



Supporters' Collective Meeting

Minutes of the Supporters' Collective meeting held on 30/11/2021 at 5.30 p.m.

Meeting held in Carling Suite, Stadium of Light.

Attendees

Sunderland AFC	Kristjaan Speakman (KJ), Steve Davison (SD), Oscar Chamberlain (OC), Chris Waters (CW)
Branch Liaison Council	Cath Reid (CR), Malcolm Green (MG), Malcolm Fail (MF)
Red & White Army	David Rose (DR), Paul Nelson (PN), Michael McAllister (MM), Martin McFadden (MMc)
Senior Supporters Association	Michelle Barraclough (MB), John Heppell (JH)

Apologies

Senior Supporters Association	Malcolm Bramley
Sunderland Liaison Group	Steve Dean, Paul Andrew
Branch Liaison Council	Phil Pollard, Joanne Youngson, Jim Gilling

CW (SAFC) welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Business update

SD confirmed there have been minor updates to website to improve the landing page and streamline the buying process. It will soon be possible for individual fans to buy hospitality packages online.

Temporary floodlights have been erected at Eppleton. It will be a few weeks before permanent ones can be installed.

There is continued investment into the Stadium and the club has now completed the replacement of the fire panel and emergency lighting both of which are essential for matchday operations.

DR (RAWA) asked about the sound system. SD is aware that improvements are required and it's high on a list of improvements.

Two sponsorship deals have been announced, RoRack Shipping and Vertu Motors. There could be further announcements soon as the Club has interest from some potentially high-profile partners.

There was a successful visit by the England Lionesses to the Stadium. Unfortunately, attendance was affected by the weather and the team were unable to train at the Academy.

Fan-led Review of Football Governance

SD was interested to hear the views of the fan groups.

DR thought the review had been thorough and well received. The EFL have supported the introduction of an independent regulator and it will be interesting to see how the Premier



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League respond. The Crouch Report has cross party support and it's possible an Independent Regulator could be in place in 2023. It is good news for fans, giving them a golden share for cultural identity and heritage issues and it calls for a shadow board that includes supporters. DR believes it would be good for the club to be ahead of the curve on these issues and asked for the club's view on the report.

SD (SAFC), speaking personally, agreed with the introduction of the independent regulator but was concerned about the practicalities of some measures, such as the redistribution of wealth and effective financial regulation. SD thought the shadow board could work well but they need a clear set of terms of reference and it will take time to get this agreed to ensure it is meaningful. There needs to be a clear purpose for the shadow board.

SD said this was an agenda item at the next SAFC Board Meeting.

KS (SAFC) thinks the EFL are looking to bridge the financial gap with the Premier League and are looking to develop their own internal regulation process. The club is already ahead of the curve in many aspects of the Report, including fan engagement and believes more clubs are trying to do things correctly to prevent another Bury or Derby scenario.

Action SD to send official feedback from the board meeting on SAFC thoughts on this topic

Finance and Governance

Confirmation of Juan Sartori and Charlie Methven Positions

RAWA submitted a request for clarification of the position of Stewart Donald, Juan Sartori and Charlie Methven.

SD read a statement from the ownership group.

Charlie and Juan are both minority shareholders of the football club. Neither hold an executive position at the club and therefore have no day to day involvement in the operation of the football club. The club utilises the expertise, knowledge and network of all stakeholders including shareholders to the benefit of the long-term project.

SD only has day-to-day interaction with Kyril Louis-Dreyfus, all instructions come from him. KS confirmed Kyril Louis-Dreyfus is his point of contact for all football matters.

Breakdown of Ownership Group

RAWA submitted a request for clarification of shares held by each owner.

SD read a statement from the ownership group

The precise details of the respective shareholdings of the football club are private. I can confirm that Kyril has a controlling stake in the football club and therefore can appoint a majority of the board. He also acts as executive chairman and supports myself and Kristjaan with all day to day decisions on football and non-football elements. The ownership group have undertaken to support SAFC financially. A substantial sum has already been invested into different parts of the football club in line with the strategy to



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create a high-performance football project which will hopefully bear its fruits in the long term.

DR expressed disappointment with the statement, asking why the percentage split could not be shared. Why should who owns what be a secret? SD said he was not able to comment on the reasons behind the statement from the owners.

In response to a question from MMc (RAWA), SD confirmed he, KS, Kyril Louis-Dreyfus, Maurice Louis-Dreyfus, Patrick Treuer, Igor Levin, Juan Sartori, Simon Vumbaca and Dave Jones attend board meetings.

DR asked if minority owners attend meetings. SD said minority shareholders have never attended a board meeting.

PN (RAWA) believes Sunderland AFC is not just a 'business', it is the heart of the community. Supporters are emotionally involved and not customers who will go elsewhere. Fans have the right to know who owns the club, with what percentage and who is representing it.

SD confirmed Kyril Louis-Dreyfus has control of the football club. In response to a question from MMc, SD believes Maurice Louis-Dreyfus brings relevant experience from different areas of business. SD continued, Kyril Louis-Dreyfus is in control, the strategy of the football club is important to him. Kyril Louis-Dreyfus is the guiding light for the football club. It is his strategy that the Executives are implementing.

KS reiterated the strategy is different to that commonly seen – It's about making use of investment across the football programme and not solely in player acquisitions. The perception is that Kyril Louis-Dreyfus is being prevented from spending, this is not the case.

MMc said the impression is that the club has austerity measures in place.

KS replied that Sunderland AFC has the largest fan base and income in the league but also the biggest overheads. The club aims to create a squad that will get us out of the league but is also developing the foundations for long term success. A responsible approach balancing expenditure on the senior squad and infrastructure for long term success.

DR thinks many fans support a sustainable model, providing it translates to relative success on the pitch.

MB (Seniors) agreed that high spending has not necessarily brought success to the club.

DR asked if the ownership group was harmonious or not. SD could not comment as he does not attend ownership meetings but surmises that as with all other ownership groups at times there will no doubt be some disagreement, but they have all agreed with the strategy so we can assume there is generally agreement on most large strategic decisions. Regular conversations happen within the ownership group.

PN asked if the £20 million written off by previous owners had been paid back, acknowledging that the moral if not a legal requirement to do so and that Stewart Donald had previously said it would be paid back in full over time. SD said money has been put back into the club by all the owners, particularly during covid, but SD said the full £20



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million has not been paid back.

PN asked if the money put in was being offset against the money owed. SD said the 2021 accounts were currently being audited and will be published on or before April 2022.

PN asked what success looks like. KLD's vision for the club to be sustainable whilst ambitious is understood; something fans can get behind. PN said, whilst fans were frustrated at not bouncing straight back from relegation to League One, that RAWA surveys had shown that supporters are also very much concerned with the long-term future of the club, including investment into the academy. This is our fourth year in the third tier and to most fans that is not really where we should be. It is the lowest period in the Club's history.

KS said that although it is year four for Sunderland AFC in the third tier, it is year one of the new strategy. The aim is to get maximum benefit from the football budget, to be promoted to the championship with a platform of sustainability to get into the Premier League. It is a competitive sport, and no club can guarantee success on the pitch. The performance plan is to assemble a promotion winning team and create assets of value to get Sunderland AFC initially into the top 25 of teams in the country.

DR asked if there is an ambition for Kyril Louis-Dreyfus to own 100% of the club. SD was unable to comment as he has not discussed that. Kyril Louis-Dreyfus is absolutely committed to Sunderland in the long-term and to building a successful football club.

MM (RAWA) was concerned that the minority shareholders could derail Kyril Louis-Dreyfus' strategy. SD has not seen any significant deviation from the overall strategy.

DR asked if there were any restrictions on appointing extra members of staff on the administration side and said the Club has a feel of one that is understaffed.

SD said the focus, up till now, has been on the footballing side, improvements are still needed to how the non-football side of the business operates. This football club is an anomaly in league one, it will be easier to run as we would like in the championship. If the club is to be run in a sustainable manner, there will be some constraints on the non-footballing side especially whilst the club remains in League 1.

Academy Update

KS has just completed an extensive transfer review with Stuart Harvey including individual reviews with all incoming players. The aim is to learn and improve – Stuart has done a great job and we have recently moved into the planning phase for the next two transfer windows.

The football structure is very close to being complete – The final two Head of Domain positions have been appointed: Head of Performance and Medicine and Head of Administration and Operations. The Strength and Conditioning Coach mentioned previously started 8 weeks ago. KS is developing a scalable model that can be built up into the Championship and beyond. KS explained creating the structure has been challenging in parallel to the day to day operations – it will however be complete within the 1 year timeframe set out.



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The Academy audit is imminent, the 10-day notice has been received. An interim club performance plan has been created as part of the audit. It should be seen as a club audit. PN asked if this determines category one status for the Academy. KS said yes but the structure of audits has changed since the last occasion SAFC received an audit. It has elements that must be adhered to but it is much more about monitoring standards and supporting the Club meet its objectives. Heads of Domain are currently preparing, and the model includes performance targets for each domain through to June 2023 so we can monitor progress and assess success.

After the January transfer window, KS will conduct deep dive review of every domain; ensuring all domains are operating efficiently and are on track with our performance goals. KS said it is important to protect the football strategy particularly when there is a dip in first team performances and asked if the club needed to be more proactive regarding the messaging around the vision and strategy. MM said patience may be difficult when we are in our fourth season in the third team, but suggested KS explain it as he just had to a wider audience, and it would help bring people on board.

SD agreed the club do need to get the message out further. He and KS have done several podcasts and talk ins.

DR suggested having Kyril Louis-Dreyfus reiterate the message would be good.

Supporter Experience

Ticket office

SD gave a review of customer service statistics: 90% of match day tickets are sold online. 300-400 are sold over the phone or in the ticket office per match. The ticket office is very busy on a match day, especially in the run up to kick-off. It is moderately busy on match day minus one. SD believes there are ways in which the club can engage more fully with fans.

CR (BLC) said on a recent visit to ticket office there was only one person serving and a long queue and asked if the ticket office could be open more.

MMc has staff at A Love Supreme helping fans who have difficulty accessing online purchasing to buy tickets on days where the ticket office is closed.

CR confirmed that the BLC have also been assisting supporters that haven't been able to purchase online for recent games.

The ticket office receives, on average, 4 hours of calls per day with the average length of a call 2.5 minutes.

MM asked about the rate of dropped calls. Changes to the telephone system has helped with this but SD will look at this for a future meeting. A significant amount of staff time is spent inputting match data to the Ticketmaster system and handling away tickets.

Post Meeting Note: Following a preliminary review it is clear that there are different profiles of drop-off rates between matchday and non-matchdays. This needs further review.

Action SD to look at call drop off rates for next meeting



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MM asked about away tickets, saying it would be helpful to have size of allocation information earlier. SD replied this sometimes only comes in 2-3 days before tickets are sent through.

MM asked if fans can be given an idea of where they are in terms of black cat points and away ticket eligibility. SD is working towards a digital system where away tickets can be put on sale 2-3 weeks before. CW confirmed phase one for away tickets is always set to ensure that supporters with the most points can purchase a ticket first.

Ticket Administration Fee

RAWA asked why an administration fee was introduced to home tickets without any communication with fans and sought clarification on which matches it applied to.

CW confirmed home games do not incur an administration fee. It was mistakenly applied to recent Mansfield and Bradford cup game tickets, but this error had now been rectified. An administration fee was introduced on away tickets in 2018, but this wasn't in place at the beginning of the season. This error has also been rectified and will apply to away tickets going forward.

CR raised a specific issue of a fan who had been over charged on postage, CW asked for details to be shared with him.

OC (SAFC) agreed internal and external communication needs to be better to inform fans about issues such as these in a proactive fashion.

Club Store

SD gave a review of retail statistics: 63% of sales are online and 37% are in store, compared to 80% instore and 20% online, pre-pandemic, reflecting changes to seen in High Street retail generally. On average 830 people go into the club store on match days, 72% make a purchase, with an average spend of £23. Based on the data, and a historic non-matchday footfall of circa 100 opening outside of matchday and matchday minus one is not financially viable. SD confirmed the store will have more opening times in the build up to Christmas, based on predicted footfall.

SD said all decisions are made to maximise contribution to the footballing side of the business.

DR said that if the Club shop is to remain operating in the way it is, then it is important the Club explain the strategic reasons for this as, at present, you cannot easily buy a Sunderland shirt in Sunderland.

Online Communications

CR (BLC) raised a concern about away ticket information being available on Twitter before it is on the website and asked for this to be changed.

OC said the optimum time to post on social to ensure maximum engagement varies from



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platform to platform. For example, a tweet at 9am can be missed by many, so it is often more appropriate to publish at 6pm based on highest online presence.

MM asked about using push notifications on the app. OC said this is a work in progress.

Defibrillators at Stadium of Light

CR asked for clarification on the position of defibrillators at the Stadium of Light.

CW confirmed there were 13 on a matchday; 4 owned by club & 9 brought in by first aid staff. All stewards have been trained to use them. Any fan should approach a steward if someone near them needs it.

Action CW to put information out to fans on locations and the process.

Closure of Roads around Stadium of Light

CR raised concerns over Millenium Way and Stadium Way and the closing of these roads at full time. This has been talked about for several years and it is a cause of concern for the safety of supporters. It must be addressed by the council. MMc said it is relatively easy to seal the access roads to the stadium, it is dangerous as it is. SD suggested it could be raised with the Safety Advisory Group (SAG). CW confirmed there is a process in place for closing the Sheepfolds.

Action Club to raise the issue of closing roads around the Stadium at the next SAG

Issues accessing Sunderland Ladies vs London city Lionesses

CW acknowledged that recent feedback from fans had led to a change on the process for the Sunderland Ladies vs Liverpool Women fixture. There will be online digital tickets, a contactless payment turnstile and donation buckets for cash payments available at all Sunderland Ladies home games at Eppleton going forward.

OC stated that it is unacceptable for fans to be turned away when purchasing tickets for a game they wish to attend, as the club is committed to increasing SAFC Ladies attendances and growing the women's game.

CW said if any fans did have a bad experience at this ladies' game to please get in touch with him on chris.waters@safc.com.

CR said the BLC plan to take some mental health hub resources to future ladies' games.

CW thanked supporter branches for officially sponsoring the Sunderland Ladies' players this season.

Streaming U23's and SAFC Ladies Matches

MM asked about streaming of men's first team games on mobile devices, particularly iPhones. OC is aware of the issue. It requires a structural change to the streaming mechanism to rectify it. It not an easy fix.

OC confirmed some Under 23 games have been streamed but matches cannot be



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streamed if a Premier League game is being televised at the same time. Many games have been on a Sunday or a Monday evening, so it has not always been possible. Sunderland AFC have played 7 games in the last week, at all levels. There is always a member of the media team at each match and there are limited resources which need to be managed.

Action Fans groups to feedback which games they would prefer to be streamed

Supporter Behaviour.

Supporter charter.

CR said the BLC were concerned at comments on message boards that were made against BLC personnel which is unacceptable and some people making the comments are part of a group attending this meeting. Behaviour is not being challenged and it should be. MMc said that behavior on social media is a problem, and it impacts on people across football and everything else. He offered to moderate comments and delete threads. The table condemned any sort of abusive comments to people volunteering and bullying behavior in general. PN said that RAWA recently held an AGM where a range of policies were adopted that included a policy to remove members who had been proven to act inappropriately and not in keep with the organisation's values. SD said club employees have also suffered abuse, comments can be taken down, but many abusive comments are posted are from repeat offenders.

MM said it is a widespread societal problem. DR said the FSA has worked with some offenders across football with a focus on education.

Roker End

CW stated that a recent SGSA inspection had reported persistent standing in the Roker End. The club would like to move to rail seating in the future. However, this would need SGSA approval and may not be possible if the current persistent standing, migration to the Roker End and congregation of fans in the concourse areas continues.

SAFC would like to work with fans to raise awareness on this and to discuss the long-term strategy in the Roker End that can hopefully lead to introduction of rail seating.

The strategy would look at making the Roker End an exclusive area for supporters with a 100% ticket check on tickets to ensure supporters are in the correct area to prevent overcrowding going forward. DR said the flag group would be good additions to a working group to look at this as they are passionate about the atmosphere at the Stadium. It was agreed that cordoning the area could be a positive step to encourage like-minded support to be in the same part of the ground – like a “proper home end”.

Action To establish a working group to look at the Roker End

Away games

SD noticed increased anti-social behavior first at Wigan (cup game) with an inappropriate



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anti Charlie Wyke song, there were also complaints at the recent Rotherham game.

The club reaffirmed its commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion. OC asked what fan groups thought the club can do to encourage positive behaviour. DR stated that anecdotally, across football there is a sense of a rise in poor behavior; visible drug taking, beer throwing and discriminatory language. The RAWA put a statement out post-Rotherham after members raised the issue with us. SD said several fans have been banned because of behaviour at matches. If anyone observes abusive behaviour online or at matches, we all need to take action.

PN smoking in the toilets remains an issue. MM asked if fans be let out to smoke.

Action The club to work on main points of the behavior issues, to place a note with away tickets stating what is unacceptable and that reiterate bans are being put in place

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion - Update on implementation of EDI policies and initiatives

SD will be asking for a board member to be responsible for this area of work. PN confirmed the RAWA passed a motion to work with the club on this area. The club has a proud history of diversity and high percentage of female season ticket holders.

Sunderland Together Campaign - Sunderland vs Plymouth Argyle

Fan groups have not finalised details. OC suggested a digital option to donate and the club offered to help promote the initiative once all plans are finalised.

Part Season Tickets

Part Season Tickets have gone on sale, for the last 12 games of the season, starting with Sheffield Wednesday. There are savings of between 20% and 70% depending on the category of purchase as compared to purchasing match by match. Season cards can be purchased online at www.eticketing.co.uk/safc or directly from the ticket office on 0371 911 1973. A direct debit / payment scheme option is not available for this.

AOB

DR said RAWA members have brought to our attention to a poorer experience in the Black Cats Bar

Action SD requested more information on the specifics to be sent to CW

MM asked if half time and full-time scores could be announced. OC agreed the club can would look into it.

Post Meeting Note



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On the day after the Supporters Collective meeting Kyril prepared an update to the Supporters Collective.

“I spoke to Steve and Kristjaan this morning and they immediately highlighted the concerns raised with regards to the club’s ownership and that is why I’m writing to you today.

The project we are undertaking can only be successful with the full support and trust of our fan base and as I have stated before, it is my desire to lead SAFC with openness and transparency.

At present I’m unable to share the details of the shareholders agreement due to confidentiality clauses but will be in a position to do so in due course. I would like to reiterate that I hold a governance majority which was non-negotiable for my involvement. It places me in direct control of the club’s long-term strategy and day-to-day operations.

Alongside the Executive Team and staff, I’m totally committed to working side-by-side with our supporters to deliver long-term success to the people of Sunderland and our wider community.

Thank you for your continued support and I hope to see you all at the Stadium of Light on Saturday.”