

Operations Committee Meeting 4th January 2022

By Zoom: For RFC: Jackie Evans, Mark Bradley, Ray Booth, Tim Kilpatrick, Mark Ilsley, Rob Coleman, Paul Collins

For STAR: Paula Martin, Steve Benton, Roger Titford

Covid issues

Has the club considered an isolated watching area for fans who aren't comfortable sitting in a crowd?

Yes, but difficult to implement because of access in and out / toilet facilities. STAR suggested contacting Cardiff City who have tried this earlier in the pandemic. Club agreed to research.

Two elderly supporters were turned away because they did not have Covid passes. What's the club's policy on this?

Club is mandated by Safety Advisory Group to check 100% of people entering the stadium – even had to turn away members of the matchday media due to insufficient proof of vaccination or a negative lateral flow result! Despite the publicity the message isn't always getting through and will need to be repeated. Also need to emphasise the need to get to seats earlier than usual, as there were long queues outside the Sir John Madejski Stand.

What is the vaccination status of players?

For medical confidentiality reasons the club cannot give out precise details but assured that RFC is not out of line with other clubs in the EFL and society in general. Players have been advised and encouraged by doctors, club medical team, posters and meetings and also by central guidance from EFL and the government to be vaccinated. However, it remains a decision based on each individual's personal choice.

Ticketing

Have the club considered a sensory watching room (as Arsenal have) for fans with sensory needs?

Yes – we were working on this with Community Trust before lockdown and funding was in place. First thought was to use an Executive Box but it is not a solution which is fit for this purpose. We will continue to look for a solution.

Why were half season tickets sold with 12 rather than 11 games?

Because of the postponement of the 'anniversary' Luton match on 18 December, HST holders were given their chosen seats for the rearranged Luton fixture. But we didn't feel it was fair to not allow HSTs access to our rescheduled 150th birthday fixture against Coventry on a Saturday afternoon. So HST holders will now be able to claim a complimentary ticket for the anniversary match vs Coventry City on 12 February (but it will probably not be for their Half Season Ticket seat as that will already have been sold when the original anniversary match was put on sale). Half a season constitutes either 11 or 12 games, depending on whether it has been rounded up or rounded down – so 12 games still represents half the season in terms of home fixtures.

Can you advise under 18s not to buy tickets for Y23-Y26 or Club 1871 – they just scream and mess around?

We do not sell tickets for Club 1871 at a rate for under-12s. 12-17s should be accompanied by a responsible adult and we have no plans to discourage them from these areas.

Now that some clubs are bringing in rail seating that enables standing at matches, what is the club's policy?

Our policy has not changed. In order to bring in rail seating we would have to convert the entire South Stand because of the sightlines and rules to provide similar seating for away fans. It would be a huge expense that would not directly pay back. As we are, we have an excellent safety record at our stadium. However, we will continue to support safe standing and assess opportunities to implement going forward.

Catering

Can we have two Berkshire Brewery stands, how about vouchers for half-time beers or a seller with a beer backpack? And street food again?

We are planning to get another beer stand outside Club 1871 (by the beginning of February we hope!). The catering firms themselves do not want to implement a voucher system and the beer backpack idea which we had at the stadium in the past proved unprofitable - the actual impact on queues with both of these options is limited (you can pre-pour pints at the kiosks but not with a roaming seller - and you can carry only a very limited number of pints per keg anyway). Likewise, the street food traders do not make enough money compared to other venues offering more regular footfall rather than intermittent home fixtures throughout the course of a season.

Stadium

Royal Elm Park (REP) doesn't seem to be happening so isn't it time for some car park maintenance?

No further progress to report on REP at the moment other than possible changes in the planning application relating to a smaller convention centre. In terms of the car park maintenance, RB was aware of the giant puddle in the Red Car Park and it is an issue which on the list to be resolved as soon as possible.

Stewarding

Would it be an idea for a STAR Board member to shadow a steward on Covid Pass duty?

Yes, happy for this to happen at the Stoke City match and for STAR to take photos and publicise.

Merchandise

Any chance of getting more home shirts in the popular sizes?

Unfortunately not. In anticipation of these shirts being more popular than normal, we upped our order quantity this season by 25% because it was an anniversary shirt. However, it has sold even better than expected! We contacted the manufacturers as soon as we established the higher demand for the shirts but the lead times on getting a re-order delivered are so lengthy that additional stock would have been too late in the season to be able to sell.

Where's Kingsley?

Sadly, Covid has restricted his roaming activities but we hope to have him and Queensley back for the Coventry match in February. It is a difficult balance with COVID and matchday activities– for example, we opened the Kids Cabin recently and received a mixed response from fans – some fans were delighted and others thought we should not be opening it.

Communication

There seems to be a lack of communication from the club, both from the top and the bottom. What do you plan to do about that?

There are many other club owners and CEOs who prefer to stay in the background and don't regularly comment publicly, but we appreciate the question and the request for comment from the hierarchy at the club and aim to improve going forward where possible. Thankfully, the manager is a great communicator, always willing to talk to fans and media.

Following our previous Operations meeting, we have listened to STAR's request and posted a RFC Who's Who on the website and a more in depth directory putting names to roles in our recent Royals 150 magazine. We are open and communicative in regular meetings such as these and the Fan Engagement Panel we hosted late last year, however we will look into how we can build on the notes and publicise them to a wider audience from a club perspective. We can also explore ways in which we can make the points discussed in these meetings come alive with a bit of audio-visual, maybe including comment from a member of the club's hierarchy.

We can explore options for a Fans Forum next month – maybe in person with limited ticketing in Princess Suite or via Zoom again.

Other

Signed items, is this happening at present and are requests being fulfilled?

We do get a huge number of requests for signed shirts and other items and we have always had to prioritise which are achievable. We don't have the capacity to meet all requests – either financially or in manpower, and that was especially true during lockdown. So we have to prioritise the worthiest of causes, the more local charities or the most loyal of supporters. This year we're focusing on No.5, our charity of the year, in terms of charity requests for signed items.

Governments Fan Led Review

Yes, we do need to discuss the Fan Led Review at our next Structured Dialogue meeting, so let's fix a date for next month.

Date of next Ops Cttee Meeting: Fri 25 February 2022.