

QUESTIONS BROUGHT TO CUSG MEETING ON MON 20th MAY 2019 BY THE USERS OF THECUMBRIANS.NET FORUM

- No Group is made/forced to answer any question and does so at their own behest.
- Some Groups have answered both their own specific questions and the ones that were marked 'All in attendance', others have answered just their own specific questions.
- If a Group hasn't answered their questions, a simple 'No answer received' has been written. This is in the interests of clarity within the CUSG Group.
- TheCumbrians.net would like to thank all those who replied on behalf of those who submitted questions.

QUESTIONS FOR CUFC: NOTE – ANSWERS PROVIDED BY NIGEL CLIBBENS.

What kind of income is generated from The Blues Lotto and Golden Gamble?

Dear Seesaw, The lotteries contribute around £100k of net cash every year.

The Lotto puts up 2 or is it 4 cars per year

We have two car draws per year.

plus all the cash prizes would it not make more sense to cut back on the cars

In the past we have changed the prizes. For instance, a large jackpot was broken up into smaller prizes.

and retain more of the income but increase some of the cash prizes to keep people interested?

Feedback from members is the "big" eye-catching draws are very popular in attracting and retaining members. The big draws on match day create a lot of interest and we gain members in the run up. The cars can be exchanged for cash too. Certainly refreshing prizes is something we will continue to look at.

It has been leaked/rumoured that EWM/finance controller has the final authorisation re any financial transactions and has to countersign cheques etc - can you comment on this please?

Dear Mullen103, That "leaked/rumoured" claim is incorrect.

Like any business, the directors and boards operate with limits on what they can approve. It is normal and sound business practice. It stops individuals overstepping what the club/board wants or committing the club to things that breach EFL rules or committing spending funders can't afford or is more than they want to fund.

In the recent Birmingham City case which resulted in their points deduction this management control was referred to.

1921 individual directors have authority and approval limits set by 1921 board to allow the club to operate day to day without the need for every action to be approved by a board meeting.

1921 board approves transactions outside that. 1921 board has its own approval limits and above that Holdings provides approvals.

Holdings (given the majority of its directors are shareholders and 100% of the shareholders and EWM is represented), provides approvals on all material contracts except where it delegates approvals.

All these approvals and limits can change from time to time (as in any normal business) but no individual on the Holdings board has final authorisation. They were overhauled when the roles and responsibilities of 1921 and Holdings were changed in 2016.

This manages risk, is clear and ensures accountability and means those responsible for financing the club (a key risk) approve the commitments they ultimately will be responsible for honouring.

If that is indeed the case, who has the final say on any financial decision club owners or EWM? Also are the current "custodians" not obsolete if EWM are making all the financial decisions?

Directors continue to make decisions as they always have.

As a supporter I find this arrangement worrying as the club is effectively controlled by an outside agency albeit partner thats making decisions.

This is not the case.

It is also worrying that this type of arrangement is putting off any attempts for new owners/takeover.

There is no such arrangement.

Nigel Clibbens - Apologies if this question seems harsh/blunt but.... you have been here a while now and the football club hasn't progressed from league 2 and is still losing a substantial amount of money. From an average supporter point of view your position can be seen as a failure and the money better spent elsewhere,

What is spent on what items is a challenge for all lower league clubs, not just CUFC. When you have limited cash, allocating it is always difficult. Spending on one thing can reduce what is available elsewhere and over the longer term create problems. The balance between on field and off field spending is always in the spotlight. It equally applies to every off field cost including directors and CEO.

Almost all L2 clubs are losing money and that requires funders to provide cash (many suffering losses far in excess of ours) and choices what to spend it on. Given almost all clubs in the lower leagues face similar challenges about "the money better spent elsewhere", what do they do? If no CEO position was the way forward, many would be doing it now or have tried it before and continued with it. Are the successful clubs following that idea? Or is it just the likes of CUFC "haven't progressed"?

In practice, in all businesses of substance there is a need for an individual to fulfil the CEO role. That means taking on the responsibilities and duties of that office for the business/club to operate. In all businesses there are common duties to be taken on and in football there are also

specific ones. These are necessary and responsibilities and duties of that position that need to be undertaken.

It is worth noting that in the proposal by the consortium, they identified putting a CEO in place was required.

It has also been suggested that the main part of your job is to be "the mouth piece" to distract attention from the owners. Therefore can you explain your achievements in this position, what you've brought to the club/help improve please?

One of my roles as CEO is to engage and communicate with supporters (something fans said the club needed to improve when I first arrived). So we have taken steps to do that, for example through answering these questions, the CUSG meetings, forums and media conferences and to direct emails. It certainly isn't to distract attention. It is done with a positive intention to share information, answer questions and address issues. I hope having a CEO who does this is considered worthwhile, positive and progress.

Therefore can you explain your achievements in this position, what you've brought to the club/help improve please?

I have been a CEO in the Championship, in League One and now League 2 and have been doing the CEO role over 10 years. Before that I had nearly twenty years working with businesses in facing financial challenges – including many football and sports clubs. As a Chartered Accountant with my experience I know finance inside out – that is crucial in football. Football is different to other business. The risks faced by a club in not having the skills and expertise on board are very significant.

There are many changes that have taken place which I think are important and positive:

Rebuilding of shareholder relations which is crucial to:

- the orderly day to day operation of the club
- ongoing funding coming into the club – and in the extreme its whole existence paving the way for a positive and orderly future succession

Drawing line under long term open legacy issues to allow the club to look forward

- Bringing the long running Kurdi process to a proper closure
- Blue Yonder

Bringing supporters into the heart of the club:

- CUOSC on holdings board – with direct influence on club decisions – like manager appointments
- CUSG group giving a voice direct into club management
- Hugely increased information and sharing by club to fans – like these Q&As

The final phase of the flood recovery – with the new offices and flood resilience in the Pioneer Stand

Improvements in how the club works:

- internal operations with the club
- CUSG and engagement with supporters
- EFL Code of Conduct award with all the associated systems and processes
- EFL Family Excellence award
- Successfully passing the Academy EPPP audit
- Changing the Club's approach to manager recruitment
- Modernising the internal board operations and decision making:

- Approach to football spending
- Increasing football expertise
- Measuring and assessing football performance

At the simplest level, the fact that fans and club can engage, pose questions and get answers through routes like this is real progress and beneficial to all.

Who from the club asked the question re thoughts on the manager in the last CUSG meeting,

Chairman of meeting.

Do you feel this is an appropriate question to ask this group and what this group is for?

I think had there been a meeting and the reps views on the manager position not be aired and given when CEO was present it could have attracted criticism.

This is supporter engagement in action. Isn't it? Fans meeting club CEO face to face and discussing club matters and things important to fans..

Why wasn't the question circulated prior to the meeting so that each group could consult their members?

It was an informal sharing of views by reps with the club listening.

A vote was had

There was no vote.

but the results not published in the minutes, why was this?

No vote.

Did the vote result have any influence in the decision to offer Pressley an extension?

The feedback from the CUSG was shared with the club directors – part of the CUSG process is that the voice of the fan groups is heard by the directors. In the end the decision to appoint a manager is influenced by many things. Fan sentiment has a part but the most important is the ability to do the job.

Again, I think fans should see this as a positive. Representatives from a diverse range of fans engaging with the club and making their feelings known and those voices being heard by the board.

It has been leaked/rumoured that the issue with the kits being late/after the start of the season was due to the club not paying the bill on time, for the required release dates. The statements from the club around the time seemed/appeared to put the blame on the supplier. Why wasn't the club truthful in this, hold its hand up and say it made a mistake instead of releasing a load of codswallop. Has the club learn't its lesson for this season, and when do we expect the new kits to be on sale?

We have nothing new to add to what was said many months ago.

We are looking forward, we have a new kit provider in Errea, the kit for next season has already arrived at the club and we are preparing for the launch in the City Centre. Further news on that will be issued.

After the MK dons match promotion, at the next home game, a supporter photographed a poster advertising it inside the East stand and was also reported to be one in the Paddock toilets. Some days after the Lincoln city game - walking up warwick road some days later the next game advertised on the big board was the Lincoln game. This is unacceptable and shows a lack of pride/organisation/speed to get things done correctly - can you comment on this please?

Please see the next answer.

At a recent DSG group committee meeting, it was mentioned that the DSG leader had a walk around with Nigel Clibbens. It was suggested that there were areas/some things in the ground that Mr Clibbens didn't know about. I found this astonishing, especially the length of time Mr Clibbens has been here. A chief exec/CEO of a football club is a privileged, and should know this - can you comment on this please,

Not being at the meeting and not having any information more specific than "It was suggested that there were areas/some things in the ground that Mr Clibbens didn't know about". I can't comment. I asked the DSG what they meant at the CUSG meeting so I could answer and they didn't recall any concerns.

also how many times a week, do you walk around the ground, making sure things are of a high/at least satisfactory standard or do you have someone that does this, if so who?

Every area has specific club staff who are responsible for posters, monitoring and reporting issues – eg West stand – Commercial and ABM, East stand - media and tickets and ABM. They are the people who work in those areas and are the "eyes" of the club.

In addition, we have independent walk rounds and random checks. Pre match we have meeting where issues can be highlighted and dealt with and post match we have debrief reviews to pick up things to address for future games.

Given we have around a dozen full staff including 2 groundsmen it is very much a team effort to work together and highlight issues, see and fix. We don't keep a log on walk rounds. On each match day I look at as many areas as I can.

Can you elaborate on the recent employment tribunal claim by Mr Curle. Were the club surprised to receive this? Has it now been fully resolved? Was an out of court settlement agreed?

We made a statement at the time and have nothing new to add.

Has the club been threatened by anyone else to an employment tribunal claim?

Not in my time – we have a very small, loyal and hardworking staff and most are very long serving.

From the outside, it seems that its yet another issue with money and the club not paying their way on agreed contracts.

That is not the case. The matter was resolved amicably and we remain on good terms with Keith. We talked at length with him at the Northampton game. He was on good form.

Why have the club not been publicly put up for sale? Steven Pattinson said he would put an ad in a paper. We still await this happening.

Dear Lakelandterrier, SP did make that personal remark in an exchange with a supporter at a fans forum. There are no plans to place an advertisement in a paper. Even without a formal advert, over my time and before the club has received a series or expressions of interest. Two turned into offers, and a number of others did not progress into anything substantive. These initial enquiries still continue to be made intermittently but in recent times they have not progressed beyond basic fact finding.

As fans can see from the experience of the club and that of other clubs, notably, Bury, Orient, Hartlepool, Morecambe and Notts County, the process has many issues.

The board's approach to achieving a succession is continuing. The position hasn't changed. The club wants and needs succession. The shareholders want others to step in. But as I have said before it needs someone with the resources and plan to want to. Until that happens, as well as trying to be successful day to day, we are taking all the steps we can to make the club attractive for investment. That means making it viable and sustainable and removing obstacles that could be a problem and that have put off interested parties in the past or could in future.

Could you just thank them from me for putting bog roll in the toilets this season it's been much appreciated.

Can you confirm that in the last 5-8 years, John Nixon has not been paid by the club or the FA, or both, we have been told he has not.

Dear Lummy8, In my time here no payments made – that's since June 2016. Before that I am told no payments made for many years – as its acknowledged we have said before. The Companies House accounts before that will still be available and disclose all the director payments if you need further details.

I've seen an email from Nigel Clibbens replying to a question about directors doing interviews with the local media in which he states they will only be doing interviews through the club's own media channels in future as they have a 'bigger reach.'

Dear Fruitbat, A supporter emailed me and he has done countless times and as I have done all my time here, I replied to him (like I reply to other fans) including saying "So we prioritise on our channels and we will continue to do so (increasingly)". ... not... "will only be doing interviews through the club's own media channels in future as they have a 'bigger reach.'"

To be really clear that is not aimed at being detrimental to any other media else, or to cut out debate or for any other reason, except to recognise the media world we live in and give more to our fans.

At the same time it doesn't mean we will be doing less with anyone else! Certainly not. Our own media and the independent media are not mutually exclusive - they are complementary.

I hope that allays any fears in that regard.

Do you not think you are accountable to fans and afraid of difficult questions as only doing things through your own media channels suggest this is the case?

In my time here I have done everything within my power not to do this so there is no reason to start now. More so than most organisations the CEO of a club is instantly and directly accountable. If the point being made was true, I would not answer emails – direct for fans, I would not have set up the CUSG group and would not attend it personally every month. Also I would not have instigated the press conference system aimed at the non club media.

Do you honestly believe your own channels have a bigger reach than all the many media platforms, that's the likes of the news and star and radio cumbria?

With the growth of new media there has been a real change and that is continuing. Whether its on line web traffic, social media, facebook, Youtube or direct email contacts the data shows the reach of the club. It has big and growing.

Club channels have come from minimal voice (a once a week programme) to be critically important. That means we have to provide more and more content direct, and there are more channels to deliver it – fans expect it – rightly so. It doesn't mean papers and radio and tv are excluded. On the contrary, it just changes the content each puts out to reach its audience. Just as football clubs' fans have widening choices so do media readers and listeners

None of that means that the radio or papers are not important. Absolutely they are. They can be important advocates, promoters and champions. It just means the media world has changed and will continue to change.

Doesn't this attitude worsen relations between the club to fans and local media at a time when you should be doing all you can to build some bridges?

The external media clearly has an important role to play and will continue to have.

That means the club's media has to move on and the media has had to move on (like from match reports), hence more punditry/ expert opinion/ deeper insight / analysis/ speculation and inside track /challenge / investigative type reporting/debate/interaction etc. That is evolution. That is not about CUFC – it is facing everyone.

QUESTIONS FOR CUSG CHAIRMAN:

How do you feel the meetings are going - any frustrations?

They was a little laughter re the last minutes regarding communications, where it was told there would be improvements followed by no response from DSG. From some quarters this meeting is seen as just a meet up going around in circles without much being done, can you explain the benefits of the meeting please?

Answered together - We have identified and resolved the technical issue that led to the lack of a written response to the DSG questions. Each meeting has an agenda that is derived from issues and activities pertinent to the member groups. Prior to each meeting the onus is on the reps to add items to the agenda that their members want to be raised. This remains an area where things can improve but the meeting does seek to hold reps of member groups, those with specific roles

(events, fundraising and communications) and the club to account, to provide updates on matters that are tracked via an action log. This recent enhancement to the structure is making a difference.

For example, we have hosted two events and generated funds at these, together with the sale of pin badges. The memorabilia project has been a successful activity and phase 2 which is the planned display of home shirts we hope will be as well received. Feedback received is that these meetings provide information to fans, add to club communications and give additional clarity on matters important to fans.

In my opinion, the more information and transparency we have with the club, the better the fan engagement piece is. Yes I sometimes feel frustrated at the slow pace of change but now we have some tangible outputs to show for our efforts, I feel that we are moving in the right direction. We attend CUSG not for any personal reasons but to represent our member groups. Our challenge is to get as many fans contributing to this forum and turn words into action.

QUESTIONS FOR CUOSC:

Regarding this statement in the last CUSG minutes "CUOSC reiterated that they had made efforts to persuade EWM to make public their long-term plans for CUFC"

Do we take that as the trust know/have been told what EWM long-term plans are or are the trust as clueless as the rest of the supporters. If its the 1st then why can't you say as you should let your members know or if it's the latter then doesn't this prove that the trust have little/no influence in the boardroom?

Answered together - On this subject discussion between the two CUOSC directors and all of the other directors of the Club (Holdings and 1921) have been taking place for a long time. This issue has been a recurring theme at each board and many ad hoc meetings. CUOSC has raised this in our members weekly briefings and during the Club's directors press conferences. As yet, there is nothing concrete to report. If and when there is, it will be made public straightaway.

Are there any PGs against the trust with regards the EWM finance deal?

No.

In terms of football position only where does the trust feel Carlisle United should be?

The feelings of the CUOSC Board in general are that we aim to get into League 1 and then push on for the Championship which can only be realistically achieved with significant new financial backing.

How much money has the trust raised/given to the club in the last financial year?

We have put in about £6k in the past three seasons. The figure season by season is variable depending on our circumstances. We have co-sponsored matches, sponsored match balls and also sponsored the Academy, a CUFC Women's match and a CUFC Women's player during that time. We have been members of United for Business during this period. Most benefits accruing to us from these sponsorships we have given away in prizes to our members, including match day hospitality and match tickets. In addition we have raised funds for the Academy this season via the ZING! Concert. This financial support is backed up by a large amount of voluntary work for the Club carried out by our two board reps and by other CUOSC volunteers.

QUESTION FOR SLO:

Can you please give an update and to what you've been doing so far, how you've found your position and any challenges? - Happy for this question to be removed, if an update is given in the main meeting.

SLO gave an update during Meeting, which is included in the main article.

QUESTIONS FOR DISABLED SUPPORTERS GROUP:

Communications with regards answering supporter queries and CUSG questions has been extremely poor or none existent, how is this going to be improved going forwards?

The CU Disabled Supporters Group know there have been communication issues and we apologise for these and now after a committee meeting a new plan has been approved .We will publish our new email address and this will be monitored by all committee members and we will try to answer any questions we do ask for any questions submitted to include your name or contact details so we can investigate your problem we have decided to answer anonymous questions the best we can.

What now is the purpose of the group going forward, especially as we have a DLO/SLO - what do members get from joining this group, that none members don't or the club doesn't do/provide?

The CU Disabled Supporters Group is totally independent group we have 70+ members we also have a committee of 7 who are looking to improve the disabled fans match day experience and also help to improve the disabled facilities at Brunton Park we will pass issues/help and advice on to the club we are there to help we are a member of the CUSG we meet with the club every 6 weeks and help out with the club when needed.

QUESTIONS FOR MESSAGEBOARD:

How do you feel the meetings are going - any frustrations?

Dan – Initial Meetings were quite lengthy, but over time the format, particularly the questions we bring from users, has been tweaked so that they don't drag on into the night! Myself and Matt are vocal in discussions, we don't see the point in attending if you're not, and I think we've added to the dynamic. I feel the Group is still evolving, but with some minor tweaks it really could be worthwhile, recent fundraising of the Forum and Pin Badges has put money into the bank that will be used to help improve supporter facilities and this can only be a good thing. I'll also add that the Club Reps, Nigel, Andy and Amy, have been particularly open whenever questions have been sent, and this is appreciated.

Matt – Meetings have caused me a lot of frustration at times and I've vented those accordingly at meetings. It's not that I think anybody there is being deliberately obstructive, I just think I have a different view on what CUSG should be for/is for. I think there have been small improvements in terms of productivity of meetings and the raising of funds is vital to being able to help fans match day experience and other areas that we may be able to support.

Are you planning on having another vote as to whether members/users wish you to continue attending.

We've always said we attend on behalf of our users. If we feel there's a growth in voices against our attendance at the Meetings, we'd have no problem putting it to the vote again.

Did you get asked your opinion on the manager, even though you couldn't attend the last meeting.

No. As far as we're aware, it was an impromptu discussion, so not being able to attend this Meeting we weren't involved. We do personally believe these Meetings aren't really for the on-field side of things, but appreciate that discussion on will arise from time to time.

QUESTIONS FOR LONDON BRANCH:

What's the London Branch's feelings towards the current owners?

The LB has a diverse membership with a range of views on most subjects. However, it is probably safe to assume that the vast majority of members feel that the current ownership situation is far from ideal. In recent years there has been an over reliance on Andrew Jenkins. Given Andrews advancing years and EWM's role there is a feeling of uncertainty as to the club's future. This uncertainty creates anxiety. No one can deny that new investment is needed to take the club forward. It is important that new investors are transparent and can present a clear vision as to how they want to take the club forward.

Do the LB feel the club is underachieving?

In terms of whether the club is underachieving, there is no doubt that there are areas on and off the field that can be improved upon. Given the dire predictions in the 2018 close season as to where the club would finish the season it could be argued that the club overachieved last season. A number of factors conspired to stop the club achieving a play off place, for example, early season inconsistency at home, the loss of three talented players in the transfer window and a number of injuries to key players. It is important to retain a sense of realism and perspective. Given that the playing budget is likely to be tight again the management need to be creative and inventive in the recruitment of players and in developing young local talent. Off the field the club needs to improve and maximise its commercial and marketing opportunities. There have been some positive signs in this regard in the last few months.

QUESTIONS FOR CUSAT:

CUSAT should be applauded for providing and supplying travel to every away game. With having a hardcore fan base, what is the feeling amongst the committee and travellers to the position of the club and where the club is.

Thanks regards the coaches to all games. RE where the club is - I've posted it on social media to get some feedback with little or no response, in my own opinion it needs to be better 11th isn't good enough and our away record which had been very good for a long while dipped alarmingly late season.

Could CUSAT explain, or provide a link to their season/monthly payment option please, I think this is a good idea but some people are unaware.

It's on the main site, follow fans and then CUSAT.

<https://www.carlisleunited.co.uk/news/2018/august/cusatdeparturetimes1819/>

Apologies for the bluntness, but can you explain what CUSAT bring to this meeting. I have never seen any questions from CUSAT reps from themselves/members apart from "are we going to sign anybody" which I find odd. Surely travellers should have lots of questions/issues for the club/other groups.

CUSAT were invited to attend we didn't demand a place, we have a good relationship with the club and are a sponsor, does everyone have to be constantly critical of the club? Our travellers are given the opportunity to post questions for the meetings but that's their choice if they don't and we respect that and as rep why ask questions for asking questions sake ?

PS I haven't asked the question "are we going to make any signings?" this time 🙄.

What do CUSAT feel this meeting should achieve or is about/needed?

The meetings are about helping the fans get a better fans experience and helping the club when and where we can, due to fundraising / donations etc we have been able to assist the club in the past and present, we bought a lens for the media team for example as a result of been at a meeting and being told they needed one.

It has been suggested from another CUSG group, which I won't name, that CUSAT feel their opinion is worth more because they go to all games, is this a correct assumption?

No that is not the case, very surprised to hear that.

QUESTIONS FOR SCOTTISH GROUP:

Can you explain what you have brought to the meeting so far please?

No answer received.

How did you expect the club to answer "How many season ticket holders do you expect to renew" have you a suggestion on how the club could have predicted this as it may be useful.

The question about the season ticket was from a member who asked it so I passed it on. It may appear it would be difficult to answer but the club may have a best and worse case thought on sales so it was a valid question..