

TOWN TALK! with Simon Ashberry

It's fitting that there's an exciting title race brewing up in the United Counties League this season.

The fourth and final phase of a major shake-up of the structure of non-league football is due to be implemented in August. It started in 2004-05 when the Conference North and South (now National League) divisions were first established.

This final phase follows a review of Steps 3 and 4 which aims to reduce travelling costs and encourage more Step 5 clubs to move up the pyramid.

Just to be clear, the United Counties League is at Step 5 so this should give ambitious clubs in the UCL a better chance to move up to Step 4 leagues such as the Northern Premier League or Southern League (as the likes of Spalding, Peterborough Sports, AFC Rushden and Diamonds, St Neots and St Ives have done in recent years).

The shake-up sees both Step 3 and Step 4 expanded, with the 276 clubs currently playing in Steps 1, 2, 3 and 4 rising to 296 from 2018-19.

The three current Step 3 divisions of 24 clubs will change to four divisions of 22 clubs and the six Step 4 divisions will go up from 136 clubs across six divisions to seven divisions with 20 clubs in each.

That means 16 more clubs at Step 3 and four more at Step 4 - a real opportunity for UCL clubs. Only teams finishing bottom in the current six divisions at Step 4 will be relegated, with 26 clubs being promoted from across all the Step 5 leagues.



Simon Ashberry is Boston Town Football Club's webmaster and archivist, and author of the club's official history 1964-2004 "Come And Sit With Us".



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