

## **Supporters Forum Minutes**

### **Saturday 25th September 2010**

#### **10.00 am**

#### Present:

#### Scunthorpe United:

David Beeby (DB) – General Manager, Scunthorpe United  
Lesley Warburton (LW) – Marketing & CRM Manager, Scunthorpe United  
Joanne Mitchell (JM) – Ticket Office Manager  
Alan Welsh (AW) – Safety & Stadium Manager  
Caroline Blanchard (CB) – Hospitality Manager  
Yvonne Dowall – PA to General Manager (Minute Taker)

#### Supporters Forum:

Neil Wright – Supporters Club  
Mark Strong – Family Enclosure  
Michael France - Executive Member/Restaurant/Box Holder  
Eleanor Imre – Disabled Supporter  
Diane Guest – Grove Wharf Stand User  
Steve Bower – Telegraph Stand User  
Doug Parker – Rainham Steel Stand User

#### Apologies:

Shaun Pashley – Iron Member

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#### Introduction

David Beeby thanked all the members of the supporters forum for attending the meeting. The meetings will be held quarterly and the aim is to give supporters a voice and to cover as many areas as possible. Members of the forum are from the different stands giving us as many opinions as possible. Each stand will have different issues which is great for the club as based on the supporters feedback we aim to improve so the only issue will be the score on match days!

#### Ticketing & Customer Service

- Doug Parker mentioned that he had booked tickets online for the Manchester United match and was charged postage for each of the 4 tickets he ordered. Doug queried the fact that when the tickets were received they were all in one envelope.
- David Beeby (DB) stated that if each ticket was processed as a separate transaction postage would be charged for each ticket. To avoid this happening the tickets need to be purchased under the friends and family facility by logging into each individual account to confirm the details which then enables you to add each member to your own account. Tickets can then be purchased on your friends/families behalf and only one amount of postage would be charged. DB will speak to Tickets.com and ask them to display full instructions of this process on the website.
- DB informed the forum that the ticketing system was not a cheap system and that it was actually the same system that Chelsea currently use and that Chelsea drive the development of the system. Scunthorpe United are pushing for the facility to select a seat on-line when purchasing tickets and have been told that this option is currently being worked on in the US. It is only recently that there has been a bigger demand for this option and Tickets.com have said that it should be up and running in the next 12 months.

- Doug Parker asked the question about ticket office hours. Some supporters work in other towns like Grimsby and work 8-5 making it difficult to buy tickets.
- DB did confirm that for bigger games like the Manchester United match the ticket office is open alternative hours. The change in hours is advertised but not many supporters actually take advantage of the change. The Club are also opening on non-match day Saturday's from 10:00am until 3pm.
- Doug Parker asked what the cut off time was for purchasing tickets for away matches. Joanne Mitchell confirmed that the cut off time was 2pm on the Friday before the match. DB pointed out that this cut off time was not the club being awkward. The club has to return any unsold tickets to the away club and provide a reconciliation so they know what availability they have left in their ground.
- Neil Wright asked if there were any plans to make Glanford Park an all ticket ground. DB replied that if the ground was full for every home game then yes this would happen but while we are not at capacity this will not be an option. From the clubs point of view it would be more beneficial to be an all ticket ground as tickets bought in advance means there is less cash on site reducing any security issues.
- Neil Wright commented that if the club loses the standing area and becomes all seating it would make sense not to have cash turnstiles. DB confirmed that there was a petition starting to try to keep the standing area.
- Alan Welsh confirmed that the law states that we have to lose the standing area. The only person who could change this decision would be the Secretary of State.
- DB confirmed that the club was preparing for the changes and that there were two options open to the club. Option 1 would be to put in seats without extending the stand which would reduce the capacity by a 1000 or Option 2 spend money to extend the stand and retain the same capacity. To carry out Option 2 will cost a 7 figure sum.
- Steve Bower mentioned that the gripe and moans he hears and reads about from supporters are that they don't want to queue at the ticket office to purchase a ticket and then have to walk round the stadium into the ground. DB replied that the club does as much as they can to get round this situation and that is why the ticket booth is now available to use. Diane Guest agreed that this was a really good initiative. Steve Bower replied that since the ticket booth came into practice he had heard less gripes from supporters.
- DB replied that most times supporters are happy but for the bigger games the club needs to educate the supporters to use the ticket booth more.
- Michael France asked if it was possible for away supporters to purchase tickets direct from Scunthorpe United. Michael was aware of 2 Barnsley supporters who had to drive to Oakwell to buy tickets for the match against Barnsley. DB replied that we are unable to sell opposing club tickets. This was because each club has their own priority system of selling to supporters.
- Neil Wright commented that he had not had any problems with the ticket office and that he felt he could rely on the ticket office support. He had no gripes at all.
- DB mentioned that for some of the bigger games it can be very difficult for the staff in the ticket office with the high volume of calls received. There is a queuing system in place which queues 50 callers, after that the caller is informed that the lines are busy and are asked to call back. Lunchtimes there is usually one member of staff in the ticket office, they could be serving at the counter so they may not always get to the phone when it is ringing. This is something the club is looking to improve.
- Diane Guest mentioned that although prioritizing ticket purchases for season ticket holders for big games is a good initiative it doesn't help if you want to attend with a non-season ticket holder as you wouldn't be able to sit together. DB replied that we have 3,500 season ticket holders so it is not always possible to allow them to buy two tickets each.
- Michael French asked if the few tickets left on sale a few days before the Manchester United were restricted view?

- JM replied that yes they were but in fact we did sell them even though we had explained that the view was extremely limited.
- DB confirmed that we did sell out for the game.
- DB explained that we had invested money in the ticketing system. The system now keeps ticketing history. We also now have a CRM system which helps to build a bigger picture of supporters so we can provide a better service. We have in the process of setting up a birthday campaign which sends an email to supporters with a picture of the manager holding a shirt showing the name of the person and their age. We are going to use this system for other offers we are planning i.e. junior members bring 5 friends free of charge to a Scunthorpe United game. We will then be able to monitor if the friends return to further games.

### Catering Facilities

- DB mentioned that the restaurant is for families and not just business people. Supporters in other stands are also able to use the restaurant and are able to discount the value of their ticket off the restaurant price.
- Neil Wright confirmed that a visit to the restaurant is a fantastic match day experience and that more supporters need to be encouraged to use the facility.
- Steve Bower commented that he was only just hearing about these options and suggested that they be advertised on the billboards around the ground.
- CB confirmed that she was working on promoting the restaurant and that she had spoken to Lesley Warburton about ideas on promoting the facilities.
- Steve Bower felt that the club assumed supporters know about the facilities available but this is not the case.
- DB commented that Caroline had been in her role for the last 12 months and that her brief was to raise the standards of the catering. The facilities at the club are small so it is difficult but we are trying. Caroline recommended the away bar and other initiatives and the away bar has now been put in place. Lesley was appointed Marketing & CRM Manager as this is an area the club is aware needs to improve. The family day and the simplicity bundles are just some of the things Lesley has been working on.
- Steve Bower asked where we advertise these initiatives.
- DB replied that it is advertised by sending out to all season ticket holders and other supporters on our database. We are adding valid email addresses to the database so we can email out the information. A newsletter also goes out every week which can be adapted to different age groups we are targeting.
- Lesley also mentioned that she is looking at improving the newsletter format. An eflyer would be more hard hitting with the information being advertised more obvious than reading text as per the current newsletter.

### Ground Development

- Neil Wright asked if the club knows yet if the ground will be upgrading to an all seater stadium.
- DB explained that the club is making plans. The club can apply for grants to help with the cost but the likelihood of large grants had decreased. The cheapest option would be to just put seats into the current stand but the capacity of the ground would reduce by 1000. The preferred option is to source funding to develop the stand. The club has a rough idea of the cost which will provide a 3 storey building which will also accommodate the shop, ticket office, Iron Bar and possibly other third parties.
- Neil Wright commented that there were plans printed in the Telegraph and then no further information about the changes.
- DB replied that the plan would involve taking the roof of the Doncaster Road stand and adding a cantilever roof which would remove the posts in the stand.
- Diane Guest asked how this would affect the shadows on the pitch.

- DB replied that it wouldn't affect the Doncaster Road end of the pitch but the away end would still be affected due to the way the sun rises/sets.
- Alan informed the forum that work was due to start on the Executive area in the next week. This will triple the size of the current area so more people can enjoy the match day experience.
- DB explained that the club was aware there was no food currently available in the exec area due to the lack of facilities. Extending the area will increase the current capacity from 250 to 300 giving much more space. A separate kitchen area is also going to be created so that food is available from 1.30. There are only 23-30 match days a year so this will also enable the club to hold events off season.
- AW also informed the forum that there were plans to move the dugouts.
- Steve Bower asked if the club were going to move the dugouts into the front seats.
- AW confirmed this would happen as the club is currently wasting 100 seats per match that are not used due to restricted viewing. AW also mentioned that when the dugouts are moved a small screen will be put in place behind the seats being used but this would not affect the view of supporters behind.

### Car Parking & Crowd Control

- Diane Guest asked why season ticket holders were not able to purchase a car parking space on the east car park this year.
- DB replied that we had started selling the car park spaces again this year.
- Diane Guest responded that she had asked the ticket office to let her know if anything changed so she could be allocated a space but had not heard anything. She also asked if we allocated spaces.
- DB confirmed that the club allocates spaces as it is easier than allocating specific bays.
- Diane commented that the spaces are not actually wide enough and that if there are several larger cars you cannot get out of your car.
- AW explained that the car park is also used as part of a park and ride scheme in conjunction with the hospital which means the spaces have to be specific sizes.
- Diane Guest asked if the price for parking for away fans could be put up as when our supporters visit other grounds the price is much more expensive. Diane also asked if it was possible for away fans to park elsewhere as parking is limited as it is.
- Alan replied that this was not possible at the moment and using the grassed area is not practical as in wet weather the ground becomes very boggy. In the past supporters cars have got stuck and needed assistance which is obviously embarrassing for the club.
- Alan also explained that on match days the average time to clear the car park was 35-40 mins.
- DB explained that the club is heavily restricted with only having one approach road to the ground.
- AW informed the forum that an FA crowd advisor had recently visited the ground and were more than happy with the way the crowds are dealt with. Scunthorpe United supporters generally behave in an acceptable manner.
- DB mentioned that some supporters think the club is being pedantic with regards where supporters can stand etc, but if the club doesn't comply with the Safety Advisory Group they can reduce the capacity of the ground.
- AW explained that after each match the referee compiles a report. For the Manchester Utd match this would include that one person had been on the pitch and that bottles were thrown nearly hitting Joe Murphy. DB also informed the forum that the club would receive a letter from the FA asking what the club had put in place to ensure this didn't happen again.
- AW confirmed that 2 other supporters from Manchester United had also been on the pitch. One was arrested and the other ejected from the ground. The stewards try not to go into the crowd which is in the interests of everyone's safety. Alan also has to compile a report at the end of each match regarding seating and standing areas.

- Brian Edwards asked if there was going to be a decking area outside the Iron Bar.
- Caroline replied that due to licensing restrictions and the extra policing that would be involved that it was not financially viable.
- Eleanor Imre asked how the disabled lift worked so she could use it at half time.
- AW informed Eleanor that a steward would be more than happy to help.
- Eleanor replied that the stewards would not let her use the disabled lift.
- AW replied that this would not be the case going forward and that they would be able to help.
- Mark Strong asked whether it was possible to have a part of the car park designated for the family area?
- Alan replied that the parking area could not be extended and there was already a waiting list for parking on the West car park.

### Restaurant

- Diane Guest informed the club that there was a huge problem in the Grove Wharf catering facility with catering staff being U18 and not being able to serve alcohol. The under age staff were taking money but then running around trying to get an older member of staff who could serve. Diane thought it would make more sense to have an area purely selling alcohol by staff over 18. Diane also thought the set up was not good.
- DB replied that we have difficulty finding staff over 18 who are willing to work.
- Caroline also replied that she had doubled the amount of 18+ members of staff. Caroline also confirmed that she was aware of the huge problems within the catering point.
- Diane asked if the club realised they were losing money.
- Caroline would like to change the layout of the Grove Wharf facility and that she fully agreed with all the points raised and would take them on board.
- Diane also asked if it was possible to have wine available in the Grove Wharf catering facility. She also commented that wine was available briefly but just as the supporters were becoming aware of the availability of the wine it was taken off sale.
- Caroline confirmed she would put it back on sale.
- Brian Edwards also asked if wine could be made available in the Doncaster Road end catering facilities.
- Caroline replied that this was not possible, however there was now the option to stay in the Iron Bar. DB also pointed out that the club is unable to serve alcohol anywhere that overlooks the pitch.
- Steve Bower asked if the club knew what the average spend for food was per customer and how were they going to increase it. Steve also commented that the Telegraph Stand is so congested around the catering facilities that most supporters buy food outside of the ground.
- Neil Wright mentioned that he eats and drinks at a pub in town prior to the match because of the queues around the catering facilities. Neil spends £10 - £15 on match days on food and this is all spent outside of the ground but he would much rather spend in the ground if the facilities were more adequate.
- DB replied that this was on the agenda and phase two of the executive extension would be to add additional catering facilities under it.
- Steve Bower suggested that the turnstile areas were extended outwards to provide more area for the catering points.
- DB commented that the club were pleased with the away bar facilities and layout but the Grove Wharf bar was not so good and did need looking at.
- Diane commented that the Grove Wharf facility simply could not cope with the volume of fans wanting to buy food.
- Caroline informed the forum that she had purchased 2 pint glasses which would hopefully cut down on queues at the bars in terms of purchasing alcohol.

- The forum asked if the away fans were aware there was a bar in their stand. Caroline confirmed that it was printed on their tickets.
- Doug Parker asked if we use local produce in the catering points.
- Caroline confirmed we buy produce from Cyril Smiths. The club had trialled alternative pies to the Pukka brand but received complaints so have reverted back to Pukka. Sausages are bought from Cyril Smiths and Lakings of Louth. Caroline commented that the Chairman was keen to support local business. Caroline is keen to ask the supporters opinions on the food served in the catering points and has asked supporters in the Iron bar to taste different options and give their feedback. Caroline also visits all the catering points during a match.
- Neil Wright commented that the food served is of an excellent quality but you just can't get to the catering points to buy it.
- Caroline asked the forum if they were offered alternatives if their first choice of food was not available. She also pointed out that food could be fetched from other points. The catering department is trying to improve all the time. Caroline has an open door and is more than happy for the forum members to contact her via email or phone with any issues regarding the catering.
- Neil Wright commented that the forum would let the fans know what is happening.
- Brian Edwards also mentioned that the website if used a lot for supporters to voice their complaints.
- DB suggested the minutes of the forum meeting be posted on the website with the contact details of each forum member.
- Steve Bower suggested having an external company cater outside the ground.
- DB responded that the club would not want this to happen and would rather provide the catering in house.
- Steve Bower thought that a lot of supporters would eat on the way into the ground if the facility was there.
- Caroline pointed out that there was an external catering point open from 1.30 which is next to the ticket booth.

### General

- Neil Wright asked about away travel. The feeling amongst some supporters club members is that there is animosity towards unofficial coaches taking supporters to away games. Neil asked the question if the club coaches were full would the club direct fans to the other coaches.
- DB replied that the club had merged coaches before and had an agreement to work fairly together. The club would prefer fans to travel on the official coaches but don't object to other coaches travelling.
- Brian Parker commented that Winterton Iron always set the time their coaches leave to 15 minutes before the official coaches so they all arrive at the away ground at the same time. For the last match the official supporters club coaches left an hour late which meant the Winterton Iron coach and Club's coaches was sat at the side of the motorway for more than 50 minutes. Brian asked if this could be looked at.
- Brian also confirmed that Winterton Iron do not try to make money on the coach travel and usually look to just break even.
- Brian felt that if Winterton Iron didn't run a bus out of the 50 travelling only a small percentage would actually travel to the away matches.
- DB felt that it was great that they traveled to away matches and would like to see it re-introduced for home matches. The club had looked at running coaches for the out of town areas but when it had been trialled it hadn't been successful. Norwich run this system successfully so it is something the club would still like to try again.
- Michael France asked if a Question and Answer page could be set up on the website re travel. A taxi share system could be suggested through the web.

- Brian Edwards commented that the official website was very good and updated regularly.
- Neil Wright also commented that the programme was very, very good and the interviews in the Manchester United programme were very interesting.
- DB replied that Manchester United had been to look at Scunthorpe United's programme after the club won the FL award. They were more than impressed and surprised that we only have one member of staff working on our programme.
- Brian Edwards thanked the club for the opportunity to talk to the club.
- Lesley asked the forum to keep in contact with her with any ideas the supporters have or things they would like to happen on an ongoing basis. All email addresses for the staff and forum members would be distributed after the meeting.

Date of Next Meeting

11<sup>th</sup> December 2010