

Meeting – 24th October 2023 5pm to 6.45pm – Fan Advisory Board and BHAFC

Attendees

BHAFC – Paul Barber, Sarah Gould, Jenny Gower

FAB - Gill Martin, Allison Brett, Niraj Haria, Clive Steed, Nigel Summers, Gerry Brown, Andy Goodchild, Jo Davis, Charlie Benny

Location: Amex Stadium

Welcome and Introductions

Paul opened the meeting by welcoming the FAB members and everyone present introduced themselves as this was the first meeting attended by the four new members of the FAB.

Communications

The meeting started with an overview from Paul on his thoughts around FAB. He said that he does not believe that BHAFC needs a FAB as there is already great communication via many fan forums and email responses to fans, however it is positive to have the FAB in place and trust and confidentiality are key. As the FAB are aware, football related matters such as VAR are not for discussion. Matters such as catering can be discussed but there must be no interference with commercial relationships such as that with Sodexo and all such discussions must go via the Club. Gill mentioned that where the Club and FAB have communicated in a structured way this has gone well.

Paul then detailed at length the issues that affect catering service in the stadium and why some of them cannot be fixed. One of the main reasons why availability is not 100% in all areas is the lack of storage and narrow concourses which make stock replenishment impossible if unexpectedly high sales on a particular day cause items to sell out. Food and drink stock levels are designed to sell out and reduce waste. It is an unreasonable expectation for catering to be perfect at the start of the season i.e. first 6-8 weeks. Sodexo are working with the Club to improve revenue and they are transparent about mistakes and rectify them e.g. replacing your burger if necessary. The staffing issues are caused by lack of availability early in the season and locally there are acute staff shortages and Sodexo can only offer work fortnightly compared to regular work offered in other hospitality businesses in the area. The proposed Fanzone will give more options and enable greater stock storage and a spread of demand.

Paul made the point that when the football is going well, other issues come to the fore and it is important not to get fixated on them and have some perspective. It is expected that the Fanzone will help flex demand and give all round value as it will be an indoor and outdoor space, taking pressure off the stadium counters and kiosks.

Some details were shared of the proposed Fanzone which is due to open Summer 2024 – these are to be published in the programme for the Fulham game. There is an expectation that the outcome will be transformational - improving match day experience for fans in terms of catering and entertainment and a consequence will be reduced pressure on the transport network as well as demand is spread. Once the new Fanzone has been up and running for a while a view will be taken on what other existing facilities will remain open after the game – with flow of people (safety) and access to the station being key factors in this decision.

The FAB will be tasked with seeking fan input and feedback on the proposals once made public – on what is to be included in the zone and how the zone will be used.

Charlie mentioned that the FAB are aware that our job is not to try and fix day to day problems e.g. with catering but to support the Club on strategic issues.

Gerry said that the FAB are keen to set up webinars to gather input from fans.

Jenny stated that she felt this was a missing area – for FAB to gain more input, representative of more of the 32,000+ fans.

Paul reiterated that BHAFC now has a global fanbase and although it is challenging, we need to find better ways to gain feedback and identify trends.

Jenny reminded the FAB members that they are not able to speak on behalf of the Club.

Sarah mentioned that Everton's FAB have a weekly session on X to reach out to their fans.

Women's Game

Paul explained that the Amex is built and designed for male athletes e.g. showers/ toilet cubicles and the fan numbers of around 7,000 mean the Club loses money and the atmosphere is not ideal. The pitch can also be advantageous for the opposing team. A solution is needed which bridges the gap between Crawley and the Amex. Plans are underway which Paul shared with the FAB.

Paul also explained that the Club have a long-term strategy to build on the success of the women, this entails using the money wisely – investing in the training ground and the right staff first and now looking to invest in the stadium.

Jo stated that the FAB want to support the Club with their plans so that the fans can provide the best support for the team, with good fan experiences helping to maximise attendance.

Paul then left the meeting after thanking the FAB members for giving up their time and saying that their input is valuable and appreciated.

Disabled Supporters Association

Niraj and Charlie have started work on this and aim to launch it in March 24. Sarah said that she is very pleased the fan led group is now coming to fruition and supports it fully. Accessibility audits are useful but feedback from fans is invaluable and can lead to really good improvements for fans e.g. the railings in Upper East.

Sarah said that following Niraj's observation that Park and Ride buses only have one wheelchair space, which can cause delays if more than one wheelchair user is waiting, she has worked with the bus company who are now introducing new fleet with two spaces available. She felt that this was a positive example of the FAB enhancing fan experience.

FAB Strategic Areas for 2023/2024

A discussion then followed on the strategic areas of focus for the FAB over the next year and the following items were agreed:

Women's Game – Working Group to be set up – Jo to lead.

Travel Review – Already underway.

Fan Experience – Working Group to be set up. To include Fanzone input.

Disabled Supporters Association – To be launched March 24 – Niraj to lead with Charlie.

Fan's Voice – New ways of gathering input on all strategic areas – Matchday/Webinars etc.

JG/SG fully support these areas of focus. We also need to think about how success will be measured.

FAB to review next steps / project plans at next weekly meeting. The FAB will also create an article for inclusion in the programme which will outline our strategic objectives and plans for the year ahead.

A photo of the new FAB group to be arranged by JG.

FAB Annual Report

Clive raised the idea that the FAB would like to issue an Annual Report. Jenny suggested that this was undertaken as part of the Fan Engagement Standard. The Board presentation that Gill and Clive have prepared may be used as a basis for this.

Meeting Conclusion

The group agreed that after almost 18 months of finding our feet some great progress has been achieved already and with the new strategic objectives giving clarity on areas the FAB should focus on, we all feel very positive about the way forward.