

Sheffield Wednesday Supporters Engagement Panel

Date: 9 March 2024

Time: 10:00am

In attendance

Panel groups: Paul Holmes (Wednesdayite), Chris Ledger (Rainbow Owls), Martin Pryor (West Midlands Owls), Evan Skillier (Owls Americas), Jon Wakefield (South West South Wales Owls), Eve Winstanley (Hoyland Owls)

Panel individuals: Philip Rushforth, Saif Salih, Alan Smith

SWFC: Dejphon Chansiri (Chairman), Alastair Wilson (General Manager and Chair), Trevor Braithwait (Director of Communications)

Welcome

DC welcomed all in attendance and thanked the panel for their time and input.

2024/25 Season Tickets

PR asked to begin the meeting with a discussion on Season Tickets. PH asked why the club did not supply answers to the Sheffield Star to a list of questions submitted by supporters. TB said the Supporters Engagement Panel was established for exactly this kind of debate. AW said almost all the questions were covered by the FAQs published on the official website, together with a further FAQ, and would answer any additional queries.

PH asked why the club had opted to switch to PayPal as its merchant provider and AW explained that PayPal is a like-for-like provider as previous merchants, other than PayPal is online only. AW said that PayPal opens up a range of options for supporters and confirmed that payments can be made via debit or credit card in exactly the same way as via Worldpay. The guest option means that opening a PayPal account is not necessary. AW explained the decision to move to an online-only provider aligns the club to the modern digital age and cited the sale of over 40,000 tickets for the Wembley play-off final last May as a key example. All tickets were sold exclusively online in a limited period of time and the process was successful and seamless. Sales for Season Tickets are facilitated in the same way, with a simple step-by-step guide on how to renew within the FAQs. AW continued by saying the club will look to sell certain products online only moving forward. He said fees had reduced significantly by using PayPal from around three years ago, there are no additional benefits to the club, more the supporters, particularly those eligible to pay for their Season Ticket over three instalments interest-free. No other provider could offer a similar benefit to our supporters.

AW said that after due diligence, PayPal was the most compelling option for both the club and supporters and

confirmed that the club are not 'blacklisted' so to prevent other providers offering their services. TB said that across the entertainment industry, an overwhelming number of transactions for tickets are online only. He said there have been very few issues with any supporter unable to make their purchase and stressed that help was on hand, in person or by telephone or email, to anyone experiencing problems.

PH asked how many Season Tickets have been sold and AW confirmed a figure of over 13,000. MP asked for the reason for the first phase delay and AW said the club were finalising full payment details outside of the club's control. It was important that any teething issues were resolved ahead of the launch. AW said the PayPal model will be rolled out to retail items and matchday tickets in the long term. JW said he understood the reasons for an online-only system but as a fanbase, not everyone is conversant with going fully digital, which stoked concern. TB reiterated the process has been a success and that had there been major problems, alternatives would be considered. However, this was not the case, the proven PayPal platform has been a success and represents a blueprint for the future. JW advised diligence in future launches and to learn from every launch, to which TB and AW agreed as a matter of course.

Fan Zone

PH said a panel sub-group had worked on designs for the Fan Zone boardings but received no updates. The panel had requested to see designs but were concerned over a lack of progress. AW apologised for this and said he will seek full feedback from the team running the Fan Zone on matchdays. AW said progress has been made in other areas - this season the Fan Zone has operated successfully throughout the winter months, which was not possible last season. Following issues over sound levels and concerns from local residents, busker-style artists have recently been introduced, together with food and drink offers, and further plans are in place for next season and potentially for the Euros this summer. The club are working with the local Safety Advisory Group to ensure the success of the Fan Zone in the long term. AW said the team will loop in plans with the panel moving forward.

Future meetings

PR said the panel have had general discussions on meetings, when and how often they should take place. The panel appreciate DC is not always available and PR said the panel are not requesting monthly meetings but they would like some form of stability, for example diarised on a quarterly basis, with a suggestion of two meetings in person and two via Zoom to accommodate everyone. Could meetings be set well in advance? DC and AW said this would not be a problem. DC said there should be pertinent issues to raise with agendas presented in good time and 'ad hoc' meetings can be called by both sides. AW said the chairman may not be able to guarantee his attendance if meetings are set far in advance and the panel said they would have similar issues but would prefer structured quarterly meetings to which DC and AW agreed. As an action point, the panel were to liaise and propose a selection of potential dates. A plan has since been provided by the panel and agreed by the club.

Community initiatives

PH asked if a central diary could be created, working with the club and Community Programme, so there was no

clash for designated community-focused initiatives. PH recognised the numerous partnerships with charities and community organisations but felt some awareness has been compromised given date clashes, mostly outside anyone's control. However, PH said a more aligned approach would be beneficial where possible to keep momentum going, AW and TB agreed, and will take this as an action point, together with the Community Programme, for future initiatives. TB reminded the panel that the club must marry with the EFL calendar for community-focused initiatives throughout the season.

Supporter conduct

AW said this item was requested as an agenda point by the club given the trend of unacceptable incidents seen at Hillsborough this season. He explained that many working hours by senior staff members have been channeled into communications with the FA and relevant authorities following a succession of incidents. AW sought panel opinion, with all feedback taken on board. He said the last thing anyone wants is for SWFC to be the first club this season to have stand sanctions and the club are doing everything possible to stamp out this behaviour. MP asked what measures in place to prevent anyone with illegal substances entering the stadium – AW said the club successfully deployed sniffer dogs at entry points around Hillsborough at the game against Leeds. Accounts have been blocked for supporters breaching ground regulations and banning orders issued. PH asked if the club can publicise those who have received banning orders and TB said discussions have taken place with the relevant authorities if this is possible.

JW mentioned a suggestion made by Emma of the SWFC Women's Supporters Group that stickers with the reporting number be placed on the back of seats to make the number more visible. AW agreed and said this is currently under consideration. AW said another deterrent is potentially using the rear of the LEDs for additional awareness. The 'Report An Incident' text messaging service has been used more by supporters and JW said that some fans may be concerned for their own safety unless the confidential nature of this platform is underlined. TB confirmed that all messages shared via this service are confidential, which was stressed in recent club statements. AS suggested the matchday announcer included strong messaging into the pre-match script, which was roundly agreed. JW suggested a pre-match video message from Danny Röhl, similar to the Darren Moore message before the Peterborough game at Hillsborough last May which had the desired impact. JW said fans need to be aware of non-financial sanctions such as the potential of stand closures or playing behind closed doors.

AOB

AW said the club had taken on board previous panel feedback regarding the range of female items in the Owls Megastore that has now been significantly increased and well received. JW thanked the Wednesday Week and praised them for their efforts along with the club for supporting the Easter Egg campaign this month, which was a great success in helping underprivileged children in the community.

SS and MP raised the issue of 'phantom' seats around the stadium, where seats were unavailable to buy. AW confirmed there were a small number of seats blocked from sale for exceptional circumstances, such as the area close to the dugouts where supporters had to be relocated to make way for the extended dugouts.

With there being no further business, DC thanked everyone for their attendance and input once more and the meeting was closed.