

Birmingham City Football Club
WM Police and Supporters Forum: January 2017

Location: Legends Lounge (18:30)

Chair: Rachele Johnson (SLO) – BCFC

BCFC Representatives: Dave Hout (Safety Officer)

WMP Representatives: PC Colin Barlow, Inspector Howard Lewis-Jones – Force Football Unit

Attendees: Lynda Courts (Redditch Blues), Dave Smith (BCFC Forum), Tony Routley (Central Blues Travel), Micky Singh (Blues4All), Linda Goodman (Birmingham), Richard Stanley (Blues Trust), Cliff Horrocks (Blues Trust), Sean Guiden (Irish BC Supporters Club), Russell Dempsey (Joys and Sorrows), Chris Sinclair (Northside Blues), Ray Hobrow (Blues Collective), Tina Hobrow (Blues Collective), Carl Upton (BCFC SLO). Nigel Smith, Emma Willock, Andrew Orgill (unaffiliated supporter representatives 16/17).

Agenda:

1. Introductions
2. West Midlands Police Open Forum regarding Aston Villa 23/4/17
3. Retail
4. Ticketing
5. Media and Communication
6. Catering
7. Match Days & Facilities
8. AOB

Introductions – Rachele Johnson



BIRMINGHAM CITY

WMP – Colin & Howard to lead forum regarding travel to Villa Park in April

The Police representatives explained that the purpose of this forum was to ask Blues fans their thoughts on ways in which their travel to and from Villa Park & their match day experience could be the safest, easiest & most enjoyable. After much discussion the Police noted around 17 suggestions which they will take to Aston Villa. These included ideas such as creating a Blues Fanzone in the away car park, asking London Midland to run Football Specials from New Street direct to Witton and ensuring fans can use toilets at the end of the game.

There were 2 suggestions for BCFC – having our own stewards accompany fans and cheaper coach travel.

Dave Hault is looking into the possibility of having Blues stewards available to attend. Dave and I are holding a meeting next week with some Heads of Department to discuss the options around the coach travel.

The Police will contact me closer to the match to call another meeting to discuss the outcome of the suggestions and advise what measures will be in place.

Retail

Q. The last 4 or 5 matches programme sellers couldn't be found in the Kop, definitely not at entrance 5. Is it possible to move the sellers inside the ground instead of Coventry Road or car parks?

A. Sellers are stationed outside the entrances 6, 7 and 8 and also walk about the stadium at half time to cover anyone they have missed coming into the ground. We have requested additional programmes are given to the Info Hut by the Ticket Office and I will walk around at the next game to note where the sellers are.

Q. The club shop is quite small and cramped – the staff are very friendly but there are long queues and the shop can get quite messy – don't know how to improve this?

A. The Club acknowledges that the shop is fine for weekday crowds but unfortunately can get crowded on a match day. We'd love to be able to expand or open another store but this would require a lot of investment which would potentially require Premier League money. Request for "pop-up" shops around the ground and more floor space in the Club shop on a match day to be referred to Wayne Cowen.



BIRMINGHAM CITY FOOTBALL CLUB

Ticketing

Q. Following an online petition to lower season ticket prices to create a better atmosphere with more fans attending matches, are there any plans to lower prices? The Season Ticket prices were reduced three years ago and have been frozen at that price for the last three years. The recent BBC survey has shown we're the 3rd cheapest Season Ticket in the league – 31% below the average. Will put the request to marketing for a survey to be sent to fans regarding prices.

Q. Following the example of Bradford City's successful introduction of a "Flexicard" which allows fans to purchase a "membership" and reserve their seat but only pay for the games they attend – is this something Blues will look into introducing?

A. We have something similar with our Blues Loyalty membership – the only difference being you can't reserve the same seat each game. Request to be taken to Wayne Cowen regarding the introduction of a flexi-card that would allow a number of games to be purchased at one time for a fixed price. This would benefit supporters abroad or shift workers etc. meaning they can build a purchase history & attend matches. It could also serve as a gift card.

Q. The Club has recently implemented a no refund policy on coach tickets for away travel. What is the Club's position if the match is rearranged after tickets have been purchased or if a person cannot travel due to illness?

If coach tickets are returned along with the match ticket a refund will be issued.

Media and Communication

Q. The sound through the speakers is poor – at the back of block 16 you couldn't hear the half-time interview. Also, the pre-match video used to have dramatic music to it building it up. Now it is effectively a silent video – the video seems pointless without build up music before the teams walk out.

We acknowledge the sound could be better and hopefully it is something we can look into in the near future. In regards to the video we agree it comes across better with the dramatic sound as we have done in previous seasons however, the timing of teams coming onto the pitch affects this. If the teams come on earlier or later than anticipated then the video and music need to be abruptly stopped or a silence occurs in between the video and teams walking on. If we could control when the teams walked out it would be easier to achieve as it could be timed correctly. On match days we are currently a man light but hopefully this is something we can look at in the future. Until then, it will have to play alongside Mr Blue Sky.

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BIRMINGHAM CITY FOOTBALL CLUB

Q. At the last meeting the club agreed to put team news on the big screen and intersperse it between the adverts so that fans could refer to it to see goal scorers, yellow and red cards and team line up. If the club don't intend to do something then they should say rather than make false promises.

It was said at the last meeting we would endeavour to do what we could however, unfortunately there is a software issue that would require the manual changing of the screen. At the moment we are one member of staff short and unfortunately it would require two people to implement this. We are actively recruiting to fill the position and will look into this when possible.

Catering

Q. Are there any plans to have a wider variety of foods – maybe street food?

A. Not at the moment but following the popularity of the Cookhouse it is something we can hopefully look into next season.

Q. Are there any plans to introduce beer hawkers/vendors to alleviate queues at the kiosks?

A. There is a beer hawker on trial in the Tilton/Kop corner. Suggestion of plastic bottles or one hawker pouring the beer, one person dealing with money to be referred to Sharon Byrne.

Q. Cookhouse is really good – is the menu going to be published pre-match to advertise what will be served?

It is currently sent out in the email before the match and advertised on Twitter. Request for more adverts around the ground to be referred to Sharon and Jess Taylor.

Q. No cookhouse menus in the Main Stand – when will this facility be made available in the Main Stand?

A. The Cookhouse menu is available in D-Bar. There is no signage at the moment but Sharon is coordinating with Marketing to get these in place.

Match Day and Facilities

Q. Is there likely to be any improvements to the toilets? There seem to be frequent blockages. Additional hand dryers would be useful – especially in winter when your hands are already cold after using cold water!

Feedback about toilet blockages will be passed on to Maintenance. In regards to hand driers – our electricity quota is high meaning we can't simply install more driers. However, we currently have companies providing quotes for an upgrade. Hopefully this can be looked at during the closed season.

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Q. Complaints about lack of hot water and lack of hand driers/paper towels. Is it possible to install anti-bacterial hand gel dispensers?

This and paper towels can be looked into as a short term solution.

Q. What age do you need to be to be searched when entering a football stadium?

A. It depends on each stadium. Blues have a policy of 18. However, if there is a need to search anyone under 18, an initial dynamic assessment should be made with a member of the safeguarding team present and the consent of the supervising adult before any further action is undertaken.

Q. Those picked to take part in the Half Time 888 Challenge always seem to be sat in the lower tiers. Can we have a better way of picking fans that is fairer which includes those at the back of the stands as well?

We will pass this on to the PA announcer and request that fans are chosen from the back as well as the lower tiers.

Q. We're always late kicking off – can the clocks be synchronised somewhere?

A. It is down to the referee to ensure the players are out on the pitch. The referee rings two warning bells into the changing rooms to signal a 10 and 5 minute warning but it is ultimately the referee who gets the players onto the pitch.

Q. Can the away fans be moved to the paddocks? This would mean the entire Gil Merrick is then open to Blues fans. This would also make policing easier.

A. The Gil Merrick has its own coach parking facilities, turnstiles and a segregated concourse which is designated as the away area. The Main Stand would be a shared area between home and away fans and there is no concourse. Also, the kiosk facilities in the Gil Merrick wouldn't be suitable for the number of home supporters.

Q. The TVs in the bars in the Kop have no sound and do not work – the bars in the Kop resemble a cattle shed. Awful.

A. At the moment they are off due to health and safety issues with people congregating underneath and causing congestion. We may look into repositioning them in the closed season. A member of the Safety Office will be looking at them at the next game.

Q. What is the Club's stance on safe standing areas?

This isn't something that the club can facilitate as the stadium was designed as an all-seater stadium. Until legislation changes, this isn't something that will be considered.

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Any Other Business

Q. Following on from the last meeting, Club Class members are still having their views obstructed when Hospitality guests leave ten minutes before half time and return ten minutes after half time. What is going to be done?

The Commercial manager has advised that in the suites, the guests are consistently requested to take their seats at the correct times. This will however, be reiterated at the next few games. The Security team will also put this in their next few briefings to monitor.

Q. An elderly gentleman requested help from a steward but was informed he couldn't help due to policy.

Most of the time our stewards are very helpful however, they need to conduct a dynamic risk assessment to see whether there is a safety risk before entering into a situation that may cause harm to the individual.

Well done and big thanks to the group of Blues fans that resuscitated a gentleman who had suffered a heart attack at the service stations on the way back from Newcastle!