



## **Derby County Supporters' Board Meeting – 20th April 2026**

The Derby County Supporters' Board met with Stephen Pearce (Chief Executive Officer), Jamie Smith (Interim Academy Manager) and Leigh Bromby (Talent Acquisition Lead) at Moor Farm Training Centre on 20th April 2026. Stella Gutteridge from the Supporters Board was unable to attend and sent her apologies.

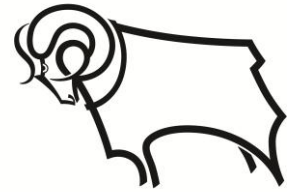
The meeting focused on reviewing the football strategy across the Academy and First Team environments, with a further finance update ahead of the 2026/27 season.

The agenda covered:

- Academy Operations
- Recruitment Strategy
- Player Development and Analysis
- Finance Update

The football club's main financial expense is what it spends on the First Team and the Academy. In the previous season (2024/25), the club generated £31.9 million through its operations and received an additional £16.3 million in cash funding from its owners, Clowes Developments (UK) Ltd.

The review of the football strategy was to understand the approach of how the club operates and makes football decisions in line with its longer-term commercial and financial plans, ensuring value from its investment and financial sustainability.



## Academy Operations

Jamie Smith led a presentation on the Academy operations and strategy. The Academy remains a core part of the club's strategy to grow and improve the First Team by developing talent in an elite environment. The investment in the Academy is continuing to grow, with the latest accounts showing youth development costs increasing from £4 million in 2022/23 to £5.6 million in 2024/25.

The club explained that the value in the Academy didn't just come from developing stars, but also developing players for the First Team squad, which meant the club didn't need to fill as many squad places through First Team transfer business. The club is targeting to have more Academy players pushing through to the First Team squad, but progression is based on merit. It is now conducting its First Team transfer business with this in mind.

The Academy operates with a mix of 100 full and part-time staff who support 183 players from Under-9 to Under-21 age groups. There are high expectations and clear objectives set for staff to ensure that the standards within the Academy are at an elite sporting level to facilitate the development of players who can play at the highest level.

Examples of player schedules across age groups and development plans were shown to us, demonstrating the scale and detail that go into the day-to-day running of the Academy and the opportunities given to players to reach their potential.

There are several challenges that the Academy faces, with larger clubs looking to attract high-potential players, social media's influence and the activities of agents targeting players.

The Academy emphasises the holistic development of players, including life skills, well-being, and education alongside football training. This provision is delivered through full-time education staff, a dedicated player services department, an Academy Psychologist and a Safeguarding Officer. This ensures that emotional support is provided, and players maintain academic standards in tandem with their football development. This support is especially important for players as they leave the Academy, so they have additional skills and resilience for life beyond football.

International tours and community experiences are integral to player development at all ages, offering life skills and experiences beyond football. Jamie stressed that whilst the Academy is an elite environment and the goal is to develop players for the First Team, he wants all the players to come out of the Academy with a sense of enjoyment and lifetime memories.



## Recruitment Strategy

Leigh Bromby walked us through the club's approach to recruitment, demonstrating the long-term planning and attention to detail that goes into developing the First Team squad in line with the club's budget.

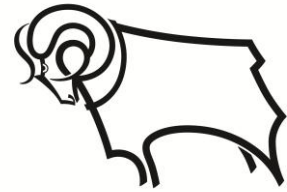
Leigh shared the organisational structure and emphasised that the club didn't rely on any one method to identify players; they are focused on capturing as much information as possible through data, traditional scouting methods, and professional networks. The ambition is still to compete for promotion to the Premier League whilst operating within a clear budget so as not to jeopardise the financial stability of the club.

The club aims to maintain a pipeline of several potential players per position, balancing Academy graduates and external signings with a focus on long-term squad building. The Head Coach, John Eustace, is heavily involved in the process and final decisions, but does not solely dictate recruitment; trust and alignment in the club strategy have been built, and the recruitment, data and coaching teams work together to ensure targets meet the Head Coach's needs.

As part of the process, detailed player dossiers are prepared ahead of final decisions covering various areas to support recruitment decisions to ensure signings fit the club's tactical, cultural, and financial profile.

The club also ensures that the squad balance and overall costs (transfers and wages) against the financial plan are maintained. The strategy involves signing a mix of players with different profiles without blocking the pathways for younger talent at the club. A heavy focus is placed on ensuring that players' personalities align with the culture of the club and signing players with high or unrealised potential to develop, contribute to the First Team's success, and/or be traded in the future to support further investment in the squad.

Recent signings, like Derry Murkin and Oscar Fraulo, were highlighted as successful acquisitions fitting the club's short and long-term objectives, whilst fitting into the budget. Detailed planning for various scenarios has been undertaken for the summer transfer window, and work is already well underway for the upcoming transfer window.



## Player Development and Analysis

In addition to investing resources into recruitment, it is also important that when players arrive, they have the environment and support to reach their potential. The club ensures that Academy players with First Team potential have enhanced individual development programmes to support transition - and this also extends to First Team players with high potential, with tailored coaching and support.

The club has expanded its coaching team over the last few years; having high-quality and high-performing staff is seen as key to maximising the potential of players and ensuring that the significant investment in the First Team isn't wasted, as the value and performance of the team can grow.

Leigh shared some examples of the performance data that the Leadership Team review. This included individual football and physical performance data, team performance data and injury data. The club has overperformed this season against where they expected to be in the league table, and Leigh and Stephen gave great credit to John Eustace, the players and the coaching team for that.

To push on, the club is constantly assessing where it can improve, and it was highlighted that early pre-season preparation and initial performance in the league was impacted by late squad assembly this season. The club wants to avoid that in the upcoming season.

Leigh shared insight into the club's injuries this season and showed that the squad has experienced the most injuries in the league, but fewer serious injuries. It was also noted that the squad selection this season was consistent, so the club wants to focus on improving squad depth in the summer transfer window. Player minutes and injury data are closely monitored to inform coaching and medical decisions.

The club demonstrated heavy use of data and analytics across the departments. The Supporters' Board enquired if the club were still in partnership with Palantir, and if so, the club's position on its partnership with them given the increased profile of Palantir and public debates about their business, ethics and use of data. The club responded with:

*"The club have been working with Palantir for well over a year, using its technology as an umbrella for pulling together all elements of the football side of the club (recruitment, medical, fitness & conditioning, data analysis) to provide a streamlined and strategised approach.*

*"The benefits can be seen specifically in the recruitment modelling and efficiency, in which the market is analysed through this data-driven approach. Several of this season's most successful signings have been as a result of this strategy.*

*"Palantir works with hundreds of private companies and public sector organisations (including the British government) across the globe, and their implementation within the US government dates back to the Obama administration.*

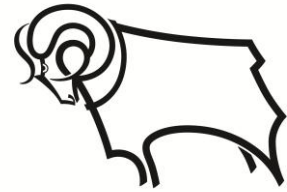
*"In terms of privacy of information, Palantir are purely a data processor and has no ability to supply data. That rests solely with the data controller, which, in this case, is the club."*



## Finance Update

The club provided an update on its financial position and future budgets ahead of the end of the season. As part of this, the club showed us the detailed financial documents showing its projected compliance with the EFL Profit and Sustainability rules, its cash position and the budget for future seasons, showing committed spend on transfers and wages along with the funding requirements from Clowes Developments. (UK) Ltd.

Final budget decisions will be undertaken at the end of the season, and the priority is always on ensuring that the club is not running up losses beyond the funding position agreed with the Ownership. It is clear that the club is reliant on the ongoing funding of the ownership. The club must balance out a desire to improve competitiveness whilst ensuring the long-term sustainability of the club, which is why so much care and attention is placed on the Academy, recruitment and development of players.



### **Additional Items**

Several other items were discussed at the end of the meeting; the following summarises the key points discussed:

- The club has agreed to amend the articles of association to formally recognise the Supporters' Board and the veto powers given to fans; this will happen on or before 30th June 2026.
- The Supporters' Board gave an update on the recruitment process for additional Independent Members to commence on the board next season. We wish to thank all those who applied and hope to announce the successful candidates in the summer.
- The Supporters' Board also shared that it had been contacted by representatives from another EFL club's Fan Advisory Board, as they were setting up a network for Fan Advisory Boards from around the EFL to share best practices and support each other. We decided to share this invite with the Supporters' Charter Group to ensure that Derby is represented by both forums.

### **Summary**

We placed on record our thanks to Jamie, Leigh and Stephen for giving up a large amount of time to share their insights with us. It was clear that a lot of thought and preparation had gone into the session, and we do not take that for granted.

It was demonstrated that the club's recruitment and development strategy is designed to balance competitive performance with financial sustainability, leveraging Academy products and smart acquisitions to build a resilient squad.

Given the investment in the First Team squad and committed spend, it is important that the club continue to operate efficiently so it can continue to progress whilst being financially prudent and sustainable. It was also pleasing to see how the club put in place resources to support and protect Academy players, with an emphasis on life beyond football.

Our next meeting with the club is on Monday 1st June, where we will review the end of season performance and detailed finance budgets for the 2026/27 season.