

By email

Rt Hon Lisa Nandy MP
Secretary of State for Culture, Media & Sport
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

11 November 2024

Dear Secretary of State

Football Governance Bill – Supporters Trusts

The undersigned are football supporters trusts registered under the Co-operative and Community Benefit Societies Act 2014 and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority.

We very much welcome the introduction of the Football Governance Bill to the House of Lords and, with its second reading due on Wednesday 13 November, we look forward to its progress through Parliament to enactment.

However, while we are very supportive of the Bill and most of its provisions we are concerned that the Bill contains no reference to the role of supporters' trusts and, in particular, to the involvement of trusts in the fans consultation process outlined in the draft legislation.

We consider this to be an unfortunate omission that needs to be addressed to ensure the inclusion of supporters' trusts as part of the 'fan engagement threshold requirements'.

Unlike other supporter groups and clubs, which tend to be unincorporated with no rules or accountability, supporters' trusts are formally organised with a written constitution and elected boards of directors.

They publish full financial accounts, maintain minutes of meetings and engage in democratic procedures under which they are accountable to their members. As such they are fully independent of the owners and directors of their respective football clubs.

We are aware of situations at certain clubs where owners, in anticipation of the coming legislation, have already created Fan Advisory Boards comprising persons close to, and friendly with, the existing controlling interests and so unlikely to confront or raise the difficult matters that may need to be addressed.

The road to supporters being properly and meaningfully represented at their clubs by independent supporters could quite easily be blocked by manipulative owners.

Whilst we appreciate that secondary legislation will be introduced by way of statutory instrument(s) to provide the Independent Football Regulator with wide powers and authority, the fact is that this will happen only after the law is enacted and such regulations are generally not subject to detailed scrutiny in debate in Parliament.

We consider that our concerns should be dealt with in the primary legislation.

Supporters' trusts have played a vital role at many clubs since their establishment in 1992, in several instances being pivotal in ensuring the continued existence of their football club from extinction at the hands of reckless, unscrupulous and impecunious owners.

Too often supporters' trusts only come into their own when their club is in severe financial difficulties and lasting damage has already been caused from which recovery can be long and painful.

Too often, supporters' trusts have been excluded or marginalised by clubs where owners have not been receptive to criticisms.

Active participation of supporters' trusts as part of the fan consultation will go a long way to early identification of issues and problems.

We believe that the involvement of supporters' trusts as a fan consultation condition attached to each operating licence granted to clubs, where supporters' trusts exist, must be obligatory.

Thanking you for your consideration.

Yours sincerely

John Morgan
Board Secretary
Northampton Town Supporters Trust

With support from:-

Barnsley - Alan Bloore (Barnsley Supporters Trust)
Birmingham City - Neil Cottrell (Blues Trust)
Blackburn Rovers – (Rovers Trust)
Doncaster Rovers - Martin O'Hara (Viking Supporters' Co-Operative)
Exeter City - Nick Hawker (Exeter City Supporters Trust)
Leyton Orient – Jonathan Kaye (Leyton Orient Fans Trust)
Manchester United – Duncan Drasdo (Manchester United Supporters Trust)
Morecambe – (Shrimps Trust)
Plymouth Argyle – Virginia Pike (Plymouth Argyle Supporters Trust)
Reading – Adam Jones (Supporters Trust At Reading)
Swansea City – Diane Hughes (Swans Trust)
Swindon Town – Nick Coote (Swindon Town Supporters Trust)
Torquay United – Rick Williams (Torquay United Supporters Trust)
Wolverhampton Wanderers – Anne Bott (Wolves 1877 Trust)