

## **Port Vale Supporter Advisory Board and Supporters Club Committee**

Meeting notes - 19<sup>th</sup> January 2026

6pm – 7:45pm

In attendance:

Matt Hancock (MH) - Chief Executive  
Ryan Grant (RG) - Director of Marketing & Communications  
Will Turner (WT) - Community & CSR Director  
Ben Martindale (BM) - General Manager  
Supporter Advisory Board  
Supporters Club Committee  
Mike Baggailey – The Valiant Newsletter  
Phil Bowers – BBC Radio Stoke

### 1. Welcome/introduction

- MH began by reiterating commitment to open and honest communication and giving the opportunity for supporters to ask questions. Purpose of the meeting is to provide a better understanding. MH also reiterated that the primary purpose of the SAB is to discuss off-pitch matters but this is a chance to discuss on-pitch matters following a period of change. Press in attendance to provide coverage.

### 2. Questions from supporters

Supporters feel there was a delay in sacking Darren Moore (DM)– why was this?

- MH reiterated that it was a difficult decision but thought-out decision. DM was given a lot of support and resource, both operationally and from a recruitment standpoint. Club had success last year and had belief in what was being built, so wanted to continue that support during a difficult run of results and had the benefit of training on-site to get a feel for how players were responding. The feeling was that players still had belief and that a positive result would have changed things, but eventually reached a tipping point. MH added that one of the traits of Port Vale is that we want to give people the best chance of success, but acceptance that DM was given more time than most managers,

and that supporters feel the decision could have been made earlier.

Did any senior club staff speak to the players beforehand?

- MH confirmed that players were spoken to. Learnings from last 20 months of DM's tenure and that includes club having better understanding of what's happening and why. Reiterated that club is keen on listening to supporters.

What did the club see that supporters weren't? How do we make sure in future that the trigger point is earlier than it has been?

- MH said that, on data, it remains very important for first-team analysis but should be used to inform things and shouldn't be the basis for all decisions. It has positive purposes but only if it affects change. We saw that we were starting games well, not taking chances and then dropping off and either missing chances or going behind. The data said that had we taken our chances and scored first, the likelihood is that we would have gone on to win games. Data paints a picture but is only part of the process. We don't want to become like many other clubs whose first thought is to sack a manager. Where we're getting to now is whose responsibility is it to affect change? The manager is ultimately responsible for results and we don't want to leave anything to chance or down to one person. MH maintains that, even with hindsight, the decision wouldn't have come much sooner than it did due to the reasons stated, and believes this time is different to our last season in League One. Jon Brady was appointed with most of the January window and half a season to go, and the team needs evolution not revolution. MH says club not naive enough to think it won't be hard to stay up.

Whose decision is it ultimately when it comes to managers?

- MH confirmed that it is a Board decision, but ultimately Carol Shanahan's decision. There has been a lot of reflection around where accountability needs to sit, both on and off the pitch. Carol and Kevin as owners are ultimate decision makers. MH confirms he can influence decisions and will have more influence moving forward. Club interviewed five managers and Jon was taken for second interview with Carol, Kevin, MH, Lee Darnborough (Senior Head of Recruitment) and Patrick Shanahan (Chief Strategy Officer). Club is working towards a better structure and people need to do those jobs to the best of their ability in the best

interest of Port Vale.

How many managers did we have to choose from, and why Jon?

- MH confirms we had many applications. One criteria was someone that wanted the job – club didn't want to canvas or try to convince, as we genuinely believe this is a great club being run in the right way and with the right values. MH feels it is a tough job but says if you can get it right, it's a fabulous job, so club wanted someone who wanted to be part of that. We were delighted with how many managers out of work and in work put their names in the hat. We interviewed some good managers but what Jon nailed was the reason why he was out of the game in the first place was about purpose. He lost that at Northampton and loves a challenge, and believes he'll always outperform expectations. Two or three other clubs had gone to Jon over the last 13 months and he hadn't thought it was the right opportunity and this was the only one he applied for – part of that is he likes what's being built and has heard about the positive things going on here. He just wants to win; some of the other managers spoke about building longer-term but Jon was very much about winning games and we have to do that in order to build. He has a clear plan, communicates clearly and directly with everyone inside and outside the club and wants to play a certain brand of football which we think supporters want to see. He wears his heart on his sleeve and we don't want to temper that. He was everyone's number one choice – he has an 18-month contract and he feels like the right fit for us right now.

When does the process of replacing a manager begin?

- MH stated that succession planning happens all the time, for all roles. In terms of the process, it begins as soon as the decision is made, as the football industry is so insular. Decision was made the day before Darren was told, but there was no targeting of managers or talking to agents prior – that is not part of MH's or club's values. Process was carried out properly.

Were you getting applications prior?

- MH confirmed that, yes, agents were sending things in but disagrees with that approach. You have got to act at pace but do it

thoroughly and club didn't waste any time. Some said 'why didn't we appoint three days after' but that's not the way the world works. Recruitment process was done in a way that allowed us to get as much information on managers as we could, including conversations with all kinds of people within the game and using experience in and around the club.

With 22 games to go, what's the investment plan for January and do we need to change the footballing structure?

- MH said that, in terms of January, every manager we spoke to – without talking about finance – wanted to reduce the playing squad. That includes Jon, who wants to work with a smaller squad to get togetherness, commitment and clarity. When you have arguably too many players, it becomes difficult to get clarity and it can also become difficult for coaches. Ronan Curtis has gone, Marvin Johnson has gone – both for different reasons – and there will be further squeeze on the squad but that is not financially motivated. Jon has opportunity to bring players in if it's right. He's likely to look in a couple of areas and will be supported. On the Director of Football model – it is not in the plan now but not off the table forever. That is a model that may work in future, but while we're working through accountability, it could muddy the waters. We have already started to change things – Jon has accountability for football decisions, and we're starting to look at structure in terms of people currently in roles and their responsibilities. Before, it was all DM, and Lee Darnborough now is clearer on his role. Governance and finance, including length of contract, comes to MH. We have Lee, and a Head of Strategy and Performance in Matt Oakley. Matt and Lee have maybe been a bit hidden but club has had conversations about their roles and that's where we're changing things in terms of responsibility and accountability. As the season goes on, it will become clearer, but Director of Football model not envisioned for the next 12 months at least.

Agreement on Director of Football but perhaps different in higher divisions. Is Jon responsible for players coming in as well as performance on the pitch?

- MH confirms Lee is responsible for recruitment. The 'who' comes from the manager. If Jon wants someone in, he'll know the budget and gives that player to Lee. It might come back that they're double the budgeted wage – that will then come to MH who will advise on whether we can afford it. Jon may want things that MH has to say no to, but no pressure from MH in terms of who he should put

out on the pitch. The club, moving forward, has a decent budget and squeezing the squad suits the manager but also frees up more budget. Building a profile of what a Vale squad and footballing philosophy should look like – not specific to one manager. What should non-negotiables be for a Vale squad? How many players should we have of a certain age? That will help better inform how we spend our money. Jon will know that he has to work of a squad of 24, and that figure is purely an example, which avoids the situation we're in at the moment.

Who's helping shape that?

- MH says it is in its infancy, but it's the people already mentioned from a club perspective, plus Carol. Spoken to Adam Yates and Phil Sproson who are helping shape that Vale profile. One thing club has learned from quickly is that managers shouldn't control everything as football doesn't allow for that anymore. Too many variables to allow full autonomy over wider strategy.

Surely dependent on contracts?

- MH confirms that is correct. We may end up with 25 or 23, for example, and it will take time because of contractual situations. Not a quick fix. All managers we spoke to mentioned a squad of a certain size, plus those out on loan. Need to be stronger as a club with who we let in and how long for – we want people that want to be here. We have to get recruitment right – not just players but length of contract and incentives, for example, so it becomes easier to get players in and out. There tends to be five or six moves every half a season, so we have to be set up for that and be aligned.

Do Senior Head of Recruitment and Head of Strategy have to take more of the responsibility for performances?

- MH says club has done some good things and club is better for having DM as manager. Club is in a better place than it was overall, although we can't argue with results this season. The learning through the previous manager-led model is that those staff need to be responsible for their areas and they're now reporting to MH. They have a direct line to Jon – who is responsible for all football decisions - but are accountable to the club. Allows Jon to concentrate on football and MH to hold people to account. Manager also reports to MH.

What is Carol's day-to-day role?

- MH says he had a two-hour meeting with Carol today and then Jon joined. Jon went through his analysis of the Mansfield game. Carol is there to support, develop and guide the club – providing financial support and the vision for MH to

manage the club. Carol not interfering, but her interest is completely there. Carol will speak to Jon around wider support and vision. MH responsible for day-to-day and looking at the next three years. Praise for senior leadership team responsible for delivering that. Football demands the here and now, and MH's view is that society doesn't give things enough time - but accepts that's the nature of the industry. Results dictate that but what can't happen is that we lose a manager and it unravels everything that happened throughout the club. If we have the right structure, strategy and philosophy, that stops it. Club could lose RG, WT or BM, but we have to ensure we leave it in a better place and one where someone else can pick it up and understand what it means, and that goes for the manager too.

We have some really good footballers, but has anyone looked into our injury record?

- MH says hamstrings have been a problem for us. Looking at ourselves against others, we're in the middle in terms of injury record. Players are athletes now and sport science dictates how many minutes you can play. All players want to play football but some more cautious than others – ultimately, it's the manager's decision and they base decisions off advice from sport science.

How many players would the club like to get out in January?

- MH says there is no specific number or financial determiner. Dependent on where Jon would like things to get to.

How was Jon received by the players?

- MH says Jon was very well received. On Jon's first day, Ben Garrity was in the gym so they met one-to-one and Ben said he was very impressed. It was great that he got that time early on. What Jon's done really well so far is speak to every player about where they stand and get them thinking about solutions.

Are we reverting back to previous crest next season?

- MH confirmed this will be the case.

How many former players are attending anniversary game?

- BM confirms we had 40 for the original date and rearrangement means we should have 25. We have sold around 8,000 tickets so far.

What does the club want from SAB and Supporters Club Committee moving forward?

- MH says club will continue to be as open, honest and transparent as possible. MH not on social media but aware of sentiment. Acknowledgement that not everyone will agree with the club but asks that SAB and SC Committee help tell



others. Club unwilling to accept personal abuse of those acting in the best interests of Port Vale.

Who will attend Meet the Manager Supporter Forum? Suggestion that Mark Porter chairs the meeting with MH and Jon in attendance.

- MH yet to confirm Carol's attendance. Tickets for the event went quickly.
- Mike Baggaley confirms that MH answers from this meeting to be reported in a dedicated newsletter.

MH finishes with thanks to all in attendance for their time and support.

