

## Fans Forum

### Match Day Experience

17 January 2024

17.30

### Online Teams Meeting

**In attendance from LFC:** Bryan Denny, Research Manager; Yonit Sharabi, Supporter Liaison Officer; Amanda Jacks, Director of Supporter Engagement; Chris Markey, Director of Safety and Security

**Fans Forum:** Roy Bentham, Gary Evans, Pamela O'Donnell, Geoff Jones, Jon Lewis

**Apologies:** Jayne Page, Andrew Hudson, Danny King

### Persistent Standing/Safe Standing

Chris Markey was invited to give a presentation to the Forum following the persistent standing in the newly opened Anfield Road Upper stand and the subsequent reaction to that.

Rail seating was introduced to several club, including LFC, during the 2019/2020 season after the Sports Ground Safety Authority (SGSA) identified that despite best efforts by clubs to ensure otherwise, supporters were still persistently standing in particular areas of the stadium. At Anfield, the main areas affected were the Kop and away end. The rationale of the SGSA was, therefore, that that risk had to be mitigated and the most effective way to do so was to install rails in front of seats.

Generic safety concerns with persistent standing have been identified including the risk of a progressive crowd collapse which increases the steeper the stand and/or the higher the stand. There are also issues with customer service as persistent standing means that it can force those whose preference is to sit to stand. Risks to a safe evacuation are another consideration if standing in seated areas leads to migration and therefore over crowding, blocking of aisles etc; sightlines can also be impacted which maybe to the detriment of other fans, including disabled spectators.

These risks have been identified after significant research by the SGSA and ultimately assisted in securing standing areas.

But where there are no rails we – like other clubs – are under pressure from both the SGSA and City Council to ensure fans remain seated for the duration of a match with exceptions for 'moments of high excitement' meaning we are very likely to install rails in the remainder of the Kop before the start of the 2024/2025 season.

Where there are no rails we are under significant pressure from the licensing authorities (the Council and SGSA) who have the power to take enforcement action against the club. We are not at this stage yet nor do we want to be but are under a warning. Hence this means we must do what we can to both educate and encourage supporters to sit down.

Since opening the upper Anfield Road tier we have seen two games (v MUFC and AFC) where we have had substantial sections of the crowd persistently standing. However, we saw overall adherence to the regulations requiring fans to sit at our games v NUFC and FFC. Clearly we hope this pattern continues as we do not want to be under the scrutiny of the council or SGSA with the threat of enforcement action – which will ultimately impact supports – hanging over us. One of the

enforcement actions open to the SGSA/council are a reduction in capacity. Effectively this means we have no room for manoeuvre.

For the time being we will continue to email supporters with ticket in the Upper Tier reminding them of their obligation to remain seated and on match day the stewards will approach any 'standers' with a view to engage and educate and enforcement. 'Yellow cards' will be handed out as a final resort and those who continue to defy stewards and/or abuse them will be ejected. If it gets to this point, two stewards will be involved with interactions recorded on body worn cameras.

The Forum asked how many fans had been ejected for persistent standing and were told that one supporter was ejected during the Arsenal game, not for persistent standing but for abusing stewards. There was similarly an ejection during the Fulham game – the supporter in question ignored the stewards and would not take appropriate advice.

The Forum were advised that mass ejections for persistent standing were not safe or proportionate which is why education is a critical part of the process.

On average there are three to four ejections per game for anything from abusive chanting to vaping so the ejections at these fixtures were not out of the ordinary.

The Forum felt that those ejected for being abusive to stewards and not following instructions "didn't have a leg to stand on".

This comment was agreed with; ordinarily there will be aggravating features that lead to an ejection. Equally, further sanctions such as stadium bans for ejections arising from persistent standing are unlikely to be imposed.

The Forum asked if it was likely that rails would be installed in the Upper Tiers and were told that there were no plans to in the immediate or long term future.

Finally, the Forum were advised that the club had received just three complaints about the enforcement of seating.

## **Atmosphere**

Roy Bentham informed the forum that following the recent comments from by Jurgen Klopp about the atmosphere he had, with many contributions from other forum members, put together a proposal document examining how the atmosphere might be improved. This is currently close to a final draft and once completed he will circulate it.

The proposal currently has some 15 recommendations, some of which are thought to be quick wins but with others that would require a more long term strategy towards possible implementation. Some of the recommendations included looking at a youth section and the flag policy.

Bryan was asked if the Forum could possibly look at doing surveys and was told yes.

As part of this potential initiative, Chris was asked if we could look at the feasibility of doing a 'migration' whereby those in licenced standing areas (on the Kop) who may prefer to sit could look to swap with other fans in seated areas who wished to stand and that maybe this could form part of the season ticket renewal process?

## **Contact Details of the Fans Forum**

The Forum asked if the club could consider publishing their contact details in the match day programme. It was discussed and decided that the best way to take this forward would be for the SLO email address to be published to save forum members from getting inundated. Yonit agreed to look into this further. It would also be helpful to have a page where we can talk about achieves.

### **Club Website**

The Forum mentioned that the club website could be very difficult to navigate and asked if we could have a website forum. Yonit and Bryan felt that this was potentially a very good idea and would look into it further.

### **Supporter Club Tickets**

It was raised that it was not uncommon for a SC to be told they were getting X number of tickets only to receive a lower allocation after the expected recipients had made travel and accommodation arrangements. This would be raised separately with the Ticketing Forum.

### **Bots**

The Forum asked what the club were doing to counter bots buying huge numbers of tickets therefore depriving fans of them. They were advised that the club were doing all they could to prevent this happening and it was, due to the sophistication of the bots, an ongoing piece of work.

### **Coaches**

The Forum asked if the club would consider listing details of unofficial coach organisers making it easier to travel to matches in the fact of near constant disruptions to the rail service. This would be considered.

Yonit then closed the meeting thanking those present for their attendance and Chris for his helpful presentation.