



GILLINGHAM FOOTBALL CLUB LTD

Medway Priestfield Stadium, Redfern Avenue, Gillingham, Kent ME7 4DD

Tel: 01634 300000 Fax: 01634 850986

www.gillinghamfootballclub.com www.priestfield.com www.factorypriestfield.com



Dear fellow supporters

This is probably the most difficult Chairman's report I have written over the past 24 years, in fact I have been thinking constantly since the season end as to whether I should even write it at all, on one hand because I really wanted to talk about the many positive things going on behind the scenes at Priestfield which will all assist in taking the Club forward but on the other hand because I believe the Club is now at a critical point in its long history whereby, after some considerable reflection and soul searching, I have to question why I am continuing to battle on a daily basis, often against the odds and under constant and extreme pressure, to run a club where I feel a segment of the supporter base, (and I can't determine to what level), have no regard, respect, support, understanding, trust nor any consideration for me as an individual, nor the role I perform as Chairman of this club, within a football pyramid that is dominated by rich pickings at the top two levels of football, against the almost impossible task of being competitive, without the luxury of financial assistance, in the lower echelons of the EFL.

Hence, and for these reasons, I must now seriously consider over the coming weeks whether I wish to continue in my role and lead this Club forward, or indeed what the consequences for the Club would be should I decide to take the easy option and just walk away, attractive in that I get my life back, will not have the daily stress I suffer but more significantly will not have to subject myself, my children nor my friends to some of the disgusting and disgraceful abuse I experienced from so called "fans" during, but more so in the latter part of the season, but not so attractive in that I would be leaving a Club that I believe can still fulfill its potential in time, the belief in same which has kept me driving forward for all these years.

Not attractive either in that I would be leaving a Club I believe in, care for and have always acted to protect, a Club I have dedicated much of my working life to progressing, nor would it be attractive if I can't find another interested party to take on, or share the financial burden, the consequences of such a situation which do not bear thought.

I guess my thoughts and feelings have been clearly influenced by the chants of the 'Scally Out' brigade, more vocal sadly at our last home game of the season against Charlton, and directed at me predominantly from the Rainham End, whom I have always respected and who form the bedrock of our support vocally at Priestfield, but more importantly the straw that has broken the camels back, (so to speak), was when I sat in my seat at Blackpool for the last game of the season, when the team were winning by 3 goals and all I could hear from a section of our so called 'fans' was the constant chant of 'Scally Scally you're a c...' !!

Not nice, not acceptable, very hurtful, disgusting people, the lowest of societies low, individuals that are an embarrassment to this great Club and the good people that genuinely care about the Club, a form of cancer that I'm not sure I can heal, individuals that are probably fueled by a group of people who purport to support the Club, many of whom I'm aware of, on Facebook and other social media platforms, but who in fact do nothing but divide and damage the Club, the supporters, the business and the reputation of myself and the GFC name by their constant negative and mostly false rhetoric,

Medway
COUNCIL

MAIN CLUB SPONSOR

GILLINGHAM FOOTBALL CLUB
Registered no. 39175 England



by their displaying libelous and degrading banners on pub walls and elsewhere, disrespectful of me, and then being too cowardly to meet with me to answer or discuss their motives.

Brave in groups, brave behind a keyboard but cowards in person. Losers on all counts.

These individuals, the so called keyboard warriors, should hang their heads in shame because the consequences of my upcoming decisions will, to the most, be their responsibility.

When I came to this Club in 1995, a Millwall fan that lived in Kent and loved football, I came because there was no one else in front, or behind me interested in helping the Club, and the club was in a bad place and in danger of going out of business.

Tony Smith, the previous owner, had done a brilliant job in keeping the Club going but he was unable to give the huge, mostly time and energy commitment required in the bigger picture, nonetheless he should always be commended for what he did do during his watch.

I came because I believed I could make a difference. I also made it clear at the time that if ever I felt I was not wanted, or needed then I would go. That remains as true today as it was back in 1995, and I guess I'm now at that point where I need to make the call.

I came alone, and sadly on a day to day basis generally remain alone, and whilst I have had, and remain extremely grateful for the tremendous support both financially and morally of Mike Quarrington, (who is a non- exec Director), who lives in Guernsey, the only other loans I have been able to achieve over the years have been from current Director Michael Anderson, whom, as most are aware, is facing issues in the US on allegations of money laundering and fraud charges, matters of which he maintains his innocence and I understand is fighting. He was stood down as Vice Chairman as soon as I became aware of his charges.

Irrespective of the merits of his situation, which is not my business save as to how it affects the Club, Mr. Anderson is now demanding repayment of his loan to the Club, which was not expected, nor planned for in our cash flows, and is therefore a matter we are trying to deal with at this present time.

We have reduced his loan by repaying c £120k over the past 12 months and will continue to make monthly and additional repayments, as best we can afford, until his loan is repaid in full.

Other than Mr. Anderson, (and of course Mike Quarrington), and despite there being some wealthy individuals in Medway and Kent, none of these people have had an interest in becoming involved, which is obviously their prerogative, however it illustrates why I have had to search further afield in the past two years to try and find the 'right' person or group, a search that is difficult, time consuming but ongoing to this day.

For the Club to really make progress, we need to galvanize our real supporters, bring in new fans of the future, rid ourselves of the damaging negativity, improve performances on the pitch, work harder on increasing non match day revenues and I need to continue my search for external investment, not an easy task but one in which I believe is achievable.



My problem now of course is that given those I have spoken to whom have shown an interest in potentially becoming involved will only become involved if I stay and continue running the Club, it would be wrong to engage further if I am unwilling, or more importantly I feel unable to commit to being in that position, and I can only commit to continuing as your Chairman if I believe I have the backing, support and more importantly trust of our entire fan base, hence our, and my dilemma.

As to trust, I can without doubt state that every decision I have made in my time as Chairman has been the right decision at the time, and always made in the best interests of the Club.

Sometimes my decisions may have been baffling to some, and sometimes I have been unable to explain them, mainly due to confidentiality or so as to not break promises or trust, quite normal in any business environment, but always I have acted in the best interests of Gillingham Football Club.

The business is in reasonable shape, no debt, current or historic, bank or otherwise, no overdraft, no significant loans (save the Anderson loan), good balance sheet, small profit last year etc. Not much spare cash, but we live within our means.

Supporters need only to look around them, go on to the BBC Sport or other websites and look at how many Clubs in the EFL are facing significant financial challenges both on and off the field. Look at the losses of teams in the Championship, League One and Two that were relegated this month, it is staggering.

In simple terms, football in the lower leagues is somewhat in crisis, big fan expectations, falling gates, big losses, Premier League big spenders, football on TV, State owned Clubs spending millions and so on. We have to decide what we want our Club to be, and where we want to go, where in fact it can go?

Our season ended with the team being just under mid table, and 5 points above relegation, with a poor home record but a better away. We saw some great performances, but to be fair some not so great. In my view we need to do better next season, we need to be very organized, our recruitment must be very precise, we must all work harder, our preparation must be excellent, we need to create a buzz about the Club, we need some fun times back, and we need to enjoy going to Priestfield again, and watch the team winning more games. Not too much to ask.

I'm grateful to Steve Lovell for his efforts during his time as Manager, great guy, good friend to me and the Club but I agreed not to talk on our conversation of 26th April, the night before the Charlton game, so I wish him every success in the future and we move on.

I have, as is normal, had many enquiries for the vacant Managers role, and have had discussions with a number of the candidates. I profiled the type of manager I believe we need at Priestfield, not a Priest but a Warrior, a winner, a fighter, a hard worker. Someone who can bring success to the Club and has enjoyed success in the past.

I have seen comments from various quarters about one of the candidates I have met with, Steve Evans, and am disappointed by some of what I've seen, although to be fair I do understand some concerns supporters have, given Steve has had less than a "Priestly" past record, albeit this has to be



tempered against the positives of his passion and will to win and succeed. I was also less than a Steve Evans fan before I got to know him.

I do, of course, have the advantage over most of having met and spoken to Steve on a number of occasions, got to know him well, and of course we have discussed his need to temper his outbursts, and to try and focus his energy in a more positive manner.

Steve is no fool, and neither am I to be fair, he is aware of comments against him from some supporters, about his reputation, about what people are saying about his past, but I would never entertain the prospect of bringing in a manager whom I thought was wrong for the Club, and although no manager comes with guarantees I can categorically say that Steve Evans is by far the best candidate for the role I have seen, and I intend to appoint him as Club Manager, he will commence his role on June 1st.

Steve has had good success as a Manager in the past and I fully expect him to bring us success both on and off the field, working within our budgets. He also had a successful career in commercial business before his time in football, so he is well balanced in how business works and the needs to increase revenue from non- football related activities.

I understand his appointment will not please everyone, least of all Daniel Schofield of The Daily Telegraph, (“doomed marriages only result in one outcome”), however I urge all fans to give Steve a chance and judge him on his merits over time.

We all have skeletons in the cupboard and past history, we can't actually change the past, what's important is looking forward not back and whether we can change the future.

Steve will be a big asset to this Club in my view, he wants fans to get to know him before totally writing him off, to understand his vision, his philosophy and his passion and as such we have convened a fans “open night” on Tuesday 4th June whereby you are all invited to attend The Factory/The Great Hall, here at Priestfield Stadium, 7.30pm to 9.30pm, to meet the man in person, ask your questions, get off your chest any gripes and listen to his point of view, followed by less formal discussion in The Factory.

You may just be surprised by what you hear. It will be an “open mic” event, but you will also be able to write down your questions on the night if you prefer, no names needed, so please, all those that have had so much to say in the past few weeks, do come along and raise your issues. If you can't attend you can e mail your questions to our media team at media@priestfield.com

Rob McCaffrey, ex Sky TV will host the event.

Steve will talk openly and honestly, will answer all your questions and address any fears. I promise you he will be candid and whether or not it changes your view on him as a person, whether you like what you hear, I guarantee you will go away better informed.

He, like us all, only wants success for Gillingham Football Club but he needs you all with him, united in trying to bring success to our Club.



Moving onto other matters, thank you to all supporters who have renewed season tickets for the coming season, we are almost at the same levels as last year with nearly 10 weeks still to go, so fully expect to be well up on last year, with a good percentage of new renewals on last season. Your support in this area is essential to the long term viability of your Club so grateful to you all, and look forward to welcoming back all those still to renew.

I'd like to thank all our players and staff for their efforts over the past 12 months, some players will be moving on and we wish them every success for the future, and we welcome back those still under contract for pre-season training at the end of June where they will begin preparations for the season ahead, along with new signings we will be making over the coming couple of months.

Big congratulations to Barry Fuller who won "Player of The Year", and Brandon Hanlon who won "Young Player of Year"

We are close to launching our "Schools Partnership" package, which will be delivered over the next 12/24 months into up to 80 primary schools in Medway with up to 40000 children benefitting from a host of special benefits, hopefully exciting them enough to join our support base and bring their parents and/or guardians to watch the team going forwards, "Fans of the Future", making good use of our new family areas. This will be a huge project and one that I have been trying to get launched for some time, linking in with one or more of our six new supporter clubs also close to launch.

If we are going to bring new young support into Priestfield, we need to re-create a positive family orientated atmosphere, failing which the Club will not grow and all our efforts will be in vain. No new supporters will only lead one way.

The GFC School, a significant and very important part of our business and community, continues to thrive. Our children are making good progress in their education at the Club.

The link between education and sport is very strong.

Two weeks ago we had an OFSTED inspection which lasted two days.

Like all schools, we received just a few hours' advice of the government body inspection.

Under the previous leadership and governance, and prior to the current GFC management fully taking control in September last year, the school had had two OFSTED inspections in Jan 2017 and Jan 2018, (although the previous Trustees resigned in Dec 2017), both of which disappointingly resulted in "Requires Improvement".

We will know the result of this latest OFSTED inspection before the end of this week and will advise once received. Staff have worked hard to build a safe and stable learning platform for our students and I would like to thank them all for their support and efforts.

Our new CEO, Tom Lawrence, has been working hard on restructuring the business. It's good to have energy and new vision working alongside me, and amongst a number of initiatives Tom is developing will be the GFC Conferencing operation, appealing to businesses large and small, and developing more income streams to assist the business.

We will also shortly be launching a concept for The Factory, which will be open to all on 5/6 nights per week, and will provide a raft of entertainment and events for the local community and fans alike.



This coming season Tom has decided to change our kit manufacturer and we will be manufacturing and buying all kit from Macron, who are well known to most of you. I fully support his decision and would like to thank our friends in Sri Lanka for all their efforts over the past few years, we will still work with SL on other matters but kit from August will be from Macron.

To conclude, I'd like to thank all fans who have stayed with, and believe in the football Club, for their loyalty and trust. If I had a £1 put into the business for every fan that's told me over the year to 'forget the idiots and trolls, they don't represent the majority of us,' then the Club would be much richer.

When I make my decision as to my personal position I will take all factors into account, not least the huge and loyal support I have received over the years from the majority, I do have a debt to them for the trust they have shown in me.

The truth, however, is whether they do it on purpose, whether they are not genuine fans and are playing stupid games, or just don't realize the impact their negativity and maliciousness is causing insofar as damage to the Club and business alike are concerned, it is becoming increasingly more difficult for me to do my job effectively as Chairman.

If I don't have the support and trust of the fans to do my job properly and make the best decisions available to me at the time, or if these so called 'fans' are going to come week in week out and hurl foul abuse at me, or at others, driving away any new fans we engage with, then there is little point in me continuing to try and take the Club forward as I simply can't do the job I came here to do. I think most decent and reasonable people would conclude with me on that scenario and my position.

Irrespective of my situation, I will of course continue to do what's best for the Club in the meantime and I hope everyone who supports Gillingham Football Club, from wherever you are in the world, thinks about my report and agrees there can be only one way forward for success, ie, being united, positive, motivated and focused, only then will we achieve.

Paul D P Scally
Chairman