

Plymouth Argyle Football Club

Minutes of Fans' Assembly meeting

Held at: 11.00am Saturday 25 September 2021
Players' Lounge, PAFC

Attendees

Name	Representing
ANDREW PARKINSON (AP)	PAFC CEO
ZAC NEWTON (ZN)	PAFC CLUB SECRETARY
SIOBHAN ROBBIE-JAMES (SRJ)	SUPPORT LIAISON OFFICER
JANE DAVY	FANS' ASSEMBLY SECRETARY
VIRGINIA PIKE (VP)	LONDON SUPPORTERS BRANCH AND ARGYLE FANS TRUST
JAN MacGREGOR (JM)	SENIOR GREENS
GRAHAM CLARK (GC)	CORNISH SUPPORTERS BRANCH
MARK SMITH (MS)	DEVONPORT SUPPORTERS
MARK EDWARDS (ME)	NORTHERN SUPPORTERS BRANCH
FRAZER LLOYD-DAVIES	GREEN TAVERNERS
MIKE GALE (MG)	GRANDSTAND SUPPORTERS

1. Attendance and Apologies

Apologies were received from:

Chris Corbett (CC) Argyle Pride
John Penney (JP) Vice-Presidents' Club

2. Welcome by Andrew Parkinson (CEO & Director)

AP welcomed everyone back after the unexpected break.

AP said that since the pandemic had begun back in March 2020 the support from everyone has been fantastic. From the beginning there has been a great deal of fundraising. Fans too have supported the club in relation to not taking up refunds that they might otherwise have been entitled to with regard to their Season Tickets. The highly publicised collaboration with the NHS from the start of the pandemic has been received very positively. Argyle TV has had a good launch. Everything that the club is continuing to do is with the aim of becoming a sustainable Championship Club. There is a great team in place now and a significant staff restructure has taken place over the last 18 months .

3. Questions submitted by email

ZN thanked everyone for submitting their questions in advance, and explained that because many of the questions were of a similar nature, they had been grouped together to form discussion points:

3.1 Mayflower Grandstand

3.1.1 Seating and overcrowding in the concourse.

The Grandstand was opened in January 2020, but certain areas stopped being in use after 3-4 games due to the pandemic induced lockdown. The ground floor spaces have been used for non-match days and this will be vital in the future to drive revenues on days when there is no football. The renovation of the Mayflower Grandstand has already proven to be a vital and versatile asset for both the club and community since opening – with use as an NHS mass vaccination centre and over 50 events held in the venue, despite the challenges of COVID-19.

However, it has been recognised that the upper grandstand seating comfort on match days, and the supporter experience in the concourses is not at the level that the Club would wish to achieve in the longer term.

The team are exploring options to improve this experience, with supporters' comfort and matchday experience at the forefront of any improvements, and these would have to be undertaken over time. In order to assess the best approach, the club have engaged external consultants, who are experts in the field and who are expected to report back over the next few months.

The Safety Advisory Group at the City Council have been involved and whilst there are no safety issues, limiting the capacity in the upper tier has significantly improved standards of comfort especially on the concourse. Supporters will be updated as to the progress in this area.

It has been acknowledged that the seating is uncomfortable for many due to the space between the rows. The Club will have to consider the level of investment required to address these issues and the best practical solutions over the short and long term. Over the long term, consideration will be given to

providing additional hospitality and concessions space which would provide additional revenue. This would support the overall sustainability strategy, and further enhance the facilities and experience for supporters.

The accommodation of the NHS has in the short term limited the number of concessions that are able to open on match day however the NHS footprint will reduce in the coming months, so that additional facilities will become available. There is currently 50% capacity in the upper tier with Season Ticket holders only currently admitted. The Club is not planning to make any further restrictions at this stage or this season.

Safe standing is something that all clubs are being asked to consider as part of a pilot scheme in the New Year. The Devonport End would be the most suitable for this at Home Park because of the sight lines. However, if the club installs the facilities to allow standing, the same offer will have to be made to away fans at this stage. There are therefore considerations over cost, time frames and the practicalities of converting the areas during the season. No decision has been made about whether the club will apply to be an 'early adopter'.

3.1.2 Not enough kiosks serving food and drink for the Lower Mayflower.

It is acknowledged that the lower mayflower provision has been reduced for the first few games, due to the Vaccination Marquee. As part of the extension to the NHS contract the Club has worked hard to improve this. A new fan zone will be in operation, with live music, 5 concessions (bar & food) as well as tables for supporters to use, all under a covered area. The toilet facilities are also being addressed from today and going forward.

4.1 Supporter experience – Stewarding

There is currently a national shortage of qualified Stewards for matches. A minimum of 90 are required for a crowd of 10,000. There are normally 95-125 Stewards, and the Club works with other Clubs, e.g., Sheffield Wednesday who brought some with them because of the national shortage. As well as the necessary safety training, all have had training on supporter experience. SIA stewards will cover bars/concessions/hospitality and Supervisors will have a level 3 or 2 qualifications. All stewards have had ground familiarisation training, induction and at the very least level 1 stewarding, however the Green Guide recommends a % of stewards that have to be level 2 qualified which we satisfy for each game. This is audited by the SAG & SGSA

The stewarding team are checking tickets in the ground to help people to their seats and make their experience better. Overall stewarding has greatly improved and the approach by stewards will be monitored at so as not to cause offence to Supporters. There needs to be a middle ground, not trying to control but trying to support fans.

All stewards, and staff, are advised to wear face coverings. There will be individuals who are exempt, however a supervisor will conduct a check on face coverings every 30 minutes.

Some of the Stewards have been reported as not sanitising their hands before carrying out searches. All Stewards should be wearing gloves so this will be addressed through Security. An individual risk assessment

is made when searching which explains why 100% of supporters are not searched at each match. Generally, all bags are searched but exceptions can be made in certain specific circumstances. All bottles taken into the Ground should have the cap removed or drinks should be brought in a flask. Supporters are advised to contact the DLO/SLO in the first instance re bag search exemption certificates for disabled supporters

Bag searches are intended for all fans, including hospitality. This has not always been the case so the team will investigate and brief the stewarding team accordingly with this feedback.

4.1.2 Halogen lighting

The Halogen lights have been reported as not working outside the Lyndhurst Stand and this makes it difficult for supporters when attending the evening games. There are also bins in the way that are a hazard.

There is a planning application with the Council currently to have a bin store so hopefully this will be rectified soon. The lighting has been resolved so this shouldn't cause any further issues. The Park lights are the responsibility of the Council, so the Club is not responsible for these.

4.1.3 Stadium Access

Due to the EFL covid guidelines, the club has to provide a sterilized 'red' area for the first team and match-officials to park in. This is our main "staff" parking area. To ensure that we can then also provide contracted car parking spaces (such as media/medical/safety officer/directors) we have worked closely with Plymouth City council who have kindly provided spaces for us to use on match-days. This is the cordoned off area in the park and Ride car park. This is planned to be a temporary solution and the club is working to put in place other parking arrangements for the second half of the year.

There is a 101 bus from multiple routes and car sharing is also encouraged. The only parking space owned by the Club is the old Director's Car Park, so the Club is looking at local schools, etc for further facilities. Despite approaches to various local coach & bus companies there are no plans to provide match day football specials to transport supporters to the ground. The last provider of this service is no longer operating, and it appears that no one else is willing to take over the routes mainly due to financial reasons.

The Club car park is available to staff and playing staff during the week. However, for events at the GTs (senior greens etc) the club have a process in place where the GT's will request any additional parking for events, and the club will accommodate those requests wherever possible. Disabled drop off is also always available to any fan/member. If the club is aware of a regular event, the NHS are notified, and allowances made. The Club are now aware of the regular events taking place.

4.1.4. Untidy Car Parking Areas

The club has plans to invest into these areas in the medium term, however, will regularly review the site to ensure all areas meet H&S requirements. The facilities team are in the process of “tidying up” certain areas, however there are parts of higher home park that are out of our control.

5.1 MISCELLANEOUS

The matchday announcements are currently read out starting with “ladies and gentlemen.” This is no longer being used this season, so this is no longer an issue. The crowd will be addressed with “Good afternoon, everyone” It is the most neutral that could be used as it covers anyone who does not identify as male or female whilst also covering pronouns.

Our commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion is important in everything that we do and we’re constantly working with key stakeholders, including Stonewall and the EFL, on such topics.

We have reviewed the language that we use in announcements and elsewhere and will make sure that it is fully inclusive, reflecting the great diversity of our fans. We welcome gender neutral announcements to be rolled out across Plymouth Argyle, as it will ensure that everyone – no matter who they identify as - feels accounted for.

5.3 Stagecoach match days.

Siobhan will be looking into whether it's possible to ask Stagecoach to agree to a park and Ride on midweek match day evenings at say 10pm to see if they will agree to try it out.

5.4 What has happened to the 1886 club?

We hope to have information soon on new membership offering for supporters, which will replace the 1886 membership. The Club is reviewing the whole membership proposition, broadening this to include members who don't come to the game. Share option schemes were looked at but they would probably have been too high per person. A package for membership to contribute is being looked into but it will take a couple of months to reveal what that is.

5.5 Disabled ticketing online.

The new codes used by Ticketmaster caused an issue that prevented online booking. This has been reported to Ticketmaster who are currently working on a solution. In addition, some supporters with

disabilities had been charged an incorrect booking fee. This was due to a misunderstanding in the ticket office and has now been corrected.

5.6 50/50 Draw

There was a delay in the draw taking place at the opening game which meant that the results were only posted online after the game. For all other matches, the draw will continue to take place on the Mayflower touchline in real-time at half-time, with results being posted on social media, the club website and outside digital screen network as soon as they're available.

5.7 Season Ticket holders' discount in the Superstore.

The Club is in the process of upgrading the Superstore online systems which, going forward, will link directly to the Argyle Accounts, providing one single login for tickets/retail/TV.

ST holders can use their discount online. This is detailed here [https:// www.pafc.co.uk/retail-discount](https://www.pafc.co.uk/retail-discount)

5.8 Argyle TV

Argyle TV replaced I Follow.

Really important that matchday passes when available are bought through PAFC so that it is PAFC that receive the revenue.

Supporters can watch any non 3pm Saturday games live on Argyle TV. These can be purchased on a game-by-game basis and will be advertised on pafc.co.uk.

Registering for an Argyle account and how to purchase is detailed under the TV section on the website.

Some fans are experiencing problems with the sound quality. There isn't the crowd noise that you hear on the radio. The Club will look into this.

The Support Team should help with problems with streaming but sometimes there are problems in getting through to them so the Club will look into that as well. If your emails are not answered, please make Zac aware.

5.9 BIG Screen

Several options for a big screen are being looked at and discussed with multiple screen providers and the venue management team. It will be essential to ensure that the maximum number of people can see the screen to maximise the fan experience and commercial benefit that the screen(s) would provide. There might need to be more than one screen. In assessing options, considerations will be given to viability and quality. Recommendations will be given to the Board in due course. The Club would hope to have a direction of travel by the next meeting.

6.0 P A System

One system appears to be fighting against another when turned up. The Club are rectifying this by investigating during the game. The Club has a stadium expert in to listen to this in different parts of the stadium. We are encouraging feedback from the fans to ensure that this can be rectified. Notwithstanding some quality issues, it was emphasised that the system that delivers safety messages is unaffected.

6.1 Women's Team

Three women's matches are planned to be played at Home Park this season and this will help to inform the discussion about how to make the Women's club financially sustainable . The women's club receives significant financial support from the main club and from the Community trust and both are very keen to have a successful women's team playing in Argyle colours. The teams are supported a lot more than before and we want to encourage more fans.

Date of next meeting: TBC (Jan 22)

Jane
Fans Assembly Secretary