

## OPERATIONS COMMITTEE MEETING 31ST MARCH

By Zoom:

For RFC: Mark Bradley, Ray Booth, Tim Kilpatrick, Mark Ilsley, Rob Coleman, Paul Collins, Dave Parker and for the latter part Jackie Evans

For STAR: Paula Martin and Sarah Turner

### Updates from last meeting

Sensory room: No further movement at the moment as still trying to establish a suitable room – an Executive Box would not be suitable. We want it done properly not just as a tick box exercise.

Club 1871 beer stand: This was in place for the Coventry City game but it was not well enough used to be available every game.

Catering: Please can STAR give examples of food choice and variety being done well at other comparable stadia. Our comparisons with similar-sized clubs are very similar. The catering company want to improve things and establish where the gaps are in what they are offering.

Royal Elm Park: Planning consent is running out so some work will be started soon. It will expected to be minor work and the car parks will still be in use for supporters for next season.

Car Park surface repair: This is scheduled - groundworkers will be looking to address the holes in the car park after the half marathon clears from the site.

### **WOMENS TEAM**

1. What are the club doing to promote the women's team? Reading have one of the lowest attendances in the WSL? Can we see more advertising for the women's team during men's matches?

The WSL includes predominantly Premier League clubs so ours naturally attracts a smaller fan base than the likes of Manchester United, Manchester City, Chelsea, Arsenal, Everton, Aston Villa etc. So we should compare our numbers to someone like Birmingham City as arguably the only comparable club in the top tier and they have similar attendance numbers to ours. We would like to grow those numbers, however. Reading FC Women have a Marketing Manager, Mitch Parris, and he is responsible for marketing the WSL fixtures. Your comments will be forwarded to him. But our support is evident in that Reading are the only WSL team to play at the same stadium as the men's team.

2. Can loyalty points be added to accounts for attending women's games too?

They could be – but would it be seen as fair to get priority for Men's games with attendance at Women's? It can be considered. The club would appreciate feedback from STAR members.

3. The women's team partnered up with Her Game Too, yet the men didn't, despite many other teams doing so, why was this?

There are a large number of initiatives which are run in football and games are designated for countless different causes or campaigns. However, the club will always look to partner with campaigns like this in the future and will contact #HerGameToo directly.

## **CATERING**

1. The catering in and around the ground, in terms of the pricing, is now beyond reasonable. Cold drinks are nearly £3 a bottle, there is never any hot chocolate - please look at this, especially if you aren't going to bring back Blue Collar.

The lack of hot chocolate and Bovril has been raised with the catering company. The club thinks the prices compare relatively favourably to other similar venues. But again, specific comparison feedback from STAR and its members would be extremely useful.

## **TICKETING**

1. Have the club considered changing the Royalty Points system currently in place? Weighting home games as the same as away games doesn't make a huge amount of sense, so perhaps more points could be given for away games?

The system needs looking at – but not this late in the season. There is never an answer that pleases everyone. Sensible suggestions are always welcome but any change results in some winners and some losers. We will look at this in the summer.

2. Can we keep all home tickets for adults at £20 each?

It's a commercial decision to have the pricing structure the way it is and it has been this way for a good number of years now. Our ticket prices are extremely competitive and affordable.

3. What are the club doing to engage more clubs in the 'Twenty's Plenty' scheme?

We have tried to engage other clubs for a number of years and while by leading by example we did have some success, it did not really have the impact we had hoped for and it remains hard to persuade other clubs to follow our lead.

4. Why have the communications around selling away tickets changed? Why do you not give advanced notice of sales for all games?

Nothing has changed with regard to communication – as soon as we have the ticket stock we put them on sale. Notice is always given if there is a loyalty points priority.

5. When will Season Tickets go on sale?

Naturally, it makes sense to wait to know what division we will be in and then they will go on sale.

6. Have the club decided the Royalty Points system for Luton away?

It will be based on loyalty points as we expect the allocation to be relatively small, but the levels are not decided yet.

7. What is the club actually doing about trying to get more fans/season ticket holders into the stadium?

We used the schools and grassroots ticketing system for the Coventry City game and more than 6,000 took advantage. We decided it was too good an opportunity not to try it again for the Cardiff game so more than 3,000 are following up by booking for the Cardiff game. We'd love more fans to come to our home games and we would welcome any realistic ideas what more we could do?

8. Why are there so many empty seats at home games, surely a seat sold for £5 is better than an empty one?

For a long time we have looked into why some Season Ticket holders don't show up for games, especially midweek games. That work is ongoing. We are not sure price is the biggest barrier to attracting fans to the games as our prices are extremely competitive, but we do want to encourage more people to come more regularly. It is worth highlighting that this is an issue not unique to Reading; the EFL average attendance is down 10.5% from pre pandemic numbers and our actual home fans through the turnstiles is down 10.4%. So while it is a trend we want to reverse, it is in line with the league's average and the issues are faced by all the clubs up and down the country.

## **MATCHDAY EXPERIENCE**

1. Is there a possibility of getting an ex-player, who is well loved, as a fan liaison to either work matchdays or part time at the club?

We had Michael Gilkes doing this as Club Ambassador – but he has a number of roles which take up his time. It's a good idea and, although logistically difficult to find a player who would represent the club repeatedly and engage with all demographics of Reading fan, it is certainly something we can look at.

2. What plans are there to update the concourses?

There are automated food ordering pods being installed at the moment in the Sir John Madejski Stand. No other plans at the moment, renovations and innovations are all down to funding which is obviously limited currently.

3. The seat numbers, especially in the SJM stand, are incorrect in some areas and are missing off some seats.

We have an individual who is looking at seats that need replacing and numbering of seats over the next few weeks.

4. Are there any plans to update the tannoy system?

The tannoy system was tested and all passed as being ok. However, we know that there are echoing issues so we will be taking a look at the calibration of the system again and see if the in-bowl acoustics can be improved using the existing system. If there are specific problems in parts of the stadium then please let us know.

5. The inside of the bowl looks absolutely battered right now, in fact it looks like the Select "Cari" Leasing Stadium because of the faded seats. Are there any plans to replace these seats, or at least reheat them with a flame so the colour comes back?

There are no plans at the moment due to costs. All seats are routinely checked after each game and damaged seats are repaired or replaced. The front 10 rows of seats are showing signs of rusting but there is no disposable funding readily available to replace them at the moment.

6. Has the club ever thought about making a “Matchday Live” live show on YouTube before and after games, it would really help those of us overseas feel closer to the matchday action – lots of clubs have these, even Charlton in League One!

We tried this a few years ago with the Royal Exchange and although it was excellent content and looked great – and we were very proud of it - it did not get many numbers viewing it given the work it entailed. We have been considering a podcast too, but it will come down to resources.

7. Who oversees the matchday entertainment this season, and why has it been so blatantly neglected? Covid is not an acceptable excuse for this, every other club has managed to do it.

We have half-time penalty shoot-outs back, mascots are back, the pizza giveaways, a quiz on the big screen. The question really is, what else do people want? We are happy to look at it if people can come up with suggestions. Naturally, the pitch has to be a consideration – with it hosting womens games, Under-23s games, some Under-18s games and first team matches, it means we do have to protect the grass as much as we can at all times. Also Covid is definitely still a problem as the tunnel area is still strictly controlled which impacts on access before the game and at half-time for guests, mascots etc.

## **SOCIAL MEDIA**

1. The social media coverage of the U18s and U23s has been severely lacking. In addition, are the club able to stream the U23 games? Are there any plans to expand this for next season?

Yes, we are able to stream U23 games and have done so in the past. We would love to cover them fully. Again, it comes down to resource. Streaming requires a minimum of two people at the game. The communications team consists of just three people and they aim to cover all home U23 games and all first team fixtures. We are considering the use of interns or students to help us going forward so we can cover our Academy more fully.

2. Would the club consider allowing current players/staff onto podcasts such as TTE and a potential interview with the CEO etc in the summer on fan engagement lines?

Yes, the club has done this in the past and is happy to do this again – with so many good fan podcasts running, we are hopeful to set up a date, probably in the summer or pre-season, where we can invite all the podcasts to set up at Bearwood and get content at once.

3. A member of a supporter group was recently in touch the club around potentially offensive historic tweets posted by a player. The club had said it would speak to the player and an apology would follow. Please can this be investigated?

This issue has been raised with the player in question and the club will communicate directly with the supporter in question on this matter.

4. Does anyone from the club care to comment on the twitter account that was allegedly from a current employee, criticizing elements and individuals of the club?

We wouldn't have any comment.

5. Does anyone at the club keep their finger on the pulse by listening to fan podcasts etc. to gauge the mood amongst the fanbase?

Yes we do – we always listen to the highlights if not listen to each and every one of the many podcasts. The communications team naturally pays close attention to fan sentiment on all social media channels.

6. Are the club concerned by Dave Kitson's recent comments and has anyone reached out to him? Who is in charge of organising the legends game at the end of the season?

The club have not reached out to him specifically, but the Former Players Association were in contact with him along with the other players we hope to invite to the game. All the operational and management team are helping to organise the legends game along with the FPA who are doing the hard work of organising the legends themselves.

7. Other than the recent EFL survey, will the club be doing something similar, to judge the mood amongst the fanbase? Or at least guarantee more engagement with us in the future?

The EFL survey is comprehensive in itself. Club surveys often only reflect the sentiment of supporters based on the success of the team at the time and the feedback we are now regularly getting through meetings like these, the Structured Dialogue Meetings and the Fan Engagement Panel meetings give us an excellent indication of what we need to do better and where we can improve. We spoke at length with Club 1871 on a number of issues and we also hosted a Young Ambassadors meeting at the stadium last month to improve our engagement with our younger fanbase alongside all of these regular meetings with supporters throughout the season.

## **RETAIL**

1. Why are you continuing to promote kit sales when the sizes available are effectively non-sellable?

There are some sizes still available and naturally we want to sell them.

2. There is still lots of interest and desire for sensible sized home shirts for this season and next - can we make a pre-order system work? Could the club poll fans to see if this is something people would be interested in?

It is not necessary to do a pre-order system for next season. There will be lots available next season – but we would encourage fans to buy them in good time and not wait for Christmas!

3. Are the club sticking with Macron next season and why are we always the last club to reveal our shirts for the following season?

Yes it will be Macron. We are not sure that we are the last club to release. We will publicise the kits as soon as was can.

4. Can the club investigate accepting American Express?

We have looked into it before and it is only 1% of transactions in the UK which are made on American Express and they charge a higher rate, so it is not viable for the club.

## **SUSTAINABILITY**

1. Aside from the community trust, what sustainability initiatives are club currently employing? What are you doing about environmental issues?

A lot of information on this will follow in due course. Watch this space, but it is in hand!

## **150 GAME**

1. What are your comments on the 150<sup>th</sup> game? Do you feel it was success? Could you have done more in terms of a celebration and ex-players coming along?

In terms of the crowd, it was a success as we had a big crowd without having to discount tickets across the board. There was much more planned for the initial December date but the change in date and increased Covid measures impacted what was possible. We did always have the Legends match earmarked as the opportunity to celebrate some of our former players as well.

2. Why does the club feel its ok to neglect our club legends in the way it does? At the 150<sup>th</sup> game they were hidden away from everyone, and no one even does the Golden Gamble draw anymore, incredibly disappointing, they should have a box in the West Stand! (When Liverpool won the Carabao Cup this season they gave lots of their legends complimentary tickets – couldn't see us doing the same in that situation!)

There are always tickets available for our legends to attend via our Former Players Association. There was an uncapped numbers of tickets available for them on the day of the 150<sup>th</sup> game. It was difficult due to the date change and not everyone could make it back for the rearranged date. In terms of pitch side appearances, the tunnel is still a 'red' area so very few people are allowed to enter that way. That made it a logistical problem to get players from hospitality to the pitch in good time – and with such a busy schedule that day, timing had to be perfect. We were also busy working on the legends game which will hopefully involve lots of players returning and give fans the opportunity to celebrate some of our promotion-winners.

## **OTHER**

1. With the world cup in a few months, do the club anticipate there will be more midweek games?

This is a question which will soon be answered when the fixtures come out. But it is possible. It will also depend on which division we are in as to the disruption to the season, which is due to start a week earlier than normal this summer.

2. Ben shadowed Dave Parker this season, would the club consider allowing anyone to shadow a more diverse range of employees at the club on match day: the kit men, groundsmen, media dept etc.

Yes, we are happy for this to happen.

Date of next meeting: May 12th at 10.00am