

CHAIR'S REPORT 2025/26

This is my first Chair's Report since taking over as Chair of the Chelsea Supporters' Trust last September, and I want to start by saying what a privilege it has been to lead the Trust over the past year.

I was warned when I took the role that there is rarely a quiet year at Chelsea, and I think it is fair to say that prediction has proved accurate. It has been an incredibly busy year for the CST, at times a challenging one, but also a year in which I believe we have strengthened considerably as an organisation, represented our members robustly and achieved some important outcomes for Chelsea supporters.

Before I get into the detail, I want to thank everyone who has supported the Trust over the past twelve months. That includes our members, everyone who has completed a survey, sent us evidence, raised an issue or simply taken the time to get in touch. Your involvement is what allows us to represent Chelsea supporters properly.

The CST Board for the 2025/26 season consisted of Cliff Auger, Gillian Bromfield, David Chidgey, Debs Coady, Mark Meehan as Vice-Chair, Dominic Rosso as Chair, Dan Silver, Phillip Spector and Ben Williams.

Co-opted to the Board were Diane Akers, Jon Gordon, Tim Rolls and Rubin Weston, while our officers were Clayton Beerman as Secretary, Paul Hay as Membership Secretary and Stuart Kinner as Treasurer.

I want to place on record my genuine thanks to every member of the Board and to our officers for the enormous amount of time, energy and commitment they have given to the Trust over the past year. Everyone involved with the CST does this voluntarily. A huge amount of work happens quietly, behind the scenes and in people's own time, whether that is attending meetings, responding to supporters, analysing proposals, organising events or simply doing the less visible work needed to keep the Trust running. I see first-hand how much effort goes into it and I am enormously grateful to every one of them.

At last year's AGM, members also gave the Board a very clear mandate across ticketing and affordability, supporter representation, Stamford Bridge and Chelsea Pitch Owners, heritage, community work and ensuring that supporters have a meaningful voice in the decisions that affect them. We have tried throughout the year to honour that mandate and, wherever possible, make sure the positions we take are grounded in what our members are actually telling us.

Our relationship with Chelsea Football Club is an important part of that. We meet and speak regularly with senior people at the club and I value the fact that we have channels through which issues can be raised directly. However, being constructive does not mean agreeing with everything the club does, and access cannot in itself be the measure of successful supporter engagement. Where our members tell us something is wrong, we have a responsibility to say so, privately where appropriate and publicly where necessary.

Djurgården and supporter safety

One of the first major pieces of work completed during this reporting year actually began before I became Chair, following the serious issues surrounding our Conference League semi-final against Djurgården at Stamford Bridge.

The CST received more than 300 pieces of written evidence, photographs and videos from supporters, raising significant concerns around ticketing, stewarding, segregation, away supporters entering home areas and, most importantly, supporter safety.

We reviewed that evidence in detail and produced a formal report for Chelsea FC setting out what supporters had experienced, where we believed things had gone wrong and recommendations designed to reduce the risk of anything similar happening again.

Chelsea subsequently commissioned its own independent review and looked again at ticketing controls for higher-risk fixtures, including additional measures aimed at preventing tickets being accessed inappropriately where there is a heightened risk of away supporters entering home areas.

That was welcome, although I remain disappointed by how little was subsequently communicated about the outcome of the review and the lessons learned. Given the seriousness of what happened, I think supporters deserved a much clearer explanation of what had been identified and what would change.

Most importantly, I want to thank every supporter who sent us evidence. Without that information, we could not have made the case we did, and the experience reinforced something that has increasingly become central to how I want the CST to operate: listen to supporters, establish the facts, gather evidence and then use that evidence to press for change.

Ticketing, affordability and touting

It will surprise absolutely nobody that ticketing has occupied an enormous amount of the Trust's time over the last twelve months, and I make no apology for that because it remains one of the issues that matters most to our members and the wider match-going supporter base.

Early in the season we challenged the club over Champions League pricing, including the prices announced for Benfica, the reduction in meaningful concessions across parts of Stamford Bridge and the limited notice given to supporters before some tickets went on sale.

Our concern was never simply about one fixture. For several years, match-going supporters across football have faced increasing costs while broadcast, commercial and sponsorship revenues have continued to grow. The contribution supporters make to Chelsea cannot simply be measured by the income generated through the turnstiles. A full Stamford Bridge, with a strong atmosphere and supporters who have followed Chelsea for years, has enormous value to the football club.

In November, we supported the Football Supporters' Association's Protect the Fans, Protect the Game campaign calling for a freeze in ticket prices. That led to extensive discussions involving the CST, Fan Advisory Board and other Chelsea supporter organisations, alongside repeated private engagement with the club.

Our position throughout has never been that Chelsea's ticketing system should not change. There are clearly areas where reform is needed, particularly after problems around digital ticketing, loyalty points, ticket availability, membership products and communication. What we have consistently argued is that reform must make things better for genuine supporters, recognise loyalty built up over many years and be supported by evidence. It should not feel punitive to the people who support Chelsea week in, week out.

At the same time, while genuine supporters struggle to access tickets at face value, tickets continue to appear on secondary websites at significantly inflated prices.

We have continued to press Chelsea on touting, encouraged supporters to report suspected abuse and welcomed action taken against accounts where evidence has been established, but nobody can credibly suggest the problem has been solved.

Our concerns around Vivid Seats have also continued. The CST escalated the relationship between Chelsea Chairman Todd Boehly and Vivid Seats to the Premier League and, following our representations, the league conducted a formal investigation, including consideration of its rules relating to club owners and directors.

The Premier League ultimately concluded that the information available did not demonstrate a technical breach of its rules and no disciplinary action was taken. It is important to be clear with members about that outcome.

We respect the finding, but it does not change our wider view that there is a clear contradiction between football clubs attempting to combat ticket touting while tickets for those same clubs continue to appear at heavily inflated prices on secondary-market platforms. We will continue to raise that issue.

Community and the wider work of the Trust

Although ticketing and supporter representation understandably receive a lot of attention, I never want the CST to be defined solely by the issues on which we disagree with Chelsea.

Our regular foodbank collections have continued throughout the season and CST volunteers once again worked alongside Chelsea and the Chelsea Foundation to support the Christmas lunch at Stamford Bridge, welcoming more than 300 guests from organisations supporting homeless people, veterans, older people and others facing difficult circumstances.

March also saw the seventh Big Stamford Bridge Sleep Out, which raised £18,345 for Stoll and Barons Court Project, taking the total raised through the seven Sleep Outs to around £165,000.

That is an extraordinary achievement and something everybody connected with the Trust should be incredibly proud of. Thank you to everyone who slept out, donated, volunteered, organised or supported the event.

There has also been significant work this year around the Chelsea Heritage Partnership and Chelsea Disabled Supporters Association. I am deliberately not going to go into those areas in detail because Cliff will update members properly later, but I do want to thank everybody involved. Both remain hugely important parts of what the Trust does.

Listening to supporters and holding the club to account

January marked what I believe was an important development in how we operate as a Trust.

We launched a detailed membership survey looking at confidence in the ownership, leadership, football governance, strategic direction and the way Chelsea supporters were being engaged by the club.

The survey was deliberately designed to look beyond individual results and understand how supporters felt about the longer-term direction of Chelsea Football Club.

The findings were stark. More than eight in ten respondents lacked confidence in Chelsea achieving sustained success over the following three to five years, more than nine in ten expressed little or no confidence in football decision-making by the ownership, and a significant majority were dissatisfied with the level of engagement between the ownership and supporters.

We presented those findings directly to senior people at Chelsea and discussed them with the club rather than simply publishing the numbers and leaving it there. Throughout the year we have continued to meet and engage with Jason Gannon and other senior leaders, including Danny Finkelstein and Michael Cornall, and those relationships remain frequent and constructive.

However, I have said consistently that access alone cannot be the measure of successful fan engagement. The test has to be whether supporters believe they are being listened to and whether their views are genuinely influencing decisions.

One of the commitments we have therefore made is to undertake supporter sentiment surveys more regularly. A single survey provides a snapshot, while regular measurement will allow us to understand whether confidence is improving, falling or simply standing still, and will give both the CST and Chelsea a stronger evidence base.

Following several months of private engagement, we wrote an open letter in April to Chelsea's ownership, Board and senior leadership. It was not something we did lightly. We had gathered the evidence, presented the findings privately and allowed time for the club to consider what supporters had told us.

The concerns remained, particularly around accountability, leadership, strategic clarity, supporter influence and confidence in the long-term direction of the club, and we therefore felt it was right to raise those questions publicly.

Successful supporter engagement does not mean Chelsea has to agree with the CST on everything. Equally, engagement cannot simply mean meetings take place, everybody has a polite conversation and nothing changes. Supporters deserve to understand the direction of their football club and, when significant numbers raise legitimate concerns, they deserve a meaningful response.

Charlton

January also brought another serious supporter-safety issue following our FA Cup match away at Charlton.

We received a large number of reports about the post-match policing operation, including the decision to hold Chelsea supporters after the game and concerns around communication, welfare and the management of supporters leaving the stadium.

We gathered evidence and raised those concerns directly with the Metropolitan Police, working alongside other Chelsea supporter organisations and the Chelsea Disabled Supporters Association.

Following several months of engagement, the Metropolitan Police acknowledged shortcomings in the operation, particularly around communication, welfare and planning, and identified practical improvements for future fixtures, including better multi-agency planning, clearer communication, improved welfare arrangements during any future holding operation and greater awareness of vulnerable and disabled supporters.

The Met maintained that the original tactical decision was justified on public-order grounds, which we recognise, but the acknowledgement that aspects of the operation could and should have been handled better was important.

Again, I want to thank every supporter who contacted us. There is a direct line between supporters telling us what happened, the CST putting that evidence in front of the responsible organisation and practical changes being identified as a result. For me, that is supporter representation working as it should.

Ticketing changes and the price freeze

By the spring, Chelsea was considering some of the biggest changes to its ticketing arrangements in many years.

Our argument was straightforward. Get the fundamentals right, provide the evidence for major reforms, protect loyalty and make sure measures intended to solve one problem do not create several new ones for genuine supporters.

When the club subsequently announced its plans for 2026/27, some changes were sensible while others caused considerable concern. We asked our members for their views and the response to the proposed home-ticket application and balloting system was overwhelmingly negative.

We made those concerns very clear to Chelsea and asked the club to reconsider. Ultimately, despite the strength of the feedback and the representations we made, the club decided to proceed.

We did not win that argument, and I think it is important to be straightforward about that. Our job is to represent your views robustly, not to pretend that every representation results in the answer we want.

The test now is whether the new system delivers what the club believes it will deliver. It needs to be transparent, meaningful data needs to be published and supporters should be able to judge whether genuine members have a better opportunity to obtain tickets.

There was, however, one particularly significant announcement which I was delighted to welcome. Chelsea confirmed that general-admission season-ticket and match-by-match prices would be frozen for 2026/27.

After several years of increases, that was extremely welcome and followed sustained representations from the CST, FAB and other supporter organisations throughout the year, both publicly and privately.

It would be wrong for any one organisation to claim sole credit, but equally supporter representatives campaigned hard for a freeze and I am particularly proud that those collective efforts contributed to a positive outcome for match-going supporters.

The price freeze does not mean every ticketing problem has been solved, but it is meaningful progress and it demonstrates why organised supporter representation matters.

Stamford Bridge

One issue where unfortunately I cannot report similar progress is the future of Stamford Bridge.

We have continued to raise it with the club and our position remains clear. Chelsea supporters must be at the centre of any serious discussion about our future home and the role and importance of Chelsea Pitch Owners must be understood and respected.

At this stage there has been no substantive progress that I can report to members, and I know the continuing lack of clarity is frustrating.

Whenever proposals do finally emerge, supporters should not simply be presented with a finished answer and asked to approve it. Meaningful engagement has to take place before the decisions have effectively been made.

Board updates

One of the things I have particularly valued during my first year as Chair has been seeing individual Board members take greater ownership of areas where they bring particular knowledge, experience or passion. I think that makes us a stronger organisation and it is exactly how a volunteer Board should work.

There are two areas I have deliberately only touched on today because I would much rather members hear directly from those who have led on them.

I have inevitably referred to ticketing throughout my report because it has dominated so much of our year, but Mark has represented the CST on the Fan Advisory Board for the past three years and has been directly involved in many of those discussions. His term on the FAB is now coming to an end, so I would like to hand over to Mark to give members his final update, including more detail on the ticketing changes being introduced for this season.

Mark Meehan: Fan Advisory Board report

[Mark's report to be given verbally during the meeting with full transcript made available after]

Thank you, Mark, and particularly for the considerable amount of time you have put into representing the Trust on the FAB over the past three years.

Another area I have deliberately only touched on is our work around Chelsea's heritage and the Chelsea Disabled Supporters Association. Both are hugely important parts of what we do and Cliff has been closely involved in developing that work, so I would now like to hand over to him to update members properly.

Cliff Auger: Chelsea Heritage Partnership and Chelsea Disabled Supporters Association

[Cliff's report to be given verbally during the meeting with full transcript made available after]

Conclusion

Thank you, Cliff, and thank you again to both Mark and Cliff.

When I took over as Chair last September, one of the things I wanted was for the CST to continue developing as an organisation that was serious about representing supporters. That does not necessarily mean being the loudest voice in the room. It means listening properly, understanding what our members are telling us, gathering evidence where we can, engaging with the people who make decisions and being prepared to challenge them when necessary.

I believe we have made considerable progress over the past year.

There have been genuine successes. The general-admission ticket price freeze matters. The changes arising from our engagement with the Metropolitan Police following Charlton matter. The hundreds of supporters who trusted us with their evidence following Djurgården and allowed us to make the case for change matter. The £165,000 raised through seven Big Stamford Bridge Sleep Outs matters.

We have strengthened the way we engage with members, increased our use of surveys and evidence, maintained regular access to senior people at Chelsea and demonstrated that having that access will never prevent us from challenging the club when we believe it is necessary.

But we should also be honest about what we have not achieved. The new home-ticket application system is being introduced despite significant opposition from our members. Touting remains a major problem. There has been no meaningful movement that I can report on Stamford Bridge, and many of the concerns members expressed in January around ownership, accountability and strategic direction have not disappeared.

Those issues are our work programme for the year ahead.

We will scrutinise the new ticketing arrangements closely, continue pushing for fair access and meaningful recognition of loyalty, keep challenging the club and football authorities on touting, continue asking for clarity and proper supporter involvement on Stamford Bridge, and keep measuring supporter sentiment so that the people running Chelsea understand what their supporters are actually telling us.

Our role is not to automatically oppose Chelsea Football Club and it is certainly not to automatically agree with it. Our responsibility is to Chelsea supporters and to the long-term interests of the football club we all care about.

There will be occasions when that means working closely with the club, occasions when it means challenging it and, as this year has shown, occasions when we make an argument strongly and still do not get the outcome we wanted.

What I hope members can expect from us is that we will make those arguments properly, wherever possible based on evidence and on what you have told us, and that we will never shy away from raising something simply because the conversation might be uncomfortable.

Finally, I want to thank every member of the Board and our officers again for everything they have contributed during the year, and most importantly thank all of our members for your support, feedback, evidence and willingness to get involved.

It has been a huge privilege to serve as Chair of the Chelsea Supporters' Trust over the past year and, if elected to continue, I look forward to working with the Board and all of you over the year ahead.

Thank you.

Dominic Rosso

Chair

Chelsea Supporters' Trust