



Sunderland AFC Supporters' Collective meeting: 26 March 2025

Attendees

Sunderland AFC	David Bruce (DB), Paul Kingsmore (PK), Oscar Chamberlain (OC), Steve Wood (SW), Chris Waters (CW)
Branch Liaison Council	Jim Gilling (JG), Peter Oliver (PO) Cath Reid (CR), Joanne Youngson (JY)
Red and White Army	David Rose (DR), Jane Hughes, Ian High (IH)
Senior Supporters' Association	David Smith (DS), Michelle Barraclough (MB)

Minutes

1. Review Action Log

The action log was circulated before the meeting to all attendees. It is the Hebburn Branch's 60th anniversary this year, CR asked for the event to be added to the action log. DB confirmed that the Club is happy to support anniversary events and providing staff availability will attend. Any group who wants to work with the Club on an upcoming event, should contact chris.waters@safc.com

2. Sunderland AFC Accounts

The Sunderland AFC 2023-24 accounts have been published recently; all revenue streams are up and the Club has the highest revenue of all Clubs not in receipt of parachute payments. Costs are up mainly due to increases in player wages, as the team transitions from a League One Club to an established Championship one. (DB)

The accounts reflect the first year of the player trading model and include the sale of Ross Stewart. Modern football is built on trading, especially in the Championship. The sales of players have not significantly impacted the quality or output of the team, with replacements stepping in to deliver. (DB)

DB confirmed the line of credit included in the accounts was opened to ensure cashflow was maintained, this is not unusual in football finance. The owner has removed this external line of credit now by providing his own. The stadium is valued at £158 million.

It is important that Sunderland AFC is financially stable. The Club has a lot of working space regarding PSR, the EFL's financial control regulations.

IH commented on the positive direction of travel demonstrated in the accounts and that PSR remains strong, and sought clarification of the club's losses of £9.7 million. DB is comfortable with them, but the Club is



looking to reduce losses, and, although not included in these accounts, is confident that the merchandise move to Hummel will reflect a contribution increase in the next ones.

IH noted a recent charge notice on Company's House. DB confirmed this is a line of credit extended to the Club by the Louis -Dreyfus family and demonstrated KLD's continued commitment to the Club. The owners have invested £20 million in the Club, which will be converted into equity.

3. Sunderland AFC Women

The Women's Professional League Limited (WPLL) governs the WSL & the Women's Championship, each Club in the league has one membership share. As a member, Sunderland AFC is working with the WPLL in all aspects of decision making for the women's game at the highest level and on growing the game from grass roots. The women's game is very different from the men's game, with only about a 30/40 percent crossover of supporters at our Club. It has and continues to create its own identity. The pyramid within the women's game is developing, and it is important to grow revenue streams, the game generally, and to set minimum standards. Creating engagement in women's football is important. The three games at the Stadium of Light this year have been a good case of the opportunity, and demonstrate the potential appetite for women's football at Sunderland. The Club wants to work with the Sunderland AFC Women's Supporters Club and understand what can be done to increase engagement across the board.

CR advised that the Sunderland AFC Women's Supporters Club has registered to become an official branch and would be joining the BLC.

DR & IH queried leaked WPLL proposals for a potentially closed league in the WSL / Championship, seeking the club's position on this. SAFC fully supports the pyramid and believes the ability for each Club to aspire to a higher league is crucial.

4. Ticketing

The Club is moving to SeatGeek (SG), a new ticketing platform, in the summer. Seat Geek has greatly improved customer functionality and will integrate more fully with some of the key operational pieces, namely the stadium's entry system. For example, currently when a ticket is bought, one email will be sent confirming the sale and another containing the ticket, this will all change under the new system. The club is confident that SeatGeek will increase the speed of service and supporter experience. Work on the transition is already underway and should be a smooth process for customers.

DB & OC underscored that Seat Geek is more compatible with mobile devices, as it has been built from the fans' perspective and will improve the match going experience.

JY emphasised the importance of very clear information in press releases or digital updates to fans to reduce confusion.

A new ticket office manager has been appointed, with significant experience in football. There has been additional recruitment in the ticket office and improvements have been made to customer service. PK



recognised that at peak times challenges remain. Senior management have been more actively involved and will continue to be, as the club recognise the importance of good customer service regarding ticketing.

PK apologised for not consulting fans and fan groups on the introduction of the 70% attendance threshold for U14 tickets for daytime games and acknowledged errors in the initial communication of the proposal. The intention is not to penalise fans living away from Sunderland or children who can't attend due to school or sporting commitments. They are at no risk of losing their season tickets. The intention is to address the issue of abuse around this category, including adults buying and entering the stadium on a concession ticket or fans who simply block seats by buying a season ticket to guarantee a Wembley ticket or to reserve a seat / extra legroom.

JY & CR raised concerns as to how this will be effectively monitored and noted that children who play sport will not be able to attend 12:30 pm kick-offs.

MB believes most fans will support the Club in addressing misuse of season tickets, providing it does not penalise young supporters.

PK reiterated that the intention is not to penalise children in these circumstances and noted that there had been no discernible drop off in renewals. DR thanked the club for acknowledging that the lack of consultation was an error, agreeing with MB that fans across the country generally support any attempts to stop the misuse of tickets. The Red and White Army wanted to place on record the belief that just because supporters continued to renew tickets, it did not mean that fans are satisfied with the decision and that, as the end of the first year of the new TV deal, which SAFC voted for, approaches that it should be acknowledged that while the deal has brought extra revenue for the club, it has brought additional challenges and disruption for fans. DR asked the Club to bear this in mind when communicating decisions to fans.

Anyone who is concerned about the 70% threshold should contact the club via [Ask.SAFC.com](https://www.ask.safc.com) or phone the ticket office 0371 911 1973, or please speak to a rep from one of the supporter groups that best represent your interests.

5. Stadium Experience & Engagement

A new PA system, lighting and standing have been installed at the Stadium of Light to improve the supporter experience. To continue to improve the experience, DB would like to open discussions on the position of the away fans and the creation of an 'atmosphere group'.

The position of the away fans has been discussed at length at previous meetings, and MB reiterated that the main issue is the displacement of long-standing season ticket holders. At the Coventry City and Leeds United away games, the atmosphere generated was excellent by the home fans. Sunderland away support is always amazing. CR agreed with MB, that moving away fans had been discussed many times. CR asked



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which areas had been considered for relocation and if 330 away fans with Preston North End or 490 Cardiff City fans would make a significant difference to the atmosphere if they moved to the lower bowl.

DB confirmed the Club had not taken a decision as to where away supporters would be re-located to, this would be done in consultation with supporters. PK noted that in the Premier League the away ticket allocation would be 3,000.

JG believes an improved atmosphere starts on the pitch, when the team are committed. DR agreed atmosphere can be reactive to actions on the pitch, but the atmosphere has not reflected the performance over the season. It was noted that this season the atmosphere was the worst in recent memory and with the team having a strong league position, the atmosphere is not creating the edge which Sunderland have been known for in the past (DB)

Limiting migration around the ground as required by the SGSA has prevented likeminded supporters congregating, the age limit in the south stand may also be a factor.

It is important to identify and work with fans who want to set up an atmosphere group, suggesting the Club reach out to younger fans who may wish to be involved in an atmosphere group. Fan groups can support the process.

DR continued that effective fan consultation is the only way forward for any discussion that relates to moving away fans: focus groups, surveys, full consultation.

Ultimately, it will be a decision made by the Club, but it can only be a good decision if the fan base has been fully consulted (PK). The Club is keen to work with the collective and the wider fanbase to determine the correct outcome.

DR asked about the progress of the election of independent fan representatives to the collective. CW confirmed that the Club was working with the FSA, and the process will begin shortly. Individually elected representatives will be in place for next season.

The Red and White Army would like to submit a proposal for a fan wall on the stadium concourse. The main concourse at the Stadium of Light remains, in the main, grey breeze block. It is a blank canvas that can be claimed by supporters. When the team played pre-season friendlies at Blackpool and Bradford City, Sunderland fans were housed in the home section and both of clubs had a display on their concourse which celebrated their fans and the stories they have. The Red and White Army would like to work with the Club and fellow supporter groups to develop our own fan wall. JY suggested this may be a good opportunity for fans to include a memorial for loved ones, due to the amount of people asking about purchasing bricks, which are no longer available.

The North Stand and beyond features branch emblems. Some branches have paid for emblems to be added, but an issue with the cherry picker meant nothing ever happened. JG is confident more branches would like to see their branch emblem displayed. DB doesn't believe this will pose an issue now.



DB confirmed the Club is working on a stadium improvement plan, including the concourses. There will be a Stadium working group walk around at the end of May /early June.

Action Log Point

RAWA to send Fan Wall proposal to the Club and fellow fan groups [Friday 28th March 2025]

CW to confirm the date of the next Stadium Working Group meeting [Friday 16th May 2025]

A key part of the Club growing commercial revenues to compete at the top of English football is how we develop the revenue mix, which includes looking at our premium spaces. DB confirmed The Founders will be open for the Millwall game, which is the newest entry level premium space on offer. All Black Cats Bar members were invited to attend one of two open evenings, which proved successful. The Founders is a convenient option for fans wanting a great lively space, programmed with live music and inspired by the founding of our Club.

The Red and White Army has received feedback from members concerned about the cost, the offering and renewals in the Black Cats Bar. The Club was given a copy of pre-meeting comments submitted to the Red and White Army.

Anyone concerned about their season tickets in the Black Cats Bar should contact Sharon Ewart on sharon.ewart@safc.com.

6. General Updates

EDI Update - CW is working with the FSA on Sunderland's My City, My Shirt campaign. It will feature photographs of city landmarks and diverse representation from the fanbase

There is a North East Sikh football tournament at the Washington Hub on 17th May. There will be a team representing Sunderland AFC in the tournament. The event will be open to all to attend.

Pride of Wearside worked with the club on the EFL Rainbow Ball campaign. The group continues to develop to grow its membership.

If anyone would like to join Pride of Wearside contact prideofwearside@outlook.com

The Club is happy to support and promote all supporter groups.

Memorial Garden - Planning permission has been submitted. The next step is for the Club to submit a biodiversity gain assessment. This is a process used to ensure that development projects result in an overall positive impact on biodiversity. The goal is to leave the natural environment in a better state than it was before the development.

JY welcomed the update but shared the frustration of bereaved families of fans that it has been over a year since the memorial garden was promised. Many families have been tracking this on the council website and reported no planning permission could be seen. There was a submission placed on the 26th of February however this was soon removed, which confused many fans. The Heaven branch will fundraise if finance is an obstacle to completion. JY asked the Club to provide regular updates for families.

Action Log Point



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CW to provide a memorial garden update to be shared on the Heaven Branch social media channels
[Monday 14th April 2025]

Panel 8 – CW confirmed all bricks have been delivered. Installation will begin on 1st April. Work is expected to take two weeks. Anyone with a brick on Panel 8 will be invited to an open evening at Quinn's Bar, which will include seeing the brick in its new position.

Pre-season - The announcement has been delayed due to the uncertainty of which league the team will be playing in and the impact this will have on the Club's pre-season schedule

CR advised at this stage, supporters want to know where and when the team would be playing to book leave from work, travel and accommodation, rather than the logistics of what the opposition would be.

The Club acknowledged this and reiterated that plans would be announced once dates and locations were confirmed.