



# ROVERSTRUST

CONSULTATION DRAFT: APRIL 2022

## BRFC Marketing Prospectus:

*1875 –2025: 150 years – Building Back Our Club*

The key aims of the Rovers Trust are to:

- Preserve the Assets and Heritage of the Club.
- Regenerate Support.
- Mitigate a Lost Generation of Support.

If the Fan-Led Review is implemented it will be vital to increase club income because the recommendation is that only 70% of income can be spent on Player wages.

This Prospectus lays out Marketing suggestions from Rovers Trust members in the following areas of interest:

### 1. Pride of Lancashire

- Celebrating the history and heritage of Blackburn Rovers.

### 2. Our fanbase

- understanding our fanbase

### 3. Safe Standing

- Moving this forward

### 4. Building Support – outlying areas

- Analysing the 40%

### 5. Building Support – overseas fans

- **Introducing new engagement with ‘far away’ fans**

## **6. Season Ticket Holders**

- Rewarding those who make the biggest commitment to our club.

## **7. All fans**

- Encouraging more fans to come to Ewood, be they lapsed Rovers fans, new fans, or neutrals.

## **8. The Next Generation**

- Ensuring every local child’s first experience of football is with the Rovers at Ewood Park.

## **9. The Matchday Experience**

- Improving the matchday experience at Ewood Park.

## **10. Building Support with Local Businesses**

- reaching out to local firms and employers in a different way

## **1.Pride of Lancashire:**

Lancashire County Council and the constituent L.A.s bid for ‘Capital of Culture’ status in 2025, and at the heart of this ought to have been our famous football Club; celebrating the 150<sup>th</sup> birthday of Blackburn Rovers that year. Whatever the result the Rovers Trust want to assist the Club to prepare for this big anniversary. Pre-Pandemic the Trust hoped to have in place a Memorandum of Understanding or Common Accord with the Club to allow the Trust to make a greater contribution.

-Lancashire citizens need to be exposed to the Heritage of the Rovers. This can be achieved by the club developing a more active partnership with Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council.

-2020 plans to celebrate 25 years since our Premier League success did not take place. There were also ongoing discussions to build a physical Hall of Fame/Museum/Time Tunnel around Ewood Park, to be triggered by an Archive Exhibition/ Rovers Antiques Road-Show , opened by the greatest living Rover: Bryan Douglas.

-Ewood Park should more prominently depict key aspects of Rovers history. A statue of Bob Crompton should be crowd-funded in the grounds; the first 'greatest footballer in the world' and life-long Rovers fan, player, and manager.

-The Ewood area needs to be regenerated as an entertainment hub, with more promotion of events at the Empire Theatre, more events in the stadium such as the successful Elton John concert of 2017, other sporting events, and the inclusion of café/restaurant areas attached to the ground. We propose 'pop-up shops' round the ground for local businesses.

-Blackburn Rovers needs to start to sponsor more local events, particularly sporting events and music events, such as 'Darwen Live'; use of the external area for Festivals and Street Fairs.

-A 'history trail' could be evolved from the Museum in Blackburn town centre, to Ewood Park, with all close ties between the town and its football team with displays and a Rovers History App.

-Long term, plans should be made through Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council to twin Blackburn with the Spanish city of Bilbao, owing to the shared history of the towns thanks to Blackburn Rovers. An initial pre-season friendly could be arranged between Rovers and Athletic Bilbao to cement the link. We need to take up the 'twinning' invitation from Concepcion in Chile....because of not only the Brereton Diaz links but also its Industrial and Music shared history.

In general there is currently a 'branding' opportunity....we should be marketed as the most successful Town Club in the world and copy niche elements from

St Pauli and Hertha Berlin in Germany and now Bodo Glimt in Norway.... a distinctive Club and Fan Experience.

## 2.Our Fanbase

There are many reasons for the fall in our Season Ticket (ST) holder numbers and match by match attendance figures. We could write a whole thesis coming up with numerous reasons; however, this prospectus is different. We are looking at new ideas and refreshing old ideas to reach out to our supporter base. We believe in working with the Club rather than criticising from the side-lines.

Rovers are **our** Club and we have invested a lifetime of support and care deeply about Rovers not only as a team but as a key part of the community and the economic well-being not only in Blackburn but further afield.

Rovers supporters are not just local to the Town, this Prospectus attempts to both acknowledge and capture the importance of this wider geographical support base.

This is a working document that may be changed, altered, and updated as circumstances change. It needs to herald a 3-year renaissance.

The aim is clear: we want to see our supporter base rebuilt and return to a vibrant 'rocking' Ewood Park as the heart of the community. No one has before articulated a strategy to rebuild our support – this is that strategy, it is do-able but it requires investment, commitment, action and analysis.

This Season has shown some of our original 2019 Prospectus as heading in the right direction. We also recognise and warmly welcome the work the Club are doing with the South Asian community to attend Rovers games. Other clubs such as Bradford City have already put successful strategies in place to build

attendances and it would be helpful to learn from their experiences not only in terms of match atmosphere and income generated but also community cohesion.

To build support, it would be helpful to better understand our existing support. Those inputting into this Prospectus are all lifelong Rovers fans yet only one or two of us live, and few have ever lived, in the Blackburn with Darwen (BwD) Council area. Drive away from Ewood after a game to see all the cars with fans - flooding back to Chorley, South Ribble, the Ribble Valley, Hyndburn, Rossendale, Lancaster, Preston, the Fylde and further afield.

Many of the above areas previously had active supporters clubs. Many had good transport links but many of the bus services to Blackburn have been lost or reduced. Many of the above areas are far more affluent than BwD and it is vitally important we actively encourage and build support from these areas rather than what appears to be an overwhelming focus on BwD.

From historic data we have previously had privy to it would suggest that at least 40% of ST holders are from outside BwD. We cannot ignore this support base. We ask the Club to share with us by local authority or post code (over say the past 10 years so we can explore trends) detailing the location of our ST holders and match-by-match ticket purchasers as of 21/22. Information on age profiles will also help us build a picture of the challenges we face. This is basic information that every football club needs to track and analyse.

(RECOMMENDATIONS: The Club shares ST and match ticket analysis with the Trust. A survey would then be conducted, including lapsed Season-Ticket holders via social media and other methods.

Also we do a survey of social cohesion measures in Clubs and Cities such as Bradford, Wolverhampton, areas of London etc to expand the Supporter base.)

### 3.Safe Standing:

When the authors of this Prospectus first attended Ewood it was because their parents took them. It is important to get fans in at a very young stage even if that means heavily subsidised or sponsored tickets. There were then, and still are many alternatives to Rovers whether those be other football teams or other activities. We speak to many fans from areas such as North Lancashire and even West Cumbria who attend now because they attended with their school 20+ years ago. Fans want to attend a lively, safe and vibrant stadium; sadly for many games in recent years it would not be an exaggeration to describe Ewood as a 'morgue'.

Ever since the closure of the Darwen End Lower (DEL) home fans 'singing section' the stadium has lacked any semblance of an exciting atmosphere. We recognise the arguments behind the closure albeit we have concerns about the process and lack of consultation. More recently (due to the improvement of on pitch performances) many fans have taken upon themselves to create a vibrant and loud singing section in the Blackburn End (BE) lower section N01. This should be encouraged and a new safe standing area planned for this area subject to agreement with the licensing authorities and consultation with ST holders in the area. Other, much larger clubs (eg. Wolves) consulted and had overwhelming support. In brief if Rovers do not legitimise safe standing we suspect fans will take control of this regardless.

Rovers have publicly stated the cost would be £70,000 to retrofit the area. This should be seen as a long term investment; if Rovers have any difficulties with this cost then the Rovers Trust pledges to assist with crowd funding for both the standing areas and for flags and banners to encourage an even better atmosphere.

(RECOMMENDATION: the club engages with the Trust on safe standing without delay)

#### 4. Building Support – Outlying Areas:

We have anecdotal evidence from a number of Rovers Community Trust (BRCT) staff that their focus is almost exclusively BwD with the exception of some limited activities in the Ribble Valley. We further believe that BRCT are far too careful “not to step on the toes of neighbouring clubs”. If the club understood our historical fanbase they would realise this is a mistake, they should, for example, acknowledge areas such as South Ribble with Leyland, Coupe Green, Gregson Lane, Bamber Bridge and Penwortham have substantial numbers of Rovers supporters and these are legitimate areas to commit to outreach work.

Many other local authority areas outside of BwD had local supporters clubs. Even Parbold and Standish had a South Lancashire supporters Club until recently. We do not propose going back to fans meetings one evening a month in the back room of a pub, instead we visualise local supporters groups with their own Facebook pages; you only need to see how our overseas fans networks successfully use social networks. More local supporters groups could be encouraged by the Club emailing existing fans to seek ‘admins’ for local Rovers fans Facebook groups with the hope that these grow to enable the Club to say pump prime a bus for a home or away game. It is a fact that having likeminded Rovers fans in your local geographical area encourages car shares and lifts to games. This will require Rovers to employ a Fan Liaison Officer to encourage such social media networking.

(RECOMMENDATION: Rovers consider employing an Outreach Worker on a limited hours contract of say 2 days equivalent per week to develop initially Lancashire Area Fan Groups)

## **5. Building Support – overseas fans:**

We believe our overseas fans are often taken for granted; this should not be the case.

The 4<sup>th</sup> edition of the new Rovers monthly magazine had an excellent article on our Norwegian Supporters Club. It stated they have around 250 members. We are aware of organised supporters groups in Australia, the USA including New York City, Canada, Northern Ireland, Thailand and Hong Kong. There were, and there may still exist, groups in Denmark, Holland, Germany, Eire and Sweden. Fans from all over the World attend Ewood every season but we do not appear to have a network to support these fans. The Trust has 16% of its Members based outside the UK.

So what do we offer overseas fans? Not a lot apart from a pay per match streaming service that sadly attracts some criticism for a lack of quality or robustness. We need to be asking overseas fans what they would like from Rovers recognising this has to be cost neutral. Put simply these fans are supporting us from a distance and on the rare occasions they can attend they spend good money at Ewood..

- A 10 match Season Ticket for Outside UK Members only.
- Facilities for Supporters Groups to hold Season-Tickets
- An appeal to Overseas Supporters to fund “Community Season Tickets” that the Rovers Community Trust and/or local Youth Workers or Schools might use
- We need to put together a package that acknowledges this support and perhaps provides a modest income stream. Asking what they would like from their Club is a good start; it could be something as simple as a player interview for their Facebook group.



(RECOMMENDATION: Development of a pro-active approach led by one of the Rovers Social Media staff)

### 6. Season Ticket Holders:

Let us deal with a myth right at the start of this section. Most ST holders we interact with do NOT have a problem with discounted matchday tickets; they want to see a full and vibrant Ewood Park.

We are concerned at our ST offering. Looking back our 'offer' has not changed in well over 30 years with the ST and ½ ST being costed on attending all games for the full or half season. Times and lifestyles have changed over those 30+ years. People expect more flexibility and the ability to pick and choose games:

- the offer of a Championship ST based on say 15 games may be attractive and encourage more to attend. The Trust have spoken to a number of former ST holders who have holiday homes or they take extended holidays abroad, these people would consider a 'pick and mix' type ST at say 15 or 17 games and would buy this to continue their support. We recognise that this proposal may encourage some existing ST holders to opt for a cheaper limited game ST rather than pay full price but conversely we believe it to be a key part of a supporter retention strategy that may well stabilise or increase numbers.
- A Darwen End 15 match Season-Ticket (excluding Derby matches) would impact on crowd atmosphere. Supporters here then offered 10% reduction for the 8 other games.
- Compound this with a Neutral zone eg Darwen side Lower Jack Walker in a designated area.

ST holders have a long-term commitment. The club needs to acknowledge this commitment by making continued support an EASY thing to do. Rovers Trust members suggest:

-Promotion of Season Tickets much earlier in the season (March, rather than in May). This allows Rovers fans to plan their budgets ahead of the costly Summer holidays. Bolton Wanderers had sold 10,700 STs by the 'early bird' cut off on March 31<sup>st</sup>.

-Add the option of a Rolling Season Ticket. This would mean a supporter could simply pay for the next Season Ticket automatically on a given date each Season, or via a continuous Direct Debit.

-Involve Season Ticket Holders in the future improvements to the ground and especially the Riverside. They are our biggest 'influencers' on families, friends and general public with their long-term support for the Club. A Season-ticket holder should NOT have to join other schemes: because they are the 'core' support.

-over 75yr old Season-Ticket holders should have a further £50 reduction to allow for reluctance to come to evening matches AND as a further reward (Nottingham Forest offer a similar discount)

-give ST holders the voluntary option of (say) adding £10 or £20 to their ST payments to cover those less fortunate/Community Season-tickets scheme.

-for our 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary in 2025 we should have special offers well trailed in advance with ST's capped at £187.50 and £202.50 to capture the imagination (with it being made clear the ST price increases the following year.) These could be on offer from Season 2024/25 when a Supporter could buy a 2 year Season ticket.

(RECOMMENDATION: Rovers look to move away from the old inflexible full and Half ST offer and also look to introduce a rolling 12 month membership scheme .

Introduce a sequence of new schemes during 2022/23 season)

## 7. All fans:

There are more Rovers supporters NOT going to Ewood than going. A half-empty stadium suits nobody; not the club, not the team, not the fans. We need to encourage more Rovers supporters into the ground, paving the way to a Season Ticket commitment.

To add the above recommendations from Section 6, Rovers Trust members suggest:

-More graded Season Ticket pricing to include those fans who are Students at College and University regardless of age. This would be in addition to the standard age-related format.

-At least three £10-ticket games per season, to be planned 3-months ahead and Season Ticket Holders warned in advance and with first chance to buy.

-Promote a loyalty scheme for 'walk-on' supporters, which uses the additional walk-on charge to guarantee a future reward. For example, '50% off the price of every 5th game attended' or discounting by £3 on their next Home Match.

-Give a voucher for a reduced-price game for one-off walk-on fans. For example, '10% off the price of the next game'

-The club should ensure there is an area for our disabled fans both inside the stands and outside on the terraces.

-Rovers should open a 'Neutral Section', similar to Fulham, for mid-week matches. Perhaps the Darwen End Lower Tier, near the Riverside Stand. This could have a separate ticket zone and separate marketing.

'Freshers Week' incentives for UCLan, Blackburn College, and Lancaster University 1<sup>st</sup> year students.

Every new initiative or change should be interrogated by one primary aim –will this increase the number of supporters moving to buy a Season-ticket in the future?

## 8. The Next Generation:

Every Lancashire child should have their first experience of football with the Rovers at Ewood Park. Rovers Trust members suggest:

-Include a Rovers Shirt in the price of a first Junior Season Ticket. A Summer Holiday or Christmas present alongside their ticket, that gives them that vital status symbol on matchdays.

-Promote the permanent 'Next Generation Stand' in the Upper Tier of the Blackburn End with £5 entry to a child under 11, with one parent going free.

Extensive re-design of the B.E. Upper to attract younger children with parents, plus 'healthy eating' options.

-Rovers players and staff should each 'adopt a school', ensuring the school is provided with free tickets for one game a season; a junior season ticket held by the School for performance or contribution; as well as access to P.E. coaching sessions and healthy eating lessons with players. This adopt a school proposal is important in areas outside of BwD.

-Rovers should provide every Primary School in Lancashire with a digital version of a ROVERS WORLD magazine including future fixtures available to be printed as reading material in the classroom.

-Rovers could devise/sponsor a set of lesson plans relating to P.E. (Ball/Invasion Games), Geography (links to Bilbao, Chile, exploration of another culture), and Science (Healthy Eating) curriculums.

-Liaise with the DW Dome at Shadsworth to encourage new supporters. A pop-up kiosk to market games and give out vouchers.

(Recommendation: The Club needs to refresh its offer to Primary School children to make them regard 'the Rovers' as THEIR CLUB)

## 9.The Matchday Experience

**The Ground has a large perimeter area, which needs to be used more fully on match days. This is essential market research of initiatives at other Grounds and in other sports.**

-Blackburn Rovers should open a Kiosk in the Blackburn Mall, to be open on all Fridays and Matchdays for same-day ticket purchases.

-Have 'pop up' shops around the Ewood Park grounds on matchdays, as an opportunity to promote local brands and shops. Create a Container village behind the Riverside.

-Test arrangements for transport from wider areas of Lancashire to matches; Ribble Valley, Haslingden, Chorley, and Lancaster. Arrange for transport and tickets for Blackburn College and UCLan students during 'Fresher's Week' and term holidays.

- Hold a 'Happy Hour' in the concourses and Blues Bar after victories.
- Encourage flags and banners:
- Hold 'Get Creative' events where flags/clappers can be designed by children, with matchday in mind.
- Reinstate the Blackburn End flag crossing the stand at the start of games.

(RECOMMENDATION: Re-organise the Fans Forum to get involved with 'mach atmosphere' initiatives, including Supporters Groups)

### 10. Encouraging Local Business Support

Firstly we recognise the work that BRCT did with their business breakfast and curry clubs; and the new Business Club formed by BRFC.

However we need to be going out and meeting local businesses. If you look around the M65 corridor, Guide and Shadsworth as well as Walton Summit in South Ribble there has been a lot of new business activity. For example the French owned AnordMardix manufacturing company in Guide employes 600+ staff, or French owned Assystem ,the Worlds largest nuclear services company, who recently moved their UK HQ to Shadsworth.

We would recommend that the Club reach out to senior executives and invite them to sample a game at no cost so they can sample our excellent corporate facilities. Previous (and new) sponsors could be invited to a specific Sponsors Club, a way of re-engaging historical Sponsors eg Crown, Thwaites etc

We should also be thinking outside of the box at Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and putting together joint initiatives eg sponsorship of match and 'Ewood Express' tickets for young fans from the different communities and Supporters Clubs.

(RECOMMENDATIONS: we need a transparent marketing strategy looking at engagement with companies at a senior corporate level and also tapping into their CSR policies)

31CO31/03/2022

IN THE 10 SECTIONS WE HAVE OUTLINED A SERIES OF IDEAS(or twists on previous ideas)  
THE ROVERS TRUST NOW WELCOME ENGAGEMENT,ELABORATION , ANALYSIS AND TIMETABLING OF OUR 3-YEAR PROGRAMME OF INITIATIVES WITH THE CLUB.

Rovers Trust: 7<sup>TH</sup> APRIL 2022(version 4)