



BIRMINGHAM CITY FOOTBALL CLUB

Birmingham City Football Club Quarterly Supporters Forum: Monday November 27th 2017

Location: Legends Lounge (18:30)

Chair: Rachele Johnson (SLO) – BCFC

BCFC Representatives: Roger Lloyd (Senior Finance Officer), David Hault (Safety Officer), Colin Tattum (Head of Media and Communication), Wayne Cowen (Head of Ticketing and Retail), Ian Dutton (Head of Commercial), Sharon Byrne (Head of Retail Catering).

Supporter Group Representatives: Lynda Courts (Redditch Blues), Dave Smith (BCFC Fan Forum), Chris Sinclair (Northside Blues), Bik Singh & Micky Singh (Blues4All), Linda Goodman (Birmingham), Tony Routley (Central Blues Travel), Richard Stanley and Cliff Horrocks (Blues Trust), Nick Glynn (East Midlands), Russell Dempsey (Joys and Sorrows), Steve Portman (Accessiblues).

Unaffiliated Supporter Representatives (2017/18): Emma Willock, Richard Cox, Mark Smith, Clare Normanton, Stuart Brereton.

Agenda:

1. Introductions
2. Club
3. Matchdays and Facilities
4. Ticketing
5. Commercial
6. Retail
7. Catering
8. Marketing
9. Media
10. Safety
11. AOB

Introductions – Rachele Johnson

RJ welcomed everyone and thanked for their attendance. Introduced BCFC staff members.

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BIRMINGHAM CITY

Club

The recently released accounts for Birmingham Sports Holdings refer to a Share Option Scheme. According to the accounts... “the purpose of the Share Option Scheme is to enable the company to provide participants with the opportunity to acquire proprietary interests in the company and encourage participants to work towards enhancing the value of the company and its shares for the benefit of the company and shareholders...” It also states, “participants of the SOS comprise of customers.” As customers of the BSH group, does this include Supporters Organisations?

RL is unsure of the answer and has put the question to Hong Kong. It is unusual for customers to be involved in a share scheme but will advise when he gets a reply.

In light of the well-publicised issues surrounding policing at our last 5.30pm kick-off match at Millwall, what assurances have the Club sought that there will be no repeat at Sheffield United and Fulham?

DH advised that it is better to over-Police and have resources in place in case of disorder. Dave advised he attended the Sheffield game and believed the fans were policed correctly and professionally. Regarding policing and stewarding at away matches, it is the away Club and Police that make decisions so if there are any concerns following away matches fans should liaise with the relevant Club/Police authorities in the first instance.

Emails were sent before the Villa game telling us to behave. Whose decision was this, why was it done, and can the Club reassure fans that this exercise will not be repeated?

DH advised it needed to be a blanket email/message as at this moment we don't necessarily know the minority of supporters who are causing disorder so can't send the message to them directly. We have an issue with disorder at matches at the moment and the Club are trying to address it.

RJ reminded that it did state on the email it was a minority of supporters.

CT added to this that we are in no way tarring every BCFC fan with the same brush and we apologise for any offence which was certainly not intended.

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Matchdays and Facilities

When will we be modernising our floodlights so that the goal line technology works?

RL confirmed goal line technology has been upgraded and meets the League requirements.
CT further confirmed it had been in place since October – in full use from the Cardiff match.

Can anything be done to protect the areas around the stadium? A lot of cars are being broken into particularly on evening games which may deter fans from coming. I understand it isn't down to the Club but if something could be arranged with the Police to patrol the local area to put opportunist criminals off.

DH advise that unfortunately our stewards aren't insured off the footprint, so they can't patrol but he will put it to West Midlands Police to see if anything can be done during a Policed fixture. Dave also added that one of the problems is people not reporting it so the Police cannot see trends of break-ins and patrol accordingly.

WC added that he and Ian are currently in talks with local companies regarding secure car parks around the ground and local public transport to ease issues that surround matchday parking.

Several of our away games have already been changed from a 3pm kick-off. Whilst we appreciate the Club have little say if it's for TV, why did the Club agree to Reading and Bolton requests to move their games from prime Bank Holiday dates to midweek evening fixtures? What consideration was given to the inconvenience and cost to the travelling supporters, many of whom may not now be able to attend or have the time off work.

CT confirmed it was agreed with both Clubs due to the short turnaround of fixtures at those times – New Year and Easter. The management team at the time felt it was in the best interests of the players and agreed to move the fixture date up one day. We appreciate that may not be of any consolation to fans but unfortunately it was a decision taken by all Clubs involved management teams to help with training and preparation.

When is the PA system going to be updated? It is embarrassing frankly.

DH stated it may be due to interference from internal announcements crossing over. It is being investigated.

Quite a few years back, the stadium announcer had great timing in getting Mr Blue Sky playing until the end, we all started clapping and then straight into the Tamperer as the teams came out. But now it gets played and abandoned before the end to show the video. Maybe they could reverse that order, so Mr Blue Sky gets played to the end just before Tamperer. It helps the atmosphere I think. Maybe more fun songs to sing along to from 2.30pm as well.

RJ checked with the Marketing Department who advised that for a 3pm kick-off, for example, we try to start the music, videos etc. at 2.52pm however, sometimes songs are cut short due to the time the players walk out or when the referee rings the bell into the dressing rooms. A new playlist has been created to fit an ever-changing demographic of supporter however, suggestions are welcome.

CT added that the big screen is being used for videos of previous matches, goals etc. in another attempt to help create further atmosphere.

Clappers?

RL confirmed they won't be used again. The decision was taken following a request from the Board for an attempt to heighten atmosphere. The Club didn't anticipate that the clappers would be used as missiles as they had been previously used and had encountered no issues. The Police were consulted and were well aware they would be used, and following that consultation we didn't place clappers in certain blocks, 39 and 40 for example, to try and ensure no problems.

ID added it was a Club decision and they were used to help further atmosphere, alongside the pyrotechnics, flag, balloon, music etc. and with the Club's best interests at heart.

When are we going to trial safe standing? There is a desire from many fans for safe standing, the Club cannot simply say “no” – we ARE the Club and our views on this must be considered.

RL confirmed the door is ajar for such an opportunity. The EFL is in talks with the Minister for Sport regarding this. The idea of Safe Standing was rejected by the Government in February 2017 but the EFL has taken on the project.

Has the Club spoken to the Met Police about the insertion of police horses at Millwall? Much of the Media was inflammatory and wrong. Blues fans were however, put at serious risk by Police actions.

RL advised that if you were there and witnessed incidents then to rebut direct to the Birmingham Mail.

Ticketing

Why does the Club not move to e-tickets as an option to solve queuing?

WC confirmed this is being worked on. It will be trialled in January with the look to being able to introduce it fully for next season through the Club app.

Commercial

Last season a substantial number of tickets for the game at Villa Park were made available to the Commercial Department for Executive Packages which resulted in people who rarely/never attend away games going to this match. However, Travel Club members even some of those who had Silver status were unable to purchase due to lack of availability. Can we please have confirmation that this season Travel Members will be given priority over Executive trips?

ID said that was a fair point and that they have listened to feedback and taken the decision to not run an executive trip to Villa Park this season.

Retail

Is there any way of Season Ticket Holders getting money off Adidas products? I am happy with the voucher booklet this season but when it can't be used on Adidas which is easily over 50% of the products sold by the Club it doesn't seem like much of a reward.

WC advised that the margin on Adidas products is smaller so isn't something we are able to offer a discount for unfortunately.

I went to the Club shop to buy the black goalkeepers jersey. I was told this wouldn't be available. I then decided to go for the white away shirt only to be told they didn't have it in Medium and it was likely it would take a few months before they came back into stock. I'm astonished by this as it's a common size and this was 1 week before the Villa game. I may have been misinformed but no fan should have to wait that long for an in-season kit to be replenished.

WC advised that the goalkeeper jersey is generally more popular for children and throughout a season we normally sell 40 to adults. Wayne advised he had ordered 60 and that this season the jersey being black meant that it was very popular, so we sold out quicker than anticipated. When Wayne approached Adidas for more they advised they wouldn't supply any more. The away top again sold more than anticipated however, it is incorrect it would have taken months. It was 2-3 weeks tops and was only in the most popular sizes M and L. The website has been upgraded so that if an item is ever out of stock you can ask for a notification when it's back in store.

Catering

The catering for the ground is quite good, especially the Cookhouse, but the areas where catering is available are drab and in winter very cold. Can something be done in those areas to make it more appealing?

DH said it would be good if fans could send in ideas.

RJ said that unfortunately we're stuck with the space we have in the ground as we're not blessed. The Fanzone is amazing during the summer but in the winter, it's not ideal. This is being looked into.

Marketing

Half-time presentations always seem to be done directly in front of the dugouts. I sit in the Kop and it would be nice to be able to see the special guests. Maybe they can be done more towards the centre circle?

RJ spoke to the Marketing Department about this and they will see if it's possible to move the interviews more central. Someone mentioned that fans in the Tilton can't see the 888 challenges as the net is covering so could they make a transparent goal covering? RJ to take back to Commercial to see if possible.

Can the BCFC announcer return to just normal, respectful announcements on opposition substitutions? It was funny 10 years ago, not now.

RJ asked the forum what their thoughts were on this subject and the majority (if not all) stated that it was a Blues tradition, was still funny whilst being respectful. They even mention it on Soccer AM. Response was to keep it as is.

Media

We were told that Blues TV would be showing live Under-23s and Ladies on selected matches but there doesn't seem to have been any of these matches. Are there any plans to give subscribers the chance to see more of these matches than has been the case so far?

CT advised he was surprised by the question as we have broadcast what has been possible in regard resources available at the time and regulations. The previous week an U23s was shown, we have been to Millwall, Colchester for example, and the afternoon games from Wast Hills, Nuneaton and evening games at St. Andrew's and Solihull have been shown. We have shown probably 70 per cent of the matches that have taken place. There has also been U18s fixtures and FA Youth Cup matches. With the Ladies we are bound by the WSL deal with BT Sport so can't show them all but when we legally can we plan to.

Safety

Half-hearted or non-existent security searches are an issue. I've got through with a bag on my shoulder that wasn't checked, fortunately it only had snacks and drinks for my 2 lads. I'm all for getting in the ground quickly but in this day and age I would rather have the peace of mind that checks have been as thorough as they can be.

DH apologised for this incident and agreed it shouldn't happen. All bags are to be searched and this is in the pre-match briefings and this procedure will be reiterated.

AOB

How many tickets have Wolves been allocated and why is it higher than Villa?

RL advised they have more because they were willing to reciprocate the number we provided when we travel to Molineux. Villa refused to give a higher allocation than 2100.

Is there a link between the current spate of hamstring injuries and the Training Ground facilities?

RL confirmed the pitches are regularly tested by a 'Clegg' machine, judged to gauge the quality of the surface and West Hills matches St. Andrew's. It shows the firmness/hardness and moisture content. Pitches that are either too hard or too soft can cause problems, hence why industry standards set an 'acceptable range' and both West Hills pitches and St. Andrew's are within this range. There has been significant investment in the pitches over the years and West Hills surfaces and infrastructure is first class. This is not a common denominator for injuries that may have been sustained this season.

QPR only provide 3 wheelchair spaces – with it being the last game of the season and popular what is going to happen?

RJ and WC said they'd speak to counterparts at QPR however, if that is all they allow us in the allocation that is regrettably all we can sell.

Away stewarding issues – racist comments, spitting from opposing fans and the stewards do nothing but focus on Blues fans.

