



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

Martin Glenn
Chief Executive Officer
Football Association
Wembley Stadium
PO Box 1966
London SW1P 9EQ

LB/BJB/CLAPTON4

23rd April 2018

Dear Mr Glenn,

I write to you regarding **Clapton FC**, who play in the Essex Senior League in my constituency at the **Old Spotted Dog Ground** in Forest Gate, London. They are the oldest senior club in the capital, with the longest-standing ground.

I have been contacted by supporters of the club who have expressed concern at financial irregularities at the club and the charity that owns a lease on the ground. There have also been concerns about the way the club is operated, its legitimacy as an entity and the fitness of the 'owner' Vincent McBean to operate as its Director.

I understand that some of these concerns have been raised with the FA at various levels over recent years, although there has been no investigation, leaving many fans feeling let down and disillusioned as the role of the FA as regards governance of the game at this level.

I believe a point has now been reached where the issues around the club need to be seriously addressed. Failure to act could mean the fans losing a club, a community losing its football ground and the Football Association being seen as complicit in this.

The club's affairs are currently being investigated by the Charity Commission. I have also asked HMRC and the Insolvency Service to thoroughly investigate the running of the business of the club itself, as well as the charity/business that owns the lease on the ground.

You may be aware of a boycott of fans by home games due to what they see as financial irregularities, and the fact that the club is not being run as a members' club. Clapton FC fans are known to be enthusiastic and have the highest attendances in the Essex Senior League, with their away support supplying the season-high attendance for most teams in the league. They do a great deal of work in the community, as well as being active in campaigns to rid the game of racism and homophobia.



I would now ask that the FA carry out a thorough investigation into Clapton FC, which should include a review of its ownership, day-to-day administration, fitness of the owner/director, adherence to its own members' club rules and constitution, and its financial dealings. I would also ask that the FA considers reinstating the rights and recognition of the original members' club of Clapton FC (the 'Real Club' – see below).

1. Ownership of the club and the barring of life members

Clapton FC is constituted to be a members' club, but my constituents have informed me this is far from the truth today.

Firstly, Mr McBean styles himself as the chairman and director of the club and controls all issues pertaining to the running of both the club and the Old Spotted Dog Ground.

Secondly, Mr McBean claims to have negotiated the sale of Clapton Football Club on behalf of the Executive Committee of Clapton Football Club to a company known as Knights Securities PLC for the total sum of £63,200 on 11 November 1999. He then personally purchased the club from this company on 23 June 2000, for £4,800. This was part of a complex scheme to settle debts supposedly run up by the club.

This is not consistent with the image of the club as a members' club, or with its constitution. Documents were signed by individuals apparently *ex officio*, but with officer titles that do not exist in the club. It is a web so tangled that many fans of the club do not fully understand the full details behind Mr McBean's claims of ownership.

Thirdly, members of Clapton FC were not consulted on these deals, nor were they able to play an active role in the club at that time, a situation that remains the case today. Life members of the club are not recognised by Mr McBean and membership of his version of the club has been closed for some years whilst a 'restructuring' takes place.

In the meantime, life members have continued a parallel 'Real Club', which claims the right to field a team at the Old Spotted Dog Ground as Clapton FC. They also own the trademark of Clapton Football Club, own its club records, and lay claim to the historic achievements of the club. I understand that the FA does not recognise this entity.

2. The fit and proper person test

I understand that the FA does not enforce the fit and proper person test below Step Four of the league pyramid, but I believe that the record of Mr McBean warrants both an exception for this Step Five club and a reconsideration of this policy.



Mr McBean's record of companies is lengthy, with a stream of businesses controlling Clapton FC that fail to file accounts before being struck off. I believe this is to avoid scrutiny and insolvency, as well as having to provide details of income and expenditure.

Clapton Football Club Limited, company number 03881855 dissolved via compulsory strike off on 6 September 2005.

Clapton Football Club Limited, company number 07291485 dissolved via compulsory strike off on 31 January 2012.

Clapton Football Club Limited, company number 0801151 dissolved via compulsory strike off on 5 November 2013.

Mr McBean also controls the business/charity that holds the lease the Old Spotted Dog Ground. **Newham Community Leisure Limited**, company number 2684173; **Newham Community Leisure Trust Limited**, registered charity number 1009672.

This is a clear conflict of interest, and Mr McBean has also clearly acted against the interests of the club in starting insolvency proceedings against this charity for an alleged £203,000 loan to the charity. This could mean the loss of the lease on the ground and mean that the club will lose the ground it has played at for 130 years. Where the money came from or what the debt is for is unclear, especially as Mr McBean is disbarred from any financial benefit or doing paid work for the charity under its constitution. **Newham Community Leisure Trust Limited** was previously dissolved via compulsory strike off on 11 November 2003.

3. Running of Clapton FC

There have been many complaints in recent years from other clubs who have travelled to play Clapton FC at the Old Spotted Dog Ground. These have ranged from poor changing facilities to no hot showers and no meals for officials. There have also been health and safety concerns regarding dangerous items around the pitch. These have had to be dealt with by the local council, the London Borough of Newham, who are now taking enforcement action against the club in relation to a number of issues.

Additionally, recent reports from former staff accuse Mr McBean of leaving them out of pocket by taking receipts for sporting equipment but never providing reimbursement. There is now the question of a debt to at least one former manager.

The charity/business that owns the lease on the ground also owns the building next to it, which was bought with a Sports Foundation Grant. This has never been used for sport and is instead rented out as a commercial premises. Mr McBean has been named by operating managers as its landlord, and may personally benefit from the ownership of this building.



As I am sure you can appreciate, taken as a whole this paints a picture of a director/chairman who does not have the interest of the club at heart and who may have gained control illegitimately.

I understand that these may appear to the FA to be minor issues at a small club, but I believe that they speak to how the game is run at grassroots level and to the trust of those who are involved at this level. I appreciate that leagues and FAs at the local level may sometimes be invested in maintaining the status quo. But I firmly believe that this is one situation where there needs to be change.

I look forward to your earliest reply.

Yours sincerely,

Lyn Brown
Member of Parliament for West Ham

CC London Football Association

CC Essex Football Association

CC Essex Senior League

CC Tracey Crouch MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Sport and Civil Society