

Minutes of the Blackburn Rovers Fans' Forum Ewood Park, Monday 12th September 2016 – 5.30pm

Present – Fans' Forum

Tris Stock
Neil Duckworth
John Wareing
Bharat Parmar
Alan Birkbeck
Annette Birkbeck
Gordon Ormerod
Jennifer Lewis
Savio Mathias
Ben Sumner

Present from BRFC

Mike Cheston
Lynsey Talbot

1. Apologies for absence

Ray Williamson
Anthony Corry
Rob Parker
Mark Hitchin
Ste Birtwell
Jim Holden
Terry Crawford

2. Matters Arising from Minutes of the Previous Meeting 11th July 2016

a) Relocation of Family Stand

LT stated that the relocation of the Family Stand had on the whole been very well received, although a few fans had been disappointed to have to move from the upper tier of the Blackburn End. In particular the new games room had been very well received and there were plans to develop this facility. There had been a few complaints about smoking in the toilets so a new smoking area had been added.

b) Relocation of TV Gantry

LT stated that there had been three complaints of a slightly restricted view because of the new TV gantry in the Riverside stand but otherwise the move had been well received.

c) Season Ticket Sales

MC stated that, whilst season tickets were still on sale, at the moment sales were around 8,500. This compared to around 10,000 in the 2015/16 season, although that figure included half season ticket sales.

- d) **Umbrellas in Club Shop**
SM stated his pleasure at the club shop now stocking umbrellas after his request at the previous meeting.
- e) **Online Ticket Purchase for Disabled Fans & Carers**
JL asked whether any progress had been made on allowing disabled fans and their carers to buy tickets for games online. LT stated that the club is looking at the issue but had not yet found a solution.

3. Matchday Programme

AB raised the issue of the matchday programme, At the last meeting there had been discussion of some radical changes to the programme, including the possibility of a smaller programme for a reduced price.

MC responded that he was focused on trying to stem the current losses on the programme and preferably make a profit, as well as cutting down on the workload for the communications team in the programme production to enable them to spend more time in other areas.

JL highlighted a problem with the use of light blue type on a dark blue background for those with sight issues. LT undertook to review the matter.

4. Owners and Continuing lack of Communication with Fans

TS asked whether the owners were aware of the current unrest with many fans. MC replied that they are definitely aware of the current issues and he was hoping to get a comment from them. In particular he was hopeful that a representative of the owners would be attending the Supporters Meeting on 29th September but this has yet to be confirmed.

Regarding the protests the club had made a decision not to get involved. The protests are clearly directed at the owners and not at the club and the team and had therefore decided it would not be appropriate to attend the recent open meeting.

MC did express his regret at the abuse a number of staff at Ewood had received from a small number of fans in recent weeks and hoped that this would not continue.

ND asked whether an appointment had been made to the recently advertised post in the Senior Management Team. MC replied that a suitable candidate had been selected but it was not possible to make an announcement until all legalities had been completed, He hoped that he could make an announcement in the first week of October.

TS asked about the arrangements for the first Supporters Meeting on

29th September. LT responded that she planned to issue an email later that week asking for nominations for attendees and for items for the agenda. It was intended to invite up to five persons from each group – two were to be permanent members to provide some continuity and three could be rotated. In addition the club would invite a further ten individuals who were not involved in any groups. The club were keen that this would allow for a broad range of fans' opinions at the meeting.

The aim was to have an attendance of around 50 – this was in line with EFL recommendations so that the meeting could be a genuine exchange of views and not just a Q&A session. From the club it was expected that he and Lynsey would be joined by Ian Silvester, Robert Coar, Owen Coyle and any other appropriate attendee dependent on agenda items.

TS asked whether MC had any comments about the documents that had recently been leaked. MC stated that the club had made no comment to date. He has read most of the documents but they all related to a period before he joined the club in March 2015 and they all related to club officers who were no longer at the club.

5. State of Ewood Park & Surroundings

MC reported that he had recently met Ewood's Operations Manager and agreed a plan of work to deal with some of the issues.

The Walker Fame bricks were a problem as the ash from smokers outside Blues Bar was causing discolouration. The club could not use certain chemicals because of the possibility of run-off into the river and damage to the pitch, but hoped to be able to steam clean them.

ND and AB added that there were untidy areas due to weed growth on the back lane between the Jack Walker stand and the house on Bolton Road and in the Darwen End car park.

6. Checktrade Trophy Admission Prices

AB stated that the price for the recent game at Fleetwood had been £20, which seemed excessive for the level of the game and probably explained the low attendance. LT stated that the EFL set both minimum and maximum prices for the competition and what to charge for the game was entirely at the discretion of the home team. The club expected to charge a competitive price for the home game at Ewood.

7. Stewarding of Half Time Smoking Areas

TS raised an issue brought up by Anthony Corry, that some fans were gaining free entrance to the second half of games due to lax stewarding of half time smoking areas. MC agreed to check this.

8. Any Other Business

- a) ND asked whether there were any ideas for improving the atmosphere at games where a low attendance was expected, such as early EPL Cup round games. He suggested considering concentrating fans in central areas by using netting.
- b) SM raised the issue of high prices for away fans at some grounds – for example Leeds were charging £35, rising to £40 for tickets bought on the day. MC stated that there was no agreement with the EFL equivalent to the Premier League, which had capped away ticket prices at £30.
- c) GO asked whether the £1m that the Premier League had promised to input to the Checkatrade Trophy was still available now that many PL clubs had declined to take part. MC agreed to check.
- d) In response to a question from BS. MC confirmed that match day pricing at Ewood was still using the three category model. BS expressed surprise as there had already been fixtures with Burton and Fulham and Rotherham coming up, all of which had been the highest category.
- e) MC wanted to put on record the value the club gave to having the Fans Forum sessions, which provided a very useful sounding board for the club on a variety of topics.

10. Dates of Next Meetings

| Pre -meet | Main meeting |
|-----------|--------------|
| 7/11/16 | 14/11/16 |

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.