

Birmingham City Football Club
Disabled Supporters Forum: 18th November 2017

Location: Changing Rooms Bar (11:30am)

BCFC Chairs: Rachele Johnson (Customer Service Manager & Supporter Liaison Officer), Amir Javaid (Ticketing Manager/Disability Co-ordinator) and Simon Hall (Matchday Disability Liaison Officer).

Agenda:

1. Introductions
2. Ticketing
3. Marketing
4. Media and Communication
5. Match Days & Facilities
6. AOB

Introductions – Rachele Johnson

RJ started by thanking everyone for attending. She advised that this is the first official disabled supporter's forum run by the Club. The forum will be held twice yearly and will follow the same format at the Quarterly Supporter's Forums held for supporter's groups. Questions will be submitted prior to the meeting and answers will be supplied by Heads of Department.

Introduced herself Customer Service Manager & SLO, Amir Javaid Ticketing Manager & Disability Coordinator and Simon Hall Matchday Disability Liaison Officer.



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RJ also advised that whilst we can answer some questions relating to away days, we unfortunately have a lack of control at away grounds. We can make a strong recommendation following feedback however, it is down to the away ground to make their final decision.

Ticketing

- Why are ambulant fans put with wheelchair users on away days as it takes up their spaces?

Bit of ambiguity as to whether the question should read why “aren’t” ambulant fans put with wheelchair users or whether it relates to coach travel.

AJ: Not sure if regarding coach or match tickets so I’ll answer both. In regard to match tickets at an away game – the final choice is with the supporter. If the supporter wishes to sit somewhere away from the wheelchair fans we will accommodate that. It also depends on the allocation that the away Club sends to us, but the final decision is down to the supporter with what seats we have available. We will accommodate as best we can with the availability we have been provided.

In regard to the coaches, we have a 47-seater coach for the Accessible Coach. If, for example, the demand isn’t there for the Accessible Coach like Middlesbrough (22nd Nov) – if we sell out of seats on the other coaches, we will then sell on the Accessible Coach to non-disabled supporters.

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- Every season we get a letter from the Club regarding parking for disabled supporters. I understand that it is limited and has to be allocated accordingly. My father is too old to claim PIP so receives an attendance allowance and this isn't taken into account and we haven't had a letter stating we've been unsuccessful.

AJ: Attendance Allowance is included as part of the application, anyone who couldn't apply for DLA or PIP due to age was considered if they received an Attendance Allowance. In regard to not receiving a letter stating they've been unsuccessful they should have received one as we thought we'd replied to everyone who had applied for a parking space so apologies if someone was missed.

A supporter then asked a follow up stating shouldn't we prioritise parking spaces for people in a wheelchair – there are some supporters who can walk who have a space and wheelchair users deserve it more.

AJ: Before making the decision to implement the new parking policy for disabled supporters we consulted with the DRC and with other Clubs to ensure we were allocating parking spaces as fairly as possible. We're not the medical experts so we have taken the advice of those who are aware.

RJ: We aren't medical experts, so we sat down from February until the start of the season with different organisations and the decision wasn't taken lightly. If there are complaints we will look and see if there needs to be a review of policy however, this policy is in place for the remainder of this season.

- My seats are in Block 30, two before the end which I am OK with, but it is difficult to get to sometimes. It would be good if the end/aisle seats were prioritised for disabled supporters.

AJ: We have seats available in other blocks in aisle seats (such as 38) but unfortunately those in Block 30 (a popular block) are already taken by Season Ticket Holders and are sold on a first-come, first-serve basis.

Marketing

- How come they never seem to pick near the Kop Corner at half time. It always seems to be the Paddocks and the Tilton End and I feel it's not fair. Everybody should get a chance to win a prize or at least go onto the pitch.

RJ: I spoke to the Marketing Manager and one of the main reasons that this happens is time constraints – there's former player interviews, presentations etc. that all need to be done in a certain time frame. There is a small window in which they set up the goal for the 888 challenge, get the supporter down from the stands and the competition is played. The Marketing Manager advised that they will look into getting a member of the Marketing Department when the half-time whistle into different areas of the ground and randomly selecting a supporter to take part in the competition. So that should provide a more varied mix of competitors from different stands.

Media and Communication

- Can the audio/sound system be raised so it is a bit louder? It is very difficult to hear it in the Main Stand and it seems recently that it has quietened down considerably.

RJ: I went to Marketing/Media for an answer to this and it seems as though the music has had to be turned down for Health & Safety reasons because the stewards and Police couldn't hear on the radios. In regard to the general speaking, as far as the Media team are aware this shouldn't have quietened down as it is kept on the same level, but they will monitor this.

Supporter also advised that they struggle to hear in the Gil Merrick as well.

Match Day and Facilities

- Is it possible for the disabled coach users to have their bags searched once they are on the coach and seated rather than having to stand around? Away days can be long for some supporters so extra standing around just adds to the difficulty.

RJ: The Safety Officer is sympathetic however, boarding a coach before having your bags checked unfortunately defeats the object as it is a safety measure.

A supporter then advised that the disabled supporters have to wait around before boarding the coach so requested that the Accessible Coach boards first. **AJ** to follow up on the possibility of this.

- We were moved from the East to West Paddocks however, it is less than ideal for ambulant supporters owing to the number of steps. I know there is a ramp but there is still a lot of steps to our seats. Would it be feasible to have a dedicated disabled supporters section somewhere more suitable?

RJ: Operations Director and Safety Officer have advised that there are areas where there are few steps to get to the seats – Block 36 and 38 of the Kop, the top of the Tilton to name a few examples. We do try and accommodate ambulant supporters who can sit anywhere in the ground – providing aisle seats where available, the back 2 rows of a block have extra leg room. In regard to Main Stand unless there was redevelopment of the whole stand it isn't something we can really do.

AJ: If a supporter does have a specific request and needs help if they contact the Ticket Office we can accommodate as best as possible.

- The use of a hearing loop system would be a nice feature to have in the stadium. Do the Club have this, or could it be installed?

RJ: We have a hearing loop system installed in the ground. You need to book prior to arrival through the Ticket Office, Club shop and Reception. We also have headsets too.



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- The surface at the top of Tilton Road entrance (4) is very slippery. I am unable to bend my ankles, so my foot goes down heel first and I have to hang on tight to my carer.

RJ: Safety Officer and Operations Director have advised that this hasn't been brought to their attention before as a consistent issue so thank you for bringing it to our attention and it will be monitored.

Supporter advised that walkway in front of Block 5 is very slippery too.

RJ to take this feedback to Ops Director to see if there is anything that can be done.

- Is there a possibility of hand rails down the steps to the seats rows. I have to hang on tight to my carer in case I fall and on leaving my seat I have to hold onto each seat in order to maintain balance.

RJ: Safety Officer advised that hand rails would impede evacuation so unfortunately it isn't something we'd be able to introduce.

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AOB

- Is there a way that wheelchair users can be given capes so when it rains they're not getting soaked?
RJ will take it to Head of Retail to see if there's a possibility.
- Able-bodied supporters are using the lift in the Gil Merrick after final whistle meaning wheelchair users are having to wait sometimes up to 20 minutes to leave.
RJ will speak to the Safety Officer to see if a steward can be placed in that area to ensure all wheelchair users are gone before able-bodied supporters use it. Maybe put a time limit of 15 minutes where solely wheelchair users can access the lift or maybe issue lift passes.
- Gil Merrick lower toilet doesn't stay up – the safety bar at the back is too far forward.
RJ to report back to the Operations Director.
- Is Simon can't make a match, who will be acting as DLO?
AJ advised he will make arrangements if that instance ever occurred.
- A supporter advised they hadn't seen the "Accessible Stewards" with separate coloured coats on even though they had been advertised.
RJ will check it as they should be in place.
SH advised there are some in the Kop and Tilton.
RJ advised she will ensure this is followed up and that stewards based in the disabled area are wearing the specific coats.



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- 10 minutes before the end of the game there are no stewards in the Upper Gil Merrick to supervise disabled fans.
RJ will feed back to Safety Officer. K2 should be covering that area when BCFC stewards go down pitch side before final whistle.

RJ ended with thanks for coming and advised that we will be organising a Christmas Party and details will follow.

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