

Minutes of the Blackburn Rovers Fans' Forum Ewood Park, Monday 14th March 2016 – 7.00pm

Present – Fans' Forum

Tris Stock
Neil Duckworth
Ben Sumner
Bharat Parmar
Ste Birtwell
Alan Birkbeck
Annette Birkbeck
Gordon Ormerod
Ray Williamson
Anthony Corry
Savio Mathias
Jim Holden
Mark Hitchin

Present from BRFC

Mike Cheston
Lynsey Talbot

1. Apologies for absence

Jennifer Lewis
Terry Crawford
John Wareing

2. Matters Arising from Minutes of the previous meeting (09/11/2015)

a) New Ewood Road Layout

RW reported that there was no noticeable change in exiting Car Park H since the introduction of the new road layout. He expressed concern that the users of Car Park H seemed to be at the bottom of the priority list when exiting the ground. A brief discussion on how to solve this problem resulted in a suggestion that the council imposed road restrictions should be relaxed for a period after a match to allow cars to exit Bolton Rd in the direction of Blackburn Town Center. LT stated that when this suggestion had been made to the council they were **unable to facilitate this**. TS suggested that both the club and existing Car Park H users should petition the council to relax the bus lane restriction after every match, allowing traffic to turn right away from Ewood Park and reduce congestion for all road users in the area.

b) £4 public transport levy on Brighton tickets.

LT read out correspondence received from Brighton relating to the levy (see attachment 1). LT also mentioned that it she would raise the issue at the next Supporters Liaison Officers meeting.

c) Home match programme quality.

It was agreed to postpone the discussion on this item until a future meeting which Alan Myers could attend.

d) Competition to design a new flag

LT agreed to progress the idea of a club organized competition to design a new flag.

e) End of season awards night.

LT said that there was nothing to report yet on this item.

f) Paul Lambert invitation to attend future FF meeting

LT suggested inviting him to the July meeting.

3) **Burnley away game experience and feedback**

TS reported that prior to the Ewood fixture there had been three planning meetings, compared to just the one meeting prior to the Turf Moor fixture. Concerns about arrangements for the game (eg allowing the David Fishwick Stand to be divided between home and away support) had been raised at that meeting but were never followed-up.

A discussion of peoples experiences of the day included:-

AB reported the following issues :-

- i) Problems with tickets causing difficulty in entering the ground.
- ii) A lack of female stewards which delayed searches for female fans.
- iii) A lack of programme availability.

MH raised concerns about the delayed departure of coaches from Ewood which resulted in fans leaving the coaches to find toilet facilities. TS stated that it had been proposed at the planning meeting to provide staggered departure times which would be indicated on the coach tickets. This never happened.

SM expressed concern that a **window** had been 'put through' on one of the coaches, though further discussion revealed that this had been caused by fans from within the coach. SM was also unhappy with the 'waving of a Burnley flag' in front of the away section when the home team scored. It was agreed that this was an ill-advised provocative gesture.

TS expressed disappointment with the e-mail sent out to ticket holders explaining the traveling arrangements for the day. He felt that it could have reflected more of the work that went into planning the day, in particular the provision of a Fan Zone in order to alleviate congestion in the concourse.

GO reported that some fans had problems seeing the game due to fellow fans standing on chairs to taunt the home fans.

LT passed on a message from Stuart Caley in which he stated that Rovers officials, though present at Ewood on the morning, had very little involvement with dispatching the coaches as this was under the control of Lancashire Police.

4) Leeds and Preston home game kick off times

TS stated that a majority of fans were unhappy with the early kick-off times, especially when the games were not even televised. There was a feeling that the club capitulates too easily to demands from the police. Why are two clubs, both under Lancashire Police jurisdiction treated differently for equivalent fixtures? For instance Preston staged the Deepdale fixture at the traditional 3 o'clock but Rovers are expected to kick-off at the more inconvenient 12:30.

LT indicated that the police stipulate an early kick-off if the whole of the Darwen end is made available to the away team.

TS suggested a statement from the club explaining the decisions.

5) Football League Equality & Diversity Code of Practice.

LT was delighted to inform the Forum that the club had achieved the required standard, which would be valid for the next three years.

6) 2016-17 kit supplier and designs

MC confirmed that the Nike deal will terminate at the end of the season, but he could not reveal who the new supplier would be or when it would be announced.

TS stated that the Forum would be pleased to provide any future input into kit design.

SB asked if the kits could be released in time for the summer holiday season. LT was hopeful that this would be achieved.

7) 2016-2017 season tickets / match tickets / corporate offer/ singing area / Darwen End home fans.

MC reported that the club was hoping to get season tickets to market earlier than last season. He canvassed opinion from the forum as to pricing etc. There was general agreement that prices should not increase dramatically but on the other hand the club should be careful not to devalue the product. Other suggestions included providing a free cup game with the season ticket and some

sort of loyalty pricing incentive.

GO asked why the club now use TicketMaster. MC replied that TicketMaster gives the club greater capacity to sell for big games and more importantly they are PCI compliant which the old in-house system was not. (NB PCI is a proprietary information security standard). MC thought that TicketMaster would be a good partner for the club and he confirmed that at present the club covers any additional handling charges for home game sales.

It was observed that Paul Lambert has mentioned on more than one occasion that he would like all the vocal fans in one location. This had led to understandable concern amongst Darwen End season ticket holders that they may be moved into the Blackburn End from next season. LT replied that there had been no conversation about closing the Darwen End to home fans, but that the club is looking at ways to improve the atmosphere and Paul Lambert is keen on any initiative which achieves this.

TS proposed that one way to freshen-up the Darwen End experience would be to swap sides. ie. put the Rovers fans in the Jack Walker side of the Darwen End stand (lower). The Jack Walker Stand is a much more substantial structure than the Riverside and would have the effect of keeping more of the home atmosphere in. Away fans could be accommodated in the upper tier on the opposite half, adjacent to the RFS Riverside stand where their vocal support would be less effective.

LT mentioned that one area that was under consideration of a re-location was the Family Stand. This was because it was now accepted that younger fans in general enjoy the pitch-side interaction, which is not available in the upper tier of the Blackburn End.

MH provided the results of data he had produced relating to possible season ticket sales strategies. These are contained in Attachment 2.

8) New Executive structure at BRFC / Derek Shaw departure

MC repeated the official reasons for Derek Shaw's departure i.e. he had another business interest and it was a challenge to manage the time between the two roles. MC reported that himself and Alan Myers had spoken to the owners and were confident that between them they could absorb all required duties. They were currently working through the process of assigning the new reporting streams.

MC responded to rumours that Derek Shaw had only worked a short week in his BRFC role by stating that those rumours were not true, and that in fact Derek Shaw had made himself available 24/7 to fulfil the requirements of his role at BRFC.

JH asked if there would be a shareholders meeting this year. MC said that there would be one.

9) **Summer 2016 pre-season plans**

MC reported that plans were being made but were not yet finalized. He appreciated that some fans plan their summer holidays around these fixtures and would let the fans know at the earliest opportunity.

10) **Any Other Business**

SM reported leaks in the Riverside Stand roof. MC read an e-mail provided by the stadium manager (See Attachment 3). The contents went into great technical detail which suggested that most of the reported leaks were in fact the result of condensation dripping from the roof.

SB was unhappy with the pre-match team entrance music (Cold Play) and the goal music. From the ensuing discussion the consensus was that the entrance music is subjective, some people like it, some don't. ... but the concept of playing ANY goal music was an anathema and detracted from the spontaneity of the moment.

It was noted that drummers had returned. Again there was no consensus as to whether this was a good or bad thing!

MH raised a concern that there were rumours that the academy is about to lose its Cat A status. MC refuted this and reported that after the recent audit the club were confident that it would be renewed.

10. **Date of Next Meetings**

Pre -meet	Main meeting
3/5/16 (Tuesday)	9/5/16
4/7/16	11/7/16
5/9/16	12/9/16
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 give their apologies if they cannot attend a meeting.

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