



Minutes of the Supporters' Collective meeting held on Thursday 28th April 2022 Riverview Brassiere

Attendees

Sunderland AFC:	Steve Davison (SD), Kristjaan Speakman (KS), Oscar Chamberlain (OC), Lindsay Douglas (LD), Alex Clark (AC), Michael Laidler (ML), Chris Waters (CW)
Supporter Groups:	
Branch Liaison Council:	Jim Gilling (JG), Phil Pollard (PP), Cath Reid (CR), Joanne Youngson (JY)
Red & White Army:	Jane Hughes (JHu), Ewan Moffat (EM), Dave Rose (DR), Rebecca Wilkinson (RW)
Senior Supporters Association	Malcolm Bramley (MB), Michelle Barraclough (MBA), John Heppell (JH)
SAFC Supporters Liaison Group:	Paul Andrew (PA), Jeff Smith (JS)
Apologies	Andrew Hird

1. Finance & Governance

Responding to submitted questions, SD stated that he had passed various approaches from interested parties onto the ownership group. This was being dealt with by the owners and he had no progress to report. SD confirmed that there was no change from the previous meeting when KLD expressed that he was interested in increasing his shareholding at the right price after a question from DR.

SAFC accounts for 2020/21 were published on Friday 29th April. They reflect an extraordinary season of Covid restrictions and no supporters. Most revenue was from online sources. Overall income was down from £29 million to £11 million, £27.9 million expenses were reduced to £21 million and the club made a loss of £11.7 million. All shareholders have put a total of £8.65 million into the club to support operational costs since the KLD purchase.

JS asked if the money put in from the owners was as loans. SD confirmed money had been placed in as director loans, but as stated in the accounts this was to be converted to equity. DR raised concerns that Stewart Donald, Charlie Methven and Juan Sartori had previously written off £20 million but are now owed money in loans.

This season the focus has been on generating income, upgrading infrastructure and rebuilding trust within and around the club with fans, businesses and the local authority (SD). Two concerts have been secured, the club has invested in new fire panel and safety lighting, public catering is



now in-sourced, there is new technology on the concourse, including Wi-Fi, and the Fanzone has moved to the Beacon of Light. A new contract has reduced beer prices. The venue sales team and executive catering will be in-sourced from the 1st June, this will improve profitability and flexibility of its use. Plans are in place to improve customer services in the shop and with ticket sales (discussed later).

Many staff have worked above and beyond expectations to improve the operations at the club, SD expressed the club's gratitude for all their efforts, continuing that he believes the club is a better business now than it was and a better place for supporters, but recognised there is still much more work to do.

The club is still loss making, but plans are in place to become economically sustainable. There has been a 10% increase in revenue compared to the first season in league one, and costs have been reduced.

JG acknowledged that club are working with Sunderland and South Tyneside councils and asked about working with Durham County council, where considerable numbers of supporters are based. The club facilities sit within Sunderland and South Tyneside, the work with them on has been on planning and operational matters. The Foundation of Light does great work across all councils and future engagement work would be across all three councils. SD has an invite from the Durham Business Group and will be looking to do more work in this area.

PA asked if streaming and online earnings would become a bigger part of future income. SD envisages that streaming will generate more income in the future, but current rules limit how many games can be streamed. OC believes the streaming team do an exceptional job and the potential for streaming would be immense should it become available domestically for fixtures taking place at 3pm on a Saturday, but the impact on matchday attendances must be considered. Multi-camera production entails considerable extra operational costs coupled with additional staffing requirements, but a small increase in the cost of seasonal streaming passes would help to fund the improved service and this is being considered.

DR echoed the thanks of the fans for the efforts of the staff this season, acknowledging the praise for staff who have helped fans out. DR commented that there is still criticism from fans that the club feels understaffed in many areas, DR asked if this would be addressed. SD confirmed he is responsible for implementing the business model agreed with the board, and is accountable to the board for this. The aim is to develop a sustainable business model that sees continued improvement on the pitch and a good service off it; to balance making business improvements, with developing on pitch performance, and improving services to supporters. This is a difficult balance in League One. SD confirmed that there had been some staff recruitment during the season, and there will be further modest recruitment in the next year. The club cannot stand still



and will continue to invest in making the business more effective and efficient.

DR stated that many fans feel the club is understaffed on the customer service side and therefore it's a worry that the current levels of expenditure in this area may be a "false economy" of sorts. Whilst we are in League 1, supporters feel we may need to "speculate to accumulate" in some areas, especially when we see smaller clubs with fully functioning ticket offices etc. JY concurred; behind scenes changes aren't seen, fans see a closed shop and ticket office, and that raises their concerns. SD confirmed KLD is fully supportive of making future improvements and has never turned down any investment that has been put to the board. The club is limited by the capacity for change, not everything can be changed immediately. SD commented that some improvements are better made between seasons.

DR shared a document outlining ticket / shop opening at several clubs; AFC Wimbledon, Shrewsbury & Fleetwood have a club shop that is open daily; Sheffield Wednesday has 2 shops & a megastore. SD had previously shared footfall / revenue figures for the club shop which didn't support longer opening or opening new outlets. SD must decide how the club can best operate within the constraints that exist. The best approach is to focus on a small number of changes at a time and ensure they get fully and properly implemented. This requires a long-term approach. EM believes improved advertising and evening opening hours would encourage fans to buy.

In response to a question from JG about the cancelled Ed Sheeran concert, OC said the unforeseen scheduling conflict is unfortunate, but all ticket holders will be accommodated on the other nights.

MB acknowledged the club's response to fans concerns about potential increased season ticket pricing and commended the club for listening to the fans. SD reiterated that the club does listen to fans and is eternally grateful for their continued support.

2. Identity, Strategy and Vision.

Edelman were engaged to investigate, consult, and obtain clarification from stakeholders on 'Sunderland', what makes Sunderland unique, what does it stand for and where does it want to be in the future. This phase has been completed – stage two has seen Internal and external working groups created to develop the work and map out a delivery and implementation phase which is expected next season. MB asked if there was fan group representation on the external working group. Fans were included in the initial consultation. SD said the working group consists of executive expertise who are committed to making SAFC better, marketing experts, commercial managers, including some that are supporters and/or executive box holders. Dave Jones is a Board representative adding value in this phase.



JY expressed concern over an external consultant company coming to tell us who we are. KS commented that it is sometimes better to get this external view as they can sometimes be more objective. Referencing the previous 'Caring Club' concept, PA asked if with implementation will it consist of bitesize values and behaviors. KS confirmed the working group aims are to bring the values to life. The easy part is identifying who we are and who we want to be, SD thinks the hard part is turning it into something that makes a difference to our club; that we must look forward, respect who we are and who we were, but also who we can become. DR recommended screen testing it with supporters before it goes live. SD confirmed this would be done.

Action

Interim progress on this project to be shared at a future meeting

3. Football

KS believes firm foundations are being created on the footballing side but there is still a long way to go. There has been implementation and clarification of a new organisational structure and a significant change in personnel and processes in pursuit of a fit for purpose operation. Significant investment in people to fill previous vacancies has been made, as well as new roles to improve the club. KS said we are in a period of refining the detail e.g.: job descriptions and this is part of a wider piece of work across the club. We have experienced lots of progression in the Academy to retain category one status and this should not be underestimated considering the position it was in a year ago. The significant progress behind the scenes is pleasing but KS reiterated this is only part of our progress – we must have a winning team.

On performance – KS said: Whilst we have outperformed last season's points total, we have not achieved our core objective (Top 2 finish). We will review appropriately, be tough in our analysis and improve. Overall, we feel we have made progress with our playing identity, but we have not reached the level of consistency required. We continue to make progress on other strategic themes, (i) the average age of our matchday eleven has reduced and we continue to work to achieve greater balance on this and (ii) we have developed value in our playing squad through a structured player recruitment and re-engagement plan. This is key to a sustainable football club.

Across the pathway we have seen pleasing team and individual progress. KS said the U15 team winning the Northern section of the PL Floodlit Cup was a great achievement for the club. U18 and U23 performances were more closely aligned to our football identity and we have seen more younger players involved around the U23 and First-Team squads. Many players, at all levels have also received international recognition which is nice feedback on the quality of players we have at AoL.



In interviews, Alex Neil says he only looks at the next game, JY asked how much say AN will have on recruitment. KS stated that club have a method of operating that's been well documented in previous meetings. The player recruitment model is there to support the Head Coach, not to restrict him, and we also want our Head Coach to help evolve our working practices. We will never sign a player who the coach does not want. As AN is garnering interest from other clubs and it was suggested he may not fit SAFC, EM asked if he would be given a longer contract. KS believes it is difficult to dispel rumors that AN doesn't fit as he quite clearly does and our recent record would suggest this. The intention of our working practices is to maximise skills and collaboration across the club for the benefit of the club.

PP asked if it was a 12-month rolling contract. SD replied this is a common practice for most senior business positions. OC added that AN had a similar contract at Preston North End.

In terms of next steps, KS and the footballing team continue to work on developing clarity on the football identity, creating an efficient system, including budgeting and developing the squad. The player retention and release processes is complete for the younger players. This will be completed for the first team at end of the season. Facility renovation and development, including a full gym refurbishment and some restructuring, is planned for the AoL.

DR asked how confident the club was about retaining our better performing players. KS believes the club has done all they can to protect the club and mitigate risk through appropriate contract structuring. From the squad approximately 70% of players from the top 13 players based on accumulated minutes over the season are under contract for next season. We are in a strong position going into the summer.

In response to a question from DR about two plans for next season, KS confirmed there were and in many respects, they cross over as SAFC are in a unique position to compete for players who also have Championship interest. We will continue to seek improvement.

JH wondered if academy tours for fans would be possible during the close season. KS revealed the club intends to hold some open training sessions next season and that, post-covid, tours can start again. AC commented that a girls' youth team is coming to watch the ladies team train at the Academy and will get a tour of the stadium.

DR asked for an extra fan group meeting, possibly with KLD in attendance, to discuss next season after we know which league we will be in. SD agreed in principle that KLD could attend one meeting per annum but stated it would be dependent on schedules & commitments.



4. Sunderland Ladies

AC thanked everyone for the invitation to attend. It has been an evolving piece of work to establish the women's team's position in the club. AC thanked supporters for all the support, including the BLC, this season's shirt sleeve sponsor.

SAFC Ladies have a rich talent centre, and the aim is to get back to the levels of past glories. Football operations, creating a world class environment and having the funds to support this, is important. The team will be called SAFC Women next season, and this will give the team an opportunity to rebrand. The One Club mentality, training at academy, playing at Stadium of Light is connecting the team across the club, particularly the coaching staff who are fully embedded. Covid and league restrictions haven't helped raise the profile of the team. Youth team interaction hasn't been possible up until now; flag bearers and mascots are now allowed; Season card holders and U14s getting in for free has helped. Challenges with parking at Eppleton are being addressed and streaming is being trialed on Sunday 1 May. The aim is to make the team inclusive and accessible. SAFC are receptive to any ideas that engage fans. If 1% of season ticket holders of the men's team attended a Ladies' game, it would make a huge difference.

AC has 5 strategic aims: Financial sustainability & maximisation of revenue opportunities, Local recruitment and promotion of young players, embracing data and technology, player and coach development & community engagement and supporter experience. The aim is to improve the matchday experience, making attendance easy and accessible. The Club identity is to be bold, creative, industrious; a no fear culture, where players and coaches learn from mistakes and become better.

An important part of the strategy is train out of the Academy and to showcase games at Stadium of Light, with a possible double header, with the men's team, next season. Regional talent development centres allow players to play for their grass roots club, but this stops at U16. SAFC are introducing an Under 23 team, who will train alongside first team and have their own league programme. U23s will play in showcase games such as the County Cup.

Player acquisition for the Ladies has clear targets for recruitment from the local environment. AC is looking to create something that is fit for purpose, there is work to be done. The Ladies team came into the league late and this created challenges. There must be a clear plan for progression that can't be solved by simply throwing money at the problem.

Players are still part time; they need to develop and there is work to be done. The intention is to spend money on professionalising the workforce, consolidating the first step of the plan, and increasing staff support for the players.

JY commended the club for adding free entry to the Ladies game as part of a men's team season ticket. CR noted the improvement to atmosphere through the addition of flags at the game. AC thanked fans for their patience, particularly at the beginning of the season when there were considerable problems, much has been learnt.



MB agreed a double-header would help promote the ladies' team to the wider fan base. There are considerable practical operational issues to address with both teams playing on the same day, but AC is confident it can be arranged.

EM asked if there were plans to move the Ladies home games to a more accessible venue. Eppleton doesn't meet WSL 1 requirements now, but SAFC are committed to play there for the next 4 years. Both the U23s and Ladies' teams play at Eppleton. SD agreed having a more central venue would increase attendances, the club is not able to move at the moment, but it was a consideration for the future.

RW asked if the ladies' team could be promoted more via the club's social media channels. OC said that during the 2021-22 season, additional resource has been made available to SAFC Ladies to enhance and promote the team – one member of the media and communications department is funded by the Women's FA to attend SAFC Ladies secure greater coverage. However, limited resource can prevent all teams – first team, academy and ladies – being fully covered all the time. Despite criticism this season, SD believes many aspects have improved and staff are in place for next season

AC acknowledged the support given by members of staff across the club to support the Ladies' team.

5. Supporter Services

The ticket office and shop are currently closed through the week, LD acknowledged that the current situation is not ideal, giving no touch point for fans. Work is being carried out behind the scenes to improve this. The shop will be open more often in the future, incorporating both retail and a supporter reception. The shop and ticket office need to be open more frequently. The club will be working with supporters to help evolve new processes, which will help the club become more efficient and effective for supporters. In the future, merchandise may become available in concourse kiosks, rather than use a merchandise cabin.

LD is keen to involve fans on what the supporter services department will look like and how it will be most effective. Current staff are dedicated and motivated to improve services. CR commended staff for excellent service this season especially during the season card renewals.

CR said the phone line remains an issue for fans, the advertised number does not work.

LD agreed this remains an issue as there is now no call centre support. As none of the ticketing companies now offer this service it is difficult to replicate within the club. Some recruitment is planned, based on the learning from the last month of the season.

Email is the best way to get in touch with the ticket office, staff will call back to fans:

ticket.office@safc.com .

CR requested a meeting with LD to discuss branch ticket purchases. LD agreed.

Other businesses end their tours via their club shop, PP asked if there were any infrastructure plans for changes that would facilitate this. LD confirmed there was.

Potential play-offs ticket sales will place considerable pressure on the current ticket office staff, MB asked how concerned LD was that the club could be able to handle it. LD is not concerned; online purchases will be available and there will be extended ticket office opening hours from



Bank Holiday Monday. Season Ticket Holders will be able to have their season ticket activated. LD is confident that everyone will be able to buy a ticket.

Concerns were raised about potential queuing times at the ticket office, LD thinks transaction time should be quicker than for a Season Ticket renewal, so queuing time will be manageable. SD encourages all fans who can, to buy tickets digitally, allowing those who have no other means of buying to buy in person to do so and commended the ticket office staff for the magnificent way they have handled the season ticket renewal process.

If we are in the play offs, SD wants to encourage as many fans as possible to come along. A decision will be made to open the premier concourse in due course. Season Ticket Holders will be able to buy their seat for the play off. Tickets will be priced at £20 and £10 concession EM commended the club for appropriate pricing for play off and believes it will encourage a large attendance. SD believes it is important that football is affordable; the club wants the atmosphere to be as intimidating as possible.

PP asked when away tickets will be available to buy. LD confirmed it would be Monday, in the usual way.

If we draw Sheffield Wednesday demand for away tickets will be huge, PP asked what was in place for this. LD confirmed processes are in place for this.

Next season's kit will be launched at end of June with a caveat on transport delays in the global market. The away kit will be launched as soon as practically possible after that. JY asked about increasing the range of women's wear. Previously there has not been the demand, but LD confirmed that there will be a women's style home shirt next season. AC is keen to get merchandise for SAFC women's team into the store.

6. Match day Experience

SD reported on progress from 10 key items identified in last year's supporter survey. There has been improved quality, choice and pricing for refreshments, including reduced beer and cider prices; Wi-Fi on the concourse and the club is working with the council to create a 5G city centre which will include the Stadium of Light; waiting time at kiosks has been substantially reduced by introducing a cashless system & increasing the number of tills. The introduction of Samson beer has proved very popular, 19,293 pints sold. These improvements have led to an increased revenue per head of 10%.

The Family Zone and the cleanliness of toilets remain issues. All toilets are all cleaned before the game. Behaviour during the game of some fans needs to be addressed.

After some initial teething troubles, turnstile waiting time have reduced. 9% of the crowd enter the stadium up to 1 hour before kick-off, 25% enter up to 30 minutes, 59% enter 30 minutes before & up to kick-off and 6% after kick-off. Peak flow is 10 minutes before kick-off. The volume and clarity of announcements continues to be addressed. Improvements have been tested. Some issues have been resolved, but it remains a work in progress. The aim is for it to be resolved for next season.



The club have tried to address the issues that are important to fans. SD said there is still work to do but progress has been made.

The family zone needs addressing SD said it is a major investment project that will need to be properly planned and funded. Migration into the Roker End remains an issue.

Family activities, such as football coaching and FIFA 22, are currently located in the Fanzone, CW believes these can be developed further in Beacon.

PP raised the general appearance of the stadium and external areas of the stadium. It does not set a good example but could be fixed relatively easily over the close season, fans would be keen to help. SD agreed this would be reviewed.

Category	Topic	Importance average	Satisfaction average	Importance / satisfaction	Review
Catering facilities	Value for Money	3.8	2.1	1.82	Improved pricing and quality and variety of products
Stadium Facilities	Concourse Mobile Signal	3.8	2.4	1.59	Not implemented yet. We are working with the council on various connectivity improvements,
Catering facilities	Waiting time to be served	3.8	2.4	1.58	EPOS system, cashless and increasing the number of tills has all reduced the time to serve
Catering facilities	Quality of Food & Drink	4.0	2.5	1.57	Some improvements for this season and based on experience and feedback we will be reviewing over the summer.
Family Zone	Family Zone Food - Value for Money	3.7	2.5	1.49	See previous comment
Catering facilities	Selection of Food & Drink	3.8	2.6	1.48	Introduced local food and drink suppliers
Stadium Facilities	Provision & Cleanliness of Toilet Facilities	4.2	2.9	1.45	This remains an ongoing issue
Stadium Facilities	Turnstile waiting time & access	4.0	2.9	1.42	The introduction of digital tickets has sped up access once people got used to them.
Matchday	Volume & Clarity of Announcements	4.1	2.9	1.41	We have surveyed on a number of occasions, and tested various improvements, but this isn't fully resolved
Fan Zone	Space & seating to socialise	3.7	2.6	1.39	Not addressed



7. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Update

CW confirmed the EFL Code of Practice submission will be submitted in May.

Kayleigh Tauge has been appointed as Head of HR at the club.

SD taken a commitment to brief the board on Equality, Diversity & Inclusion. Igor Levin has been appointed as an EDI champion on the board.

Sunderland AFC would like to appoint an EDI Champion from the fan groups to represent supporters. This appointment will be made early next season.

8. Review of Actions from 2021/22 Season Meetings

06/10/21

1. CW to report back on processes and experience of ticket purchases for Fleetwood Town away tickets
Action complete.
Error has been fixed with Ticket Master.
2. BLC to work with ML on publicising and supporting fan use of the Sunderland City card
Group agreed that the Sunderland City card wouldn't be suitable as you can't top the card up with more funds.
3. SD to raise the responsibility for Equality, Inclusion and Diversity at the next board meeting
Action complete.
4. RAWA will provide CW with a paper to develop & regenerate the Roker End flag display
RAWA continuing to work with the club to enhance the flag display
5. RAWA to work with club on My Club, My Shirt campaign
RAWA to revisit this idea next season

30/11/21

1. SD to send official feedback from the board meeting on SAFC thoughts on this topic
Action complete.
2. SD to look at call drop off rates for next meeting
Action complete.
3. CW to put information out to fans on locations and the process of defibrillators
Action complete
4. Club to raise the issue of closing roads around the Stadium at the next SAG
Action complete

16/02/22

1. KLD will attend the next Supporter Collective meeting
Action complete



2. SD to present Edelman research to the group at the next meeting
Action complete
3. SD to see supporter input in delivering the best possible service for the ticket office
Action ongoing and the club will work with the fan groups over the Summer
4. Club to have one telephone number to improve front line response
Action to be completed in June
5. Review the number of direct debit payments on offer for season card holders
Action complete, it wasn't possible to add more DD payment dates
6. Alex Clark to attend next meeting
Action complete
7. Club to look at ways to improve Sunderland Ladies attendance
Action ongoing
8. Can Sunderland Ladies games be streamed in the future?
Action complete
9. Update on return of mascots
Action complete
10. Migration issues in Roker End, further meeting on Roker End with Steve Neill
Next meeting to take place in July

03/03/22

1. Club to review season card prices for the 2022/23 campaign after fan groups recommended a price freeze
Action complete
2. Full check of the tannoy system at the Stadium of Light
Action ongoing, full test on tannoy has taken place. Need to look at next steps.
3. Use the away kit at a home fixture to support Ukraine
Action complete

9. AOB

CW confirmed Black Cats Points are not being abolished and will work with Ticketmaster on their use.

When asked about the medical emergency at the Rotherham game, SD confirmed the individual was in hospital recovering. After a series of medical emergencies including one at the Stadium of Light during the Burton game, the EFL issued new guidelines determining when a match should / should not be stopped. At the Rotherham game, the referee & the 4th official were informed and agreed that, in line with EFL protocols, the game should not be stopped on this occasion.

Seagulls in the Stadium were notable at the Rotherham game. During lockdown a hawk nested in the stadium and got rid of the seagulls. In the past a Hawk has been used to discourage the seagulls and this would be looked at again.

CW confirmed details of the position of defibrillators can be found in the match day guide information section of the website - <https://www.safc.com/matchday/matchday-guide>.



Supporter Collective Meeting

EM asked if a concession travel pass could be reintroduced. CW is hoping to reestablish a partnership with Stagecoach again. The previous partnerships provided free child travel with a paying adult.

EM asked about the prospects of restarting a junior supporters club. It is long term project for the club, but SD wants to do it well and for it to be properly resourced.

MB thanked SAFC staff for their efforts and recognised the challenges they have faced this season, acknowledging the value of these meetings and the club's commitment to them. SD & KS agreed they are important to the club.