

CHELSEA FOOTBALL CLUB SUPPORTERS' CONSULTATIVE FORUM 2018-19, 1st MEETING MINUTES

Meeting held in the 1905 Club, Chelsea FC at 6.15pm on Wednesday 12th September 2018

Attendees	Club title/ group represented
Atkins, Steve	Club Director of Communications
Barfoot, Mark	UK branch
Beard, Neil	CFCUK
Buck, Bruce	Club Chairman
Cardwell, Judith	Away season ticket ("ST") holder
Churchill, Alex	Chelsea Football Fancast
Daine, Nav	General Manager of Levy UK
Gordon-Brown, Patrick	Chelsea Supporters Club
Hayden, Lisa	Accessible
Last, Nick	UK branch
Laurence, Guy	Club Chief Executive Officer
Levi, Yarin	Overseas branch
Lister, Simon	Chelsea Supporters Group
Rayburn, Chris	Chelsea Supporters Trust
Reeves, Gill	Hospitality
Regan, Andy	Forum Chairman
Rosso, Dominic	16-21's
Ryan, Kevin	Over 65s
Smith, Graham	Club Head of Ticketing and Supporters' Liaison
Stewart, Shaun	Family
Thileepan, Tila	Home ST holder
Twelvetree, Gary	Club Director of Marketing
Van Watermeulen, Tom	Overseas branch
Apologies for absence	
Brown, Tracy	Chelsea Pride/ LGBT
Devall, Nick	Member
Kimberley, Steve	UK branch

(Action points are underlined.)

INTRODUCTION

Forum members introduced themselves.

The Forum Chairman thanked those who've provided photos for the website. Representatives are also contactable on the website now and important issues raised through the website will be brought to the Forum's attention. Representatives are requested to keep each other's email addresses confidential should they see them.

Meetings are recorded and only the official transcript should be used to publicise what is discussed here. Sometimes the Club will ask for an issue to be kept confidential and representatives are asked to respect that. Representatives were asked to keep comments concise given the volume of issues brought. The Club apologised for the slight delay in approving the last minutes.

MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING/ MATTERS ARISING

There were no changes to the minutes.

Pre-match flag in Matthew Harding Stand

The supporter responsible is trying to circulate the flag earlier so it doesn't obstruct views by kick off.

Safety of fans abroad

The Club commented that an appeal to UEFA continues regarding Barcelona away. For matches generally, it conducts dialogue with the FA, the Metropolitan Police and others and pre-match visits occur, as well as communication with supporter groups. The experiences of other English clubs at the same stadium are also reviewed.

A representative asked for an update on Barcelona away. Poor security and the problems with the bridge were very concerning. Sanctions have been announced against various clubs including Arsenal and Liverpool by UEFA recently. The Club responded that dialogue with UEFA on this issue is still ongoing.

The Club added it has made an announcement recently about our forthcoming match in Greece. We always have a meeting with the away club, their police, UEFA and an FA representative. We were informed in those meetings as to the arrangements for our fans in Greece and we wanted to communicate what we were told. We received criticism on social media for the statement but ultimately we have little control over how we are treated overseas at away fixtures. We wanted to be transparent and sometimes we speak to MPs, which fans could do too. All attempts were made to obtain a Thomas Cook flight, however we were unable to due to the high volume of holiday traffic on that route. Club staff had to take a circuitous route for the pre-match visit last week, as we are now at the tail end of the holiday season.

We can only pass over what we are told, such as fans having to keep their passport with them for identification purposes. Most representatives acknowledged that the Club were correct to communicate what they were told by the Greek authorities. The Greek club's opponents were made to play seven games behind closed doors last year. One added that if the police estimate is a two-hour delay on the coach pre-match, it's likely to be a lot longer.

The Club responded to a question that in England, despite what may happen at stadiums in other European countries, by law we are not allowed to hold fans back unless there is a potential incident. The police make a decision on the night. The Club's concern is that there will be Greek fans living in London who obtain tickets for home areas and we are focusing on communicating to that community that they can't wear away shirts or openly support the opposition in home areas. We also have better detection of pyrotechnics in hand.

In response to a question, the Club said UEFA will provide a delegate for that match, just as there was for the Barcelona match. A representative added that English fans will be blamed inevitably if there is trouble in Greece despite the long wait on the buses. Others added that the problems in Greece seem to be tolerated by UEFA and there appears to be a bias against our Club at UEFA. The Club added there is a limit to how much we can change the perception of English fans within UEFA. Our report to UEFA after Barcelona was very substantial and we received a huge volume of evidence from fans.

The Club will consider publishing an update to supporters about Barcelona whilst awaiting the end of that UEFA process.

The Club said we are taking about 500 supporters to Greece.

Bag security tags

The Club commented this does not happen now due to the nature of the site. It will remain under review.

Smoking in the stadium

The Club said stewards are reminded before every game that smoking is banned and toilets are checked regularly.

Clock/ scoreboard for East Stand Upper

A clock is being reviewed but is unlikely to happen. There would be structural issues.

Publicising the Forum

A representative commented that fans are unsure where to check for Forum details. The Club will publish a news item link to the Forum page and will consider publicity leading up to the next meeting.

MEGASTORE

Asian Megastore

It was raised that the away kit online shows "nothing found". The Club will check this.

It was raised that the site appears to be Nike-heavy, though less so than originally. The Club commented that the ecommerce aspect of the website is run by the Club as of about ten days ago. Feedback is very welcome. Fans added that cheaper items would be welcome as Christmas stocking fillers. The Club said it continues to communicate with Nike as to what products are most popular with our fans. It is up to them as to how they brand themselves.

In answer to questions, the Club will investigate reintroducing coat sales in the store.

Loyalty points

Representatives commented that early in the shop's existence, there was a direct cash discount for membership and then loyalty points were introduced. Loyalty points have now been stopped. The Club will look into this further.

WEBSITE/ 5TH STAND APP

A representative stated it's difficult to navigate around the new site, with no Academy fixture dates accessible and ticketing hard to follow. The Club responded that new sites always need to bed in and one aspect is fans getting used to the new links. We do receive feedback and ran two sites for a time especially for that purpose. We ensured all content was there from the original site, introduced new content and observed how many moved from the old site to the new site by choice. When only a small proportion were using the old site, we switched permanently.

Feedback regarding the website can sometimes be taken on board quickly. The number who report being unable to find specific information is small. Further to a suggestion to have more links to the same pages, the Club responded there should only be one area on the site for each topic otherwise it has to update more than one page at a time with the same information.

A representative asked about the complexity of buying tickets, as anti-fraud information appears a lot. The "picture click" measures can be particularly slow. The Club responded that it has to have anti-fraud measures included and the card companies have their own measures too. Banks can't see the codes you enter onto their site.

The Club will confirm the website feedback address.

The site is accessed by 183 countries so has to appeal across the world. The Club also tests different types of browser and loading times. It optimises certain pages regularly. Many pages are probably at optimal access speed now.

A representative commented on the problem of buying tickets on a mobile phone rather than via the 5th Stand. The Club added that the App may show up as an option during purchase, via the App Store.

A representative raised the fact that different tabs open in the ticket purchase process which can become quite cumbersome on a mobile phone in particular. The Club will investigate this. It will also check there is a site map available.

An overseas branch representative said the supporters' club section could be seen to replicate what each branch offers anyway. The Club responded that, in the 5th Stand, fans can find their local supporters' club and follow them, with the aim of promoting growth for the clubs. Each club can publicise meeting points if they choose. The Club will review how supporters' clubs post information once the representative concerned provides screenshots. Generally, the Club said it consults with clubs as to what they want and how the process is working. A UK branch representative welcomed the common approach for communication that now assists supporters' clubs.

In response to a question, the Club said the intention is to highlight latest news prominently and will review this is happening. It wouldn't want to further highlight the ticketing option as the majority of those visiting the site aren't entitled to purchase tickets.

The Club responded to a question by saying it understood the Singapore Supporters' Club site was taken down but not by the Club; they infringed a third party's copyright. As regards unofficial Apps such as "Breathe Chelsea" that purport to be official, the Club sends a cease and desist letter as it doesn't condone or support such sites.

WI-FI

The Club commented that while there have been big improvements in the stadium's Wi-Fi coverage there are inherent problems in utilising Wi-Fi in a large steel structure. Testing in recent matches has covered 1,500 to 2,000 fans, and we will roll it out further. Usual take up is around 65% wanting Wi-Fi in a stadium, which we aim to surpass. In some areas such as stairwells and toilets, it may not be accessible. There are in effect 180 Wi-Fi centres that we use to cover all relevant areas. Once it's all completed we hope to achieve at least 85% stadium coverage. Representatives commented that the Matthew Harding and Shed End don't have coverage, at least in some places. The Club said it's happy for feedback but that feedback must be precise as to the location. It will publicise an email address for fans to contact the Club on this. Generally, responses received are that the West Stand and Shed End have good coverage but the Matthew Harding and East Stands don't work well, but these are from limited numbers. A lot has been spent on the process and we have worked with the major phone companies to keep improving this.

STADIUM - FAMILY STAND

A representative presented a list of proposals for improvement, which the Club is already considering. These included cup holders for seats, which the Club will review.

Lower urinals will be considered by the Club. The Club added that lower shelving at kiosks is already in place for the disabled which all can use. As regards keeping younger fans further from the away end, few parents would want seats right by the away fans ideally so that wouldn't be fair. The Club provides a map to show ticket purchasers where the away fans are located.

It was raised that youth players could appear in the family area before matches to sign autographs and for photos. The Club will consider this. It was also raised that free fruit could be provided as was recently experienced at another ground. The Club already provides free fruit in that area.

Another mentioned that there are fewer Megastore appearances by players now.

In response to a proposal that there be a games room for children, the Club responded that it's very limited for space in our current configuration. Another representative responded that children should focus on enjoying the match if they attend, rather than playing other games. A representative congratulated the Club on the new sensory room.

STADIUM – GENERAL

East Stand lift

It was raised that the lift has broken down for both home matches. One couple went home before the match rather than wait. Also, at the end of the game the smell in the lift was horrible. The Club responded the lift was mended within 20 minutes. It's a goods lift that has been utilised for fans over the years. The Club will review the condition of the lift.

Signage

The Club responded to a question by stating that there is clear signage in place as to where specific seats are.

New stadium

In response to a question the Club said there is no additional news to report.

Singha beer

A supporter raised the issue of the quality of Singha beer, also asking if it's served flat. The Club said it reviews options at the end of each contract but it's a popular national brand and partnerships like the one we have with Singha help pay for the players we all enjoy seeing on the pitch each week. The Club added that due to the way it's served it may look flat but it's not.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Players' arrival

A representative raised the new manner of players' arrival and that only the first 14 children who demonstrate the 'floss' dance move from the game Fortnite at 12.30 and are under-16 can greet the players. The representative thought this has become a soulless development. Another representative raised this as part of a theme that fans are increasingly being considered customers rather than fans, and some feel alienated from the Club. The Club will review this generally.

First World War

A representative raised the upcoming 100-year anniversary of the First World War armistice and suggested that descendants of those who signed up for service at Stamford Bridge be included in our commemorations. The representative added that this had previously been dismissed by the Club, as had feedback regarding inaccurate information about the War on the website. That information has now been taken on board though.

The Club responded that due to our kick off time most of those we want to invite for the commemoration are at other events on the day of that match. The Club will take up offers to assist with attendees.

Garry Brown

Garry Brown, a lifelong supporter, died in the summer and a commemoration would be welcome. The Club will come back on this.

Fancast interviews

UK fancasts have seemingly been ignored by the Club for player interviews in favour of an American fancast. The Club will help set up interviews.

Neil Barnett

A representative commented that Neil has been a prominent part of the match experience for many fans for a long period of time, but there was no recognition of him when his role on the pitch came to an end. He should have been thanked publicly for his contribution. Two representatives added they regret he no longer had the same role. The Club responded it has the prerogative to make changes for match day presentation and that it would look at recognising Neil's contribution to match days.

Overseas FAPL match

A supporters' group representative commented that they ran a survey, with an overwhelming response against an overseas match, further to the La Liga announcement. The Club noted

the response and said it's not been discussed as a proposal recently by the FAPL. The view of supporters is useful to know though.

Bobby Tambling

A representative commented that the Shed Wall should recognise Bobby Tambling's achievements. The Club responded that it will look into it adding that information regarding his Club achievements and records had recently been updated and added to in the West Stand suite that bears his name.

Ticket touting

This will be discussed in more detail at the next meeting with ticketing. The Club said it's considering further use of technology to help tackle touting. It is a matter for the police and we would like them to do more. As a result the Club continues to look at improved prevention. It added that the ticket exchange works well and there isn't evidence that the problem is genuine fans trying to get rid of unwanted tickets on a match day.

Members' packs

The Club will consider "thank you" packs to ST holders, along the lines of those provided to members. It added that members pay for various benefits and they are not complimentary.

Acknowledgement by players on a match day

In response to comments, the Club stated there is necessarily less interaction with players on a match day given security concerns. As regards appreciation of fans on the pitch at the end of a game, the Club encourages players to acknowledge fans. Generally, this has improved over time.

Cobham

It was requested that more supporters be able to attend Cobham. The Club responded that it's the players' workplace so there is limited access. There is some access for our Foundation and charitable partners. It was hard to organise Fans' Forum trips, and fan trips generally, to Cobham as training times change at short notice. Players don't necessarily all train on the pitch at the same time. Huge numbers of fans would want to attend. There are also safeguarding issues for all visitors to Cobham, due to the age groups training there.

The Club will consider fans' engagement generally with the Club/ players.

Safety Advisory Group

A supporters' group representative said that Chelsea Supporters Trust members are pushing for its attendance at the Safety Advisory Group meetings. The Club responded it's the Council's body so it can admit who it wants but there are confidential issues that arise there.

Chelsea TV

A representative said there appears to be less fan engagement here too. The phone-in has stopped, for instance, and youth games aren't shown. The Club responded that the format has been overtaken by developments in other areas like websites and apps as the way supporters consume their information continues to evolve. There is unlikely to be a return to old formats. The App has an audience some twelve times larger than watched Chelsea TV. Archive material will be provided as part of the new website. Chelsea TV and its very talented and hardworking staff are being repurposed for the new formats.

Academy matches being shown just helped our competition to monitor our players and are also expensive to film. We will still be showing some select games but we also wanted to reallocate some resources so women's matches are shown. The Club will confirm which matches will be covered.

Chelsea v Lyon

The Club confirmed, further to a question about timing, that Lyon was announced in June and the Checktrade Trophy match was confirmed after that draw. Lyon was not our game to manage so we just loaned the stadium and organised the tickets. The Club confirmed in response to a question that loyalty points are not provided for friendlies.

Europa pricing

The Club was thanked for setting appropriate pricing for these matches.

Bovril Entrance security

The Club was thanked for providing bag searches there now.

Auschwitz tour

The Club was thanked for arranging this.

Pride march

The Club was thanked generally for its support of the event and in particular Bridget and Stamford attending.

The meeting finished at 8.20pm.