

# Account of Introductory Meeting with SAFC CEO Jim Rodwell

The RAWA Chair, Andrew Hird, and one of our Vice Chairs, Jane Hughes, attended an introductory meeting with SAFC CEO Jim Rodwell and Non-Executive Director Tom Sloanes on Friday afternoon. Whilst not a "Structured Dialogue" meeting and more of an introduction, the supporter groups were clear that they would be reporting the discussion back to their respective members. We have decided therefore to briefly summarise the pertinent points.

We went into yesterday's meeting expecting to hear the things we have heard over and over again from those running SAFC in recent years. Most fans are sick of hearing things like "we must look forward", "we go again" and "the fans deserve better" – we are all too familiar at Sunderland with detail-free rhetoric. How many more false dawns can a set of supporters endure?

The recent Season Ticket debacle has accelerated this feeling amongst many fans - seemingly large numbers have cancelled their Direct Debits. This is not through lack of loyalty but from a lack of options, a cold tone in the communications from the club and the uncertainty relating to Covid19.

So, it was with all this in mind that we attended the meeting.

We found Jim Rodwell to be personable, polite and very keen to listen. He displayed a desire to improve things and do a good job. The proof will be evidenced by his actions and he seems very aware of that.

Non-Executive director Tom Sloanes was also in attendance. It is the first time RAWA have officially met with him too, and he was honest about some of the past mistakes and came across as passionate about wanting to make improvements.

The tone of the meeting was constructive and respectful and on the Club's side there seems to be a desire for a fresh start. We feel this is a tough ask of the fanbase who seem to have united in their desire to see our current owners move on. In the meantime, RAWA will continue to try to help the Club staff to improve what is on their power to improve and will represent the supporters' feelings as best we can. Those running the club must be in no doubt at how discontent we are.

## **CEO Introductory meeting with Fans' Group Representatives 12th June 2020**

**Present:** Jim Rodwell (SAFC), Tom Sloanes (SAFC), Steve Dean (SLG), Paul Andrew (SLG), Malcolm Bramley (Senior Supporters), Oscar Chamberlain (SAFC), Jane Hughes (RAWA), Andrew Hird (RAWA), Phil Pollard (BLC), Cath Reid (BLC)

Although the meeting was billed as introductory and had no set agenda, in the few days we had in advance of the meeting, RAWA collated fans opinions on the recent season ticket fiasco and a range of other matters. Throughout the meeting RAWA pressed club officials on these matters.

In summary,

- All supporter groups reflected supporters' frustration about the Club's communication and stance on season tickets. Also stated that better communication with fans prior to the various announcements from the club would surely have avoided this disappointing situation.
- Jim Rodwell apologised for how the season ticket refunds and renewals had been handled and stated he would look into reviewing the Club's stance. No set date was given but we will be pushing the club next week about this. Fans need clarity urgently.
- The Club stated that it wants to build bridges with fans and listen to them.
- Tom Sloanes is keen to see communications improve. He feels that repairing the damaged relationship with fans is important and there are lots of people at the club who want to do things better.
- Jim Rodwell confirmed the club is up for sale but that is not a factor in his running of the club. Stewart Donald is happy to meet his obligations and is leaving the running of SAFC to the CEO.
- RAWA explained that they are under increasing pressure from supporters to call for Stewart Donald to sell at a fair price. We summarised the various well documented reasons for this and reiterated our disappointment at the current position the club finds itself in.
- Supporters challenged club officials on the performance of the academy and the recent cases of selling our best young talent. Jim Rodwell stated that they must balance investment in the first team with investment in the academy. There are no plans to scale back or mothball the academy, but all options will have to be considered. RAWA reminded the club of how integral the academy is to the future of the football club.
- Away tickets will be refunded via the same method it was paid for and fans can expect an announcement next week.

RAWA will continue to communicate with the club to receive updates on the matters discussed and will seek clarity on any further changes to the season ticket renewal policy as a matter of urgency.