

Welcome to this Special General Meeting of LOFT.

It's only a little under 4 months since we gathered in a packed Birkbeck for our AGM, but so much has happened to our football club since then, it seems like a lot longer.

Before we get down to the business of the meeting, while I don't have to give a Chair's Report, I do want to update you on what has happened since the AGM.

We said then that our research showed a distinct possibility that Becchetti's funding of the club could run out. All that happened in the January transfer window appeared to confirm that. And the events of yesterday are the final proof.

The club's playing squad has been decimated, stripped to the bare bones of the walking wounded and the inexperienced youth. Their performances show they are clearly giving everything they can, but they are only human.

The manager has changed twice more.

The club faces relegation out of the Football League for the first time in its 112-year stay.

And now the club has been served with a winding-up petition for what is reported to be an unpaid tax bill of some £250,000.

I said this at the AGM and I make no apology for saying it again:

WE WANT OUR CLUB BACK !!

At the AGM, members voted unanimously to hold a joint protest with Blackpool. That protest was just the start of wider coverage in the media of what's happening at our club. A number of LOFT Board members have written or contributed to various print and online articles at the BBC, Telegraph, Guardian, Evening Standard and various local media, or appeared on TV and radio.

I want to address accusations by some fans (and now others) that LOFT and the protest is somehow to blame for Becchetti's actions over the past few months.

No.

Francesco Becchetti is a man that has faced down corporations and governments in the courts and emerged triumphant. He had already stopped coming to games before the protest. He had already tried to slash the playing budget in the summer by trying to offload both Dean Cox and Jay Simpson. He had already made sure Dean Cox couldn't play professional football for 4 months. He had already waved away verbal abuse aimed directly at him at matches.

No, this is not a man that would see one protest march taking place and head for the hills (or the safety of his Mayfair home).

But if he did react to protest in this way, I would point out that protest was already growing inside the ground anyway. The abuse shouted at Becchetti, the holding up of a protest banner in the South Stand. Protest inside the ground would only have got louder and more abusive, aimed directly at Mr Becchetti, worsening an already poisonous atmosphere at matches.

And you all would have rightly asked what we were doing about it.

So what we did was channel people's anger and frustrations into a single protest, with a simple message and a constructive call for change. We didn't want abuse to be chanted, so we called for a commitment to be a better custodian of Orient's future or to put the club up for sale. We took it away from being in front of the players and did all we could to encourage a better atmosphere inside the ground. That's why we suggested a 'Stand up for the Orient' chant on the day of the protest as a way of bringing fans together inside the ground. That's why we issued an open letter trying to rally the players and fans together after Danny Webb took over as manager.

In short, we did what a supporters' trust is supposed to do; give fans a chance to turn their individual voices that can all too easily be ignored into a collective voice that CANNOT be ignored.

So no, the protest wasn't ill-timed or ill-judged. It was very carefully planned to be a joint show of unity between two sets of fans who both want their club to be better than it is. And I want to make clear that I absolutely condemn any abuse that has been aimed at Mr Becchetti or others at the club – we tried from day 1 to have a positive constructive dialogue with him. I only wish he'd taken us up on our many offers of a meeting or our invite to a previous AGM.

And what were fans supposed to do, anyway? Sit there quietly, watching the club slide further and further down the football pyramid as managers are sacked and players made 'unavailable' every few months? Were we all supposed to live in fear of voicing any criticism, in case it provokes the owner? What kind of way is that to spend an afternoon at Brisbane Road?

No, we are where we are because Mr Becchetti has chosen not to pay the bills for some time; he would fail even the FA's Owners and Directors Test if it were run now. We are seeing the results of not just several months, but nearly 3 years of bad decisions, bad appointments and knee-jerk reactions every five minutes. All fans welcomed the extra investment Mr Becchetti brought in, although we were worried at the debt it was heaping on the club, but to go from feast to famine is now killing the club.

At the AGM, we set out the work that had been carried out at that point in putting disaster recovery plans in place. We said that this wasn't ready and that we were working towards completing this by the end of the season as we foresaw this as a crunch point for the club.

Since then we've been working flat out on this, to get it into a position where we can update you now – and we were right to, because the situation has almost reached critical now.

So I am sure everyone appreciates that to get to where we are now has not been an easy task, for volunteers doing this in their all-too-little spare time. The recovery plans are an ongoing document that is being updated all the time.

Tonight we will be taking you through the scenarios the club faces and the plans we have for each of those. We're seeking your approval for those plans, not to pat ourselves on the back, but to ensure that you the members are behind us in what we're doing.

We're also seeking your approval for a 'fighting fund', or as we've called it a Regeneration Fund, because we believe that each scenario will require money, and lots of it, to help regenerate Leyton Orient. I've been speaking to the Supporters Club chairman David Dodd, and he's pledged in principle to donate to the fund (and was happy for me to say that tonight), subject to agreement with their committee.

This is just one example of why all Orient fans need to come together now, because inevitably some fans are abusing us for what we've done. This is very sad, but not surprising - you put your head above the parapet, you get shot at. But in the past week since we published the documents you have in front of you tonight, we've received a number of messages of thanks and praise for the work we're putting in on behalf of all fans.

And the outpouring of support since the winding-up petition yesterday, not just from Orient fans but from other clubs too, has been heartwarming. I want to particularly thank Swansea fans, who remember how LOFT supported them some 15 years ago when a former owner looked set to kill their club. Football may be a competitive sport, but fans know deep down that a threat to one club's existence is a threat to us all.

Getting back to our club - the club we all love - the club we have been proud of - the club that we have invested time, money and emotion into.

I said at the AGM that we want our club to be what it was for 133 years; a family club, built on the values of community and stability.

I will add to what I said then.

We want a club where fans enjoy going to games to meet with fellow supporters, without the toxic atmosphere that is so sadly apparent now and has been for some time.

A club where fans are not turning on each other, or spitting at fellow fans – that actually happened at the end of the protest march.

A club that is run with respect for its past and to protect its future.

I have supported this club since my first home game in 1968. I was hooked, in the same way that you have all been hooked. Whether you have supported the O's for a longer or shorter time isn't important. We all belong to the same Orient family.

We have all suffered the lows and highs that this club has given us. There have been more lows than highs but OH BOY, that makes the highs even better, doesn't it?

Jonathan Téhoué's goal against Arsenal.

The play off semi-final wins against Scarborough, Rotherham, Hull and Peterborough.

Those crazy 15 seconds at Oxford in 2006.

Promotion to the top flight in 1962 – and beating West Ham and Manchester United during that one season at the summit.

That amazing comeback at Plymouth just the other week!

There are plenty more that we can all think of.

Most of the 2013-14 season. A squad without future? No, a team that would not give up!

Well I have a message to the current owner. And I am sure that I speak for everyone in this room. Mr Becchetti, if you have any of your passion for Leyton Orient left, then please don't kill it. But if you have given up on this great club, we the Orient fans will NOT give up, in the same way that Russell Slade's side did not give up.

We on the LOFT Board will not give up either. We will keep doing what we think is right, what we think is important, to try our best in representing all of you and working for the future of Leyton Orient.

Forget anyone else, this is OUR club. A unique, silly, wonderful club that is proud of its family heritage and proud of its multi-cultural history. Above all else, proud to be Orient.

You will be pleased to know I am sure, that I will be taking a backseat in most of these discussions tonight. I will leave the questions and answers to those that have worked so hard on the Recovery Sub Committee and the rest of the Board, in getting to where we are.

So please contribute to tonight's meeting, if and when you see fit. Before I hand you over to others on the Board, instead of that old Doors quote I keep trotting out, let me leave you with one final thought:

THERE IS ONLY ONE ORIENT, AND WE WILL NOT LET IT DIE !!