

Chair's statement for AGM on 4 December 2017

Welcome to the Annual General Meeting of the Leyton Orient Fans' Society Ltd, more commonly known as the Leyton Orient Fans' Trust, or LOFT.

First of all, our apologies that we're a tiny bit later than hoped for with holding this AGM. We normally aim for the end of November each year, but our Treasurer Peter Osborne has been away on holiday – and since we have slightly more money in the bank than usual, we thought it best to hold this when he could be here!

So, my report for the past 12 months.

As the saying goes – it was the best of times, it was the worst of times. You don't need me to run through the list of everything that made the past 12 months our collective year of hell. For all O's fans, it felt like we were being repeatedly punched in the stomach while nobody would do anything to help us.

We put the phrase 'We Want Our Club Back' at the forefront of everything we did from this time last year onwards. It's therefore no surprise that the first thing Nigel Travis said when he took over was that the fans have got their club back.

So the first and most important message I want you all to take away from tonight - **WE WON!**

We wanted the club to move into better ownership, with fan engagement at its core, and with Nigel Travis at the helm that's exactly what we've got.

As the football club went into meltdown on and off the pitch last season, we led the way in making sure that the collective voices of O's fans were heard loud and clear.

We led a peaceful protest that ensured the glare of publicity was shone on what was going on at the club.

We showed that we had plans for disaster recovery scenarios if the worst happened. And we led the way in raising money to be used if one of those scenarios came to pass.

We did everything we could to keep the whole fanbase informed, when the previous club leadership abandoned its responsibilities as well as its bills. In fact, we effectively became the contact point for the media and interested potential buyers, since nobody in any leadership position at the club was returning calls.

And as you now know, we were doing everything we could to support Nigel's bid to buy the club. We knew before launching the Regeneration Fund that Nigel was interested in buying the club, and after the fund launched we learned that it was more than just an interest. So we made contact with Nigel to see if we could help, and from mid-March onwards every major decision we took included a check that it either supported, or at least didn't harm, what Nigel was doing.

It meant that we couldn't say everything that was going on, even when others decided to leak the ins and outs of the negotiations. Contrary to the views of some fans, we weren't in this to make LOFT look better or for personal gain – we were in this to help Leyton Orient Football Club, a club we all love, get out of the mess it was in.

So I want to pay credit now to every single person on the LOFT board, as everybody to a man and woman put everything we had into that objective. We put our lives on hold for nearly half a year, lost countless hours' sleep, and lost time with our loved ones. And why? Because somebody had to represent fans' interests. Somebody had to prepare for the worst possible scenarios, and to show that we would not let the club die.

And that somebody had to be LOFT, because that's what Supporters' Trusts do. It's in our DNA, it's in the rules of every single Trust up and down the country – to be the democratic and representative voice of supporters, and to achieve the greatest possible supporter and community influence in the running of their club.

Only a supporters' trust like LOFT could have done all of those things we did in the past year.

Not individual fans acting alone or in small groups. Only a well-organised and committed board could have coped with the crisis, and the grief caused by the EFL, and the sniping on social media, and the queries from so many fans any time the slightest little thing happened, and hundreds and hundreds of new members joining, and organising events like the fantastic Legends day, and so much more.

So to Tom, Peter, Jonathan, Adam, Anna, Dave, Mat, Mark, Mike and Paul – as Chair of LOFT I want to thank you publicly for all the time, effort and dedication you put in to Leyton Orient Football Club. Since the summer, Mark has stood down from the board for personal and work reasons, so I want to thank him not only for keeping on top of the explosion in new members, but also for the fantastic work he put in trawling through the EFL's rules to highlight the ones we think they didn't follow.

As we always say the Supporters Club, by their own admission are not political and do a fantastic job at what they do. I must say now that I did meet with David Dodd on a couple of occasions to explain where we were and had his full support. The Supporters Club WERE put on a compromising position by having their premises at Leyton Stadium.

And to all of you in this room tonight, and to those who couldn't make it – thank you for backing us in your hundreds. Thank you for standing up for us when often-ludicrous accusations were thrown at us. Thank you for all the messages of support, they really did help keep us going.

I want to end this report with a very important message. LOFT is not done. Our core aims and objectives I mentioned earlier remain the same, whoever the owner is.

But more than that, LOFT's board wants to make a real difference in the governance of football. All Leyton Orient fans were let down dreadfully by the football authorities, not least the EFL who shamefully hid behind the mantra that "we're only a competition organiser". We are not going to let them off the hook and we will do all we can, on our own and with other supporters' groups, to fight for change – because it's all very well saying no fan should ever suffer the way we did, but somebody has to make it happen.

So to those of you who joined LOFT during the past year, we still need you. Your backing through your membership gives us the right to represent you.

That's the end of my Chair's report. I'll now hand over to Peter to give us the Treasurer's report and summary of the accounts, as there's a bit more to talk about money-wise than usual!