

## Charlton Athletic Fans' Forum – Thursday, June 16<sup>th</sup>

### **Chair**

LB – Lucy Bishop – Fan Adviser

### **Fan representatives**

PB – Paul Breen – Charlton Athletic Supporters' Trust, CL – Christine Lawrie – Reminiscence Group, JP – John Perkins – Valley Away, AP – Alan Pledger – Maidstone Addicks, PS – Peter Smith – East Kent Addicks, IW – Ian Wallis – Bromley Addicks, JW – John Whitfield – Fans4Fans

### **Club**

TS – Thomas Sandgaard – Owner, CEO, RM – Dr Raelynn Maloney – Ownership Representative, AS – Andrew Smith – Head of Commercial Partnerships, DJ – David Johnson – Marketing Consultant, TR – Tom Rubashow – Head of Communications

<u>Topic</u>	<u>Raised by</u>
<p><b>Fill The Valley</b></p> <p>PB said that the CAST survey suggested a more coordinated plan was needed around season-ticket holders and filling The Valley. He said that what proved popular initially was the idea of bringing family and friends. He said people were more resistant to the idea of what they saw as 'non-committed' fans being given free tickets. He asked if there is a strategy and said that if supporters are made aware of it then perhaps that would help. They felt that giving tickets to the loyal supporter base to distribute was much more of a way forward in comparison to giving tickets to people who potentially didn't appreciate them as much.</p> <p>RM said that the club received a lot of feedback from season-ticket holders, through emails, on social media, people sending feedback to fan engagement – meeting with supporters. She said the club are clear that the way it was set up last season was not that effective, other than maybe the first two games – Plymouth went really well and we were pleased with that. She said the club are looking at season-ticket holders as the people who the club wants to work alongside in Fill The Valley efforts. As the season went on, a couple more games the season-ticket holders started to feel it was too much, and that it was devaluing their ticket over time. She said towards the end of the season tickets were being distributed without a solid strategy to get those with a ticket to attend, the process was not managed well by the internal team, nor the groups that were being invited to The Valley. She said the club realised this was not what the club aimed to do, and at the end of last season as well as all effort moving forward, the club will not be doing free ticket distribution like this. She said the club would be more focused on ticket sales to groups (schools, charities, grassroots clubs) who want to attend matches with their friends, teammate and families.</p> <p>She said one of the things the club are trying to focus on is trying to build a bigger base of new fan groups that we want to try to bring in and bring fans back who have left the club for various reasons. She said the club are talking to a number of schools and grassroots teams, developing partnerships and will begin to work with them in a way where they can possibly earn money through fundraising with ticket sales to their community. Instead of free tickets, we can sell tickets that help fund school or grassroots needs (school supplies, sports equipment), and bring in young fans who want to be a part of the football and experience The Valley. She said the club is focussed on building better relationships with many groups such as those that season ticket holders are a part of or want to help as well as the NHS, emergency workers, the armed forces, etc.</p> <p>She said if any free-ticket initiatives are considered, we will talk with season-ticket holders as well as focus on filling the two areas of The Valley which haven't been selling, so it doesn't impact season-ticket holders. She said tickets will not just be printed and distributed – the club want to know who is coming to The Valley so we can invite them back again, and again.</p> <p>She said the club would look to share their strategy ahead of the start of the season. She explained that the club are also bringing in a new role where staff are directly accountable for the season-ticket holders – a main point of contact, responsive to their</p>	PB

needs and suggestions. She said the club want to hear directly from season-ticket holders and other fans about what is going well, what is not, and ensure season-ticket holders know and feel that they are an important and valued part of this club. The club is focused on improving in many areas like this.

PB said he thought the dedicated area for new fans would be popular, as people found it difficult to book seats for friends and family at times last season.

RM said the club are already starting to pull that plan together. She said the club can try to summarise it in a way that we can communicate with season-ticket holders so that they are more aware that it is not going to be the same experience as it was last season.

IW said he thought it was just overkill in the end, the first couple of times it was brilliant and it really worked but added you can only do that a couple of times a year otherwise it will lose its momentum.

RM agreed and said the club have been trying to connect more with season-ticket holders. She said the club have held three or four meetings with season-ticket holders and they are looking at how they can increase attendance at those meetings. She said the club want to connect in multiple ways.

She said the club is aware of feedback from social media, emails, Fans' Forum, and the Fill The Valley group. While she acknowledged that not every season-ticket holder or fan is on social media, the club is finding ways to reach out in other ways. She said as part of the season-ticket holder benefit package, season-ticket holders will again be provided with an opportunity to bring a friend (a ticket for a friend to four specific games). She said the club had prepared a list of benefits and would appreciate feedback from supporters in the meeting of what they would value most.

She said the initial focus was to "fill the seats, and bring the people in that can enjoy this experience". She said after the initial success, instead of building on it, things sort of went sideways, and the club is taking all that to heart and helping the commercial team manage this better in the coming season. She said that of course we still want to Fill The Valley, that goal has not changed, but we need to do it in a way that works with our current supporters and is a much more conscious effort to who we are reaching out to, to build relationships with those who may become long term supporters. She said we need to think about when they do show up to The Valley, we want to know who they are so we can maintain them as a fan/individual, invite them to come to future games. She said a lot of those components were missed in the initial action with this initiative.

JW said in relation to one specific experience from a season-ticket holder, he was approached by a friend who was a trustee for a local charity, who approached the club for free tickets for this charity, a local charity. He said he didn't receive any communication from the club and the charity ended up going elsewhere, which he found embarrassing, especially as Charlton were giving away lots of free tickets. He said hopefully the club can learn from this moving forwards.

RM agreed it was embarrassing and unacceptable. She said she had recently received a letter from a charity, which sounded very similar and she would follow-up with JW to make sure the club contacted the individual he was speaking of. She said the club now have an improved internal structure which should ensure requests like this aren't missed.

**Season-ticket holder benefits**

The club presented the supporter representatives in attendance with a list of season-ticket holder benefits and asked them to feedback on priority order.

Club

**Away tickets**

JW asked if the club can have unreserved tickets for away games rather than numbered tickets to avoid disagreements about where people are sitting/standing.

TR said it was at the discretion of the home club but that Charlton would look into it. DJ explained that a big issue with unreserved seating is turnstile access, as stadiums can only have a certain amount going through a certain turnstile without causing problems, which is why every club will have a different set of rules.

JW

<p>IW said at Millwall games their supporters ignore reserved seating. He said all the people who stand up and sing go to the back and the older supporters go to the front. He said that if you get seats allocated and people stand up in front of you it causes far more trouble.</p> <p>RM said the club would look into it and update.</p> <p>JW asked about price caps for away games – referencing they have it in the Premier League. He said that some of the away tickets, Sheffield Wednesday for example, are extortionate, especially bearing in mind the cost of living rising.</p> <p>TS said he would bring up with the EFL.</p>	
<p><b>Fan Advisory Board</b></p> <p>JW asked if the club could have a Fan Advisory Board.</p> <p>TR referenced it had been talked about a little bit previously. He added working with supporters is important to the club and that there is the Fans’ Forum, the Youth Advisory Group, the Fill The Valley group and more staff dealing directly with supporters on a day-to-day basis.</p> <p>TS said a Fan Advisory Board could be a next development as the club continue to improve their engagement with supporters.</p> <p>JW said that if you look at the model that some of the Premier League teams are using, elected fans, where people can vote. He said that there is quite a strategic move, it is the next logical step.</p>	JW
<p><b>Player appearances</b></p> <p>PS asked about getting players out to supporters groups again.</p> <p>TS said that he wanted to do this as much as possible. He said the club need to engage with the fans as much as possible and in so many ways.</p> <p>TR said in terms of the process that the supporters groups should request player appearances for men’s and women’s players through Fan Engagement (<a href="mailto:Fans@cafc.co.uk">Fans@cafc.co.uk</a>) and can reach out to Player Liaison, Tracey Leaburn also.</p>	PS
<p><b>Cash catering</b></p> <p>PS asked if the club would go back to cash catering.</p> <p>TS said probably not as it is not only safer from a covid perspective but we also get through the supporters quicker, so it is less waiting time for fans.</p> <p>RM said that the club haven’t really received too much negative feedback about going cashless. However, if it is a problem the club will look into how to resolve this so notify the club of concerns.</p> <p>PS said it was talked about youngsters putting cash onto a card so they could purchase too.</p> <p>RM said the club haven’t found machines for that, however they are trying to work something out where if they only have cash, the Ticket office can provide a card with the amount on it, so they can use it in the stadium.</p>	PS
<p><b>Charlton Women’s team</b></p> <p>IW asked for an update on the proposed name change of Charlton Athletic Women to Charlton Athletic Ladies.</p> <p>TS said the club have submitted the request.</p> <p>RM said the club had a response from the London FA and submitted all materials to the Women’s FA, and were now waiting to hear their decision.</p>	IW
<p><b>Player of the Year dinner</b></p> <p>IW said the event went well and extended his thanks to the club and club staff for supporting the event. He said he was really impressed with the quality of the food.</p> <p>TS said the event flowed well and there was a really happy atmosphere.</p>	IW
<p><b>Museum storage</b></p> <p>IW asked when the museum storage would be sorted.</p> <p>TR said he had been told it will be cleared by the end of August.</p> <p>IW said August was absolutely fine, he just didn’t want it being forgotten.</p>	IW
<p><b>Club shop</b></p> <p>IW asked about the status of the club shop.</p> <p>TS said it will open in early July.</p>	IW

<p>IW asked if his new book could be stocked there. AS said he would speak to those involved and follow up. IW said in the past it has just been clothes in the shop and there should be more.</p>	
<p><b>Academy update</b> CL asked for an update on the club's application for category one status. TS said it is still in limbo. He explained there has been a lot going on. He said there was an audit a few months ago that was an audit for category two but could be used for the club's application for category one. He said the club got good feedback but there were a few things to follow-up on. He said he's had dialogue with Rick Parry, Trevor Birch and several other people and that the club are still waiting for the final committee meeting where they will make a decision. He said the club are still hoping that we get that one year temporary licence where they can come out and do a re-audit and see if there were many things we could improve on that we have already improved. He said that there is no doubt we have an amazing academy with great productivity. CL said that in the meantime Premier League clubs can still come in and take our players for not a lot of money. TS agreed it is too easy for those Premier League clubs to pick off players. He said one of the things we can do here in the meantime is to be smarter about how we sign up those players. He said the club have improved a lot over the year and a half he has been here. He said when he first got here it was like we were giving away academy players.</p>	CL
<p><b>Player recruitment, Ben Garner, pre-season</b> Notes on these topics were published on Friday, June 17<sup>th</sup>. <a href="#">Supporters can read notes from this section by clicking here.</a></p>	Various
<p><b>AOB</b> CL asked if supporters would be allowed to the TG to watch U23s and U18s games again. TR said the club would look into this and update. CL asked if turnstiles in the West had been fixed. TR said he wasn't sure but the club would look into it and update.</p>	CL
<p><b>Date for next Fans' Forum</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To be confirmed</li> </ul>	Club