

FAN SURVEY SUMMARY

THE Fan Survey closed at the end of last month and we have now had the opportunity to read your comments and produce a summary of the results.

The response to the survey was excellent, with over 660 fans taking part and literally hundreds of comments were made against the different questions in the survey. These ideas, suggestions and criticisms will now be looked at in more detail and will be influential in shaping the contents of the Torquay United Five-Year Business Plan.

A big thank you to everyone who took part in the survey.

Survey Results

The profile of the respondents can be summarised as follows:

Out of a total of 667 respondents, the highest number of respondents were male (93.05%), over the age of 30 (75.56%) and had been supporting the Club for 10 years or more (86.69%). The majority of respondents (67.68%) indicated that they would like to hear from the Club on our latest news, offers, sponsorship and ticketing opportunities, which is encouraging, as more fans look to get involved with the Club.

Over 77% of respondents attended at least three home games last season, with 42.27% supporting the team by attending all of the home games. Nearly 37% of the respondents were season-ticket holders but less than 50% were a local resident, which shows what amazing fans we have, with the majority of the respondents living outside of the Torbay area. In fact, over 25% of respondents travelled over 100 miles to see their team in action..... a fantastic effort and a big thank you to all our supporters.

Not surprisingly, the majority of fans seek to enjoy the experience with family (39.91%) and friends (44.60%). In addition, 20.50% of respondents also regularly follow the Yellow Army to away fixtures.

The large majority of respondents (76.9%) like to get to the ground at least 30 minutes before kick-off with only a very few people (3.12%) rushing through the turnstiles at the very last minute.

Key Issues

One of the main purposes of the consultation exercise was to gain the views of supporters on a number of key issues that will influence our thinking on the future direction of the Club. A number of these were potentially controversial and, therefore, have inevitably produced a mixed response.

To reach and sustain Football League status, the Club needs to have a new stadium with the ability to grow capacity?

The response from over 57% of the respondents indicated that they were not massively supportive of the above statement. Reasons for not supporting this statement included:

“Whilst I understand the appeal of a new stadium that could be used for other activities during the week and during the close season I do not think that this is a prerequisite to be a successful club in

L1/L2. The current stadium is ideal for us for the foreseeable future and provides for a good atmosphere, even if the gate is relatively low. I also enjoy watching a game close to the action and do not enjoy watching games when the pitches are separated from fans by running tracks or similar. My fear for a new ground, if that was ever built, is that it would be difficult to generate any atmosphere and so the fans' experience would be diminished."

"Plainmoor is our home and should always remain so. We do not want or need a new stadium."

"The club does not require a new stadium. The current ground is absolutely fine for us, capacity-wise. We have not hit a complete sell out for over five years, so a new stadium would not be at the forefront of my mind were I in charge. I would look at all avenues available to ensure that Plainmoor becomes a hub for local football (such as playing local cup finals there), as well as other income streams. Plainmoor has the facilities available to be used much more than it currently is."

On the other side of the fence, over 37% of the respondents did not disagree that a new stadium would help the Club grow.

Some typical comments were:

"Time to move on the world has changed and tufc need to change to survive!"

"Although it will be a crying shame to say goodbye to Plainmoor, I believe a stadium move is required. Plainmoor has history, yes, it has the Gulls nest and Boots and Laces but that is it, and it's not enough. The club needs a new stadium with on-site parking (free money, essentially), astro turf, five a side pitches, gym, physio, bar(s), club shop and catering. It is vital that the club owns, runs and maintains these facilities, and doesn't outsource to contractors who may not care about the club."

"TUFC cannot survive on match-day takings and sponsorship alone, all you need to do is look at the MK Dons stadium and surrounding area."

"Although for the past 37 years, I have been at Plainmoor and don't wish to move, I recognise that the move is necessary for future stability, and sustainability of the club."

"There is no doubt other revenue sources other than one match a fortnight are needed."

"To be financially sustainable we need other revenue streams apart from ticket sales. A multi-use stadium will do that, and an Academy allows us to develop players with sell-on value."

To maintain a healthy financial position, the Club needs to build a multi-event stadium facility capable of commercial use on a daily basis?

Respondents were more persuaded of the financial benefits of building a new stadium with nearly 43% in favour and 32.12% disagreeing with the statement. A further 25% were happy to "sit on the fence" on this issue until further details of any plans emerge. As has been said previously, the club strongly believes that for Torquay United to grow and prosper there has to be the opportunity to generate new income streams and that a multi-event stadium is the best way to achieve this objective.

The statements in support and in opposition to a multi-event stadium are similar to those above and, therefore, have not been duplicated here.

To maintain Football League status, the club needs to develop a fully functioning Academy?

This question was far less controversial with over 85% of respondents in agreement with the statement. We are already working in partnership with the Torquay United Community Sports Trust, who provide excellent coaching sessions for youngsters of all ages in different geographical locations in South Devon. In addition, trials have been held to select the more promising children to be part of an elite training programme and participation in the Junior Premier League.

The following comments indicate the feelings of support:

“Academy is good for the club’s reputation, as much as it is to develop future local talent from a large recruitment area.”

“Also looking for new talent in the academies of Torquay and others is very important to find those key players that can shape the club’s future.”

“This will form the foundation required for sustainability, like at Southampton, who have made enormous profit developing young players and selling them.”

Gulls Nest

The views expressed about the Gulls Nest bar were generally positive.

Respondents scored the following as “good or very good”

- Level of service- 49.85%
- Comfort & decoration-40.87%
- Selection & quality of drinks-46.56%
- Selection & quality of food-24.15%

In addition to the above scores between 40-53% of respondents indicated that the Gulls Nest was “OK” in each category.

A selection of typical comments were:

“Greatly improved as season went on. New staff are great.”

“Food quality could be better. Look at good local produce.”

“More people would use it on match-days if there were more staff, so you could get served quicker.”

“Decor is old and poor. Needs a refurbishment. Bigger range of food needed to improve.”

“Great bunch of staff, always used to use Boots but wanted to give my money to club, to the best of my knowledge you can't get food in the Nest, so having food on offer on match-days would be good, maybe a greater selection of lager would be good also.”

“Not enough room. Need more comfy chairs and better facilities. Better snacks”

No 10's Restaurant

Respondents scored the following as "good or very good"

- Level of service- 52.81%
- Comfort & decoration-41.02%
- Selection & quality of drinks-42.22%
- Selection & quality of food-47.16%

In addition to the above scores, between 40-51% of respondents indicated that No 10's Restaurant was "OK" in each category.

A selection of typical comments were:

"More imagination needed with meal choices to make people attend more often."

"I eat there every home game....I think that says it all."

"Waiting times can be long. Food was OK to good and one of the better aspects"

"Offer a family meal deal on match-days."

"Very slow at serving at half time. Should serve bottles only to keep waiting times down."

Whilst the results for both the Gulls Nest and No 10's are encouraging, we would still like to improve the service and quality of food and drinks on offer and will be working hard over the next few weeks to see what can be done in time for next season.

Food Outlets

Respondents scored the following as "good or very good"

- Level of service- 44.60%
- Selection & quality of food-26.87%

In addition to the above scores, between 45 -53% of respondents indicated that the food outlets were "OK" in both categories.

A selection of typical comments were:

"The catering facilities are a mixed bag with good prices and reasonable quality. Chips and cups of tea seem particularly popular. The biggest issue seems to be the long queues at half-time which need to be addressed, so fans won't risk missing the game."

"Food is average, burgers taste very cheap".

"Decent pies and coffee"

"The queue is always ridiculous, regardless of attendance. A better system needs to be implemented, as it also crosses over for the queue to the toilets."

Toilets

Respondents scored the following as “good or very good”

- Construction/fittings-11.83%
- Cleanliness-15.44%

In addition to the above scores between 45 -50% of respondents indicated that the toilets were “OK” in each category.

A selection of typical comments were:

“In the Popside you get what you expect, I have seen worse at away grounds.”

“Just need to be newer, very old and dated.”

“More hand soap in the toilets would be appreciated and the queues are also an issue in the home fans’ corner of Bristow’s Bench. The issue is the close proximity between the toilets and catering facilities. In contrast, the popular covered-terrace is better laid-out.”

“Build a new toilet block.”

Match Day Experience

The match day experience is not only influenced by what is happening on the pitch (although that is the most important indicator as to whether you will go home happy or not) but by a variety of experiences that will either enhance or detract from your day out at Plainmoor. The following are possibly worth adding to your experience:

- Match day programme- respondents indicated good or very good (53.38%)
- PA system- respondents indicated good or very good (41.67%)
- Big Screen- respondents indicated good or very good (47.64%)

Other features of the day need improving and these include:

- Half-time activities on the pitch- respondents indicated good or very good (23.58%)
- Activities for children- respondents indicated good or very good (13.17%)
- Stewards- respondents indicated good or very good (26.84%)
- Parking- respondents indicated good or very good (16.36%)

The respondents who replied “OK” to each of these options ranged from 37-46%

Some of these, like the problem of parking, is outside of the Club’s control but the others indicate where more needs to be done to make match-days more of a memorable experience.

A selection of typical comments were:

“The PA on the Popside is terrible, stewards are over officious.”

“I think you will always be limited at the current ground. Nostalgia is great but to improve I think you need to move. If you did, perhaps a children's hang out area with facilities.”

“Big screen could be used more. Highlights at half time/full time with scrolling advertising/scores would be great.”

“Inject some personality and fun into half time, perhaps showcasing local talent.”

“The parking is non-existent at the stadium. Half-time activities are relatively low-key and brief. The match-day programme used to be good quality but could contain more information about the last match, fitness updates on players, and interviews with the managers/fans/players/former Torquay United players.”

“Stewards: Jobsworths who make situations worse than they need to be. More training required and fitness levels need to improve. Seem to be there for a free game.”

“Music far too loud. Big screen pointless. I'm sure that local organisations would be willing to perform/display etc. at half-time if enough effort was put in to contacting them. E.g. bands/choirs/school teams etc.”

Social & Corporate Facilities

We are very grateful for the long list of ideas, comments and suggestions on how the Club can use its facilities for social and corporate activities. Some of these have been tried in the past but are still worthy of renewed consideration as generating income is central to the stability and growth of the Club. We have lifted a selection of some of the comments which includes:

- *Charity events, kids parties, half-term / summer clubs for kids, music evenings, quiz nights, bouncy castles.*
- *Local cup finals like the Herald Cup at Plainmoor.*
- *Need to recruit staff capable of putting on these events.*
- *Annual music festival events held at the stadium. If you get big acts down, it will fill up.*
- *Boots and Laces taken back under the TUFC banner, local bands, quiz nights, guest speakers etc.*
- *Hold more community events.*
- *Attract other sports clubs to use the facilities, and even add on a sports/entertainment hall large enough for, say, basketball, with spectator viewing.*
- *Conference facilities will be best served via a new venue.*
- *Torquay United club tours (this is a club with a proud history), music gigs, school award ceremonies (primary/secondary). Greater involvement with the local schools is important.*
- *Mailshot local companies, also social media Facebook etc.*
- *New stadium with public facilities gym/pool/bar/restaurant/conference facilities/hotel.*
- *Whilst accepting the limitations of current location, look to Exeter Chiefs for example of how to make maximum use of facilities.*
- *It might be a good idea to ask those that attend the business breakfast events.*
- *Introduce special offers.*
- *Turn Boots & Laces into a football Supporters Club.*
- *Regular quiz nights, themed evenings and invited speakers on football-related subjects.*
- *Hosting children's football tournaments on the pitch.*
- *A Food Fair with Vendors once a month during the summer might help raise funds.*

- *Fill the family end with children under 12 accompanied with an adult free. Or even two kids for the price of one. Better to be filled with noise than almost empty.*
- *Need to keep in mind that the stadium is primarily for football, not a conference or other activities venue. Happy to expand into these areas but careful consideration of other venues in the locality offering similar options needs to be given.*
- *Support the local sports council, find out which clubs would benefit from having a home or access to some of the facilities Plainmoor has. Task someone with developing the relationship with sport England.*
- *Private parties. Small conference facilities.*
- *I think a fans forum once a month , even a gulls membership, which had functions once a month in the Gulls Nest , i.e. using the bar ,bringing in money.*
- *Agree would need to be a new ground. Parking on site/near crucial and access to ground. Would it necessarily need to be IN Torquay? Capacity for games will never need to be massive - temp seating for events. Obvious great example of how to do this REALLY well is Exeter Chiefs - their corporate facilities are great - having used them.*
- *Let the local community know. Weddings/funerals/ birthday etc.*
- *4g pitch for multi-day usage and consideration of co-location with other s - e.g. ground share in new location with rugby club - happy to discuss this topic as a coach at rugby club. I am not against new stadium like some other supporters and feel it just needs to be done right.*
- *Regular MMA and boxing events both live and screened, I am happy to help where possible. Music events, host tournaments (all sport) feel free to come to me.*
- *Letting the ladies play at the ground.*

Communication

- Website- respondents indicated good or very good (22.36%)
- Emails- respondents indicated good or very good (10.57%)
- Facebook- respondents indicated good or very good (24.35%)
- Twitter- respondents indicated good or very good (35.34%)
- External Media- respondents indicated good or very good (12.18%)

The respondents who replied "OK" to each of these options ranged from 37-41%

A selection of typical comments were:

"I feel the club's communication should be much more proactive than it currently is. Information is slow to come out, and there have been times where I have got in touch with the club but have had no response. There is no excuse for this and it is something that other clubs strongly understand, and are very active on social media in responding to fans."

"Communication very much depends on topic and some will want to know more about "their" club operationally while others may like to be informed about the team and others about corporate opportunities. Being open is important but I understand the need for business matters to remain within the club, and that they may not need to be made public"

"Seem to hear news from external sources first. Twitter is good when a game in progress."

“Social media presence much improved over the past year, a further push into this area with more innovative content would be much appreciated and help the club with the younger demographics.”

“Communication with fans is essential. It has been diabolical under the last two sets of owners. The fans questions and video answers are a good start but you need to a lot more.”

We also asked for any specific ideas on how we can improve our website and some of the replies are very helpful and will be given consideration as we reach the final stages of launching a new website at the end of June. Ideas put forward included:

- *More videos.*
- *Keeping it up-to-date is important, with regular reports about what is going on in the local football world (including the National League) that affects TUF. If you need to get fans views on topical issues, ask them directly through the website.*
- *Publishing information before it appears elsewhere.*
- *Messy at the moment as too many pop ups and adverts make it hard to read and navigate - of course you need those but more contained perhaps.*
- *All supporters really want to know is what is going on with players, and the manager's thoughts. Team news is the number one priority.*
- *More interviews, more info about players injuries.*
- *Stream live matches on the Gulls Player for people who can't attend a home game.*
- *Online shop to be updated - living in London it's difficult to purchase merchandise when the shop is rarely updated.*
- *People love the history of the club, videos and interviews with past players*
- *Most important thing is tickets, away travel and the shop.*
- *Please get rid of the black background and white writing it hurts my eyes.*
- *More info on player targets. Budget for players. Reasons why players didn't accept an offer*
- *Chat room to maybe include players & Staff.*
- *The latest question & answer sessions are very good, perhaps the same with a different player each week*
- *A deeper match preview and review would go down well. I feel the current previews do not offer much insight into the opposition and feel they are very light in content. Match reviews could be improved to include more analysis. A more interactive website would go down well too.*
- *A chat room or Blog would be good.*
- *Articles written by fans recalling games which hold a special meaning for them, useful as a reminder of the club's history? Perhaps a series of themed articles e.g. why or when I became a TUF fan? Back issues/ reprints of fanzines?*
- *Maybe a site where sensible questions can be answered could be a bit time consuming but would help supporters understand more, even things they don't agree with.*
- *A forum facility would be good.*
- *Start an Instagram account, it would be good*
- *Communicate with supporters and not remain silent*
- *SEATING PLAN is a must!!!! ALSO STADIUM PLAN/LAYOUT*
- *No - it's very good. I'm also a Saints supporter, & the TUF website is miles better.*

- *You should have Wi-Fi available like most other sports grounds.*
- *A better search engine and archived news section.*
- *Message board.*
- *Gulls Player has been under used which has killed any subscription it had. If properly taken advantage of. Good regular content it could work.*
- *Audio interviews.*
- *How about "A day in the life" feature about a player or member of staff, or even a supporter. Make it more inclusive.*

We also asked the question on how we can improve our communication. Some of the answers duplicate what has been listed above, so they won't be repeated but there were other suggestions which included:

- *A regular fans forum.*
- *Stream fan forums online.*
- *Surveys on match-day. Customer service reps in different areas of stadium*
- *More online advertising and local radio ads when events are happening.*
- *Be more transparent and honest and stop hiding behind "commercial sensitivity". Also the club has missed a trick over the years as it does not collect information about who is attending games. All supporters should be able to apply for a member's card, which is swiped whenever the supporter attends a game or spends in any club outlet. Personal offers and rewards can then be targeted to individual members to involve the club in people's lives, i.e. birthday promotions, offers to occasional fans to encourage them to attend more games etc., variations on match tickets - nobody pays the same when they fly on EasyJet why do we all pay the same to watch a football match.*
- *Regular e-mails or newsletters to local schools, clubs, shops, businesses, community centres, etc.*
- *Possibly a text message/what's app group*
- *I think a weekly update from the Chairman or Board would be really beneficial in keeping supporters abreast*
- *Programme has too much rubbish in it. Regular programme on local radio.*
- *Direct contact between the Club goes a long way. Try getting a club official or player to ring the odd renewing season ticket holder and thank them for their continued support. That sort of news is positive and would spread like wild fire amongst fans*
- *By not manipulating survey results to satisfy your own ends and by encouraging challenge from stakeholders not silencing it and whitewashing with interviews serving as glorified PR stunts.*
- *Build a strong, clean, regularly updated database of supporters.*
- *Involve Gilbert more.*

Online Forums

Online forum can always be a contentious issue at football clubs but they are undoubtedly a useful platform for discussion. The width of opinion can be summed up by this one quote:

“Yes I do [use them], as I am not local; mixed feelings - they can be informative which is helpful; they can be speculative, which arouses a host of feelings and reactions (and suspicions); they can also be divisive, disrespectful and create bad feeling, which is unpleasant and needs filtering; none of this will change.”

Commercial

Every business needs to be successful in its commercial activities and Torquay United is no different in that respect. The following list does not include all of the activities and opportunities that are available but the results indicate that more needs to be done to fully utilise the commercial and hospitality opportunities that exist at the Club.

- Sponsorship options- respondents indicated good or very good (20.22%)
- Stadium Advertising- respondents indicated good or very good (31.22%)
- Match-day packages- respondents indicated good or very good (20.80%)
- Club Shop- respondents indicated good or very good (31.51%)

The respondents who replied “OK” to each of these options ranged from 41-61%

We also asked if respondents would be interested in sponsorship of the Club or the players. The results were disappointing as only 16.90% of the respondents felt willing to do so, which shows the Club must work doubly hard in order to achieve greater commercial success.

A selection of typical comments were:

“I feel match-day packages could be improved. It is expensive at the moment for what you get - a meal, programme and the game. I feel there should be more - guest speakers coming into the box to answer any questions, tour of the stadium, into the dressing room after the game are just some examples I can think of.”

“Online shop always out of stock, match-day packages, e.g. mascot, too expensive, need to appeal to the masses more”.

“Difficult with sponsorship. The “value” to sponsors is limited by the current product on offer. Obviously, if we were a Football League club, the value is enhanced. I am sure the club does all it can on the sponsorship front. I would not be critical of efforts made in this respect.”

“Revamp club shop.”

“The whole commercial operation needs revamping to encourage new revenue streams into the club.”

Ticketing Services

We also asked for your views on the ticketing services available at Plainmoor. The replies showed a mixed appreciation of those services.

- Online tickets- respondents indicated good or very good (22.72%)
- Match-day ticket office- respondents indicated good or very good (29.26%)
- Phone sales- respondents indicated good or very good (22.25%)

- Turnstiles- respondents indicated good or very good (49.65%)

The respondents who replied “OK” to each of these options ranged from 41-62%

Comments indicated that fans found the online system confusing and that embracing technology with the introduction of scanners for season ticket holders would be a welcome move. The age and condition of the turnstiles was also raised, although, for some, there was still pleasure to be gained by having “traditional turnstiles”. The opportunity to pay by credit card at the turnstiles was also raised as something that would be an improvement, although it could increase the time spent queuing, which was a concern for some.

One comment seems to encapsulate the feelings of quite a few fans: *“Online ticketing difficult to navigate. Never enough staff at ticket office window. Could do with more turnstiles.”*

Away Travel

The number of respondents who attend away fixtures ranged from 25.23% who never travelled to 2.79% who went to every game. The majority of respondents (71.98%) went to between 1-10 games each season.

The majority of travelling fans go by car (74.95%) or train (15.48%) or with the Official Torquay United Travel Club (8.55%).

Supporters Club

We asked for suggestions on how the Official Supporters Club could be improved. There were a range of replies that revealed confusion between the Supporters Club, the Travel Club and Torquay United Supporters Trust (TUST).

This confusion indicates each organisation needs to do more to advertise and promote what their organisation can do to support the fans. This confusion was reflected in the comments about the Travel Club running a good service through to levels of mistrust about the other two groups. Some of the polite suggestions indicated a need to do more to advertise what the Supporters Club does.

Despite the confusion and some negativity, 37.84% of the respondents would like to join the Supporters Club and the Travel Club?

Any Other Comments

The final question asked for any other comments on how we can improve the Club. There was a lot of duplication of previous comments made, which have not been reproduced here. Other comments included:

- *Change the kits to a decent brand, such as Nike/Adidas.*
- *Reopen Boots and Laces for half-time drinks.*
- *Be very open about the direction of the club at all times, and build a small team of advisors (football, business, marketing & IT, commercial and financial) around the new owner, the board (when there is one), the team manager and general manager.*

- *Reduced tickets for families, you need to try and get the young people of the area interested in the local football club and the only way to do this is if they attend games with their parents.*
- *Firstly, a positive comment about the club , so many things are working well with the community and young supporters side it has been great to watch it grow and my own son is completely engaged in striving to play for the youth and then first team. The players on training days in holidays etc. is fantastic.*
- *The number one thing you need to do is run a reserve team. I know entering a local league would be the best but hard to run, but regular weekly/fortnightly friendly matches would be just as good.*
- *Focus on building a football club that has relevance and is trusted by the local community. The gate for the final home game demonstrates that there is a latent interest in the club but it needs to engage more, particularly with younger people children and families.*
- *Investment and a reasonable squad to challenge for promotion, which would be a statement of intent.*
- *The club has an amazing spirit and very good support. It's one division below where it should be and hopefully the new owners intend to get us back there. The team rather than politics should be the focus.*

Summary

The response to the survey has been very impressive and the Club would like to thank everyone who took the time and trouble to complete it. There are many very helpful and constructive ideas on how the Club can consolidate and develop over the next five years, as well as criticism of where improvements in our current services are needed. Nothing is fixed overnight but the main objective of this exercise was to listen to the fans and let your ideas and concerns influence the preparation of the Business Plan, which we plan to publish in July.