

IN THE MATTER OF THE APPEAL BOARD OF THE FOOTBALL
ASSOCIATION

BETWEEN

THATCHAM TOWN FC

Appellant

and

THE FA ALLIANCE COMMITTEE

Respondent

DECISION AND WRITTEN REASONS OF THE APPEAL BOARD

1. The Appeal Board conducted a hearing on Wednesday 5 June 2024, to determine an appeal by the Appellant against a decision of the Respondent, dated 17 May 2024.
2. This hearing was conducted by Microsoft Teams (video-conferencing).
3. The Appeal Board consisted of Mr Tony Rock (Chairperson), Mr Daniel Mole, and Mr Glenn Moulton. Mr Conrad Gibbons, the Judicial Services Officer, acted as Secretary to the Appeal Board.
4. The Appellant was represented by the attendance of Mr Paul Ayres, Chairman, with Mr Stuart Bailey and Mr Yashwa Romeo observing. The Respondent was represented by Mr Mark Ives, with Mr Mark Harris, Mr Matt Edkins and Mr James Earl observing.

The Hearing

5. The Respondent, on 17 May 2024, notified the Appellant of their decision that the Appellant was to be laterally moved from the Isthmian League Division One South Central to Southern League Division One South for the 2024/25 season.
6. The Appeal Board, having taken into account the submissions of the parties and having given the Appeal Bundle careful consideration, noted the following:

7. The Appeal Board thanks both parties for the manner in which they made their submissions.
8. The Appeal Board noted that the Appellant was appealing on the following ground:
 - a. Came to a decision to which no reasonable such body could have come.
9. The Appeal Board unanimously dismissed the appeal on this ground.
10. The Appeal Board reached this decision considering the following:
 - a. The following is a summary of the primary considerations of the Appeal Board, however the absence in these reasons of any particular point, or submission, should not imply that the Appeal Board did not take such point, or submission, into consideration when it considered the matter and reached its findings.
 - b. The Appellant accepted that the FA Alliance Committee (FAAC) had a tough job to do when trying to allocate clubs to leagues. Planning for Season 2024/25 started a year ago and at no point did the Appellant ever consider the Southern League as a viable option. They are now the most easterly team in the league with a significant increase in costs, particularly travel costs. The Appellant described, in detail, the impact this decision would have on player retention, the local community, the environment and support from home and away fans. The Appellant had concerns that this decision could have serious implications for the survivability of the club and that relegation may have been a better option.
 - c. The Appellant acknowledged they were considering this issue through a 'single lens' and in their view it was 'Thatcham first'. They believed that geographical location and associated costs were more important than trying to balance the football pyramid by having 22 clubs in each of the Step 4 leagues. The Appellant stated that compromises have to

be made and identified an alternative solution involving the Southern League Central.

- d. The Respondent accepted that Thatcham Town FC are at the extreme of the Southern League Division One South's geographical footprint and are vulnerable to lateral movement. The Respondent stated that with nearly 1000 clubs in the National League System it was not possible to have detailed discussions with every club who may be the subject of relegation, promotion or lateral movement. It was for that very reason that the FAAC had league representation. The FAAC were keen to maintain sporting integrity by retaining, where possible, the same number of clubs in each Step 4 league. They acknowledged that this was not always possible and cited a recent example where a compromise had to be made. The Respondent argued that this compromise was as a result of decisions made outside of the FAAC's direct control.
- e. The Respondent said that travelling times and distances were clearly important, but had to be considered alongside a number of other factors. When moving Thatcham Town FC, they considered a number of options, including the possibility of moving Horndean, Moneyfields and Worcester City. They felt it was important to consider the pairing of clubs and concluded that the best option was to place Thatcham Town FC and Didcot Town FC in the Southern League Division One South.
- f. The Appeal Board reminded itself that it is unable to impose its own solution in such cases and is only empowered by the FA Appeal Regulations to review the original decision of the Respondent. When looking at league allocations objectively, the Appellant finds itself in a location where it is a club on the border of a number of possible leagues and the Respondent must exercise objective discernment when placing clubs. The Appeal Board concluded that, whilst alternative solutions were available to the Respondent, their decision to laterally move Thatcham Town FC to the Southern League Division One South was reasonable and one that they were entitled to make.

11. The Appeal Board considered the matter of costs and decided that there would be no order as to costs.
12. The Appeal Board order that the appeal fee be forfeited.
13. The Appeal Board's decision is final and binding.

Tony Rock (Chair)

Daniel Mole

Glenn Moulton

6 June 2024