

# STOCKPORT COUNTY SUPPORTERS' CO-OPERATIVE

## Agenda

held on Wednesday 3 May 2023 at Edgeley Park

commencing at 6pm

### ATTENDANCE

**Present (SCSC):** Pete Towey (Chair), Ian Brown, Caroline Burt (Independent Secretary), Simon Dawson, John Giles, Dave Marchbank, Paul Thompson and Callum Walmsley

**Present (SCFC):** Steve Bellis (Club President), Tom Mahon (Chief Operating Officer) and Liam Richardson (Media Executive) and Jonathan Vaughan (Chief Executive Officer)

**The Co-op would like to place on record our thanks to the Club for helping with the project to commission a statue of Danny Bergara. Mark Stott for donating £10,000, Steve Bellis for helping with fundraising and Rick Simkin and Tom Mahon, Jonathan Vaughan and David Ancell for helping with logistics.**

### Ticketing

1. Are the Club looking to continue with the existing ticket system for next season?
  - a) Can issues with the system crashing when tickets that are high in demand be resolved?

We will be continuing with Future Ticketing for the 23/24 season. Tom Mahon has worked with many different systems during his time at Man City and they all have pros and cons. Other Clubs have also started moving over to Future Ticketing, such as Wigan and Preston, so they are growing their market share.

We are constantly looking at making improvements – it shouldn't be crashing anymore, and a queuing system has been installed.

There are several KPI's that have been put in place and if these are not met, we will start looking for an alternative provider.

- b) A main season ticket holder, with multiple season ticket holders on their account can only purchase away tickets once, even if their allocation isn't fully taken. Can this be resolved?
  - c) Season ticket holders purchasing away tickets are automatically locked out of purchasing away travel. Can this be resolved?

One development point being worked on is to allow each individual season ticket to have its own account, even if it is linked with other family members. That way, if someone has 4 season tickets on one account, but only buys two tickets for an away game, they can go back and order another one at a later date if needs be. This hasn't previously been possible.

This would also solve the problem of purchasing away travel. The intention is to roll this out prior to next season.

2. Is it possible for the club to consider a loyalty scheme for tickets? Allow more frequent attendees to purchase tickets ahead of open sale but avoid locking younger / new supporters from the scheme.

The challenge with this is how to backdate loyalty? No scheme will please everyone. Season ticket holders take priority at the moment before tickets go on open sale, and so far this season, there have been tickets available after the priority window closes - with the exception of Leyton Orient.

It is a situation we will continue to monitor.

3. Could the club offer a next day/recorded delivery option when buying tickets? Obviously, it would cost fans the additional postage charge, but it would give us reassurance and peace of mind.

A next day service would not be feasible due to the turnaround time in issuing tickets, but a 48-hour option will be considered for next season.

4. County have 'sold out' a number of home games this season. It is apparent though that there are many unoccupied seats at these 'sold out' games and one of the reasons for this is the fact that not all season ticket holders are able to attend every game. Could the club introduce a scheme where season ticket holders can surrender their seat to the ticket office for any games they can't attend, so that these otherwise empty seats can be re-sold to other fans?

It is something we can look at, but we need to find a more effective way of operating it rather than have people come to the ticket office. Once the development point outlined in question 1c is implemented, you could transfer your ticket to someone else electronically.

We could also look at running non scan reports on season tickets to find out where there are gaps and to investigate why. The Club are aware that there is an issue with some free under 5's season ticket not being utilised.

5. Can you share any details on what ST / match-day prices will look like for next year?

We expect to announce next season ticket pricing at the end of May.

6. Will there be an early bird period and if so when will this likely be open from and how long will it last?

There will be a renewal period for current season ticket holders, then the window will open for new season tickets.

7. Have any considerations been made to help with the cost-of-living crisis for people who might not be able to afford the cost of a ST in one payment?

We have looked at a number of third-party providers, but as yet we are not happy with the service they provide or the approach that they take to recover debt. We aren't happy with any of them.

The only other alternative would be to try and operate it in-house which could potentially involve the chasing of 5,000 direct debit payments and with the associated manpower that would involve, it isn't really feasible.

However this is something we will continue to look at.

8. Can the Club update us on the status of the free tickets for schools' scheme? How many tickets are allocated to schools per game? How long remains on the sponsorship deal with Together?

There have been games this season where over 300 free tickets were given to schools. However, we have seen a relatively high no show rate. We will continue to hand out tickets but need to find a way to improve the no show rate. We need to look at this on a school-by-school basis as we don't want to penalise the schools who are turning up.

There is a rolling 1 year sponsorship deal in place with Together.

We are trying to be more creative in finding ways to engage with people in the area.

9. Could the Club consider inviting junior football clubs to games where there are traditionally lower attendances - for example games at the start of the season and midweek games?

The Club are committed to supporting local junior football clubs and have just launched a new £50,000 grassroots football fund to support both male and female clubs across the borough. The Club are also looking at setting up a "County Cup" for Junior Football. This scheme has been very well received and has had a positive reaction on social media.

*(the Co-op congratulated the Club on their initiative to help grass roots football)*

### **Away Travel**

10. Will the club continue to run coaches for away matches next season? What feedback have fans provided (i.e. cost compared to other coaches / comfort stops)?

We've been very happy with the uptake and feedback has been positive so far. The intention is to continue to run coaches as and when required.

The first team funded a coach to Carlisle and Beeline funded a 2nd coach to recognise the efforts of the fans throughout the season.

### **Finances**

11. In view of the fact that the recent £7.7M debt/equity conversion relates to an inter-company debt, can the Directors give us an indication whether there is any intention to convert the third party debt currently being carried by the companies that actually own the club, namely Newco Stockport A which owes £3.1M (at the 31.12.21) and Select Group International Limited which owes £12.1M (at the 31.12.21.) to equity?

If there is no intention to convert these debts, can the Directors please give an assurance that there are sufficient non-club assets that are available to satisfy these debts should they need repaying?

These two companies are not part of the Club, The Club does not report for other entities in the wider group structure.

12. Previously, in answering a similar question, the Directors stated that the above companies 'are not part of the club' and would therefore not provide details of the debtor/creditor balances. On the basis that these companies own the club, it is important for supporters to understand the potential implications for the club if these debts cannot be repaid within the wider group structure, especially when you consider that Select Group International Limited currently has 2 outstanding legal charges.

Mark Stott owns multiple companies across various different industries, the companies mentioned here are not part of the football club.

Mark remains committed to convert debt to equity.

## Edgeley Park

13. Will there be any further fans consultations regarding the stadium expansion?

Have planning applications been submitted for any of the ground re-development as yet? If not when is this likely to happen?

What difference, if any, will what division we are in next season make to the timescales of the developments?

There will be a public consultation exercise when we are ready, which would include everyone in the area, including the fans.

We are still looking at a number of design options and we are yet to lock down the final design. We would expect the planning application to be submitted in Q3 or Q4 of this year. The build period is expected to be around 16 months, so it isn't crucial that works start in the close season.

There are multiple factors that need to be considered before we commence the building works: establishing ourselves in League 1, Consistently selling out at Edgeley Park, and securing some external funding.

The first stage of the redevelopment will be the Railway End.

14. With the higher attendances and possible reduced capacity when works begin can we please have the seat numbers re-instated where they are missing?

We will definitely have a look at this in the closed season. We believe this was done a couple of years ago, but the quality of the numbering was poor.

15. Would it be possible to create a covered area for the Co-op so we can meet supporters on a match day? Possibly the grassy knoll or the Courtyard?

As improvements made to the stadium, the available space changes. We will work with the Co-op to find somewhere suitable.

*(the Club agreed to meet up with some Co-op representatives at the next match to see if they could find a workable space)*

16. The men's toilet block in the Main Stand now gets very congested. Furthermore, the layout is very poor with a small entrance / exit with the sinks & users causing an obstruction. Could the club look at improvements in this situation for next season?

We are hindered in that stand trying to maximise the space that is available. We will have a look at the format though.

17. Service at the main bar in the Cheadle End is incredibly slow. Can drinks be pre-poured in advance?

We can certainly look at it, but pre pouring relies on hitting the sweet spot – no-one wants a flat pint!

The Courtyard has helped eased congestion and we are always looking at ways of improving the service – we have recently installed a new self-serve beer tap by a start-up company in Stockport. Admittedly, it only provides one choice of beer at the moment, but if this works, we can look at introducing more varieties.

We are also looking at technology that will let us know when there is only 5 pints left in the barrel so you can get ready to change it before it runs out.

We will continue to trial things to improve efficiency.

18. The Club discussed potentially holding back away fans for 15 minutes for games where trouble was likely. Can the Club provide an update?

This directive would come from the Police who we meet twice before every home game. They determine the strategy, and we haven't had a Category A match recently. Anything outside of the footprint of the ground is in the hands of the Police.

The new compound for coaches has been introduced along with the egress for away fans to use to access the away end to reduce flashpoints.

### **Training Ground**

19. Is it still the goal of the club to have a training facility in Stockport? Have any potential sites been identified? When is work expected to start on this?

This is still a medium-term goal. Land in the Stockport Borough is quite scarce and at a premium. The stadium takes priority, and everything needs to happen in phases.

Planning and funding would need to be put in place. The Club regularly speak with SMBC.

In terms of requirements, six to eight pitches would be needed. Structures to deliver benefits to the community with a large educational offering would be required to help access funding.

*(Fleetwood was highlighted as a good model with an elite training facility, academy and restaurants on site)*

### **Player Sponsorship**

20. Player sponsorship is not good value for money now. It used to include two tickets to the end of season awards dinner (which was a proper sit-down event), name read out by Ken when the player scored or was MotM etc - now it's pretty much £300 for just a shirt. Why did the end of season awards get removed from player sponsorship package? And will the club introduce a limit on number of sponsorships an individual can hold in one season to avoid a situation where one person has 7/8 players at a time. If demand is so high that we are selling out, surely it is fair to limit the number one person can have.

We will always take feedback on board. Sponsors receive their name featured on the scoreboard if their chosen player scores or is man of the match, their name mentioned on social media posts as well as receiving a shirt.

It is hard to organise a successful end of season awards dinner when you don't know when the season is going to end.

### **Replica Shirts**

21. What measures are being taken to ensure that Puma / logistics don't make the same mistake with the kit shipments next season

Sales have been brilliant this year and we were not the only Club impacted by the shipment issues. The shirt order has been increased for next season in anticipation of increased demand.

22. Has the Club considered having at least one of the shirts have a two-season lifetime?

The one season shirt is a standard operating model and previous research suggests that this works. Parents have indicated that they want new kits every season as the old ones are wrecked by the end of the season!

We are focusing on making sure the shirts are affordable, rather than adopting a 2-season model.

### **Events**

23. Is it possible for the Club and Co-op to host a dual-branded fans forum, with some player representation, either at season close (if we have been successful) or pre-season?

Will the club commit to a minimum of two fans forums during the 2023/24 season and then continue with this each subsequent season?

The next Fans Forum will be at the start of next season, and we would look to committing to doing this every year.

24. Would it be possible for the Co-op to hold an event at Stockport Gin, with players in attendance?

The Club can look at this if the Co-op can put a proposal is put together.

### **GENERAL FEEDBACK**

The Club are to be congratulated on the following:

- installation of a quality covered cycle rack in the new car park.
- The Courtyard has had a very positive impact on the match day experience.
- installation of stairway supports in the Main stand - very useful for some of the more physical challenged spectators