

Minutes of the Blackburn Rovers Fans' Forum

Ewood Park, Monday 13th November 2017 – 6.00pm

Present – Fans' Forum

Tris Stock
Neil Duckworth

John Wareing
Bharat Parmar
Jim Holden
Savio Mathias
Jennifer Lewis
Alan Birkbeck
Annette Birkbeck
Anthony Corry

Present from BRFC

Lynsey Talbot
Mike Cheston

Stuart Caley (items 2-5 only)

1. Apologies for absence

Steve Birtwell
Mark Hitchen
Rob Parker
Terry Crawford
Gordon Ormerod
Ray Williamson

2. Matters Arising from Minutes of the Previous Meeting 10th July 2017

a) **Online Ticket Purchasing** LT reported that the fault which was not allowing the purchase of more than one ticket at a time, had now been fixed. Supporters can now buy up to 6 tickets at a time as long as they are all in the same family and friends group and all meet the criteria stipulated during that ticketing phase.

3. Flares at Games

ND stated that the use of flares by Rovers fans at away games had become a common problem this season. SC replied that this was now a problem right across English football. The EFL had relaunched their anti-pyrotechnic campaign on 1st November and posters were being used at the Darwen End at Ewood. Part of the campaign asked clubs to ban anyone found using flares for three seasons and Rovers had committed to doing this. This action would be on top of any criminal charges.

SC also reported that a few Rovers fans had been live streaming the TV coverage produced for overseas distribution live on to Facebook. It was strictly illegal to do this on to social media.

Finally SC stated that the club had now received reports from the FA and EFL investigations into incidents at the Carabao Cup game with Burnley. After reviewing the evidence provided by the club both organisations have decided to take no further action.

4. Closure of Stands for Cup Games

In response to a question about the decision to close stands for cup games this season SC stated that the primary reason was to save money, given the size of crowds expected at the games. Most fans had accepted these changes, although a few fans in the JW Lower stand at the Darwen End with mobility issues had been concerned about having to move for the Barnet game. SC stated that this would not be an issue for the upcoming game with Crewe as it has been agreed to house away fans in the Darwen end as for league games.

5. Family Stand Ticket Checks

TS stated that fans had been concerned about recent ticket checks in the Family Stand and the implication that adults would not be allowed into the stand without a child in future. LT stated that no fans had been refused entry to the Family Stand to date. The club were monitoring the situation by checking tickets as there was some concern that some fans could have "bought" free child tickets to gain entry to the stand. There may be some action against fans who habitually do not come with children to games but no action has been taken to date.

The club had also been checking tickets in other stands as there was some evidence that adults were coming to the games using child or young adult tickets - this had resulted in some fans being directed to buy new tickets.

JL asked whether updates to the online ticketing system would allow disabled tickets to be bought online from next season. LT hoped this would be the case if the ticketing system was further upgraded as planned.

ND asked why the exit down the steps at the back of the Riverside stand had been closed. SC stated that some remedial work had been necessary and the work would be done shortly. He also noted that this exit was often closed in the winter months because the steps were often not safe to use.

6. Radio Rovers / iFollow

LT stated that the club had now bought eight sets of cordless headphones for use anywhere within the ground for visually impaired fans to get a match commentary. Feedback had been very good for the quality of the sound.

JW raised the issue of the poor service for subscribers to iFollow. The subscription had been sold on the basis of availability of full first team games and highlights of under 23 games. The current reality was that not all first team games had full coverage and there was no under 23 coverage. It was discussed that this appeared to be an issue with iFollow rather than the club but LT undertook to investigate.

7. Supporter Consultation Meeting

There was some discussion about the format of the meetings. It was agreed that an item would be tabled at the next meeting in January to discuss any ways in which the meeting could be improved for Rovers fans.

8. Brockhall – Asset of Community Value

TS noted that Ribble Valley Borough Council had refused an application from the Rovers Trust to have Brockhall listed as an asset of Community Value and asked the club for their comments.

MC stated that, whilst he was not at the club at the time, he could accept that Ewood Park had been so designated in the past. The club was keen to get the community to come to the ground both for games and for other events throughout the year. He and the club felt, however, that this was not the case for Brockhall. Half of the site was occupied by the Academy so any free access to the community for that would raise issues of safeguarding. The club were also reluctant to provide the same level of access afforded to the public at Ewood to the team's training sessions for reasons of privacy and confidentiality

In addition, public transport was difficult to the site and there was also a gated community next door. Furthermore, the facilities themselves are not designed for community use. The public have and will be continued to be given limited access on a managed basis.

MC emphasised that the club's objection to the listing of Brockhall in no way indicated any plans to change the status of the site. The club had just invested in a new 3G pitch at the STC and gained Category 1 academy status for the next two seasons, which was a demonstration of their commitment. Whilst he could never rule out a change in the future the club would only move the training complex if any new site was at least as good as Brockhall.

9. Contactless Payments at Kiosks

JW asked whether it would be possible to introduce an option for contactless payments at kiosks in the ground, as this would be more convenient for many fans and speed up service at busy times. MC replied that the club had undertaken a tender process for such a service in early 2017 with a view to introduction for this season, but had been unable to get approval for the necessary capital expenditure. The club were hopeful that this would be done at some time in the future.

10. Merchandise

SM asked whether there were any plans to update the range of merchandise in the shop. LT replied that there was only a very small market for many items. In addition it was usually the case that minimum orders for items with the club's logo tended to be prohibitively high. The club were, however, looking at current buying processes and that might allow changes to the range. The toddler range was one area they were particularly looking at.

SM asked whether more items like players' mugs and signed photos could be introduced and JL also suggested using former players as well.

11. Any Other Business

- JH congratulated the club on the minute's silence before the Barnet game but did express disappointment that, whilst the teams, officials and veterans observed the silence impeccably the photographer was constantly moving around taking photos, which detracted from the solemnity somewhat.
JW also thanked the club for their decision to allow a fan from each club to lay a wreath rather than using the managers as in the past, especially as he had been the one chosen. He hoped that this would continue in future years and that other fans would get the opportunity.
- LT stated that there would be a Winter Wonderland event in the Fan Zone and Blackburn End on Thursday 7th December, which would be launched soon. It was a follow-on event to the Big Celebration in the Summer and would feature a small stage in front of the Blackburn End, player appearances, a carol concert, the Blackburn Cathedral Choir, brass bands and fireworks. They expected a nominal charge of £2 per person and all proceeds would be donated to three charities.

12. Dates of Next Meetings

Pre -meet

Main meeting

8/1/18	16/1/18
5/3/18	13/3/18
14/5/18	22/5/18
2/7/18	9/7/18
3/9/18	10/9/18
5/1/18	12/11/18

Pre-meets are held one week before the main meetings. The pre-meet is open to all interested fans to attend, providing they request to do so in advance by contacting John Wareing by email or phone as below.

Members should contact John Wareing at roversfansforum@hotmail.com or 07984 085474 to give their apologies if they cannot attend a meeting.

Fans can also contact John regarding the Forum using the contact details above.