

Fan Advisory Board – First Meeting
Wednesday 27th March 2024, 17:30, Bramall Lane.

Attendees

SUFC Representatives

Stephen Bettis (SB)- CEO (FAB Club Chair)
Jon Helliwell (JH)- Supporter Liaison & Disability Access Manager (FES Project Lead)
Kevin Cookson (KC)- Head of Media
Hayley Wheeler (HW)- Ticketing Manager
Andy Chadwick (AC)- Head of Facilities
Mark Butler (MB)- Head of Safety & Security
Adam Rivers (AR)-Compass General Manager
Lauren Jones (LJ)- Executive PA

FAB Representatives

Bob Dyson (FAB Co-Chair)
Bob Uttley
Jill Pyper
Kathryn Woodward
James Laley
Derek Stillwell
Phil Ridley
Callum Cheswick

JH opened the meeting and thanked everyone for their work done so far.

Introductions were made.

LJ was confirmed as minute taker.

FAB Agenda Items	
Facilities Questions AC	General Better maintenance & management needed across the entire stadium in Fan concourse areas – general facilities, cleanliness, hygiene products, water temperature and flooding. - AC explained that what we can do facilities wise, comes down to funding as it requires significant funding to change them. This is a priority and something we want to change. Regarding cleanliness, we have recently changed our cleaning provider and are seeing good improvements. - Feasibility checks are currently being carried out for the KOP, John St & South stand looking at what upgrades could be carried should investment not be available. - SB explained we are continually looking at improving the facilities and various projects have been completed this season, which we may not have communicated enough. - AC confirmed that 140 projects and 1600 re-active maintenance jobs (such as leaking taps) have been carried out this season. Projects include: Academy Projects: ➤ New Artificial Pitch ➤ Extended 1st Team Gym ➤ New 1st Team Restaurant ➤ Purchased new grounds team equipment ➤ Refurbishing the Academy restaurant

	➤ Refurbished Academy and coaching staff changing rooms ➤ Installed new fire alarm ➤ Refurbished first team analysis offices ➤ New physio & recovery facility Bramall Lane Projects: ➤ Replaced 2000 Light fittings ➤ Installed generator back up to south stand ➤ Refurbished hundreds of fire doors across the stadium ➤ Refurbished the boxes, 1889 which improves revenue income ➤ Replacing the stadium fire alarm ➤ Refurbishing all disabled toilets ➤ Installed new interview room ➤ New 1st team showers ablutions and recovery baths ➤ Hotel refurbishment ➤ Big screen resolution has been improved ➤ Painted the KOP ➤ Dugout & Media Upgrade • We are also refurbishing all of the disabled toilets for the start of next season. • All agreed that the facility work carried out at the Club needs to be communicated better so that supporters can understand what is being done and where money is being spent. Roofing - KOP to Corner don't align and fans get soaked when it's raining. There's also a similar issue in the Press Box in the South Stand. • Roof replacement would be considered in a larger scheme. Roof repairs are carried out frequently and a detailed survey of all 4 roofs have been carried out along with full clearance of all guttering, which has reduced the number of leaks substantially. PA System - Cannot hear the announcements on the KOP and quality has deteriorated over the last few years. • AC confirmed the PA system and fire alarm are both out to tender. The fire alarm is highly likely to be replaced with the infrastructure to support a new PAVA system for when funding is available.
Media / Communications KC	Official interviews via Club SUTV rather than fan channels & National media. • We can do this but often there are good reasons behind why we choose other methods, such as the BBC Radio Sheffield interview with SB a few weeks ago. I didn't want fans to think it was sanitised and that we pre-arranged the questions, I thought it was important that fans got answers to their own questions, hence going on Football Heaven. SB did interviews with other local media too – Sheffield Star and Yorkshire Post and no questions were off limits. We have good relationships with the local media and some of our fan base use them as their source of Blades news. There will also be club interviews going forward, too. • PR said that part of the problem is the fact the owner gives interviews and updates to the media (such as TalkSport) before the supporters. KC explained that as the owner he is entitled to speak to whichever media outlet he chooses to. However, there is no malice intended (towards the local media) and the owner thinks by doing this, that he is talking to the supporters.

	Early updates on pre-season tours to enable fan attendance. - KC explained that this is difficult because we often don't know the details until very last minute ourselves. Last year the delay with the announcement was due to a contract that hadn't been signed, there was no hidden agenda. Also, these games and/or training often change at late notice, so it would be unfair to announce too early for fans to make travel arrangements and everything changes. FAB Comms – full transparency & importantly fans want to feel engaged. - KC confirmed this is an open forum and we want transparency, which is why we have these meetings. Minutes will be published and happy for FAB members to communicate with other fans as they see fit. FAB Minutes: Can the Board minutes be posted across Social Media - JH confirmed that minutes from the FAB meetings will be shared on the official website, under the Fan Advisory Board section. It will also be announced on social media once these have been published. - JL suggested that we have the main bullet points shared as well as the whole minutes, in order to keep fans engaged. Can more context & detail be provided on the Behind-the-Scenes posts on transfers, medicals etc. as per the ones in Chris Wilders previous managerial tenure. - That's the plan, we have a fantastic content team who are always look for new ways to give behind the scenes footage. However, there are challenges – medicals etc, medical practitioners are not fans of having cameras in their places of work and sometimes, particularly with international players, the club's media/content teams cannot get access to them until they arrive in Sheffield. Message taken on board and we, too, would like to produce more of this content. Team Sheet: Please return to Positional order from the current Numerical order! - The reason is that simply sometimes that the media/content teams do not know the formation and are guessing, the manager, rightly, does not share the formation before kick-off. Additionally, this is for footballing reasons, too, if the manager changes formation or has players playing out of their usual position, it would keep the opposition guessing up until kick-off.
Catering - Food & Beverages AR, SB	What influence does the Club have on the service partner: Quality, price, selection, kids' meals Vegetarian options, allergen information Speed of service, inability to access/purchase & knowledge of staff - The Club has full influence. Compass put ideas forward and the Club approve or decline them. We have put a lot of effort in to updating our catering facilities (all hospitality kitchens have been refurbished this year which was a massive project). - We are looking to invest in the Kop as we realise this is the area that needs it most. It is really difficult to get through the crowds at the tills so we are looking at installing self-service drinks machines which will supply beer, spirits and soft drinks, which would speed up service massively. Each machine is £16,000 and we are looking to install a couple at each side of the tills. - AR explained Compass are currently looking at different beer brands and also looking to change the pies served in the kiosks. - The Pukka pies served at tonight's meeting were donated as samples and AR asked the group for feedback. All agreed they were very good but feel the pies served on matchdays

	currently are always very dry. AR said that the pies should be alternated around the oven to keep them fresh and prevent them from drying out and that quality checks should also be done. AR will reiterate this to the team. Options for Disabled away fans • Away supporters are made aware of this prior to attending Bramall Lane. • Currently a complimentary hot drink is provided. • There is no concourse access for them. We have discussed at whether we can have staff serving them at their seats but this would not work as they would have to walk past the away fans and through the concourses with hot food and drink. We don't have a designated kitchen in that area that we can use. • Club and Compass consistently looking at options for this and looking at how other clubs overcome this challenge should they have it. 10-year contract signed following our last meeting which was a key issue. Context needed on the deliverables, influence, control etc. for all areas of the stadium. • SB explained that managing catering in house is not doable and the Club believe Compass to be the best provider for the job. Having travelled to stadiums across the country, SB believes the food at Bramall Lane is of a much higher standard than the majority of other football clubs (including Premier League Clubs).
Ticketing & Loyalty HW	Points System - Plenty of views including ours – the change to 20% to ballot a good move & further revamp needed but to what – be good to see Club feedback & analysis • HW explained that this is a discussion we are constantly having at the Club and trying to improve. • BD asked about re-setting loyalty points like some other teams do. HW explained that because we haven't re-set ours for so long and supporters' points have built up so much, this would cause massive issues, which is why we decided on the ballots to make it fair. We have found this way to be positive and means we are seeing more children coming through, who are the fans of the future. • SB explained that we put a survey out and asked supporters what they wanted to see and the majority said a ballot. We started doing 10% of tickets in a ballot, then because it was going so well, we increased it to 20%. • HW talked through the ticketing statistics and confirmed that out of the 16 away games so far this season, 8 of these have gone to general sale. We appreciate some of this may be due to results on the pitch. However, one of these games was West Ham which was the third game into the season on a Saturday afternoon. • The Club believes the ballot system is the best way of working at this moment in time. Season Tickets - Is it possible to change policy and sell them for the Bramall Lane Upper • HW confirmed that we do sell season tickets in the Bramall Lane Upper corner but not in the main upper stand. The reason is because we have to offer 3000 tickets to away fans in the Premier League, and the away stand only holds 2800. Therefore, if the away Club demands the full 3000 allocation, we would have to take 200 from Bramall Lane upper. - Timing & launch for 24/25 season, concerns regards a price increase & option to purchase via finance over 3/6 months • Issues with previous provider in terms of influxes of missed payments, last years PayPal offering was very successful therefore we will once again only be offering PayPal credit options for the 24/25 season.

	SUFC Women - Why Alfreton for FAC games – if a necessity could we move to a nearer stadium? • The Club is currently undertaking a Facilities Review ahead of next season, specific to alternative venues for the Women’s 1st Team when Bramall Lane isn’t available due to fixture clashes. At the moment, due to League ground grading, we are limited in terms of acceptable stadiums, also need to take into consideration pitch usage and scheduling. • SB explained that we want the women’s team to play here, it’s good for them and the fans which is why we have the league games here. - Suggestion to section off the stands for Championship home games to concentrate the fans and provide a better atmosphere. • The initial issue we have is that Season Ticket holders have specific seats across the stand, meaning we can’t section off areas this season. However, this is something that is being discussed ahead of next season and will be worked into any season ticket plans. Away Travel - Can the Club contribute & discount the cost of travel on the official coaches when games are chosen for live TV coverage? • Away travel is not a massive revenue scheme for the Club, that said, at present we are not in a position to make a loss. Club does not get a specific payment for each game that is televised. - The pricing is higher than independent operators with no discounts for Children. • JH explained that we use executive coaches where we provide a much better service. They supply luxury coaches with toilets and disabled access. Also, they don’t always sell out, so this has to be factored into the price. Any discounts on children/conc would have to be passed onto the cost of an adult ticket. NFC Ticketing • More comms to fans will be released once the Clubs internal testing and trials are complete. • FAB members to release to release some key talking points via social media channels in advance of the FAQ’s being released.
Health & Safety/Incidents MB	Stewarding - Excellent feedback on the IPM stewards following the change. Would it be possible to train & provide dedicated stewards for the disabled fans. • MB said the Club would love to do this but we need reliable, designated staff and this is difficult. Hopefully we will be able to do this in the future. • JH explained we are looking at recruiting additional SLO’s for next season and that one of these will be a designated matchday disabled supporter SLO. Stadium Access - With the cordoning off of roads in the vicinity of the Stadium pre & post-match disabled supporters cannot gain nearby access to the ground. Could passes be provided for disabled drivers together with a designated drop off point for non-drivers. • MB said this is something that has been raised several times since he joined the Club 3 months ago, so he has been trying to research the plans and why they were put in place by the travel management company. • The Club has come to an agreement that the roads beyond John St (Clough Road, Baron and Countess) also the London Road side of John St are accessible to blue badge holders. MB will chase the communication of this. Racism/Abuse

	- Does the Club have a plan for dealing with offenders with significant punishments for those found guilty? • SB confirmed the Club has a zero-tolerance policy to racism and abuse and that if a supporter is found to behave in this way, we will (and do) issue bans. We also work closely with Kick It Out. • MB explained that with online abuse cases where it gets passed to court, this can take a long time to be dealt with and we are not always updated on the outcome. Both of these factors make it difficult for us to publish this, sometimes months after the actual event.
Other	Following answers summarised in minutes and not discussed as part of the meeting. Maddy Cusack SB - Update on the investigation, if possible, by the Club. • The investigation is currently with the FA and we are waiting to hear from them. - Retirement of the Women's SUFC No 8 Shirt in recognition of Maddy Cusack. • This will be addressed once the investigation has been completed. Fan Zone JH/SB - Much needed to create atmosphere, increase sales pre and post-match to capture revenues. • As a Club we are constantly looking at different options for this as this is something we support too. Currently awaiting outcome of Compound Car Park and whether we are successful in acquiring this. If so, this will most certainly be looked at as a Fan Zone in the first instance. Alternatives such as a 'Fan Street' on John Street are also being explored. Junior Fans Forum - To improve Junior Fan engagement, attain their views and provide them with a channel specific to their needs. • Fan Experience team currently working on a larger project alongside our new FAB, as to how we currently work with and recognise all of our supporter groups going forwards. Further details hoping to be announced prior to the new season. Green & Sustainability SB/AR/AC - Does the Club have a plan? • Yes, Compass (catering) and facilities currently have a number of sustainable initiatives and plans in place. WIFI JH - Access across the whole ground as 4G almost impossible to connect. • The stadium currently doesn't have the infrastructure for this. IT team are working with our partner IDAQ to see if this is something that can be implemented in the future. Retail SB - The Blades clothing range is expensive given the quality & that many items are off the shelf products with the addition of a Blades badge/logos. Can this be addressed to match the Blades Retro products that are excellent & good value. • Errea part of the United World scheme and as such cannot be changed at present. Retail team consistently monitor and benchmark prices across other football clubs and clothing shops. - Could a sensory range of toys for Children be introduced? JH • Sensory Packs are being launched this summer ahead of the new season. Mental Health JH - Andys Man Club membership and awareness is growing across the UK. Does the Club have plans to include under the Community Foundation? • Sheffield United Community Foundation currently run a Talk Club every week supporting men's mental health. Our fixture against Burnley this season will also be in support of men's mental health. Safe Standing SB

	- Is there an appetite, is it part of KOP redevelopment plans? • From our perspective, we are supportive of safe-standing and aware that supporters would embrace it, but the honest answer is that we won't do it until we redevelop a stand. At the moment, logistically it would be tough, and we would have to move people around, which would make some people happy and some not. Fan Group Idea JH - Potential formation of a Fan Group that oversees matchday Fan Activations/Tifos. Potential to raise money through fans/sponsors/donations. • Club to discuss with FAB potential to form a fan group that works with supporters and the club on supporter lead matchday initiatives. This to be discussed further during this coming pre-season.
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