

## **Notes of Sheffield Wednesday Supporters Engagement Panel**

Date: Thursday 9 March

Time: 6:00pm, Hillsborough, in person and via Zoom

### **In Attendance**

Panel Groups: Dave Higgins (Wednesday Ladies), Simon Hodgkinson (North Yorkshire Owls), Paul Holmes (Wednesdayite), Ashley Rogers (Wednesday Week), Jon Wakefield (South West Owls)

Panel Individuals: Dave Buttery, Harry Buttery, Martin Pryor, Alan Smith

From the club: Dejphon Chansiri (Chairman), Liam Dooley (Chief Operating Officer & Chair), Trevor Braithwait (Director of Communications), Tracey Fidler (Designated Safeguard Officer & EDI Lead)

### **New Business**

DC welcomed everyone in attendance and said he was pleased an in-person meeting could take place following previous restrictions. Some panel members joined via Zoom relative to convenience for those living outside of Sheffield and personal situations. DC said meetings are normally more productive in person where possible. LD explained with there being no set agenda for this meeting, both parties were encouraged to debate relevant points of order.

### **Fan Zone**

PH praised the new concept, stressing the Fan Zone has proved a welcome addition to the North Stand area of the stadium, complementing the Wednesday Tap and 1867 Lounge in the South Stand. LD agreed that general feedback from supporters has been extremely positive and explained the strategy of providing a sustainable pre-match entertainment area for supporters whilst encouraging early arrival to the stadium on matchday.

PH enquired over potentially expanding the Fan Zone and LD said the club are exploring every way possible to maximise the limited space available. TF stressed adherence to health and safety is paramount, particularly with regards access into the stadium for disabled supporters. Licensing legislation must also be followed in the event of potential expansion.

LD said the Fan Zone was regrettably closed for isolated recent fixtures, this was due to adverse weather conditions causing severe damage to the newly installed covering structure. He expressed the club's disappointment as the venture has proved popular and sustainable. The club are seeking to bring the whole operation of the Fan Zone in-house next season to assume full control. One particular positive was that no footfall has been compromised from the South side of the stadium regarding occupancy of the Fan Zone on the North side.

TF offered a brief and rounded explanation of her role, which is central to current EFL guidelines and future audits. TF is working strategically across the club on a range of EDI subjects. TF said no vehicular movement is permitted in the North Stand area after 1:30pm for a 3:00pm kick-off. Densely populated areas must be a

consideration given the proximity of the Fan Zone and North Stand car parking bays, particularly for disabled supporters. LD added that noise pollution is also a factor, thus limiting music options on matchday.

### **Owls Foundation**

LD explained the club are keen to bolster subscriptions to pre-COVID-19 levels, during which there was an inevitable drop in numbers. LD explained how the Foundation directly supports the academy and further ideas were debated on raising the profile of the organisation.

DC asked the panel for feedback on new ideas for the Foundation from the supporters' perspective. AR said rewards could be more appealing as priority for big match tickets could be deemed surplus given most members are invariably Season Ticket holders. LD acknowledged the point raised. All parties agreed that promotional video featuring players who have graduated from the academy to the first team would be advantageous. *NB – this has since been actioned.*

### **Matchday experience/atmosphere**

LD explained that the club are in the midst of establishing a separate working group focusing solely on the matchday experience and atmosphere at Hillsborough. Invitees include supporters and local journalists with experience and expertise on stadia around the world. LD said a new and revamped family area has been launched in the Grandstand with plans for expansion, including new computer consoles and regular first team player appearances. A range of further ideas were debated and the panel were invited to nominate a representative for the new working group.

Regarding the atmosphere, PH enquired if away supporters would be allowed in the West Stand lower in the event of promotion to the Championship and higher away attendances, LD said this would be at the behest of the local Safety Advisory Group.

LD enquired if additional panel members could support PH in the role of Fan Engagement Officer on home matchdays. It was observed that fans asking fans for feedback could be particularly beneficial in terms of direct 'ground floor' feedback. TF said EFL auditing will include surveying supporters and LD added that the club will soon launch the most extensive fan survey in the club's history as the value of such feedback is so high. DC said the club are actively seeking feedback and engagement from supporters of all backgrounds and ages to cover the fan base as widely as possible.

DC said if some panel members are not active, could they be rotated with others who are or would be in the event of new recruits. DC said he has no desire to change panel members but did stress that all members should be active where possible. DC asked the panel to consider these observations and revert at the next meeting and together all parties can proceed in a mutually beneficial way.

The panel commended the club's 'Inside Matchday' YouTube series as a direct channel of fan engagement. LD said the increased video output formed part of the club's engagement strategy geared to attract supporters of all ages and backgrounds to Hillsborough. LD stressed the importance of increasing diversity and inclusion and

continuing with the ethos of breaking down barriers, working in unison with the SWFC Community Programme. *NB The club note the recent success of the dedicated Her Game Too fixture with Bolton Wanderers.*

The resounding success of the Community Programme's new facility on Claywheels Lane was discussed and commended by the panel. TB/LD said that the club's media team, together with the Community Programme media team, have a revised strategy to increase the profile and reach of the Community Programme, showcasing SWFC as a club whose values reflect '*more than 90 minutes*'.

PH asked if the club could make greater use of the big screen on matchdays and LD explained a range of ideas moving forward and how the operation has been significantly enhanced since moving in-house, both output wise and economically.

#### **Away match tickets**

PH raised concerns how he believes some supporters are buying tickets for certain away games and not attending, instead accruing Ticket Priority Points. The Fleetwood Town FA Cup-tie at Highbury Stadium was cited as an example, PH said 100 envelopes with tickets were not collected by visiting supporters. PH said this prevents regular away supporters attending fixtures with lesser ticket allocations. After further debate, the point was noted but it was agreed that the Ticket Priority Points scheme, while not infallible, remains the fairest method to determine priority. There is little the club can do if supporters fairly buy tickets but do not attend for what could be a number of reasons.

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

#### **Date of next meeting**

To be confirmed.