



SUPPORTERS' FORUM LUNCH MINUTES

Topic	Supporters' Forum Lunch minutes – 2021/22
Attendees	BCFC: Edward Zheng, Craig Gardner, Lungi Macebo, Ian Dutton, David Hoult, Dale Moon, Sharon Byrne, Sharon Crehan, David Brown, Aamir Javaid, Wendy Buswell, Jake Malbasa Supporter Clubs: Accessiblues, Birmingham Supporters Club, Blues 4 All, Blues Collective, Blues Trust, Central Blues, Northside Blues, North West Blues, Punjabi Blues, Redditch Blues
Date and time	Tuesday 3 rd August, 12noon – 3pm
Location	Jasper Carrot suite, St. Andrew's Stadium
Apologies	Jessica Poulson, Gabbie Cabbie Media, Michael Jabbari, BCFC Forum, Paul Delves, Richard Cox, Birmingham Tenna Ladies
Meeting opened 12.25pm	
Introduction from Dave Brown and Edward Zheng	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Dave Brown (DB) opened meeting and introduced all members of staff in attendance- Edward Zheng (EZ) explained the new structure of the club – how EZ and board of directors work closely with senior management team and first team staff to support where needed	
Transfer update from Craig Gardner	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Craig Gardner (CG) outlined he works with Lee Bowyer on every transfer. Decisions of positions and who to recruit are made between them- CG explained that business was purposely done early in the window. A striker and potentially a defender are still on the agenda, depending on outgoings. Two to three outgoings are expected- CG shared that Neil Etheridge is back in training and working with the doctor- Fans stated how pleased they were to see a man of football on the board and the results so far have been impressive	
Stadium update from Lungi Macebo	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Lungi Macebo (LM) confirmed the stadium works are currently on track for fans to return in Upper Kop and Upper Tilton for Stoke at home- LM explained problems with stands stem from original build. Upon the appointment of the Buckingham Group, it became clear that the issues were more complicated than first envisioned. It was clear that there was some delamination to the bolts, some bolts were missing (since actioned), in addition to this, some steel beams were corroded, which have been brushed clean and are being recoated with specialist paint. Addressing the corrosion in the lower tiers is a much bigger job, with current terraces due to be removed, corrosion to the steels remedied and the terraces being replaced, in-situ. LM stated the original build has fallen considerably short of expected lifespan. Complexity of repairs caused initial delay.	

- Work on lower stands will take 12-18 weeks to complete and cannot begin until upper stands are signed off.
- LM stated cost of repairs will be £2.5million plus unforeseen costs with the deadline of the end of May 2022 to be adhered to
- LM and EZ stated that BCFC as tenants, foot the bill for repairs
- Gil Merrick undergoing painting and maintenance as we speak
- Flags on stadium have been replaced, signs are to be replaced ASAP, panels at the front are to be repainted and the replacement of the windows at the front are being looked into
- Following a question, when restrictions around player interaction are lifted, BCFC to look into West Hills access for signings. Fan access day to be considered
- BCFC to consider producing a large comms document detailing the sale and lease of the stadium at a later date

Marketing update from Ian Dutton

- Ian Dutton (ID) was speaking on behalf of chief marketing officer Jessica Poulson, who sent in her apologies due to shielding
- ID spoke about the Club's increased communication over the past few months and how this intends to carry on indefinitely, making sure the board's "fan first" philosophy is adhered to
- ID also highlighted the strength of the Club's media creation team for being unmatched in terms of player reveals and announcements
- With Blues Loyalty coming to end, ID stated that a new model with more rewards will be introduced in the future
- ID stated that BluesTV has proven to be an excellent asset especially during lockdown, with plans to expand and develop the department over time
- DB and ID addressed issues surrounding the Cheltenham BluesTV refunds, stating StreamAMG should automatically process these. Liaison with StreamAMG to identify why this happened is ongoing and refunds have been processed manually when requested

Ticketing update from Aamir Javaid

- Aamir Javaid (AJ) stated that the Club has sold approaching 11,000 season tickets and those requesting cards will have them sent out this week
- Sheffield United away has sold out and went on general sale so members have had a chance to get credits
- In reference to away priority criteria, AJ cited the amount of away cup games as to why the limits were not reduced. Had the four Covid affected games in 2019/20 gone ahead, limits would have increased

- More than 50% of the fanbase have opted for digital season tickets with that number expected to rise over the season
- AJ and ID answered questions on the Category A price for the upcoming season, stating that as season tickets were increased slightly, match tickets had to as well to ensure season ticket holders are receiving best value
- Away teams will receive a maximum allocation of 2,000 tickets

Retail update from Wendy Buswell and Ian Dutton

- ID stated working relationship with JustSport is good and mutually beneficial
- Wendy Buswell (WB) explained the closure to the shop last week also put web comms offline, causing a backlog in orders
- Both shirts are selling very well, with children's shirts on pre-order. Sales best in years
- ID explained procedure for choosing kit – a committee of staff and JustSport chose to recognise 2011/12 campaign. All agree kits are a great success
- Blues Store operates on a profit share model, currently not much change in finances to previous model however this is expected grow. Importance of having a specialist retail company onboard also highlighted

Catering update from Sharon Crehan and Ian Dutton

- ID introduced Sharon Crehan (SC) from Elixir, the Club's new catering partner. ID explained a full tender process went ahead, and SC listed Ibrox and several other stadia as its experience
- ID discussed how the Club listened to fans to bring back Pukka Pies and to introduce a more widespread contactless payment approach to include Apple and Google Pay
- Over the course of the season, ID hopes the changes in catering are visibly a level up

Covid-19 update from Lungi Macebo

- LM is the Club's Covid officer and discussed the measures taken at the Club going back to when players had to return to training in May 2020
- LM stated no major outbreaks at the Club during the peak of lockdowns
- Following the governments guidance, (yet to be issued), the EFL may introduce Covid Passports effective from October 1st, once the Club has got more information on this, it will be shared with fans and implemented, accordingly.
- Stadium is currently operating in three zones Red/Purple/Green: players and coaches, press, and public.
- LM reiterated the importance of player interaction but stated it must remain suspended for the time being

Security update from Dave Hoult

- Dave Hoult (DH) introduced new security measures, stating the upcoming Manchester Bombing Report will raise many points that the Club will implement
- DH is using upcoming Staff Open Days to recruit more in-house security staff as opposed to extra contracted security
- New emergency evacuation routes are being implemented and DH would like supporters' clubs to help with test events
- DH to consider more fan-led security firms

Supporters' Clubs update from Jake Malbasa

- Jake Malbasa (JM) provided an update to the new workings of the Supporters' Clubs, stating they will be used as focus groups for any changes in the Club
- JM issued all clubs with a new Code of Conduct that needed to be signed by all

Questions from Supporters' Clubs

Club:

1. What are the plans for Blues Women? There has been very little investment in the team over the last three years.

LM stated that Covid had posed a number of challenges for BCWFC, it will continue to be a challenge to try to compete with the Premier League backed clubs, with their level of investment, however the Club intends to be competitive and will be supported to do so. Budget was signed off early, in the middle of May, the right Head Coach, in Scott Booth has been appointed and funding has been agreed by parent club. ID stated the move to St. Andrew's highlights commitment to team and bigger brands are investing. LM stated broadcast deal is a good start but could be a lot, lot better with some WSL teams not expected to break even for at least 10 more years.

Ticketing:

1. Will free away travel for carers still only be available on the accessible coach?

AJ will look into this and the investment needed. AJ stated BCFC remain the only Club to offer free carer travel on away coaches

2. How many fans took up the offer of purchasing a season ticket for Blues Women?

ID stated that women's season ticket numbers are approaching 100, which is a number the Club would want to improve in the build up to the season and called for the help of all Supporters' Clubs to get behind the women's team. Board understand the importance and history of the women's team.

3. Is it possible for more notice to be given before away tickets go on sale? It is not always convenient for those who purchase in person to make it down to the ticket office at short notice.

AJ stated the home team are responsible for any delay in tickets going on sale, but fans should prepare for away tickets four weeks in advance of matchday. Tickets will always be announced to go on sale at 5pm the following day to allow fans time to read the messaging. AJ will look at other methods to give fans enough time

4. Why have the price of season tickets gone up so much?

ID explained that given the increase in operating costs across the board, a small and reasonable price increase was necessary, but made sure to stay well below league average and still some of the most affordable season tickets in the league.

5. Many clubs give ticketing discounts to supporters over 60. Would Blues consider this rather than needing to be 65 to qualify?

AJ to look into how many other clubs operate a 60 scheme and potentially revisit with senior management team

6. Are there any plans to upgrade the current Ticketing system in the future?

TicketMaster who currently operate BCFC tickets are the industry leaders, however AJ will look at ways of improving online portal

7. If we are asked to isolate by the NHS, will our tickets be refunded for fixtures missed?

LM stated that credit notes will be issued to fans who get notified to isolate by the NHS app. Number of people getting notified set to decrease in the middle of August with anyone who is double jabbed not being required to self-isolate.

Marketing:

1. Will the Club be producing a traditional programme this season as opposed to the poster version that was issued last season? Will programmes still be complimentary for Club Class members?

From Stoke onwards, matchday programmes will return and remain complimentary for Club Class

2. Can the Club issue communication online regarding how recent changes may affect fans' matchday journey and parking? For example, the new Clean Air charges mean there is now an £8 fee to enter the area around Clements Arms where many fans park. Meanwhile, Bolton Road is now a one-way street in the direction AWAY from St. Andrew's. Many fans are not aware of this

DH explained how alternate routes around the city can work. JM discussed the Club's intentions to put out a piece of comms for all fans about changes to the surrounding areas in terms of logistics. JM also stated the Club's intentions to work with third party transport providers to assist fans

Retail

1. Is there going to be a new range of leisure wear this autumn – for example sweatshirts and fleeces?

WB stated new range of Nike tracksuits, jumpers and leisurewear will arrive in time for Christmas (Nov/Dec)

2. What is the point in AVEC merchandise? It is not replica wear as it is not worn by the players, and it does not seem to be very popular. Why don't we sell more Nike merchandise?

WB stated the AVEC offers a cheaper alternative to the Nike wear and has proven very popular. No plans to discontinue

3. Last season there were only two Nike items in XXXL or larger. This year the replica shirts fit even smaller. Are the Club losing sales because of this?

WB and ID informed that this is a Nike global stance, with majority of items only going to 2XL. AVEC does offer 3XL in multiple items

4. The kits this year are beautiful, but the printed badge stops some of us from buying the shirts! Can something be done about this?

As communicated in previous statements, next season's kit is guaranteed to be a woven badge. ID stated that the decision to move to a heat pressed badge was never financial, instead was an idea related to sport science

Safety

1. Will the Club reconsider their policy on not allowing drinks bottles or flasks into the ground for the new season?

DH stated that due to the flasks being used as a missile in a previous match, there are no plans to allow flasks into the stadium at the minute. This is not a permanent decision and one that will be reviewed at a later date

2. Has the disabled ramp for Bar 8 been repaired yet?

DH stated he has only just been made aware of this issue and will rectify as quickly as possible

3. Will face coverings or negative COVID-19 tests be a condition of entry onto the Club coaches for away travel?

Due to the coaches being classed as enclosed public transport, masks will still be required on Club coaches. There are no plans to introduce Lateral Flow testing, for now.

Other

1. When people drive past the stadium, the first thing you notice are the tatty flags on top of the Kop, the faded paintwork, and the filthy windows. Do we still have a maintenance team?

As mentioned previously, flags have been changed, painting is ongoing and repairs to the windows are being explored

2. Can the Club update us on the chances of having the badge on the back of the Gil Merrick stand?

DH and ID stated that this is a far bigger job than many anticipate due to council planning being required and the involvement of Network Rail. In order to carry out the work, the train line must close for at least two days, with the Club responsible for all loss of income. ID understands it would be good branding and visible from New Street. To be revisited at a later date.

3. Matchday parking has always been an issue at Blues and this will become worse this season because of the clean air zone charges in Digbeth where many supporters usually park. Are there any plans to provide secure cycling storage at the stadium – possible under the Gil Merrick stand?

DH stated that the Club as had secure cycle lock facilities for eight years by exit 8A. A steward operates in this area also

4. Is the Club in contact with the City Council regarding the Metro extension through Digbeth? Is there a timeline in place for extending it to St. Andrew's? This would really help people get to the ground on matchday.

LM stated the Club is in regular contact with Birmingham City Council about various matters, however there has been no update recently on the Metro extension. LM will pick this up ASAP, agreed Metro extension would be beneficial

Additional questions

1. There is no hot water in one of the women's toilets. Will this be rectified this season?

The toilets in question were additionally built toilets and never designed to have hot water originally. However, this is something that could be looked into, with costing to be quoted up at a later date

2. Is it possible to have a second big screen put into the stadium?

This is not something that has been considered at this point, however it is something that could be looked into next season dependent on fan feedback and pricing. Location would need to be considered also.

Close of meeting