**CFU MEMBERS MEETING - 22ND OCTOBER, 2012 – THE BLUES BAR 7.30PM**

**CFU BOARD PRESENT:** Chris Pilsbury (Chairman), Jeff Banks, David Evans, Jane Hipkiss, Russ Hughes, Bill Smith, Campbell Smith, Alan Tarbuck

**APOLOGIES:** Paul Baker, Mike Vickers

CP opened the meeting and gave brief updates on the Think Pink Day, the availability of the Legends’ Lounge and Blues Bar for private functions with AT informing members about the Former Players event on Friday 27th October entitled ‘Hotshot Heaven’. This was followed by the CFU Player of the Month Awards hosted by Mark Howell. The winners were:-

U9s Riley Jones

U11s Rowan Whelan

U14s Joe Brandon

U17s Calum Woods

Youth Owen Crawford

Ladies Becky O’Brien

The first team award went to Antoni Sarcevic who will receive it prior to Saturday’s game against Histon. Mark thanked the Club and CFU for recognising the players.

CP gave a vote of thanks for all of the youth coaches and stated that in the original CFU business plan the establishment of junior / ladies teams had high importance and it was gratifying to see the number of teams that had been established and it was an important statement of what CFC is all about and CFU owes both Mark Howell and Bernard Concannon a great deal of gratitude.

CP then moved on to speak about how CFU could be developed. Football League requirements mean that certain structures would need to be in place if CFC were to become a member of it. The Club is effectively top of the Conference North and since its formation in 2010 has averaged a position of 1.2 in the respective league tables. Given that fact, and the current start to the season, it is a distinct possibility that a third promotion could come our way in six months’ time which would see us one promotion away from the Football League.

A place in the Football Conference and at the end of the season a play-off position could lead to a fourth promotion and it is essential that the Board look at all possibilities. Two and a half years ago nobody envisaged we’d be at the top of Conference North, who knows where we may be in a further two and a half years.

Should we get into the Football League, the Football League requires a separate limited company to run the football club but this company would be owned by CFU. At its last meeting the Board were presented with a discussion document that looked at various ways of structuring the Club. It included various options including one, which was inaccurately reported on Deva Chat, which was the establishment of an Executive Board. If this option were to be taken up an Executive Board would be established to undertake the day to day running of the business with the CFU Board responsible for the Club’s strategy.

The Board intends to set up a working party with a view to reporting back to the CFU in six months’ time with a preferred option. The working party will not just consist of current Board Members but other CFU Members who feel their skills and expertise would contribute to it. For example a CFU member with a legal background would be required for help with negotiating the new lease plus ensuring our constitution complied with those of both the Football League and Football Association.

A question came from the floor asking if the Club had spoken to Supporters Direct about any proposed changes. CP replied that he had discussed it with Tom Hall, who had also had input into changes at AFC Wimbledon where he was a fan. Those discussions would continue as part of the process.

CP handed over to CS who gave a brief overview of the constitutional changes required following a change in the SD model which had taken place in response to events at certain clubs. SD have encouraged CFU to adopt these changes at the forthcoming AGM as they have stripped out a lot of the original rules and put them into policy documents to sit alongside the rules which gives clubs more flexibility. These should appear on the CFU website within the next 14 days.

CP continued stating that if we want to push the Club forward we need more growth. We are currently working with CWAC with regards to a new lease, training ground and grant applications. Flintshire CC have indicated that there will be no major planning issues with the proposed development and tonight we need to start to prepare the way for the future.

DE then introduced a presentation which will be e-mailed to CFU members. In his opinion the Club is at a crossroads, we’re striving to do our best and striving to do better to achieve more but how do we ensure sustainability? The Club has never known a period of success as we have now in its history.

He added that our model is our biggest asset not a hindrance although at times it might feel like it as we have no ‘owner’ to fund us other than our members. Sustainability is the key word. When the CFU took over the football club the brand was ‘shot to pieces’ The involvement of the likes of MBNA and CWAC has only come about because they believe in what we are trying to achieve and this is integral for our commercial future. If we treat people correctly we will have a whole host of volunteers to help take us forward. However, we need to make choices, at times we cannot progress as quickly as we might like but need to grow our support year on year. There must be 50k people in the Cheshire West and Chester area who take a passing interest in the Club’s fortunes, we need to engage with those people.

The original targets from the business plan were displayed alongside a scorecard where DE indicated how well he thought the Club had done since 2010, with marks ranging from 9/10 to 4/10. He also demonstrated the commercial potential of the Club with the estimated revenue of CCFC dwarfed by the current CFC figures but those figures need to grow and grow,

RH continued with the presentation adding that far too often we target the same people for financial contributions and we need to share the load. We need all CFU members to participate and add their own ideas to the ones suggested by the Board who don’t have a monopoly on such things.

Two questions from the floor followed….how much do the current fundraising schemes such as the Seals Lottery and Blues Lotto contribute to the Club….a lot of the current problems stem from the Club’s poor communication, membership has dropped by 50% and whilst it is understood that the Board has undertaken an enormous amount of work it still needs to communicate more.

JB replied that the income figures should be available in the forthcoming accounts whilst it was recognised that the communication aspect needed to be improved and for starters the power point presentation being discussed would be e-mailed to all CFU members. He also pointed out that constitutionally there was no requirement for minutes to be taken at CFU members’ meetings, notes were being taken this evening and would be sent out and placed on the CFU website.

Four further questions followed…can matters relating to CFU be posted on the official CFU website and not on Deva Chat as a number of members will not go on it…..has the Board considered publishing its minutes as FC United do …..could the information boards in the concourses be used to display CFU information….could there be a CFU page in the matchday programme.

JB replied that all of the above were possibilities and some, eg the minutes, had already been discussed by the Board. He continued to move through the presentation and asked what fee CFU membership should be and would members pay more for additional benefits, and if so what benefits would they like to see. Membership rates at other Clubs were quoted and members suggested that for an additional fee on top of the annual £5 benefits could include:-

* Monthly draw
* Family ticket giveaway
* Club shop discount
* Priority tickets for away games
* Car park passes
* Discount on away travel

Question from the floor about Junior Blues having their Club Shop discount rescinded this year. Pat Cluskey responded that in his opinion the Club would lose more money than it would make if a 10% discount was offered to whatever category of CFU member paid a £5 annual subscription. If, however, that subscription was £5 per month / £60 per year, the decision could be revisited but if the Board felt that a discount was appropriate on an annual £5 membership then that could be introduced. Barrie Hipkiss added that the away travel was not necessarily a profit-making venture and there were losses and gains on trips throughout the season with any profit at the end of the year being used to purchase items for the Club so the Club might lose out on that if the fares were to be discounted.

JB showed the meeting ideas the Board had already discussed, some of which had also been suggested from the floor.

The question of falling memberships was addressed again and DE informed that at Bishop’s Stortford the Exiles had recruited 10 new CFU members, a further 14 had been recruited today from a group of Australian tourists. Could there be recruitment drives on matchdays to which CS replied there was to be one this weekend. JB reminded the room that the directors were all fans too and ‘paid their way’.

The issue of the official website was brought up and JB gave a background to the current situation which currently affected 86 clubs. Whilst the FLI contract was open-ended moving to another provide would see a waste of months of work that he had undertaken to populate the site so that it would be an asset to the Club where it has the potential to earn a five figure sum each year. We were also hoping to continue to be innovative following the introduction of Blues Live Coverage from away fixtures, although the quality was limited by the facilities at the respective grounds. He also stated that despite all the problems he was still receiving less complaints than he did about the pitchero site.

CP added that the problems that had been encountered had led to the resignation of the man heading up FLI, who had contacted the Club following a discussion with his son, Simon, as the former site did not generate a proportionate amount of income for the Club compared to the hits it received but made money for the operators.

CS also apologised for the lack of updates on the CFU site following the transfer of his job from Chester to Manchester but hoped to complete a ‘makeover’ of it by January. Ann Wiggins commented that although there were issues, we often received e-mails from both JB and CS at unearthly hours and given that they were trying to deal with the issues whilst maintaining full-time employment they should be given credit for their efforts.

A question from the floor ….why don’t we utilise Dee 106 to promote CFU memberships. JB replied that we get tremendous coverage from them but given that their business is funded by advertising we cannot always be looking to use them to sell our products for free. He added that the coverage the Club received from the Chester Chronicle continued to excel whilst the coverage in the Leader had improved thanks in part to former director Jim Green who is a senior journalist there. Whilst we get some coverage on the Non League Show and in the Non League Paper, Sky Sports and Soccer AM were not too interested in football at our level and Radio Merseyside’s non league coverage was focused on Southport as they were in the Conference National.

After a break RH continued to talk through the presentation highlighting some of the fundraising initiatives which could be introduced, such as the community share scheme which had recently been successfully adopted by FC United and was also being utilised by Wrexham FC.

He added that If we wanted to compete in the Football Conference, hopefully next year, we would need to have a playing budget of circa £500,000 so all of the options on the presentation were available for us to follow up. A lot of the ‘usual’ advertising / sponsorship packages had already been sold for this season so we had to look at ways of bringing in new money to the business.

A question from the floor….could we look at additional shirt and/or short sponsorship. Pat Cluskey replied that the MBNA deal guaranteed exclusivity on the shirt but last week there had been talks with a potential sponsor about either shorts or stand sponsorship. He added that if anybody in the room had any contacts who wanted to get involved on the sponsorship / advertising front at any level please let him know.

RH concluded the presentation, thanking those members who had given up their time to attend and after some discussion a follow up meeting was set for 14th January, 2013.