

THE BEDFORD EAGLES SUPPORTERS TRUST (B.E.S.T) BUSINESS PLAN

10th July 2008

This Business Plan has been developed in conjunction with comments and issues raised at “The Wave” consultation process held at The Kings Arms pub in Bedford on 7th May 2008. Thank you to all Trust Members who attended. “The Wave” is a Business Planning tool using symbols to show hopes, dreams and goals while recognising and finding ways to overcome fears and challenges. The launch of this plan is on July 10th 2008.

A business plan is necessary for any successful organisation. It makes the current aspirations and challenges clear for all to understand and sets timed goals to be achieved.

B.E.S.T TO DATE

On July 30th last year the previous Trust Committee resigned en bloc.

This followed calls for changes in the direction and organisation of the Trust that had been supported by Members and some Committee members, who attended AGM and EGM meetings in January and May 2007. The motions put were passed by those attending, but defeated by proxy votes at the meeting in May.

Supporters Direct, our governing body, which the previous Committee had involved during March 2007, became concerned about a number of issues. Discussions between senior Committee members and Supporters Direct continued throughout the summer. Unresolved differences between the two groups culminated in the resignation of the entire committee on July 30th. This was announced on September 5th 2007. It is important to reiterate that not all of the Committee members resigned for the same reasons, and that some have returned to actively support The B.E.S.T.

Before resigning, the outgoing committee gave over 80% of the Trusts money (£3000) to the Players Budget Fund. £1000 had also been collected from members and passed to the Club Chairman following his January 2007 appeal for funds for additional stadium seating, to comply with new Conference league regulations. In all, some £2050 was donated to the Seat Appeal, but has not to date been used for this purpose.

Following the Committees’ resignation, use of the Stan Maxey centre was handed over to the Supporters’ Club.

After the resignations, and following discussions with Supporters Direct, Terry Pavey applied to take control of the Trust in order to set up new and democratic elections and B.E.S.T was formed.

A Newsletter was quickly published in November 2007 setting out the proposed directions, and sent to members past and present.

A Meeting of members and non-members was held on 5th December 2007 at which it was agreed to continue, and 10 members agreed to form an Election Steering Group.

The Steering Group oversaw a democratic process culminating in the automatic election of the current Board of Society.

The B.E.S.T. MISSION AND PURPOSE

A Supporters Trust is an umbrella organisation with the ability to embrace and utilise the wishes and resources of fans; shareholders; businesses; political and sporting organisations for the benefit of our towns football club.

The Board, and members of the Society will pursue a meaningful level of ownership and governance of the Bedford Town Football Club **at an appropriate time**, thus ensuring that along with the investment of supporters' time, effort and money comes the real authority to share in decision-making.

In order to achieve this we will work with or alongside, any and all individuals and organisations that see the potential for a greater involvement of the whole community in the club, and of the clubs potential as a more vital part of the community. We may thus be one of a group of separate businesses and organisations on a future Club Board, or act as an umbrella organisation in which those other partners join us.

Our Trust must be democratic; honest; transparent in its dealings, and always seek to involve members. It must constantly educate us all on how the game is governed and run. It must attempt to always have regard to the differing opinions within the community of people who wish to see Bedford Town Football Club as a vibrant and successful community club.

CURRENT RELATIONSHIP WITH BEDFORD TOWN FOOTBALL CLUB

The Chairman of Bedford Town Football Club (David Howell) has decided that B.E.S.T. cannot operate from within the club; purchase stadium or programme advertising, contribute articles to the programme, engage in public debate in the ground; be mentioned over the public address system; leaflet inside the stadium, or hire the facilities of The New Eyrie for Trust events. This is regrettable in some senses, because The Trust remains willing to discuss with David Howell how we might help achieve some return on his as yet unfulfilled property investment. B.E.S.T has also come under some criticism from Mr Howell who clearly sees the vision of The Trust as a threat rather than an opportunity.

More recently in response to our work in The Trust, David Howell has set up a Football Management Committee (FMC) designed to include fans in club decision-making. This

Committee has a remit to run the players budget scheme focussing on management and income generation to use now and in the near future.

This contrasts with the aims of B.E.S.T which are to generate income to meet a longer-term goal of Community involvement, and a wider model of ownership and governance.

David Howell and his family own over 75% of the shares in Bedford Town Football Club giving him ultimate control on all aspects of the company.

We believe that the path to a fully inclusive community club is through **The B.E.S.T.**

THE WAY FORWARD

In order for **The B.E.S.T** to move towards its end goal of full or part ownership and governance of Bedford Town Football Club Ltd (BTFC) it is essential to recognise issues current within the organisation and all external issues that have an effect on the running of it.

EXTERNAL ISSUES

The Chairman of BTFC, David Howell, currently has a negative attitude towards B.E.S.T. as has been demonstrated by articles in the local press. We believe that he feels his management and power is challenged by ideas put forward by The Trust, whose style is to work in a democratic and open way. This has led to B.E.S.T as an organisation being banned from the ground.

We need to work towards the development of relationships with businesses in order to increase corporate Trust membership, raise capital, bonds and financial pledges. This will give us a strong negotiating position with potential partners.

Mr Howell's company Hilco Investments Ltd (now struck) took control of BTFC Ltd and the lease to the football ground in 2000. Hilco Investments Ltd submitted a planning application for the development of a commercial fitness centre/cafe on the training ground. To date this has not been fully approved by Bedford Council planning department. In order for B.E.S.T to better understand Mr Howells options, further research is required in a number of areas

Lack of recent investment by the current club owner has led to a poor atmosphere at the ground. Many supporters are feeling that the club is not thriving which is leading to lower supporter attendances at matches.

A major issue currently facing BTFC Ltd is the lack of outside investment. Many people who could invest in BTFC have told our members that they would not invest while the current owner remains with ultimate control.

We need to publicise our vision for the future, build membership and show what the club would be like under Trust leadership. This includes a target of developing long-term

relationships with local and national media; develop regular newsletters to Members explaining clearly our goals and achievements to date.

We need to develop a commercial team from **The B.E.S.T.** members whose task will be marketing to local business explaining the vision of The Trust and obtaining funding and pledges of funding to be given when control of BTFC changes in the future. This consortium of future funders will only be accepted if they believe in and sign up to the community vision of the Trust

In order to develop this commercial team, it is essential to build an accurate skills audit of B.E.S.T members with information about the skills, experience and abilities our members have and how much time they can volunteer to the development of The Trust.

There is still limited information and accountability from the current BTFC Ltd management team to fans and shareholders. In order to build our knowledge we need to research accounts and all public information available to us.

Many of our members are also club shareholders who have a right to attend the BTFC Ltd AGM and who can pose questions about club expenditure and other issues for Mr Howell to answer. There is a need to understand the impact of the 2006 Companies Act.

We need to develop relationships with a solicitor and accountant who would be willing to volunteer professional advice. We need our members who are also shareholders of the club to develop a series of questions for BTFC Board.

A significant challenge to B.E.S.T is the way in which the current fan base is divided. There is history of misunderstandings and differences between a Supporters Club and a Trust. Many fans feel that they have to be loyal to one group or another. Some fans are not joining either organisation because they do not want to be involved with the “politics”. Some fans are unaware of the remit of both the Trust and The Supporters Club.

There are however clear differences between the objectives of The Supporters Club and The Trust. It is essential that in the future everyone work together, as **both organisations bring different positive outcomes** to the club and there is no reason why supporters may not be members of both organisations without compromising themselves.

Our task is to develop a marketing strategy to clearly show all supporters the reasons and benefits of joining B.E.S.T and to engage current Trust members in the development of B.E.S.T so they can be actively recruiting new members.

INTERNAL ISSUES

It is recognised that B.E.S.T is a democratic organisation working in a professional way. Our current marketing materials have been praised and our progress to date has

influenced changes in BTFC Ltd. We must not underestimate our influence and build on the positive beginning.

We need to develop the following strategies

Marketing/membership

There remains much to be done to move **The B.E.S.T** towards our long-term goals. We currently have 91 paid up members. Whilst this is positive bearing in mind all of the changes that have taken place over the last year it is not enough. We need to rebuild relationships with ex Trust members and develop new relationships with supporters who have not been members before. A clear vision and set of goals will assist in this task.

In order to reach our goals we need the current membership to increase and engage in the tasks of **The B.E.S.T** to move it forward. The development of an accurate skills audit is essential in order to get the expertise we need on **The B.E.S.T**. Boards and in working groups. We need to set targets for increasing active membership and this task should be shared among all current Trust members.

We need to develop a Business Working Group as soon as possible. This group will be marketing to potential future funders and influencers such as politicians; businesses and individual investors. This group will also oversee funding projects such as “Eagle Auctions”

Communication

Our public information needs to be clear and concise and we need to regularly be featured in local and national press and publications and on the Web. We will attract new members and potential financial backing in this way. We also need to communicate regularly to existing Trust members via a developed website, and newsletters. When we have discovered information that we believe should be in the public domain we need to communicate it and have the courage to stand by our knowledge even if the subject is challenging. We also need to be proud of our achievements and develop a way of notifying people of our successes.

Research

We have a lack of independent research on a number of important issues. We need to develop a research officer post to enable accurate information to be passed to the Board.

Finance/fundraising

We need to be accurate and transparent in all of our financial dealings. We also need to present finances in a user- friendly way to make sure all interested parties can access and understand the information. We need to develop a strategy to ensure that we exceed any legal requirements and that our financial information is readily accessible. We also need

to develop relationships with The Council, education establishments and other funding bodies to access all available funding.

Football / community involvement

Over time we need to be actively developing relationships with schools, community groups, colleges and existing youth teams. This will ensure that when **The B.E.S.T.** reaches its goal of a supporter owned/led club, we have a strong network of support and potential talent available to us.

The B.E.S.T LONG-TERM AIMS

Our long-term goal is for **The B.E.S.T** to own, part own or lead a consortium of community minded organisations, businesses and funding bodies in the management and running of Bedford Town Football Club. This will require inspiring leadership. We feel sure that within our current Trust Membership and within Bedfordshire these leaders are available. We need people with financial backing to enable our community club vision to be realised.

We plan to publicise our goals and targets and will notify all members when they are met. This will build confidence in B.E.S.T and over time increase our membership. We will build relationships with Bedford Council working towards a healthy debate about the ground and where in the future it should be situated,

We want The Eagles to be a successful club with strong community focus. Success breeds success. If the team has investment it will lead to supporters returning to watch the game every week and new fans feeling excited by their local club. This in turn will lead to more financial interest and investment, and to an ambitious successful team who can progress through league and cup competitions.

We believe that in conjunction with The Supporters Club and the wider community, The B.E.S.T has a major contribution to make in the long-term success of our club.

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