

2017 / 2018

DIGITAL, CULTURE, MEDIA & SPORT

The Parliamentary Review

A YEAR IN PERSPECTIVE

■ FOREWORDS

The Rt Hon Theresa May MP
Tracey Crouch MP

■ SPORT REPRESENTATIVES

Goodwood Racecourse	Luton Town
The Ski Club of Great Britain	Football Club
Rockingham Motor Speedway	Brio Leisure
Torquay United Football Club	Whilton Mill Karting
Rocks Lane Multi Sports Centres	4global
Amateur Motor Cycle Association	Base Soccer
Basingstoke Sports Trust	Sheffield Sports Stadium
Kings Hill Golf Club	Sport4Kids Franchising Ltd
Metropolitan Police (Chigwell) Sports Club	

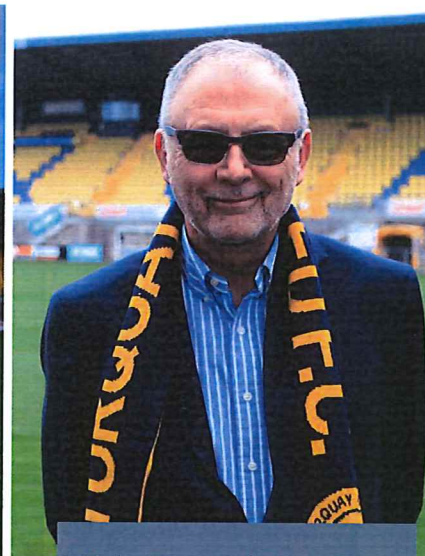
■ FEATURES

Review of the Year
Review of Parliament

Torquay United Football Club



The view of Bristow's Bench, Torquay United's main grandstand



Clarke Osborne, chairman

Following relegation from the National League at the end of the 2017/18 season, Torquay United now compete in the National League South, the sixth tier of English football. Since then, the club has seen its fair share of excitement, but looks now at achieving a central goal: regaining its status as one of the 92 clubs that competes in the prestigious English Football League. Chairman Clarke Osborne here discusses where Torquay United are now, where the club and its supporters want to be and how they plan on getting there.

We were first elected to the Football League in 1920, and have subsequently played across a number of tiers in English football. Our latest promotion to the third tier, now known as League One, was in 2004. In 2009, we beat Cambridge United at Wembley to win the National League play-off final and return to the Football League. Though we have never quite reached the second tier, now the Championship, we hope to soon return to the fourth tier of English league football.

A community of local fans

One of the things that makes us so unique as a club is our geography. In the South West, there are only three football clubs competing in the fifth tier or above: Plymouth Argyle, Exeter City and Torquay United. Other regions of the country – such as London and the North West – are saturated with a variety of sometimes dozens of different clubs. For them, a local derby match can be only 15 minutes away; for us, it can be up to 150 miles.

FACTS ABOUT TORQUAY UNITED FOOTBALL CLUB

- » Chairman: Clarke Osborne
- » Established in 1899
- » Based in Torquay, Devon
- » Services: Association football club competing in the National League South
- » No. of employees: 55
- » Stadium capacity: 6,200
- » Strong cohort of between 200 and 400 dedicated away fans
- » Beat Cambridge United 2-0 at Wembley to secure promotion back to the Football League in the 2008/09 season
- » www.torquayunited.com

“We want everyone to enjoy their time at Torquay United”

This really does resonate with what makes us so special: we are, at heart, a family club, and our vocal, tight-knit community of fans includes a seriously dedicated number of away supporters. The distances that sometimes between 200 and 400 people travel for the level we compete at is genuinely incredible.

Honesty, hospitality and hard work

Our staff's work ethic and honesty, both on and off the pitch, is unique and very special. While this might be the basis of any given business, it is something at the forefront of our club. With the return of two major staff members, general manager Geoff Harrop and club secretary Tim Herbert, at the beginning of 2017, the attitude at our club is demonstrably one that keeps people coming back. Even through the last four years, where we have struggled, there has been an honesty about everybody involved with Torquay.

Torquay is a town with an extensive history and a great deal of folklore concerning its hospitality; this is

something that undoubtedly extends to the club. When players move down here, we look after them. This is true for current and previous managerial staff too; the transition to a new town is always difficult, but we want to make it as smooth and as easy as possible.

This is all true for supporters, home and away. We want everyone to enjoy their time at Torquay United, and we don't want to have to shout from the rooftops about it. We have a good hospitality programme; offering a positive experience and an overhauled visual representation of the club are things we are always working on.

Overhauling everything

Our club shop has been totally reorganised. Our kit is now all Nike branded – something that local kids recognise and want to wear. Trying to achieve new-found excellence in every aspect of the club's management means working on these smaller things as well, and using a top brand for our strip.

Alongside this, we have relaunched our football development programme. Premier League clubs say this takes ten years – we want to see it achieved within two or three. Local supporters have expressed a desire to see young, home-grown players on the pitch in a Torquay strip. This means working tirelessly with nearby schools to get the talent and players we want.

Refurbishment has not just been limited to merchandise and our academy, however. We have seen a recent upgrade to our hospitality capability and are preparing to bring the pub next to our ground back under the club's jurisdiction, alongside a complete rework of all marketing and branding. Our website has been redeveloped with a view to improving the communication process with supporters.

Tim Sills celebrating the winning goal in the play-off final against Cambridge United at Wembley





Scouts and supporters

Our scouting process is much stronger than it has been historically. In order to find good players, you need to have good scouts; and the more people who are out there scouting that the management can trust, the more intelligence you can receive. Before long, this process starts to pay dividends, and you can discover the players who are going to be most appropriate to your style. Behind the scenes, we are investing further in the training process and facilities – the grounds, gymnasium and everything else that comes along with a professional club, even at our level.

Younger and more suitable players are just one thing to work on, however. We want to change as the demographic of football supporters is changing nationally, and appeal to a far younger audience. Our official supporters club now has members as young as three and four years old, and we are making use of stickers, rucksacks and T-shirts. We want to create the fan of the future through a weekly Saturday habit.



The Yellow Army

Setting our own targets

Though the last five years have been challenging for the club in a number of respects, the challenges we want to focus on are the ones we're setting for ourselves. This includes a programme to move from our existing ground to a new stadium on another site, where we will develop a capacity not just for football, but also to accommodate events, supporting leisure and possibly a hotel.

Our current stadium has a capacity of 6,200; the new site will start by supporting 7,500, while also being expandable in the future for up to 20,000. The club infrastructure will allow us to operate every day of the week in a leisure capacity, with the premises being used, one way or another, every single day. Physically building an academy and training ground will further challenge us.

All of this, however, is about moving towards league results. At the beginning of the 2020/21 season, or the following season, at the absolute latest, we want to see Torquay United return to the English Football League, with a fully functional academy and a new stadium on the horizon.

“We want to appeal to a younger audience”