

Christmas comes early for Bury fans

- £1 million government levelling up money will save historic Bury FC ground
- Fan-led group will reopen 12,000-seater Gigg Lane for the whole community

Bury football ground will be brought back to life after fans were handed £1 million of government levelling up funding to buy the club's historic Gigg Lane stadium.

The intervention by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport is a huge boost for football fan power and for Bury's loyal supporters, who have been working tirelessly to get their beloved club back up and running.

The club, nicknamed The Shakers, was expelled from the English Football League in 2019 after 125 years of membership and placed into administration just over a year ago.

The grant from the Community Ownership Fund (COF) will help get football back to Gigg Lane for the 2022/23 season.

Gigg Lane is one of the world's oldest professional football stadiums and has been home to Bury FC since the club's founding in 1885.

The vital funding has been awarded to Bury Football Club Supporters Society and will transform the 12,500 seater ground into a cherished asset for the whole community, providing facilities for the men's and women's teams, youth football, local schools and the public.

The COF is backing communities to take control of much-loved local assets that might otherwise be lost, and is a key tool in the government's mission to level up across the United Kingdom.

Secretary of State for Levelling Up Michael Gove said:

The collapse of Bury FC is a stain on English football and the result of the game being ripped out of the hands of the supporters and communities who made it what it is by big business and corporate interest.

I pay enormous tribute to Bury's supporters, who have shown incredible resolve in their fight to bring their beloved club back to life. By helping rescue the historic Gigg Lane stadium, we are helping to put power back into their hands and securing a cherished asset for the wider community.

As we deliver on our central mission to level up the United Kingdom, we are backing community-led projects that bring people

together, restore local pride and benefit towns and cities across the country.

The collapse of Bury FC in 2019 was a catalyst for the government to make a manifesto commitment to conduct a fan-led review of football governance at the last general election. This commitment was then triggered by the failed European Super League bid earlier this year, and we are now considering the review's findings.

The Bury FC case has shown how vital it is that football in England has the necessary regulation and governance structures in place to ensure its long-term sustainability.

Math Pickup, representing Forever Bury and Est 1885 said:

We welcome the news from the Secretary of State for Levelling Up Michael Gove, that our combined efforts with Forever Bury to receive the community ownership funding has been successful.

This funding will allow us the opportunity to complete the purchase of Gigg Lane in order to bring football back to its historic home after a nearly 3 year hiatus.

There are still a few steps left in the process and we hope to provide a further update in the coming days when the legalities have been completed but we thank all the fans for their continued support.

We would also like to thank James Daly MP, Bury Council, Bury College and the football foundation for their support with our application.

Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Nadine Dorries said:

Football clubs are at the heart of our local communities and the fans are at the centre of our national game.

This is levelling up in action and I very much welcome the Community Ownership Fund's £1 million that will go towards ensuring that Gigg Lane continues to play an integral role in the community.

The fan-led review of football governance looked at ways to stop situations like Bury FC happening again, which is why we've endorsed the principle of an independent regulator to take action in this space

The funding announced today will transform Gigg Lane into a multi-use community asset and will include:

- An all-weather pitch and gymnasium for use by local schools and members of the public.
- An indoor facility for adult education, events for the elderly, public meetings and rehabilitation services.
- The redevelopment of the Manchester Road Stand to accommodate NHS diagnostic and physiotherapy provision.

The Shakers have a rich footballing history, lifting the FA Cup twice in the early 20th century and supporting the journeys of British footballing greats including Colin Bell, Terry McDermott and Neville Southall.

In 2018-19, Bury FC finished second in League Two, earning automatic promotion to the higher tier. However, due to longstanding financial difficulties the club was unable to start the season in August 2019 and was expelled from the EFL.

Bury fans were informed that they would need to complete the purchase of the stadium by Christmas in order to prevent it being sold to developers and lost to the community for ever.

Bury is not the only fan-led group set to benefit from the Community Ownership Fund. The John Jenkins Stadium in Portsmouth will provide a new home to Portsmouth FC Women and Moneyfields FC.

'Pompey in the Community' secured almost £1 million to build the new football ground, where they will run programmes for thousands of school children, disability sports groups and members of the public all year-round.

Both Gigg Lane and John Jenkins Stadium will revitalise the grassroots game in the communities of Portsmouth and Bury. They will also be important to spur on growth of the women's game ahead of England hosting this summer's Euro 2022 competition.

The COF is supporting communities across the United Kingdom to purchase and refurbish vital assets at risk of closure, with 21 projects across the UK benefitting from the first round of the £150 million scheme.

The government has reopened the bidding process for those applicants whose bids were eligible but not funded in the first round, to support community groups who urgently need funding to save prized community assets. Further announcements of successful applications from community groups are expected in due course. The second round of COF will be opening in spring 2022.

At the Spending Review, the government announced a further £205 million to build or improve up to 8,000 multi-use sport pitches across the UK, in addition to £25 million being delivered this year.