



Bilston Town Community Football Club, Wolverhampton



Location
Wolverhampton

Founded
2013

Legal structure
Registered charity

Description of activity
Mainly used for football, including some junior football teams, the pitch is occasionally rented out, the club bar is subleased and used for local events

Key assets
Land and football stadium

Staff and volunteers
No staff. 10 to 15 volunteers

Overview

Bilston Town Community Football Club, founded in 1894, is located in Bilston, Wolverhampton. They compete in the West Midlands Regional League Premier Division and play their matches at Queen Street and have done so since 1919. The Club is a registered charity and has a long-term lease with the City of Wolverhampton Council for the land and stadium. This was originally a 25-year sub-lease from the existing leaseholder agreed in 2013 but in 2016 that business was dissolved and the club became the main leaseholder. They are currently in the process of renegotiating the lease to include neighbouring derelict land that would enable the club to expand and develop the ground.

The asset is primarily there to enable the first team to play its competitive matches, however, the organisation seeks to utilise the asset beyond this. They provide a community space in the adjoining club bar and have ambitions to install an all-weather pitch that would enable them to create a revenue stream through hiring out the pitch to local teams and sports clubs to use. At present, the club is run by a core group of four volunteers, drawn from the local community and supporters, who help with a wide variety of tasks associated with managing a football club. They are supported on an ad hoc basis by a range of different volunteers.

What difference community ownership makes

Asset ownership has been fundamental to the club's survival during a financially difficult period. By becoming a charity and being granted the lease in 2016, the club has been able to separate itself from the problems associated with the previous leaseholder and secure the future of the club. The ethos of the club is very much grounded in the community and being located at a ground where they have played matches for 100 years is extremely important



to supporting this community-centred approach. Ownership gives the club control over how to develop the ground. Securing the lease for the neighbouring piece of land would enable the creation of a car park that would free up space around the pitch and enable the club (if promoted to a higher league) to comply with strict FA regulations on football grounds, alongside making further investments in the asset.

Financial health

The club does not currently have strong financial health owing to the various challenges and expenses involved in running a football club. However, this has improved in the last few years and they anticipate it continuing to improve in the future. The extreme example of the challenges previously faced by the club is clear from this description of when the current management team first became involved: *“We lived hand to mouth, and we went begging everywhere, the reputation of the club was at rock bottom and we had to convince the community that our intentions were serious and long-term.”* A key challenge for managing such an asset is that when the need for money arises, this can often be sizeable and require rapid securing of funds. For example, recently, the pitch floodlights failed and the club had 10 days to replace them or face fines from the Football Association for failing to fulfil their fixtures. A lack of reserves and the high costs of such facilities mean the club is continually faced with a precarity that is difficult to break from without the ability to generate more substantial revenues.

Three key factors that have affected its development and financial health:

1. The ability to draw on grant funding and donations

The asset is able to generate a small, regular income from sources such as matchday tickets, sponsorship, and sub-leasing the club bar. However, this revenue is not enough to cover costs when significant expenditure is required, such as repairs and investments in the ground. Funding can often be secured from the Football Association, although they will only fund planned investments so grants to pay for shocks are not possible.

The failure of the floodlights is only one example where financial challenges created by a “shock” has been faced and overcome. When the floodlights failed at the end of 2018 they launched a fundraising campaign to secure the £20,000 needed to replace them. This led to a fundraising game at the ground involving the local Member of Parliament Pat McFadden, a crowdfunding page online, and other private donations, which enabled the club to secure the essential money. The club has suffered from

other shocks as well, such as break-ins and unfulfilled contracts. Through various channels and with support from the local community they have been able to overcome these challenges.

2. Support from local businesses and elected representatives

The support from the community, local businesses, and specific key figures in the community has been vital to the on-going success of the club and the asset. Pat McFadden MP is the Club President and acts as an important figurehead to raise the profile of the club and provide a voice for it (and to participate in fundraising efforts as described above). Over the years the club has also been able to draw on support from a number of local individuals and businesses. Dennis Turner (a former local MP and subsequently a member of the House of Lords) and his brother Bert, a local councillor were ardent supporters of the club and its place in the community. The club has also been able to draw on the support and generosity of local businesses and suppliers to either provide sponsorship, donations, or favourable repayment arrangements.

3. Taking on the full lease

The last five to 10 years has been particularly difficult for the club but it has been able to overcome the challenges it has faced. A key factor has been the support of the council and its willingness to cooperate and work together to secure the future of the club and support its development.



Future direction

The club has a clear set of objectives to develop the ground, something the long-term lease has enabled it to do. Its plans for the future is to replace the existing pitch with an all-weather pitch that could be hired out when the first team is not using it. This would generate significant income for the club and also create a small number of jobs (as someone would need to be on site whenever the pitch is in use). This potential revenue stream is seen as vital to the clubs ability to generate the income they need to invest in their ground, yet raising the funds for the pitch itself is no small feat.

Financial information

The following table provides an overview of Bilston Community Football Club's income, expenditure and assets for the year ending 31st May 2018.

Income	£55,171
Expenditure	£64,300
Difference between income and expenditure	-£9,129
Surplus/deficit on ordinary activities before taxation	-£9,129
Annual income from grant or subsidy	£1,475
Fixed assets	£7,921
Current assets (Debtors; cash at bank and in hand)	£28,708
Creditors: amounts falling due within one year	-£1,699
Total	£34,930
Net assets	£34,930