

LOFT AGM 10/11/16 – Chair’s Report for the period ended 31 May 2016

Technically this is a report covering LOFT’s trading year to 31 May 2016.

But since our last AGM was only in April, as we tried unsuccessfully to get Francesco Becchetti to even **reply** to an invitation to come and speak to you, I’ll digress a bit.

First of all I have to announce that James Cassidy our vice chair is stepping down after seven years of impeccable service to the Trust. He started the recruitment drive at the ground and could be seen with a clip board. He has been our main voice on both Twitter and the message board. He has been involved in nearly every aspect of the Trust since he joined.

On a personal note he has become a good friend. James, you will be missed

Another sad thing is that I could now simply read you some of the phrases from my **last** report:

- “constant upheaval”
- “a basket case [of a club] that’s only ever a short run of poor form away from another set of terminated contracts”
- “palpable anger among O’s supporters and concern for the club’s future”

So since nothing has changed for the better since then, I’m going to use this report to say something that many of us in this room, possibly all of us, have increasingly felt over the last 2 and a bit years since Francesco Becchetti bought the club from Barry Hearn.

We want our club back.

We want our club to be what it was for 133 years until Becchetti came along; a family club, built on the values of community and stability.

A club where the chairman hired a manager and trusted him and his coaches to manage the playing side of things.

A club where the chairman didn’t tell the manager who he could and couldn’t play.

A club where the longest-serving player wasn’t treated with the shameful disrespect that Dean Cox was shown.

A club that, quite simply, did the right thing.

This is not about nationality. Leyton Orient has a proud multi-cultural history, and an English club doesn’t have to have a British owner or manager in order to succeed – as proven last season by Thai-owned and Italian-managed Leicester City. But what an English club does have to have is an owner who understands and respects how

English clubs work, who respects the fans and the club's identity, and who doesn't treat the club as an expensive game of puppets.

Earlier this year we thought there was enough bad feeling about the way the club was being run, that a LOFT-led protest would gain traction. In fact, the fan base wasn't ready for protest while a play-off spot was still up for grabs.

We got the message from the last AGM that LOFT needed to engage the wider fanbase, to try and build a support to call for change, so that's exactly what we've done since then.

Since the start of this season we surveyed first the membership and then the wider Orient fan base. Over 1,100 fans completed the survey, and the findings were clear; over 70% believed LOFT should declare it has no confidence in the club regime, with around two-thirds saying they would take part in peaceful demonstration against Becchetti.

We used those results to make a very clear point; if you are frustrated and angry at the way Leyton Orient is run and that on your own you can't make a difference, if you believe there has to be change, if you believe that supporters need to come together to help make Orient a better football club than it currently is, then you **need to join LOFT now**.

A joint demonstration with Blackpool fans has been arranged for next week's home game. I have always strongly believed in solidarity among football fans, indeed, one of the first actions that LOFT members took part in was supporting Swansea fans in a demo against their then asset-stripping owner Tony Petty.

As The Doors said "They have the guns, we have the numbers."

So now, tonight, you the membership have a chance to set the course for LOFT. You will have a chance to debate and vote on a resolution that calls for Becchetti to either set out how he will change the way he runs Leyton Orient Football Club, or put the club up for sale.

LOFT's purpose is to represent its members' views to help the future wellbeing of Leyton Orient Football Club. We believe that this meeting should send a clear signal to Francesco Becchetti; the way you are running the club is threatening its wellbeing and tearing apart everything that made it work up to 2014.

We want our club back, Mr Becchetti.

We want you to be a better owner. We believe you either have to radically change how you run the club, or put the club up for sale.

It is the considered opinion of the LOFT committee, that Francesco Becchetti's current ownership is not compatible with the future well-being of Leyton Orient Football Club without radical changes to the way he runs the club

LOFT therefore feels it has no choice other than to call on Mr Becchetti either to *change* the way he runs the football club, such that it is on a stable footing where employees aren't continually looking over their shoulder waiting for the sack, *or* put the club up for sale.