



Newcastle United Fans Forum Minutes

Thursday 29 June 2017
Sir Bobby Robson Suite
St. James' Park

Club representatives

Lee CHARNLEY	Managing Director
Nicole ATKIN	Head of Business Development
Lee MARSHALL	Head of Marketing Comms (chair)
Eddie RUTHERFORD	Head of Facilities
Steve STOREY	Head of Safety and Security
Stephen TICKLE	Ticket Operations Manager

Supporters

Gareth BEARD	NUDSA
Mark BETHAM	Equality representative
Alan CLARK	Over-65s representative
Steve COLE	Supporters Clubs
Peter FANNING	NUST
Steve HASTIE	NUFC Fans United
Jon LANE	Members' representative
Phil LEE	East Stand representative
Jill MORRIS	Long-distance supporters
Lynne PARMLEY	NUDSA
Bryn TENNANT	Young persons' representative
Martin TYRRELL	Leazes Stand representative
Steve WALLWORK	Away fans' representative
Kris WOODS	Gallowgate End representative

Apologies

Kate BRADLEY	Head of Newcastle United Foundation
Craig ENGLISH	Corporate representative
Sharon RAVENHALL	Women's representative
Daniel THOMPSON	Milburn Stand representative
Wendy TAYLOR	Head of Media

1. Introduction

Lee Marshall (LM) welcomed all attendees and outlined meeting protocol.

Outgoing members

LM outlined that six members would be vacating their seats at the end of the June 2017 meeting following their two-season tenure and thanked them for their contributions. The club will be welcoming new applications for vacant seats shortly.

2. Supporter items

The club received a number of questions from supporters in advance of the meeting and they were added to the agenda accordingly. For agenda purposes, supporter safety and stadium issues were grouped together first.

Supporter safety – Strawberry Place

In the weeks running up to the Fans Forum, forum members had collectively raised concerns about supporter safety on Strawberry Place immediately after matches. Members had contacted Newcastle City Council (NCC) and Northumbria Police (NP) for a meeting regarding a proposed closure of the road but a meeting with supporters had not yet taken place.

Steve Hastie (SH) outlined that he and Kris Woods (KW) had coordinated correspondence on behalf of Fans Forum members.

Steve Storey (SS) acknowledged members' concerns and referenced recent global terror attacks involving vehicles, which had understandably exacerbated those concerns.

SS reassured members that a productive meeting had since taken place between the club, NCC and NP and that supporter and public safety was of paramount importance to all parties.

Accordingly, counter-terrorism experts were already carrying out analysis and will be submitting recommendations at a further meeting imminently.

SS assured members that the council is committed to putting temporary measures in place ahead of the 2017/18 season, with a view to permanent measures to follow.

The club would also be looking at experts' recommendations inside the stadium.

SS thanked members for their collective efforts in raising awareness of supporters' concerns.

Phil Lee (PL) asked if other areas around the stadium, including Leazes Lane, would be covered by the recommendations.

SS confirmed that the wider area around the stadium would be under consideration.

SH outlined the benefit of considering supporters' views when assessing risks and outlined several locations close to the ground where NCC could make improvements. SH and Gareth Beard also raised specific issues on behalf of disabled supporters.

Peter Fanning (PF) praised NP for their efforts in meeting supporters directly in recent years and strongly encouraged NCC to follow suit.

SS reassured the Fans Forum that respective colleagues at NCC are committed to making the areas surrounding the stadium safe for the public.

The club agreed to pass on a meeting request to NCC on behalf of members.

Alan Clark (AC) asked if additional security measures would be introduced inside the stadium. Jill Morris (JM) asked if fans would be told about such measures in advance.

The club advised that its procedures are under constant review for all events and that any relevant changes that would impact on fans would be communicated in advance of matchdays.

Location of away supporters at St. James' Park

Members raised questions regarding the location of away supporters at St. James' Park following a change to Premier League rules. As part of the new rule, away supporters should be located at pitch level inside Premier League stadia if it is safe to do so.

SH, PF, KW, JM, Mark Betham (MB), Jon Lane (JL) and Steve Wallwork (SW) all contributed to a subsequent discussion.

The club confirmed that it had been given dispensation to accommodate away supporters in the upper tier of the Leazes Stand as normal for the entirety of the 2017/18 season, based on research, analysis and recommendations it had provided to the Premier League.

The club explained that all options for the potential relocation of away supporters had been explored in its research and that moving away supporters to pitch level would – in the club and local authority's opinion – not be safe.

The Premier League has commissioned an independent assessment of the club's report and there will be further discussion between the parties ahead of the 2018/19 season.

Singing section

LM confirmed that the club has been liaising with supporter groups Gallowgate Flags and Wor Hyem 1892 for several months to find a suitable location.

Having identified sufficient availability in the Gallowgate Upper, both supporter groups agreed on the proposed location and the club has started the process of moving supporters into vacant seats to form a new singing section.

LM explained that conversations are continuing with both groups in support of the initiative and in support of the atmosphere across the whole stadium.

'Safe standing'

The club explained that current legislation requires all-seater stadia in the Premier League and accordingly, no changes are imminent.

SS outlined publicity around a survey that had been circulated to clubs by the Premier League in relation only to "permitted standing". The club has requested further clarification from the Premier League before considering its response.

SS explained that if legislation changes, the club will consider the implications and will consult with supporters but would not want to raise expectations unnecessarily in the meantime.

Transfers / recruitment

Members raised a number of questions in relation to the summer transfer window.

The club reinforced its commitment to strengthening in positions identified by the manager and aims to deliver positive news in the coming days.

In a general discussion with the group, several factors that can impact upon transfers were explained and the club highlighted the limited amount of business completed by most clubs through the early stages of what are challenging market conditions to date.

The club explained that it had hoped to conclude some incoming and outgoing deals early and while sharing frustrations, there is confidence that the squad will be improved.

The club emphasised that rumours in the media had no influence on its operations.

Bryn Tennant (BT) and Steve Cole (SC) asked about Graham Carr's departure from the club and its impact on transfers.

The club explained that planning for a specific transfer window takes place well in advance so the mutual decision by the club and Graham Carr to part ways would have no impact on current targets.

The club confirmed that its scouting operations are being reviewed with the manager and an announcement will follow soon (*n.b. the appointment of Steve Nickson as head of recruitment was subsequently confirmed by the club on Saturday 1st July*).

KW asked if the club had a specific policy regarding the age of incoming players.

As outlined in a previous Fans Forum, the club stated that it does work towards a particular profile but that exceptions are – and have always – been considered in order to balance the squad.

Footballing objectives

KW asked if that club had a specific plan over the next 3-5 years.

The club accepted that relegation had been a step back but emphasised the importance of achieving an immediate return to the top flight.

The club's aim now is to finish as high up the Premier League table as possible and in doing so, build a platform to progress further.

PL touched on the club's approach to cup fixtures in recent seasons.

The club was aware of the challenge managers face when giving a full squad game-time during a long season, but drew attention to public comments made by the manager during the 2016/17 season which demonstrated a will to win every game played, whether league or cup.

Training ground development

The club is continuing to discuss the development of the training ground but is currently prioritising investment in other areas including the squad, rather than on the immediate construction of brand new facilities.

While plans haven't changed significantly, there have been modifications to the process in consultation with the manager and the club is aiming to minimise disruption to the team. There is currently no timescale on developments but the club remains committed to the long term project.

The club reassured members that while it would like to improve aspects of the training ground building, the outdoor and indoor pitches that players use for match preparation are as good as anywhere else in the Premier League.

Tickets / loyalty points

Nicole Atkin (NA) confirmed a date in August 2017 for a ticketing workshop, which will assist the club in improving its ticketing services in all areas. The club encouraged all Fans Forum members to participate and will be communicating arrangements separately.

SW encouraged the club to invite former Fans Forum members, including individuals who participated in its previous ticketing working group.

JM asked if all fans will be receiving new season ticket cards for the new season.

NA confirmed that all fans will be receiving new cards for the 2017/18 campaign.

SW asked if the club had an away fans fund and, if so, would it be funding initiatives for away supporters.

LM explained that the Premier League-wide £30 cap on away match ticket prices had replaced a ring-fenced away fans fund and accordingly, there was no immediate guarantee of additional funding for separate initiatives.

LM outlined the club's recent history in setting affordable tickets prices, its work in establishing reciprocal pricing with other clubs and its central role as a member of the Premier League working group that directly secured the £30 cap.

Should further funding be made available, the club will communicate it at the earliest opportunity.

Away ticket allocations

Following the news that 3,000 tickets would be made available by Tottenham Hotspur for away fans at Wembley during the 2017/18 season, MB asked for clarification on the Premier League rule in relation to minimum allocations.

LM confirmed that as per Section R 9.1 of the Premier League regulations, clubs need to make a minimum of 3,000 tickets available for away supporters, or 10% of seats if the ground has a capacity lower than 30,000.

Providing there are no applicable safety regulations or limits set by the local authority, clubs can offer a greater allocation to visiting clubs depending on availability.

Shirt sponsorship

SW asked if the club would make sponsor-free adult shirts available.

The club confirmed that the issue had been raised in previous Fans Forums, however contractually the club's shirt sponsor is entitled to have its logo on all adult shirts. As per legislation, the logo can't be featured on juniors' shirts.

The club noted the very positive feedback received on the new home kit overall and thanked fans for their comments on the kit design, including the anniversary crest and return of red numbers and lettering on the reverse.

LM confirmed that the club's away and third kits would be officially revealed before the end of July.

SW asked if Fun88 would be involved in any club-related activities over the course of the next three seasons.

LM explained that an 'activation plan' is being produced by Fun88 in consultation with the club's commercial partnerships team and its activities would be confirmed in due course.

LM encouraged members to share their ideas on potential sponsor activities, which will be passed on to Fun88.

JL enquired about a potential sleeve sponsor on the 2017/18 kits.

The club stated that it is making progress in this area but that a final sleeve sponsor had not yet been confirmed.

Virgin Trains East Coast scheme

JM and SC registered an interest in seeing the return of a previous Virgin Trains scheme which offered fans benefits including discounted fares and free booking amendments if matches were rescheduled for television.

LM explained that the scheme was always designed to be a one-year pilot. While it provided useful benefits to individuals who signed up, the club noted that uptake was below the level anticipated by Virgin Trains East Coast and accordingly, it closed as scheduled at the end of the 2015/16 season.

The club is not aware of any plans to resurrect the scheme but would be open to discussing how it could provide support.

JM requested statistics on season ticket holders travelling long distances to support any discussions.

Fixtures / broadcast selections

JM asked if the Premier League had made commitments to giving supporters suitable notice of fixtures dates/times being changed for live broadcast.

LM advised that the Premier League has published specific dates in relation to broadcast selections (Sky Sports and BT Sport) across the season, as follows:

Period of matches covered	Approx. date of announcement
August and September	10 July 2017
October and November	11 August 2017
December and January	12 October 2017
February	12 December 2017
March	25 January 2018
April	26 February 2018
May	6 April 2018
Matchweek 38	After all clubs have played 37 matches

PL raised raised a question around a potential increase in the number of alternative kick-off times (i.e. Friday and Saturday evenings) that could be introduced by the Premier League.

The club explained that the number of games to be televised is set out in the contract between the broadcasters and the Premier League. The current Premier League broadcast cycle runs until the end of the 2018/19 season therefore, if there were to be an increase, it would be at that point with the agreement of clubs.

PF confirmed that Newcastle United Supporters Trust (NUST) would be included in some discussions around fixture scheduling as part of the Premier League's forthcoming club trusts meeting.

3. AOB

NUFCTV highlights

SC asked if the club would be continuing to post full highlights of matches on the club website as it had during the 2016/17 season.

LM advised that Premier League rules are different to those set by the EFL but that the club is committed to providing access to free highlights as and when the rules permit.

Stadium improvements

SH asked what changes had been made inside stadium over the summer months.

Eddie Rutherford (ER) advised that several hospitality areas had been renovated, while all East Stand toilets and the PA system have been improved. The ramp for disabled supporters in the North East corner will also have new flooring applied in coming weeks.

Season tickets

SW asked if all fans who have applied for season tickets will receive one.

The club confirmed that sales of season tickets are ahead of like-for-like sales at the same time last year and that all applicants will receive confirmation of their season tickets and their Direct Debit mandate (if applicable) shortly.

SW enquired about the return of concerts to St. James' Park following the announcement of Ed Sheeran's scheduled performance in June 2018.

The club explained that previous opportunities had not been desirable from a commercial perspective, however this concert was structured differently and presented the club with a risk-free income opportunity.

The club outlined its recent and forthcoming rugby fixtures and explained that it is always open to securing events that will create new revenue streams.

NUFC Fans Food Bank

SH wished to thank all supporters for their support of the NUFC Fans Food Bank initiative, which directly benefits vulnerable families across the region. The campaign has been a huge success and there is now a donation point located in the Grainger Market in the city centre. The donation point will be returning to the stadium for the 2017/18 season.

The club congratulated NUFC Fans United and Newcastle United Supporters Trust for their efforts in launching and supporting the campaign. LM underlined the club's commitment to promoting the food bank campaign across its digital channels. Other charitable campaigns are also invited to share updates via website@nufc.co.uk.

LGBT flag

SW raised awareness of an independent fundraising initiative for a Newcastle United rainbow flag to show solidarity with the LGBT community. The flag will be used by fans before matches at St. James' Park and has the backing of the Gallowgate Flags movement.

The club welcomed the idea and has publicly supported the fundraising initiative on social media. The club is committed to nurturing an inclusive and welcoming environment at St. James' Park and will be working proactively with LGBT groups throughout the 2017/18 season and beyond.

Fans Forum promotion

Members expressed an interest in securing a page in the matchday programme to draw attention to the Fans Forum and its members.

The club will look at available space in the matchday programme and underlined its commitment to highlighting the positive work of the Forum to its wider fan base.

The club will also update its contact details for individuals once new members are appointed.

Next meeting: September 2017

ENDS