Shrimpers Trust

The Shrimpers Trust is a legal entity created and run by passionate Southend United supporters whose main aim is to ensure that professional football remains in the city of Southend-on-Sea.

The Trust was originally formed in 2000 just after the current owner, Ron Martin, took over the club from Vic Jobson, when the principals became increasingly concerned at the prospect of the club being owned by a property developer.

Over the past 20 years, the Trust has attempted to hold the club's owner to account during regular liaison meetings, and has worked closely with other supporters' groups. It has donated over £200,000 to the club during that period, as well as a further £50,000 in donations to charity and other good causes.

During the past year, the Shrimpers Trust has worked tirelessly to safeguard the club's short, medium and long-term interests, hosting online meetings with other supporters' groups and keeping the fanbase updated through regular communications. Indeed, over the past 12 months the Shrimpers Trust has issued 24 statements, as well as helping to compose a further 23 with the combined supporters' groups.

The Trust has also provided financial support courtesy of a £40,000 loan to assist with the payment on non-playing staff, establishing a hardship fund for club staff that had not been paid, lobbying local and national MPs and liaising with Southend-on-Sea City Council and prospective new owners.

Now representing in excess of 1500 adult members, as well as administering a Junior Blues section of 300+ members on behalf of the club, the Shrimpers Trust also consults regularly with other supporters' trusts and the Football Supporters Association in our attempts to protect the future of the club.

On 19th September 2023, The Trust submitted an Expression of Interest in applying to the UK Government's Community Ownership Fund, following this up with a membership drive and a fan engagement survey.

As membership numbers have swelled in the past month, the Trust's mandate has grown stronger, its voice has grown louder and its ability to serve the fanbase has been greatly enhanced with every single person that has signed up.

The organisation helps to bring disadvantaged groups to Roots Hall as part of a social inclusion project; formed the Southend United Ex-Players Association (SUEPA), possibly the largest ex-players association in the world, to celebrate the achievements of our former heroes; organises away travel to all first-team fixtures; and runs social events throughout the season.

The Shrimpers Trust seeks to promote supporter influence, giving fans and the community more of a say in the running and ownership of Southend United; to represent supporters and the local community by being a democratic voice; to promote community engagement, and request the same of the football club.

It aims to encourage good governance, and influence Southend United FC to operate democratically, fairly, sustainably, transparently and with financial responsibility as well; and to be inclusive, open and accessible to all supporters of the club regardless of their age, income, location, ethnicity, gender, disability, sexuality or religious or moral beliefs.



SUEPA

Southend United Ex-Players Association

The Southend United Ex-Players Association (SUEPA) was formed by The Shrimpers Trust on 10th January 2018. From a standing start it has now grown into what is quite possibly the largest former players group in the world.



The inspiration was a tribute campaign run by the Trust in the autumn of 2017 for our record appearances holder, Alan Moody, when just over £11,500 was raised by the fans to help purchase a specially-adapted car to meet Alan's new needs. Alan came back to Roots Hall to receive the cheque with a number of his old team-mates and friends present. The day went so well that we simply thought 'we must do more of that', and so SUEPA was born.

The aims of SUEPA

- To help rekindle player relationships by putting ex-players in touch with each other
- On occasion and where possible, to help ex-players facing difficulties
- To celebrate past achievements
- To hold events from time to time
- Help promote a positive image for the club

- Allow fans to meet their former heroes when appropriate
- To also create a few new memories along the way.

As of 1 May 2023, there were over 450 ex-player/coaching staff members, spanning the decades right from the 1950s to the present day. The SUEPA President is none other than former captain and local boy Adam Barrett, who is hugely supportive of what we do.

Activities are self-funded or supported by the Shrimpers Trust, whilst a number of donations have also been received. SUEPA also works very closely with the club who have been generous in providing hospitality facilities for a number of matchday events when former players have returned to Roots Hall.

A sell-out event was held on 18th February 2023 with 25 out of the 49 players Dave Smith used during his seven-year Roots Hall tenure as manager paying tribute to the great man and raising over £3,000 for various causes in the process. A match to raise money towards care for former forward James Walker on 28th May 2023 subsequently raised over £20,000.

SUEPA is supportive of many fund-raising activities to help either the club or local charities and is always willing to help former players where practical. It is with the latter in mind that a strong link has now been forged with the Professional Footballers Association, and the organisation is hopeful that a key initiative - the setting up of a national network of former player groups - will soon get under way.

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“I'm very proud to say that Southend United Ex-Players Association is a great exemplar of work in this area. It is one of the largest in this country, with 465 members and includes players going as far back as the 1950s, and at least a dozen members of SUEPA have some form of degenerative condition. SUEPA, which is founded and led by Andy Leeder, provides fantastic support to former players.”

Anna Firth at the House of Commons

The UK Government White Paper for Football:

'A sustainable future – reforming club football governance'

On February 23rd 2023, the Government published the long awaited policy paper 'A sustainable future - reforming club football governance' following on from Tracey Crouch CBE MP's groundbreaking 'The Fan-Led Review of Football Governance'.

The policy paper introduced the Government's proposed outline for a Football Regulator. The Regulator's primary strategic purpose will be to ensure that English football is sustainable and resilient, for the benefit of fans and the local communities football clubs serve.

The Football Regulator

The Regulator will require clubs to:

- Demonstrate good basic financial practices;
- Have appropriate financial resources or 'buffers' to meet cash flows and financial shocks; and
- Protect the core assets of the club - such as the stadium - from harm.

The Regulator will establish new tests for prospective owners and directors of football clubs. The new tests will consist of 3 key elements:

1. A fitness and propriety test, to ensure integrity of owners and directors.
2. Enhanced due diligence of source of wealth (owners).
3. A requirement for robust financial plans (owners).

The Regulator will implement a minimum standard of fan engagement. Supporter engagement can mean different things to different people. In the context of this regulatory system, it means dialogue between a football club and its fans, ensuring that the views of fans are listened to and acted upon.

The Regulator will have a targeted power of last resort to intervene in relation to financial distributions, to deliver a solution if football fails to find one itself. It will also add, and reinforce existing, protections around club heritage. The Regulator will require clubs to comply with The Football Association on its new rules for club heritage.

The Regulator will ensure the domestic regulatory landscape remains coherent and simple for all involved.

While the specific requirements of the Football Club Corporate Governance Code would be established by the Regulator, indicative requirements may be linked to the following 5 areas:

- **Structure:** clubs shall have a clear, appropriate governance structure with a properly constituted board that makes decisions collectively.
- **People:** clubs shall recruit and engage people with appropriate skills, knowledge, experience and independence to further the club's goals.
- **Communication:** clubs shall be transparent and accountable, engaging effectively with fans and other stakeholders.
- **Standards and conduct:** clubs shall uphold high standards of integrity, appropriately address breaches of those standards, and engage in regular evaluation to drive continuous improvement.

- **Policies and processes:** clubs shall comply with all applicable laws and regulations, undertake responsible financial strategic planning, and have appropriate controls and risk management procedures.

The Regulator would hold a club's senior management accountable for the club's decisions and for compliance with regulation. Every club would be required to make it clear which individuals have significant decision-making influence at the club, and whether the owner is involved in day-to-day decisions. This means, where appropriate, it could take enforcement action against individuals as well as, or instead of, clubs.

The Regulator would have an expert advisory panel, appointed by the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport and separate from the Board. Panel members would have expertise across a range of sectors and disciplines, including football. The Board would be able to draw on the Panel to form a Regulatory Decisions Committee (RDC) to advise on certain key or complex regulatory decisions, such as enforcement action.

Consultation responses

The FA Response to the White Paper (17th April 2023)

“The FA has stated its support for more independent financial regulation of football since the Fan-Led Review was published.

One of our key concerns is the financial support for the whole football pyramid.

This could be a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to support and secure the future of 18,000 clubs across the National League System and grassroots pyramid.

The need for redistribution to the grassroots was recognised in the Fan Led Review, but not the White Paper, so we are

recommending that the Regulator ensures that any redistribution of income from the professional game covers the whole football pyramid, including the grassroots game.

We support the White Paper’s proposals to ensure that every club has an appropriate level of fan engagement. The design of such requirements will need full consultation with fans. We also welcome the White Paper’s positive acknowledgement of the changes made to FA Rules with respect to club heritage and necessary fan engagement and we will continue to work with the Government on the issue of ground locations.”

EFL Response to the White Paper (22nd February 2023)

“The EFL has been clear that the English game needs a fundamental financial reset in order to make the game sustainable so that all Clubs can continue to serve their supporters and communities long into the future.

After an extensive period of consultation, the EFL is therefore pleased to note that the Government’s announcement regarding an Independent Regulator proposes to “oversee the financial sustainability of the game” and we welcome that a Regulator will have

“targeted powers of last resort to intervene and facilitate an agreement as and when necessary”, should football be unable to find a funding agreement that safeguards the future of our pyramid for the long term.

Going hand-in-hand with financial reform, the League is supportive of proposals relating to enhanced regulation and looks forward to consulting with Government on matters including Club Licensing, the Owners and Directors Test, and heritage protection in the period ahead.”

Government response to the consultations

On September 7th 2023, the Government published its response to the consultation on the on the policy paper and Southend United were mentioned prominently:

Southend United

The club has had a series of financial difficulties including payroll deadlines being missed, loan payments not being made, and obligations to HMRC not being met. HMRC has issued 18 winding-up petitions to Southend United in the past 25 years, each of which could have led to administration or liquidation. The club narrowly escaped this

“21. The financial situations of a number of clubs have significantly worsened in recent months, highlighting the need for the government to deliver at pace.

in February 2023, but a further winding-up petition was issued by HMRC in May 2023. Backroom staff and academy players were not paid for 2 months at the start of 2023, and at the time of publication, Southend United was under an ongoing transfer embargo.”

4.2 Next steps and future legislation

86. We are keen to continue this engagement with stakeholders, as well as experts from various fields, to inform, fine-tune and stress-test our policy proposals, to make sure they are able to achieve the reform required in a manner appropriate to this

uniquely important industry. We are moving at pace to deliver this much-needed, coherent and effective model of regulation that safeguards the success story of the beautiful game.



FSA statement related to the consultation response (7th September 2023)

“The Government has today (Thursday 7th September) published its response to the consultation on the Football Governance White Paper.

The Football Supporters’ Association was consulted alongside football clubs, the FA, leagues, football-related organisations and other experts.

The response makes clear the Government is sticking by its commitment to an independent regulator in the game – the case for reform is strong and legislation will be brought forward “when Parliamentary time allows”.

The document, titled A Sustainable Future – Reforming Club Football Governance, says that “football has failed to adequately resolve these issues itself, which is why statutory regulatory intervention is required”.

A commitment to legislation is expected in November’s King’s Speech.

The promise of a football regulator remains and it will be independent of government with a tight focus on financial sustainability as this is where “there is clear evidence of market failure”.

Despite football having more money than ever before, too many clubs are still in severe financial difficulties. A regulator will have powers to intervene before things get to that stage.

There’s an acknowledgement that “fans are the most important stakeholder for any club” and must be engaged on cultural heritage issues – examples would be stadium moves and home shirt colour changes.

Sports minister Stuart Andrew MP said: “Our proposals will see the introduction of a new independent regulator for English football clubs, with the primary strategic purpose of ensuring that English football is sustainable and resilient, for the benefits of fans and the local communities they serve. This will help to protect our national game.”

The FSA used an image of Southend United’s #MartinOut protests as their header



Football Supporters Association response

Kevin Miles, chief executive of the FSA, said: “Football has more money than ever before, yet we still see professional clubs teetering on the edge of existence.”

“We’ve made the case for an independent regulator for many years and today’s Government response makes clear, once again, that they recognise the need for one too.”

“We expect to see a further commitment to that in November’s King’s Speech which can ultimately deliver a regulator to protect our clubs and their heritage while improving supporter engagement.”



All-Party Parliamentary Group for Football Supporters (APPG)

Chair of the APPG for Football Supporters, Ian Mearns MP, said: “The Football Governance White Paper’s recommendation to implement an independent regulator is fully supported by our APPG and we look forward to seeing its inclusion in November’s King Speech. We’ll continue to back the FSA in making that happen.”

Joint Letter to

The Rt Hon Lucy Frazer KC MP

On the 18th October 2023, Southend West MP Anna Firth, met with Stuart Andrew MP, Minister of State for Sport.

Anna Firth outlined the Shrimpers Trust's thoughts, as well as her personal thoughts, on what role the anticipated Independent Regulator for English Football (IREF) must have and how it could be implemented.

At this meeting, a joint letter from The Shrimpers Trust and Anna Firth to The Rt Hon Lucy Frazer KC MP, Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport was shared with the minister.



”

“I am thrilled to have secured this latest meeting with Minister Andrew, who has always been incredibly concerned with the issues facing Southend United and willing to engage with me and help however he could.

I welcome his pledge to engage constructively with the Shrimpers Trust as I know it will be of huge benefit to all parties and will most importantly, help ensure dire situations like the one at Southend United will never be repeated.

I look forward to welcoming the Minister to Roots Hall and to showing him the fantastic Southend United crowds and what a brilliant community led football club we are.”

Anna Firth MP

ANNA FIRTH MP
Member of Parliament for Southend West

HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

The Rt Hon Lucy Frazer KC MP
Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport
Department for Culture Media & Sport
100 Parliament Street
London
SW1A 2BQ

Our Ref: AF6565

9 October 2023

Dear Lucy,

Re: Southend United Football Club

As the MP for Southend United Football Club, that was saved from liquidation last week, I welcome the news that progress has been made an agreement between the Premier League and the lower leagues over broadcasting rights and revenues, as does the Shrimpers Trust, the main Southend United supporters association, who are co-signatories to this letter.

We are both aware of the deep impact that football clubs have on our constituents and communities, hence it is essential that this deal is the right one.

We believe that a deal must ensure that the key issues facing clubs are properly addressed: a fair share of income from broadcast revenues - and a damper on runaway costs from excessive growth in player wages.

Broadcasting revenues have already transformed our game and are a lifeblood that must flow through to benefit all parts of the football pyramid. Clubs playing at the higher levels of the game have access to different sources of funding for prudent investment than clubs in lower leagues.

Firstly, therefore, it seems reasonable then that this should be reflected in a larger proportionate share for lower league clubs in the agreement.

It is also important that those revenues are not simply channelled into higher player wages. If we are really concerned about the wider contribution of a club to the community it sits within, then the growing tendency for clubs to find themselves in an arms race over growing players' wages is not sustainable. They are taking a huge risk with these payments - often committing to wage levels that can only be met if they are successful. They are therefore likely to be damned if they do pay - but definitely damned if they don't.

Secondly, we hope an agreement can be found to potentially ring-fence some of the monies - at all levels - for infrastructure development, for community work, grass roots development, youth work and a variety of apprenticeships. All of these help clubs grow deeper roots into the community of which they are a part.

Third, while parachute payments are sensible, they must not reward or compensate failure. Sport generates winners and losers - much like elections. It is reasonable that parachute payments are there, but for an orderly wind down of reasonable business commitments, not to fully compensate losses, reckless risk taking, poor business administration or to provide an advantage over other clubs for the next season's push for promotion.

Fourth and arguably the most important, football clubs are most commonly exploited for their bricks and mortar assets. The Regulator, legislation and local authorities need powers to protect those assets from being used as a bargaining chip for private gain and/or collateral against which funds can be borrowed. Opaque corporate structures, including offshore shareholdings, can not be permitted. Fans are expected to put their hands in their pockets for clubs and thus deserve to know how that money is being used.

As part of the legislation, fans also deserve to be organised and educated on the risks that club custodians present. Formal education and training should be given to each clubs' nominated fans organisation by the Regulator, to ensure the supporters groups have the contacts they need to raise concerns proactively and allow them to address issues with the regulator, before they are able to escalate.

I hope you would agree that the Shrimpers Trust should be at the very core of discussions when Government is finalising the new legislation, given the large scope of recent experiences and current on-going change of custodian. After all, there can be no debate that the most powerful form of regulation is a club's own fanbase and therefore the independent regulator may be required to intervene far less if a robust structure of material fan involvement and ownership, and ideally a requirement for fan representation on the board, can be implemented effectively.

Taken together, we believe these reasonable and proportionate measures, will secure long term benefit for clubs, the game and society as a whole.

We know your department is giving close consideration to regulation of the game. We see this negotiation as an important test of the game's ability to provide for its long-term interests and urge you to take careful note of developments.

For the sake of the game, our clubs, and the communities they sit within,

With all best wishes,

Yours sincerely,



Anna Firth MP
Member of Parliament for Southend West



Paul FitzGerald
Chairman of the Shrimpers Trust



Righting the Rons

The Martin Model

- Single 70% Shareholder
- Accounts filed late
- Non-payment of wages
- Non-payment of tax
- Numerous creditors
- Points deductions
- Transfer embargoes

**NO PLANNING • NO GOVERNANCE
NO ACCOUNTABILITY • NO TRANSPARENCY
NO FORMAL FAN INVOLVEMENT**



The Case for Meaningful Fan Involvement

Southend United fans have shown loyalty beyond logic since their relegation from the Football League. In the 2022/23 season average gates were in excess of 6,000 and a recent membership drive from the Shrimpers Trust has seen an increase of over 68%.

The fans at any club are those that turn up week-in, week-out, in sickness and in health, for richer for poorer, 'til death do they part. The goals of the fans are no different to that of private owners: growth, increased income, better players, better performances, higher divisions, bigger opponents, better facilities, bigger crowds, more money etc. The difference between the fanbase and the owners is the understanding of long-term strategy, both forwards and backwards. Football fans are rooted in tradition, routine and identity; while we're keen to preserve, we're keen to build.

Sustainability is not a new concept. It has been a fundamental approach for community projects for centuries. The idea that something a group of people can build for the enjoyment of their children, grandchildren and their whole bloodline is why football clubs were created in the first place. The place for fans is absolutely in the boardroom, to help with the direction of the club and to provide a sense of perspective.

In Southend United's case, meaningful fan involvement would have seen the current owner's plans to move the club to a new ground discussed and potentially sidelined in favour of developing the existing ground. It might have encouraged the current owner to submit the club's accounts on time, or pay its tax bill on time, or pay its staff on time.

Meaningful fan involvement can look like anything, but it must fundamentally be about holding power to account and preventing clubs that form part of local cultural heritage from disappearing due to mismanagement or even criminal activities. Fans know where they've come from, and they know where they want to get to. We turn up in numbers and play our part, so there's no reason why we can't be involved in discussions about what that journey looks like.



Ownership Structures

In the UK Government White Paper for Football, 'A sustainable future - reforming club football governance', the proposed threshold conditions for clubs to obtain a license are: adequate resources, fit and proper custodians, fan interests and participation in approved conditions.

The proposed Independent Regulator would have the ability to assess the suitability of owners in line with an improved Owners & Directors Test and to encourage fan engagement, amongst other key proposals.

Fan involvement and governance can and does occur in a variety of ways across different clubs whose owners have formally invited supporters into the boardroom. During the course of our research, we found that fan ownership/involvement was often preceded by insolvency events such as administration, sometimes at the eleventh hour prior.

Fans are key stakeholders. Even in the modern age of TV audiences, club 'size' is denoted by stadium capacity and away attendances seen as a key metric of fan

loyalty. Supporters are interested in the long-term, sustainable success of their team and so are able to make valuable input at board level, combining a sense of tradition and local knowledge with a sense of perspective for the future of the football club and all it represents in perpetuity.



Here follows some examples of how fans might be formally involved in a club's hierarchy and therefore improve the structure of the club and make it more representative of the supporters and local community:

1. Shareholding in the football club - This is the simplest legal method of fan involvement, whereby a formal supporters organisation would simply purchase shares in the business of the football club. This is an expensive option but allows fans certain legal powers at different shareholder percentages. With a shareholding of more than 25%, fans would be able to block special resolutions (such as amendments to the club's Articles of Association) called by the majority shareholder. The downside of this is that the club can issue new shares at any time and effectively dilute the supporter shareholding;

2. Shareholding in a club's tangible assets - Generally speaking, football clubs have two tangible assets: a stadium to host matches and a training ground for work during the week. Recent trends have seen club owners separate their bricks & mortar assets from their football clubs in an OpCo/PropCo structure that sees owners take direct legal control of valuable land assets. The Pitch Owners approach used at Chelsea FC sees the freehold of the land under the stadium, as well as the name Chelsea FC, owned by Chelsea Pitch Owners PLC. This approach gives the fans a controlling interest over existential matters regarding their club and forces clubs' owners to engage with fans as formal stakeholders;

3. The Golden Share - This is a single share held by one individual or legal entity. It gives the holder special veto power over certain corporate decisions, even if the holder does not own a significant percentage of the company's ordinary shares. The term "golden share" comes from the idea that the share is valuable and provides certain rights and privileges to the holder that are not available to other shareholders. In football this could mean veto over for example club name, nickname, colours, badge, stadium naming. It could also provide "seat on the board" or other formal engagements. There is no real limit, just imagination and co-operation. Brentford FC have this model in place and their golden share allows Bees United to veto sale of Brentford's football ground unless certain conditions are met;

4. Articles of Association - The Articles of Association is essentially a business's constitution. Changes require a 75% majority of shareholders to agree to any suggestions made. Suggestions may include that Official Supporters Groups may have access to certain financial information or a seat on the board. The terms and specifics would be agreed but once clauses and legal rights are enshrined in a company's Articles of Association it would need a further 75% majority to overturn them.

The Economic Impact of Football

As part of the UK Government White Paper: 'A sustainable future - reforming club football governance', Ipsos and Ecorys were commissioned to undertake research reacting to the Fan-Led Review. This research, 'Contingent Valuation of men's Professional Football Clubs and the Fan-Led Review Recommendations for DCMS', was undertaken in August 2022.

The research sought to establish the non-market value of football clubs in connection with their wider cultural heritage, and drew upon the experiences not just of football club fans, but of neutral football followers and people who don't follow the game.

61% of club fans were, in principle, willing to pay annually through a Club Heritage Fund to support the continued existence of the professional men's club they support; 22% of neutral fans would, in principle, be willing to pay annually to support the continued existence of their local club and 8% of non-football fans would, in principle, be willing to pay to support the continued existence of their local club.

The contingent valuation was £51.55 per household per year amongst club fans, £5.85 per household per year amongst neutral football fans and £0.76 per household per year amongst non-football fans. However, the lower the local club was placed in the English professional football pyramid, the greater the valuation amongst neutral football fans, with the value being £18.21 where those local clubs, like Southend United, competed in the National League.

Focus group research then looked at the drivers for that valuation. Fans from all the focus groups spoke of the positive impact professional football clubs have in their area, whether that be through charitable outreach initiatives, their heritage value or

the economic benefits they bring to the area. There was also widespread agreement that fans should be consulted over key decisions that could lead to a loss of heritage or community benefit.

Away travel

So far in the 2023/24 season (as of 7th November), an average of 739 Southend United fans have supported the team at National League away fixtures (2022/23: 680), with an average of 160 opposition fans travelling away to support their team when playing against Southend at Roots Hall (2022/23: 212).

Southend's average away following shows the potential for a growth in away followings at Roots Hall should the club progress back up through the divisions and find itself competing against bigger clubs with bigger supporter bases.

Away supporters travelling in football bring undoubted economic benefits via increased

footfall every other week. They arrive in the town that they are visiting at least several hours before matches, giving them ample time to spend their money and to boost the local economy. This spending can take the form of anything from drinks in one of the local pubs, to grabbing food from a local cafe or takeaway outlet, to buying sundries in high street shops.

In the case of Saturday matches, some supporters choose to make a weekend trip out of it and stay in local hotels, thus providing an even bigger boost to the local economy. This is especially true of "destination" locations, of which Southend-on-Sea is one as a traditional seaside town.



The Concept of the Community Stadium

The concept of the community stadium has been on the rise over the last 15 years or so and there are many of them across the United Kingdom.

All have different ways of engaging with the community but are similar in that they provide facilities, amenities and services to their local communities beyond their core operations (which are often based around leading local professional/semi-professional football, rugby league and/or rugby union clubs).

A number of innovative new approaches have been used around the country to provide the 'community' element of the community stadiums. Healthcare and education provision have been used to generate an income stream and are provided as part of the wider stadium complex. Successful examples of this are with the Primary Care Trusts at both Preston and Warrington, and with higher/further education colleges at Headingley and Hull. The LNER Community Stadium in York has a variety of community and commercial uses.

Many community stadiums have received support from councils, ranging from assistance with infrastructure (e.g. the

London Borough of Brent with the Brentford Community Stadium) to direct funding and/or ownership (e.g. Colchester City Council with the JobServe Community Stadium and York City Council with the LNER Community Stadium). Where councils have got behind stadium projects, exciting community-focused initiatives have been delivered with impressive outputs for the locality.

There is also diversity in the way that these stadiums are managed and developed, with the goal being to become an accessible and affordable hub for the community. They range from being a base for outreach community sports initiatives to being full sports villages. These facilities are available to residents from all backgrounds and abilities (including young people and adults with disabilities), as well as local schools, colleges and clubs. They can also provide facilities for elite sports people from the local area.

Bringing Roots Hall into part or full community ownership would give an opportunity to provide a similar facility in Southend-on-Sea. It would become a real beacon of civic pride, exciting and enthusing the community whilst serving it, and would be a development that is fundamentally more compatible with a 21st Century, family-centred, leisure and sporting experience for supporters, visitors, amateur and professional athletes.

Southend-on-Sea's ranking in the 2019 Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) is 189 out of 317 local authorities, which makes it less deprived on average than 60% of the UK's local authorities. However, this figure masks significant differences at a more local level, with some considerable areas of deprivation in various areas of the city. Roots Hall is surrounded by and sits within 2 miles of several areas of Southend which the IMD ranks as being within the most deprived 2.7% - 30.7% of areas in the country. Community stadium services such as sporting opportunities, community outreach, educational amenities, an affordable gym, a night economy, etc. would be invaluable to the residents living within these areas, promoting physical and mental wellbeing and stimulating further mixed-use development that contributes to Southend's economic progress. They would also provide additional employment and training/development opportunities.



Shrimpers Trust Surveys

In August 2023, the Shrimpers Trust released the results from the first edition of a new monthly survey for members on matters relating to Southend United FC and the Trust's operations.

The consultation enshrines the Trust's belief that engagement with supporters is crucial to being able to represent fans' views accurately, providing a mandate for the Trust Board to make informed decisions, especially when liaising with other key stakeholders.

The success of the season card survey released by supporters' groups during the summer of 2023 showed a quick and effective understanding of the general consensus of fans could be ascertained via this method, and the Shrimpers Trust is committed to publishing the results of the surveys each month, encouraging member participation.

So far each survey has been completed by over 40% of adult members and has given an indication of support for various methods of protesting against the club's current owner and the levels of potential participation

amongst the Trust membership, about potential investment in the football club or its facilities and how members feel about Roots Hall.

Almost 90% of respondents to the September survey supported the principle of protesting against the club's current owner, whilst in the August survey over three-quarters of respondents indicated they would invest in an opportunity to purchase the Roots Hall freehold, contributing a potential £247,000 to do so.

97% of respondents to the same survey said they considered Roots Hall to be an Asset of Community Value whilst, in a subsequent survey, 92% of respondents stated they would be willing to make a monthly contribution to help purchase a stake in the future operation of the football club, with potential pledges reaching £8,000 per month.

We have used the August and September surveys as the foundations for a comprehensive, conjoint analysis of the issues raised across the full supporter-base. This allows for a detailed overview of the economic potential of that fanbase, their willingness to participate and their views.

The analysis from the September 2023 fan engagement survey is multi-faceted. It could support the Community Ownership Fund application, inform a new ownership group about the priorities of Southend United supporters, or be used as a basis for a phoenix club should this become a necessity.



Expression of Interest Submitted

As part of its efforts to help secure the future of Southend United, the Shrimpers Trust has been exploring potential pathways to fan involvement forming part of the club's future ownership structure. One such pathway could be community ownership of Roots Hall.

The Community Ownership Fund

On 19th September 2023, the Shrimpers Trust submitted, after discussions with Anna Firth MP and Southend-on-Sea city councillors, an Expression of Interest to the Community Ownership Fund (COF). This fund, administered by the UK Government's Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC), could help the Trust to bring ownership of the freehold of Roots Hall Stadium and its facilities into the hands of those who value it most – our local community of Southend-on-Sea.

This is not just about securing Southend United's future. The Expression of Interest lets the DLUHC and the Government know that our community is serious about keeping and enhancing Roots Hall, about fulfilling its potential as a pivotal community asset, and about realising all

of the opportunities and positive influence that it can bring to the health and wellbeing of the local community and economy. It lays out how this could happen and what those opportunities look like and, if successful, the partners will be invited to make a full application for financial support. This forms part of an extensive project to explore all avenues available to increase the role that supporters play in the security and long-term sustainability of Southend United FC.

The result of forthcoming Government legislation related to football governance should be that clubs like ours no longer become a burden on their communities with their facilities suffering from a lack of investment. The legislation also calls for mechanisms that allow greater fan involvement, and we are grateful for the support from policy officials within the Department for Culture, Media and Sport



(DCMS) and the Football Supporters' Association (FSA) in working with us to investigate and highlight the issues blighting Southend United FC as well as exploring pathways to help our club and others in similar situations to turn things around.

What is the Community Ownership Fund?

The COF has 4 strategic objectives:

- to provide targeted investment for communities to save and sustain local assets for community use when they would otherwise be lost
- to strengthen capacity and capability in communities, supporting them to shape their places and develop sustainable community businesses
- to empower communities in left behind places to level up
- to strengthen direct links between places across the UK and the UK Government

Programme Outcomes

For the purposes of this Fund, community ownership refers to the ownership and management of local community assets by a community organisation, in order to deliver benefits for the community and place.

This could be that the community outsources operations to the football club/a 3rd party as part of a secure, long-term lease agreement. This will also allow the community to explore other grants and investment opportunities that might aid further refurbishments/essential developments.

The fund provides up to £2m of capital match funding for the purchase of assets, refurbishment of assets and for feasibility studies for future investment opportunities.

What this might look like at Roots Hall

There are multiple success stories involving greater fan ownership and community stadium models, with the most well-known and recent being Brentford FC's Brentford Community Stadium. The Expression of Interest allows us to work with DLUHC, bid writers, specialist consultants and to call upon the fan base to bring their skills and resources to the table. It will allow us to actively explore how fan investment models could help form a new ownership structure for Southend United, and how community involvement in the stadium might benefit not only the club, but the wider City of Southend-on-Sea.

Does this mean that the community will own Southend United Football Club itself?

No, the expression of interest is the way to kick-off the process of potentially utilising Government funding for Levelling Up and enhancing communities like ours to bring Roots Hall and its facilities into community ownership. This will, of course, have a positive impact on the club itself.

As things stand, The Shrimpers Trust does not intend to attempt to buy the football club, and we have no desire to block the pathway for anyone that would deliver a fit and proper ownership model.

We do, however, believe that meaningful fan involvement should form a crucial part of that future ownership model and have encouraged supporters to have their say in helping to shape this approach as and if it progresses.



Conclusions and Recommendations

Southend United Football Club is designated as one of the most “at risk” by the UK Government for good reason.

Ron Martin’s tenure has been a leading example of how not to act as the owner and custodian of an important and historic community asset, and has proven, beyond a shadow of doubt, the urgent need for the upcoming legislation around

a new independent football regulator. We therefore feel that we are in a unique position to present our conclusions and recommendations, formed out of our own experiences and observations, and offer them to feed into the formulation of policy.

Conclusions

1. Fans are not customers; we are the key stakeholders in the football clubs. Grounded by the past, obsessed with the present, concerned for the future. Fans have been considered a nuisance and a financial tap for too long

2. Football clubs are not businesses, they are cultural heritage assets born of and represented by their communities in a sport invented in England, a country regarded as the home of fair play

3. Ron Martin is a symptom of a broken ecosystem. His actions almost destroyed (and could still destroy) a 117-year-old local institution but, without wider, sustainable changes, another may be just around the corner as Bury FC found out in 2019 and Scunthorpe United almost found out recently



Recommendations

1. The most powerful form of regulator is a club’s own fanbase. The independent regulator will not be required to intervene if a robust structure of material fan involvement and ownership can be implemented

2. Opaque corporate structures, including offshore shareholdings, cannot be permitted. Fans are expected to put their hands in their pockets for clubs, they deserve to know how that money is being used

3. Football clubs are most commonly exploited for their bricks and mortar assets. Local authorities need powers to protect those assets from being used as a bargaining chip for private gain

4. Fans deserve to be organised and educated on the risks that club custodians present. Formal education and training should be given to each clubs’ nominated fans organisation by the independent regulator to allow for relationship-forming and ground-up vigilance and management of problematic custodians.



Southend United Supporters Protests

Southend United supporters have demonstrated in an impressive show of strength against the club's ownership, with almost a thousand of them turning out in a recent march from the city's iconic pier-head to the ground at Roots Hall.

In the weeks leading up to the march, with the situation worsening and no communication forthcoming from the owner, protests had already begun to ramp up. These mostly took the form of disrupting matches for several minutes by throwing soft objects onto the pitch - tennis balls one week, and soft rubber rats another.

Football fans are versatile, passionate and determined, and the work of combined supporters' groups to bring people together to protest in a respectful and lawful manner has provided a useful outlet for many to vent their strength of feeling.

The resulting protests have been an important complement to the less public work being undertaken by the Shrimpers Trust with local and national politicians, councillors and relevant authorities. They have brought the long-overdue and much-

needed attention of the national press to our football club's plight, increasing public awareness and exerting pressure on the owner.





Dereliction and Decline

The first version and circulation of our paper, “Dereliction & Decline: The Story of Southend United Under Ron Martin”, was well-received by stakeholders and notable figures within the industry.

We present below some of the responses and testimonials that we have received for the paper, and more widely about our experiences of supporting a football club owned by an unfit and improper custodian:

Anna Firth MP for Southend West

There are 650 MPs in Westminster and only a few of them are lucky enough to have a professional football club in their constituency, but it is such a privilege to be able to say that I can represent Southend United and the incredible fan base that comes with it. I have been fortunate enough to meet lots of fans throughout the last 18 months and watching the community come together in July at the “Roots Hall Action Day” was a truly humbling experience. Hearing all your stories about Southend United and what it means to you really lends perspective to the huge importance this club has to the local community.

The Government needs to safeguard football against belligerent and unscrupulous owners who may not have the best interest of their clubs at heart. The recently released

White Paper regarding the future of football governance is undoubtedly a step in the right direction however, the proposed Independent Regulator for English Football (IREF) must be given the strength it needs to be effective at all levels of the pyramid, not just the top.

It has been a pleasure to work alongside the Shrimpers Trust to secure a future for Southend United and whilst it appears as though the short-term future for Southend has been secured, focus must turn to the long-term where Southend United not just survives but thrives. I look forward to working with the Shrimpers Trust and with the Department of Culture, Media and Sport to ensure that the legislation is effective and we do not waste this a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to safeguard the future of football for generations to come.

Football Supporters Association

The experience of Southend United fans has once again shown why strong regulation of the game of football is so badly needed. Football supporters up and down the country want to see regulation which gives real protection to clubs. Football clubs are

community assets built on hard work over generations. These community assets require good custodians not rogue owners who can destroy the hardwork and dedication it takes to build a club over generations.

ResPublica

We were proud to host the Shrimpers Trust at our Playing by the Rules: The Governance of English Football event in the launch of their Dereliction and Decline paper, at the Conservative Party Conference on 2nd October 2023 along with Southend West MP Anna Firth and Stuart Andrew MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for the DCMS. We had also previously met and exchanged views at the House of Commons launch of our report published in March 2023.

The Dereliction and Decline paper outlines, via case study, the need for an independent regulator for football and highlights the

important work that the Shrimpers Trust and other Supporters Trusts have been undertaking in lieu of this urgent reform.

We look forward to continuing working with the Shrimpers Trust to ensure the upcoming legislation prevents other football clubs from having to go through the turmoil of unfit ownership, as we push for greater transparency, accountability and meaningful supporter involvement.

Fair Game

We were pleased to meet the Shrimpers Trust at the Playing by the Rules: The Governance of English Football event hosted by Respublica at 2023 Conservative Party Conference on 2nd October along with Southend West MP Anna Firth and Stuart Andrew MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for the DCMS.

The Trust had also chosen that event to launch their excellent Dereliction and Decline paper which outlines, via case studies, the need for an independent regulator for football and stricter OADTs while also highlighting the vital work that the Shrimpers Trust and other

football Supporters Trusts have performed ahead of this urgent reform. The sad decline of Southend United, a club that has appeared in the Championship on two occasions but now finds itself in the National League, is a tragic example of the consequences of unfit and improper ownership.

We have since spoken to the Shrimpers Trust on a number of occasions and we very much look forward to keep working with them as we both push for greater levels of transparency, accountability and meaningful supporter involvement in our beautiful game.

Kieran Maguire - Author of “The Price of Football” and Podcast co-host of “The price of Football”

The state of football finances are of concern all over the UK and Europe too. From the Premier League, where 18 out of 20 clubs lose money at an operational level, to the Championship, with average operating losses of £476,000 a week, as far down as the National League, where Scunthorpe and Southend have both been looking over the precipice in recent months.

There is a culture of lack of transparency, poor or non-existent governance, owners with motives out of synch with the fans and community, and a desire for power and wealth to be concentrated in the hands of fewer and fewer people.

Southend was saved due to the importance of the club to the fanbase, the people of the town and those whose identity, history and pride come partially from their affiliation to Southend United. The club could have been another Bury or Macclesfield Town, and football has failed to learn from its history of allowing those who see football as a real estate opportunity rather than as a sporting institution that gives so much pleasure to so many people.



SHRIMPERS TRUST

For more information visit us at shrimperstrust.co.uk