

I am extremely disappointed that the RFU last night elected to suspend London Irish from the Gallagher Premiership.

As a lifelong fan of London Irish, the club's suspension is bitterly disappointing, and I understand the sadness felt by the thousands of our loyal supporters and the frustrations of our incredible coaches, medical staff, back-office team, and players. But this decision has ultimately ended any hope of an acquisition of the club and has regrettably forced us to file for administration this morning.

Over the last seven months, I have been working closely with the RFU, PRL and representatives of NUE Equity to complete a widely publicised deal to acquire the club. Negotiations have been complex from the start, further complicated by issues regarding our tenancy at Brentford's stadium and unrealistic demands from the governing body. But throughout, I have remained confident a deal could be made that would secure the long-term future of London Irish.

As we neared the completion of the deal, I continually received promises, from both NUE Equity and Redstrike, that the acquisition would be completed imminently, and that funds would arrive within days. Right up to yesterday's final deadline, we continued to receive verbal assurances from the group. I have trusted that these were not hollow promises and agreed to financially support the club throughout to ensure it could finish the season and give the group time to conclude the deal.

Sadly, the promises have failed to materialise, and, despite our very best efforts, it was not possible to meet the conditions set by the RFU Club Financial Viability Group yesterday afternoon. Its subsequent disappointing decision to force our suspension has proved the tipping point where we will not be able to meet our current and future financial obligations. And after assessing our options last night, we agreed that administration offered the safest path forward for the club.

Since acquiring London Irish in 2013, I have made a significant financial investment to ensure we could compete at the highest level once again. We have worked tirelessly over the last few years to develop a more sustainable business model, trying to tap into the Irish community, developing new revenue streams, investing in our fantastic academy to develop future stars, and of course bringing the club back to its spiritual home in West London after 20 years away.

However, the reality is that professional rugby in this country is going through a hugely challenging time and, as we know, many clubs are sadly still struggling to get back on a stable path following the pandemic. I have publicly stated, on numerous occasions, that I would be willing to pass on the stewardship of the club if we could find the right person or group to take it forward and secure its long-term future. After a decade of supporting the club financially, it is not feasible for me to continue absorbing the multi-million-pound losses of the club each year, indefinitely.

The comments from the RFU Chair, Tom Ilube, last night completely overlook the precarious situation other clubs are currently in. Collectively, owners of clubs are working very hard to transform their models, but the lack of real support, at times, is non-existent. And it speaks volumes that Ralph Rimmer and Chris Pilling have been appointed by the Government as independent advisers to work on the future stability of rugby union in the UK.

The professional game in this country needs to be radically transformed. And the current leadership must urgently review its practices from top to bottom if it has a desire to see professional rugby continue in England.

Administration has always been the last resort, and something we hoped we could avoid. And we bitterly regret the difficulties it will present.

My focus is now on working with the appointed administrator and I hope that the club will come out of administration as quickly as possible. This development does not affect London Irish Amateur Rugby Football Club, to whom we recently granted a long lease on the Hazelwood premises and playing fields, or the operation of the Hazelwood facility whose facilities are extensively used for the benefit of all types of sporting activities and for the wider benefit of the local community.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone for the support you have shown the club over the years. I share your sadness and frustration at today's news, and I very much hope the administrators can find a way forward for London Irish Rugby Club.