



Fans First

Football needs a right to buy

From Hearts and Rangers to Dunfermline and Livingston, too many Scottish football clubs have struggled because boardroom decisions are not always taken in the best interests of the fans.

At the moment, the majority of Scottish clubs are owned privately, and too often have to rely on the personal funds of a wealthy benefactor to have a chance of sporting success. As funds dry up, the club ends up in financial crisis and fans get brought in to pick up the pieces. This model for running our football clubs has proven to be completely unsustainable.

What is fan ownership?

Fan ownership is a well-established ownership model for sports clubs, and is the norm in Scandinavia and Germany. It is becoming more common in Scotland too, with Clyde FC, East Stirlingshire, Stirling Albion and Dunfermline Athletic now majority owned by their supporters, and Hearts well on the road to community ownership also.

When fan ownership has come about to date in Scotland, it has generally been against a backdrop of debt and failure. In 2014 for example, when Hearts went into administration they were bailed out by their fans, and saved by an individual benefactor who is now in the process of transferring ownership to Foundation of Hearts – the club's fan group.

Too many football fans have gone through this painful cycle of boom and bust at their clubs, and there needs to be a practical route for community ownership that does not mean waiting for a crisis.

Reasons for fans' right to buy

- 1. Fan ownership works.** In Sweden and Germany, clubs there have to, by law, be majority owned by their supporters. This ensures that commercial interests cannot dominate the sport.
- 2. Loyal fans support their teams through thick and thin.** Communities deserve a say in how their club is run. There is no better way to ensure this than by supporting fans who wish to take ownership of their club.
- 3. Turbulent times in Scottish football have put countless clubs at risk.** Fans are often the only people able and willing to rescue their teams – but they shouldn't have to do so in the first place.
- 4. Even the most well-intentioned custodian needs to have an 'exit strategy'.** When the time comes for an owner to move on, we want fans to be secure in the knowledge that support is available for them to step in wherever and whenever required.
- 5. Purchasing a club is currently a complicated and difficult process.** If we get the legislation right, fan groups will have a more secure – and understandable – process through which to buy their clubs.



How to make it happen

Not all clubs' supporters will necessarily view fan ownership as the right option for every club, but where fans are willing and able to take over their clubs, it should be made as straightforward as possible.

The Scottish Parliament boosted the rights of Scotland's communities through the Community Empowerment Bill, including a right for community groups to buy land. After a campaign led by the Scottish Green Party's Alison Johnstone MSP, the legislation now includes the powers for Ministers to give a similar right to allow football fans to purchase their clubs.

Now, the Scottish Government are consulting with the public on what these new rights for fan groups will mean in practice and whether to bring those powers in. We want to make sure that the bill will guarantee fans a right to buy their clubs.

What we're arguing for

We want the Scottish Government to include the following elements in the final legislation:

- **A fans' right to buy their club for an agreed price or an independent valuation.**
- **A right of appeal for owners, and a requirement for democratic fan support.**
- **Eligibility for Scottish Government loans or grants to help fans buy their clubs.**

What can you do?

We need as many football fans and fan groups as possible to tell the Scottish Government that a fans' right to buy is the way forward. To show your support, you can fill out our petition at:

<https://www.scottishgreens.org.uk/put-fans-first/>

Or you or your fan group can reply to the Scottish Government's consultation at:

<http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2015/09/8222>

The Scottish Green Party's role in this campaign

Community ownership is one of our Party's long-standing priorities; we believe people should have more direct say over how their communities are managed and run. This includes the assets within those communities.

Our MSP for Lothian, Alison Johnstone, has led the campaign for fan-owned football clubs since first raising the matter in the Scottish Parliament in 2013.

At our Party conference in 2013, Zara Kitson (then candidate in the Dunfermline by-election) won support for a motion expressing the Party's support for the Pars Trust, as they sought to take ownership of Dunfermline Athletic.

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