

Blues Trust Annual General Meeting, 8 November 2014

Four candidates have been nominated for election to the board: Emma-Louise Hodgson, Chris Walker, Peter Bull and Steve McCarthy. Here are their statements.

Emma-Louise Hodgson nominated by Brian Harries & Kevin Baker

I have been a Birmingham City supporter for as long as I can remember, and started attending games from the age of 15. I am a season ticket holder of the Tilton Road and sit between my father who has had the same seat for 20 years, and my eight year old nephew. I travel to away games as much as possible, and up until May it had been a "toss up" as to whether the trip to Wembley in 1995 at age 17 for the Auto Windscreens Shield was the best away trip of my life or whether when it was Sunday 25th February 2001, for the Cup Final. Despite the result that day, it was still a fantastic experience for me, as it would be for any homesick 22 year old Bluenose, living just outside of Cardiff with a staunch Liverpool supporting boyfriend. However, I need not worry about deciding between 1995 or 2001. The last game of the season at Bolton last season trounces them both for me. I felt unbelievably privileged to be part of that day, and so desperately proud of the supporters.

Birmingham City Football Club is very much an integral part of my life, because I think it has influenced so many aspects. When I attended university in Wales at 18, I was aware I wasn't going to be getting my weekly football fix, and so took part in trials for the university women's football team. I played at University and County level and I would like to think that the interest I took in playing football was fostered by the influence of Birmingham City. Supporting "The Blues" is something I do with heart and soul and no matter what situations it may be in or indeed how far away from St. Andrews I live, I remain loyal and passionate with regard to my support. – no matter how hard it may be at times.

I had become a Trust Member, but became involved with the Trust Board in January 2013 initially as Secretary. Like so many, I was sceptical of what the Trust did or possibly could do. However, I recognised this was though a lack of knowledge. I am pleased to say after a week of working with them, I was immersed in the sense that they were ordinary supporters who were and are doing their utmost to give the supporters a say in how their club is run. After a year, I recognised that I needed to "put my money where my mouth was" so to speak. If I was convinced that I could do things for the Trust and make it work, then it was up to me to get on and do it, and not sit back and let my keyboard do the talking or share my views in the pub. Now I am a co-opted board member, and I hope that after today I am an elected member of the board.

In the last two years my eyes have really been opened to the possibility that supporters can make a difference and become a strong and recognised influence on their club.

Professionally, I have been a teacher for sixteen years, and this has equipped me with transferable skills that I can use in my role on the board. Communication, co-operation and creativity are all skills that I utilise wherever I can with my Trust work and I am very keen on fostering a love of not just football in the youngsters that I work with, but also a desire to support their local team. I see it as demoralising to see children who live within five miles of our club worshipping teams such as Chelsea and Manchester United, knowing they will never attend a match or experience that thrill of going to the ground on a Saturday. When speaking to five and six year old male pupils last week, they all stated they want to be footballers when they grow up "because you get loads of money" We have lost our way with football. It has become a commodity. I believe if Greg Dyke needs to look anywhere as to why grassroots football is failing, why attendance is dropping at championship games and how we can secure a National squad in ten years time, it's the schools and education we need to look to. That is what I want to push for. As an elected board member, engaging with the younger generation and fostering a Birmingham City supporter base that will continue for future years is something I am very much interested in. Whilst working on the ACV application last year, my role saw me exploring the benefits and opportunities for young people that BCFC, the ground and it's facilities provide. I am delighted to say that they were, and remain, considerable.

If I am elected I would like to encourage those that are sceptical about the Trust – the way it operates, and what work it actually does – to come and join. Come and help out. We would be happy to have you working with us. There is so much we as supporters need to do.

I have enjoyed, and will continue to enjoy the challenges that come with my role, and not only do I feel privileged to work with such dedicated and passionate individuals on the Trust board, but also proud to be a Birmingham City Supporter. My work for your Trust has helped dissolve the apathy that I personally sense at the games. If elected, I will continue to do my absolute best to work for our members – my vision is that the Trust continues to grow and strengthen in membership, so that no matter what happens to our club, apathy will fade, unity increases and the fans will remain the life and soul of Birmingham City, regardless of who manages the team, who owns the club or who plays for the team.

Chris Walker nominated by Steve McCarthy & Peter Bull

I have supported Birmingham City football Club since watching my first match back in 1961, a 2-1 victory over Fulham. From that day on, I never considered supporting another team despite my Granddad telling me, "You'll never win anything with following that shower" and how wrong he was. Over the years, I have witnessed many highs and lows, experienced several promotions, relegations and been to Wembley three times, all of which were successful. As a Bluenose, I have witnessed the sorrows and dark days when the club went down the rocky road of administrators, debts and poor crowds. Always feeling helpless, the only way I could help was to get down St Andrews and support the team and the club.

I have had a season ticket at various times over the years, but work commitments took me around the country and I found it difficult to get to games consistently so it was not viable to renew every season, but now I am back in the Midlands and am a season ticket holder in the Kop. Since that glorious February day in 2011, we have witnessed yet another decline, to which we seem to be in free fall. There is nothing we can do but watch and hope it will end, from relegation to the Championship, the incarceration of our owner and the sale of any assets, the promising young players we have developed for pittance, we sit and watch.

As most supporters I have wished to win the lottery and help the club, I have wondered what I can do to help. When I heard about the Blues Trust, I followed their growth to see what they were trying to do. When they secured the Asset of Community Value for St Andrews, it showed they wanted to do something towards the betterment of BCFC and the supporters; they wanted to make changes and have some influence so I signed up. In July, the Blues Trust invited me to join some board members for the Supporters Seminar held at Wembley. I met many like-minded supporters who want to influence the running of their clubs. Some have even gone as far as buying into their clubs and are now running them, Swansea and Portsmouth, to name just two, while Coventry have battled to get their club back home where they belong.

Football Supporters Trusts are growing throughout all levels and are beginning to have their voices heard along the corridors of power, not just the FA but in parliament, slowly the revolution is taking shape, I want to be part of that movement and I want it to be with Blues Trust for the supporters of Birmingham City Football Club. I feel I have something to offer the board from many experiences I have acquired over many years, enthusiasm, fresh ideas and hard work along with a willingness to learn to name a few.

Peter Bull nominated by Steve McCarthy & Chris Walker

My name is Peter Bull and I have been a supporter of Birmingham City FC for over 60 years having first visited St Andrews in the early 1950's. I have been a season ticket holder on the Kop, and earlier the Tilton, for many years. I attend nearly all home games, but now rarely attend away games because of other commitments.

I retired in the middle 1990's having spent 40 years in the Civil Service and am now enjoying some leisure time, travelling, walking, boating on the English canal network and photography. I also have a strong interest in IT matters and run my own websites. These things make me sound quite busy but I always find time to watch my favourite football team.

In recent years, since the ownership of BCFC by its Hong Kong parent company, I have become fearful of the club's survival. I am passionate about reinstating our status in the league. In short I want my club back and ideally would like the fans to collectively own a block of shares in BCFC so that we can be represented on the club Board and have a say in how the club is run. This is not a criticism of the current staff at St Andrews who have done a sterling job in all the circumstances, but more the Directors in remote Hong Kong.

I believe that fans should have a collective financial interest in the club and that this could be achieved by acquiring a block shareholding via a holding of community shares in Blues Trust which is a registered society under the Co-operative and Community Benefit Societies Act 2014.

It is for this reason that I joined up with Blues Trust in early 2013. I put a written proposal to the 2013 AGM that the Trust should make a serious attempt to try to acquire a shareholding in BCFC and that we should test the appetite of the fans by asking them to make pledges to see how much we could raise. The results were very interesting and it is nice to know that there is an army of fans waiting to invest should the opportunity arise.

I was co-opted to the Board in Dec 2013 and try to attend all Board meetings. I enjoy working with the Trust and am at present helping to develop its website. One of my aims is that we should try to increase the membership beyond its present modest levels to several thousand.

I want to continue taking an active role in Blues Trust by standing for election to the main Board.

Steve McCarthy nominated by Julia Waller & Mick McCarthy

My name is Steve McCarthy. I want to continue taking an active role in the Bluestrust by standing for re-election to the main Board, for a further 2 years. We have already made significant progress in terms of membership accruals and infrastructure set up with a mission to support our members. We have always made our intent clear, that is we are not a protest group; we are not an anti- BIHL or anti-board movement and our aim is to work with Birmingham City FC for the sole good of the football club. I am excited to offer my work experience, passion for Birmingham City F.C. and talents to help our Trust adequately plan for the challenges of future growth within the trusts limited funding sources.

I have been a Season Ticket holder for nearly 29 years, residing in Block 16 of the Tilton Road, same seat since construction of the new Kop, in that time of have experienced many highs and lows, but never once questioned either my loyalty or commitment to the club. I also travel to as many away games as possible accompanied by my 15 year old son Nathan who is also an avid Blues fan. I became involved with the Trust just over 3 years ago during its inception as a member of the Steering Committee, most recently I have held the position as Chair. I enjoy but appreciate the challenges we face, being under no illusions the scale of the task faced by supporters in today's footballing world.

I have held many leadership roles over the years, both in my professional career and with the education authority as part of the Governing Body for my children's school. I currently am employed by a Maintenance Service provider within the Manufacturing sector holding the position of their Business Improvement Manager. I have ensured that during my tenure as a trust member I have always made time to attend meeting and execute actionable items, to date since my involvement I have not missed one meeting. I enjoy my involvement with the trust and knowing that in the future as the trust grows we will have helped improve the interaction and communication between the club and our members.

I am committed to the trust, I feel I have worked hard and been committed to influence positive change within the club, we still have a long journey ahead of us and I am sure with the support of the many members we have accrued along the way we can achieve great things. I remain excited by this opportunity. I have years of experience with budgeting, business improvement, management and business contracts, I feel I have a lot to offer this trust so therefore I would appreciate your vote for me, Steve McCarthy, to continue serve on the Blues trust main board.