

MINUTES OF FANS' FORUM
Zoom
Thursday 11th March 2021, 6.30pm

Those Present:

Name	Seat Location
Stuart Hayton (SH), Club Secretary	
Dan Palfrey (DP), PR Manager	
Elizabeth Edwards (EE), Supporter Liaison Officer	Sir Alf Ramsey Upper
Martin Swallow (MS)	
Phil Taylor (PT)	Sir Alf Ramsey Lower
Mandy Garner (MG)	Co-op Lower
Mary McCourt (MM)	Sir Bobby Robson Lower
Andrew Kerrison (AK)	Sir Bobby Robson
Steve Beckett (SB)	Various
Barry Calver (BC)	
Sandra Cuningham (SC)	Sir Alf Ramsey Upper
Mark Ramsay (MR)	Sir Alf Ramsey Upper
Paul Peachey (PP)	Co-op Lower
John Marazzi (JM)	Sir Alf Ramsey Upper

Item	Action
<p>1. Apologies for Absence - Peter Over (Observer), Steve Pearce (Media Manager)</p>	
<p>2. Minutes of Previous Meeting and Matters Arising It was agreed that most of the points raised at the last meeting (14 December 2019, Bristol Rovers) had been addressed or were now in the past.</p>	
<p>3. New fan engagement working group plans DP thanked everyone for attending and spoke about the work he has been doing, with input from SH, EE and MR (Chair, Supporters Club), to revamp the existing fan network groups and the new groups that would be introduced. The aim of these groups is to increase and improve the Club's transparency and dialogue with supporters.</p> <p>The forum will aim to meet 3-4 times a season, mainly on a matchday. An important change is that minutes will be published on the Club website and through the Club's social media accounts so that all fans can keep up to date with what is happening at the Club.</p> <p>Town Matters (previously Fans Panel) will be re-launched and will be made up of a representative group of fans from different demographics, the stands they sit in and with different matchday habits. There will be some overlap with the forum but the Club sees having two groups as a real benefit as it means increased dialogue with supporters.</p> <p>A new group 'Long Distance Blues' is to be created for those fans living outside of Suffolk including those who may not get to Portman Road as often as they would like to. These meetings are likely to be virtual but DP acknowledged that in the past there have been events with ITFC management and staff and the South West Branch before games in Bristol. The North of England Branch have held similar events in Blackpool, Manchester and Newcastle. On being asked by SB and MM about the criteria for Long Distance Blues, DP</p>	DP/EE/MR

suggested that it would probably cover UK fans in the first instance. MR and EE suggested that overseas fans should not be forgotten as we have a large following worldwide with many travelling to Portman Road during the season. DP advised that there has been a lot of interest in this group and that he will be talking further with EE and MR in the forthcoming weeks with the aim of launching by the summer.

Details of the groups were announced on the club website:
<https://www.itfc.co.uk/news/2021/march/fan-network-groups-revamped/>.

A page has been created for the groups on the Club website. This page will continue to be developed as the groups evolve.
<https://www.itfc.co.uk/supporters/fan-engagement-groups/fan-engagement-groups-page/>

4. Various Discussion items

The key points from the discussions are summarised below:

Season Ticket compensation 2020/21

The Club have held discussions with Marcus and it is hoped that details will be announced over the next few weeks. There are a number of different variables as per Marcus Evans' statement including whether the Club is eligible to apply for the Premier League rescue package which has different variables, including restrictions on future transfer windows.

The group gave their thoughts on the potential compensation package. Based on a package being offered by another League One club, PT raised a number of points which he felt should be considered. He highlighted the £230 iFollow cost (£10 x 23 matches), which most clubs are using in their calculations and suggested the £140 iFollow season ticket price should be used instead, SH and DP clarified that the iFollow season ticket at £140 which PT was referring to is for overseas fans only and has been in place since iFollow launched. PT also commented that some households have more than one season ticket holder but only need one iFollow access code per game and junior fans that can't technically create an iFollow account, thus it having no value to them. It was also pointed out that some fans will have attended one league game this season whilst others won't have attended any.

PT and other group members asked that the Club be as transparent as possible when communicating the compensation package with clear reasoning set out up front, along with a statement saying that they have been fair, as fair as possible, to all season ticket holders.

MR felt that the lack of any announcement has gone on for far too long and that more clarification and communication should have been given months ago. He said he started talking to the Club, on behalf of the Supporters Club, last October. He questioned how season ticket holders will feel about buying a season ticket for next season if this season's compensation hasn't yet been sorted.

DP confirmed that iFollow will be taken into account with compensation, and that the protection of season ticket holders is important to the Club. A number of group members said that there was a perception that iFollow access was a free benefit to season ticket holders as the words 'free access' had been used. It was felt this was misleading and that any iFollow adjustment to potential refunds might cause an adverse reaction from fans. DP explained that it was about providing a code for season ticket holders to redeem so that they did not incur additional costs as they were already paying or had paid for their season tickets.

**DP/SH to
feedback**

JM asked whether ITFC pays £10 each time someone redeems a code and how much does the Club receive back. SH confirmed that the Club received about 80% of the revenue received by the EFL from fans buying iFollow.

AK commented that he thought the deal between the Club and the EFL re iFollow was sort of irrelevant. The important thing to him is that any compensation deal is fair and that season ticket holders don't feel abused or taken advantage of. SH reminded the group that the Club loses £175,000 for each home game behind closed doors and more for the two games where 2,000 fans attended – so the Club receiving an amount for each iFollow purchase is small in the overall scheme of things.

DP confirmed to the group that the Club will be taking into account that non-season ticket holders will have paid £230 for iFollow if they have watched every game and these fans should not be better off than season ticket holders. This is the key to any compensation package.

Regarding prices for the 2021/22 season, AK suggested that the price should reflect where ITFC is in the EFL structure. DP confirmed that the owner has already stated (in last season's season ticket campaign) that tickets will be frozen in the event that we get promoted for those who purchased before May 7. MR suggested that the Club look at the prices for all other clubs and take these into account as fans do not want to be paying Championship prices for League One football.

Members felt that some fans will choose not to come back to football as a year away has broken the habit and a change may be needed to go back to football. A winning team will of course help. It was also commented that fans may choose to watch on iFollow but SH advised that iFollow will not be available on a Saturday afternoon, when the world returns to 'normal'.

DP commented that the Club were really pleased to break the iFollow League One viewing figure records for the Gillingham and Accrington Stanley away games.

Season Ticket compensation 2019/20

AK asked whether there were any plans to extend the expiry dates (May 2021) on the vouchers and credits (where this option was chosen the credits were added to online accounts to be used towards match tickets, memberships and events for 2020/21). DP confirmed that the intention is for extensions to be given to both. The Club will announce this in due course.

Plans for return of fans

DP explained to the group that the Club are planning the return of fans step by step taking into account the governing bodies and government guidelines. At the current moment the Club does not know the position with away fans. SH said that the latest information suggests that fans will be allowed back into stadiums on 17 May 2021 but that the government is unlikely to be releasing clear information until 7 days prior to this. He added that the EFL are considering moving the dates of the play-off semi-finals so that some fans can attend. In the event that ITFC are in the play-offs the capacity, based on current indications, would be around 6,500 with home fans only the likely scenario. Season tickets are not valid for play-off games but preference would be given to season ticket holders. For games held at Wembley Stadium the capacity we believe would be 25% of normal so around 20,000 for a play-off final. All games will be covered live on Sky.

Feedback was given on the two games – Portsmouth and Burton Albion – where we had

ITFC

fans back at PR. SC attended the Burton game and commented that all went well. She had heard different things reported but her ID had been checked several times with her bag checked whilst in the queue. Temperatures were taken at the turnstiles. In the stadium fans were well spaced in the seats and the use of toilets was well managed at half-time. AK added that he had his temperature taken and that everything was well organised with the stewards, knowing what they had to do, giving clear, authoritative directions to fans. JM commented that his experience was exceptional given the time the Club had to prepare. PT commented that he had seen fans saying that people from different households had moved to be together with their mates and that other clubs had experienced similar. SH said that there is only so much that clubs can do re fans trying to break rules but he wasn't aware of any such issues at PR. DP advised that prior to the games the Club had phoned a number of fans checking if their proposed bubbles met the government requirements.

MM and MG congratulated the Club and said that the hard work in getting fans back into the stadium was much appreciated.

DP informed the group that all fans attending had been sent a survey. Feedback had been largely positive. Having two games close together meant that any issues identified at the first game could be addressed at the second.

Communication from the Club

MG commented that some fans feel that there is a disconnection with the Club and that it is important that everyone pulls in the same direction. She further commented that communication usually comes from the top, although she understands Marcus Evans' choice to keep himself private. She commented that the interviews and videos that the Club started to do recently are refreshing and that it is comforting to know that fans can contact the Club when they need to by phone or email and also put their questions to the Club.

DP told the group that it was untrue that Paul Lambert didn't want the media team at the training ground. However, the media team try to reflect what the supporters are wanting and that sometimes they have to take the conscious decision not to do something. On Paul Cook's appointment they made the decision to ramp up coverage, hence more interviews and videos are currently being shared.

SB asked that the Club find a way of conveying that Phil Ham (www.twtd.co.uk) is attending press conferences again, both pre and post match. DP confirmed that this is the case. He also confirmed that Phil was sent all quotes by the Club's media team during the time he was not attending the press conferences.

MR picked up on the recent 'long' statement from Marcus Evans to all fans and the start of the letter which stated that 'I can't wait to welcome you all back to Portman Road'. MR claimed that this isn't true as Marcus will not be there to welcome fans and added that he (MR) doesn't like supporters being taken as mugs. DP advised the group that Marcus writes the letters himself and that some were looking too deeply into it. AK felt the letter was upbeat, honest and heart felt and wasn't in anyway offended. SB felt that the statement was very well written but the same positive stuff with nothing really changing. AK felt that the real problem is the match results and that the announcement of Paul Cook as manager was the same as that for Paul Lambert.

Matchday experience

The group discussed the matchday experience and in particular the FanZone.

MG asked whether more seats could be provided outside the marquee.

DP to

DP informed the group that a proposal for a large screen in the FanZone is being discussed with Marcus Evans. This will enhance the matchday experience and also provide more opportunities for the Portman Road field turf to be used as an entertainment venue. SB asked about the timescales for this. DP said discussions were ongoing but a lot will depend on when lockdown restrictions are fully lifted.

DP also advised that a giant screen within the stadium is also being discussed.

Matchdays will continue to see activities in the FanZone with more planned for the younger fans.

MR commented that the Club should have plans in place whether they choose to activate them or not. They can then be announced as soon as the government makes decisions. He further suggested that these plans should be shared with the supporters so they know what to expect under certain circumstances. SH explained that this isn't always possible and that, using the giant screen as an example, fans need to trust that those working at the Club are doing everything with the right intentions and that information will be released as soon as it is possible. Where possible DP wants to use the fan groups as a sounding board to involve fans through the process.

SB commented that he likes the new Preview show and recommended that others watch it. DP was pleased with the feedback – he added that ideally the media team would like to do something similar but live on a matchday but we don't have the manpower to do this. There is a good bank of guests for this with Darren Ambrose and Matt Holland amongst those appearing.

MM praised the Inside Matchday experience video with the comment that 'it makes you feel as if you are there'. She also says that it was good to see the Club doing interviews with ITFC Women's Eloise King on International Women's Day and David Flisher from Rainbow Tractors who spoke to DP ahead of the Club's dedicated Football v Homophobia match on February 26.

PP asked whether fans would be able to vote for next season's shirts. DP and SH advised that these have already been chosen. Ideas are always welcome however and will be passed to those making the decision.

It was asked when the Magical Vegas sponsorship was up and whether gambling companies can no longer be shirt sponsors. SH understands that gambling companies can still sponsor as any changes to legislation would have to go through parliament. SH said that the Club could not comment on shirt sponsorship.

4. AOB

In view of statements from ex-Academy players, MG asked about the duty of care for Academy players and whether the Academy have Liaison Officers. SH advised that it is not possible to comment on individual cases but the Club has an experienced safeguarding team in place along with strict policies and procedures and regularly undergoes reviews from the FA, EFL and external agencies to ensure they are operating appropriately. SH also advised that a new online safeguarding management system has been purchased by the Club which will further enhance how the Club operates.

MS asked about changes to the Ticket Office staff. Gavin Preston has been appointed Head of Ticketing. Gavin joins from Southend where he was Ticket Office Manager. Prior to

Southend, Town fans may well remember Gavin from when he was the Retail Store Manager for Planet Blue. Donna Powell becomes Ticket Office Executive and works part-time.

MS asked for some information about Disability Liaison Officer Lee Smith as he had wanted to contact him. Lee joined the club back in 2018 and does fantastic work for our fans with disabilities. (Not discussed at the meeting, but worthy of note, Lee has recently set up a Facebook page and WhatsApp group for fans with disabilities and their carers and organises weekly zoom coffee mornings and match date chats. He also organised a Q&A with Russell Osman and Terry Butcher and other activities as part of the Level Playing Field weeks of actions. Lee can be contacted on lee.smith@itfc.co.uk.)

The meeting ended at 19:43.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING: TBA