



We Own Our Football Club

31st October 2019

Dear Candidates

Questions from Trust Members to Candidates for the 2019 Election to the Trust Board

Please find below a series of questions posed by Trust Members to the 2019 candidates for election to the Trust Board. Please provide a written response to each of these questions by Sunday 3rd November. Individual candidate responses will be posted to the trust website (<http://weownexetercityfc.co.uk/>).

1. Are any of the candidates considering ways to reduce the amount of plastic used on match days? There seems to be a huge amount of plastic drinking glasses which appear to get thrown away after a single use.

Environmental sustainability plays a huge part in any organisation these days. I know that the club have already implemented a number of initiatives to reduce plastic, such as the use of paper bags in the club shop or paper straws in the centre spot bar. With regards to plastic drinking glasses on match days, the club already have reusable ones for which a deposit must be paid – I believe these are used at the bottle bar in the centre spot and are collected at the time of closing and reused.

I am not aware of how plastic cups are used in other parts of the ground, however, I know that there were other clubs trialling another reusable plastic cup initiative which positioned cup chutes around the concourse in order to prompt fans to recycle the plastic cups. The easier we make it for our fans to collaborate on sustainable initiatives, the more likely we are to see a successful reduction of plastic waste. This is something I would be keen to promote if I were elected to the Trust board.

2. Have you done any unpaid work for the Trust-Club over the last 5 years that we Supporters would know about if so what and why did you get involved?

My initial contact with the Trust was when I was writing up my undergraduate project in 2015, which was a marketing plan for the Trust. Through this I became involved with the club shop, where I volunteered on the online shop and helped in the physical shop for nine months. Following this I became involved with CCT doing coaching and matchday experiences and I have been on the Communications and Engagement working group of the Trust since July 2017, most notably aiding in the relaunching of the Trust newsletter and leading the [1,000th Goal project](#), which raised money through corporate members sponsoring goals 990 through 1,000 under Trust ownership and saw Steve Flack and Jonathan Forte awarded with commemorative plates pitch side to celebrate them scoring the 1st and 1,000th goals since becoming Trust owned.



3. Why did you join The Trust?

I have been a Trust member for as long as I can remember – my dad signed me up when I was a young kid! Perhaps more pertinent is why I am still a Trust member: I believe in the model and that fans should have a say in their football club. All too often we have seen clubs plagued by poor ownership at this level: Leyton Orient, Notts County, Blackpool, Coventry and, sadly, Bury are all recent examples of what can happen. We have been there ourselves and since the Trust took over our club has completely transformed itself, both on and off the pitch. We can continue to go from strength to strength under the Trust model and I am excited at the opportunity to be a part of it, which is why I am standing for election.

4. In your own household/family is anyone a Trust member if so who, if not do you think you could help them see why they should join.

Everyone in my immediate family are Trust members: my dad, my brother and my mum (even though she doesn't actually like football).

5. Why should new members join in the future?

That depends on who would be joining the Trust in the future. From a fan's perspective, we're one of a handful of clubs that are run at a profit and, for the most part, the club has been in incredibly good financial health under the ownership of the Supporters' Trust, something which has not been the case under private ownership. Supporting and joining the Trust is a vote for the continuation of a well-run club, that genuinely benefits the community it is based in and that is showing progress both on and off the pitch.

However, I feel that the Trust needs to appeal to a much wider audience than just football fans in order to grow. A recent question on my election thread on Exeweb has made me think long and hard about what I think can be learnt from fan-owned clubs on the continent, specifically where I grew up in Bilbao. Whilst replicating the specific situation would be impossible, ensuring that the football club is an integral part of the community is certainly possible. I think that developing the football club into an entity that brings tangible benefits to the citizens of Exeter (and Greater Exeter), spearheaded by the Trust, would encourage a different demographic to take a genuine interest in both the Trust and the Club. Of course, this would have to form part of a joint long-term strategy between the Trust, Club and CCT; and the rewards would not be seen for a number of years.

Also important to consider are potential corporate members, as I feel there is great scope for growth in this area. I believe that the Trust can offer corporate members activation opportunities for existing and potential corporate members that will entice businesses to sign up to the Trust and provide a platform for them to meaningfully engage with the wider membership.

6. Aside from whatever technical and business skills you feel you can bring to the role, what do you think is the best personal quality you possess that will make you an effective Trustee?"



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I feel I am well equipped for the role due to my knowledge of how the Trust is run. I been involved at working group level, delivering on a number of projects since joining the Communications and Engagement group, and now feel that the time is right to become more involved. I feel my personal skill I can bring to the role is my ability to form good working relationships, some which I have developed with a number of people at the Trust, which will stand me in good stead should I be elected as a Trustee.

7. Would you have liked to see the hustings on a match day, like 6.30pm last Saturday after the Plymouth game with the Centre Spot closing then would have been a fantastic time for fans to meet the candidates.

Most certainly. A big issue with Trust elections in the past has been the difficulty of getting members to engage with candidates. I can understand, however, that the fixture list has not been kind with regards to this and that it has not been possible on this occasion. The use of technology will have hopefully ensured that a large number of members got to see this year's hustings (via a livestream which was proposed at a Communications and Engagements group meeting I was involved in) and further widespread use of media should definitely be considered for future elections.

8. How would you make the Elections more focused by the Club & Media to get more fans involved and understanding there vote counts.

Making it easier for the membership to engage with candidates and to vote. With the technology now available it is certainly possible to ensure that candidates can interact with a broad number of members over a multitude of channels.

The lack of online voting, alongside only having one home match to drop off voting slips before the election, will certainly have had a negative impact on participation. It is a true shame that we do not have an online voting system in place, as this would not only increase participation due to ease of access, but it would also allow members who live abroad to have a direct say in how the Trust is run.

The use of livestreams and other media should also be used in future elections to help aid the participation and engagement of the membership.

9. The Trust Logo is missing from a lot of prominent locations within the Club how would you get more of a natural link between the Trust & Club

From my previous experience I feel the working link between the Trust and the Club is a good and natural one. This has certainly improved since the Trust gained more voting power on the club board a number of years ago.

As for the Trust logo – I do feel that it could be more prominent around the ground, though I am sure that as much space as possible is allocated to sponsors to maximise commercial revenues. Whether the Trust should pay for more visibility around the ground is an interesting idea though, and certainly one I'll be willing to debate with the Communications and Engagement group at our next meeting.



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10. Do you think the Trust should take more advantage of the in house Club media departments like The 360, Club Websites, Match Day Programme, internet outlets, Local & Nation media contacts.

Absolutely, though it is important to generate sufficient content to warrant the use of these channels. This can be a struggle in an organisation that is run by volunteers, though myself, Will Barrett (who is also standing for election) and Jon Beer (a current Trustee) are in the process of working on a platform for the Trust to generate its own content, which will hopefully be launching in the new year.

11. How would you improve next years Trust Elections from encouraging fans to stand for election and how the Trust Focuses on bringing the candidates to the memberships thoughts.

Electronic or online voting is the main way of improving the Trust elections at this time. Producing a Trust platform for candidates to campaign on would also be an improvement. This functionality was feasible up until recently, from my understanding, and will certainly be something I will pursue whether I am elected to the Trust board or not.

12. Would you like to see the Trust improve the assets for the Club and what opportunities do you feel we are missing at the moment that could bring long term gains for our football club.

The Trust improving the assets of the Club that would lead to long-term gain would be challenging for the Trust. The Club own its assets (not the Trust) and generate considerably more revenue than the Trust, with or without windfalls from player transfers.

With regards to missed opportunities, it is difficult to say. We are limited in what we can do with SJP to bring in significant revenue 365 days a year, which perhaps means we may have to look at alternative venues from which we can be based, which would be built with year-round non-footballing income in mind. Clubs further up the pyramid and abroad have been renting the space in their stadiums to cafés, restaurants, gyms, etc., which is something we could take inspiration from moving forward.

13. How would you make the Trust website more prominent with Exeter City FC Fans.

By uploading engaging content. This is difficult when the organisation is led by volunteers, but is a challenge myself and Will Barrett will be looking to take on once we launch a revamped Trust website; again hopefully in the new year.

14. Do you think that Exeter City AFC Limited should post the full company accounts and not the edited version on company's house, and also push for all EFL clubs to do the same?

I do, though I believe there is an additional cost to publishing the full accounts. However, I think it is important to be transparent with the fans, particularly at a club that is fan-owned, so that the accounts can be properly analysed. The best way to measure whether an organisation is financially sound is to analyse (or produce) a cashflow statement, which



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cannot be done with the current set of accounts as the income statement is omitted. If necessary, I feel that the Trust could pay for the additional costs of producing the full accounts.

15. What's the candidates views on GESP "Mid Devon, East Devon, Teignbridge and Exeter City Council, in partnership with Devon County Council, are teaming up to create the "Greater Exeter Strategic Plan" and the new sports venue mentioned?
- "An sports stadium and concert arena with a capacity for 20,000 people could be built in the Greater Exeter area". No specific location for where any stadium would go has yet been decided. Cllr Christophers said it would have to be accessible for all four councils in the GESP. He said-"Making it accessible for all four areas cuts it down to around only four or five sites that can meet all the criteria we are looking at," Cllr Christophers said. "It is too early to be site specific but we are having discussions about it now. "Any stadium may need to grow over time and would have to be built so it can expand as it could be something that draws people in from all over the south west."
 - With the Exeter City Community Trust (CCT) strap line used over the last 2 years "Making Greater Exeter Greater" and Club Board Directors using Greater Exeter in the press there is an assumption that talks have taken place to move ECFC outside Exeter.
 - If we had to move do you think the best 2 locations would be Exeter Arena Park Whipton inside Exeter or Westpoint outside Exeter.

ECFC have always been in the heart of Exeter and should we ever leave SJP, which I think is necessary to ensure the financial sustainability of the club in the long-term, I would much prefer if we could stay within the city boundary. The idea of potentially moving to Exeter Arena and sharing with other sporting organisations in the city would fit in perfectly with the community ethos of both the Club and Trust, though the number of stakeholders that would be involved in the negotiations could make the idea potentially unfeasible.

As for moving to a new sports venue as part of the "Greater Exeter Strategic Plan", it would certainly be something to consider. For me, everything would depend on the level of ownership and control over the ground that ECFC would have and the potential to benefit from the facilities both on matchdays and on non-matchdays. Without knowledge of any potential plans, I cannot confidently state whether I would back such a move.

16. Under Trust Rules this would need to go to the vote of Trust members, how would you guide members if ever to be voted on.

It would all come down to the long-term sustainability of the club – that is for me the main concern of the Trust and on what it should base its guidance to members. The membership should have access to as much information as possible in order to make an informed decision.

17. Would you keep the younger Supporters involved and if ever to be voted on a move would you include the Junior Grecians in that vote.



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Keeping younger supporters engaged and involved with the Trust is vital for the long-term, both the Club's and the Trust's. With regards to allowing members under the age of 16 a vote, I believe it would require a change in the Trust's rules, which state that *"no person under the age of 16 shall be entitled to a share in the Trust or be entitled to vote at any general meeting of the Trust"*.

Phil Burden

Trust Secretary