

Minutes of the Blackburn Rovers Fans' Forum

Zoom Meeting Wednesday 1st December 2020 – 6.00pm

Present – Fans' Forum

Tris Stock
Mike Graham

John Wareing
Mark Hitchen
Peter Bolton
Ray Williamson
Jennifer Lewis
Annette Birkbeck
Alan Birkbeck
Savio Mathias
Chris Lofthouse
Mushtaq Khan
Neil Mellin

Present from BRFC

Lynsey Talbot
Mike Cheston

Greg Coar

1. Apologies for Absence

Bharat Parmar
Anthony Corry

TS welcomed two new members to the Forum – Chris Lofthouse representing Proud Rovers and Neil Mellin.

2. Matters Arising from the Minutes of the Previous Meeting 14th October 2020

• Club Shop Opening

MG asked what the situation was with the re-opening of the club shop. GC stated that the shop would fully reopen on the following day (2nd December). He stated that the shop had been very busy with online and click and collect orders in recent weeks and particularly with the Black Friday offers. There had been a lot of work inside the shop to ensure social distancing and safe operation.

TS stated that he thought there was a lack of non football leisurewear in the shop. GC said that the last few months had been a very challenging period – the club had not stopped procurement for the shop but had had to be careful because of the financial situation and this was to some extent reflected in the range of goods on offer. Less Christmas stock had been bought for example. LT stated that she has found the current range to be very good.

- **Ewood Park Maintenance and Appearance**

JW asked whether any further progress had been made with the maintenance work required at Ewood Park. MC replied that he had that day authorised work on cleaning the moss from the panelling, but that the current financial position meant that the club had to constantly be careful of expenditure.

3. Season Ticket Offering & Uptake

GC confirmed that the club had sold a little over 2,500 season tickets. Should the club be able to welcome 2,000 fans back if Blackburn with Darwen moved into Tier 2 season ticket holders would be given first priority.

JohnW asked if and when the club planned to start selling season tickets again. GC stated that there were no plans as yet and that what was offered would depend on the circumstances at the time and may take the form of half season tickets and/or individual tickets.

MG asked about uptake of Diamond Club season tickets. GC replied that there had been a lot of interest but in the end only a very small number had been sold.

4. Update on Fans Attending Games

MG asked what the current situation was in getting fans back into Ewood Park. GC stated that it was not possible to give any definite information at this time whilst Blackburn with Darwen remained in Tier 3 and he expected that things would be difficult through the rest of this season. MC added that the club's primary objective was survival and that meant a return of supporters to Ewood Park and an increase in income as soon as possible. GC stated that he hoped it would be possible to have a full re-launch of the club's offer to fans for the 2021/22 season.

TS asked what the situation would be with households who normally bought two or more season tickets but had only renewed one to gain access to iFollow so far. GC stated that what would happen would depend on the circumstances at the time but in the first instance the priority for any match tickets would be for current season ticket holders. The situation would be reviewed as and when the 2,000 limit was increased.

MC stated that the club had been in regular contact with Dominic Harrison, the Director of Public Health for the council and had a good working relationship. Whilst covid-19 cases were steadily declining in the area there were other factors such as hospital capacity and the rate of virus in the more vulnerable over-60s which may delay a move into Tier 2. The club had been doing a lot of work to set Ewood Park up to receive fans in a safe manner as soon as possible and has been lobbying Government to accept that they can manage fans returning safely. The club had had a number of employees across their various sites who had had the virus, isolated due to similar symptoms or needed to self-isolate but at the time of the meeting there were no live cases amongst either employees or the playing staff.

JenW asked about the situation with fans who had not renewed their season tickets this year but who would want to keep the seats they had had for many years in the 2021/21. GC confirmed that this was not an issue currently as no seats had been allocated to 2020/21 season ticket holders.

NM asked about the situation for fans who might live in Tier 3 if Blackburn with Darwen moved into Tier 2 and fans were allowed back. LT replied that current guidelines suggest that anyone in Tier 3 would not be able to attend a game in Tier 2.

JohnW asked whether it would be possible for friends not in the same household or bubble to choose to sit close by each other whilst still socially distancing. GC replied that he hoped that fans would be able to choose their seats so should be able to plan to sit close to friends, although it might depend on the circumstances at the time.

JenW asked whether the club would produce detailed information on what fans would expect when returning under social distancing including maybe a video. Many, especially disabled fans were anxious about returning. MC replied that it was a primary responsibility for the club to ensure that fans felt safe and comfortable and that plans were in place for fans to be fully informed.

JohnW asked whether the club was happy with the situation of fans being allowed into some grounds but not others over the coming weeks as it might give some other teams a competitive advantage. MC stated that the club was not happy about the situation and recognised that it could give an advantage to some opposition teams. However, the club were committed to the return of fans to stadiums as soon as possible and it would be difficult to complain about this situation right now.

JohnW asked whether the club might require fans to have proof of vaccination to attend future games. MC stated that whilst there were no plans for this, the club were constantly looking at any way of helping fans to get back to games. GC added that the club had been speaking to

some technology companies about using technological solutions to help and were happy to be guinea pigs if appropriate.

TS noted that the EFL had asked the Government to lift the ban on fans drinking alcohol within sight of the pitch at football games and wondered whether the club supported this. LT replied that they would support this request whilst capacities were limited as they needed any possible extra revenue sources. MK stated that it would be good if that happened for the club to designate a part of the stadium as alcohol free. LT replied that the club had already had a couple of trial games with the upper tier of the Blackburn End being alcohol free and would have done more but for the suspension of games in March and this would be put forward for consideration.

5. Use of Ewood Catering Facilities

JohnW asked whether the club were considering opening up corporate facilities for fans to have a meal whilst watching a game when rules allowed this.

GC said that this was being considered although not as a revenue earner. There would be little profit in serving meals under social distancing rules but it would be good to have a connection back with at least some fans

6. January Transfer Window and Player Contract Renewals/Extensions

JohnW asked whether the club were expecting any transfer activity in the upcoming January transfer window. MC stated that he expected little activity as the club currently had a strong squad with some key players about to return from injury and a group of academy players establishing themselves in the first team squad. However, he could not rule out offers for players from other clubs which might affect things, although there no plans for anyone to be sold. The club had been talking to a number of players and their agents about new and extended contracts for a number of weeks now.

7. Fans Consultation Meeting

JohnW asked about a date for the next consultation meeting with fans. LT stated that she had discussed this issue with Steve Waggott but they felt that a meeting with the same numbers as in the past was not workable using Zoom. It may be that they would have a meeting where questions were put in advance by fans and the club produced a session to reply to them or limited numbers were invited to attend a virtual meeting. The club had until the end of June 2021 to have two meetings and it was hoped that these could be carried out in large rooms with

social distancing in due course.

8. BBC Premier League Documentary

JohnW stated that he had been approached by a production company who were developing a documentary series for the BBC about the history of the Premier League. Clearly the Premier League win in the 1990s would form a major part of the series of 4 x 60 minute programmes. The company had already made contact with the club, who had made their archive available.

The company were particularly looking for any film footage fans might have made for themselves around the time of the Premier League win. This could be in any format, although Super8 might be difficult. If any fan has anything that might be of interest they should contact John by email or phone using the contact details at the end of these minutes

9. Dates of Next Meetings

11th January 2021

8th March 2021

10th May 2021

12th July 2021

13th September 2021

8th November 2021

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

Any fan who wishes to see an item on the agenda should contact John Wareing at least a week in advance of the meeting by email or phone as above.