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**Paying to hear the People's Anthem**

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Barclaycard is putting its money into the mouth of the football terraces. Or, to be more exact, the sponsors of the Premiership have decided to allocate £10,000 for the appointment of a "*chants laureate*".

This lucky individual, drawn from the throngs of paying spectators who go through the turnstiles every weekend, will have the dubious honour of "*composing chants*" and "*observing key moments*" during the football season. Quite what Barclaycard hope to gain from this rather bizarre publicity stunt remains to be seen. However, one of the most amusing aspects of the campaign has to be the requirement on the incumbent people's poet to "*avoid obscenities*".

Now, I am no expert, but as someone who lives in a household of season ticket holders, my understanding is that in the world of terrace chants, four letters is almost certainly better than two. And while I don't particularly want to spend my own afternoons swearing at the ref, I will defend the right of the thousands who do.

Cash or no cash, the reality is, that football songs do not need a stamp of pseudo intellectual approval, much less a rigorous documentation of origin and rationale. Rather, they are emotional and at times highly successful rallying calls which ebb and flow with the enthusiasm of the crowd.

The thing is, there are some things in the world which are just not meant to be sanitized. And, it is a lesson which needs to be learnt not only in the Barclaycard Boardroom but right across a public sector hell bent on Community Plans, Town Centre Strategies and Vision Statements. Documents which call for "*green and pleasant places*", "*access for all*" and "*improved quality of life*" are pathetic placebos which do nothing to reflect real emotions on the ground and even less to galvanise real action in the town hall.



The whole process of dreaming dreams for the places and spaces of the future has become the equivalent of some half baked corporately sponsored attempt to sanitise the soul of the city. The challenge is to capture what is a far more diverse, more passionate and more challenging call for change. This means getting beyond what is “safe” and “acceptable” to hear. What we need is something sanctioned by its own credibility and the endorsement of thousands of voices.

Afterall, as Barclaycard will soon discover, giving a crowd of 40,000 a sheet with words and music kind of misses the point.