



Stirling Albion Supporters' Trust

ANNUAL REPORT

2003

Registered by the Financial Services Authority as Stirling Albion Supporters' Society Limited.
Registration No. 29560R.
Registered Office: Bell and Craig, Solicitors, 4 Albert Place, Dumbarton Road, Stirling, FK8 2QL

1. Introduction

- 1.1 For the first Annual General Meeting (AGM) of the Stirling Albion Supporters' Trust held on 6 March 2003, the then Interim Chairman gave a verbal report to those present at the meeting of developments since the initial meeting in the Tollbooth in June 2002 when Albion's faithful signified interest in establishing a supporters' trust.
- 1.2 For the 2004 Annual General Meeting, the Trust's Board members agreed that a written report should be prepared and submitted in advance to all Trust members. The report is intended to cover major events and developments in which the Trust has been involved in the year ending 31 December 2003.
- 1.3 The Board hopes that Trust members will welcome such a report and, if favourably received, intends that the publication of an Annual Report will continue for future years.
- 1.4 The Board would welcome suggestions from members as to the future content of Annual Reports in order that, as far as possible, the wishes of members can be met.

2. Trust Board

- 2.1 At the AGM on 6 March 2003, the following 12 Interim Board members were elected en bloc to constitute the new Board:

John Buchan
Robert Cunningham
Neil Emslie
David Gardner
Linda Graham
Graham Hamilton
Dick King
Murray MacLeod
Sandy Morton
Colin Ogilvie
Nelson Robertson
Jim Thomson

- 2.2. At the first Board meeting following the AGM, the following were elected as office bearers:

Dick King – Chairman
Graham Hamilton – Vice Chairman
Jim Thomson – Secretary
Sandy Morton – Treasurer

- 2.3 During 2003, Board meetings have been held on 16 January and 20 February (both Interim Board meetings), 18 March, 15 April, 20 May, 3 June, 28 August, 25 September, 14 October and 18 November.
- 2.4 The Trust has been fortunate in that Board meetings have not incurred any costs for room hire since we have been provided free of charge with the use of the lounge at the Halfway House, Kerse Road, Stirling. The Trust is very grateful to Mr David MacGowan, Licensee of the Halfway House for his kind gesture in allowing the Trust the use of the facilities free of charge. In recognition of this, the Board agreed to donate a toaster to the Halfway House during 2003 for a charity event taking place there.
- 2.5 During the course of the year, and in accordance with Rule 56(b) of the Trust's Rules, the Board agreed to invite Stirling Council to nominate a representative to be co-opted to the Board. We were advised in June 2003 that Mr Andy Gould, SFA Football Development Manager for Forth Valley, would serve in this capacity. Unfortunately, Mr Gould has yet to take his place as a co-optee on the Board.
- 2.6 The Board determined to take no further action at this stage to invite two further co-optees (to the maximum of 3 allowed) to serve on the Board. However, it agreed that Dave Gardner should provide a liaison link with the Stirling Albion Supporters' Club, with Colin Ogilvie fulfilling a similar role with the Young Reds.
- 2.7 In accordance with Trust Rule 64, six of the 12 Board members' term of Office will expire in March 2004 although re-election can be sought. Neil Emslie (family commitments) and Sandy Morton (business commitments) have indicated that they will stand down in March 2004, leaving 4 existing Trust Board members to seek re-election should they so desire.
- 2.8 It has been agreed that the following 4 Board members' term of office should expire in March 2004 and, as already indicated, each has the option of seeking re-election to the Board:
- John Buchan
Graham Hamilton
Colin Ogilvie
Nelson Robertson
- 2.9 The six remaining Board members – Robert Cunningham, David Gardner, Linda Graham, Dick King, Murray MacLeod and Jim Thomson - will continue to serve on the Board and their term of office will expire in 2005.
- 2.10 The Board wishes to record its sincere appreciation of the services rendered to the Trust by outgoing Board members, Neil Emslie and Sandy Morton. Both have indicated that they intend remain Trust members and support the Trust into the future.

3. Registration of the Trust

- 3.1 In April 2003, The Trust learned that its application to the Financial Services Authority (FSA) to be registered as an Industrial and Provident Society had succeeded. We are now bound by relevant legislation.
- 3.2 The Trust is registered as “Stirling Albion Supporters’ Society Ltd”, although the Board has determined that we will continue to “trade” as “Stirling Albion Supporters’ Trust”. We are not allowed to be registered as the second-named since the FSA has absolute discretion under the Industrial and Provident Societies Act 1965 to forbid usage of specific names. The FSA will not allow the use of the word “Trust” in the name of any body registering with it.

4. Accounts and Balance Sheet 2003

- 4.1 As a consequence of the establishment of the Trust as an Industrial and Provident Society, it is obligated to submit to the Financial Services Authority properly audited Accounts and Balance Sheet for the financial year ending 31 December 2003.
- 4.2 The Accounts and Balance Sheet is within a separate document for the information and approval of Trust members at the 2004 Annual General Meeting.

5. Business Plan

- 5.1 During the course of the year, the Board decided that it should devise a Business Plan setting out its anticipated income and expenditure in the year ahead. This is still in its developmental stages but individual Trust members will be welcome to peruse it upon request to Board members.
- 5.2 If any Trust member has expertise in this field, the Board would welcome offers of assistance in taking this forward.

6. Relationship with the Club

- 6.1 Of all the issues confronting the Trust in 2003, this issue has proved to be the most time-consuming. It has also proved to be the most frustrating.
- 6.2 At the Annual General Meeting on 6 March 2003, the Trust noted that its Chairman and Treasurer, on behalf of the Trust had had an exploratory meeting with the Club’s Chairman and Directors on 11 December 2002. Those discussions had primarily centred upon the Trust’s desire to enter into dialogue on ways of extending mutual co-operation designed to further the interests of the Club.

- 6.3 Those preliminary talks could best be described as “one-sided” with the Trust’s representatives proactively tabling proposals designed to achieve that end, with the Club’s representatives merely responding that they would take our points away for further consideration and get back to us at a later date. Significantly, in hindsight, no date was indicated when the Trust might expect a formal response from the Club’s Directors.
- 6.4 Further contact initiated on behalf of the Trust, elicited virtually no tangible response from the Club and the Trust was denied the common courtesy of a formal reply.
- 6.5 Trust members will recall that the Club was invited to send a representative to our AGM on 6 March 2003, but they declined our invitation to do so.
- 6.6 The next development did not occur until 7 April 2003 when a meeting was convened at Forthbank Stadium at the behest of Stirling Council. Present at the meeting was Mr Keith Russell, Stirling Council’s Sport & Leisure Manager (who chaired the event), the Chairman and Directors of the Club, representatives of the Trust’s Board, and Mr James Proctor of Supporters’ Direct (Scotland).
- 6.7 Discussions focussed upon the desire of the Council for there to be appropriate community involvement in Stirling Albion as a Club, primarily through the Trust. James Proctor was very supportive of the concept of Trusts having a say in the running of Clubs and having the ability of raising funds to support Clubs especially in times of financial difficulty, but with the quid pro quo of Trusts being given a voice on the Boards of Clubs.
- 6.8 For the Trust, we revisited much of the ground which we had meticulously and constructively exposed in our presentation to the Club’s Directors at the meeting on 11 December 2002. Great emphasis was given by the Trust’s representatives to the desirability of Club and Trust (and thereby, the community) working together for the common cause, namely the well-being of Stirling Albion Football Club.
- 6.9 It has to be recorded that the Directors of the Club were scarcely proactive in injecting positive ideas for consideration at the meeting – the running being made by the Trust, Stirling Council’s representative and James Proctor from Supporters Direct. The Club’s Directors were at best non-committal towards the notion of working together with the Trust on ways of co-operating for mutual benefits.
- 6.10 For Stirling Council, Keith Russell outlined to the meeting that it was on the point of concluding a major agreement with the Club which covered revised leasing terms for Forthbank Stadium. An integral part of that agreement would be community involvement, through the Trust, in the Club. The precise terms of the draft agreement were not disclosed at the meeting but it was indicated that it would require the Club to have entered

into a meaningful dialogue with the Trust and have reached agreement with us by no later than 30 June 2003.

- 6.11 The Trust's representatives endeavoured to clarify timescales including those for the conduct of the Club/Trust discussions. Indeed, we pressed for a date to be diaried for the first such meeting. The Club's Chairman considered that the Council/Club agreement should be finalised (signed) first, at which stage the parties could proceed in the light of whatever the agreement contained. Mr Russell said he would be disappointed if the Club/Council agreement had not been signed off by the end of April and he gave us reason to believe that the Club/Trust talks would proceed in the first half of May 2003, leaving a reasonable period of time to conclude an agreement by the aforesaid stipulated date of 30 June 2003. It was agreed that Mr Russell would broker the Club/Trust meetings which would proceed under his guidance.
- 6.12 The Trust's representatives left the meeting on 7 April 2003 reinvigorated with some optimism that Club/Trust dialogue was likely to be back on track.
- 6.13 It is a matter of considerable disappointment to the Trust's Board that at the time of writing we still await news of the Club/Council agreement having been signed, or the detail within it. In consequence, the first meeting between the Club and Trust under Keith Russell's stewardship anticipated in May 2003 is still awaited. Efforts to obtain substantive details from Mr Russell have not been entirely successful and we have been advised that shortages of key personnel within the Council itself, and/or delays in progressing by the respective legal representatives, amongst other things, have contributed to the overall delay in finalising the agreement.
- 6.14 On 19 August 2003, the Trust sought specific assurances from the Council on a number of issues including the question of whether it was still committed to concept of the community, using the Trust as a vehicle, having a voice in the running of the Club.
- 6.15 On 28 August 2003, the Council's representative repeated that problems within the Council had contributed in a major way to the delays. The signing of the Club/Council agreement was then said to be "imminent". A verbal indication was received from the Council that it was still "committed to us" as a Trust and that it still required the Club to engage with us in a meaningful way.
- 6.16 Since then, we have yet to hear any positive news from the Council and it has to be recorded that at the time of writing we perceive that there is little cause for optimism.
- 6.17 The Board considers that we should also go on the record as to the conduct of the Club in the intervening period. Later in this Annual Report we refer to our attempts to sponsor a player which were eventually

successful but, apart from this, it is noteworthy that since the meeting at Forthbank on 7 April 2003 the Club has made no attempt to deal with us.

- 6.18 The Board believes it was not an unreasonable expectation on its part for the Club's Directors, as a gesture of good faith in the run up to the signing of the agreement between Club and Council which we have been told provides an obligation upon the Club to co-operate with us, to have at least offered to meet us for further exploratory talks. Moreover, the Club has still not extended to the Trust the courtesy of responding to our ideas which we initially exposed at the meeting on 11 December 2003, and which we revisited with those present at the meeting on 7 April 2003.
- 6.19 We believe that had we been a Trust involved with any other Scottish or English Football League club this courtesy would have been extended to us. We are very aware that at numerous other Trusts, there is regular two-way discussion with the respective Clubs. Indeed, in Scotland in 2003, there have been a number of Trust-nominated Directors accepted onto Club Boards.
- 6.20 So why do Albion's Directors give every impression of acting mute towards our Trust? The simple answer is that we do not know, because they will not tell us. If our Trust is perceived as a threat by the Albion's Directors then let them say so and explain why they should harbour such concerns. So far, because of their inability to converse with us directly, or reveal any misgivings in the presence of others such as at the meeting on 7 April 2003, they do all the loyal supporters of Stirling Albion (not just those within the Trust) an extreme disservice.
- 6.21 In a situation, where we have made it clear to the Club's Directors on more than one occasion that they have absolutely nothing to fear from us, and that our motivation is solely to assist the Club in whatever practical ways we can, why do they choose to look the proverbial gift horse in the mouth?
- 6.22 For our part, the Trust's Board is very conscious of the need not to be seen to be overly critical of the Directors at a time when performance of the Albion on the field has exceeded and continues to exceed our best expectations. We have no desire by directly and publicly criticising the Club's Directors to distract from the performance on the park, or, more importantly, distracting the focus of those putting in such remarkable results on the field of play week after week. However, The Trust's Board will not flinch from constructive criticism when this could result in wrongs being righted and generally advance the best interests of the Club.
- 6.23 Unlike some, we acknowledge that Stirling Albion belongs to the community it serves and not to any small and insular group of individuals who need to be mindful of their role of caretaking the Club for others to enjoy well into the future.

6.24 The Trust's Board will continue with our efforts to engage with the Club's Directors but if they continue to refuse to co-operate with us, we will not hesitate to proceed independently and unilaterally towards our objectives as enshrined in our Rules, regardless of any views which the Directors might hold but, for reasons best known to them, refuse to share with us.

6.25 We are confident that the Trust will be flourishing long after existing Club office-holders have moved to pastures new, and perhaps be in a position to work together in partnership with others for the good of the Club.

7. The Official Stirling Albion Website

7.1 In the Autumn of 2003, it came to the attention of the Trust's Board that those responsible for maintaining and updating the Club's Official website were finding it difficult to devote sufficient of their spare time to ensure its upkeep. In the light of this, and in view of the known popularity of the Website - as proven by the number of "hits" upon it, the Trust wrote to the Club offering to take it over and run it, at no cost at all to the Club. In keeping with the sort of discourtesy outlined within the preceding paragraphs of this Annual Report, the Club never formally replied to our letter in writing, although we learned by a roundabout route that the Club was not prepared to accede to our offer to take over the running of the Website on the basis that "it did not recognise the Trust". In the absence of any alternative arrangements by the Club's Directors, the Website was, therefore, closed down from 7 November 2003.

7.2 The Trust's Board gave further consideration to the matter and whilst initially it was felt, subject to resources being available and persons being competent to operate it, that an Unofficial Club Website could be run by the Trust, there is evidence to suggest that alternative unofficial websites already in existence, will be able to quench the thirst for information from supporters. Any "Club" website established by the Trust would be unlikely to add to the information available through other sites and merely duplicate effort which could be better devoted to other things. Thus, the Trust Board decided, in finality, not to set up a further website beyond its own.

8. Fundraising

8.1 The Board has been very conscious of the need to maximise Trust funds and augment income over and above that accruing through membership subscription. To this end, a number of options have been examined during the course of 2003, with some being taken forward and some rejected or deferred for further consideration at a future date.

8.2 The Trust attended a successful Car Boot Sale in July 2003 when many

items donated by Trust members and others were disposed of in return for cash. A net profit to the Trust of £137 resulted.

- 8.3 The Trust is extremely grateful to all donors of items for sale, and invites Trust members and others who have items for disposal through this means to contact Board members so that collection can be arranged.
- 8.4 On 15 May 2003, the Trust arranged a very successful Bingo night at the Stirling Indoor Bowling Club. A net profit to the Trust of £628 accrued.
- 8.5 The Trust records its thanks to those who generously donated prizes for the evening and all those – Trust members and others alike- whose efforts both prior to and on the day itself contributed to such a successful evening.
- 8.6 Special thanks are recorded in respect of the sterling work of Linda Graham and Robert Cunningham in organising the event on behalf of the Trust.
- 8.7 The Trust wishes to record its appreciation to James Burgess, Trust member, for his kindness in donating signed copies of his book for sale to aid Trust funds.
- 8.8 In mid- 2003, the Trust organised the sale of quiz sheets which brought a net profit to funds of £175.55.
- 8.9 A Christmas Quiz sheet was sold towards the end of 2003 but the net profit is likely to flow through to 2004 Accounts and Balance Sheet.
- 8.10 During the year, to fulfil its legal obligations the Trust registered with Stirling Council as the local Licensing Authority, so that we could legitimately raise funds by the foregoing means and the like.
- 8.11 Fund-raising opportunities along the lines of those undertaken in 2003 will be considered for 2004 and beyond as well as other viable ideas.
- 8.12 Mention needs to be made of our exploring the opportunity of organising a “Hall of Fame” dinner at some stage in the future which would necessarily need to have the Club’s blessing and might also involve the Albion Supporters’ Club and, possibly, the Young Reds. This is currently under consideration with the Supporters Club and Young Reds.

9. Affiliations/Sponsorship

- 9.1 During the course of the 2002-3 season, the Trust attempted to sponsor Mark McNally in the sum of £100 + VAT. It was reasoned that this was a way of getting our name into the programme for each home game and, more importantly, was an indication to the Club’s Directors of our good intentions in wishing to put money into the Club.

- 9.2 Despite the money being paid over to the Club which duly banked the cheque, the sponsorship was never activated in last season's programme - and neither was the money returned during the course of the season.
- 9.3 The matter was raised during the course of the meeting with the Club and others on 7 April 2003 mentioned in the foregoing paragraphs. This caused some confusion amongst the Directors and Club Secretary at the meeting who claimed that this has arisen due to a misunderstanding on their part. It was eventually agreed that the sponsorship would be carried over to and activated for the 2003-4 season.
- 9.4 Notwithstanding this clear commitment on the Club's part, a cheque in the appropriate sum was sent to the Trust in August 2003 with an indication that the Club could not accept sponsorship since the Trust was not recognised. This disgraceful act was very much in keeping with the Club's treatment of the Trust throughout 2003 (see earlier paragraphs) and reflected badly upon the integrity of those concerned.
- 9.5 In the light of the Club's behaviour, the Board decided to write to the Club Secretary in suitable terms, sending a new cheque in the sum of £100 + VAT with a request that we sponsor Scott McLean. In our letter we indicated that we wished to issue a press release publicising the sponsorship. The possibility of our issuing a press release informing everyone that the Club had refused our sponsorship for a second time evidently concentrated minds at Forthbank and the decision to accept our money and associated sponsorship was notified to us by the deadline we had stipulated in our letter.
- 9.6 It seems that the possibility of bad publicity spurred the Club into a positive response and it is likely there is a lesson to be learned here.
- 9.7 The Trust Board also decided to approach the Club with a view to sponsoring a match, but on the basis that the overall costs would be met by special personal contribution of participating Trust members, rather than direct from Trust funds. Incredibly, our approach was rebuffed on the basis that the Club Directors did not recognise the Trust. Despite the Club being deeply in debt, it refused our money!
- 9.8 The Trust also decided to sponsor Radio Royal in the sum of £50 for the season. Radio Royal delivers a radio service to patients in the hospital wards of Falkirk and Stirling Royal Infirmaries and was considered very worthy of our support. The hospital service also delivers live commentaries of every home game. We receive publicity on the airwaves of Radio Royal through our sponsorship.
- 9.9 The Trust also decided to approach the Supporters Club to enquire if it was willing to allow us to award a trophy to a player at the Annual Dinner/Dance of the Supporters Club. We were delighted when the Supporters Club readily agreed to our request.

9.10 The trophy was awarded for the Most Improved Player and Paul Hay was duly presented with the trophy on behalf of the Trust.

9.11 We hope to provide a similar trophy at the next event at the end of the 2003-4 season.

10. Publicity

10.1 The Trust Board believes that public relations and publicity, properly used can open up opportunities of advantage to us.

10.2 First and foremost, the Board believes it is essential that all Trust members are kept advised of what is being done in the Trust's name. To this end two newsletters were published during 2003 and the Board will evaluate how useful these are regarded by members and how informative they are perceived. We would welcome feedback from members in this respect.

10.3 We also distributed copies of two newsletters to supporters outside the ground on match days. The Club's Directors did not respond to our letter seeking prior approval to our taking this course but in the absence of any objection we went ahead with the distribution. We will aim to follow this course for future newsletters.

10.4 Secondly, we regard the publication of this Annual Report as being very much part of the process of keeping members informed.

10.5 Thirdly, the Trust has established its own website which members can access for information. The website also provides prospective members with information about the Trust as well as giving the opportunity for people to join. We are very grateful to Colin Ogilvie for his technical expertise in establishing the Trust website.

10.6 The Trust Website is at www.safcsupporterstrust.org.uk

10.7 Finally, the Trust Board considers it important that the name of the Trust and what it is attempting to do within the community reaches a wider audience in the hope that this may eventually lead to people taking a closer interest in the local Football Club. We have, therefore, adopted a policy of issuing Press Releases covering events involving the Trust and we are delighted that there has, as a consequence, been appropriate coverage in the Stirling Observer and Stirling News.

10.8 We will continue this policy during 2004 in the hope that this will bring further advantage to the Trust.

11. Supporters Direct

11.1 The Trust continues to have a regular dialogue with Supporters Direct

(Scotland) and in particular with its Development Officer, James Proctor, who has been of considerable assistance to the Trust in advising us on a number of issues. James accepted our invitation to address our Board meeting on 25 September 2003.

11.2 Supporters Direct produces a UK-wide quarterly newsletter which goes to all Trusts and this provides useful ideas for initiatives which have been successfully taken forward in other Trusts, and those which have not been so successful. We have contributed two articles which were published in Supporters Direct Newsletters during 2003. The first covered how we had evolved as a Trust from the first meeting of Albion's faithful at the Tollbooth on 30 June 2002. The second article recounted the history associated with Annfield and our ultimate move to Forthbank in 1993 with the attendant difficulties that this has brought.

11.3 Copies of both articles and copies of Supporters Direct Newsletters can be made available to Trust members upon request.

11.4 On 19 January 2003, the Trust was represented at a one-day conference held at Tynecastle organised by Supporters Direct which covered a range of subjects of interest to Trusts and those involved in football viz. the financial health of the game; the implications of the demise of Clydebank from senior football; boardroom representation; funding the game, fundraising; establishing a Supporters Trust; running a successful supporters campaign; and the future of Scottish football, amongst others.

11.5 The Trust was also represented at another event organised by Supporters Direct for Trusts in Scotland in Dundee on 1 June 2003. Subjects covered included the business arrangements for Trusts including business plans; financing/funding of Trusts; attracting sponsorship; and shareholding in football clubs.

11.6 The Trust's representatives at these events were unanimous that they had benefited from being involved and the conferences had been extremely worthwhile.

11.7 Supporters Direct is planning another event on 22 February 2004 and the Trust intends to participate fully.

12. Membership

12.1 Trust membership at 31 December 2003 stood at 87.

12.2 As agreed at the 2003 Annual General Meeting, supporters taking out membership were permitted to have this run to 31 December 2003. The challenge now is for the Trust to ensure that all of those members renew their membership for 2004.

12.3 Furthermore, we wish to continue to grow the Trust since only by doing this can our ability to influence events grow in proportion.

13. The challenges for 2004

13.1 The Board does not underestimate what confronts us in 2004. Our prime objective must be to gain acceptance amongst the Club's Directors. However, if we do not succeed we will not be deflected from our purposes as enshrined in our Constitution and we will thrive either with or without the support of the Directors.

13.2 As already stated, we need to grow our membership, not only amongst existing and potential individual supporters, but amongst local businesses – a significant but untapped area. It reflects poorly upon the Club that it has singularly failed to attract sponsorship for matches, players etc. as well as ground advertising, from local businesses to the same extent as other Scottish Third Division or Highland League Clubs as witnessed by Albion supporters on their travels

13.3 The Trust is also committed to try to swell match-day attendances by attracting support from students at Stirling University which has a catchment of some 9, 000 persons. Possible options will be explored in the coming year.

13.4 The Trust will also seek to exploit other opportunities which may arise in 2004.

Board of the Stirling Albion Supporters' Trust
January 2004