



BACK TO THE COTTAGE

SUBMISSION TO THE GREATER LONDON

AUTHORITY

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1. Executive Summary

- 1.1** We believe the GLA should recognise the contribution that football clubs make to their communities and take a great deal of convincing about proposals for re-location. There should be a presumption towards keeping clubs in their areas, only allowing relocation once an alternative stadium in an appropriate area has been built. Local residents should have a fair, but not undue influence in cases where clubs have been an established part of the area for decades. GLA should protect clubs against predatory forces.
- 1.2** These recommendations arise out of the experiences of Fulham Football Club at the Thames-side home, Craven Cottage ('CC'), they occupied from 1894 till May 2002. Regulations about all-seater stadia enforced the club's move to share with QPR at Loftus Road. This was due to be for two seasons, while CC was re-developed into a 28,000-capacity stadium. Three months ago, however, the club abandoned this scheme and news emerged of the sale of an option to purchase the freehold for £50m subject to planning permission for luxury housing being achieved within three years. A property development company has taken up this option and has made a £15m down-payment.
- 1.3** In the decade prior to the present Chairman's arrival, there were numerous attempts to remove the club from Craven Cottage to enable re-development as housing, but none was approved by the Council and all failed. Prior to that, the club existed uneventfully on their Edwardian site among Edwardian streets. Nine seasons in the top division, ending 1968, saw attendances average 23,000 and frequently exceed 35,000.
- 1.4** Loftus Road is not a long-term option. An alternative site in the Borough capable of receiving planning permission is difficult to foresee, and a new ground on the edge of London may well run contrary to current planning policy. All these options would alienate many supporters, as would sharing at Chelsea's Stamford Bridge. The latter would be fiercely opposed by local residents and most likely by Chelsea fans too.
- 1.5** The GLA has stated that its strategic planning objectives include making London a better city to live in. The draft Spatial Development Strategy (The London Plan) emphasises the need to provide continued and diverse opportunities to enjoy London. Indeed, policy 3D.6 of the draft Plan seeks to protect this by ensuring that "the Mayor will work with Sport England, other agencies, and boroughs to promote and develop London's sporting facilities". Fulham Football Club are an integral part of those facilities and the GLA has a responsibility to ensure that they remain so.
- 1.6** The GLA should be wary of allowing permanent groundshares, for which there have been no positive UK examples. The Italian example is different, since those grounds are municipally owned. Groundshare in this country causes both immediate and long-term problems for clubs and robs the vacated area of previously-enjoyed benefits. Without the focal point and identity of a home in Fulham, the club's outstanding contribution to both the immediate and wider community may well be lost.

- 1.7** Fulham FC having been one of the first to realise the importance of their role in the community, the Community Department has grown to be one of the biggest and the best in the country. Key partnerships in this context include with Hammersmith & Fulham and three other neighbouring London boroughs. Initiatives include a unique project to enable the young unemployed to gain skills and qualifications to enable them to work in sport/leisure at all levels.
- 1.8** The club's recent u-turn on the ground has dismayed many supporters. There has been no meaningful consultation with them and key facts have only emerged through press investigation. Attendances at Loftus Road are already significantly down on those at Craven Cottage and this decline will exacerbate unless the club takes action. A return to Craven Cottage while the club got its long-term act together would unite everyone.
- 1.9** Long-term, the existing ground could be gradually re-built to accommodate approximately as many as The Valley, where Charlton Athletic -- very similar to Fulham historically -- are now a successful Premiership club. In the short-term, a similar capacity to Loftus Road could be achieved by re-profiling existing terraces and bolting seats on top. The cost of this would be retrievable within a very short period.

2. Historical Perspective In Brief

- 2.1** Prior to 1984, Craven Cottage had sustained professional football for nearly 90 years in an unchanging streetscape. When the club was in the top division, crowds averaged 23,000 and often topped 35,000.
- 2.2** In 1984, club Chairman, Ernie Clay, successfully persuaded the Church Commissioners to sell him the freehold of the Craven Cottage site. Since then, the very future of the club has been inextricably linked to the future of the Craven Cottage site for no more reason than the accident of geography that the stadium is on a plot of land which is now hugely valuable.
- 2.3** 1986 saw the first of numerous attempts to remove the club from Craven Cottage to enable re-development as housing. Thanks largely to the Council, plus passionate campaigning from fans, all these attempts failed.
- 2.4** The fight for Craven Cottage along with the stadium's unique setting and charm, has nurtured the very special relationship that many long-standing Fulham fans have with the ground. In turn, the protection of football at Craven Cottage -- even where councillors representing the ward in which the stadium is situated have demonstrated an antagonistic stance towards the club -- has been a policy to which Hammersmith & Fulham Council has shown a strong and unswerving commitment.

3. Fulham's Current Situation in Brief

- 3.1 In May 2002, Fulham left Craven Cottage for a temporary groundshare at Loftus Road, the home of Queens Park Rangers. This was with the promise of a return after two seasons to a redeveloped stadium on the same site complying with the stipulations of the Taylor Report for an all-seater venue.
- 3.2 Once Fulham had played their final home fixture of the 2001/2002 season, over the summer and early months of 2002, it became apparent that a return to Craven Cottage in line with the achieved Planning Permission was not going to happen.
- 3.3 Throughout the autumn, a drip-feed of hints -- sometimes in official statements, but mostly in press reports apparently fed by the club -- continued to escalate doubts as to whether the redevelopment would occur. (*Please see Appendix Three for examples*).
- 3.4 Supporter dismay at this apparent drift, led to the formation of the Back to the Cottage (BTTC) group, which aimed to stiffen the club's resolve. BTTC won immediate support from some, while others urged restraint for a few weeks until the House of Lords' decision on a final appeal against the redevelopment scheme.
- 3.5 In December 2002, The House of Lords threw out that appeal -- emphatically -- leaving the way open for re-development to commence at Craven Cottage. Two days before Christmas, the club admitted that they had abandoned the scheme. The reasons given were that the cost had risen from an originally estimated £60m to £100m.
- 3.6 Within days, it emerged that an agreement had already taken place in September 2002, whereby a company called Fulham River Projects (FRP) had made a £15 million down-payment towards a £50m deal for the site. FRP hoped to start building work on a purely residential development in two years' time. Should this not prove possible, then the £15m would need to be repaid to it, plus interest payments above normal market rates.
- 3.7 In the face of shock and outrage from supporters, Mohamed Al Fayed stated: *"Fulham Football Club have not, I repeat, not sold Craven Cottage. The ground still belongs to us and will remain so."* He added, however: *"we have set up a structure which would make it possible for us to sell Craven Cottage if as a last resort we are forced to do so."*
- 3.8 The Chairman maintained: *"We are still exploring a number of options including looking at the possibility of re-developing Craven Cottage in a simpler more affordable way which would not threaten our financial survival. If that should prove impossible we are also looking at other possibilities which might allow us to build the stadiumwithin the borough of Hammersmith and Fulham. Those precautions include working in partnership with various development and finance companies. To that end we have raised £15 million*

to help with operating expenses of the Club and to take the stadium project forward.” [14.01.03]

- 3.9** Fulham supporters are immensely grateful to the current Chairman for his significant investment in Fulham Football Club and the transition that has seen a lower league club regain a place in the top echelon of English football after an absence of more than 30 years. Fans do not want to be critical of a Chairman whose commitment has provided so many on-field achievements in the past six years, but the uncertainty over the future of the Craven Cottage site has resulted in a mixture of feelings ranging from bewilderment to betrayal.
- 3.10** Long-standing Fulham fans, who had been involved in previous campaigns to save the club and ground, believed that the uncertainty was over with the promise of a new stadium on the Craven Cottage site. As they struggle to assess the recent revelations, there remains a reticence to criticise the Chairman when there is a perception that he could be provoked into walking away and saddling the Club with unsustainable debts.
- 3.11** Unease has been fuelled by the club's obfuscation and lack of communication (other than ill-conceived and flawed comparisons of Fulham's situation with that of Southampton and fanciful suggestions that there are 38,000 fans ready to be "recruited"). Meaningful consultation with supporters might abate this unease, but there has been none to date.

4. Problems with Alternative Sites

- 4.1** The alternatives open to Fulham away from Craven Cottage are all deeply unattractive. They will by necessity require difficult decisions which are likely to alienate supporters and residents.
- 4.2** It is difficult to see how Fulham can continue in their present location beyond next season. The club have suffered a sharp drop in attendances, despite an increase in the capacity for away supporters, with the move to Loftus Road. This decline is expected to increase next season given that many supporters have indicated that they will not be returning until the ground issue is clarified.
- 4.3** The other site for professional football in the Borough, Stamford Bridge, also seems unlikely to provide the kind of home Fulham require. Planning consent will be required to permit a second professional club to base operations there. Residents were told that the price of permitting the redevelopment of Stamford Bridge was that no other club would play there. Given the likely scale of opposition to a permanent groundshare from all relevant stakeholders -- Fulham Fans, Chelsea Fans, local residents and the local authority -- it seems highly unlikely such consent will be obtained
- 4.4** Sharing at Stamford Bridge is also likely to alienate a significant section of Fulham support with a resulting adverse effect on attendances. It is extremely unlikely that any club sharing at Stamford Bridge will be permitted to share in the vital non-match day revenues which the ground generates. Overall such a decision would significantly impair Fulham's continued financial viability.
- 4.5** The only other alternative is the construction of a new ground, either in the Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham or elsewhere. The lack of a sizeable and affordable plot of land which would receive planning permission for a stadium in inner London means that the former option would be extremely difficult to achieve.
- 4.6** If clubs in Fulham's position were to move instead to the periphery of London, to exploit motorway links and cheaper land prices, this would have adverse consequences for the inner city communities which currently host professional football and from where support has traditionally been drawn.
- 4.7** Fulham's move to the periphery would also run contrary to current planning policy which emphasises the importance of vibrant inner city communities and discourages pressure on green belt land for car-centric developments. Any such move would mean that fans would no longer primarily arrive by public transport, but rather migrate to a car-based approach.

5. Problems with Groundsharing

- 5.1** It seems certain that the GLA will be required to review proposals for ground sharing in London in the near future. Such proposals have been made not only for Fulham and Chelsea/QPR but also Arsenal/Tottenham and Barnet/Orient and Brentford/QPR. We believe that the GLA should be wary of exercising its planning powers to permit such schemes given the problems they pose to the continued survival of football clubs and the wider adverse affects on communities in London.
- 5.2** Proponents of such schemes argue that clubs can share the costs of initial stadium redevelopment as well as the ongoing expenses of running a stadium. However a review of key issues indicates that, despite such apparent advantages, this approach is highly problematic in the UK and even more so in a London context.

Previous unsuccessful UK experience

- 5.3** A number of clubs in England and Scotland have had to ground-share over the last fifteen years. There is no example of this being a positive experience for the clubs involved. The reasons for this reflect the particular features of football here which emphasise the importance of a distinctive ground to supporters.
- 5.4** The most obvious problem is economic. Significant numbers of football supporters are simply unwilling to transfer their attendance to another team's ground and will only attend again when their clubs have returned home. This problem is not confined to Fulham. Clubs such as Charlton, Wimbledon and in Scotland, Falkirk have seen crowds diminish significantly once clubs have left their traditional homes.
- 5.5** This issue has both immediate and long-term difficulties for clubs. The immediate problem is obvious: a significant reduction in the number of fans has a dramatic and immediate effect on profitability with knock-on consequences for success on the field. This means clubs can be forced into a circle of failure as a lack of success means lower crowds which in turn means diminished funds and further reduction in supporter numbers. Over the longer term clubs, removed from their traditional catchment area, stop attracting new younger fans with equally troubling consequences.

Foreign experience

- 5.6** One of the most common arguments used by the proponents of groundsharing is to point to the success of clubs abroad which have shared a stadium. In particular the success of Genoa and Sampdoria or AC Milan and Internazionale in Italy are used as examples of how this can work.

- 5.7** However this comparison is not accurate. Most obviously these grounds are owned by the relevant city authorities rather than the landlord/tenant relationship which characterises ground sharing in this country. Clubs' use of grounds in Italy is on an equal basis as neither club can be said to be the "real" owner of the ground. By contrast in England, it is obvious which club is the "landlord" and which is the "tenant".
- 5.8** Public ownership of football grounds also means that clubs both have to pay rent to the relevant local authority. This amount is typically low given the importance of football clubs to local pride. Again the experience in England is different. Local authorities do not generally own stadia and it is hard to envisage this changing. Therefore clubs reach private deals which will progressively strengthen the "landlord" as it receives rental income whilst the "tenant" club will be disadvantaged by having to meet rental payments.
- 5.9** Other financial drawbacks are also significant. A club hosting another will generally be unwilling to share the income arising from functions and similar events which are an increasingly important additional source of funds. The importance of this extends beyond the ability to host corporate lunches during the week. Larger clubs are increasingly turning to sophisticated financial vehicles such as the securitisation of future income to raise funds. Again with no ground of their own, clubs cannot access this valuable market.

A London Perspective

- 5.10** These factors are even more important in a crowded city like London. Groundsharing will mean those living nearby will be adversely affected by increased use of grounds. In the event that clubs co-operate to build a new ground together, the pressure to use facilities much more intensively will be even stronger given the financial pressures at stake.
- 5.11** London is unique amongst European capitals in the number of league clubs it can boast. These clubs are typically the focus of their communities. The grounds possess distinct architectural features reflecting the distinct periods in which they were built. In addition football clubs, particularly in recent years, are a focus of community involvement. By reducing the number of grounds where professional football is based, such community involvement will by necessity be reduced.
- 5.12** This problem is particularly acute given that, due to historical factors, football clubs in London are primarily located in inner city areas. These communities would lose significantly in the event that clubs ground-shared and their outreach to communities suffered.

6. Role of Fulham Football Club in the Community

- 6.1** Relative to the length of time that professional football has existed in this country, the notion that league clubs have a part to play in the fabric of the community in which they exist is a relatively new one.
- 6.2** We are proud of the fact that FFC were one of the earliest clubs to realise the importance of their role in the community, probably borne out of the identification of FFC as ‘Fulham’s team’, despite the presence of our much bigger neighbours down at Fulham Broadway. Despite the financial position at the time, Fulham’s Community Department was launched back in 1992, and has grown to be one of the biggest and the best in the country.
- 6.3** The Community Department’s work covers a wide spectrum – too wide to cover in any great detail here. Some of the key initiatives promoted by FFC include
 - 6.3.1** Key partnerships – with the London Boroughs of Hammersmith & Fulham, Lambeth, Wandsworth, and Kingston-Upon-Thames, as well as neighbouring Elmbridge, Epsom & Ewell, and Reigate & Banstead. Football courses are run during school holidays as well as numerous forums, coaching, and life skills initiatives all aimed at the community as a whole;
 - 6.3.2** ‘Access for All’ – which seeks to promote football to under-represented groups, including unemployed people, the homeless, ethnic minorities, disabled and special needs groups, under-privileged children, and senior citizens. Our base at Craven Cottage was the focus point for this;
 - 6.3.3** ‘Football into Work’ – a project unique to FFC operating in the Boroughs of Hammersmith & Fulham and Lambeth. Courses are run aimed at the young unemployed gaining a range of skills and qualifications to enable them to work in football and sport / leisure at all levels;
 - 6.3.4** Charity Fundraising – usually promoting a different charity partner each year. Last season £52,000 was raised for the Variety Club Children’s Charity;
 - 6.3.5** Women’s football – unparalleled support for the development of this sport, right through from grass-roots level to the creation of the first full-time professional women’s team.
- 6.4** The extensive consultation process leading up to planning permission for the 30,000 stadium on the Craven Cottage site does mean that there is reputable empirical evidence of the level of support amongst many Fulham residents for the Club continuing to play at Craven Cottage.

- 6.5** Despite claims by the 'Fulham Alliance' that their opposition to the redevelopment was representative of the widespread views of Fulham residents, a MORI poll commissioned by another residents' group, 'Fulham United,' suggested otherwise. A representative sample of 500 Fulham residents showed objections to the stadium coming from 28%, with the remainder either being in favour of, or having no objection to, a redeveloped stadium on the Craven Cottage site.
- 6.6** Fulham Football Club's profile in the local community at the time of the MORI poll indicates the level to which the club are held in affection by local residents who are not particularly Fulham, or football, fans. Just 4% concluded that Fulham Football Club were a drawback to living in the area, and 92% viewed FFC as having a positive impact upon the local community. 1 in 10 of the residents surveyed also indicated that they, or their immediate family, had direct experience of the Club's community activity – from coaching for local schoolchildren to the facilities provided for local groups such as Fulham Age Concern.
- 6.7** Without the ground as a focal point, Fulham FC will find it increasingly difficult to maintain their outstanding contribution to both the immediate and wider community which is such a hallmark of the club. As can be seen from the list of partners above, the 'catchment area' is Fulham and areas of London to the south/south west of Fulham. It is vital, not just for the well-being of the professional football club, but for the community as a whole, that FFC be able to return home to Fulham as soon as possible, that home most logically being a re-developed Craven Cottage.

7. Role of the Greater London Authority

- 7.1** The current situation is simply the latest episode in the close to twenty-year saga of uncertainty over the future of Craven Cottage as a continuing football stadium in Fulham. Fortunately, during that period, Hammersmith & Fulham Council were one of the first London local authorities to demonstrate their awareness of the positive and constructive role a professional football club can have in the community. BTTC looks to the Greater London Authority to do the same.
- 7.2** It is vital for the future of professional football in London that the contribution and constructive role that clubs play in their communities and the significant local heritage they represent is properly recognised. Professional football clubs are not like any other business; they often represent and promote areas of London in a way in which public bodies are unable to. Football clubs are also an important part of the economic life of their local area. There has been a significant downturn in business in shops, restaurants, pubs and bars in Putney and Fulham since the move from Craven Cottage. The GLA should ensure that these factors are properly recognised in preparing planning guidance and policy.
- 7.3** The activity of nine residents in pursuing legal challenges as a delaying tactic -- possibly successfully -- to prevent redevelopment of the Craven Cottage site indicates how perverse the planning process can become. Even after permission was granted, and an appeal for a public inquiry had been considered, and declined, by the Secretary of State, a small number of people have been able to obstruct and frustrate the process. Whilst it is obviously important that residents of the areas immediately around football grounds have their concerns addressed in the planning process, it is crucial that the wider benefits that clubs bring to the area are not overlooked – particularly in a situation where a football stadium has been on that site for longer than any local resident has lived there.
- 7.4** Since the Greater London Assembly came into existence, the planning powers of the Mayor of London are influential, particularly on matters, such as football stadia, which are of London-wide significance in sporting, cultural and economic terms. The GLA and London local authorities should have a presumption towards protecting London's football clubs from the threat of predatory owners whose real interest lies in the potential value of the land. Planning authorities across London should be able to protect existing football stadia from redevelopment that excludes professional football unless and until a suitable local alternative site for a stadium has been identified and the stadium built.
- 7.5** Relocation of football clubs does happen – most recently at Southampton and Leicester, following moves to similar new stadia at Derby, Middlesbrough and Sunderland. However, there is a crucial distinction in the London experience. All the clubs listed above have been able to relocate within the same town, and continue to play within their own historic community and

fanbase. The London situation is different – suitable sites are rarer, the land more expensive, and the fanbases more geographically limited. Therefore, using a London borough as a suitable guideline for relocation is not always appropriate. Local government boundaries in London are artificial creations of a merger of local authorities in relatively recent history. The north part of Hammersmith & Fulham borough, for example, is historically within the fanbase of Queens Park Rangers and has little real connection with Fulham FC, situated in the south of the borough. With much of the Fulham fanbase coming from either existing residents of Fulham, or where families originally from the area have moved typically south-west of Fulham, a more appropriate area for the relocation of Fulham would be Putney, within the London Borough of Wandsworth.

- 7.6** Football clubs represent and contribute to their local communities, and are an important part of the social heritage of their local area. In London, with so many professional clubs, local identity is even more crucial. Professional football clubs should be recognised as a positive contributor to the cultural life of London, and their stadia protected as such. Where the possibility of relocation exists, statutory authorities should use their influence and powers to ensure that such a relocation is appropriate to the club’s community identity, and does not encroach upon the traditional catchment area of another club. The authorities should also develop policies which only allow any change of use of an existing football stadium site to residential or commercial development after a new stadium has been built, thereby protecting the long-term future of professional football clubs within the local communities to which they are closely tied, and simultaneously preventing owners from taking advantage of the commercial value of the site of a football stadium whilst leaving the club itself to sink into oblivion.
- 7.7** It was by the fortunate coincidence of the timing of the property crash in the early 1990s that Fulham Football Club were able to survive at Craven Cottage. Greater London Authority policy should aim to prevent clubs having to rely on such good luck again.

8. Ideas for Redevelopment of Craven Cottage

Perspective: Fulham and Charlton - historic equivalents

- 8.1** The other London club with direct experience of groundsharing before eventually returning to their historic home are Charlton Athletic. Despite an impressive on-field record, which included playing in the top flight of English football, Charlton's attendances whilst tenants at Selhurst Park, and latterly Upton Park, suffered. A return to the Valley, despite relegation, had the opposite effect. Gradually increasing capacity from an initial low of 8,300, Charlton are now an established Premiership club with a stadium accommodating around 27,000, often full or close to capacity, and with impressive, strong links with the local community and supporters.

Fulham Football Club returning to Craven Cottage

- 8.2** We have long-term and short-term visions of Craven Cottage as a continuing site for Fulham Football Club. Long-term, the site remains capable of seating at least 28,000 people. Short-term, it can provide a better alternative to exile at Loftus Road.

In the long-term

- 8.3** The club say their aborted 28,000-capacity development would have cost over £3,500 per achieved seat, exclusive of land costs. We agree that would be extremely hard to justify. Even having adjusted for inflation, the stadia at Sunderland and Middlesbrough -- also alongside rivers -- had one fifth of this per-seat cost.
- 8.4** No two cases are identical and it is true that restricted access to our own site adds significant complication, as does the need to retain listed structures. Nevertheless, a more basic, less flamboyant design of stadium with cheaper materials would yield very considerable economies over the aborted plan. Meetings already held with specialist professionals have echoed this point.
- 8.5** It must be remembered that only the intervention of a billionaire -- who desired the very best as soon as possible -- set our ground on course for dramatic transformation in one grand sweep. If the climate has changed, it must be accepted that a revised development will need to be worked towards in stages. By far the majority of the other league clubs have expanded their stadia in such a fashion.
- 8.6** Redeveloping the two ends would be the most straightforward and this alone would raise capacity to the low 20,000s. The two lateral stands, with their undoubted complications and special factors (river frontage and the listed Stevenage Road stand) could then follow when affordable and cost-justifiable.
- 8.7** Both factors are relevant, given that a club with a ground capacity of 23,000 is metaphorically in the same league as one with 28,000. At either size, we would still have the stadium of a small Premiership or average Division One

club -- appropriate to our status to date in football history and comparable to Charlton, a sustainable successful London Premiership club.

In the short-term

- 8.8** Developments such as discussed above mean demolishing and replacing structures. A much cheaper alternative is to take existing standing terraces and 're-profile' them to become suitable for seats. Subject to weight considerations, the underlying structures need not change.
- 8.9** In the aftermath of the Taylor Report, a body called the Football Stadia Advisory Design Council dispensed wisdom on this topic -- still available via its 1991 publication 'Seating.' This spells out several methods, using either a concrete, polystyrene, steel plate or Glass Reinforced Plastic superstructure, onto which seats may then be bolted. We recently heard that the club investigated one such option and found that a 17,500 capacity could be achieved. Our own investigations accord with this.
- 8.10** The expense would be in the very low millions were this route taken -- a sum cost-justifiable by two or three years' saved rental at Loftus Road. Moreover, on the basis that attendances would hold up better at our traditional home, such an investment might even pay back within a single year.
- 8.11** This quick fix method could return us from our two-year tenancy at Loftus Road to a Craven Cottage that was just marginally smaller, but was all ours. This would be by far the best solution while the club worked out its long-term strategy. In the event that the club actually identified an alternative site for a new stadium, it would take a number of years to achieve permission, survive appeals and be built.
- 8.12** Last year, the average attendance at The Valley was 24,164, whereas the previous time that Charlton finished 14th in the top division, they averaged only 9,400. Why the difference? That season (1988-9) was their fourth in exile from The Valley. Would our fourth season away from the Cottage be much better?
- 8.13** There is already a significant proportion of Fulham fans who are not attending as frequently since the move to Loftus Road. With many fans having purchased season-tickets for the current season at a time when they were confident there would only be a two-year exile, it is likely that many will not renew them, and so will almost certainly attend fewer fixtures next season. The speculation over a potential groundshare with Chelsea at Stamford Bridge, were the considerable planning hurdles to be overcome, has been greeted with horror by a proportion of fans who assert they would no longer attend. The one option which unites all Fulham fans would be a return to Craven Cottage, on whatever basis.

9. Fuller Historical Background

Fulham Football Club – 1879 to 1985

- 9.1** The area in and around Craven Cottage has sustained professional football for over 100 years in an unchanging streetscape.
- 9.2** Fulham Football Club were founded in 1879 and remain London's oldest professional club. After playing at a number of venues in and around Fulham, FFC secured the use of the historic site known to all as Craven Cottage in 1894, and remained there until May 2002. In the early 1900's local businessmen acquired a new site, made it ready for professional football and offered it to FFC. Fulham thankfully decided that they preferred their more charming ground on the banks of the Thames and declined the offer. Thus the area of Fulham had another ground, but no team -- hence the creation of Chelsea FC to play at Stamford Bridge and the start of our existence as very near neighbours.
- 9.3** Off the pitch, the first 90 years or so at Craven Cottage (1896-1985) were generally uneventful. The freehold belonged to the Church Commissioners, with FFC having the security of a 110-year lease. Most of the ground as it exists today was in place by 1905, including the now listed buildings comprising the Stevenage Road stand and Craven Cottage itself. No major re-development took place until the Hammersmith End was covered in 1965 and the all-seater Riverside Stand was built alongside the Thames in 1972.
- 9.4** On the pitch, Fulham spent most of this 90-year period in the top two divisions of the Football League. Attendances fluctuated in line with success on the pitch and with the popularity of football as a whole. Most seasons until the 1970's saw crowds peak at around 35,000. During the last period of sustained success prior to the current era, when FFC were in the top flight (1959-68), crowds averaged 23,000 – an average very close to the figure we believe to be sustainable at a re-developed Craven Cottage.
- 9.5** As Fulham's first season in the Premiership at Craven Cottage confirmed, the streets surrounding the ground and the local transport infrastructure remain able to cope with crowds of the size likely to want to watch Fulham play in the top division at a re-developed Craven Cottage.

Fulham Football Club – 1986 to 1997

- 9.6** A decline in playing fortunes coincided with the most fraught period in Fulham's long history. Having missed out on promotion to the top division in 1983, the club's then Chairman Ernie Clay started to sell the best players, whilst at the same time eventually persuading the Church Commissioners to sell him the freehold of Craven Cottage in 1984. His intentions soon became clear when the football club and its stadium were sold to property developers Marler Estates in 1986. The full background to this sale, as detailed by leading football ground historian Simon Inglis, can be read in *Appendix One*.

Suffice to say none of the £9m sale proceeds were made available to fund FFC's future, whilst Mr Clay decamped to Portugal with an estimated £4m personal profit.

- 9.7 The sale of club and ground to property developers triggered a decade of financial difficulties, deteriorating playing standards, ever-dwindling attendances, and several threats to the very existence of Fulham Football Club. The ground situation during this period has too many twists and turns to recount here. A summary can be found in *Appendix Two*. Some key events are particularly relevant to this submission, however.
- 9.8 In early 1987, west London football faced the dangerous situation of the same property developers – Marler Estates – owning club and ground at Fulham and QPR, as well as Stamford Bridge stadium (but not Chelsea FC). An attempt to merge the first two clubs to form 'Fulham Park Rangers' soon followed (to play at Loftus Road) but was defeated in February 1987.
- 9.9 Numerous further attempts were made to remove Fulham from Craven Cottage to enable re-development as luxury housing, but all (so far) have failed. With a fair degree of luck along the way, but in the main due to the steadfast and uncompromising support of Hammersmith and Fulham Council, FFC managed to cling on to their tenure of Craven Cottage, and their place in the lowest division of the Football League. The Council's support has been crucial to Fulham's survival, not least their feeling strongly enough to commit significant time, effort, and public money to the launching in 1989 of an attempted Compulsory Purchase Order for the site. The CPO eventually failed, but the very fact that it was attempted in the first place demonstrated to all the significance attached to FFC's continued existence at Craven Cottage.

Fulham Football Club – 1997 - December 2002

- 9.10 Promotion in 1997, achieved with very little resource but with the security of a fresh 10-year lease from the new freeholders, Royal Bank of Scotland, signalled a much-needed reversal in FFC's fortunes. After promotion had been achieved, club, and shortly thereafter ground, had been unexpectedly bought by Mohamed Al Fayed to signal the start of the most exciting, yet potentially dangerous, period in the long and proud history of Fulham Football Club.
- 9.11 In the summer of 1997, Mohamed Al Fayed bought the Craven Cottage freehold without apparently requiring to subsidise either that deal or the upgrading of the ground by means of housing development. Responding to rumours to that he intended to revert to Jimmy Hill's plan (see *Appendix Two*) to build perimeter flats around rebuilt stands, he confirmed: "*These plans were subsequently scrapped and the new master plan emerged to build a Premiership standard stadium. This remains the plan. Hear me now. Fulham Football Club is in the football business, not the property development business.*" [Club programme, 17.01.98, p.38]

- 9.12** The plans for redevelopment submitted to the Council in March 2000, did in fact include some apartments, but only as part of a 30,000-seater ground -- double the capacity of the Hill plan. Two residents' groups "Fulham United" (supporting the Club's plans) and "The Fulham Alliance" (opposing them) were formed. Following representations, the Club's plans satisfied the concerns of the Environment Agency, English Heritage and the Port of London Authority.
- 9.13** When the redevelopment was approved by the Council in February 2001, Mr. Al Fayed hailed it as *"the chance to begin the next century of occupation on the bank of the Thames,"* while his Managing Director, Michael Fiddy, stated that: *"only by staying at its current site could Fulham Football Club's future be secured."* [Club programme, 04.03.01, p.8]
- 9.14** The Secretary of State declined to intervene and, by December 2002 the planning process had survived appeals to the House of Lords. Having now run out of legal reasons to defer work, the club announced that the plan had been scrapped for financial reasons.

10. About Back to the Cottage

- 10.1** Back to the Cottage is the campaign name of the recently formed, and soon to be officially launched, Fulham Supporters' Trust. The Trust has been set up with the assistance of Supporters' Direct, a government-funded initiative, whose aim is to help fans "who wish to play a responsible part in the life of the football club they support."
- 10.2** What began as a small group of like-minded fans distributing leaflets and engaging the media to seek answers to a number of pertinent questions, soon developed into an umbrella organisation, supported by the independent Fulham Supporters' Club. Following a well-attended public meeting at Hammersmith Town Hall, fans decided to establish a Supporters' Trust, following the successful model in place at more than 70 of the 92 professional English League clubs.
- 10.3** Back to the Cottage is not, as some associated with Fulham Football Club have sought to suggest, an anti-Fulham, or anti-Al Fayed, group. With the lack of any realistic alternative sites in Fulham, Back to the Cottage are dedicated to work with the local Council, the football authorities and ideally Fulham Football Club, to enable a return to the Craven Cottage site. If the changing nature of football finances make the stadium for which planning permission was granted in February 2001 financially impossible, then Back to the Cottage believe a simpler – and therefore cheaper – redevelopment would be the most sensible option for the long-term viability of the oldest professional football club in London.

APPENDIX ONE: BACKGROUND TO THE 1986 SALE OF CRAVEN COTTAGE

(Reproduced with slight adaptation from Simon Inglis' *Football Grounds of Britain*, 3rd paperback edition, 1996).

The businessman Ernie Clay became chairman of Fulham FC in 1977

According to former manager Alec Stock, from the outset Clay had only one aim in mind: to sell Craven Cottage for a whacking profit. In order to do this he would have to buy the ground from its owners, the Church Commissioners (who charged Fulham only a nominal rent) and then sell it to property developers. Stock wrote that, on his first day as chairman, Clay told the players, 'We shall all be rich one day when we have a BUPA hospital and hotel on the ground.'

Whether serious or not.....the true aim of Clay's strategy became quite hard to pin down. In 1894 Fulham signed a 110-year lease with the Church Commissioners, at the token annual rent of £2,000. As this lease drew to a close, the stated intention was, seemingly, to buy the freehold at a low price (as sitting tenants), then develop one or two sides of the ground (as at Hull, Brentford, Palace), using the profits to clear the club's debts. On paper, it was an eminently sensible plan.

If paying off the debts and saving the Cottage was his intention, as he claimed, why, during negotiations for the freehold, did he not insist on a legally binding stipulation that football should always be played on the site?

But what did Clay really want? With a restrictive clause the site's value was worth perhaps £400-600,000. Without it, the price went up to £900,000. So it was that in January 1985 Clay willingly paid more for a deal which enabled him to sell or redevelop the whole site, without Fulham, at a huge profit. Clay then borrowed the required £972,000 from a Manchester-based property company called Kilroe.

Seduced by Clay's promises (they claimed) Kilroe then submitted plans in November 1985 for an L-shaped block of 179 luxury flats, backing onto new, narrow stands to replace the Putney End terrace and the Riverside Stand. The Cottage itself would, alas, have to be demolished, but the ground would still hold 22,000, have new offices, executive boxes and a restaurant, and the sale of the flats promised to raise as much as £26 million: enough to settle Fulham's debts, provide Kilroe with a profit and leave Fulham with the freehold of the ground.

If only it had been that simple. Kilroe's plans were roundly rejected by a Tory-controlled planning committee in March 1986, partly because residents' objections made the scheme sensitive in the run-up to an election, but also because the plans were suspect on planning grounds.

For Clay the rejection was the last straw (or was it just the excuse he needed?). In May 1986 he sold out, leaving Kilroe high and dry and both Fulham and the Cottage in the hands of....Marler Estates.....the company which owned Stamford Bridge.

So Clay may not have got his hospital or hotel, but he did make a cool £4 million profit on the deal with Marler. Not bad for nine years' work....

Marler actually shelled out £9 million overall to buy Clay's shares, the freehold of the ground and to cover the club's debts. Their next move was either to persuade Chelsea to share the Cottage (or wherever), or get Fulham to share the Bridge. They could then make a tidy profit from developing whichever ground was spare.

APPENDIX TWO: SUMMARY OF PERIOD BETWEEN ERNIE CLAY AND MOHAMED AL FAYED

In May 1986, Clay sold the Craven Cottage ('CC') site to Marler Estates.

In February 1987, Marler bought Queens Park Rangers, intending to amalgamate the two clubs at Loftus Road, then build housing at CC. Within weeks, the Football League refused the merger while the Department of the Environment Grade Two-listed the 1905 Stevenage Road stand, its adjoining turnstile blocks and the Cottage itself.

In April 1987, Marler sold the club's name for a nominal sum to a consortium backed by Fulham fan Bill Muddyman and led by former player, Jimmy Hill. A 3-year lease was agreed, on the understanding that the club would vacate thereafter.

During those next three years, Cabra Estates (which had taken over Marler) submitted two plans for residential development at CC, both of which Hammersmith and Fulham Council rejected. Instead the Council drew up its own development plan -- retaining both side stands and the Cottage -- which Cabra would need either to follow or face compulsory re-purchase. Cabra appealed and the matter became scheduled for a public enquiry.

At the very last moment, in January 1990, the club took Cabra's shilling. They would receive £2 million up front, £4 million when vacating CC and up to £7m more if planning permission were gained. In return the Club could say nothing in support of the CPO. The club would be granted a further three-year lease from June 1990, but have to leave prior to that if Cabra gained planning consent earlier.

The public enquiry proceeded to reject everything -- the case for CPO, the Council's own blueprint for redevelopment and Cabra's plans.

During the next two years, Fulham's board came close to agreeing with Chelsea to share at Stamford Bridge, before determining in May 1992 to see out the final year of its lease at CC. By this time, it was evident that the property boom was in reverse and Cabra's shares were plummeting. The company duly went into liquidation in November 1992 and Fulham FC became tenant of their chief creditor, the Royal Bank of Scotland. They were granted a 10-year lease with an option to purchase for £7.5 million. But should they fail to exercise this option by June 1996, the annual rent would soar from nominal to ruinous.

To raise the necessary funds, the club drew up plans for a 15,000-seater ground comprising the 1905 listed structures plus three slimline stands and 142 flats ranged around the perimeter. By Spring 1997, a public enquiry had upheld planning permission for this.

The board was now divided between those who wished to proceed on this basis and those (led by Bill Muddyman) who were concerned that with a 15,000 capacity, the club could never aspire to return to the top division. It was Muddyman who brokered the arrival of Mohamed Al Fayed, who that summer purchased the freehold without apparently requiring to fund this from residential development.

APPENDIX THREE: STATEMENTS FROM FULHAM FC ON CRAVEN COTTAGE SINCE APRIL 2002

27 April 2002. From Chairman's message in the programme for the final fixture v. Leicester City)

When we leave Craven Cottage today it will mark the beginning of a new era for Fulham Football Club, an era that will see the building of our new home begin.....we will be playing and watching our football in a state of the art stadium befitting a first class team.....We will never forget the emotional attachment that all of you feel for this fantastic ground which is why we have gone to such great lengths to ensure that we can remain on this historic site.

31 May 2002 From Chairman's introduction to "Celebrating Craven Cottage"

When I took control of Fulham Football Club in 1997, the club had spent many years fighting a losing battle against property developers who wanted to build on that prime riverside site. I put a stop to that at once. Securing the future of football at Craven Cottage was a vital pre-requisite to everything that has happened since.

1 August 2002 Fulham hit by Craven Cottage blow

(Taken from the Website Soccernet.com)

(A pressure group called 'The Fulham Alliance' announced that it would continue to fight against the development and had ample funds to appeal to the High Court and House of Lords. The Press Association reported this adding as follows:)

The Alliance's warning came as Fulham admitted they did make an unsuccessful bid for the 10.3 acre former Dairycrest milk distribution depot in Wood Lane, Shepherd's Bush -- just round the corner from QPR's Loftus Road ground.

The Cottagers lost out to the preferred bidder, property developer Helical Bar & Morley Fund Management -- and the club's chief executive Langham confirmed: *'We made a bid for a site in the borough.*

'We were unsuccessful in gaining that site and are now investigating other fallback positions. It's prudent business practice to look at fall-backs if it is not possible to redevelop Craven Cottage.

'Our plan is still to redevelop the ground, but the longer it gets held up in the planning process, the more difficult it will be redevelop in two years. So the sooner we get a result on this, the better for everybody.

'Craven Cottage is still top of the list, but the planning permission has been held up by action by local residents and the legal process. Until that is resolved, we can't move forward.'

23 September 2002 Fayed: We won't share with Chelsea

(Ian Chadband, Evening Standard)

Mohamed Fayed today publicly aired his doubts for the first time about Fulham's prospects of ever returning to Craven Cottage -- but ruled out the possibility of a ground-share with Chelsea as an alternative.

In an exclusive interview with Standard Sport.....Fayed explained that the club, currently sharing QPR's ground at Loftus Road, were still looking at alternative sites as a "fallback" should the club be forced to abandon the Cottage plans, but he said: *"It would have to be in west London. No way would we do a Wimbledon."*

He also revealed that he and Chelsea chairman Ken Bates had "mentioned casually" the possibility of a ground-sharing arrangement at Stamford Bridge, but added: *"There have never been any serious talks along these lines. There's too much history and rivalry."*

Asked if his gut feeling was that the club would return to Craven Cottage, Fayed said: *"It's all in God's hands. We hope so but we can't wait for 10 years for people to fight us. The fact that I own the club has a part to play. Some of those people think they are upper class and that this bloody Egyptian owns the club."*

25 October 2002 We can sell out 38,000 stadium, insist Fulham

Soccernet.com reported that a consultancy firm had convinced the club they can more than double their usual crowd and fill a 38,000-capacity stadium.

Fulham chief executive Bruce Langham said: *'We hired some very expensive consultants to help us and we're pleased with the outcome.*

'We're confident as we have a robust business plan over the next two or three years to get our crowd up to around 85 percent of 38,000, plus a fairly consistent away support for the rest of the figure.

'There are three strands of our business plan. We want to get fans who aren't coming now, fans who've supported us but never come and new fans.'

Langham revealed the scenario at Southampton has bolstered confidence in their own plans.

The Saints' 32,551-capacity St Mary's Stadium averaged attendances of 30,633 last term -- doubling the 15,115 figure from The Dell the previous season.

Langham said: *'Our plan is based on precedent, not field of dreams. Look at St Mary's Stadium, for example.*

'If you build a stadium and give people a Premiership experience -- which with respect to QPR, you don't get at Loftus Road -- people buy that experience.'

6 November 2002 Interview with Mohammed Al Fayed, ITV London Tonight

We are 99% certain to return to Craven Cottage

12 December 2002 Statement from Fulham FC in reaction to announcement of House of Lords ruling.

'We are naturally pleased to learn that the House of Lords has refused the Fulham Alliance leave to appeal against last summer's decision of the High Court which ruled that they had no grounds to challenge our planning permission.

The actions of the Fulham Alliance - a group of fewer than ten individuals - have already severely damaged the club's plans to re-develop Craven Cottage. Their filibustering is undoubtedly aimed at destroying the financial viability of the entire project.

It is sad that the actions of so few can spoil the enjoyment of so many.

We are still investigating the possibility of increasing the capacity and usage of Craven Cottage so that it can be commercially viable but are also exploring the possibility of other sites within the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham in case that proves to be impossible.'

23 December 2002 Statement from Fulham FC

In light of increasing speculation from fans and the media following the Club's official statement regarding the House of Lords decision recently, the Chairman of Fulham Football Club, Mohamed Al Fayed, wishes to clarify his and the Club's position regarding the re-development plans for the Craven Cottage site.

It has always been the Chairman's aim to develop the best possible stadium facilities for the future but, since the project to re-develop Craven Cottage first began the cost has spiralled out of all proportion. It is now obvious that to invest heavily in building a stadium which would only generate revenue, at most, once a week is not a financially viable option.

If the proposed Craven Cottage stadium were now to be built according to the original plans the cost would exceed £100 million. Clearly, to saddle the Club with this magnitude of debt in the current financial climate would be foolhardy in the extreme and could seriously jeopardise the long term future of the Club.

Accordingly, we are currently pursuing a range of more sensible options. But there are a number of delicate and complicated issues involved in this process which must, of necessity, be conducted with the utmost discretion and under the most confidential of terms.

17 January 2003 Mohamed Al Fayed - Fulham Chairman

Recent press coverage of the so-called 'deal to sell Craven Cottage' has caused unnecessary alarm. *There is nothing sinister or mysterious about this. It is no secret that we have been attempting to buy a plot of land at White City to build a new stadium, and we have also been looking at other possibilities. If our attempts are successful we will need to pay for it and the 'deal' was set up for precisely that purpose. Without the Council's continued support none of these plans can happen anyway.*

A short-term benefit of the deal did provide the club with funds. For those who have been trying to make mischief by claiming that I, or the club, will make a £50m profit from the sale of Craven Cottage, remember this. Even if we spend, say, £30m in buying a site elsewhere in the borough and £50m in building a superb stadium on it, the actual cost to the club after selling Craven Cottage would still be about £30m. This is still a lot of money but seems to me to be infinitely better for the club's long-term future than spending £100m on a much smaller stadium at Craven Cottage.

Why also is it so difficult to make Craven Cottage commercially viable? The simple fact is that planning regulations restrict us to using Craven Cottage only on home match days. Even with the enormous support the club has received from the Council officers and local politicians certain planning conditions were necessary. We are therefore prevented from raising revenue by using the stadium for any other events or even from groundsharing with another club to generate income. Please also remember that the costs incurred in this particular process to date are close to £5m.

Notwithstanding that, we are still looking at ways in which we might build a cheaper more efficient stadium at Craven Cottage. However the probability is that any stadium we could now build at Craven Cottage at an acceptable price would not be sufficient to enable the club to compete at the highest levels.

19 January 2003 From the Chairman's notes from the programme that day

I have invested over £100 million in Fulham already. That was done to achieve Premiership football. Now the days of profligate spending are over. We must tighten our belts and introduce a regime of prudent budgetary control. And that will apply from top to bottom. All the way down from transfer fees, player salaries and stadium development.

I have been accused of being one of those rich men who blindly indulge their passion for football by simply buying success for their favourite club without considering whether there is a big enough fan base to justify that expenditure. I reject that accusation.

The fact is Fulham is a sleeping giant. The hardcore of Fulham fans, thousands and thousands of them, have supported this club for generations and the potential fan base out there is enormous.

Once we have a modern stadium with the right capacity, and we have built success on the pitch, Fulham will attract the crowds large enough to maintain that success.

26 January 2003 From a statement from the Club on why the cost of redeveloping CC was so high.

“If any of those fans who so genuinely want to return to The Cottage can come up with a financially viable business plan to enable us to stay at Craven Cottage we would be more than happy to hear it.”

1 March 2003 Bruce Langham - Fulham CEO

We're looking at Craven Cottage to see if there's a way we can build a more affordable stadium but which is also financially viable for the club. We're also looking at trying to find other pieces of land within the borough where we could build a brand new stadium and that search is ongoing."