

CHRISTMAS 2018



# GILLINGHAM FC

A MESSAGE TO ALL SUPPORTERS  
FROM THE CHAIRMAN

[www.gillinghamfootballclub.com](http://www.gillinghamfootballclub.com)



## DEAR SUPPORTERS, SPONSORS AND STAKEHOLDERS,

As we move into our Xmas schedule of six games, including the exciting challenge of pitching our skills against Premiership opposition Cardiff City in the FA Cup 3rd round on January 5th, here at Priestfield, I thought it would make sense to discuss where we are as a Club, offer my thoughts on certain issues, and deal with points that I have been asked to clarify by many individuals, and indeed sponsors, over the past few months.

I will deal with matters in no particular order, however what I write about will be FACT and not FICTION, it may, in part, be uncomfortable reading for some, especially those that have used social media and other forum to peddle fiction, to create uncertainty and confusion amongst our supporter base, and who have wittingly or otherwise tried to damage or destabilize the fabric of our Club, my reputation as Chairman or the good standing of the people that come together to make this Club function.

Rest assured, I will continue to run this Club to the best of my ability, for the good of those employed by the Club and for the benefit of those that support and sponsor the club, and no amount of nonsense written on these forums will deter my focus, nor sway my passion for the job I do and what I am trying to achieve.

Social media, which is part of our daily life now, allows any individual to anonymously or otherwise create or voice an opinion, based on matters of substance or matters completely manufactured, fabricated or simply untrue, and gain comment from individuals who, in the main, also remain anonymous and therefore unaccountable for their comment.

Whilst I personally don't do social media, I am made aware by staff and supporters alike of some content, and apart from such content generally being totally untrue, it is mostly painful and often distressing to hear, especially when I work,

together with a great group of individuals here at the Club, so tirelessly hard in pursuit of a better and more prosperous future for us all.

Those with clear agendas peddle negativity and comment that is simply unfair, unjust, lack truth or structure and affect not just myself in my ability to focus on the positive factors in the business, but more importantly they affect the players, management, sponsors and real supporters who come to Priestfield to give positive support and encouragement to the team, whether the result on the day is in our favour or otherwise.



# ON THE PITCH

**We'd all like to win every game, and play great football in the process, but the reality is that's not real football, and anyone who follows, supports, understands and cares for a Club like our own accepts the highs and lows, the joys and frustrations, as part and parcel of buying the ticket, and it can so often be frustrating, in fact it drives me mad at times, but then the joys of winning are also, in contrast, so very enjoyable and exciting.**

Clearly with the growth of football worldwide, and particularly with the success of the English Premier League, it has become significantly more difficult for Clubs in the EFL, ie the 72 clubs below the Premier League, to function financially and achieve success, with success by many seemingly only being measured on achieving promotion to the Premier League, often at any cost and mostly only with significant external investment into those lucky Clubs. I will deal with Investment further on.

The reality of course, is that it is highly unlikely the majority of Clubs in The EFL Championship or Leagues One and Two, and even more unlikely for Clubs below League Two, will ever get near to achieving Premier League status, so is the conclusion therefore that all these Clubs are failures, ... I think not!

When I came to Gillingham in 1995, some 23 years ago, I came for three reasons, my love and passion for football, my overwhelming belief that the Club had the potential to do much better given its demographics and location in regards to London and the South East, and because the support it enjoyed had passion and belief, and turned up each week regardless of performances to support their team, real fans, fans that didn't really expect a lot of success, didn't moan at the team, but turned up anyway, always with positive support for their heroes who battled to their best ability on the pitch sometimes successfully, other times not so.

We still, to a great extent enjoy that support, and I still believe today, as I did then, this Club has the potential to do much

better, to go on, and indeed I believe, (although some may question my sanity), that this Club has the ability to one day compete in the top leagues, in a new purpose-built stadium.

And it is largely this belief, together with my love and passion for this Club that has kept me going for all these years, often in challenging circumstances and often at times when to walk away would have been the better option than to stay for many reasons, not least so that I could enjoy a normal regular life, something I accept now will probably never happen, given the extreme pressures I operate under on a daily basis.

The trouble with our new levels of expectations as fans, and the influences of English football today, is that there is little middle ground, it's either success or failure, little in between.

Taking our current season thus far, there is little doubt that our management team of Steve, Patto and Coxy care passionately about the Club, they've all had playing history here, they understand the culture, they're great to work with, they have the respect and support of the players, staff and majority of fans alike and understand the football business, their jobs should not be subject to just performances, but this is the world we have created, and it's not always a fair world. They deserve a good amount of time to build what they believe in, their futures should not be determined by knee jerk decisions, fear of failure, short term thinking.

We must look at the bigger picture, of building with people we trust.

I totally support these guys and their backroom team, I will continue to support them and I believe the majority of our supporters also support them and should continue to do so. Since Steve came in to the management role to replace Ade Pennock, who put his life and soul into the role, I believe we have made good progress, we have seen some great performances from ever improving players and we all believe we can still achieve more as the season develops.



As a matter of record, and it's a decent record, our current Manager has been in position for about 14 months, his record being:

55 x league games, 19 x wins, 16 x draws and 20 x defeats, around a 35%-win ratio, but what is worth noting as I discuss below is home wins x 7 but away wins x 12.

This season so far, 21 league games, Wins x 7, Draws x 3, Defeats x 11. 4 x away wins to 3 home wins. 6 x home losses to 5 x away losses!!

Too many defeats I accept, but more importantly why have we won more games away from home in 14 months and lost more games at Priestfield? Stats don't lie.

Do we as fans, without realizing, create anxiety on the terraces that transmits itself to the players on the pitch, making them uncertain or nervous? Psychology is a huge part of a sportsman's make up, can we create a more relaxed but supportive atmosphere?

Do we expect the players to excite us first before we can encourage them?

Gets into a cycle of what comes first. We all need to think about this.

I don't have the answers but it's an issue we must all look at and help to solve.

In fact, I have it on good authority that in the 125-year history of GFC, last season was the first time the Club won more games away from home than at home, a statistic we must overturn together. If we keep winning the same number of away games, but double our home wins then watch what happens.

Our season thus far has had many positives, for instance we have scored 31 league goals in 21 games, the highest in League One bar the top seven teams, all of whom are in promotion challenging places, and many of the goals have been scorers, so plenty to build on.

My concerns, indeed all of our concerns must be that it is easy to come to football on a Saturday or evening game and criticize rather than support and I'm sad to say there has been an unusual level of criticism and negativity from a minority of "fans" coming from all areas over the past year or so.

This has to stop please for the benefit of everyone, especially the Club, the players, but also for fellow supporters. The Club and its future success is far more important than any one person, or indeed group of people so again I urge all fans to come together and get behind the team.

Abuse is cheap and unpleasant to hear, it affects concentration and performance but it does also create an uncomfortable atmosphere that is picked up by everyone in the stadium, and manifests itself to the pitch, the players feel it, no true supporter wants this, it is within our wish to change it.





Players are human beings, just like everyone else, they have families, they always go out on the pitch wearing the badge to do their best, irrespective of whether at any particular time their best results in the right result, and for sure they are affected by what they pick up on matchdays, as maybe are their families, so please, if you are one of those that just hurls abuse at the team or individual players, the management or even myself, during or after a game, I would ask you to stay away, because you're causing more harm than good and not helping the cause. None of us want you if in a negative mode.

Of course, we'd much prefer your support to remain at Priestfield but only if it's considered and positive.

I have no problem with fans expressing themselves and showing emotion, that's part of why we love football, but as I've mentioned above, in a controlled manner please.

We are very fortunate to have a great squad of professional players, talented, honest and committed, together as one we can achieve many goals. We work as a tight unit internally, like a family in many respects, so when one person gets hurt it obviously upsets the rest of the family, sometimes I don't think fans realize the complexities of how things work, but hopefully more fans will think deeply now about how they can improve the matchday experience for everyone, especially the boys in the shirt.

There is no doubt that when our fans are in positive mode, there is no more an exciting place, no more an intimidating place, and those are the times when we are all so proud to be part of the GFC family, so let's bin the negativity and bring home the positives, we'll all notice the improvement in stats. 50% more home wins puts us in promotion form.

The Rainham End, in positive form, is a very powerful weapon, for sure the 12th man, and on numerous occasions over the years their banter, support and noise has lifted the rest of the stadium and achieved great results, you are so important to the team, please keep it going, make Priestfield rock every game. Your strength is such an important asset, and when you're all on it there is no better place to be.

Other good news on the playing front comes from our younger, up and coming stars of the future, our 1st and 2nd year scholars, (16/17 year olds), who have reached the 4th Round of the FA Youth Cup beating AFC Wimbledon away 3-1 in the 1st round, Cheltenham away 4-0 in the 2nd round, Blackburn Rovers away at Ewood Park 2-1 in the 3rd round, and now face Ipswich Town at Priestfield in the 4th round in early January, probably 9th.

The last time they reached the 5th round was in 2003, so all to play for.

I know you will all be delighted with how well the boys are performing and I hope you all come out and support them in January as they seek to progress further.

Our 1st and 2nd year pros have also done extremely well reaching the Quarter final of the Kent Senior Cup, playing Herne Bay away from home on Tuesday last, the game ended with a great victory 1-4 and sends the boys into the semifinal, date to be advised.

Both our Academy and Senior Ladies teams also continue to go from strength to strength, this area of the game is growing so quickly and I'm delighted with the professionalism of both the girls and staff. Well done to you all.

# FINANCES

**I am informed that an issue being discussed on forums/ Facebook by people who 'know for definite', is that GFC Ltd and/or GFC holdings has debt of £13m.... FICTION.**

Neither GFC Ltd nor GFC Holdings Ltd has any debt, nor bank overdraft for that matter.

The Company results are in the public domain and are prepared by independent auditors, easy for any competent 'troller' to check, misleading and confusing for supporters who follow the feeds assuming them to be true.

Those responsible for peddling this misleading information should hang their heads in shame. Do they realize potential investors may also read this nonsense and be dissuaded from getting involved?

I'm also told by one of our sponsors that discussion on forums state that Colin Jarvis, Chairman of MEMS, our previous main Club sponsors made a significant bid to buy GFC but I would not sell to him, hence he withdrew his sponsorship. ...FICTION.

Colin has been a fantastic supporter and friend to the Club for many years, but at no time has he ever discussed, nor made any offer for GFC. His focus has been on building and running his very successful tennis club.

Colin remains a current sponsor to the Club, and a much-valued supporter.

MEMS did a fantastic job as Main Sponsor to GFC for seven years, we should all be grateful to them for their loyalty.

The new pitch, subject of negative comment, had to be replaced in October because it had a serious problem, unknown to us prior to end Sept, It was dangerous, was the cause of player injuries and would not have lasted the season, in fact it would have probably been unplayable by Xmas.

We paid approximately £500k for a hybrid pitch and irrigation works, fortunately we had the funds otherwise we would have had a serious problem. I've been criticized for not spending that money on players but there was no choice, pitch had to be done first unfortunately.

It is important supporters understand that Banks in the UK, in general, will not lend to professional Football Clubs, we have been segregated as an industry, unfairly in my view, but banks are scared in case they have to go against a Club to realize security, and indeed the effect that would have in the Community. It's not a new thing and something we have to live with, but it does mean we have to manage cash flow very carefully and live within our means.





“WE WORK CLOSELY WITH STAKEHOLDERS AND PARENTS, BUT CLEARLY THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EDUCATION AND SPORT IS VERY STRONG AND ONE WE INTEND TO DEVELOP FURTHER”



## THE GFC SCHOOL



You should all be proud at the way the staff and students at our 'in house' school are progressing. We now have around 30 students between 11 and 16 studying full time, with around 16 full and part time teaching staff. We work closely with

stakeholders and parents, but clearly the relationship between education and sport is very strong and one we intend to develop further, offering post 16 education and apprenticeships going forward.

## FA CUP v CARDIFF Sat 5th Jan 2019

I had an e mail and subsequent call from the KM newspaper last Tuesday advising that they had received an e mail from a supporter complaining at our ticket prices for the above match. I was told that again there was discussion and the usual criticism on forums.

Can I say that I believe the pricing to be totally appropriate for this fixture, the last time we reached this round of the Cup against Stoke, we had the same pricing and the stadium was sold out, I don't see Cardiff as a lesser opposition, in fact the opposite could be true.

For information, our adult ticket price is £25, however from that we have to pay VAT of £4.16 to HMRC leaving a Nett figure of £20.84.

We have to pay Police, Stewards, Cardiff Coach and Hotel, Floodlighting, Medical and casual pitch labour totaling around £20k, around £2.00 per head if gate is 10000, leaving a NETT figure of £18.84 per adult ticket.

From that figure Cardiff receive 50% and GFC receive 50% hence our Nett income per head is just £9.42 per adult ticket and remember for concessions and juniors we receive much less.



Our fixed overheads are in the region of £112k per week so the maths are quite simple, hence why the tickets are priced as they are, hope all supporters understand and we manage to fill the stadium. If every supporter brings one person that hasn't been for a while we should have a sell out and an enjoyable day for all.

I'm delighted that sales are brisk after just a few days, with STH's having priority for the next week or so, but let's try and make it a day to remember, bring your family and friends and bring back the romance of the FA Cup.



# STRATEGY – MY THOUGHT PROCESS

**It is well documented, in fact I produced a report in 1999 to the effect, that firstly I firmly believe GFC has huge, as yet unlocked potential as a Football Club, but secondly, and for it to achieve its football potential, it has no long-term future in its current stadium.**

My views have never altered.

The Club sits in a conurbation of some 278000 people in Medway and rising, and over 1.5m people in Kent, a County where we are the only professional Football Club and a County that has no Club playing in the top league in English football. Fans that want to watch Premier League football have to leave Medway and Kent to do so.

In fact, some may be surprised that Medway is the 13th largest conurbation in the UK, slightly behind the likes of Sunderland, Leicester and Nottingham, and ahead of Cities such as Newcastle, Brighton, Hull, Stoke, Derby and Wolverhampton, to name but a few.

Medway is also a very proactive authority with good leadership and a regeneration strategy that is proving successful, attracting great interest from the business and domestic community alike, we have all witnessed much change over the past 10 years, with more to come, in fact Medway is becoming more and more a destination to live for those that are moving out of London and the suburbs, especially with its connectivity to other parts of the UK and Europe.



I have been working with Medway Council for a number of years to explore relocation sites, and a site has been identified.

The Council have, and continue to be extremely supportive of the Club, recognizing the significant importance it has to the Community as a whole, and are keen to ensure its long-term future in a new, purpose build arena, capable of taking the Club on its next journey.

The question I pose therefore, is could Medway/Kent support a Premier League Football Club?

For example, if GFC was a Premier League Club, would it be able to attract 20/30000 fans to home games?

For me the answer is, and has always been a resounding 'Yes', the issue is how do we achieve it, which I guess is the more difficult part, and indeed the part I have been working on intently for the past couple of years.

There are many examples we have seen over the past years of Clubs that have achieved Premier League status, Clubs, amongst others, such as Blackpool, Bolton, Wigan, Blackburn, Norwich, Reading, Portsmouth, Derby, Hull and Stoke, all of whom have lower conurbations than Medway, with Burnley, Newcastle, Brighton and Bournemouth, also with lesser conurbations than Medway still enjoying Premier League status.

Bournemouth and Brighton are good examples to support my argument, with populations of around 248000 and 191000 respectively, who would have predicted 10 years ago either of these Clubs would be sustaining Premier League football in 2018, Brighton in a new 30000 seat stadium, (built in 2011 at 22000 then increased in 2015 to 30000), and Bournemouth in a newly constructed 12000-seater, which I understand they are now looking to expand to 18000, or even move from, after 106 years, to a larger purpose-built arena.

10 years ago, both these Clubs were attracting gates similar to ourselves, in fact many fans will remember the days when Brighton ground shared at Priestfield as they had lost their stadium altogether!

Either way they are both, (and there are others), remarkable stories and must give us all hope that the seemingly impossible, is actually possible.

"It's the believers that climb to the top of the ladder!"

I know some will scoff at the thought of our Club playing Premier League football in our lifetime, and I understand and respect that, but if we have the basic ingredients right on our doorstep, why not try and make the cake?

If I did not believe it could be achieved I would not be at the Club today.

As is always the case, the answer is financial. As a Club, we can get by each year, make some money one year, break even the next and sometimes lose a bit another year, that's fine but it does make progress slow and often precarious, hence the reason I have been actively seeking Investors, or new owners, for the past year or so.





## INVESTMENT

**My strategy to attract investors, and it has certainly attracted a number of interested parties, has been to talk about the Football Club and its clear potential, together with the opportunity of building a new multi-purpose stadium, with enabling development on a site close to the current stadium. To that effect I have travelled far and wide on an almost weekly basis talking with groups, individuals and, sadly on occasions, complete time wasters about the opportunities in Medway and GFC in particular.**

I have made it clear to all parties that I am happy to step down as Chairman/Owner if I was convinced the new parties were genuine in their desire to take the Club on, and could offer appropriate guarantees, or would stay if the new investors/owners preferred. That remains the case today.

Football Clubs are not easy businesses to run, everyone thinks they can do my job better, I accept that, and I'd love that person to walk through the door and take on some of my duties, but as yet the door hasn't opened so I battle on doing the best I can in, without doubt, the most challenging years of my entire life, and for sure I've had a few challenging years.

In general, I have probably met more groups that want to do the development as a priority to the football, but I'm speaking with a few that have the reverse preference. In fact, this past week alone, I have met with groups in Dubai, Madrid and an Italian group in London, with discussions ongoing.

My view, and it is supported by industry professionals, is that if we can build a truly multi use arena, one that acts, looks and feels like a football stadium on matchdays, but is also a commercial building on non-matchdays, with income streams guaranteed 365 days a year, then we can build a sustainable football model that has ongoing regular and lucrative annual financial support, separate to that which may derive from a benefactor.

It is clearly attractive to have a benefactor, and we have seen many examples of individuals and/or groups coming into English Football Clubs over the years, many of whom have been successful, but we should also take caution from the many disastrous situations that have occurred, and are currently occurring, that have had a negative impact on respective Clubs and fans alike. I won't name Clubs in difficulty but a perfect example of an investment going wrong must sit with a particular Club not far from the North side of Blackwall Tunnel.

As the saying goes "We must be careful what we wish for in life."

In essence, the new stadium plans, and the need to take the Football Club higher run in parallel, albeit not necessarily at the same pace, that is to say it would be clearly pointless taking the team to the Premier League in a small stadium, although I'd suffer that, and obviously pointless having a 20/30000 seater stadium with a League One Football Club, hence my requirements on investment must address either or both of these issues.

I would also like to make the point that there was no queue of investors/owners looking to buy a Football Club outside my office door last time I opened it. I have had to work hard at seeking interest, and that process alone takes time, although there is definite interest worldwide in English Football

When I came to Gillingham in 1995, Tony Smith, who remains a top supporter of the Club, had owned and been running the business for a few years. He had a few difficulties but put his heart, soul and money into keeping the business going. Tony was one of the reasons I took control of GFC, his passion and vision rubbed off on me, but what has always concerned me was that then, some 23 years ago, as is now, there were no Gillingham fans prepared to step in and help him financially, prepared to take on the Club or to shoulder the responsibility, pretty sad when I look back, but that is now the reason why I have had to look further afield.

**“I’D LIKE TO EXTEND AN OPEN INVITATION TO ANY FANS THAT HAVE MATTERS OF CONCERN OR WOULD LIKE ISSUES CLARIFIED, YOU ARE ALL INVITED AND WELCOME”**



## SCALLY OUT BRIGADE

**It’s not nice getting hammered when the team loses football matches, I’ve tried to get used to abuse and generally I take it on the chin as part of the job, strangely, apart from one foul-mouthed idiot to whom I annoyingly reacted last season, unfortunately with one of our potential investors behind me (which wasn’t good on my part), I never get anyone come up to me and have a go face to face, not outside the stadium, or when I go about my business in the towns etc. It’s never happened in 23 years.**

What I do get is many fans telling me what’s being said on the forums, and of course I hear the fans chanting ‘Scally Out’ from time to time, which isn’t nice, and to be honest I find it quite disrespectful given how I work so hard for these same people.

The forums I’ve already mentioned, are a problem because whilst I welcome debate and banter, I cannot accept the level of out and out lies and garbage that are put on these platforms, by anonymous cowards, people not man enough to argue their points to my face.

As a result of these unfair, incorrect and unacceptable postings, normal fans looking for debate jump on the bandwagon and in many cases actually believe what is being posted as the truth, hence a misconception of what I actually do for the business is in peoples minds.

What I would say to these people is threefold:

Firstly, you should realize that when you are posting false, untrue or distorted facts, you are actually damaging the very Club you purport to support, and everyone within that Club that earns a living from it, assuming you’re a genuine fan of course and not just a sad and lonely “troller” in need of help.

Secondly, given these forums are in the public domain, and given I am seeking investment from people that check out the business and may look on these forums to see the fans view, people that may have been sitting in the Directors Box at games this season and last, you are painting a

negative picture of me and the Club that could deter investors continuing their interest, again ultimately at the expense of the Club.

Thirdly, we are a tight unit, the players, management and staff hate negativity from our supporters, they hate to see their Chairman, or Manager, or an individual player being hammered when they see what I, and others try and do for the business, and genuine supporters hate what you’re doing because they also don’t like foul play and want to see the club go forward.

We employ around 300 full and part time staff at GFC, we have a successful Community team, Conference and Banqueting team and Educational Department, please do not damage the fabric of the Club in your attempts to damage me, or our staff, you will fail.

If you have an issue with what I do, or want to understand what I do better, or even don’t understand what I do, please come and see me face to face, my door is always open and it’s better to behave like men (or women) and talk.

On that basis I’d like to extend an open invitation to any fans that have matters of concern or would like issues clarified, you are all invited and welcome to come and talk to me in my office at the stadium, kind of a mini fans forum but with smaller groups. I don’t need to know who you are, don’t need names, anyone can come and every question will be answered, no excuses then for making up stories on forums.

I will have “open office’ on the following days, anyone welcome.

<b>Sat</b>	<b>15th Dec</b>	<b>Midday to 1pm (this coming Saturday)</b>
<b>Weds</b>	<b>19th Dec</b>	<b>6pm to 8pm</b>
<b>Thu</b>	<b>20th Dec</b>	<b>6pm to 9pm</b>
<b>Fri</b>	<b>28th Dec</b>	<b>Midday to 2pm</b>

Enter via players entrance at far end of stadium.



**“I WISH EVERYONE A  
HAPPY XMAS AND  
PROSPEROUS NEW YEAR,  
AND I WILL UPDATE YOU  
ALL ON ANY SIGNIFICANT  
PROGRESS I MAKE”**



## CONCLUSION

**I understand this report is lengthy but there have been a number of issues I wanted to discuss and put out there for some time, but I was prompted by sponsors who are concerned at the unfair and unacceptable behaviour of a minority of fans, who they rightly feel are letting the Club down.**

In addition, I feel I should take some of the blame because I tend to try and avoid negativity and focus on positives in life, without which I can't function, but it is important all fans realize the work that goes on behind the scenes, it's not just about what happens in 90 minutes on the pitch, it's as much about the operation that supports what happens on the pitch.

The future, I believe, is positive. I will continue to find the right formula to allow the Club to achieve its true potential, whether that includes me or not is really not relevant, what matters most in this 125th anniversary year is the Club is positioned well to see in its 250th anniversary year, I'm guessing most of us will be watching from above by then, but at least we can say we played a part in getting there.

I wish everyone a happy Xmas and prosperous New Year, and I will update you all on any significant progress I make.

Up the Gills  
**Paul D P Scally**  
Chairman

