

## **Charlton Athletic Supporter Forum**

**Thursday, November 14th, 2024**

### **Chair:**

LC – Lewis Catt – Charlton Athletic Fan Advocate

### **Club representatives:**

EW – Ed Warrick – Chief Financial Officer, Chief Operations Officer and Board Member, JB – Jon Blythe – Head of Operations, TR – Tom Rubashow – Head of External Relations

### **Fan representatives:**

HA – Heather Alderson – Charlton Athletic Supporters' Trust (CAST), AB – Alan Buhl – Charlton Athletic Disabled Supporters' Association (CADSA), CF – Colin Foakes – Dutch Addicks, AH – Adrian Howlett – Scottish Addicks, RH – Roger Hutton – Proud Valiants, LL – Lars Liljegren – Swedish Addicks, SL – Simon Ludden – East Kent Addicks, AM – Alan Malloy – Reminiscence Group, JP – John Perkins – Valley Express, MS – Matt Symes – North American Addicks, IW – Ian Wallis – Bromley Addicks and Charlton Athletic Museum

### **Introduction**

LC introduced the meeting in the context of the club's new Fan Engagement structure launched at the end of September. [Click here to read full information on the structure.](#)

### **Evacuation process for disabled supporters in the North West and North East Quadrants, raised by AB**

JB explained the process, which will be sent directly to CADSA. AB suggested the process be posted up on the Quadrants. JB agreed and said that would be done.

### **Disability parking for Wrexham, raised by AB**

AB said an individual's parking space was taken by someone else for the Wrexham game and the individual was asked to park in a different space because stewards didn't have a parking list. JB said every matchday parking list is distributed. He said for the Wrexham game it was a big day and from an operations perspective it was successful but added that there were learnings to take and said he would look into the specific incident mentioned. AB said the process is working fine and CADSA support the process in place.

### **Supporter Liaison Contact, raised by HA, AB and LL**

TR confirmed a new fan engagement team is now in place, including a new Supporter Liaison Officer. The new team will be announced later this month. He confirmed the previous Supporter Liaison Officer Lisa Squires had now left the club and goes with everyone's well wishes given all the excellent work she put in during her time at Charlton.

AB and LL referenced they had had no responses when emailing staff who have now left the club. JB to follow up to ensure part of the process for leavers will be an automatic response, confirming their departure, being added to email accounts. TR referenced all fan queries should copy in [fans@cafc.co.uk](mailto:fans@cafc.co.uk) which is an active mailbox.

AB asked who is best to contact specifically on queries for disabled supporters. JB confirmed the first point of contact is the club's Disability Liaison Officer.

HA said an individual couldn't get through to the club to give the club some money from a commercial perspective. TR said a new starter was beginning in the commercial team in the next week, with a prime focus on the administration side and answering the phone will be part of his responsibilities.

EW added a club only works when people know where to go with queries and the club take it seriously. He said if people aren't getting responses, please email [fans@cafc.co.uk](mailto:fans@cafc.co.uk).

### **Player kit sponsorship, raised by LL**

LL said the Swedish Addicks were disappointed they weren't able to negotiate a kit sponsorship package as they had done in previous seasons, given they didn't require all the benefits of the package, especially with unsold player sponsorships. TR said the club's commercial team had done some benchmarking on kit sponsorship prices in the summer and had adjusted accordingly. He referenced half-season player sponsorship packages would be published shortly which may offer something suitable.

MS agreed with LL that kit sponsorship packages allow international supporters to keep an important connection with the club. AH agreed. EW said that it is really important international supporters have a connection with the club, and that kit sponsorships have been a good way of doing that. He said the club were always interested in ways of increasing revenue and that he would pass on to his colleagues in commercial to look for ways to provide a suitable product for international supporters. MS offered support in consultation around the point.

### **Clarity on Valley Gold and ticket loyalty points, raised by AM**

AM said there had been a number of queries as it felt like Valley Gold weren't getting the same priority as before. TR referenced that the club's loyalty scheme hadn't changed since its induction in 2018. More information on the loyalty points scheme can be found [here](#).

### **Themed matchdays, raised by HA**

HA asked that supporters be consulted when selecting themed matchdays. TR said there is a committee for themed matchdays, which includes assigning them once the fixtures are out. He said some games are set because of their timings within the calendar year and some games are particularly in-demand. He said moving forwards, the club would involve a supporter representative on the themed matchdays committee ahead of the start of the season.

HA and AM asked about the club's remembrance activity, which was set for the postponed game against Peterborough United. TR said that at the start of each season, the home league game closest to Remembrance Sunday is selected for the club's remembrance ceremony. He said this year that was the Peterborough game, as it was felt that the Wrexham home game was too early. With the Peterborough game being called off on the Sunday before it was set to be played, the club made the decision to hold the remembrance ceremony before Charlton's game against Bromley on Tuesday, November 12th. He added that there would also be a ceremony ahead of Charlton Women vs Bristol City Women on Sunday, November 17th at The Valley.

### **Valley Review, raised by IW**

IW said that the content of Valley Review this year is very good but the design makes some parts difficult to read. He referenced the back page was particularly challenging to read. TR said the back page was part of a bigger, collectable design but acknowledged that a couple

of individuals had raised the point too. He said he would pick it up with the club's programme designers. HA said she would send through some best practice on colour matching around graphic design.

IW also referenced the stats page towards the end of last season was difficult to read because of the adjusted size of text, given the amount of players being used.

EW said programmes are important and he was really pleased with how many people buy it and read it. He said the club has a big history of memorabilia, which the Museum brings to life, which other clubs don't have. He said that when new supporters come it is important they become part of the club's history and that the programme can help make that connection.

IW referenced the 10th anniversary of the Museum on November 15th. EW said the museum is one of the best football museums. EW said the club want to weave the museum into the new staff induction process.

AH said he couldn't find programmes after the Birmingham game. TR said they are still available in the club shop post-game and supporters can also purchase this season's programmes online. [The link to purchase them is here.](#)

AB asked about the readability of the screen. TR said the shade of red used on the big screen had been changed after a few games to help with readability. AB asked about readability of the website for those that are colour blind. TR said he would raise internally.

### **Alan Curbishley Stand safety concerns, raised by HA/DW**

It was referenced that a number of people had safety concerns about the lack of handrails in the Alan Curbishley Stand. JB said it was something he had been looking at. He referenced that he had reached out to a few companies regarding installing a handrail down the middle of each stairway. He said the challenge with this was it would involve taking out a line of seats on each side of each stairway – which would dramatically reduce capacity. He said there are other options, for example a **P rail**, which is like a walking stick, so various options are being considered. EW said that like the safe standing in the summer, when this gets brought in there will be a process that includes significant supporter consultation, trials and advice to make sure that everybody is involved in the decision-making.

### **Hand-dryers and hot water, raised by DW**

JB said the club have been running a process of upgrading hand-dryers throughout the whole stadium. He said the Alan Curbishley Stand is the last bit and they will be upgraded in the next few months.

It was also raised that the toilet the north side of the Alan Curbishley Stand is busy. JB said he was aware of this and that there are toilets further down that are less busy, so the club will look at signage to point out that there are more toilets available.

On hot water in the Alan Curbishley Stand concourses, JB said when the stand was built, it wasn't built to have hot water, it was built for cold water. He said that the job to get hot water would be a very big, expensive job with new pipework etc. He said the club has looked at mini-boilers under each basin. JB said any solution is very expensive. He said given that the club will put sanitisers in the toilets. HA thanked JB for his honesty.

EW said the stadium has not had any meaningful work done to it for a long period of time. He said there are lots of things cropping up – leaking roofs, leaking pipes etc. He said it means the club have to prioritise what gets done and where money is spent. He said where

there are critical safety issues, they will be dealt with as priority. Where there are opportunities for the club to make things better for fans then that will also be important, for example the Fan Zone and upgrades to the shop. RH said the fan facing elements do send out a signal. He said he even noticed the hand-dryers changing after many, many years.

SL said a problem in the Alan Curbishley Stand is how difficult it is to purchase food at half-time, so many don't bother. JB said he would look into this. He said the automatic Beer Boxes (beer vending machines) in the Covered End Lower have been very successful and is something the club will be rolling out elsewhere in the stadium to help with speed of service.

EW said a lot of football clubs have challenges serving at half-time, given the immediate demand but it is important that the club can serve as many people as possible in the short space of time. As well as the automatic beer machines, which had been well-received, there are now quicker pouring beer pumps in some of the kiosks and beer queues in place around the stadium for those just wanting to purchase beer. EW said the staff in the kiosks were incentivised for the Wrexham game, with the fastest moving kiosk staff winning prizes. He said the information the club had around that was that the initiative worked. He said the club worked with Gather & Gather to make sure more till points were open than ever before. He said the club are trying to do as much as can be done within the season to make improvements on how quickly supporters are served.

JP asked about pre-pouring beers. EW said when tested not everyone wanted pre-pour beers, which caused challenges. He said for Wrexham in the beer priority lanes, the club tested a three-quarter pour for topping up on order to retain fizziness. EW said if people notice pinch-points then they should let the club know.

#### **Access to stands during the Wrexham game, raised by AM**

AM said it was raised that one turnstile in the Alan Curbishley Stand has not been working for some time. JB said in advance of the Wrexham game, the turnstile was given a manual fix but it went down again on the day. JB said despite the operational success of the Wrexham game there were learnings taken as it has been a while since the stadium had an attendance that big. He said that some fans would join on the end of queues on turnstiles, rather than going to the next turnstile, where there was less of a queue, so the club would look at communication to help solve those challenges. He said some supporters were trying to use print at home tickets on their mobile devices, which again the club would look at how the communication can help with that. JB said that the biggest learning he had taken was the need to upgrade turnstiles which will speed up the entry time to pick-up the bar code, however big or small and down the road be able to pick up digital tickets. He said it was busy at the Wrexham game but there was plenty to take from it to help the club in the future when hopefully we are getting those attendances week in, week out.

#### **Use of car parks on non-matchdays, raised by AB**

JB said the non-matchday parking restrictions in The Valley car park are not live but will be shortly and the club will communicate when that happens. He said when they do come in, there will be a 15-minute grace period, where no parking will be charged, so supporters can still pop down to the club shop or purchase tickets. He said if individuals are attending meetings at The Valley, there will be a validation screen on reception.

JP asked what happens on away games if supporters want to park their car at The Valley. JB said they would be charged for parking. EW said the club would give some thought to a car parking and coach ticket option, but that he would not give a guarantee on discounts.

### **Parking restrictions, raised by IW**

IW asked if anything had progressed on the car parking restrictions around the stadium. TR said the restrictions had been brought in. He said with that in mind the club need to consider how else to support people in getting to the stadium – which has included increased promotion around the safe, reliable and affordable Valley Express coach service. He said the Supporters' Trust had written a really helpful article on where to park too, [which can be read by clicking here](#). He said there was a nervousness about how the restrictions may impact attendances but that has not been seen at this stage, with home match-to-match sales up on last season – even if you take away the Wrexham game ticket sales are up considerably on last season. EW said The Valley is very accessible by public transport and that is something the club will continue to communicate. AB asked if anything was confirmed on evening games. JB said that is not in place at the moment and there has been no update on it.

### **Graffiti around The Valley, raised by IW**

JB said the graffiti on Clive Mendonca has been removed.

### **Fan WiFi at The Valley, raised by HA**

JB said the fan WiFi from a few years ago was not fit for purpose as the club does not have the infrastructure in place. He said the cost of putting it in is very high and it would still be a poor user experience.

JP asked if the half-time scores can go on the big screen.

### **Charlton foodbank, raised by HA**

JB said the foodbank, run by CAST, was good to run for the upcoming home game against Mansfield on Saturday, December 14th.

### **Stadium map on the club shop, raised by IW**

IW said the new stadium maps do not show the Meantime Fans' Bar, Bartram's or the Museum. JB said it was designed as a way-finder in the run-up to the Wrexham game. He said the club would review it moving forwards.

### **Next meeting, raised by IW**

Club to fix date as soon as possible.

### **CharltonTV, raised by MS**

MS just wanted to raise the importance of CharltonTV. TR said the club were pleased to keep Steve Brown on the commentary around games and were also happy with how well the monthly show has been received.