

DATE: 16 Sept 2020

To: Mr Paul Shackley, CEO Rushmoor Borough Council
Cc: Mr Ian Harrison, Deputy Chief Executive, Executive Director of Operations
Mr Malcolm Clarke, Chair, Football Supporters Association

Dear Mr Shackley,

You will be aware that the Shots Trust appeared before the Council on 3rd September, to make a presentation on a subject close to our hearts, the extension of the lease on the Aldershot Town Football Club's EBB Stadium.

Prior to the event, we had been approached by Councillor Gaynor Austin to ask about accusations made against the Trust, namely that two directors had been charged with being homophobic in one case and racist in the other. Our Chairman, Tommy Anderson, attempted to meet with the Councillor in order to explain the charges and the subsequent outcome; unfortunately, that was not possible. My two colleagues and I were of the opinion that she would not be the only Councillor who had questions about the case; this turned out to be true, unfortunately. We did not want these cases to overshadow what we believed to be an important presentation on the ongoing, vexatious subject of the lease extension.

On the evening in question, Mr Hilliar unexpectedly chose to address those concerns upfront. Unfortunately, in his eagerness to close down that discussion, he was a little careless in his use of language. He was trying to smooth over the situation and deflect the discussion back to the lease but he has, inadvertently, misled you.

In discussing the allegations, he said that they: "*were found to be groundless*". He went on to say that "*There is nobody on the Supporters' Trust who could in any way, validly be accused of any form of racism*". I will focus on the accusation of racism, as I believe that, for the charge of homophobia, the Board member's explanation was accepted.

The charge of racism was in fact NOT found to be groundless. The FSA Panel investigating the matter concluded, amongst other points:

"That the post was racist even if it was not intended as such, and that it was reasonable for Mr. Azeem to interpret it as such, and that the Shots Trust should have made a finding to this effect."

It was the '*not intended as such*' that prompted Mr Hilliar's and, I confess, my own belief that the Board member had been exonerated. This was a very unfortunate misunderstanding on both our parts, for which we can only apologise.

At the end of the presentation, the conversation returned once again to the accusation of racism. Councillor Bridgeman asked: "*Is it true that an FSA investigation did find that a director of the Trust had made a racist remark on Facebook about the chairman of the football club and that person is still a member of your board?*"

The answer given on the night to the second part of that question was based on our belief that the accusation was unfair, although we wholly accept that this was not a belief shared by the FSA. Mr Hilliar said: "*There is nobody on the Supporters' Trust who could in any way, validly be accused of any form of racism.*"

There was no intention on the Trust's part to mislead the Council; one cannot, however, police every word said in open forum. As a Board, we are fully aware that racism is an appalling matter and we certainly do not underplay the seriousness of the matter.

That is why we took the decision to ask the Board member to resign his position; he has now stepped down from the Trust Board with immediate effect.

CONCLUSION

On behalf of the Trust, I apologise for the misleading statements made to the Council in the course of our presentation. I am happy to have this opportunity to correct the position.

I have copied this letter to Mr Harrison, and Mr Malcolm Clarke from the FSA.

Yours sincerely,

Laura Smart

Secretary, The Shots Trust Board