

Date: Thursday 27 May 2021

Time: 6.00pm, via Zoom

### In Attendance

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Panel Groups: Dave Higgins (Wednesday Ladies), Simon Hodgkinson (North Yorkshire Owls), Paul Holmes (Wednesdayite), Martin Pryor (West Midlands Owls), Ashley Rogers (Wednesday Week), Jon Wakefield (South West South Wales Owls), Steve Walmsley (Sheffield Wednesday Supporters Trust), Eve Winstanley (Hoyland Owls)

Panel Individuals: Dave Buttery, Kerrie Footit, Paul Hodgetts, Saif Salih, Alan Smith

From the club: Dejphon Chansiri (Chairman), Liam Dooley (Chief Operating Officer and Chair), Trevor Braithwait (Director of Communications)

Apologies: Philip Rushforth (individual) and Paul Woolfson (London Owls)

### Matters arising

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This third formal meeting was arranged following feedback in which the panel proposed the club set agenda items as well as the panel. The club initially intended the engagement process to be entirely fan-led in the interests of transparency and following guidance from the Football Supporters Association and EFL. However, SWFC took on board the panel's suggestion to continue a harmonious relationship and called the meeting with the agenda set out as below. Future agendas will be at the discretion of the panel and the club.

### New Business

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- **Introducing recently appointed Chief Operating Officer Liam Dooley**
- **Panel feedback on club's proposed update statement on Season Ticket refunds**

DC welcomed everyone to the meeting and personally introduced LD to the panel. After a brief insight into his business background in the UK and internationally, LD expressed his delight at taking the role of COO and said he will essentially oversee ticketing, retail, hospitality and general stadium operations. LD said the club are keen for the engagement process to develop in the most productive way possible for both parties and the panel's input is welcome and valued. Following an update from DC, LD said he would share the club's draft statement on the current refund situation and Season Tickets for 2021/22.

DC reiterated that cashflow concerns are affecting businesses all over the world, including football clubs and his own businesses. He outlined his intention for SWFC to be self-sustainable. DC said like most people he expected the pandemic situation to be over much sooner and did not anticipate that 15 months down the line, supporters would still be excluded from games. The severe loss of income has led to cashflow issues with revenue streams starved. DC said he is working as hard as possible to balance financial commitments every day and every month.

LD referenced cashflow and after viewing the statement, PH from Wednesdayite suggested that refunds might be repositioned as a credit for tickets or retail products. LD said this is something the club would welcome. After the panel gave their general approval to the statement, LD said the club would revert and discuss the credit

option which was actioned and included in the statement the next day. The statement was issued to the panel for further approval which was given and the statement was released on Friday 28 May.

DH from Wednesday Ladies suggested that additional credit be offered to those awaiting a refund, LD appreciated the gesture but offered that this would be unfair on the thousands of supporters who have already received a refund. DC said a host of clubs did not initially offer refunds following the first lockdown but credit only. LD said we tried to be better and offer the best possible options, saying the club want over and above in terms of options. DC reiterated that cashflow is an issue and that had the pandemic ended sooner, as was initially predicted by the Government, refunds would be fully satisfied.

AS said LD is starting his role on a 'low base' given areas of discontent amplified by relegation into League One, some concerns that may not necessarily rise to the surface were the club vying for promotion for example, a point acknowledged by LD. DC said the club is open to all viable suggestions but that consideration must be given to both sides. DC said he could easily implement numerous initiatives but they must be done with both sides in mind as the club is his responsibility. He said proposals should come from a neutral stance and then debated and merged together from both standpoints. LD said the club will work to build fan relations organically with voices of reason from both sides. DC said he understands the fans' perspective but he must provide balance as owner and chairman.

SW of the Supporters Trust said like everybody he was surprised by the 55% volume of supporters who opted for a cash refund but reiterated this was a message from the fan base. Could the club build a more transparent narrative? DC said his team have underlined to him that he has been the most transparent of all previous owners and chairmen. Whilst acknowledging that certain sensitive issues must remain confidential, overall, DC said he tries to be as transparent as possible. LD said this engagement process is certainly another step in the right direction in terms of communication and transparency. Both parties will not always agree, this is normal and expected, but debate and engagement is key.

- ***Debate on pricing for 2021/22 season***

The meeting moved to Season Ticket pricing for next season and LD said the general consensus is for reductions, to which the panel agreed. DC asked for the panel's thoughts on where the pricing should be pitched. He said the majority of supporters who buy Season Tickets do so in the Early Bird window, around 90%. The club sold 12,000 Season Tickets at the Early Bird stage in February 2020. He said there are challenges ahead with cashflow and income and many clubs in League One will not have the overheads of SWFC, the size of the club has an effect on pricing. The panel agreed that overheads at SWFC will exceed those of other clubs and LD said he was pleased this was appreciated.

LD asked panel members to each note what they thought would be an acceptable pricing strategy for next season. LD said prices will be realistic and not too high while stressing at the other end of the scale they cannot be too low to be sustainable. DB said it is important for perception that SWFC will not have the most expensive pricing in the division and LD said this would not be the case. LD also underlined the value of current pricing for juniors of £1 a game with future generations in mind. LD said the club has invested significant time and resource into enhancing the matchday experience in the Family Zone in the Grandstand to complement the lowest possible pricing.

The panel were asked to note their individual price points for Season Tickets, using an adult on the Kop as an example. Responses ranged from £350 to £455 while noting they would not have expected to pay more in the event of promotion so would not automatically expect to pay a lot less following relegation – Season Tickets at Early Bird have discounts and benefits and are bought well ahead of divisional status the following year.

The panel put forward the possibility of selling smaller packages for tickets – DC said this has been trialed in the past, alongside mini-Season Tickets but take-up has been very low. LD said the club are in regular dialogue with other clubs regarding ticketing strategies and delivery.

With ballpark figures presented by the panel, DC said it is fair that the club reveals to the panel first the pricing strategies currently under consideration. DC and LD said the club are keen to hear the panel's opinion before finalising the pricing. LD shared the document with guide prices having conducted a huge piece of work on comparisons around the divisions. Again using the Kop as an example, LD said the guide is for an adult Season Ticket to come down from £455 to £365, or around 20% off current prices. The rounded figure of a 20% reduction around the stadium was also presented. LD asked the panel if they would be happy with the suggested pricing points and the panel responded overwhelmingly in favour.

JW of the South West, South Wales Owls asked if there was a possibility of subsidies/tailored packages for those supporters who travel extremely long distances to attend home games. DC said the club would be happy to liaise with hotels and travel companies for potential discounts, using existing relationships. Overall, DC said ticket prices will be fair and reasonable.

LD said the club will now revert and finalise full pricing prior to release.

#### [Any other business](#)

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With there being no other business, DC, LD and TB thanked everyone for their attendance and the meeting was closed.

#### [Date of next meeting:](#)

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To be confirmed.