

# Birmingham City FC

## Supporters Forum – Monday 17<sup>th</sup> December, 2018

Location: Jasper Carrott Suite, St. Andrew's Stadium

Chair: David Brown (Supporter Services)

Birmingham City FC representatives: Wayne Cowen (Head of Retail & Ticketing); Ciara Gallagher (Club Secretary); Aamir Javaid (Ticketing Manager); Jess Poulson (Head of Marketing); Colin Tattum (Head of Media & Communications); Edward Zheng (Assistant to Chairman, Club Director).

Supporters: Accessiblues (Steve Portman, Adrian Howell); Blues 4 All (Bik Singh, Micky Singh); BCFC Forum (Dave Smith, Cath Smith); Blues Trust (Richard Stanley; Cliff Horrocks); Central Blues Travel (Tony Routley, Wozza Miles); East Midlands Blues (Nick Glynn); Independent supporters (Mel Castle, Richard Cox, Emma Willock, Paul Delves, Richard Swainson); Irish Brummies (Sean Guiden, Paula Wilson); Northside Blues (Chris Sinclair, John Page); Redditch Blues (Lynda Courts, Mark Marshall).

Agenda:

### Ticketing

- Can we know how many Platinum, Gold, Silver and Bronze away travel members do we have so that we can get some idea of our chances of getting away tickets? (*Redditch Blues*)

Platinum – 1,425 (includes commercial seasonal clients)

Gold – 815

Silver – 603

Bronze – 530

- What is the reasoning behind tickets going on sale online the night before they go on sale from the Ticket Office? (*Redditch Blues*)

To resolve the phone line issues that we used to have when big games went on sale at 9am. The phone lines were not able to handle the surge in calls causing people to sit in the queue before then getting cut off. e-ticketing can handle much bigger demand than the phone lines can and eliminates these issues. We have had a lot of positive feedback in response to this.

- For high profile games like Villa, can Platinum priority have their own selling time different from Gold? (*Redditch Blues*)

Yes, where time frames allow, this will be implemented.

- How did you decide on how many away games were needed for each priority? Should it be the same each year or should it be based on percentages – e.g. 10% are Platinum etc.? Is it ever publicised how many you will need the following season to be a certain away priority the next season? (*Redditch Blues*)

The bands rarely change but, if required, are sometimes tweaked to try and maintain an even split of supporters across the bands. The bands are not decided until the summer once we have the figures available of how many supporters attended away games.

- How will my grandchild be able to have away priority the first year he has a season ticket as he will be going to most games but can't have a season ticket until he is 2 yrs old? (*Redditch Blues*)

A baby is not issued a season ticket until they can actually occupy a seat and instead enter the stadium as a baby in arms. Whether this is permitted at away grounds will be dependent on the away teams conditions of entry. Some clubs do not permit children under a certain age.

- How many Platinum and Gold away travel members do we have? Are away tickets allocated to corporate box holders before Platinum and Gold members? (*Northwest Blues*)

Answered above.

- If the reason the Gil Merrick Upper isn't used is because we don't have enough fans at matches, why not look to the future and have a large part of it set aside for increased free places for school groups? Let's fill St. Andrews again rather than have empty sections. (*BCFC Forum*)

We are currently doing a lot of work to engage with schools to bring in young fans but it is not cost effective to put them in the Gil Merrick Upper when we have seats available elsewhere in the stadium.

### **Catering**

- I'm still not happy about the BCFC catering, poor food, poor menu and poor eating areas. Recently I went to Derby away and sat in their end, what a difference. Can you suggest that some of the staff go to other grounds on matchdays and see what their catering is like for their home supporters? (*BCFC Forum*)

There is nothing we can do with regards to the eating areas due to the compact nature of our stadium. Our Retail Catering Manager Sharon Byrne will again visit other grounds in the New Year to analyse their offerings, but we can confirm that all of our food is freshly delivered for each game.

- I asked for a pint of tap water at the bar in the Tilton. He said OK but also said they are not normally allowed to give out water in plastic cups so didn't want the other staff to see him do it. When serving alcohol it's a legal requirement to provide free water with pretty large consequences if refused and a complaint is made. What is the Club's position in providing free tap water on match days at the bar? (*BCFC Forum*)

We use the pint glasses as opening and closing stock so we know how many pints have been sold on the day, so he had probably been told not to give out any pint cups if fans asked. He should have just told the team leader on the day that there will be one waste pint cup. All kiosks know that if anyone asks for water it is not a problem. We will liaise with the team leaders regarding this incident.

- What happened to the veggie pies at St. Andrew's? (*Richard Swainson, independent*)

We do still have the cheese and onion pasty on sale, but the veggie balti pie just did not sell – we were throwing away more than we were selling so it became unviable.

## Marketing

- Why is the Cookhouse menu not advertised on Twitter? *(BCFC Forum)*

The Cookhouse menu is listed in the “What’s On” section on bcfc.com. We are always happy to review our social media output and will consider this moving forward.

## Retail

- Blues need to increase their visibility to fans. People have said they would buy more Blues merchandise if there was a shop in town. There used to be one and it is understandable that there isn’t one at the moment, but is there a possibility of setting up another one if the situation improves, even if it is rented floor space in one of the larger stores? *(BCFC Forum)*

The rental and associated costs of a store in the city centre do not make this viable we are afraid.

- Could Blues explore the possibility of sharing a shop in town with WBA? and possibly Warwickshire CCC as well? It makes sense. *(BCFC Forum)*

It is an interesting idea but we feel there are various factors that would not make this conducive.

## Finances

- In light of the last reported losses and the current wage bill can the Board explain how it will ensure it stays within FFP limits going forward after the disciplinary result is known. Will we have to sell players and what is the possibility of strengthening the team in the summer? *(Blues Trust)*

The Club is continuing to work balancing the need to be competitive and strengthen its on and off field operations whilst managing costs. The Board has no desire to sell players and what our situation will be in the summer we are not in a position to say at this present time as the Disciplinary Commission have yet to meet and make a decision on our profitability and sustainability case.

- Have the Board been able to consider the options for structured dialogue within the ‘Engage’ publication that we have provided copies of? *(Blues Trust)*

This is something the Board is in receipt of but at the moment our energies are focused on other issues. We hope you understand.

- What would the Board like from Blues Trust to help in building for the future at Birmingham City FC? *(Blues Trust)*

We are happy with our dialogue and we value the support of all organisations including the Blues Trust.

- Will we still be under EFL restrictions next season as well? It's very concerning. *(BCFC Forum)*

Until the Disciplinary Commission meets and makes a decision, this is a question that cannot be answered.

- What are the plans come summer, can we clarify signing up our own players i.e. Morrison? Fans are naturally worried about the situation and cannot see us being able to move forward under the current restrictions. *(BCFC Forum)*

The Club is in constant dialogue with the EFL over these kind of issues to seek clarification and naturally we want to be able to secure our best players, like the captain. Even in the situation we are in, reference the Disciplinary Commission and the EFL business plan, the Club is striving to make sure that all matters relating to players' resigning are dealt with in accordance to the current restrictions.

### **Commercial**

- What are your thoughts on how Fastpay is working so far? *(BCFC Forum)*

It's improved, and we can tell by the uptake each game, which is increasing – however, we know we are far from making this initiative a good solid proposition for our fans. We have identified that further staff training is needed, and plans are well and truly in place to make this happen.

- Have BCFC reviewed the success/uptake of Fastpay and if so, what are your conclusions? *(Richard Swainson, independent)*

As above, we have a solid foundation of supporters using fastpay each game, and it is also increasing each game.

- What plans are there to reduce the cost of tables for the Players Awards night for Supporters Clubs? Offering a 20% discount isn't a fair incentive when many of us aren't VAT registered. The last couple of years the atmosphere in there has been very flat and it would be great to improve it a little. *(Central Blues Travel)*

I think the atmosphere has been excellent for the past couple of years, and feedback from the majority of supporters following each event has backed this up. We will review the pricing structure for Supporters Clubs, however the cost of putting these events on is not cheap so I doubt we would be able to make any huge improvements.

### **Stadium/safety**

- The outside of the stadium looks tired and dirty. Has no one got a jet wash to sort it out? *(Paul Delves, independent)*

The front of the stadium cannot be jet washed as water can ingress. We have a quote to re-paint the front elevation this summer.

- The pre-match road closure is great for supporters but the traffic lights on the corner of Coventry Road and the St. Andrew's retail park are still in use even though the road is closed. This makes traffic back up and queues build up very quickly. This week two number 17 buses completely blocked the road as they must have forgot about the road block and went the wrong way. Can the traffic lights be covered while the road is blocked? *(Emma Willock, independent)*

Per our agreement with Highways England, we are not permitted to touch any of the traffic lights. Our Operations Director has requested a meeting with them in the New Year when this question will be raised.

- There are continuous problems with the ladies' toilets at Kop entrance 5 and there is still no hot water in the gents'. Surely we can find a cheap, friendly plumber to solve this? *(BCFC Forum)*

We are hoping to install hot water in the gents' during the close season. The toilets all around the ground are checked before and after each match by the stadium plumber. He has been called out a couple of times during the matches this season to leaks in the ladies' toilets which have now been resolved. We will continue to monitor this area and urge supporters to report any problems to the nearest steward as soon as they encounter them to ensure that we can resolve issues as quickly as possible.

- Issues such as the concourses and toilets seem to be discussed time and time again. Why does nothing change? *(BCFC Forum)*

If we know what the individual issues are we can try to rectify them. We repaint all of the toilets every summer and check them before and after each match. Overall we receive good feedback when comparing to similar aged venues around the country. Again if supporters report any maintenance issues as and when they arise we will endeavour to sort them.

- Does the Club tender out the security work at the stadium? *(Central Blues Travel)*

We do tender out the security work. No company other than K2 can currently accommodate the numbers required as past applicants have shown.

#### **Misc.**

- Can we have an update with regards to the Community Trust? Just want to know what the plans are going forward and who should Blues 4 All engage with? *(Blues 4 All)*

The BCFC Community Trust is operating and running as normal. Blues 4 All are welcome to engage with Craig Gill or Antony Isherwood.

- Could we have some better pre-match music with more variety? *(Redditch Blues)*

We will continue to review and adjust our playlist and are always open to suggestions.

- Could the club do anything more to ease congestion around the ground on matchdays, e.g. subsidised buses from New Street? *(Northwest Blues)*

We continue to look at ways to improve travel options to and from the stadium on a matchday and have been engaging with two different bus companies in recent months to try to achieve this.

- The GM Upper gives a terrific view of the match and you can often see things that aren't as obvious from lower parts of the ground, particularly from the dugouts I would have thought. I think it would make sense to make use of this extra perspective by having one of the coaching team sitting up there with radio contact to the bench. Has this ever been considered? *(BCFC Forum)*

Our analysts cover the game from the Main Stand and have a camera feed from the upper Gil Merrick. The analysts are in radio contact with the technical area via radio and need to have quick access from their position to the bench and dressing rooms. The coaching team work together as a unit from the dug outs.

- Whereas other clubs seem to kick off on time, I habitually glance at my watch at kick off time and ours seem to always start a few minutes late including Saturday's match which kicked off at 3.02pm. *(BCFC Forum)*

The vast majority of games kick-off on time at 3:00pm. We are guided by the referee's buzzer for the teams to come out of the dressing room and also by the match official synchronising the kick-off in accordance with television, if the match is being broadcast by Sky or overseas.