



**SARACENS**

## SARACENS SUPPORTERS' FORUM

TUESDAY 11TH DECEMBER 18H30 – 21H00 - **MINUTES**

### ATTENDEES

- / **Lucy Wray** – Group Chairperson, Premier Team Promotions (LW)\*
- / **Tim Hunt** – CEO, Premier Team Promotions (TH)
- / **Mitesh Velani** – CEO, Saracens Ltd (MV)
- / **Gordon Banks** – Chief Community Officer, Saracens Ltd (GB)
- / **Alex Gummer** – Marketing Director, Saracens Ltd (AG)
- / **Clare Ludlow** – Marketing Manager, Saracens Ltd (CL)
- / **Alice Spicer** – Head of Ticketing, Saracens Ltd (AS)
- / **Amanda Docherty** – Communications Consultant (AD)
  
- / **Steve Cummins** – East Stand (SC)
- / **Dean Harris** – South Stand (DH)
- / **Debbie Knight** – West Upper (DK)
- / **Gavin Jones** – Hospitality (GJ)
- / **Denis Collen** – BAME Supporters (DC)
- / **Helen Ellis** – Disabled Supporters (HE)
- / **Steve Cracknell** – Local Supporters (SC)
- / **Lesley Mayo** – Over 65s Supporters (LM)
- / **Emma Southam** – U25s Supporters (ES)
- / **James Degiorgio** – Partner Clubs (JD)
- / **Katherine Engler** – Women's Representative (KE)
- / **Alun Morgan** – Saracens Supporters Association Representative (AM)

\*LW present for initial meet and greet

### APOLOGIES

- / **Brian Levin** – North Stand
- / **Luke Saint** – Sarries On Tour Representative
- / **Jasmine Farrant** – West Lower

### AGENDA ITEMS

#### 1. Introductions, thank yous and ways of working

All attendees were asked to introduce themselves to the group and explain their connection to/history with the club.

TH highlighted the intention for meetings going forward, namely, to create meaningful discussion around key issues that affect the club and to help make decisions which will be invaluable to the club and its future sustainability. This will not be a forum designed to pay lip service to fans and their views, but will have real meaning and value.

TH called for the meeting to occur quarterly and for the group to elect a chair to manage the flow of communication. The group decided the suitable person for the position would be Katherine Engler with James Degiorgio as deputy.

CL noted that each attendee would be responsible for a certain area of the ground. She highlighted the importance of this as there will be a function on the website available to supporters to voice their opinions and raise any concerns to relevant members. TH highlighted the need to manage this carefully to avoid an overload of e-mails.

*Action: CL and AG to look into controlling management of emails to members and to define confidential matters prior to the new function being installed on the website*

## **2. An update on West Stand plans**

MV provided an overview of the West Stand progress as follows:

- Physical construction to commence in August 2019
- Main construction phase over a 52-week period
- Delivery of West Stand in August 2020
- Current Season Ticket Holders (STH) to move to 1300 seated area in the West Stand (covered) or option to move to other parts of the ground
- During construction there will be a temporary village inclusive of facilities on the P3 car park
- Capacity reducing to c.8,500 seats with the opportunity to add more temporary seats if and when required

DK commenced discussions by asking what priority has been given to groups that have formed over a number of years and that would be relocated during the construction phase. AS confirmed that she was in communication with season ticket holders and will cater to their needs during this phase. She added that she is looking to hold STH meetings to ensure that everyone is fully accommodated and listened to throughout the process. TH further emphasised that there should not be undue concern around this as there are currently c.400 STH in the West stand and the temporary West Stand during construction will comprise c.1300 seats.

JD questioned the continuation of festivals throughout the build. TH stated the intention to continue to host festivals but that they will be allocated to certain games most suitable for festivals. He reiterated that decision making factors were not based around finance but guest value and growing an audience.

GJ questioned whether there was a first come, first served basis for STH including a pot available to bring guests to games. AM added that this has been done at Leicester where STH have an opportunity to sacrifice their tickets for friends. AS commented that this is only facilitated when asked. TH supported this and would like this to go ahead but emphasised the need for it to be time limited to enable unused guest allocations to go on general sale.

*Action: AS to look into the opportunity for STH to pass on their tickets as well as purchase from an allocation of tickets for guests.*

GJ questioned the restrictions of standing tickets once building is complete. GB commented that standing space will be gained. TH added that there could be more standing space in the corners of the ground for certain games. DC highlighted Saracens' unique selling proposition of the ability to navigate around the ground easily during a match. He voiced his concern of losing this during the transition phase. MV stated that the flow of people won't change.

### **3. Matchday Experience**

TH stated the desire to develop the matchday experience and create an environment where everyone is entertained pre and post-game so they can't wait to arrive and don't want to leave. He added that the goal is to create vibrant and integrated areas around the site which are fun and invite people to mingle.

HE touched on a personal matter whereby she would find an increase in crowds overwhelming. She added that all groups need to be considered for matchday experience. GB confirmed that would be taken into account. GJ suggested a quiet space within the West Stand to accommodate for this.

LM raised her concerns around the Olympic Bar space. She noted that during bad weather conditions and festival days it is overly crowded and the musicians in the area cannot be heard. AM supported this and stated that he feels the crowd is growing. DC suggested filling spaces in the corners of the ground with marquees to free up space within the Olympic Bar.

DC stated a health and safety issue with the C entrance which can only be accessible on gravel providing difficulty for supporters in wheelchairs. TH confirmed that this matter will be looked into.

*Action: TH and MV to look into accessibility of C entrance.*

JD highlighted the need to make the experience more attractive to families and children in particular by creating hooks. He touched on his personal highlight of being able to take his children onto the ground post-match. AM suggested using the players to increase the crowd numbers before and after the game. KE further voiced the costly expenditure of arriving two hours earlier to the game and suggested offering free items for kids and adults.

DC highlighted the need to tap into the wider community as nearby clubs aren't currently supporting Saracens' which could increase crowd numbers. TH highlighted that this was being looked into and flags were recently put up as a first step in a programme of measures aimed at increasing awareness around the community.

ES spoke of her matchday experience being dampened due to the difficulty of getting transport to and from the ground. She highlighted many issues with the Shuttle Bus. DC added that the bus is invisible within a crowd and called for it to be made more obvious. ES further stated that it often does not arrive on time and communication is poor.

*Action: To look at transportation and review the Shuttle Bus to improve service and make routes and stops more clearly signposted/communicated*

GJ suggested that the stadium should operate on a one-way system to make travelling easier. MV stated that he was in communication with Barnet Council around having a bus route through the site. HE and LM spoke of their difficult journeys when walking around the site during darkness and the poor lighting. MV confirmed that walking routes were also being looked into throughout the site and in particular, lighting in those areas.

SC, HE and DC spoke of poor communication leading up to matchday. They confirmed that the tailored messaging a day before the game was too late. AG reiterated that this was being looked into and will be distributed earlier.

ES raised an issue around the app being deleted and thus causing difficulty for the younger fan base. TH confirmed that the app is being looked into and will be relaunched in due course. KE highlighted her discovery of another Saracens' app including forums, news etc. CL to look into.

GJ questioned double headers/double games with the Saracens' Women. TH & MV shared some of the concerns over pitch quality following one game and preceding the men's game, but confirmed double-headers were a priority for next season with the women likely to follow men's games where possible.

#### **4. Future Ticketing Strategy**

TH again apologised for errors in the ticketing process this season. He added that he was looking into an overview ticket pricing for the coming years and to build into a wider strategy. This would define the core principle of ensuring a "ticket for all". SC highlighted the 'open sore' from fans who are still hurt by past decisions. SC believes they should receive open communication and a heartfelt apology and be offered some form of good will gesture. TH and MV commented that this would be considered.

TH asked members to have an open discussion surrounding a ticket for all, making it inclusive and available as possible for next season and the next 4 years. DC expressed interest in hosting a workshop in answering all questions re: ticketing through selecting members of the group.

DC added that the new stand could be used to acknowledge long term members. AG stated that his team were in the process of enabling a membership programme through one joint platform that could facilitate this. SC stated the need for there to be clear and concise communication to fans surrounding this and all ticket related matters.

## 5. Other points from representatives

KE shared her disappointment of the merchandise which doesn't support the female base of fans like the men's. HE suggested jewellery being included in merchandise. DH suggested items such as pyjamas and more size 3&4 rugby balls for kids.

GJ suggested involving Charities to create a theme for games. He touched on the brilliance of the 'breast cancer awareness' game but also shared disappointment that it didn't carry through. MV to look into themes for match days. SC questioned whether other charities could come on board and focus not to be placed solely on the 'Saracens Sport Foundation.' GB supported this and suggested looking into bringing in another charity. DC commented the need for the charity to be local and utilize the power of the people. AD further supported this in saying that it adds to matchday experience providing a 'feel good' vibe throughout.

- DH stated that WIFI needs to be improved around the stadium.

- SC questioned the cost of printing tickets at home (50p) as it is printed from their laptop and printer. He feels that it alienates people.

- AM voiced the problems associated with seats where more control should be administered to prevent standing fans taking up empty seats and fans heading to/from seats during play. He added that this problem was irritating a large number of fans. He suggested pioneers holding fans at the bottom of the stairs or entrance until a break in play

- SC would like to see standing tables to in the Olympic Bar.

- KE presented issues within the ladies' toilets due to the queues being 'unbearable.' She further added that she would like to have separate commentary on the radio for fan goers who might not understand the rules of the game.

- LM stated her delight with the new AV company due to the volume and frequency of the music being overbearing previously. She noted that the winning theme (Sweet Caroline) song being played 30 seconds before the final whistle can come across as arrogant.

- ES suggested student benefits to support the younger fan base.

- DC suggested:

- / Administering ponchos for season ticket holders
- / Communication plan timelines (re: ticket pricing for next season)

- / Utilising Facebook Live to stream/promote Saracens games for those who don't make it to match day

NB. This isn't possible due to restrictions imposed around broadcast rights but may be possible for pre-season games

- / Removing any limitation on inviting a large amount of people to a game (e.g. London Stadium), capped numbers of discounted tickets,
- / STH should be recognised if coming to many games

- HE touched on post match fans on the pitch and in particular regulating where kids can't play to ensure no danger amongst other fans trying to navigate around the ground.

TH concluded the meeting by thanking all for their time and attendance.