

Birmingham City FC

Supporters Forum – Thursday 2nd May, 2019

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

Chair: David Brown (Supporter Services)

Birmingham City FC representatives: Tom Bishop (Marketing Assistant); Claire Boden (PR & Engagement Manager); Wendy Buswell (Retail Manager); James Corrigan (Football Sales Manager); Lungi Macebo (Chief Operating Officer); Jessica Poulson (Head of Brand & Marketing); Shah Uddin (Assistant Ticketing Manager).

Director Edward Zheng sends his apologies. Important Club business means he cannot make it this evening. He has given me this message to pass on:

My sincere apologies that I cannot be with you tonight. You know how much I look forward to meeting and chatting with you.

Myself and the Board of Directors would like to thank you for your loyal support during what has been a quite difficult season.

We could not have got through it without you.

Please be assured that we will do everything we can to make next season a successful one and, of course, we will always listen to your voice.

Keep Right On

Edward

Tonight's agenda:

Ticketing

- How are the prices determined for away games? Bristol City away was really expensive this season and I'm sure we didn't charge them as much. (*Mel Castle, independent*)

Prices for away games are decided by the home clubs. All clubs have a different pricing structure for each game. Bristol City home supporters would have been charged the same price as away fans in the equivalent areas of the stadium.

- Will the deadline be extended for renewal of season tickets as no finance option has yet been sourced? (*Mel Castle, independent*)
- What can be done to allow supporters to spread the cost for the purchase of season tickets? We are in the last week of the early bird renewal period and there is still no finance package. (*BCFC Forum*)

The Club is currently working hard to secure a new finance deal. Any further information will be posted on the Club's website and across our social media channels.

- Although most fans appreciate the need for a reasonable increase in price how can the Club justify the 25% increase in senior season ticket prices? (*Birmingham Supporters Club*)

Senior season ticket prices have been increased to bring them more in line with the adult price. We believe that these tickets still offer outstanding value, with each game costing just under £11 for senior season ticket holders.

- When renewing our season tickets, why do we have to show proof EVERY year? Surely it would be a bit less intrusive and problematic for both the supporter and the Club spot checks were done only once every 5 years for example? (*Accessiblues*)

This has been Club policy for the last two years and is common in football. It is best practise because some supporters' circumstances may change from season to season, as has happened here over the last two seasons.

- Wouldn't it be more cost-effective to load next season's tickets onto our current passes rather than issue new season ticket cards for everyone? (*Birmingham Supporters Club*)

This has been tried previously, but led to a number of issues due to barcodes not working on matchday, and thus caused extra expense for the Club.

- Has a decision been made as to the number of matches attended for each away travel category for next season? (*Birmingham Supporters Club*)

This decision will be made after the renewal deadline.

- How do we get an increased away allocation for games? (*East Midlands Blues*)

We always work with the home Club to acquire the best possible allocation for our supporters and always request the full allocation where there is a chance of us selling it. For example, we were able to secure 5,600 away tickets for Preston and 4,500 tickets for Wigan.

- Could we have the allocated accessible coach seats spread across two accessible coaches? This way friends and family members can also join their loved ones on the same coach, as well as integrating disabled supporters and able-bodied supporters on away journeys. (*Accessiblues*)

This was covered at length in the previous disabled supporters meeting in March.

Safety

- Can stewarding, especially by the K2 stewards, be carried out with higher customer service and greater use of common sense? (*Blues Trust*)

All stewards undertake customer service training as part of their NVQ qualifications. We will be looking into refresher training during the closed season.

- Why is no one listening about K2? Why are we treated as second class citizens in our own stadium? We are fee-paying customers and the vast majority of us have never broken any rule but being treated so badly only encourages fans to be rebellious. We are treated better at most away grounds. When will something be done to stop this trend? (*Central Blues*)
- K2 stewards have been bullying people in the Kop corner for years – throwing teenage kids to the ground, searching people's pockets and bending kids arms up their backs, which I stood up to them about. It got to the point where one of the decent stewards warned me they were after me and looking to get me nicked or banned which is why I moved to the main stand. The recent crap about confiscating water and sun screen is one in a long line of things. K2 need sacking or at least being given clear instructions as to what they can and can't do which is shared with the fans so it's clear. (*Central Blues*)
- One K2 steward tried to confiscate my son's season ticket for being in the wrong seat! He was sat quietly in an empty row with his mates. I confronted the steward after being told and he shut his mouth. How do we avoid having these kind of things happen again and again? (*Central Blues*)

If there are specific issues relating to K2 we would need further information in order to investigate. Please report these incidents as soon as they happen with as much information as possible so that they can be looked into immediately. Please also be aware that any decision on safety grounds is made from the control room and not by K2.

- Can you confirm that all K2 security staff are fully qualified and have received not just safety training but customer service training? I have my doubts. (*Debbie Brick, independent*)

All stewards are either qualified to NVQ level 2 or 3 or they are working towards their qualifications. As part of the qualification they do also undertake customer service training.

- The Gil Merrick Upper stand offers without doubt the best seats in the ground. Will we be able to consistently purchase tickets or even season tickets there now that it has been reopened? If not, why not? (*Redditch Blues*)

A decision has not yet been made as to whether it is feasible to open the Gil Merrick Upper for all games. This decision will be communicated at a later date.

- The new giant Blues flag has been banned by the Blues Safety team as it has been deemed offensive for having the abbreviation "SOTV" in the corner. Who is it offending? Villa fans were allowed into St. Andrew's with a banner saying "FOREVER IN OUR SHADOWS" – surely this was just as offensive, if not more? We only want the flag to be passed around for two minutes before kick-off. Why does it feel like our Club is trying to make an issue with the fans out of nothing? (*Central Blues*)

The safety team spoke to a fan directly in regards to SOTV being on the flag. The supporter agreed to take this off prior to bringing the flag to home games. However, this has not been done and therefore it will not be allowed into the stadium.

- When the bottle ban came in, I asked on two separate occasions to two separate stewards whether a flask of soup would be ok to bring in and both of them, including one supervisor,

said yes that was no problem. However now we're told that there are no flasks not allowed?
(*Redditch Blues*)

- At the Sheffield United home game I was told that I could not take my flask in despite bringing it for most of the season. I asked to speak to a senior steward as my flask cost me £7.00 and I was reluctant to throw it away, and flasks are not listed as a banned item outside the turnstiles. A few rows in front of me a young lad had a flask and asked his dad if he had a problem with bringing in his flask and he said no – why the inconsistency? (*Redditch Blues*)
- I've seen many things thrown onto a football pitch over the years by both our fans and opposing supporters, but never a flask. Is it really necessary to take flasks off people?
(*Debbie Brick, independent*)
- I can fully understand the reasons behind the club banning plastic bottles due to instances of these being thrown onto the pitch. I have never heard of a flask ever being thrown and this seems a heavy-handed way to deal with the problem. Can this policy be reversed or if not what can supporters use to bring their own drinks into the ground? (*BCFC Forum*)
- What is the justification for placing a bottle and flask restriction on every supporter? This makes things particularly difficult for fans with limited mobility, for whom having to carry a cup is virtually impossible, especially going up and down the steps. Time for a bit of common sense? (*East Midlands Blues*)
- We have been taking flasks to home and away games since 2002. The majority of people who take flasks don't normally fit the criteria of hooligans and to date we are not aware of any flasks being thrown. As law abiding citizens, we are prepared not to take our flask however we do expect Birmingham City to supply hot water from the kiosks. What will it be next – no snacks allowed? Will you ban the oranges and bananas that we bring to the ground? (*Redditch Blues*)

We can confirm that both bottles and flasks are prohibited items at our stadium. We have received a warning from the FA due to fan behaviour and have had to take the necessary precautionary actions to prevent us from receiving a large fine.

- It was a very hot and sunny day against Derby and kids were burning in the Paddocks. Parents understandably had brought bottles of sun cream with them and these were confiscated on entrance. Why did this happen and since when was sun cream banned? There was no sun cream provided inside the stadium for those who'd had it confiscated.
(*Central Blues*)

The request for sun cream to be allowed into the stadium was authorised from control after the question was raised. After giving authorisation, we did not receive any reports on the day to say there were issues. I would like to believe that if a child was in danger of burning it would have been brought to the attention of the safety team or the medics by the parent.

- Is there any update on the introduction of safe standing areas? We know it will happen eventually so why are Blues dragging their feet on this when we could be leading? Many fans stand for the whole game in the Tilton already, many more of us would like to do the same.
(*East Midlands Blues*)

St. Andrew's is currently licensed as an all-seater stadium and the Government does not currently allow for safe standing areas at Championship clubs. To confirm, you should not be persistently standing as this has already been highlighted as an issue to the local authority.

- I was late by less than 10 minutes and was refused entry at the disabled gate which is my normal entry point. I was told to walk to the late gate down by the Kop ticket office. Seeing as I got dropped off in a taxi as I can't walk, how was I supposed to walk down there? Twice it's happened now and both times I've had to ring a taxi to go home and miss the game. Can there not be more understanding on this? *(Central Blues)*

We have put extra scanners around the ground to facilitate late arrivals therefore this should not be an issue in the future.

Brand & Marketing

- Why is the opposing team no longer announced over the tannoy? *(BCFC Forum)*

This is to allow for better timings in terms of pre-match music and to make Blues the sole focus of the pre-match build-up. This is our home and it is about our side. Feedback on this has been very positive.

- Why did Club communication refer to a "small increase" in season ticket prices when senior citizens faced a £50 increase? A 25% increase is not a slight change. *(Redditch Blues)*

In retrospect we could have communicated the increase better. We have learnt lessons from this process which we will apply moving forward and can only apologise to any supporters who feel misled. This was never our intention.

- Can you remove the notice saying that the Information kiosk on the Kop side of the ground is a Fastpay top-up point because it isn't? *(Blues Trust)*

This is on the list of items to be looked at over the summer. The kiosk was intended to be a top-up point at the start of the season, hence the re-branding, prior to plans changing.

- Could the Club put on some sort of family fun day where players attend and kids get to meet them in pre-season? They used to do this when I was a youngster and I think it would build on the great community feel that the Club currently has. *(Mel Castle, independent)*

This was done this season in the form of an open training session, which was a big success. We are always looking for more ways to engage with our supporters, especially the younger generation, and are hoping to host another open training session at the stadium in the new season.

Commercial

- Everywhere offers contactless – even some market stalls on a Saturday morning. Other grounds offer it, so why can't Blues? *(BCFC Forum)*

The plan for the future is to install contactless payments at the ground. The current Club infrastructure is not set up for such a facility – however it will be in due course.

- Do you think Fastpay is working? Queues for cash payments are ridiculous and Fastpay kiosks are empty! (*Redditch Blues*)

It is not working as well as we would like thus far, but we have plans and measures in place to ensure a smooth cashless transaction which is easy for supporters moving forward. This will hopefully be in place for the start of the season.

- How much have refreshments sales gone down since Fastpay was introduced? (*BCFC Forum*)

We are not at liberty to disclose such figures.

- At a recent game the cash queue before kick-off was many tens of fans long whilst the Fastpay staff were literally standing doing nothing, serving no one. At halftime a fan sitting near me came back after the second half had started, without even getting served as the cash queue could not cope with demand. Surely this can't go on? (*BCFC Forum*)

We agree. We need more supporters using Fastpay and the only way we can achieve this is by offering a better, easier to use solution. We are hoping to have one in place for the start of the new season. A cashless operation is used at a long list of major venues across the globe and there is no reason why it can't be used successfully for the benefit of supporters here.

- Fastpay discriminates against those without a smartphone and those like me who are digitally challenged. We need a simpler solution rather than having to deal with transaction codes. (*Redditch Blues*)

The transaction codes will hopefully be eliminated by the start of next season.

- Isn't it unfair to lose unspent money on the Fastpay card? Why does this happen? It would not happen with credit card contactless payments. (*BCFC Forum*)

Supporters have the option to withdraw their funds up until the end of May and have been reminded of this on the Club website, the Club's social media channels, and in emails.

Kiosks

- Why are beers never pre-poured? (*BCFC Forum*)

They are pre-poured on most bars. It may be that the ones that have been pre-poured may have been sold prior to the supporter coming to the bar as we have limited space only so many can be pre-poured.

- Could you install taps for soft drinks so that it takes less time for staff to serve them in cups? (*Blues Trust*)

We have started looking into this for next season after the no-bottles rule was introduced. Coca-Cola are not prepared to install them in all kiosks but we are hopeful of installing them in the busier ones.

- We all knew that there would be a big crowd at the Derby match, but half the pumps in the bar "ran out of beer." The service was awful as usual. Just when you think it can't get any slower, it does. What are your plans to improve the kiosks experience? (*BCFC Forum*)

Without knowing which kiosk you are referring to as nothing along these lines was reported on the day. If any kiosk did run out of draft there were cans available as back-up. We do not want a situation where we have lots of kegs left over at the end of the season.

Board & Finances

- Do Birmingham City have any plans to sell St. Andrew's to Trillion Trophy Asia or to any party in the next 12 months? If they do, would they be open to receiving a bid from supporters through the Blues Trust? (*Blues Trust*)

The Club is always looking at ways of increasing revenue streams as part of our ongoing strategy but financial and commercial sensitivities dictate that this has to remain private.

- Are we in danger of falling foul of financial fair play for this season's finances (2018/2019)? (*East Midlands Blues*)

As we have already stated, we are working hard to comply with the Profitability and Sustainability regulations and remain in regular dialogue with the EFL about our finances and future business projections.

- Has the Club considered replacing the old Main Stand with a more modern stand? (*Blues Trust*)

As was noted at the previous forum, this is not on the list of immediate priorities for the Club.

Misc.

- Has there been any progress on the idea of projecting the Club badge onto the back of the Gil Merrick stand? (*East Midlands Blues*)

We are working hard on this and hope to have it in place for the start of the new season. It's not as straightforward as just going ahead and doing it planning permission and various other hoops that we need to jump through. However, we are making progress slowly.

- Could you ask the Council to improve the street lighting for people exiting the ground from the Gil Merrick stand onto St. Andrew's Street? (*Blues Trust*)

We have a meeting scheduled with the local authority in two weeks' time where this will be discussed.

- What plans are in place to help supporters who will be affected by the Clean Air Zone being implemented four months into the new season? I'd like to see the club provide free secure cycle parking to help promote healthier living. I sit in the Gil Merrick where there is ample space for hundreds of bikes. Can this be looked into? (*BCFC Forum*)

Yes, this will be looked into.

- Traffic management around the stadium is awful. You still see local residents trying to drive against the traffic on match days, there is total gridlock. Can you do a review of the traffic management plan, and seek some alternative solutions? Perhaps you could consider

introducing a traffic flow system that, for example, allows two lanes of downhill traffic on Garrison Lane after the match? (*East Midlands Blues*)

We will bring this up with relevant authorities and endeavour to find an improved solution to the problem.

- Can Blues partner with the local authority and local residents and do a proper clean-up of the streets around St. Andrew's? It looks like an absolute dump. More bins around the vicinity of the stadium would surely help? (*East Midlands Blues*)

We agree this can be improved upon and we will again speak to local councillors and investigate different options moving forward.