

# **SARACENS SUPPORTERS FORUM**

## **21st DECEMBER 2019**

### **ATTENDEES**

Mitesh Velani - CEO, Saracens Ltd  
Gordon Banks - Chief Community Officer, Saracens Ltd  
Clare Ludlow – Marketing Manager, Saracens Ltd  
Alice Spicer – Head of Ticketing, Saracens Ltd

Gavin Jones - Hospitality  
Denis Collen – BAME Supporters  
Helen Ellis – Disabled Supporters  
Steve Cracknell – Local Supporters  
Michael Gostick – Over 65s Supporters  
Steve Cummins – East Stand  
Alun Morgan – Saracens Supporters Association Representative  
Gareth Lynch – Partner Clubs  
Olly Wallace – U25s Supporters  
Katherine Engler – Women’s Representative  
Oli Thompson – Sarries On Tour Representative

### **APOLOGIES**

Dean Harris – South Stand  
Jasmine Farrant – West Lower  
Debbie Knight – West Upper  
Brian Levin – North Stand

### **INTRODUCTIONS AND REFLECTIONS**

CL began the meeting by welcoming the newly elected representatives to the Forum and outlining how the Forum operates. CL then ran through a number of the areas in which the Forum has enjoyed success over the past year including:

- Introduction of the ticket re-sale platform for season ticket holders
- Improved accessibility access to Gate C with a new paved route
- Continuing efforts to improve sustainability at the Club including sale of metal water bottles in the shop and end to plastic straw use
- Improved signage for the shuttle bus stops on match days
- The introduction of Together Since dates and the ability for fans to share their stories with the club over the website
- Introduction of a colour toggle feature on the new website to improve accessibility
- Changes to ticket pricing including introduction of new concession rates

## LOOKING AHEAD

CL then touched on some areas which the Forum had previously discussed and for which there are plans for in 2020 including:

- The launch of a new club app
- Improvements to Saracens Women match days
- Club charity partnerships beyond the Saracens Sport Foundation
- Movement in the stands during games

CL then opened discussion up to the representatives for feedback on these areas.

SC suggested the Forum could be used as a test user group ahead of the launch of the new app.

SC raised whether there would be donations to Duchenne UK from sales of the Allianz Showdown shirt this season. GB confirmed this would not be the case this season but the Showdown will be a big focus for the Duchenne partnerships with meetings planned for the New Year to consider two or three fundraising mechanics to find the most effective way of fundraising on the match day.

SC enquired whether the club would look at running a trial of changing the system to address seat movement. GB asked for more details of when movement is an issue. HE raised problems around the period ahead of half time. DC suggested the use of big screens and messaging around 'keeping everyone's match day enjoyable'.

OT posed a question around whether the issue was caused by problems with queues around the ground at peak periods. DC suggested the building works could be used to frame changes to crowd control.

GB asked the group whether festivals were impacting on the movement issue and how this could be tightened up. GL admitted it was hard to tighten up as kids are excited by match day experience. GL said festival seats are already sold in a particular area of the stadium but asked whether there was scope for a better route back to seats. AM and GL agreed season tickets should not be sold in festival seats. AS highlighted difficulties around this as season tickets are sold before festival matches and seats are allocated.

SC asked whether the messaging could be tied up in messages about wider rugby values on the big screen.

GJ highlighted that group needed to consider how the Pioneers operate – they are briefed to move people away from fire exits but there is then nowhere else to wait for a break in play.

HE suggested a countdown to kick off on the big screens to encourage people to take their seats. CL flagged that there are PRL and EPCR protocols which dictate what has to be on the big screen in the immediate period before kick off. HE emphasised the importance of reminding people to take seats with sensory triggers in mind. SCr suggesting using Pioneers to spread the message and encourage people to move on from the Olympic Bar. SC suggested a player message. Option to include comms about taking your seats in announcer's matchday script.

GJ raised a number of concerns about the club website, highlighting difficulties for users. OW said it was a shame the team news wasn't posted directly on Twitter anymore. AM suggested the team news graphic could be posted after the videos.

AM raised worries that the fixtures on the website were hard to find and that the date filter has bugs and often doesn't work. OW acknowledged some challenges but said the mobile version of the site is good.

KE asked whether product descriptions on the shop website could be expanded – for example dimensions of products would be useful.

OW asked whether student discounts could be considered as many young people could not afford kit.

GJ asked whether there could be a standardised style guide which featured comparisons between suppliers.

## **WEST STAND PROJECT UPDATE**

MV provided an update on the West Stand project to the group.

MV said enabling works have now been completed including temporary building with home, away and medical facilities and a temporary media facility. Grass crete car park works are continuing. GJ raised concerns over the condition of P1. MV agreed but highlighted difficulties with a nearby stream that doesn't drain. MV said final grass crete work was scheduled for Jan/Feb.

MV ran through details around the process to partner with a contractor for the main West Stand build and said four options have now been reduced to two and the club is weighing up programme length and price. MV highlighted that the contractor would need pitching in to Barnet Council who have a say in selection as they are committing funds.

MV said club was working on producing marketing and sales collateral for the 650 new hospitality covers including fly throughs and lounge mock ups and hoped to launch the packages for sale from April 2020. GJ volunteered to help with a feedback session to test the market before sales launch and said there was interest in a debentures package.

KE asked whether West Stand general admission season ticket holders will get a priority window. AS said yes but flagged that central area of the West Stand will be hospitality seats. KE asked whether category of seat for current West Stand ticket holders will be considered, AS said the ticketing team were not at that stage of planning but will consider it.

AS highlighted that the West Stand build was part of a big project for the ticketing team and that giving realistic timelines to fans was a key priority. AS said there was work to be done across the whole stadium pricing, particularly around ensuring accessibility seats across a range of price categories. MV said this was an opportunity to get a balance of categories across the stadium.

GJ suggested that debentures could be offered for five years from the 2021/22 season but with the added benefit of being able to use the facilities at the end of 2020/21 season if they were ready to allow some room for delays to the build.

DC suggested the club pick a flat rate for West Stand season ticket holders and then there is an added benefit of an upgrade at the end of the season if the stand is ready so there are no guarantees made about better seats and at the same time no additional costs. DC also suggested a half season ticket in the new West Stand.

MG suggested that East Stand season ticket holders could be given the chance to upgrade to West Stand on a match by match basis to test the experience before committing for a full season. DC said the resale platform is working well this season and could be tied in to plans for the launch of the West Stand.

GJ emphasised that any short term/half season plans need to have longer term pricing in mind so people can commit to a half season and have the confidence they can afford the whole season. GJ suggested an 18 month season ticket as part of this.

HE said clarity and communication about the new facilities were key

GJ asked whether East Stand hospitality packages could be revisited after the launch of the new West Stand, for example returning to a 'lounge with access' package as opposed to F&B inclusive offerings. GJ also raised point around lack of space for guests in current Fez Club and suggested restricting ST sales to allow for guests passes on a MBM basis.

DC asked how technology would be used in the West Stand to help beat queues and stay ahead of the game. GJ highlighted some challenges in hospitality around speed of service. SCr said going cashless has really helped queues in the Olympic Bar. There was a general feeling in the group that service could improve.

## **POINTS FROM REPRESENTATIVES**

Discussion around soft drinks as an external concession to reduce queues

HE informed the group about some work her employer (the National Autistic Society) are doing with Northampton Saints to create a video to show the match day experience to potential fans to help people unsure of what to expect from going to live sport. GB was keen to explore the idea further.

GB updated the group on club plans to continue to improve sustainability at Allianz Park. GB said he had made a recent visit to Lords to learn from their practises. GB told the group that the club will be working with a consultant in 2020 to talk more about what the club is already doing as well as work to do more. This will be an ongoing piece of work over the next six months.

KE asked whether there was a mechanism for fans to share season tickets without reselling them – e.g. with friends or family you might not be able to meet face to face. AS said club would investigate.

AM raised concerns about continuing problems with sight lines around the ground due to the position of the big screens. AS accepted there were issues but that the club cannot solve the problem while building works are going on. AM asked for better

communication about the issue. AS asked representatives to encourage fans to contact Supporter Services so the club can help.

GJ reiterated his concerns around the website and said he had had many supporters tell him better balance was needed between Saracens Men content and other sports.

GL asked about plans for changes to the festival ticketing process. AS said the club was looking at improvements and asked GL to collate feedback from fellow partner clubs.

DC asked about Saracens branding in Barnet, GB said it was an ongoing process with Barnet Council.

OW – student discount possibilities

CL closed the meeting and said the next meeting would likely take place on a week night in April.