



26/01/2026

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**Sunderland AFC:** David Bruce (DB), Paul Kingsmore (PK), Oscar Chamberlain (OC), Georgi Rusev (GR), Steve Wood (SW), Ashley Lowerson (AL), Emily Jewitt (EJ), Chris Waters (CW)

**Supporters:**

**Elected Members:** Patricia Phillipson (PP), Daniel Stokell (DS), Matthew Foreman (MF), Zaf Iqbal (ZI)

**Branch Liaison Council:** Cath Reid (CR), Joanne Youngson (JY)

**Red and White Army:** Ian High (IH), David Rose (DR), Matthew Lounton (ML)

**Senior Supporters Association:** Michelle Barraclough (MB)

**Apologies:** Jim Gilling, Lynn Glendenning

### 1. Welcome & Introductions

DB welcomed everyone to the meeting, emphasising that collaboration with fans can help Sunderland AFC become a world-class operation.

DB thanked This is Wearside for the Remembrance Day and Derby Day displays. Both games were the Premier League's global featured game on those weekends and showed off the very best of Sunderland. DB applauded the hard work & commitment of the volunteers, stating that the displays were 'best in class'.

DB believes the Heaven Branch is unrivalled as a group, and their commemoration display versus Manchester City was amazing, reflecting their passion and commitment.

DS thanked the Club staff and JY and This is Wearside for the support the groups received with their endeavours.

### 2. Finance & Commercial

The Club recently announced the appointment of two non-executive board members. Tom Burwell, CEO of Bia Sports Group, and Alexandra Louis-Dreyfus, who has worked closely with the Club throughout the ownership group's tenure.

The passing of Patrick Truer devastated all at the Club. He was very generous with his time and his contribution to the Club's development was gratefully acknowledged by DB, who worked closely with him.

The 2025 Club accounts are due to be published shortly and can be discussed at the next meeting. However, the Club is in a healthy financial position. £10+million was invested in stadium infrastructure and improvements in the summer, and there was considerable squad investment.

There has also been investment in staffing and resourcing to compete in the Premier League, particularly in the commercial department. Operating expenses in last year's figures are unusually high, due to bonus payments on promotion.



Player trading has been good, noting the sales of Jobe Bellingham and Tommy Watson, and the Club is well positioned with respect to PSR. The trend is positive, underlining revenue is strong, and costs are well-managed, ensuring the team will be able to continue to compete on the pitch (DB).

At the recent Premier League shareholder meeting, Sunderland voted in favour of the introduction of Squad Cost Ratio (SCR) as the new financial control mechanism in place. It is different from PSR, which assesses losses over 3 years, with SCR focusing on driving revenue and the cost of your squad.

SCR works in real time rather than retrospectively. Aligning with UEFA, the Club believe it will help competitive balance, which keeps the Premier League strong, and encourages investment off the pitch, in facilities and infrastructure. Sunderland AFC is well positioned for the last year of PSR and for SCR when introduced (DB).

The Independent Football Regulator will protect Clubs and communities. DB believes regulation will be good for football and encourage responsible ownership. The IFR will look at governance, finance and fan engagement and will have enforcement powers. Sunderland AFC will need a license from the regulator to compete in the Premier League. The Club will work with the regulator to ensure this is achieved within the required timescale. The Club is engaged with the regulator as part of their consultation process.

The IFR will provide a layer of independent scrutiny, with legal powers that offer real protection for fans, particularly regarding heritage items, including the Club badge, stadium, name. PK believes that the work between SAFC and the fans will help meet part of the IFR requirements.

IH asked about the Football License. All 116 Clubs in the five top leagues will initially apply for a provisional licence. The provisional license will last for three years, and each Club will apply for a full licence during that period. PK added that the IFR can remove it at any time if regulations are broken.

The Regulator can reassess the suitability of existing owners if standards fall. It should be noted that the regulator is currently consulting on a range of issues so aspects might alter.

DR concurred, believing Sunderland AFC is regulator ready with respect to engagement.

### 3. Ticketing

The aim of the ticket office is to solve issues that fans have and develop systems that enable the purchase and servicing of those tickets. PK acknowledged the work of the ticketing sub-group in collaborating closely with the Club to address and resolve challenges.

The Club wants to work with fans to ensure that those eligible to buy tickets are the ones that use them. Ticketing integrity is vital to the Club and the league – with touting and transfer of tickets issues prominent across the Premier League. Sunderland AFC works with the league on this and is part of a Premier League ticket working group. The Premier League expects clubs to appoint a Ticketing Compliance Manager to help monitor the situation.

- **2026-27 season tickets**

There are several price points for season tickets, with fans renewing and buying in different windows (PK). Work continues with ownership and senior management to finalise pricing for the 2026-27 season. The aim is to have season tickets on sale in late February. DB confirmed season ticket prices will rise to reflect Premier League status while remaining competitive and fair, and ensuring loyalty is rewarded.

Auto renewal will not be available this year, as the Club completes its migration from Ticketmaster to Seat Geek. Every STH will have to actively renew their seat for 2026-27. Auto renewal will be available again for 2027-28.



There is unrest amongst supporters at Clubs at the top end of ticket pricing in the Premier League (DR). Fans are protesting and fear that ordinary fans are being priced away from their respective Clubs. Income has never been so high, with approximately £115 million being received in broadcast revenue. This turns the dial for the Club with regards to on and off the pitch investment. Ticket price increases will not have a similar impact on the club but do significantly impact fans. DR believes most fans will accept a price increase but does not want to see outlandish increases. Just because a Premier League Club can exploit loyalty, it does not mean it should. Fans hope that the Club will not harm the excellent relationship it has built with the fanbase by pushing prices too high.

JY would like to see Sunderland AFC be an example of good practice across football. The Club wants to get the price right, and DB acknowledged the points made, and added that success on the pitch has accelerated the entire business and finances must catch up. Discussions will continue with the working group.

Fans are very positive and will continue to invest in the Club (DS) but this should not be seen as an opportunity for the Club to raise prices. Fans across other Clubs love their past but hate their future because of how Clubs treat fans. It should be done the Sunderland way.

DS asked about flexible payment options for season ticket purchases. The increase from four to six, interest free, direct debit payments was well received (PK). Seat Geek allows for additional transaction methods and a monthly payment plan option will be available.

The upper concession rate will rise to 66 years in 2027-28 (no changes in 26/27) and will track future changes in the state pension age.

Those who need a plastic season ticket will be eligible again and be given a card.

- **Away Ticketing & ID Checks**

ID checks at away games have been introduced in response to reports and social media posts that tickets are being passed on. The Club does not want tickets passed on to people who are not eligible, as this denies fans who have the appropriate points the opportunity to attend. People with points, who have been loyal, should be able to apply for tickets at away games (PK).

At each away game 10 tickets are checked; five are random, five are targeted. Tickets are targeted if suspicious activity is suspected. The Club gives notice to fans randomly selected that a check will be required, via email, the day before the game. Targeted tickets are not notified. GR and/or ticket office staff are at away games to support.

At Manchester City, seven out of the ten did not turn up to be checked. This has since improved. GR confirmed the Black Cat Point for any unscanned tickets is removed.

If someone does not turn up for an ID check, they will be invited for another check. If two checks are missed, individuals will be contacted but could be denied future away tickets.

In response to questions from DS, PK confirmed that the Club will continue this process.

The Red and White Army does not disagree with the principles of checking ticket ownership. DR asked for clarity in the process; fans need to clearly know what the checks are for, what can be expected, acceptable forms of identification, what are the sanctions, and what is the appeals process.

MF concurred. There is panic in the fanbase about it; transparency is important. Clarity about why ID checks have been introduced would be helpful. The actions of the Club are being questioned because fans do not understand (PP).



The Club accepts a driving license or passport as acceptable forms of ID.

Life happens, sometimes issues arise and people will be unable to go. DR asked for a proportionate response when unavoidable circumstances prevent someone attending a game.

CR asked about fans who do not operate digitally. PK stated that Club staff are available to help at away games where necessary.

The Club is receiving reports from fans about people regularly passing on tickets. The Club wants to stop this and anyone making money by doing so. Fans are regularly disappointed when they cannot go to away games; the Club wants to be fair. Any response will be proportionate, but action will be taken when necessary (PK).

SW confirmed any sanction imposed by the Club falls under the club's sanction policy, which has the right to appeal.

Tickets for Sunderland games are appearing on global exchange websites (PK). Tickets have appeared and then sold for a considerable profit. None of these are real. Fans have also presented fake tickets at the ticket office that they bought in good faith.

Fans can resell their ticket through the Club's official resell platform. DB encouraged any fan unable to attend to use this facility.

JY if there was a process for 'passing on' an away ticket for legitimate reasons, and the timescale for this. GR asked any fan unable to attend to contact the ticket office.

PK wants the Club to be an example of good practice, but using someone else's SAFC number to inappropriately purchase an away ticket is not permitted.

The Red and White Army thanked Ashley Lowerson for emails sent to fans ahead of visits to Tottenham Hotspur, Brentford, and Everton, sharing key information for travelling fans.

JY noted the positive impact of Sunderland AFC stewards at away games.

- **Ticket Credit**

Credits earned through ticket resale can be used to pay for tours and events at the Stadium of Light. It can also be used as part-payment for 2026-27 season tickets. PK encouraged fans who cannot attend a home game to put it for resale via the Club platform.

- **Membership Programme**

DB is keen to introduce a membership scheme, suggesting something for international fans and junior fans. Anything that is brought to market would have to be an attractive product. Loyalty should be rewarded but it is not always easy to define.

JY, MF & DS agreed that these would be welcomed by junior and international fans.

DR is happy to work with the Club to develop something appropriate but believes any membership scheme should not encourage queue jumping.

#### **4. Stadium, Infrastructure & Matchday Experience**

New screens have been installed at the Stadium of Light and DB thanked Chris Ferguson, Head of Facilities, and his team for achieving this in-season. Two new videos have helped raise the sense of belonging and atmosphere pre-match.



The Club is pleased with its partnership with Delaware. Catering in corporate and general admission areas has improved. There are secret shoppers deployed at all games to help rate the experience and ensure the service levels and offer improve.

Founders Bar opened post-match for the first time this season and is available to all fans after the game. Access is via the old club shop entrance.

The E-bars and a Grab & Go unit in the Roker End have also improved service and reduced waiting times on the concourse. DR noted the reduced waiting times, despite the increase in attendance. The Club is exploring the possibility of installing catering units outside the stadium to improve half-time congestion on the concourses.

10,000 to 12,000 fans are using the Keel Crossing each match (DB). There is a merchandise unit, but the Club is looking at developing the environment as fans arrive. Fan rep suggestions included improved signage, 'Welcome to Sunderland', catering vans, murals, creating a corridor promoting Sunderland to show our pride in our Club.

Suggestions can be submitted to the Club via [ASK.SAFC](#)

- **Atmosphere & fan engagement**

The atmosphere group has discussed options for developing and maintaining the atmosphere at the Stadium (EJ).

KLD believes Sunderland AFC can have the best atmosphere in the league because of what we can achieve together (DB).

DR agreed but noted the ebb and flow of the atmosphere in English football. Fans react to what happens on the pitch and that should not be lost, but there can be gaps. There is no easy solution, but atmosphere can be driven by a group of dedicated fans. The position of the away fans is a factor, as the back and forth between home and away fans is a catalyst to improving atmosphere.

A group of home fans are emerging in the upper Jimmy Montgomery / North Stand, who sing and interact close to away fans (DB).

One discussion point has centered around further reinforcing the South Stand as a singing section, facilitating fans who want to move in and out of the area, as a means to enhancing the atmosphere.

MF feels that the atmosphere can sometimes be too staged managed (pre and post), allowing the atmosphere to breathe post-match and fans deciding what to sing. This is monitored, and the Club responds by fading songs out in response to atmosphere (DB). EJ acknowledged similar feedback. The Club has been playing the songs connected to player chants that are topical to the game narrative.

Other Clubs have a song that is synonymous with their Club, and DS believes Sunderland should have that. DB & PP stated Can't Help Falling in Love was the Sunderland song.

DS is concerned that the atmosphere at Sunderland away games is not as strong as it used to be and wondered if this could be addressed. MF speculated that this is due to the older demographic of away support. The Club is looking into this and whether there is anything they can do.

If you would like to be involved in the atmosphere working group, contact [ASK.SAFC](#)

- **Matchday Enhancements**



There has been strong engagement for the Club's themed weeks, Founders and Heroes (DB).

The Nottingham Forest game will be culmination of a new week, celebrating the innovation and talent of the city. EJ welcomes suggestions to celebrate this.

CW confirmed International Fans Weekend, held since 2020. International fans should contact the Club directly to be involved. To ensure a warm welcome for all fans, the Club is working closely with CR and JY. PK is happy to work with CW, CR and JY to support post-match activities in Founders Bar

EJ confirmed there is a stadium fan cam, on the West Stand 20 minutes before the game, but EJ is looking to extend it to half time and other areas of the Stadium.

The next Red and White Army survey is ready to launch. This is an effective way to collect feedback from fans on number of topics, including atmosphere. The aim is to get the survey out mid-February. DB is happy for the Club to promote the survey.

- **Stadium Updates**

SW commended the behaviour of both home and away supporters at the Stadium of Light throughout the season. With over 500,000 fans having passed through the Stadium's turnstiles this campaign, there were only 14 arrests recorded at the Stadium of Light, which is a very low figure given the scale of attendance. Arrest numbers at away fixtures are also low, AL noted, reinforcing the positive behaviour of Sunderland supporters both home and away. In addition, the Everton Safety Officer formally congratulated Sunderland fans on their conduct during the recent cup fixture, further underlining the Club's strong reputation for supporter behaviour within stadium environments.

However, the Club expressed concern regarding reports of supporter behaviour while travelling by train to and from fixtures. Incidents involving individuals wearing Sunderland tops and club kit have been reported, which risks undermining the excellent work and reputation built at the Stadium of Light. The Club is clear that the actions of a small minority must not be allowed to damage the Club's name, DB emphasised. The Club will work closely with relevant partners to identify any perpetrators and will pursue the strongest possible sanctions against any individual found to be responsible.

The Club also reiterated its desire to extend and expand safe standing provision at the Stadium of Light. Safe standing has been well received and is seen as a positive development for supporter experience. While there are logistical and operational challenges to be addressed, the Club remains committed to exploring options to increase provision where feasible.

- **Stadium working group update (from last meeting of subgroup)**

The discussion centered on the Club's summer initiatives and stadium improvements, especially in concourses and hospitality areas, with an overview of completed projects, including the Keel Crossing and the pitch.

Communication with fans was emphasised, including proposals to create summaries of working group meetings to document progress and encourage supporter involvement.

Accessibility improvements for disabled fans were highlighted, focusing on wheelchair access and viewing, with a phased stadium upgrade plan aiming to complete vertical sections within three years.

The new footbridge's impact on crowd management and traffic flow was noted, with attendees reporting smoother experiences and reduced congestion.



Priorities for the upcoming financial year were outlined, including internal improvements and accommodating increased attendance, with suggestions to enhance communication via website updates and social media.

Plans to explore acoustic panels to improve stadium atmosphere were discussed, reflecting the Club's broader commitment to infrastructure upgrades and fan engagement.

- **Away fan location**

The Club commissioned an independent assessor to provide expert advice on the appropriate positioning of away supporters within the stadium. Following this assessment, the Club has submitted a formal proposal to the Premier League requesting dispensation to retain away fans in their current location on safety grounds. Any relocation would materially increase the risk of supporter crossover in the external footprint of the stadium, particularly during ingress and egress, thereby heightening safety and security concerns.

This position is fully supported by the Sunderland Safety Advisory Group (SAG), which has reviewed the proposal and concurs with the Club's assessment.

- **Accessibility & Inclusion**

The Accessibility and Inclusion working group has been formed and is beginning to look at topics raised.

The first meeting took place in September and the next meeting will take place in February 2026. Dan Taylor has been appointed as the Club's Disability Access Officer

The Accessibility Working Group met to discuss improving fan accessibility at the Stadium of Light, with members introducing themselves and sharing motivations, and agreeing to broaden participation and create a terms of reference.

Key accessibility concerns included seating arrangements for personal assistants of wheelchair users, with proposals to seat assistants closer to fans to improve support and comfort.

Inconsistencies in toilet facilities were noted, and the group discussed conducting a comprehensive accessibility audit and learning from best practices at other stadiums.

Ticketing accessibility challenges were raised, including confusion over digital ticketing for away games and challenges following the switch to SeatGeek, with calls for clearer communication.

The group emphasised the importance of effective testing strategies, clear communication, and addressing accessibility challenges to enhance the overall experience for disabled supporters.

- **Infrastructure Projects**

The Club objected to the council's proposed plans for Sheepfolds, as any plans must protect and support future development of the Club. The Club and council have common goals, and the Club is confident that an appropriate outcome can be achieved.

The memorial garden is being built and the Heaven Branch noted that it was pleased with the latest progress.

## 5. Upcoming games and events



## Supporter Collective Meeting

The Club is speaking to interested parties about pre-season (DB). It is challenging in a World Cup year, but the Club is determined to do what is right for football, whilst maximising commercial opportunities and providing the best experiences for fans. An announcement is expected shortly.

Coaches to the Newcastle United game will be subsidised by the Club. CR, SW, and DB discussed supporter branch intentions & arrangements to travel to the game.

Sunderland AFC recently contacted supporters who regularly purchase official club merchandise to gather feedback on the design of next season's retail home shirt, specifically regarding the back of the shirt.

Supporters were asked to choose between a full striped back for retail shirts only or a blank panel to allow for clearer number visibility replicating player shirts, which must have the panel to comply with PL regulations. The response showed a very strong preference for maintaining the club's traditional striped look across the entire shirt.

- 90.35% voted for a Full Striped Back
- 9.65% voted for a Blank Panel