

Fans Forum Minutes – 25 April 2016

1. Attendances/Introductions/Apologies

Present - Syd Cheeswright, Lisa Squires, Chris Lawrie, Tony Keohane, David Jones, Tony Farrell, Olly Groome, Jack O'Sullivan, Mandy Anderson-Myers, Ian Wallis, Ravi Patel, John Perkins, John Bennett, Craig Parrett, Katrien Meire, David Wood, Darren Kent

Apologies – Vernon Roper, Pete Catlin, Jean Huelin, Matt Ring, Keith Blair

2. Matters Arising from previous meetings

The last meeting was videoed but this one will not be.

KM: Last time was a one off as not everyone felt comfortable and more importantly, we realized that not everyone has the time to sit through a video of 1h30, so minutes are probably the better option.

Minutes from last meeting?

KM: They were taken, but video was posted instead. There is a summary that can be produced.

3. Player of the Year Dinner

IW: It is this Sunday and has been the most difficult to organise in six years. Numbers will be much lower due to a combination of events on and off the field. Quite a few people didn't feel the meal last year was acceptable. Hope meal will be better this year. On track in terms of overall organisation. Total likely to be there is 175-200, about half of normal. Also dissatisfaction with club as a whole which has contributed. Joe Bridges and Felicity Waller have been very helpful.

TF: The disabled supporters have a trophy that they would like to present. Will TVs show the presentations in the room as disabled supporters may be some way from the stage?

OG: System tested so should work this year.

The event is likely to make a small loss, depending on the raffle. However, it was agreed that it is important that the event is not lost.

4. Hall of Fame

Online vote now finished. Will add to museum votes.

5. Club Senior Management turnover/departures

CP: There has been a high turnover of senior management, in particular both the commercial and communication managers resigned after a very short time in the post. Was it anything to do with the statement on website?

KM: Unable to comment on internal HR matters, but it was down to a combination of things.

KM: We are recruiting for all positions, including a chief scout.

CL: Why are so many leaving?

KM: It is normal when a club is relegated that people look for positions elsewhere.

6. Communications

a. Owner meeting with fans

CP: It has apparently been indicated in an email sent by the new club email that RD met members of target 20k and FF.

KM: Those meetings never took place, and both KM and TK were not aware that a statement had ever been issued to that effect. RD did meet a couple of fans, standalone people, who had an open conversation with him for 1.5 hours.

KM: We met Steve Clarke, Richard Wiseman and one other representative from the Trust today. The advice from them was to sell the club.

b. Club fans email

CP: A lot of responses appear to be cut and pasted and do not address specific queries that are raised. Who is responsible for this channel of communication?

KM: The communications team is responsible. Want to deal with all queries sent and they have responded to over 700 emails. It is a step in the right direction, and shows that communications between the club and supporters have not broken down.

CP: The statement that appeared on the website about a month ago was bizarre, and many supporters thought that the website had been hacked when it first appeared. Who drafted it?

KM: It was drafted by the senior management team and Mr Duchatalet had his input.

7. Plans for next Season/Season tickets

CL: Will the club be embarking on the same recruitment strategy or is owner prepared to change? If he carries on, one thing will happen.

KM: We will learn from mistakes.

IW: It was a completely unnecessary relegation. Squad we have shouldn't be relegated. Poor planning at start of season, preference for unfamiliar players, changes of managers are the cause. Are we really learning from it?

KM: The owner assessed the season last week and changes will be made.

Is it right that 75% of turnover can be spent on salary in League 1?

DJ: The position is slightly more complex, and there are rules about whether any shortfall can be funded by debt or equity.

IW: Part of the reason fans are disillusioned is because owner does not seek success on the field. Will we be going all out for promotion?

KM: Yes, finances don't look pretty in League 1. But obviously Mr. Duchatelet seeks success on the pitch, the idea that he doesn't, makes no sense.

IW: Lots of people believe the owner is embarking on a mad experiment. Message has not got out there. We want to hear that promotion is our aim. Being competitive doesn't sound right.

SC: Recent statements have said that senior management will start rebuilding immediately.

KM - 4 people in senior management team, TK, DJ, MA, KM.

SC: How will those plans be communicated?

KM: We will communicate on all channels.

OG: Will also be picked up by newspapers.

CP: What are the current figures for season ticket sales?

MA: We are ahead of sales target. The Lower North and u11 tickets have been popular. Figures are lower than this time last year, but that is expected with relegation. The figures are commercially sensitive so we can't share at this stage.

CL: Lots of fans are not coming back, totally disillusioned.

CL: Some on the touch screens at the turnstiles are not working?

MA: Only one is not working now and that is no 21 (water damage).

8. Match day experience

CL: People are not enjoying matches any more. Fans are leaving in droves. Flat atmosphere, except demonstrations. Sofa should go.

KM: Target 20k are working on an alternative idea to the sofa.

IW: All about winning football matches and if we are not winning the experience will be poor.

CP: Sofa is symbolic of problems that are far wider, it is a focus. IW agreed.

IW: At Bromley Addicks with Mel Baroni, we discussed the big screen. Everyone preferred screen to be changed. Good how it is now.

CL: Penalty shootout for children. Names should be announced.

LS: They are announced, maybe cannot hear due to sound system.

9. Sale of the club

CP: The view amongst the vast majority of supporters is that this appears to be the only option. It is likely that people will return and the club will be invigorated with a new owner, provided it is the right person. Is there anything in the stories that have appeared in the media?

KM: The meetings around bids for the clubs are often called by intermediaries, who cannot disclose who the investors are behind them. As stated before the club is not for sale. The only way to get out of this is to work together with the fans on the current issues, so hopefully the fans won't see a sale as the only option.

IW: The club should talk up promotion. We want to see ambition, and saying we want a "competitive" team is not sending the right message.

KM: We don't want to build up expectations. Will have one of top six budgets in League 1. Hopefully on the back of a successful season, we can rebuild.

CL: Problem is fans won't believe it any more.

IW: Significant number of people believe owner is a mad professor who has no interest in winning football matches.

10. Plans for the Stadium and Sparrows Lane

TF: Trying to promote sale of wheelchair season tickets. Don't want wheelchair areas to be closed.

MA: No plans to close any wheelchair areas.

CL: If don't sell season tickets, will areas be closed?

KM: It is too early to consider.

TK: Will look at it if we need to, but not on the agenda at the moment.

Redevelopment of Jimmy Seed Stand incorporating flats?

TK: No plans at present.

IW: Is work continuing at training ground?

TK: Going through tender and Phase 2 about to start soon. Phase 1 nearing completion.

CP: Does relegation affect aspirations to be a Category 1 academy?

TK: No, still in discussions with football league.

11. Travel

a. CARTG

SC has been the rail group coordinator for 9 years. Time somebody else had a go, happy to assist with handover.

KM: Will put it on website that a successor is sought.

b. Valley Away

John Perkins introduced as the Valley Away representative.

JP: Need to look at pick up times. Had to wait for an hour at Bexleyheath for example. Arrival times are more of a problem at close clubs. If no pick ups at Dartford and Gravesend, get to Bexleyheath 45 minutes early. Pick up times are not adjusted.

JP: Free travel is major problem. Hooligans on coaches, stewards being sworn at, drinking, obscene chants.

KM: Wanted to offer free travel as support of fans was vital. Idea was noble, but sometimes that is lost, and there may be a different way to do it.

JP: Hardcore away supporters have stopped going.

JP: For Sheffield Wednesday, there were 50 people on the coach but only 22 names.

MA: We ask for names, some don't know, some are unwilling. For next season, we will make it part of terms and conditions that each passenger must be named. Any anti social behaviour is dealt with.

TK: Aware there is a small group causing challenges. Next season, we will have an individual who will be monitoring that.

TK suggested meeting with JP to review away travel in the summer.

TF: Incident a couple of months ago where a wheelchair user had to leave wheelchair.

DJ: Coaches said it was wheelchair friendly but it wasn't.

MA: Has been passed on to DJ, and they are looking into the regulations.

TF: Hard to find wheelchair friendly coaches.

TF: Disabled supporters have to pay for carers as well, which makes it very expensive for wheelchair users. Any discount for carers?

MA: On match tickets, costs are absorbed, but coach has to pay for itself. The matter will be reviewed.

SC: Last season, how many TMOs (traffic management orders).

MA: We don't have figure.

JB asked about police liaison officer. We are still not being met at away grounds to tell us where to go and what to do.

MA said the problem was not with police liaison at this end but at the away end.

12. Any other business

CL: Have Burnley asked for more tickets?

KM: Had request today and will discuss with them. It is very unlikely that they will be given more tickets. We will offer them the option of a beamback.

IW: Chris Solly didn't feature on Saturday, allegedly for non footballing reasons because he spoke out. Like to think there is no truth.

KM: At no point did we try to push Chris Solly out to Gillingham. Quite the contrary, we have been speaking to Chris Solly regarding his future at the club, he had an injury on Saturday. It is not a true story. Paul Elliot story also has no grounds and is easy to explain. It's quite difficult to rebut all the rumours which are flying around all the time. Communications team draws KM's attention to these stories.

CL: Players do not seem to be complimentary about the regime. Club is in disarray. Only way to get people back is to get it right on the pitch.

TF: Will West Ham affect us?

KM: Unlikely for established fans, but maybe for newer fans. I'm obviously unhappy about the West Ham story because as a former a lawyer specialized in that field it looks from the outset that there's an argument for illegal state aid. But the harm is done, they're moving in. So the only solution is try to make them pay a higher rental fee and probably to make the best use of the Olympic stadium by ground sharing with another club, not be Charlton but for example a Leyton Orient.

CP: Is owner aware of scale of discontent?

KM: He is fully appraised.

KM: Heard a story about a previous manager not having a say in recruitment. The managers do have a say and that is why such a high turnover of players.

IW: Seem to be better players recruited in mid season.

13. Date of next meeting

18 July 2016