

Notes of Sheffield Wednesday Supporters Engagement Panel

Date: Sunday 3 October

Time: 10.00am, via Zoom

In Attendance

Panel Groups: Dave Higgins (Wednesday Ladies), Simon Hodgkinson (North Yorkshire Owls), Paul Holmes (Wednesdayite), Ashley Rogers (Wednesday Week), Eve Winstanley (Hoyland Owls)

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

From the club: Dejphon Chansiri (Chairman), Liam Dooley (Chief Operating Officer & Chair), Trevor Braithwait (Director of Communications), Richard Stanford (Stadium Operations Manager), Rob Cox (Executive Head Chef)

New Business (agenda set by panel)

- Terms of Reference document

- Panel consultation on club releases

- Ticketing refunds update

- Catering/Health & Safety/Hygiene & staffing levels

- SWFC Ladies and funding/direction

Terms of Reference document

Following previous discussions, the panel asked for a Terms of Reference document to be finalised and issued to the panel for approval. TB took this as an action point and will distribute in due course. AS asked for clear guidance on the aims of the club and what is sought from the engagement process. TB reiterated this quite simply this is a two-way process, with engagement on both sides, which will be underlined in the document. DC said he welcomes more suggestions and ideas from the panel and that the club will always, where possible, answer as openly as possible all questions. DC said the panel can help with creative suggestions and feedback. PH put forward that the panel could be consulted before the club put certain stories into the public domain. LD explained that the intention is always to consult with the panel on 'big ticket' items such as Season Tickets and matchday pricing as examples but when stories are 'bullet proof' the club must have courage in our convictions. LD said we have a vastly experienced team running the club on a day-to-day basis but will certainly consult when necessary, adding the everyday strategies/stories cannot be put out to consensus.

Ticketing refunds update

LD explained that the Ticket Office are continuing to make their way through outstanding refunds. He said that cashflow issues were well documented and impacted severely on the process. The process now has a dedicated member of staff working full time on refunds, with other staff assisting where possible, working around regular Ticket Office duties and projects. All refunds are actioned manually by telephone given the new ticketing system. LD said feedback is that almost all conversations are pleasant, with supporters understanding of what has been

an exceptionally challenging period. All refunds continue to be actioned in chronological order in the interests of fairness. Recruitment drives in the Ticket Office and across other areas of the club continue.

Catering & staffing levels

The panel offered feedback on 'poor products, low stock levels, staffing issues' and LD explained that many issues are post-pandemic related and the hospitality industry is experiencing similar problems all over the country. He said there is no excuse for 'poor products' which he challenged, as did RC who stressed that any feasible product request can be fed back to the club. LD said he fully understood the wider ranging issues regarding kiosks and service. He said the club has not made the progress we would have liked and the pandemic has severely impacted that situation. LD explained he is in regular contact with other clubs, all of whom report the same concerns and supporter feedback. He sees on a matchday first-hand the situation at Hillsborough and, working on a daily basis with RC, is doing everything possible to resolve the problems. He said football clubs and entertainment venues are struggling to recruit staff across the board, which is affecting our matchday services. He assured the panel categorically that the imminent shift to a new till provider will lead to a significantly quicker service at the kiosks.

RC reiterated that these issues are universal at present. The club's recruitment drive has been hard and fast and will continue but there is no instant solution to certain problems, many of which are related to the current tillage system which will be replaced, so moving forward the service will be quicker. All transactions will be monitored in real time, current average transaction time is 37 seconds and the aim is for this to come down to 8 seconds. RC asked for supporters' patience in this period of transition, stressing we went fans to buy products from the club and is running numerous trials at the moment, primarily in the South Stand. LD said we are increasing staffing levels and stock, we have bottle bars and increased signage and flow maps in the South Stand. Part of the strategy with new tillage partners in future will see the introduction of an app which will dramatically improve service, we will be able to monitor sales and stock in real time, which will also be of benefit regarding wastage. SH asked if his experience in the hospitality industry could be utilised, LD and RC agreed and suggested a separate conversation.

Sheffield Wednesday Ladies

DH introduced a conversation on the Ladies section and it was explained that the Ladies are run separately from the club, whilst under the umbrella of the SWFC brand. He said the Ladies receive a page in the programme, discount on kit and historically use of a Community Programme minibus to enable the players to save money on fuel costs. DH asked if the minibus option remains as an observation and not a complaint, could this be revisited and could the club help with kit as the Ladies have invested significantly on tracksuits.

DC said he wants to support the Ladies section more but his understanding from his team is that the Ladies wish to continue to manage themselves. He said the situation could change if they were in-house. He said DH cannot request and receive support but then continue managing themselves, if the Ladies are brought in-house then support can be increased, if that were to happen then we can start to work together immediately. DC and LD said a meeting for further discussions should take place, to which DH agreed. *The meeting subsequently took

place on 28 October.

Any other business

PH asked if the club reach out to both universities in the city to drive recruitment and potential ticket sales. LD explained that we have excellent relationships with the universities – this year has seen a later start for students than normal but we recently attended recruitment events with staff wearing Wednesday shirts for added visibility. The club also has a similar presence in the city colleges.

AS asked if there were any development on potential transport discounts for long distance supporters. LD said this is one of many projects on his radar and one he will continue to explore.

PH said the car park closing opposite the Kop has impacted on disabled parking – are there any plans in place to extend parking facilities? RS explained that this area is not owned by the club and planned to be converted to retail outlets. He explained that while the club explore every avenue regarding parking on matchday, the stadium is located in a residential area and the club are not responsible for any parking issues nor restrictions on matchday. RS would always encourage supporters to use public transport where possible. He said parking is extremely limited and we do maximise that space where possible, for example the training ground is now used for additional parking. RS said the club are looking at potential locations on flat level for disabled supporters, with Hillsborough Park a possibility.

RS went on thank all supporters for positively taking note and acting upon club communications through the COVID-19 crisis. He said the prospect of COVID-19 passports for football supporters remains a possibility as discussions continue on an ongoing basis at Government level.

DC asked if the panel had any further questions, none were forthcoming and after thanking everyone for their attendance, LD declared the meeting closed.

Date of next meeting

To be confirmed