



## GILLINGHAM FOOTBALL CLUB LTD

Dear Fellow Supporters

**1<sup>st</sup> September 2020**

I hope you are all keeping well and managing to find some positives in these very strange, unnatural and challenging times, indeed, I'm sure like many people, I have personally experienced just about every type of emotion over the past six months as I battle to find a solution to ensure, initially short- term survival, and as importantly longer- term sustainability of this great football club for which we all care so much about.

I have begun drafting an update to you on several occasions over the past few weeks, only to find situations and procedures changing on sometimes a daily basis, however I feel I now have as clear a position as is possible right now as to the way forward, but would stress the information I give you could change at any time, therefore please keep an eye on the Club website which we will update on a weekly, or more frequent basis.

When we went into shutdown on 13<sup>th</sup> March, the Country was unclear as to what lay ahead, and although we seem to have more guidance of late on the foreseeable future, there are continual flare ups of the Virus in many parts of the UK, and indeed to a greater or lesser extent throughout the World, so caution and safety is key to a way forward and we all need to act responsibly and play whatever part we can towards an eventual return to normality, whatever that normality may look like.

Our initial strategy was to reduce costs throughout the Club and preserve as much cash as possible to ensure the business could survive for as long as possible, given we last played a game, and thus had our last matchday income at Priestfield on 29<sup>th</sup> February.

The Government furlough and HMRC schemes were invaluable, and have gone a long way to ensuring we have hope for the future, but whilst it has bought us time, we are by no means out of the woods and I continue to work non- stop, 7 days a week to find other solutions of funding, both independently and in association with the EFL, who themselves have worked tirelessly in an attempt to keep their Clubs afloat.

HMRC, whilst assisting and offering a deferment of taxes between April and August, now want their money back, (despite our income position not changing since end March), and are seemingly taking a hard -line position with football, and whilst we are trying to negotiate a repayment plan to ease cashflow, we have not, as yet, been successful.

We have been fortunate in that we went on sale before lockdown with season ticket sales for the season ahead, and I'd like to thank all those that bought their tickets during that period for remaining patient and understanding the huge significance and benefit those funds have been to the business, your funds have been the difference between surviving or not surviving.



Main Club Sponsor

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

Tel: 01634 300000 Fax: 01634 850986

[gillinghamfootballclub.com](http://gillinghamfootballclub.com) [priestfield.com](http://priestfield.com) [thegfcschool.com](http://thegfcschool.com)

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It is no exaggeration when I say that had we not had the funds those sales achieved from our loyal supporters, we may well not be playing our first competitive game, albeit behind closed doors, this coming Saturday, nor would I have had the funds to allow Steve Evans to go out and sign the players we have brought to the Club to add to the seven contracted players we had at the end of July.

I have also been humbled by the huge number of emails of support I have received over the past few months, mostly from supporters I don't personally know, just urging me on and wishing me every success in my efforts. There have been some lonely and dark days during this period and I can assure you I have read each and every message and they have inspired me to keep going and battling, which I will always do as a given, so thank you to everyone, I am extremely grateful.

It's fair to say I've also received just two or three somewhat poor emails from 'supporters' (guess that will always be how it is), but for the record I have never treated, nor do I regard supporters as 'cash cows', nor do I disregard the value of our supporters and sponsors, I have always viewed this Club as your Club, you are the lifeblood of the business and without you we would not exist, in fact as mentioned above you have actually saved the Club over the past few months, and therefore deserve huge credit, history will reflect these troubled times and those that have stood up to the challenge will be remembered.

It is also the case that our entire ticket income, whether matchday or Season Ticket, and whilst hugely important to the future of the Club, only covers a proportion of our overheads, therefore we have to work very hard to make up the balance, some of which comes from our EFL TV deal, some comes from the Premier League solidarity payment, some comes from our Main and other sponsors, and the rest came from matchday income, Priestfield conference and banqueting, and the Factory, all of which have been shut down since March, and in the case of the Banqueting Hall we lost all our bookings for this year and Xmas coming, which is a real blow.

I understand there are some supporters that have asked about the position regarding games "missed" at the end of our last campaign, some being Season Ticket holders, others may have purchased in advance for Fleetwood on 14<sup>th</sup> March.

The majority have not asked in regards to cash refunds, realizing the position the Club is in, and understanding the effect this scenario would have to the survival of the business, in fact most have 'donated' the benefit to the Club, which is again admirable and I thank you for your generosity. I am fully aware of the need to come up with some kind of solution, my thinking right now would be to offer guest tickets for above for games when crowds are allowed back into stadia, or some other kind of benefit once clarity returns, so please bear with me, I just need to see how the next month or so develops, more importantly whether either myself and/or the EFL are successful in external funding efforts, and then I can offer more ideas and solutions.

Turning now to the season we are about to embark on, and all being well we will actually get to complete this season in its entirety, one way or another.

Over the past month or so we have been modelling potential scenarios in regards to fans being allowed back into Priestfield for home games, with safety obviously being the most significant and determining factor.

Our planning has been led by government appointed bodies, working alongside the Local Authority, our Safety Advisory Group, the EFL, our Safety Officer, myself and staff internally. We do not decide on how the procedures will or can work, but we are obviously party to the planning and procedures.

The potential crowd capacity will be determined by a number of factors, algorithms, access and egress points, crowd flows, concourse sizes, safe distancing, and many of the phrases we have all become used to in recent months, that work is ongoing and we believe we may be able to have some supporters in Priestfield for our first home game after 3<sup>rd</sup> October, i.e. Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> October. We will be unable to open concourse food and beverage facilities at this stage.

We are awaiting clarification as to how many fans we can welcome back to Priestfield, however we are confident we will be able to sell, and welcome, more Season Ticket Holders than currently expected, therefore we will be opening up applications very shortly, details to follow.

We understand we will also be able to welcome back our Box Holders and VIP Club Members providing they are within their own 'Bubble' within the Stadium, checks and documentation will be required. More details on this point to follow.

Games before this date will sadly be behind closed doors, however, in conjunction with the EFL, we will be streaming all games, hopefully, with full commentary via iFollow, (available on Club Website).

Each iFollow match pass will be Free of Charge to all Season Ticket Holders for home League games only, season ticket holders will be sent a unique 'once only usage' password/code, with all other supporters having the option to view at a cost of £10.

Away matches are not available free of charge, they will also cost £10.

EFL Cup games will also cost £10, beginning with our game against Southend this coming Saturday 5<sup>th</sup> September. FA Cup games to be advised, we are awaiting detail from the FA.

This does not affect games that are selected for broadcasting by Sky TV, they will be available on normal Sky TV.

Our planning thus far for potential supporter return on October 10<sup>th</sup>. ('with reduced crowd'), will primarily be based on the following, but we will confirm final details asap, once confirmed.

1/ Priority for entry to home games will be given to Season Ticket Holders in the first instance. There will be a system set up whereby Season Ticket Holders request an entry pass/es, which we will send for the specific game, or games ahead. We are just working up logistics. We would urge you not to request a pass or passes unless you are personally coming to the game, you must not request a pass for someone else, all attending will be monitored. Remember safety is paramount and we require full support from our fans to ensure the system is effective and can continue.

2/ Fans will be able, subject to loading factors and numbers, to generally sit in the stand for which they have purchased a Season Ticket, but will NOT be able to sit in the specific seat they normally sit in, until full crowds return and no restrictions apply.

3/ Fans MUST sit in the seat allocated by Stadium Loading Staff on arrival in the Stadium, we will load stands on a first come, best available seat basis. You CANNOT change seats, or

move to any empty seats once you have been seated. You must sit in the seat directed by Stadium Loading Staff. There will be no seating of choice. You must sit with whoever you arrive with in the same bubble.

There will be empty seats between different individuals/groups, these seats MUST remain empty for safe distancing. Alternate rows will be left empty. If a supporter decides to ignore the safe distancing and move seat, or use one of the empty seats they will be removed from stadium and their ST revoked. We need everyone to act responsibly for this scheme to work. It is in everyone's interests for this process to work successfully.

4/ A maximum of 4 persons from same household/bubble allowable.

5/ Your temperature will be taken prior to entering the stadium, anyone above limits will not be permitted entry.

6/ There will be no tea bars or concessions open, we may be able to open toilets, but ideally supporters should plan to remain in allocated seat until game finishes. You will be permitted to bring food/drink into the stadium for personal consumption, subject to stadium regulations, i.e. no glass bottles or cans permitted.

I know this all sounds quite radical, but these are the protocols all grounds will need to work to if they are to be successful in getting fans back to watch football, which is what we all want.

These procedures are being put in place for the safety of all, and given the past few months it would be difficult to try and argue otherwise. I have no doubt all reasonable fans understand the challenges.

Finally, we have made many adjustments to our business model during lockdown, some difficult and tough decisions have had to be made, and more will follow, but my primary concern has, and will continue to be the welfare and long-term future of the Football Club we all support and care so much for, it's simply survival whatever it takes, and that is my prime focus. If I can achieve that, and there are still many hurdles to jump, I will consider I have fulfilled my responsibilities.

On the changes, we are remodeling our merchandise offering and building a more significant on-line merchandising operation, the main shop will close in due course and be replaced by other matchday shops and/or offerings, but we will drive online in a big way, hopefully that will be kicking in before the end of October. We are staying with Macron and keeping the current kit, there will be no changes this season.

Ticketing will be changed, probably with a new ticketing platform, better online offering, e ticketing, print at home with new access control system for ground entry, new CRM system fully integrated to allow better interaction with supporters and businesses, and other ground improvements are in hand.

Hope the above clarifies where we think we are, I would caution that change is possible, however I think what I have outlined is fairly close to where we hope we will be, and indeed it will be fantastic to get you all back into Priestfield asap, to cheer on the new re-modelled team as we set sail on another journey, one we weren't sure was going to happen a couple of

months ago. Thanks for your continued support and understanding, you really are special people.

Keep safe and Best Wishes

Up The Gills!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'P. Scally' with a stylized flourish above the name.

Paul D P Scally

Chairman