



13/05/2026

Sunderland AFC: Tom Burwell (TB), Florent Ghisolfi (FG), Paul Kingsmore (PK), Georgi Rusev (GR), Steve Wood (SW), Emily Jewitt (EJ), Chris Waters (CW)

Supporter Groups

Branch Liaison Council: Jim Gilling (JG), Cath Reid (CR), Peter Oliver (PO)
Red and White Army: Andrew Hird (AH), David Rose (DR), Ian High (IH)
Senior Supporters Association: Lynn Glendenning (LG), Michelle Barraclough (MB)
Individual Representatives: Matthew Foreman (MF), Zaf Iqbal (ZI)
Apologies: Patricia Phillipson, Daniel Stokell

Welcome & Introductions

CW welcomed all.

Tom Burwell (TB) thanked everyone for the warm welcome he has received since joining Sunderland AFC. The club is in a good place and TB reconfirmed his commitment to engagement with both the Collective & the entire fan base.

Florent Ghisolfi (FG) sees fans as part of a successful performance on the pitch, that the connection between the fans & the players is essential and thanked supporters for their contribution to a good season.

Finance, Governance & Commercial

Recent changes in organisational structure have not been reactive; they have been strategically planned (TB).

The ownership has consistently looked at what the club will look like in the future, assessing what a successful Sunderland AFC looks like in the Premier League rather than the EFL. The club now has a £200 million turnover with a global reach, compared to a £44 million turnover within a 30-mile radius. It is essential to be competitive and commercially successful in a wider market.

The business and football side of the club will be prudently scaled this summer and will be a different organisation by then, but with a continued connection with the local community. There will be a significant investment programme from the owners, in conjunction with Delaware. Hospitality boxes are being refitted and any 30-year-old areas refurbished. There will be improvements to the fan experience, including an expansion of safe standing provision, wow-factor enhancements for fans entering the stadium, and significant academy investment. LED upgrades will improve both revenue and the fan experience.

Paul Kingsmore (PK) confirmed that 2,500 season ticket holders in the new safe standing area, in the South West Corner, were informed during the renewal process of their options to stay or move to a seated area.

Zaf Iqbal (ZI) asked about the LED boards in the East Stand returning to their original position. FG will see what will happen with this.



A new Head of Grounds has been recruited; pitches will be improved to match the higher expectations & aspirations of players which are at the highest end of Premier league expectations.

Dave Rose (DR) thanked the ownership for their continued investment and acknowledged Kristjaan Speakman's (KS) significant contribution to the Academy & player development. He sought reassurance of the continued attention to detail demonstrated by KS.

The Academy is the entry point to the ecosystem of Sunderland AFC; for parents & young players. KS was a big part of that inspiration & aspiration. TB. The academy is important and that responsibility lies with FG.

Transition is part of any football club and this change was anticipated. FG worked well with KS during the transition. FG is ready to face the next challenge, players from the academy now need to be ready to perform for top 10 Premier League. There are now 10 people in the scouting team. The club is currently recruiting a Head of the Academy.

Sunderland's business is competing with 19 other Premier League teams every week, with security, events, and engagement. TB wants to compete on every front. The standards on the football pitch are setting the standard for business as well. These are the standards to be competitive.

Before the first game of the season, FG asked players to 'Be Sunderland' and do their best every day. Results were not the focus, representing Sunderland in the best way possible was the aim; to maintain commitment and performance, and results will follow. FG does not think small, after learning from the club historian that Sunderland was once the best team in the country, FG believes we can aim high again.

TB is developing a culture of high performance across the club; on and off the pitch, with heart and humility, the club can represent Sunderland.

Ian High (IH) asked about the targets for overseas revenue, referencing the forthcoming pre-season tour in the USA.

The summer tour to the United States will be important, TB, but it is a difficult market to cut through and maximise revenue in. Sunderland is unique, the club has a connection to Africa. Sunderland AFC had more players at AFCON than any other Premier League club. A significant proportion of business discussions are with African companies and are happy to position ourselves with opportunities in Africa. International fan growth is important.

There are 19 other Premier League clubs, but what Sunderland offers inside the stadium is unique. The club must remain connected to the local community. The intention is to export what Sunderland means to the world, TB.

AH asked for comments on recent media reports that the club is up for sale.

TB could not comment, but it isn't something the ownership group has mentioned to anyone in the room.

CW confirmed that there are kit launches scheduled for June, July & August.

Ticketing & Membership

TB thanked fan groups for bringing ticketing cases to the club's attention. The initial cases brought by the Red and White Army have been resolved. Additional cases brought by the new deadline of Monday 11



May, 12:00 pm, have been contacted. Some have been referred to the review panel. TB acknowledged service comes first, that more consultation is required before any fundamental changes to policy are made.

The club is addressing the issue of fans whose tickets were rescinded for the Newcastle United away fixture. Fans with a legitimate entitlement to a ticket will be contacted by the club.

A Working Group for premium season ticket holders will be established, giving fans in corporate areas the same consideration as General admission ticket holders.

Lynn Glendenning (LG) raised the issue of fans not being able to move from premium to General Admission, because of affordability.

TB stands by decision but acknowledges that purchase history is a factor. Fans with a history of only premium purchases will not move, but the club hears the fans.

TB praised staff in the ticket office, acknowledging the magnificent job they do, but the abuse given to these staff by some fans is wholly unacceptable and this must be addressed. Elements of ticketing customer service will be digitised, but good service will come first. The club will assess how best to support people who need assistance, there will always be a human option. During the summer there will be a shift from Ticket Office support to Customer Service supported by technology.

Fan groups do not condone the abuse of staff, DR.

Cath Reid (CR) asked if physical season ticket cards would be available in 2027-28. Numbers are reducing but PK confirmed there is no intention of removing this provision for fans who need one.

MF queried a £40.00 charge to move season ticket seats which was not communicated to fans.

The administration fee was £20.00, PK. If a fan has paid more than £20.00 per person to move a seat, contact the club for reimbursement; help.asksafc.com

In 2025 the club moved to Seat Geek for ticketing, AH asked if feedback has been given to Seat Geek to develop season ticket renewal processes for 2027-28.

PK confirmed feedback is given to Seat Geek regularly. Delays in phase release were due to attempts to improve customer service. Phase 2 was closed to offer a bespoke service to fans to purchase season tickets. A significant number of tickets were sold in this phase. A third phase will be sold in due course.

Ticketing is worth millions. It is an important aspect of any business, and the club will get it right, TB.

A membership scheme will be introduced in the summer. It will be built to service fans locally & across the world, with both free & paid options.

DR sought reassurance that there would be fan consultation on this matter before decisions were made.

Stadium, Infrastructure & Accessibility

After submitting a 126-page report to the Premier League, Steve Wood (SW) received notification that dispensation for 2026-27 to keep away fans in their current location. The Premier League will be conducting its own independent analysis to determine if this dispensation will be extended. SW believes having away fans where they are is a success. Premier League reports are positive, SAFC stewards regularly receive praise for how away fans are welcomed. There have been no FA reports this year for any fan related issues.



Supporters' Collective Meeting

There has been a 20% decrease in arrests, ejections and refusals of home fans at the Stadium of Light, and 6 fixtures this season have been police-free fixtures. No other Premier League club has been able to do this, SW. The integration between stewards and home fans is very positive.

There has been a 50% reduction in reports of racial abuse incidents, and these are being reported directly to stewards who fans regularly see, as they are deployed to consistent positions within the Stadium.

The increased diversity of the playing squad is helping make the community more inclusive, IH.

SW is considering a non-segregation match next season. Safety and security is being delivered at a level above other Premier League clubs. SW commended Sunderland fans for making the club an example across the league.

LG agreed that not having police at games is positive. TB understands the presence of police can be seen as an indication of potential problems; having no police makes the environment more welcoming and inclusive. TB wants to celebrate these successes and asked for support in getting the message out.

This is a testament to the long-term vision, changes in processes, and changes to policy made with the fans at their heart, DR, when fans are treated with respect they respond in kind.

Next season SAFC stewards will travel with fans on busy LNER trains after a positive trial at the Bournemouth game. Behaviour on the trains has improved.

The club is facing pressure from the Premier League to search all home fans. SW asked for fans to please work with SAFC stewards if asked to be searched before a home game.

Jim Gilling (JG) applauded the stewards who travel to Sunderland away games for their support and service.

The club is considering relocating the away fan coaches within the stadium footprint and a charge for away fan coaches will be introduced.

TB confirmed stadium expansion is a constant topic of discussion internally. The club will continue to explore options and aims to maximise the opportunity for as many fans as possible to attend, generating revenue for the club. It may potentially cost the club £250 million for expansion. The council continues to be supportive of the club's ambitions.

A lengthy waiting list for season tickets is a recognition of how the club is performing, but TB acknowledges that this will rise and fall. Any proposal for expansion will have to consider this. 16% of seats at Hill Dickinson are in Premium areas, only 6% of seats at the Stadium of Light are.

An Accessibility Report for the stadium will be shared with the Accessibility Working Group at the next meeting on 18th May. A budget has been allocated to improve accessibility for supporters. Debra Curniskey has been recruited as the club's Disability Access Officer.

The final Accessibility Working Group meeting of the season will be held on 16 June. If anyone is interested in attending Accessibility Working Group meetings, please contact the Red and White Army, the BLC or the Senior Supporters.

The Red and White Army proposed that a member of the Sunderland AFC Disabled Supporters Association be invited to the future Collective meetings. PK & TB agreed, diverse representation is important.



Regarding final choices for Legends Way, Emily Jewitt (EJ) confirmed a social media poll was used to gather fan preferences. The younger demographic of social media may have influenced results. Fans suggested Peter Reid & Jermaine Defoe be included.

Atmosphere & Matchday Experience

There will be a Stadium Working Group meeting, with Chris Ferguson, at the Stadium on 18 June.

The Premier League Fan Engagement Standard report submission deadline is 26 June. There will be a Fan Engagement Assessment meeting in June for fan representatives and groups from the Collective to review fan engagement in 2025-26.

The club will send minutes of Collective meetings (the SAFC Fan Advisory Board), summaries of working groups activities and a senior level review of the Fan Engagement Plan to the Premier League.

In a recent Premier League Matchday Fan Experience and Engagement survey, completed by 2,000 Sunderland fans, the club received an overall score of 80.3, well above the league average of 60, placing Sunderland AFC second in the Premier League.

- Match attending Sunderland fans are very positive about the Club in its first season back in the Premier League since 2016/17. The Club's Matchday Fan Experience and Engagement Score of 80.3 is well above the League average of 67.0 and places Sunderland 2nd in the League.
- Ratings of general Club impressions including positivity, perceptions of being well-run and having a long-term vision are the highest in the League, as are ratings of the match atmosphere at the Stadium of Light. Fan engagement metrics such as maintaining the ethos and traditions of the club and listening to supporters are also the highest in the League.
- Ratings of on pitch performance, such as recruiting the strongest possible squad, youth development and investment in facilities are extremely positive and well above the League average.
- Most Sunderland fans consider the Stadium of Light to be welcoming and family-friendly, outperforming the League average on both measures. Arrival time at the ground is varied, although the most common time to arrive is 15-29 minutes ahead of kick-off, with 1 in 4 fans arriving at this time.
- Perceptions of the facilities on matchdays is mixed. Ratings of toilet facilities, Wi-Fi-connectivity and mobile phone are about average compared to the rest of the League, whereas services and amenities including announcements in the stadium, the quality/range of food and drink, and provision of digital tickets are in the top half of the League, with the matchday programme/magazine topping the League table.
- Sunderland's overall fan engagement is very highly regarded, and well above the League average.
- Priority access to tickets would be the most encouraging benefit of a membership programme, followed by exclusive discounts.

The club does not take these positive perceptions for granted, and recognises that work still needs to be done, TB. Issues identified by fans in the survey with the toilets and Wi-Fi mirror the club's understanding of areas identified for improvement.

The election of two individual fan representatives to the Supporters Collective will begin in June & July. The club placed on record thanks to Matthew Foreman & Zaf Iqbal for their commitment and contribution while on the Collective, inviting them to be part of the working groups & to apply again to represent fellow fans.



Supporters' Collective Meeting

The club is working hard to be at the forefront of concert promoters' consideration and to bring other sporting opportunities to the Stadium of Light. Future rugby & boxing events are possibilities.

AOB

The lack of draught beer in Quinn's Bar (MB) is a supplier issue that the club is trying to address (PK).

DR sought clarification on the Women's team and its changing structure.

TB was mandated, 12 months ago, by the SAFC Board to look at how best to position our Women's team to achieve success. Partners were engaged who would develop the Women's team. 80% of the Women's team was sold. SAFC remains engaged with the Women's team and there are a number of agreements in place between the new owners and SAFC.

One is a ground sharing agreement. The new owners will also invest in the academy primarily to accommodate the Women's team. There is a sponsorship agreement. An Intellectual Property License agreement ensures there will always be a Sunderland AFC Women's team, and that the brand will be managed appropriately. A Master Service agreement means the club will continue to support the Women's team with ticketing distribution & events. Existing support will continue; any additional services / work will be invested in by the new owners.

The new owners have the experience & expertise to develop the Women's team, which will strengthen the overall SAFC ecosystem.

The club gave credit to Alex Clark, Women's team General Manager, for the work he and his team have done in the last 5 years to bring Sunderland AFC Women to this point.

Reading the oppositions starting 11 just before kick-off can be reconsidered.

FG would like to kick start the atmosphere at the start of the second half and wondered if singing a new song at the end of half-time would develop the atmosphere.