

Charlton Athletic Fans' Forum – Thursday, December 9th 2021

Chair

LB – Lucy Bishop – Fan Adviser

Fan representatives

HA – Heather Alderson – Charlton Athletic Supporters' Trust, SH – Sam Herbert – Youth Advisory Group, ME – Millie Edmondson – Youth Advisory Group, PS – Peter Smith – East Kent Addicks, IW – Ian Wallis – Bromley Addicks, JP – John Perkins – Valley Away, CL – Christine Lawrie – Reminiscence Group, RH – Roger Hutton – Proud Valiants, SS – Sharron Sherress – Valley Gold

Club

TS – Thomas Sandgaard – Owner, CEO, WM – Wayne Mumford – Commercial Director, TK – Tony Keohane – Chief Operating Officer, TR – Tom Rubashow – Head of Communications, DB – Dan Burke – Fan Engagement and Memberships Coordinator

Additional

RM – Dr Raelynn Maloney, KH – Kyle Henderson (via Zoom), BB – Benjamin Burton – Gather & Gather

Apologies

DW – David Wood – West Country Branch, JW – John Whitfield – Fans4Fans, TF – Tony Farrell – Charlton Athletic Disabled Supporters Association

Topic	Raised by
<p>Johnnie Jackson CL asked TS to give Johnnie Jackson a contract now. TS explained that he is talking to JJ and his attorneys/agents about the role. He was asked if he had spoken to other managers and said he had. He said he had hoped the club would be able to announce something that week but maybe time was running out for that. He said, if everything goes well there should be an announcement in short order. (Post meeting note: the announcement was made on 17/12) LB said she had been asked to ask if the delay in the announcement had been caused by egos in the senior staff. TS said he was doing the negotiating and there was no-one else involved.</p>	<p>CL</p>
<p>Women's team HA said she understands the club would like to rename Charlton Women to Charlton Ladies. She said the one-club approach is brilliant and gives the club the opportunity to attract supporters and players from a broad pool. She said it is swimming with the tide where the game is going – men and women. She said given it is one brand, with a shared vision, shared opportunity and a shared future and a great ambition – why do we need to change the name? Particularly with many people close to women's sport feeling the change to ladies represents a step backwards. She said as a professional woman she also recognises that in her own career. She said when people use lady towards her they are either being very polite and it is probably when she is wearing high heels or having lunch. She said when she goes to the toilet she may well go to the "ladies" room and gentlemen to the "gents". She said when at work, when expecting equality – she believes women is the correct term. She said she understand from media reports and the players that they identify with being women as well. She said it was an own goal and that everything is going so well, so we don't need to do this. She said it is not a hill worth dying on. TS said the idea was born more than six months ago. He said he did his research of Charlton history, looking at a variety of options, meeting with the team/staff, and looking at other team names within the league, including three named ladies in the same division, and the term is often used in mainstream language as well as other sports. He had a conversation with team and staff six months ago to change to the ladies. HA asked why he was making the change from women's to ladies'.</p>	<p>HA</p>

TS said it is important to have a name change with the team's transition into the club – the team going professional and operating under a new, one-club approach. He said they could have been called Robins, Devils, Warriors. He said the historical root is that the team originated from the Croydon Ladies that were absorbed into Charlton. He said there are different opinions on how people feel about the word "ladies". He said ladies ended up being the most logical. He said the decision was made at the same time to turn the team into a full-time professional team, recruit professional players, provide resources, facilities at the training ground. He said there are many other teams where the resources aren't given and he wants to make sure that we gave everybody on that part of the club the best opportunity to give the best possible sports outcome.

He said there are many different terms for females and ladies is not a word that is generally considered derogatory. HA agreed it isn't specifically derogatory and said many name changes going in the direction of women, which reflects the progress women are making in terms of equality.

TS said he understands some have that opinion but he doesn't think the word makes them less equal. HA said she believes it is important that the players and coaching staff seem to oppose it. She said she believes the decision is already having an impact on the brand and reputation as an inclusive club. HA said her opinion is the debate has emboldened those who feel women are kept quiet and in the kitchen.

She said she agrees with the objective of one club, agrees in drawing attention to move things forward, agrees in the investment TS has made. HA said she knows the players were consulted six months ago but said that the people, right now wearing shirt are not regarding it as good, those in the game have asked 'what on earth is going on?' and it is not a good look for Charlton Athletic.

HA said the change has been made over the heads of the team who don't actively want it. TS asked if the sentiment was different next season, with a different group of players, is the change ok based on who is on the team? HA said the status quo is fine, so why impose a change on the team.

TS said the decision was made six months ago, after acquiring the team, and there were no objections from players at the time. He said it was clumsy on how long the club took to roll it out.

PS said he thinks Charlton Athletic female supporters wouldn't support the change.

RH said the female members of the Proud Valiants took it very badly. He said it feels like an own goal when everything else is going so brilliantly.

IW said the growth of women's football has increased massively in the last five years. He said it has moved away from ladies football, he said some see it as demeaning and is not how the players wish to be described. IW said he doesn't feel that strongly about it but recognised that others did.

TS said he recently spoke to players and staff about it again (because the roll out was taking long), and somehow the word has gotten out so it is being talked about a bit more. He said he noticed strong emotions and opinions which he said may come from a lack of respect around women's football. He said hopefully there will be more interest in female footballers as athletes, and more interest in the team in the coming years as he aims to grow this part of the club. He said he wants as many people as possible watching women's football in the future and taking it seriously.

IW said people acknowledge the work TS has done. He said it is just the change of name which people feel uncomfortable about.

HA asked if it was a done deal.

TS said it was a done deal six months ago and the roll out has been long and clumsy. When asked, he said the update would be made at Companies House.

LB asked if there is room for discussion on it.

TS said he always wants to ensure that he is open to a discussion and he would listen to people's opinions.

HA asked what the process for discussion was.

TS said there was no formal process but people could call or email him.

HA suggested that there is a women's team Fans' Forum. She said everything TS is saying around the team is right – but let's do it differently.

LB to arrange separate group to facilitate further discussion.	
<p>January transfer window</p> <p>SH asked what the transfer plans are for January and will there be more investment in the men's team?</p> <p>TS said that yes there would be investment in both the men's and ladies team. He said in the men's first team, his hope is we can do more of what we have done in the last couple of windows. Players like Sam Lavelle, Charlie Kirk, Diallang Jaiyesimi - long-term investments for the club. He said the club are looking at young players who have the potential to develop. He said he hopes we can make at least one more of those. He said he was looking at a minimum of one, maybe two. He said there may be an option for loan players we can bring in too. He said, we will continue to improve on the team. He said that we already have the deepest squad in the league, with Ipswich. He said that as the season goes on and injuries and suspensions mount, we can keep putting players on the pitch that can compete at the highest level in League One.</p>	SH
<p>Category One (Cat 1) – Academy</p> <p>ME asked how the club can achieve Cat 1 status and how far we are from achieving the goal</p> <p>TS said the club are trying to get Cat 1 status as being Cat 1 gives you a better opportunity to attract better talent.</p> <p>He said more and more clubs are becoming Cat 1. He said we want to make sure we get in. He said we are ranked number 14 in the country in terms of recent productivity figures, that is higher than many other Cat 1 clubs. Higher than quite a few Premier League clubs.</p> <p>IW said he was under the impression, Cat 1 improvements needed a new building which is why it hadn't been done previously. TS said it was an investment in more structure and the club had found an economic way of doing it. He said the academy needs to be in a permanent building. He said the club are bringing in very high quality semi-permanent buildings which will go in the area designated for new building. He said the electricity and water are already in place. He said that area will house the first team, staff etc. He said then the academy can stay in the existing building. He said it was £6m-£8m, Roland Duchatelet was looking about investing and did a little bit and then stopped. He said the way he was looking at it involved doing it a bit differently with a different amount he said it is still seven figures but more manageable. He said he is investing despite the ownership structure of the land, to develop the academy.</p>	ME
<p>Fan-led review</p> <p>HA explained the report led by Tracey Crouch has been published. She said there were 47 different recommendations. She said the Football Supporters Association welcomed the report. She said with the proposed changes, the club might have avoided the ESI shenanigans. She said there is a right of tenure in the review. She said that this would mean should someone like RD oust the club from The Valley, he would need to build an equivalent or better stadium elsewhere before he could start on that. She said for our fans, that is great.</p> <p>HA said all supporters should work constructively with TS, WM, TK and the club on the Fan-led review given what the club has been collectively through.</p> <p>TS said he had been on a Zoom call with 70 EFL owners. He said from a football-side there is a window of opportunity to see more money trickle down the pyramid. He said everybody had good ideas to utilise momentum.</p> <p>TS said there is something structurally wrong with the pyramid but really two triangles. He said it is the Premier League and then the rest. He said many years ago the decision was made for the PL to break away. He said if there is a way to use momentum to get it back to a 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th division and distribute from there it will make the conversation much less awkward. He said he felt it is an us vs. them.</p> <p>HA said a lot of fans would share his views.</p>	HA
<p>Fill The Valley</p> <p>HA said that the feedback from CAST members was that Fill The Valley had been great. HA asked what more can supporters be doing? She said it was good that fans thoughts were</p>	HA

<p>incorporated, with the catering improvements and the guest food stalls. SH and ME asked what more the club can be doing to attract local supporters.</p> <p>WM recognised season ticket holders are the sales agents for the club. He said it was the same with Valley Express. HA asked, how do we get the community to support the club. WM said the club are engaging the community better with 125 fans coming from the Caribbean community to Saturday's game, fans coming from the Nepalese community, 80 schools engaged. He said there is a process of education about Charlton. He said we can't just drop tickets at schools – further engagement is needed.</p> <p>He said he is picking up that atmosphere has changed, that there is a better feeling about The Valley. He said the hospitality suites are full, the stadium is busy and the team has responded. He said he can see the energy levels. He said the revenue levels picking up with the selling of beers, pies etc. and that the shop is busier. WM said a few other clubs might follow us.</p> <p>TS said the plan is to kick start the full stadium with initiatives. He said every time, he wants to get more and more paying fans. He said he wants to do a good job on footballing side and commercially, we'll get there where the stadium is full. WM said big business winning awards are starting to come in to hospitality. He said there are potential sponsors, who, also have a workforce to engage to come to The Valley. WM said he has a good relationship with the council and has told them he doesn't feel they do enough to promote Charlton and he is working on that.</p>	
<p>CharltonTV</p> <p>RH said that CharltonTV is brilliant but that it would help to have subtitles for the hearing impaired. TR said he would task one of the team members on managing this. TS said it was definitely doable.</p> <p>HA said fans in Scotland love CharltonTV and asked if it is possible to watch the games on catch-up. TR said the games are available to watch on catchup the working day following the game. He said under EFL rules 1am the following day is the earliest we can show EFL rules and it is something the club are looking to putting in place in the near future.</p>	RH
<p>POTY Dinner</p> <p>IW said the Player of the Year Dinner meeting is earmarked for May 1st.</p>	IW
<p>Women's POTY</p> <p>IW said the Player of the Year Dinner fund is buying an honours board to the Women's Player of the Year which would be hung in Bartrams.</p>	IW
<p>Museum of storage area</p> <p>IW asked about additional storage for the museum. TK said the club would look into it.</p>	IW
<p>Club shop</p> <p>CL asked why some products are only available online or in the club shop. WM asked CL to send the product details through and he would look into it.</p> <p>WM said the club are in a partnership at the moment. He said he is not happy with the service levels fans are experiencing. He said the club are looking at a new partner for next year with a range of products that is a lot better. He said he is aware of expensive international pricing and that is being looked at.</p>	CL
<p>West stand access</p> <p>HA said a few CAST members raised issues of West Stand access at a recent game against Plymouth.</p> <p>TK said that several years ago turnstiles were stripped for parts mainly because the club didn't have the attendances that required them. He said when the new ticketing system went in several years ago, it was only put in to a proportion of the turnstiles. He said there is a mixture of type of tickets (tap, printed) which changes the speed of entry – tapping entry is much quicker. He said in recent games there has been a higher increase of mobile tickets and print at home which has increased the time taken at the turnstiles.</p> <p>He said to resolve this the club now has those additional turnstiles open, some of the additional turnstiles are now done with handheld devices. He said the club still anticipate a higher proportion of print at home and mobile tickets at the turnstiles. He said the club would communicate out to fans about the phone use. He said people taking pictures of their tickets and expanding the QR and bar codes is causing delays – and the club will</p>	HA

<p>continue to communicate to help this. He said the West Stand worked fine for Tuesday's game against Ipswich but there were small delays in the Covered End, some of that was about late arrival.</p> <p>HA said the fans would help with communication.</p> <p>PS said there needs to be a better briefing of stewards.</p> <p>TK said the club would reinforce training and understanding of the area for stewards.</p> <p>CL asked about turnstiles not working for Plymouth that were working for Ipswich. CL said season ticket holders were let in via the Exit Gates to help.</p> <p>TK said that the opening of gates has been a fall back position in the past as there wouldn't be an issue of a full stadium but that can't be done now with a busy stadium.</p> <p>He said West Upper was where a lot of the free tickets were located, which meant there were a lot of print at home and mobile tickets in that area.</p> <p>He said that lessons had been learned from Plymouth, which were implemented and worked successfully on Tuesday against Ipswich Town.</p> <p>CL agreed lessons had been learned at it was much better.</p>	
<p>Fan Email</p> <p>CL asked about the fan email address. She said someone had emailed in September about seat issues and the problem had only just been fixed.</p> <p>TK said before Plymouth game, every seat was checked. It was agreed the club would review the internal process around emails.</p>	CL
<p>Toilets</p> <p>PS said he understood there had been issues in the ladies toilets, with no toilet paper. TK said he would review the process to prevent issues in future.</p>	PS
<p>PA system</p> <p>PS said the PA system in the Alan Curbishley Stand is still a bit muffled. TK said there are different parts of the ground that the club get different feedback from – too loud or too quiet. IW said it isn't good in the Alan Curbishley Stand. TK said in the summer there was investment in the PA system. He said the system acts differently with voice than it does with music. He said the changes have improved certain areas but he would look at the Alan Curbishley Stand for upcoming games.</p>	PS
<p>Music after full time</p> <p>SH said the music played immediately after full time was too soon.</p> <p>TS agreed and said that will be changed moving forward.</p>	SH
<p>Catering</p> <p>JW via LB thanked Gather and Gather for meeting with the fans ahead of recent games. He said there had been noticeable improvements – LB seconded that. He said that the quality of the food and drink had improved. He specifically noted improvements in hot drinks. He said that non-alcoholic drinks were too expensive. BB said that tap water would be available at the bar in the Fans' Bar.</p> <p>JP asked about the club's food pricing which he felt was too expensive. BB said the club do extensive benchmarking in the summer and compare against QPR, Brentford, Watford and Millwall to name a few. TK said the club also compares with local pubs, like the Royal Oak.</p> <p>TK said the Fans' Bar is popular and the pricing compares to the local area.</p> <p>TK said the club are on a journey in the club's matchday experience. He said there is a clear vision about fan experience which comes from the owner. He said there has been a lack of investment in catering infrastructure and equipment in the past and things are really getting better. He said WM is working on beer deals that are good for fans. There has been an increase in food units externally and there will be more. He said there is a challenge sourcing staff. And those challenges include numbers, consistency and continuity but that isn't specific to Charlton, that is across London. He said the fan experience will get better and better because of the vision and focus. He said the club have made changes based on the feedback from fans. IW and PS said that the catering improved no end.</p>	JW
<p>Upbeats Kitchen</p> <p>RH said that the new Upbeats Kitchen is great. BB said it was discussed a number of months ago. He said it is rewarding and the food is great. He said he wants the Upbeats Kitchen to have the best burger in any stadium.</p>	RH

<p>Bookmakers in The Valley JW asked if it would be possible to have bookmakers in the stand. TK said bookmakers are driving online but the club will look at that. HA said the club should consider the family friendliness of putting a bookmaker in.</p>	JW
<p>Smoking area at The Valley JW asked about the possibility of having a smoking area at The Valley. JP said can't smokers go without a cigarette for two hours. TK said the club would look at options and consult fans to get a broad consensus.</p>	JW
<p>Loyalty points system last reviewed JW asked when the loyalty point system was last reviewed and if there are plans to change it. TR said the system was created in 2018. He said the club are reviewing memberships and loyalty points would fall within that.</p>	JW
<p>Compensation for season ticket holders CL said there are murmuring from some season-ticket holders, not her, that they are missing out with the free ticket initiatives. WM said the majority of season-ticket holders he spoke to loved the Fill The Valley campaign and were grateful for the tickets to bring friends – seeing the tickets as more of a benefit. The Fans' Forum members agreed.</p>	CL
<p>Fans' Bar TK said the Fans' Bar is at capacity every game and they are having to turn supporters away. He said to get more people in the club is considering reducing the furniture which could add another 100 spaces in there. SH said that was a very good idea to get a younger crowd in. He said that the tables do take up a lot of space. LB asked if the tables could be put away during the game, or taken out during the game to create more space at different times.</p>	TK
<p>Road closing JP asked about closing the road before kick-off with more people attending. TK said there is a traffic manager order in place. He said the club work with the council and police to close the road but to allow access to the car park. He said the club restrict it as much as possible.</p>	JP
<p>Covid JP asked about club's Covid policy. TK said the club are awaiting further confirmation from the EFL, FA and local council. CL said getting fans to turn up early might be difficult depending on the regulations.</p>	JP
<p>Valley Express Norwich PS asked if Valley Express would run for the Norwich game, the club confirmed it would.</p>	PS
<p>Date for next Fans' Forum - Thursday, March 17th @ 6.30pm</p>	Club