

Rod Petrie demands more from supporters at AGM



Hibs Chairman Rod Petrie addressed the shareholders at the club's AGM on Monday evening, and once again urged lapsed supporters to return to Easter Road in their numbers, or alternatively he demanded a substantial reduction on costs. He also praised the contribution of the Hibernian Community Foundation and the supporters group 'Let's Work Together' and apologised for two seasons of under-achievement, conceding that the appointment of former manager Colin Calderwood had not been a good one. Finally, he advised those present about the two recent suggestions for league reconstruction currently being discussed by the SPL and SFL.

His full statement is reproduced below:-

"We have approved the Financial Statements for last year – only our second loss in eight years. We are keen to avoid a hat-trick and need your help to grow revenues while we continue to maintain a tight control on costs.

The poor performances on the pitch in the early part of last Season resulted in lower attendances and lower levels of income. This followed a difficult summer in which Colin Calderwood was linked with two jobs in England. When neither of the moves happened, Colin failed to convince supporters of his long term ambitions for Hibernian Football Club and Season Tickets suffered.

After a credible draw at Celtic Park at the end of October, Colin Calderwood left the Club following an ignominious defeat at home to Dunfermline Athletic in front of 9,531 supporters.

The way things worked out, the appointment of Colin Calderwood was not a good one. Mistakes were made. As Chairman, I take responsibility for that. I am sorry that we have all had to endure two seasons of under-achievement and decline.

After a thorough recruitment process, Pat Fenlon was appointed the Manager on 25 November 2011. He faced a tough task to turn around the Club's playing fortunes. Pat completed the Club's home SPL programme on 7 May 2012 with a return match against Dunfermline Athletic, this time in front of 15,281 supporters. The team won 4-0 to secure the Club's status in the top flight of Scottish football – which should never have been put in doubt.

That progress and the Club's re-engagement with supporters suffered a severe blow with defeat in the William Hill Scottish Cup final on 19 May. The Club apologised to supporters for the manner of that defeat in the aftermath of the game.

Some people had mixed emotions when the fourth round draw for this Season's Scottish Cup paired last Season's finalists. Pat Fenlon and the team were delighted to have the opportunity, so quickly to atone in small measure for the events of last May. We look forward to the fifth round tie against either Aberdeen or Motherwell.

The deep disappointment of May was compounded by major uncertainty over the summer months regarding the finances of the SPL following the insolvency of Rangers. New TV contracts were eventually negotiated with Sky and ESPN and approved by the SPL clubs on 3 August, the day before the start of the Season. The worst fears of financial meltdown were avoided.

Rumours of the financial position of Rangers had been circulating for some months but it was still a jolt to Scottish and European football when Rangers finally went into

administration on 14 February. It took four months of twists and turns, deals and no deals, before the Rangers' CVA was voted down by HMRC on 14 June.

Having run out of money, the Administrators immediately sold the assets to the consortium led by Charles Green, which had the effect of putting Rangers outside football. By selling Ibrox Stadium and splitting it from the club's membership of the SFA and the SPL, Rangers had lost its ability to play football in Scotland or, indeed, anywhere in the world.

It took four months to put Rangers outside football. It took Scottish football just six weeks to find a place for the Rangers' Newco.

Your club did what it thought was right at every step of the process. The rest, they say is history.

Our performances on the pitch this Season have improved dramatically following the major overhaul of the playing squad undertaken by the Manager in the close season. However, it looks as if it will take sustained performances on the pitch over an extended run of games to have a meaningful impact on home attendances and so on Club revenues.

The number of home supporters attending Easter Road Stadium has grown slowly, game by game since the start of the Season – 9,024 Hibernian supporters attended the first home game of the Season whereas there were 10,136 Hibernian supporters in Easter Road Stadium at the last home SPL league match against Aberdeen.

And some 13,000 Hibernian supporters were here for the fourth round tie in the William Hill Scottish Cup.

It would be nice to think that those 13,000 supporters will return here at 3pm on Saturday for our SPL clash against Motherwell – or that we might achieve a modern day record attendance at 3pm on Saturday 29 December. The Celtic game

has not been moved for TV. The only way you can see the match against the league leaders is by being here in the Stadium.

Growing the attendances by Hibernian supporters is our core strategy. We are asking supporters to do what you do best – support the team at home matches. If we cannot do that, and if we cannot grow our income, then the only route to get back to break even will be to make substantial reductions in costs. The Club is asking shareholders, supporters and everyone connected with the Club to play your part in getting back to where we all want it to be.

The Club has approximately 8,000 Season Ticket holders which is up on the number for last season despite the severe economic conditions facing every household. The Club is grateful to those supporters who rallied to the call in the summer to find additional Season Ticket Holders. In the main, it was existing Season Ticket Holders who bought the additional tickets or who bought Kicks for Kids tickets to help those less fortunate than themselves get access to Easter Road Stadium.

We know that there are still a significant number of individuals and families who had Season Tickets in 2010 and 2011 but who are not Season Ticket Holders today. Hopefully the Half Season Ticket offering will add to the number of Season Ticket Holders in the second half of the Season.

Members of the Lets Work Together group made telephone calls to lapsed Season Ticket Holders as part of the drive for renewals in the summer and their calls were appreciated by all who received them. The “Let’s Work Together Group” is a supporter led initiative formed over the summer and drawn from right across the Hibernian Family. Members of the Lets Work Together Group meet with staff on a regular basis to discuss ways in which the Club can improve. They have come forward with a range of good ideas to foster greater collaboration between Club and supporters. This is a small

beginning which we hope will develop over the coming weeks and months for the benefit of the Club.

The Hibernian Community Foundation continues to make a difference in our communities:

- 468 learners have attended the Hibernian Learning Centre in the last two years*
- 88 Football Fans In Training have lost almost 6 metres round their waists and 216 Kg in weight*
- 67% of all participants in Fit For Work have gone on to employment or further education*
- Over 45 players with learning disabilities have been coached by our U20 Academy players*
- And numerous young people have participated in a number of community coaching initiatives*

The landscape of Scottish football is changing. The SPL spent two years developing a strategy for all of Scottish football. At the end of the day, the SPL could not win over 11 of its 12 clubs let alone the clubs which are members of other leagues. However, discussions are now being pursued in earnest between the SPL and the SFL under the auspices of the Scottish FA. There are two options which have been put forward in recent weeks:

- The SFL has suggested that the SPL and the SFL could be merged into one league for all 42 clubs organised into a top division of 16 clubs; a middle division of 10 clubs; and a bottom division of 16 clubs. That has merit, but on its own does not deal with the top clubs suffering a 20% drop in the number of games going from 38 league games per season in the current set up to 30 games per season in a 16 team league.*
- The SPL has suggested that the 42 clubs could be organised into a top tier of 24 clubs with the remaining 18 clubs*

(currently SFL Division 2 and 3 clubs) organised in a manner that they think is best for them – either on their own or with clubs drawn from the Highland League; the East of Scotland League; and the South of Scotland league.

- The top 24 clubs would be organised into two groups of 12 clubs for the first half of the Season. They would play each other home and away, giving each club 22 fixtures in this first phase of the League which would run through to the New Year fixtures.*

- Then, following a Winter Break, the second phase would consist of three groups of 8 clubs. This gives a further 14 fixtures per club and a total of 36 matches for the Season.*

- Having a Top 8 continues the theme of ‘best v best’ with the top clubs playing for the Championship and for European places.*

- The Middle 8 – possibly known as the ‘Play Off 8’ – would comprise the bottom 4 clubs from the top 12 and the top 4 clubs from the bottom 12. These 8 clubs would start on zero points and over 14 matches and would play for promotion and relegation. This means that up to four clubs could be relegated and up to four clubs could be promoted in each Season.*

- The Bottom 8 clubs would play to avoid relegation and play offs which could lead to relegation from the tier containing the top 24 clubs in Scotland.*

Both plans call for a change in the financial distribution model to reduce the huge financial difference which exists at present between the bottom of the SPL and the top of the SFL. A softer financial landing takes away the threat to the very survival of a club through relegation.

Neither plan is being advanced as a mechanism to provide for

the accelerated promotion of Rangers.

There have been constructive discussions of late and more discussions are planned for the weeks ahead. Your Club will continue to play its part in these discussions at the top table of Scottish football.

Ladies and gentlemen, in conclusion, there have been significant changes at your Club – not just on the pitch but also behind the scenes and in the senior management of the Club. I should like to thank every member of staff for their hard work and dedication to the Club. Some of it is supporter facing but most of it is behind the scenes. They are the unsung heroes who help make your Club what it is today.

I would also like to thank Pat Fenlon for accepting the post of Manager at a particularly challenging time, and for attacking the task of rebuilding the squad with conviction. Pat himself will tell you that it is still work in progress as we approach the January Transfer Window.

Today, we find ourselves near the top end of the most competitive league in recent years. We are 1 point away from second place; but there are just 5 points covering the six teams vying for a top six position alongside Celtic. With 27 points from 17 games; we are just 6 points short of our total points haul for the whole of last Season.

The stewardship of your Club is in the hands of the Board of Directors. The future of your Club is in the hands of the supporters who help in a real and tangible way by attending matches either on a seasonal basis or as walk up supporters. Our plea is a simple one – if you can, please attend matches at Easter Road Stadium to support your team!

Everyone wants Hibernian to be all that it can be, with success on the pitch, influence off it and making a difference in our communities.”