

Minutes of the Blackburn Rovers Fans' Forum Meeting Monday 14th July 2025 – 6.30pm

Present – Fans' Forum

Mark Hitchen	- Chair
John Wareing	- Secretary
Attiq Ali	- Rovers SAS
Zubair Bassa	- Rovers SAS
Annette Birkbeck	- Ewood Blues
Steve Birtwell	
Terry Crawford	- Ewood Blues
Neil Duckworth	
Kenny Hodgkinson	- BRFC
Katie Hull	- Blackburn Rovers Independent Disabled Supporters Club
Chris Lofthouse	- Proud Rovers
Megan Longworth	- Her Game Too
Duncan Miller	- We Are The Rovers Trust
Glen Mullan	- We Are The Rovers Trust
Fin Rosbotham	- Junior Fans' Forum
Ivan Rosbotham	- Junior Fans' Forum

Present from BRFC

Suhail Shaikh	Chief Operating Officer
Lynsey Talbot	Head of Operations
Christina Haines	Admin, Access and Inclusion Officer/Supporter Liaison Officer
Yasir Sufi	Head of Commercial & Partnerships
Adam Owen	Head of Technical Development
Anna Melia	Head of Marketing
Rob Gill	Head of Media & Communications

1. Apologies for Absence

Ray Williamson
Savio Mathias
Bharat Parmar
Tristan Stock
Peter Bolton
Adrian Chenery
Joel Chenery
Anne-Marie Riach

2. Matters Arising from the minutes of the previous meeting 15th April 2025

None.

3. Pre-Season – including Spain Tour

YS stated that tickets for both games at the Pinetar Arena were available online from the venue. JW asked whether there would be open training sessions. YS replied that the cost that would be charged by the hotel were not justifiable.

JW asked whether any game had been arranged for the weekend of 2nd and 3rd August.

SS replied that nothing had been arranged as yet however discussions were ongoing.

4. Staffing Changes

MH wished to put on record his and the Forum's thanks to Steve Waggott for his input to the Fans Forum over the past seven years. He asked whether the club had any comment to make on the terse official statement on his departure. SS replied that he wished to make no further comment.

DM asked who was running the club in the absence of the CEO and accountable as it was noted Steve Waggott was still listed as a Director at Companies house. SS confirmed that at the moment Steve Waggott was still officially a club employee, whilst the other members of the board carry full accountability.

GM asked who would be appointing the CEO, who would be carrying out the interviewing process and, what would be their role given the leaked job description which suggested they would not be involved with the football side.

SS stated to GM, you claim to speak to the owners, why don't you ask or text them?

GM replied the question was for him.

SS stated that the owners are solely reviewing this and that they would be responsible for interviewing and ultimately making the decision on this appointment. Ewood personnel will not have input into this process, as was the case when Steve Waggott was appointed and we will be notified when the appointment is made. SS assumes the CEO will be accountable for the day to day running of the club.

JW asked about the reported departure of David Lowe.

SS replied that as far as he understood this had not happened.

GM asked why is it we have had several key employees decide Rovers is not the place for them and exit, whilst several good loyal and long serving employees have also exited the club Stuart Jones being one example, whilst managers including JDT and Eustace have also exited citing in none Rovers interviews different reasons than those suggested by Rovers?

SS advised that we would need to ask them, but Stuart Jones was at the club for 10 years. JDT did interviews with the LET when he was appointed and when he

was about to exit, which were completely opposite to what he stated previously, whilst Eustace chose to be closer to home.

GM stated that Stuart Jones had been part of an instrumental time at the club with key players coming through the academy, notably Adam Wharton who was sold for what appears to be below market value to pay bills, with no reinvestment into the squad with those funds.

SS stated that no one knew Wharton would be a good player at youth level whilst AO stated no one pays more for a championship player.

GM gave the recent £40m plus add-ons sale of Jobe Bellingham as a rebuttal, whilst refuting SS claim on Wharton who had been the worse kept secret in years as a player very much expected to progress to the first team since during the emergence of his brother.

AO acknowledged, other championship players have gone for much more money than the previous suggestion of Wharton's value being market value. In relation to Jobe Bellingham, he was actually sold after they became a Premier League side therefore the value of the sale would be higher than if he was a Championship player.

GM asked why it is we are once again at that point where we are losing players for free, or in their last years of the contracts.

SS advised how we offer players new contracts as we have done previously for example with Brereton etc, and contracts were the responsibility of the CEO and SS, the club has lost too much in terms of potential transfer revenue previously.

5. Club Communications

DM asked about the status of the Fan Engagement Plans which the EFL now require clubs to produce each season and how the club intended to report not meeting the guidelines?

LT replied that the 2024/25 survey had been submitted before the end of June in line with EFL Regulation. The 2025/26 plan was being prepared by LT, AM and YS, this would then be signed off by SS and the Board and submitted by the end of July as per EFL requirements.

GM asked whether the club were still supporting the Government's proposals regarding a Football Regulator given Steve Waggott took the lead and was extremely passionate regarding supporter involvement with their clubs. LT replied that the position of the Club remained the same as it had previously.

6. Funding

ZB asked for feedback on SS's recent visit to the owners in India. SS replied that it had been a normal trip to finalise club budgets for the coming year. The owners had provided £17m to offset operational losses in the previous year and a further £5m has recently be sent to cover for shortfalls in May and

June. Capex budget of £1.5m had been proposed for planned stadium maintenance.

DM asked for clarification on the transfer budget.

SS replied that a budget had been agreed which was slightly up on last years but below what had been requested.

GM asked whether, if the club generates funds by player sales, why the board or SS, as the clubs trusted adviser, can't come to some arrangement with the owners of crystal clarity of a said percentage of those funds being immediately available to strengthen the squad, GM asked had that question been asked? SS replied that, there was no such general agreement in place, or had the question been asked of the owners, though there had been reinvestment in the playing squad from player sales, such as when the club re-invested about 40% of Sammie Szmodics' transfer fee.

GM stated this was a small proportion given the club also sold Gallagher, Kaminski, Wharton amongst others in the same year, whilst they received payments for Raya and others, and this seems low investment in terms of money received. SS Stated that spending more money or increasing wages don't guarantee a jump in league position.

DM asked given we currently have FFP Headroom but only for a finite time, would SS be requesting the maximum budget from the owners at the previous FF Meeting, and if this request was not granted by the owners, then there was no legacy to the sale of Adam Wharton. SS replied that he did not ask as the owners would never give 15 to 20 million for transfers as this is not sustainable and does not guarantee success and the owners didn't grant the full amount, which was requested as yet this time, but it was a workable budget and was in-line with last year

DM asked what the owners' ultimate aspirations for the club were. SS stated they want a sustainable club. DM asked whether it as sustainable regardless of what division as it had been previously stated they had wanted a sustainable Premier League club.

DM asked AO is it possible for any club in the Championship to be financially sustainable. AO replied that he had agreed to come to the club based on its model of developing young players and selling them on for profit as they develop to mitigate losses. He believed that this was possible with a Category 1 academy without the owners having to put £20m pound in each season, though conceded that we could become more sustainable but not completely.

7. Season Tickets 2025-26

AM stated that information on the membership tiers would be issued in the following week and that the club had taken on board various issues with Blues membership.

YS provided some information on season ticket sales for the 2025/26 season. The club had responded to the supporters' desire to have season ticket prices launched earlier to aid affordability. The decision had been made to launch in March ahead of the club having a run of three games against teams in the relegation fight, however YS stated it turned out to be the worst possible time to launch due to the Head Coach leaving, the run of results and the negativity on social media. Currently the number of season ticket sold were 3.6% down on the total sales at the same time in the previous season, but revenue was up by 10%. In phase 1 of sales, we had surpassed revenue from all 3 phases of season ticket sales last season.

YS stated that in the 2024-25 season the club were 23rd in the Championship in terms of revenue from season ticket sales and that the Championship average season ticket income across all clubs was more than double that for Rovers. We also had 7,000 less season ticket holders than the Championship average in the 24/25 season. Rovers had year on year reduced season ticket pricing, which had led to a decrease in overall revenue. Only Hull City offer overall cheaper ticket prices across all age groups than Rovers in the 25/26 season.

He stated that the club were not where they had hoped to be in terms of sales but were in a better position than had been feared earlier. In response to a question, he stated that to date the club had sold about 400 tickets in Phase 2.

JW asked whether the club intended to issue a flexible season ticket as they had done in January. YS stated that this may well be done in the New Year.

YS believed that pricing was not the principal reason for declining sales. He stated that he believes we have the same level of core supporters in terms of numbers and over the last 10 years this has not really changed.

DM stated there had been two significant drop off periods within the club's history, one being after the 1960 cup final and the other being when the club was relegated under the Rao family ownership, where a disconnection and loss of faith appeared. DM stated during the last 15 years there had been no contrition or acknowledgement of the mistakes made during their tenure.

GM believes that the club has failed to engage with lapsed supporters from the fanbase, those whose families have been fans for generations or understand their reasoning for no attendance.

ZB stated it was also important to grow the interest in the South Asian community in Blackburn, now a significant proportion of the population.

ND agreed with the club that they should look at attracting fans who have no familial connection to the club and start a new chain of batons being asked.

DM and GM asked whether the club could publicly recognise their failures in the management of the club which have had impact on attendances, regeneration and the community.

8. Club Kits 2025-26

MH asked for an update on sales of the two kits so far released for the new season and the plans for the 150th Anniversary kit.

YS replied that sales had been going well and that there had been a positive reaction from fans. The club had increased the order for the 3rd kit after the success of the 2024-25 version.

GM praised the enthusiasm and professionalism of the staff on duty during the season ticket holder pre-open sale event.

The 150th Anniversary shirt would also be provided by Macron under the existing contract. It would be a limited-edition shirt and would be released closer to the Anniversary date in November, with a limited amount made available for sale.

The away kit would be launched on Friday 18th July. The team would be wearing this kit for the friendly game with Everton on 19th, as Everton had as yet only released their new home kit and they had requested that they wear it at the game.

GM asked about the inadvertent leak of the kit the day before the launch.

AM replied that the error had been an individual one made by a member of staff of the agency that had been contracted to help. It was extremely unfortunate, and the club had come to an agreement with the agency as a result.

GM asked regarding the quality of the home shirt in particular which appears to sub-optimal quality in terms of fabric and manufacture with a number being returned due to defects or damage after minimal handling. YS stated it is common for first batches to have quality issues, and they tend to improve after the first batch, but the club can be refunded for any substandard product.

9. Summer Works

LT stated that bore holes were being drilled for the rails to be fitted for the new safe seating section that week. The rails would not be fitted before the Everton game as, once fitted they would require building regulation approval along with SGSA Licensing which would have been time restrictive as until the license is approved the whole area would not be able to be used. LT expected that everything would be ready for the home cup game with Bradford City in August.

MH asked what other work had been done recently. LT replied that £250,000 had been spent on the vomitories at both the Blackburn and Darwen End in the last year. The toilets in Blues Bar had been refurbished and a considerable amount of work had been done at Brockhall.

YS stated that, contrary to some social media comment, the ANPR cameras which had been installed in the car parks were not for fans parking there but were for the number of cars who use the car parks across the week. An example was driving instructors who often brought their clients on to the car parks.

YS stated that there had been upgrades to the turnstiles. There would be communication to fans ahead of the Everton game encouraging fans to have their mobile tickets ready for processing and downloaded to their wallet ahead of arriving at the turnstiles.

GM asked about parking for stewarding staff on the club car parks, feeling that they should for security be allowed to park close to their work.

LT replied that current staff who had car parking spaces would be protected but spaces would not be provided for new staff as there was no available space unless there was a need to make a reasonable adjustment. Darwen Vale school had provided more space and that they had been willing to offer several spaces for staff who were willing to park there and walk to and from the ground.

10. Equality, Diversity & Inclusion

LT stated that there was nothing to report during the close season.

11. Women's Team

ML led the discussion on the club's decision to voluntarily relegate the women's team to League 4. Despite the club's #OneRovers inclusive campaign they had withdrawn funding for the team. SS replied that unfortunately due to the demands the current model was not sustainable, with a further significant rise in minimum criteria set by the league, increase in staffing levels and player contract it was not economically viable for the club to continue to support the team at the Championship level given the new funding requirements.

DM stated what is to stop the club deciding the Men's team is also unsustainable given it loses far more money? The team had had a £100,000 sponsor but took less than £20,000 in ticket income in 2024-25 but the new funding would require expenditure of £1m a season.

GM Asked who made the decision to pull the woman's funding without adequate notice and leave the players careers in limbo, whilst the new rules and funding requirements were known 12 months ago, why have the club not pursued an alternative ownership model or third-party funding, whilst carrying out significant consultation to review all options over this period of time. SS stated the CEO was in charge of the woman's team and unfortunately, we don't have too many people who want to invest in woman's football. We had Women's games at Ewood Park but we could only generate about 20,000 pounds from ticketing.

GM asked who made the ultimate decision to pull funding? SS stated it was the owner's decision.

DM asked did SS Make the owners aware of how bad a decision like this would be received amongst the supporters and wider community given the success of the national team which has had significant input from past Rovers players, providing in turn fantastic PR which the club have previously been happy to receive? SS replied he thinks the owners know what is going on at their football club.

KH asked whether there was any truth in the rumour that the club rejected an offer for some external funding for the team. SS replied that he was not aware of this.

ML asked what the plan for the team was now. SS stated that they would compete in League 4.

DM asked about the rumour of a team player whose funding for her rehabilitation programme had been stopped because of this decision. SS stated that this was not true. The player was unable to undertake her rehabilitation at Brockhall but the programme to support was continuing elsewhere, and they were hoping to come to an agreement to train at the University of Lancashire's facility in Preston or a suitable alternative location.

YS pointed out that Rovers Women's team were not the only club to be in a difficult financial situation due to the requirements from the league.

GM asked whether the club would accept that the whole situation surrounding the women's team had been handled poorly and should have been done better, SS acknowledged this could have been handled better.

12. Any Other Business

- a) CL asked if SS could confirm his role at the club. SS explained that he was responsible for the Academy and for the commercial operations at the club. The CEO would be responsible for the football club.
- b) GM stated that the FF has been successful over a long period of time, however, cannot be used as a reason for the club to avoid open dialogue with the wider fan base including supporter groups with membership bases and constitutions given Fans Forum meetings shouldn't be hijacked by supporter group mandate issues, whilst SB also commented about the loss of open supporter consultation meetings which have discontinued since COVID. GM reiterated not all fans conform or want to be a part of a group; however, the lack of democracy and transparency is one of the largest bugbears within our valuable supporter base. Its important club keep open consultation with the various fan's groups, as per with previous regimes whilst looking to increase wider engagement particularly given the changes the new regulator will bring. LT explained that the club had to outline its approach to consultation as part of its annual Fan Engagement Plan. It may be that a new CEO would approach consultation in a different way, and it was possible to change the plan by notifying the EFL with 5 days' notice. LT also stated the Fans Forum was set up to save meeting with all the various different groups to discuss the same issues which wasn't the best use of everyone's time. YS stated that it would be important that any fan communications were consistent across the whole fan base, and not just with select supporters.
- c) MH asked if there had been any indication of the owners attending Ewood Park given the years that have passed without attending? SS stated there is

no planned trip to attend at this stage.

- d) GM asked SS why he had stated on BBC Radio that there had been no interest from potential purchasers, given previous directors have stated that three expressions of interest were sent to India, and they were advised by the Rao's to stop sending these to them, as they have no desire to sell the club. SS replied that there were no potential purchasers he was aware of.

13. Dates of Next Meeting:

20/10/25

9/02/26

5/5/26

13/7/26

Members should contact John Wareing at johnwareing52@gmail.com
T: 07984 085474 to give their apologies if they cannot attend a meeting.

Any fan who wishes to have an item on the agenda should contact John at least a week in advance of the meeting by email or phone as above.