



Sunderland AFC Supporters' Collective meeting: 8 January 2025

Attendees

Sunderland AFC	David Bruce (DB), Paul Kingsmore (PK), Oscar Chamberlain (OC), Steve Wood (SW), Brandon Furse (BF), Chris Waters (CW)
Branch Liason Council	Cath Reid (CR), Joanne Youngson (JY), Paul Usher (PU)
Red and White Army	Andrew Hird (AH), David Rose (DR), Jane Hughes, Ian High (IH)
Senior Supporters' Association	David Smith (DS), Lynn Glendenning (LG)

Minutes

1. Introduction

CW welcomed everyone to the first meeting of 2025. BF, who attended his first meeting as the Club's acting ticketing lead, provided an insight into his career, during which he has specialised in developing ticketing strategies and processes and held senior roles at Nottingham Forest and Derby County, and more recently as a consultant to sporting organisations.

2. Review action log

Roadshow talk-ins: After prioritising in-house events throughout the current season, the Club are focusing on a full schedule of events for the 2025-26 campaign. The Club also committed to supporting additional external events upon request, including landmark activities for branches.

3. Progress Update

Introduction: DB was pleased to see over 15,000 fans attend SAFC Women's fixture versus Newcastle United at the Stadium of Light, which resulted in a new divisional record. 1,800 part-season tickets have been sold; demonstrating the deep commitment supporters have for the team and the Club's on-pitch performance this campaign.

Festive period: DB praised the players for giving up a lot of their time over the festive period to support various community activities. Niall Quinn also visited the refurbished Quinn's bar for the first time and engaged with fans across several of the premium spaces, reflecting positively about his time at the Club and its recent performance. Peter Reid, John O'Shea and Aiden McGeady have or will be attending matches in the coming months. The gifting of tickets via the Salvation Army has been successful with a significant number of children being able to attend matches because of supporters' generosity.

Fan behaviour: SW, Head of Safety, praised supporters for their positive behaviour throughout the 2024-25 season. There have been no FA reports regarding fan', or player, behaviour this campaign. Club sanctions are down by 75% and there has been a 14% increase in the number of stewards directly employed by SAFC and a 20% reduction in the use of agency stewards. This continuity of personnel and their performance is having a positive impact on the matchday experience. Incidents of negative behaviour at away games has reduced, as has the police presence at the stadium.



- DB thanked SW for his work in this area. DR also thanked SW for his pragmatic approach and continued work to put policies in place, as well as for working with fans to address negative behaviours.
- JY acknowledged the benefits of employing stewards directly. DB agreed that having the Club's own stewards helps create a culture of not just safety and security, but one focused on service delivery for fans.
- CR reported positive feedback from away Clubs and venues hosting visiting Sunderland fans.
- LG asked about vaping in the stadium. If someone is vaping in the stadium, SW would like supporters to report it to the stewards, who will deal with it in as discrete a manner as possible.

4. Ticketing

Ticketing sub-group update: BF stated the first ticketing sub-group meeting was valuable, with open and direct discussions. At previous collective meetings, poor ticketing was the focus of fan concerns and AH was pleased to report that feedback to the Red & White Army has generally been more positive recently but advised that there were still improvements to be made. CR commented on improved communication from the ticket office, particularly to branches.

Away ticketing process: A change has been implemented to the away ticket application process, removing the ballot. The ticketing process for Blackburn Rovers, which saw 7,000 fans travel to Ewood Park, ran smoothly. The new away ticketing policy is available here - [Away Ticket Policy 2024/25 – Sunderland AFC](#).

Recruitment and structure: No ticket office manager has been appointed at this stage, with BF leading ticketing operations in the interim period. PK explained the importance of making the right appointment, noting the need for a high calibre of candidate. Additional ticket office staff have already been appointed.

Ticket office phonelines: There is work being done to provide an efficient phone system at the ticket office and PK recognises the importance of having the telephone as a communication option for fans.

- DR noted that fan representatives have been raising this issue for two years, and while many improvements have been made, some fans are frustrated at not being able to contact the ticket office. He also requested for a timeline for completion.
- Additional resource has been added to the phonelines and PK is aware that this capacity needs to be increased.

Ask SAFC: The club continues to receive good feedback on response times and assistance provided via Ask SAFC. PK encouraged fans to contact the ticket office with any relevant enquiries. AI is supporting the development of the platform section based on incoming requests and outgoing responses.

Ticketing platform: Ticketing system options are being considered, as the existing Ticketmaster contract is due to expire in summer 2025. BF stated that the Club would need to introduce nominal fees to enable investment in improving the fan ticketing experience. DB aims to provide a better ticketing experience for the fans. PK concurred.

- DR suggested fans be involved in testing any new or upgraded system. BF mentioned that the Club would not be taking risks if they were to change system, and the club would make sure that any system was tried and tested at Clubs of similar size and demand.



2025-26 season tickets: DR asked for fans to be consulted on season ticket prices for 2025-26 before decisions are made. BF concurred. It will be discussed in the ticketing sub-group. AH applauded the Club's free direct debit option for season ticket payments. JY agreed.

Disabled ticketing policy: BF is keen to review the current policy to make it easier and more equitable, and he will be working with fans to improve processes.

Emirates FA Cup: LG reported issues with some senior supporters not being able to choose their seats for the Emirates FA Cup game versus Stoke City. BF encouraged any fan experiencing issues with ticket purchases to submit an enquiry via [ASK.SAFC](#). PK confirmed the predicted attendance for the game only required two stands to be opened.

Sensory room: There are two sensory rooms in the Stadium of Light, explained CW. Bookings can also be made via [Ask SAFC](#), by calling 0371 911 1973, or by visiting the Stadium of Light ticket office. JY acknowledged that while information was now available, fans had experienced difficulties previously in accessing tickets.

5. Retail

Update: The Club launched a pop-up shop in the Bridges for the festive period, providing fans access to SAFC products in the city centre. This was a good test event, and sales were positive, added DB. Overall, the Club are very happy with retail sales to date.

- DR noted that the Red and White Army has not had negative comments about the quality, availability, and range of official merchandise from members and fans. DR wanted to compliment the club on a job well done in this area.
- JY applauded the Christmas jumper and suggested young supporters could be engaged to design the 2025 jumper.

Counterfeit merchandise: The Club is working with a domestic and international legal team to prevent counterfeit SAFC products from being sold, explained DB. Many of these sellers are sophisticated and are using paid media to target Sunderland fans, which demonstrates how lucrative this market is. As well as diverting potential revenue from the Club, DB is concerned that the fake shirt industry has deep links to organised crime, and that poor quality fabrics with no safety checks can result in flammable materials that put fans at risk. CR asked if the club was working with HMRC and their anti-organised crime team.

6. Stadium experience

RAWA survey on fans leaving early: AH summarised the survey results and, in addition to looking at improved traffic management, suggested talking to Nexus as well as looking at options for fans to stay within the stadium footprint after the game.

- There have been some initial discussions with transport operators. PK reported that they do not currently have the capacity to make more services available.
- 60% of respondents travel by car. AH believes incentivising public transport, as another local Club does, may relieve congestion on the roads.
- JY asked about the potential impact the opening of the new bridge would have on egress from the Stadium. It will give a second exit route from the stadium initially (PK).
- DR has noticed a reduction in early leavers since the topic has been raised. IH agreed.



- DB intends to look at the survey results and see what the Club can improve and/or directly impact.

Kick-off times: JY asked if the Club could object to a kick-off time moved for broadcast, citing the difficulties some fans had with the 8pm kick-off on New Year's Day. PK stated that only safety issues raised by the Safety Advisory Group or the police refusing to cover the game would impact a broadcast kick-off time.

Atmosphere: DB acknowledged Kyril Louis-Dreyfus' investment in stadium infrastructure to improve the matchday experience for fans, including the sound and lighting systems, and believes the Club and the fans have 10 games to get the team over the line. The players feed off the atmosphere generated in the stadium, noting the atmosphere towards the end of the Sheffield United game.

- All supporters' representatives agreed that the atmosphere at home this season is not where we want it to be. Suggestions of how to maximise the atmosphere at the stadium for the last 10 home games of the season were discussed, including engaging younger fans in the process.
- JY, JH & LG reported some issues with the lighting effects affecting fans with photo-sensitive responses. The light show post-match can be looked at, confirmed DB.
- It was agreed to collect the views of fans on maximising how best to improve the SoL_atmosphere.

Safe standing: SW ran a survey with season ticket holders in the south-east and south-west corners and the south stand (central) to determine their views on railed seating. 47% of respondents in the south-east corner, 67% of south stand (central) and 91% in the south-west corner would like safe standing introduced in their area. The Club will look at capital expenditure implications regarding the installation of additional safe standing.

- PU noted that some supporters sitting in the south stand have difficulty seeing areas of the pitch because of those standing in existing rail standing areas.

Family section: DB is looking to develop this area and wants young fans to be as close to the pitch as possible. This season, injured players and mascots are attending the family section and fans are coming in earlier to experience this. PK recognises that the current family area needs to be updated, and the Club will be looking at this further to optimise the location.

Premium experiences: All premium spaces can be booked online until the end of the season. Special offers are available to make this experience accessible to more supporters and DB wants to ensure all fans can consider upgrades when time and money permits. A general admission plus space will be opening in the old Club store later this year. JY took up one of the offers and commented on the excellent of experience in the Montgomery Suite.

Stadium access and egress: Crowded spaces management for the Stadium of Light must include an assessment by an anti-terrorist adviser (SW). This report was completed in June 2024 and advised that hostile vehicle mitigation measures (H-stops) should be implemented.

- The approach roads to the stadium have been painted to show the exact position of the H-stops. There are six locations where these barriers are placed 30 minutes before the game, preventing any vehicles from moving onto the stadium footprint. These are located at Hay Street, Essington Street, St Peter's, Millenium Way & Colliery Street.



- Post-match, the measures are put in place 30 before the final whistle, although vehicles are allowed to leave the stadium in that period.
- Essington Street will be closed completely from 9 January. All footfall from St Peter's will have to go through Hay Street.
- 60 minutes before the game, St Peter's and Hay Street will be closed to vehicles. 45 minutes before kick-off, Millenium Way will be closed to vehicles. Colliery Street will close 30 minutes before.
- Fans who currently park in Sheepfolds should find an alternative parking location, as the council is demolishing the current buildings and preparing for the redevelopment of that area.
- LG raised concerns about fan tripping over H-stops in the dark as they left the Stadium.
- Fans would appreciate having the position and timing of restrictions shared via social media and other comms channels (AH). As planned, this was actioned post-meeting.

7. Fan Engagement

Themed weeks: Themed weeks are designed to engage existing fans and introduce new audiences to the Club, or elements of our history, and drive new revenue (DB). For Founders Week, pre-match activities and build-up aimed to reflect a retro matchday experience. The team entered the stadium to Z Cars, a 50's Sunderland bus was located near the Stokoe statue, there were pop-up stalls at the Fans Museum, and the Club worked with Beamish Museum to activate the week.

- £16,000 was raised for the Royal British Legion, as Sunderland AFC, Fanatics and Hummel donated all profits from the bespoke merchandise range. The SAS Who Dares Wins stars hosted a dinner on Friday night in the Montgomery Suite.
- Feedback on Founders' Week and Heroes' Week can be sent to info@redandwhitearmy.co.uk, or submitted via [Ask SAFC](#).

Dedicated matchdays: CW shared details of successful and forthcoming dedicated matchdays. West Bromwich Albion was dedicated to Show Racism the Red Card and the Club invited local schools and organisations across the North East to the fixture. The Bristol City game was dedicated to the Multibank Hygiene Poverty Campaign. The campaign supported the Sunderland Community Soup Kitchen and the donations and support from our fanbase received high praise from the organisers. At the Portsmouth game, the Club partnered with Utilita to support the Sunderland Foodbank.

- CW acknowledged the work of JY and the Heaven Branch during preparation for the memorial fixture, which took place when Sheffield United travelled to Wearside. JY has sent feedback from more than 40 bereaved families to the Club regarding the memorial match, sharing what it meant to them.
- The Club is keen to support the local community through dedicated matchdays and is always looking for more causes to help. SAFC will continue to work with supporter groups and community projects on these moving forward.
- CR asked about the announcement of International Fans' Day 2025. CW confirmed it would be announced on safc.com shortly, with the matchday set to take place in April when Swansea City travel to Wearside.



Memorial garden: CW confirmed that planning consent for the new memorial garden has been submitted and once approved, it should take around six weeks to complete. The Club will reach out to families whose ashes will be placed there, inviting them to the opening.

- The process for any families who wish to place a loved one's ashes in the garden will be communicated in due course.
- When the memorial garden is complete, all supporters will be able to visit, and this will be the official area for families to leave ashes moving forward. The club will continue to work alongside the Heaven Branch on the development of this area, as many families have found comfort from this initiative.

Personalised bricks in panel eight: Over 75% of the bricks for the new panel eight have now arrived. Work cannot start on the installation until all new bricks have arrived. There are two remaining shipments still to be delivered. Once complete, the impacted supporters will be invited to attend an exclusive event to mark the opening of the new panel as an appreciation for their support.

Pre-season: DB expects an announcement in early February, but it is a fluid situation dependent on which league we are in.

Supporter group representation: All parties believe it is important to add younger fans and greater diversity to the supporters' collective meetings.

- CW presented an update on the proposed election process for additional attendees to be present at collective meetings. There will be four new places available on the supporters' collective and it will be open for all supporters to apply. The Club and the collective are working with the Football Supporters Association to ensure there is an independent and transparent process, which is hoped to be completed by early April.

Disabled supporters' group: The Club would like to establish a new disabled supporters' group to continue the work of the previous group. If anyone would like to be involved with this, please contact chris.waters@safc.com.

Pride of Wearside: CW continues to work with Pride of Wearside to develop inclusivity and support for the LGBTQ+ community, who have a member meeting scheduled for the end of the month. They plan to attend the upcoming Stadium of Light fixtures against Plymouth Argyle and Watford, as well as the Birmingham City Women and Durham Women fixtures.

Young Asian Voices: CW is liaising regularly with Young Asian Voices, inviting members to attend recent games. The group recently attended home fixtures against West Bromwich Albion and Stoke City. There is a keen interest from their members, who would like to establish a new supporters' group for the Asian community.

7. Finance Update

Club update: As the 2023-24 accounts will be published before the next meeting, DB requested this item be deferred to the next meeting.

8. Next Meeting

Dates: CW will send out dates for forthcoming supporters' collective and ticket and stadium sub-group meetings shortly.



Supporter Collective Meeting

9. AOB

Guardian reports: DR asked about reports in The Guardian of a potential ground share with Newcastle United. DB confirmed it has not been discussed and would not be entertained.