



UNLOCKING HARD-PRESSED SPORT CLUBS' VITAL ASSETS

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Let billionaire backers keep their premier league clubs and prima donna players – a Bristol businessman has set up a new company that operates at grassroots level, safeguarding the future of the nation's very smallest, non league clubs.

Chris Bevan, a property specialist has hit on a winning business formula, helping the nation's community sports clubs unlock vital assets from their city centre sites and reinvest them in spacious, state of the art facilities at the edge of town.

"There are tens of thousands of small sports clubs across the country," said Chris. "Whether cricket, football or tennis clubs, they often share the same problems. They struggle to meet new regulations; their facilities are tired and beginning to show their age and they battle to attract local people who expect more – much more than they can offer.

"Salvation for many hard-pressed clubs lies in the fact that they own their town or city centre sites – and thanks to the property boom of recent years, this land is now extremely valuable."

Set up in 2006, Chris Bevan's company, Sports Solutions GB, draws on the experience of its property specialists to help clubs get the best value when selling their existing sites – and to identify and buy an ideal new location.

The firm's sports experts then use their understanding of UK sports funding opportunities to obtain grant aid and source investment. Finally, Sports Solutions GB planning, procurement, project management and construction teams see the development completed and post project support put in place.

In the 18 months since the company was launched, Sports Solutions GB, which has its project management and quantity surveying operation in Clifton, has grown strongly, and the company now has eight members of staff.

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It has also developed close collaborative relationships with other Bristol based specialists, including Stride Treglown, Alder King and Clarke Bond.

Chris, who lives in Clifton, is a keen polo player – he believes that team sports are planted deep in his genes – he is very proud of the fact that his great grand-father played for Clifton RFC and was the captain of the first official Welsh national team in the 1880s.

He is relishing the challenge of building a new business – in tackling this he can draw on his involvement in the rapid development of Fitness First Plc, where he worked as one of the original three-strong property team.

“There were eight clubs when I joined Fitness First,” said Chris. “Four years later we had grown this to 120 in the UK – and the whole chain was the world’s second largest with more than 250 worldwide – this was a huge learning experience.”

Chris left Fitness First to become a director at property development company, ICP Commercial Limited. It was here through involvement with Cirencester Town FC that Chris witnessed the scope for relocating a sports club to new facilities and giving it a new lease of life.

“ICP led a renewal strategy that resulted in Cirencester Town becoming one of the first true community football clubs as recognised by the FA.

“Before renewal, the club had just one pitch – now they have six, in addition to their inviting recreational facilities, indoor all weather training facilities that are unrivalled outside the football league and brand new spectators’ seating and stands.”

This project brought two further collaborators to the Sports Solutions GB start up team. Former Swindon Town FC, Crystal Palace, QPR and Manchester United goalkeeper, Fraser Digby also joined the company at its launch as did Anna Kocerhan, an experienced sports aid specialist, who worked closely with the Football Association and Football Foundation.

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The final member of the launch team was non executive chairman, Ken Chapman, former managing partner of Chapman Warren Planning Consultants, one of the region's most respected planning specialists.

Sports Solution GB has caught the attention of the sports world – considering that there are tens of thousands of community sports clubs across the country the scope is enormous.

“We now have more than 50 projects at various stages – and expect four developments to be on site next year - it is a very exciting time,” said Chris.

“We are creating a totally new concept and specialist branded service to deliver it,” said Chris. “Many sports clubs grasp the opportunities very quickly.

“Our biggest challenge is ensure that they also understand the complexities. They have one opportunity to sell their site and move – they are selling the ‘family silver’ - it is imperative that they make all the right decisions.”

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