

BRISA Meeting with Bristol Rovers

Detailed public summary and breakdown

7 September 2026 | Meeting 1

“The purpose of this first meeting was to introduce BRISA, explain how the organisation has evolved and put the priorities identified by our members directly to the club.”

This report distinguishes between what the club answered, what it explained in more detail, and what remains unanswered.

Attendees

BRISA

Steve Mowat, Co-chair

Shane Leonard, Co-chair

Mike Ethridge, Comms lead

Jack Tranter, Secretary (virtual)

Bristol Rovers

Ritchie Bates, CEO

Mitch Waddon, Head of Media

Meeting overview

BRISA representatives met Bristol Rovers CEO Ritchie Bates and other club representatives for the first formal meeting between BRISA and the club. Jack joined remotely, while the remaining attendees met at the Memorial Stadium.

The discussion was constructive and detailed. The three main areas were communication and transparency, the long-term stadium strategy, and the club’s finances and sustainability. These were not selected solely by the BRISA committee. They reflected the priorities and votes submitted by BRISA members before the meeting.

As this was the first meeting, BRISA also wanted to establish a professional working relationship with the club. That did not prevent difficult questions being asked. The aim was to obtain clearer information, identify where the club could answer, and record where important gaps remain.

How BRISA started and how it has evolved

Why BRISA was formed

BRISA explained that concern had been building among supporters over several years and across different ownerships. By late 2025, many fans felt the club lacked direction. The team was struggling, managerial and football leadership changes had created instability, communication was limited, and supporters did not understand the owners’ long-term plan for Bristol Rovers.

The stadium remained the most visible long-term issue, but BRISA was not created solely because of the stadium. The wider concern was that supporters lacked an independent organisation focused on ownership, governance, infrastructure, strategic planning and financial sustainability.

Not a rival to the Supporters Club

BRISA made clear that it respects the work and history of the Bristol Rovers Supporters Club. BRISA does not exist to replace it or compete with its work around travel, fundraising or traditional supporter activities. BRISA was established to address a different gap: asking strategic questions and representing supporters on the long-term direction of the football club.

From a campaign voice to a structured organisation

BRISA acknowledged that its earliest communications were deliberately direct. That was intended to show both the club and supporters that a new independent voice was being created and that long-standing issues would be addressed.

After the initial launch, BRISA became quieter while the organisation was built properly. It developed a constitution, established formal principles, gained Football Supporters' Association recognition and created a structure intended to continue beyond the current officers. The objective is not for a small group of individuals to retain control, but to create a sustainable supporter organisation that can be handed on through elections and continue representing members in future.

Supporter-led and data-driven

BRISA explained that its officers are constitutionally required to represent the views of members, even where an officer's personal view differs. The agenda is therefore intended to flow from the membership upward, rather than being decided by a small committee and then presented to supporters.

The club was shown the results of BRISA's member survey. BRISA explained that questions would be supported by member votes, percentages and direct comments wherever possible. This was important in establishing that the issues raised were not simply the personal opinions of the people in the room.

What this introduction established

- BRISA is independent, but its stated purpose is constructive engagement rather than opposition for its own sake.
- BRISA represents more than 400 members and continues to grow.
- BRISA focuses on strategic priorities that members believe are not adequately covered elsewhere.
- The club appeared receptive to BRISA's role and to continued engagement after the first meeting.

1. Communication and transparency

Why BRISA raised it

BRISA opened this section positively. Member feedback recognised that communication had improved, particularly around matchdays, football matters, media output and practical fan engagement. The club was also thanked for visible improvements such as shelving in the safe-standing area.

However, the survey showed that members distinguish between operational communication and strategic communication. Supporters generally feel better informed about what is happening week to week, but remain unclear about the stadium, the chairman's ownership vision, the financial strategy and where the club intends to be in five, ten or fifteen years.

BRISA question: Communication has improved, but what does the club believe supporters still need to hear more about?

The club asked BRISA directly what members wanted to see more of. BRISA pointed to the survey, where stadium strategy and ownership strategy accounted for the overwhelming majority of responses to the question about which topic needed significantly better communication.

BRISA explained that supporters are not asking for every negotiation or commercially sensitive detail. They want a credible outline of the club's direction, its priorities and the steps being taken to deliver them.

The club's approach to communication

Ritchie Bates explained that personal visibility was not something he sought when results were positive, but that he expected to become more visible and communicate more when the football side was struggling. His view was that difficult periods were when leadership communication mattered most, and he'd be more visible to the fanbase when things are less successful on the pitch.

The club also stressed that it does not want to repeat past mistakes by making confident promises that later fail. This was particularly relevant to stadium communication. The club's concern is that publishing dates or outcomes before the evidence is complete could create another promise that cannot be delivered.

BRISA question: Can supporters be given a broad strategic direction without the club promising an outcome it cannot guarantee?

BRISA accepted that supporters do not need a precise date for every action. The request was for a general roadmap: what the owners want to achieve, what is currently being assessed, what the next decision point is and how supporters will know that progress is being made.

The club accepted the principle that supporters need a stronger strategic narrative. It also indicated that further communication was planned, including future media pieces involving senior club representatives, with the Memorial Stadium expected to be discussed.

What the club answered

- The club recognises that communication has improved and remains open to direct feedback on what supporters want covered.
- Ritchie Bates intends to become more visible when results or circumstances are difficult.
- The club accepts that the stadium, ownership strategy and long-term direction are the main strategic information gaps identified by supporters.
- The club is cautious about communicating timelines or outcomes before it believes there is firm evidence.

What remains unclear

- Whether there will be a regular schedule for strategic updates rather than communication only when a major decision is complete.
- How frequently supporters will receive stadium progress updates during the next 6 to 12 months.

- When supporters will hear directly from the chairman about the wider ownership vision and the intended legacy of the ownership.

2. Stadium strategy

The stadium was the longest and most detailed part of the meeting. BRISA explained that member feedback was unambiguous: the stadium remains the leading strategic concern. Supporters have lived with uncertainty through Eastville, Twerton Park, the return to the Memorial Stadium and multiple proposed developments that did not materialise.

Is the club prioritising the Memorial Stadium over new land?

BRISA question: The discussion sounds increasingly focused on completing work at the Memorial Stadium. Is that a fair reflection of the club's current strategic priority?

BRISA challenged whether too much time was being spent investigating the Memorial Stadium when acquiring and developing a new site would itself take many years. The concern was that if the club has not acquired alternative land, each additional year of investigation could push any relocation further into the future.

The club's response was that it is deliberately seeking to complete the Memorial Stadium process properly. Ownership wants to understand, once and for all, whether the current site can be redeveloped before closing that option. The club does not want to relocate and then, years later, discover that remaining at the Memorial Stadium might have been possible, they want it to be a closed chapter without regrets. The club therefore described its approach as exhausting every reasonable avenue at the Memorial Stadium and completing the evidence base before making a final decision. Alternative possibilities are still being considered, but the club wants a defensible conclusion on the current site first.

Has redevelopment of the Memorial Stadium been ruled out?

BRISA question: Is redevelopment now categorically ruled out?

The club's answer was clear, it is not ruled out.

This was one of the most important clarifications from the meeting. The club did not present Memorial Stadium redevelopment as dead. It remains under assessment, and the purpose of the current studies is to determine whether the identified constraints can be overcome at an acceptable cost and within the relevant safety, planning and infrastructure requirements.

What are the specific red flags at the Memorial Stadium?

BRISA question: What exactly are the red flags that have been identified?

BRISA asked for specific examples rather than another general statement that the site is difficult. Club representatives then described several practical constraints.

Home and away supporter flashpoints

The club highlighted the convergence of home and away supporters around the main entrance, car park and access routes to the South Stand and away terrace. The existing layout creates points where groups mix when entering and leaving the stadium. The club described these as significant flashpoints under modern safety expectations.

The issue is not simply that the layout has existed for 30 years. Safety requirements continue to develop, and the club, police, Safety Advisory Group and other authorities must assess the ground against current standards. A layout accepted in the past may not support increased capacity or a substantially redeveloped stadium today.

Policing costs

The club connected the segregation problem directly to cost. Once police officers are required within the club's footprint, the club becomes responsible for the associated policing charge. The club said its policing bill was significantly higher than that of many comparable clubs because the current layout requires additional management of home and away movements.

This means the stadium problem is not only about supporter experience. The existing design creates recurring operating costs and may make expansion more expensive unless access and segregation can be redesigned.

Road access and surrounding streets

Possible secondary entrances were discussed, but the surrounding streets are narrow and affected by residential considerations. Any new route would require support from local residents, the council, police and safety authorities. Historic use of other exits has also created difficulties with nearby residents.

Transport and car dependency

The club referred to crowd and transport modelling undertaken around a recent high-attendance match. According to the club, the work indicated that approximately 83% of supporters travel by car, described as one of the highest proportions in the country.

The opening of Ashley Down station is relevant, but the existing level of car dependency remains a significant consideration for expansion, planning, parking and movement around the site.

Power, water and utilities

The club said the current site experiences practical utility constraints. One example was loss of water pressure in parts of the ground during matches. Electrical capacity was also cited, including the work needed before new screens could be installed. Any major redevelopment would therefore require solutions to utility supply rather than simply constructing new stands.

Accessibility and the existing supporter experience

The club and BRISA discussed the difficulty of accommodating supporters who cannot stand for long periods, need accessible seating or struggle with uneven routes through the stadium. Even apparently simple improvements can require substantial expenditure. The club gave an example of an estimated cost of around £125,000 to level part of an access area.

These issues reinforce why the stadium question affects more than capacity. It also affects families, older supporters, people with accessibility needs and the club's ability to grow attendance in a modern and inclusive environment.

When will the current studies be completed?

BRISA question: If the club is completing all of this work before deciding, when does that investigative phase finish?

The club did not provide an overall stadium delivery timetable. However, it said that the different studies around the Memorial Stadium appear to be approaching completion and indicated a period of approximately 6 to 12 months for the outstanding work to come together.

This is an important distinction. The club did not promise that a final stadium decision, planning application or new stadium site would be delivered within 6 to 12 months. The indication related to the completion of the current studies and evidence gathering. BRISA will therefore need to ask what decision follows once that work is complete.

Are alternative sites still being explored?

BRISA question: Are alternative sites being progressed alongside the assessment of the Memorial Stadium?

The club confirmed that the chairman is looking at other possibilities and that a number of consultants are involved in the wider work. However, no site was identified, no stage of land acquisition was disclosed and no timetable was provided for deciding between redevelopment and relocation.

The overall picture presented was therefore not that external options have stopped, but that the club is currently placing significant emphasis on completing the Memorial Stadium assessment before drawing a final conclusion.

How committed is the chairman?

BRISA question: What is Hussein AlSaeed's long-term intention, and how seriously is the stadium being pursued?

BRISA explained why supporters remain uncertain about the chairman's wider vision. Fans can see substantial spending, but have heard less directly about whether ownership regards Bristol Rovers as a long-term project and what success would look like.

The club gave a strong assurance that the stadium is the chairman's leading priority and that not a day passes where this isn't the top priority for the chairman, and he wants a new stadium to be his legacy. BRISA responded that hearing this directly from the chairman would help address uncertainty among supporters. The club explained that the chairman prefers to communicate when there are concrete developments and is acutely aware of the club's history of stadium promises that did not come to fruition.

What the club answered

- The Memorial Stadium has not been categorically ruled out.
- The current strategy is to investigate every reasonable avenue at the Memorial Stadium before deciding whether to close that option.
- Specific challenges include supporter segregation, policing costs, road access, car dependency, utilities, accessibility and planning or safety requirements.
- The club expects much of the remaining study work to come together over the next 6 to 12 months.
- Alternative possibilities are still being considered and consultants are involved.
- The stadium is described as the chairman's number one priority and intended legacy project.

What remains unanswered

- What formal decision will be taken once the studies are complete.
- Whether the club will set a deadline for choosing between redevelopment and relocation.
- How advanced the alternative land search is and whether any sites have reached meaningful discussion.

- What milestones supporters should expect during the next 6 to 12 months.
- What the overall delivery timetable is for either a redeveloped Memorial Stadium or a new stadium elsewhere.
- How either option would ultimately be funded.

3. Finances and long-term sustainability

Why BRISA raised it

BRISA explained that members are concerned not simply by the existence of football losses, but by their scale, how they are financed and what they mean for the long-term security of the club. The stadium and financial questions are inseparable: supporters want to know how continued operating losses can be reduced and how a major stadium project could then be financed on top of the existing position.

Why have recent losses been so high?

BRISA question: What has driven the scale of the recent losses, and why should supporters expect the position to improve?

The club's explanation was that a significant portion of recent expenditure represented investment and restructuring rather than a permanent annual cost at the same level. Examples included buying assets, exiting contracts, replacing outsourced arrangements, increasing staffing and bringing functions in-house.

The club said staffing had more than trebled over approximately 18 months as departments and capabilities were built internally. A new in-house finance team was also introduced after finance had previously been outsourced.

Other examples included vehicles, insurance arrangements, operational equipment, stadium maintenance and fixing long-standing issues that had previously been deferred. A walk-in freezer repair costing approximately £15,000 to £20,000 was given as one small illustration of the costs involved in running and maintaining the ground.

Are revenues increasing and costs falling?

BRISA question: Is the investment now translating into a more sustainable operating position?

The club stated that revenues are rising and costs are coming down, which it is very happy with. It expects the next financial information to show an improvement compared with the previous reported loss. The club did not give an exact forecast because the finance team was still completing the relevant year-end and audit work.

The stated strategic objective is for the club to generate more of its own income and become less dependent on a single owner. The club accepted that losses at the recent level are not sustainable indefinitely.

What is the annual loss target?

BRISA question: Has the chairman given the CEO a target for reducing the annual loss, and can that target be shared?

BRISA pushed beyond the general objective of reducing losses and asked whether the club was aiming for a specific figure, using possible annual losses of £1 million, £2 million or £3 million as examples.

The response confirmed that budgets and targets exist internally. Management prepares the annual requirement, presents it to the chairman and is challenged on where costs can be reduced. Monthly management accounts and weekly matchday dashboards are used to track performance.

However, the club did not disclose the actual annual loss target. The reason given was that the latest financial work and audit process were still being completed by the new finance team.

Is interest being charged on the chairman's loans?

BRISA question: Is the chairman charging interest on the funding advanced to the club?

The answer was direct: no interest is being charged.

This was one of the clearest financial answers obtained during the meeting and provides an important distinction between the size of the balance owed and whether that balance is increasing through interest charges.

Will the loans be capitalised?

BRISA question: Will the owner funding remain as loans, or is the intention to capitalise it and convert it into equity?

The club could not answer this. Ritchie Bates said he had not discussed the specific treatment of the loans with the chairman and was therefore unable to comment on the chairman's long-term intention.

BRISA made clear that this is a central concern for members. The historic comparison raised was that previous ownership capitalised losses, leaving the football club in a different debt position. Supporters want assurance that the current accumulated funding does not create a future risk to the club or the Memorial Stadium.

Is there a ceiling on debt or losses?

BRISA question: Is there a point at which ownership would say the total debt cannot increase any further, or that the current strategy must change?

BRISA asked whether there is a maximum acceptable debt position, using figures such as £27 million or £35 million to illustrate the concern. The question was prompted by previous comments that losses cannot continue indefinitely and by the uncertainty supporters feel when debt rises while the club competes at a lower level.

The club did not provide a debt ceiling, a maximum cumulative funding figure or a defined point at which strategy would change. The response returned to the expectation that future accounts will show improving revenues and reduced costs.

How would a future stadium be funded?

BRISA question: How can the club finance a stadium on top of its existing losses and owner funding? Would outside investment be required?

The club did not provide a funding model. The response was that, once the project reaches the relevant stage, the chairman would be expected to explain how the club intends to deliver and finance it. In the meantime, the stated priority is to improve operational sustainability and reduce reliance on owner support.

This remains a major unanswered issue. Even if the technical and planning questions are resolved, supporters still do not know whether a stadium would be funded directly by ownership, through development

value, through external investors, through debt, through a partnership, or through a combination of these routes.

What the club answered

- No interest is being charged on the chairman's loans to the club.
- The club expects the next financial position to show improvement, with revenues increasing and costs reducing.
- Recent expenditure included investment in assets, staffing, in-house functions, infrastructure and the termination or replacement of existing contracts.
- The club has internal budgets and financial targets, supported by monthly management accounts and weekly operational dashboards.
- The stated long-term aim is to increase self-generated revenue and reduce dependence on owner funding.

What the club could not or did not answer

- Whether the shareholder loans will eventually be capitalised.
- The specific annual loss target the club is working towards.
- Whether ownership has set a maximum acceptable level of cumulative debt or funding.
- What would cause the financial strategy to change.
- How a future stadium project would be financed.
- What the eventual financial end state of the ownership model is intended to be.

Overall conclusions from Meeting 1

The first meeting achieved its core purpose. BRISA introduced a recognised, supporter-led organisation to the club, demonstrated that its priorities are backed by member evidence and established a basis for further meetings. The club engaged constructively and agreed that the conversation could continue.

The most important new stadium insight was the rationale behind the current approach. The club is not presently treating the Memorial Stadium as a closed option. It wants to complete the outstanding technical, safety, transport, utility and planning work before deciding whether redevelopment can proceed or must be ruled out. The club indicated that much of this evidence should come together within 6 to 12 months.

At the same time, BRISA did not receive an overall stadium timetable, a decision deadline or clear milestones for alternative land. The next stage of accountability is therefore straightforward: what remains to be completed, when will the evidence be reviewed, who makes the decision, and what happens immediately afterwards?

On finances, BRISA obtained confirmation that the chairman's loans are not attracting interest and heard the club's explanation that recent losses include substantial investment and restructuring. However, the long-term treatment of the loans, the target level of annual losses, any debt ceiling and the funding route for a stadium all remain unanswered.

BRISA will continue to report both the answers received and the areas where clarity is still required.