

**CHELSEA FOOTBALL CLUB
SUPPORTERS CONSULTATIVE FORUM
2007/ 2008 SEASON**

Meeting held at the Lord Attenborough Suite, Chelsea F.C. Hotel, at 10.30 am on Sunday, 11th November 2007.

ATTENDEES/ group represented

Alexander, James	(season ticket holder)
Beard, Neil	(CFCUK)
Brown, Toby	(CFCnet)
Fiorellino, Trizia	(Chelsea Supporters Group)
Gibbins, Jason	(member)
Goldston, Geoff	(over 60)
Gourlay, Ron	(Chelsea F.C. Commercial & Venue Director)
Greenberg, Simon	(Chelsea F.C. Communications Director)
Hine, Lenny	(16 – 21 age group)
Law, Matthew	(disabled section)
Lister, Simon	(member)
Newby, David	(Chelsea F.C. Marketing Manager)
O'Brien, John	(non-UK branch)
Phelps, Mary	(exec member/ box holder)
Pickering, Trevor	(Chelsea Supporters Club)
Regan, Andy	(Electoral Reform Services, Chair)
Smith, Graham	(Chelsea F.C. Head of Ticketing)
Smith, Ian	(member)
Sporle, Lee	(branch)
Trenter, Peter	(home & away season ticket holder)

GUEST

Grant, Avram (Chelsea F.C. Manager)

Apologies

Greer, Gary	(branch)
Kenyon, Peter	(Chelsea F.C. Chief Executive)
Marriott, Bryan	(family section)
Whalley, Elizabeth	(season ticket holder)

(Action points are in bold and underlined.)

INTRODUCTION

Chair: Welcome to the Forum. We will have a two minute silence at 11am if agreed. (Agreed.)

We may need to alter the agenda and move “Chelsea in the Community” to a later Forum.

CHANGES TO THE MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING/ MATTERS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MINUTES

Fans: There was a reference in the minutes to both the Community Shield and the Desailly charity match not offering loyalty points for purchases. The reference should have been to just the Community Shield not offering loyalty points.

Also, page 8, third paragraph; the word “fans” should be replaced with “songs”.

Further to our discussion about deterring touts, how about printing the member’s name on the ticket when sold. Also, a large message warning about the risks of touting could be printed on it.

Club: We don’t have names on the tickets but we do have ways of tracing each ticket to a member. On the second suggestion, we can consider that for next season.

Fans: We discussed a supporters’ match at Cobham last time, which will now probably take place in the summer.

A contact form with email details will be sent round during this meeting. Please check that your details are correct and indicate whether you are happy to be contacted by fans from outside the Forum. (All present subsequently agreed to be contacted.)

AWAY MATCHES

Fans: There is still an issue with away season ticket holders not getting the best seats in the away sections.

Club: We automatically sell in a certain order for each block, due to the order of fans on our database. We have since had complaints from those in the middle wanting to be at the front or the back! If we move those people around the list we have, they would be allocated tickets in a different position in the block – that may be the way forward. Fans choosing their seats on the internet would not work.

We have to resolve this as it keeps being discussed at the Forum.

Fans to contact the Club detailing where they want to sit within a block (top, middle, lower etc). Club to then alter the away seat listing.

AVRAM GRANT

(Avram Grant arrives at the meeting.)

Chair: We have a slight change to the agenda today!

Club: We had a chat with Avram Grant (AG) on Friday and he kindly agreed to come along to the Forum on a match day for around fifteen minutes to answer any questions. We would request that Forum members wait for the formal minutes to be circulated before any details are released on external media, to ensure accuracy.

This is the first time one of our managers has attended a Forum meeting.

Fans: Thank you for taking the time to come to the Forum today.

AG: My pleasure, please ask any questions. Although I was a very good footballer I was not a great player so I finished at 18. So I come as a supporter. I know what it's like to be one.

Fans: What is the atmosphere like amongst the players?

AG: It is very good, and has been from the beginning, though they were in shock on the first day. You can be proud of them and their commitment to the team. I know there are stories in the papers but I am on the inside, I didn't have to speak to them about it. I like to see how they behave, not what is written in the papers, and they are 100% committed to the team. It is said that the Club is bigger than the players and this is true; if the players think like this then they give more.

Fans: There are reports in the media of Drogba being dissatisfied. What can fans expect of him?

AG: You can see how he behaves in training and in matches. He gives 100%, though of course he won't score in every match. He is fighting well and playing well, being fully committed. It's not always as it says in the papers. It says from a few years ago that he wants to leave, but I believe that is from his agent and not him. There is no problem with him.

Fans: Was it a shock to you how fast events moved when you were asked to take over?

AG: I haven't had time to think about it as we had to play Man United straight away. It was a good game, though we had a problem with the referee. You know I have coached since I was 18, but I took over here in the middle of the season. We have tried to do things step by step; trying to win but follow the new style of the team. I think it's going well, though it could, of course, be better. As a coach or manager you want to have time for preparation, which I didn't have.

Fans: Are you concerned with losing the African players in January?

AG: Of course; it's a big problem. I don't know why the Euros are played in the summer yet the African Cup is played during the season, when they know most top African players play in the

European leagues. They are four good players, so this is one of the reasons we have a big squad. Maybe if we find someone good for Chelsea, we will take him in January.

Fans: There have been a lot of changes at the Club recently. What role do you expect the supporters to play?

AG: As I said, I was a supporter originally. Here, you were supporters before I was here, and will be after I leave. They are the main key. You live for the supporters and like them. It's a love affair; sometimes up and sometimes down. I am very happy with the supporters. The atmosphere at the stadium has been very good. The away game was amazing at Valencia. It was a time when we needed them to support us. You can see how it helped the team...it's a love affair!

Fans: Can you explain to us how the team of yourself, Steve Clarke and Henk Ten Cate split their responsibilities?

AG: Football has changed a lot in the last ten years and will continue to do so. It will become more personal for each player, to maximise their abilities. I take pleasure not only in winning matches, but in seeing players develop.

You need staff to change the message as well. When I came here I asked for a British coach. We have Steve Clarke who is very, very good. He was quiet in the last few years, but is doing the job very well, and likes the Club very much. I also wanted someone from the European mainland, as many players come from there, and I like the different ideas from there. Of course, I say what style I want.

We also want a top fitness coach. But I won't take anyone for that who isn't top quality, and am still looking.

Fans: How do the coaches work together? Are they equal?

AG: Yes, they are equal but each have their roles. I would need over an hour to explain! They both work on the pitch, and know what our tactical targets are. The training methods are part of it.

Fans: Do you have different ways of training with the different coaches?

AG: No, we bring the elements together.

Fans: What would be a successful season for you?

AG: At a big club we want to fight for all the trophies. I know we missed a lot of points at the start and it isn't easy to chase from there, but we are doing a good job. We may not keep getting points as we have been non-stop recently, but we will be near the top. Then anything is possible.

It's also important that we have a good base for the style of the team for the future.

Fans: Where would you like to see improvements in the squad?

AG: I am very happy with the squad but you always look to improve. We always look at possible players, such as those who are more creative. It's not easy to find someone for a top club, and we are demanding on our players. Any player who can improve our squad is considered.

Fans: What do you think the score will be today?!

AG: If I knew I would be very rich! One player said it's a problem to win 6-0 as everyone now expects it all the time!

Fans: If you could have one player free of charge who would it be?

AG: There is no one like this...the players I want are far from being available for free!

Fans: Thanks again for attending.

Club: Maybe we can try and organise it again.

(AG leaves.)

AWAY MATCHES (Continued)

Fans: Derby away has been advertised as 5.45, which is wrong.

Club: Kick off is 5.15 and we have publicised this since.

Fans: Thanks to the Club for their efforts with cheap travel to some away matches. Could trains for northern matches stop in the Midlands to collect fans?

Club: For Wigan, there were problems at the station, and we are discussing this with the police. We couldn't get a second train for Wigan. There were issues at Wigan as well. We will have to allocate vouchers in the future for different carriages, and be able to identify individual fans. We are sure we can put it right. The players were talking about the atmosphere after the match.

We will have the whole stand at Blackburn, which holds 3,500. We have taken 2,000 initially. For Wigan we sold over 700 tickets for the train. We could have had 5,000 tickets and sold 4,000.

Fans: In choosing away matches for cheap travel, the Club needs to consider the proximity of the stadium from the station, to ensure not too great a distance.

Club: We will hopefully have the option of coaches for the next trip.

Fans: Is it true that non-UK members cannot apply for away match tickets?

Club: Yes they can; they are treated the same as any other member.

Club to advertise that non-UK members can apply for away match tickets.

Fans: It seems unfair that a member of the European away season-ticket scheme can't miss a match occasionally. Why should we still have to buy a ticket?

(Others:) The rule seems fair to ensure that fans don't cherry-pick their matches. The whole point is to reward fans who are going to the less popular matches.

Club: This is one of the requirements of the scheme as it stands. You could bring it up at the next meeting when we look at policy for next season.

Fans: We emailed you about trouble at the Valencia match.

Club: David Barnard is dealing with this, so please cc him in to emails about this issue.

(At 11am, the Remembrance Day two minute silence was observed.)

Fans: To provide more detail about Valencia, some fans were hit by the local police, whilst our stewards were standing around doing nothing. Fans were just exhausted from climbing the stairs and wanted to catch their breath. The police then hit them for not going straight to their seats.

Club to ensure they are publicising how our stewards can help at away matches, and what the local police may clamp down on abroad.

Fans: Do stewards not intervene for insurance reasons?

Club: No, this is not true. Our stewards have little power overseas, just as visiting stewards don't have power here. UK clubs are the only ones who fly out to check the grounds abroad along with our police. Overseas clubs don't do that visiting here.

It wouldn't make any difference if the stewards intervened, in all likelihood. We know police abroad can be very tough.

Fans: It makes a mockery of going on a Club trip in that case, if your safety is as much in jeopardy as travelling separately. We can provide details of the stewards involved. Have the stewards reported it?

Club: We don't know if they have. Maybe the answer is not to take tickets abroad, if we cannot protect our fans. Gill Dawson was there so we can speak to her about what happened.

Club to investigate incident in Valencia when fans were hit by police within view of Club stewards.

Fans: Since the 50-50 split for away matches, general feedback, via Chelsea Supporters Group, is favourable. There has been an improvement in atmosphere, and tickets are easier to purchase. Why are we the only FAPL club who don't put away tickets on general sale though?

Club: We feel that if anyone was that determined to get tickets, they would get membership. We often don't need general sale for away matches. If there is trouble in the away end then the Club would get the blame. We are happy to discuss it at the next meeting on ticketing. We will bring Ed to the next meeting for that.

Fans: Why are we the only club who ask for declaration forms for European away matches? Do the forms go to the police? If so, how does that comply with the Data Protection Act (DPA)?

Club: The DPA doesn't come into it. The police want the information to help security; we feel it is a fair requirement. Hopefully it helps protect fans as well. We are reviewing how the declaration form is presented to fans, along with the delivery method for tickets. Flight details are provided when travelling with the official England fan club as well.

Fans: If a fan is arrested they seem to receive a temporary ban from the Club anyway, regardless of whether they are released without charge or not convicted, as happened to a fan arrested in Middlesbrough. This doesn't seem fair.

Club: We don't just go by the conviction. If we have evidence of wrongdoing, we may ban them anyway.

Club to review circumstances of fan at Middlesbrough being temporarily banned.

Fans: At the next meeting, we would also like to look at whether season tickets can be paid for by instalments.

CLUB MEDIA

Fans: There have been many complaints about Chelsea TV: Not on enough; too expensive; in effect it's a shopping channel.

Club: We obviously have to work within a budget, and can't afford to make non-stop original programmes.

Fans: Other criticisms include: Too many repeats; only about three hours of original TV. Also, there is too much general football news. When Shevchenko was injured, it wasn't reported. Yet he then played for Ukraine.

Club: There is a mix of features that we think works well. We have a constant debate about the news balance; whether to report on what others are saying about us. If something relevant is happening at UEFA, FAPL or opponents we are about to play, we feel that should be reported. We know it's all about balance.

Shevchenko was deemed not fit to play by Jose. He said this at a press conference. Shevchenko then went to the Ukraine as part of his rehabilitation, but if we had felt he couldn't play at all we wouldn't have let him travel there.

Fans: We would like to see more of what is going on currently, rather than reruns from the past. More ticket news would be useful. It is admittedly difficult to keep coming up with fresh news on a daily basis.

Club: We agree about the importance of current ticketing news. We have a new editorial executive producer, and we agree that such information needs a higher profile. We certainly don't want to try and be another Sky Sports News.

Fans: Paper talk on Chelsea TV, and the quiz recently, were good. More fan involvement on programmes would help. Children's programmes in the morning would be good too. Real Madrid TV has loads of programmes in the morning aimed at children.

Club: It is run by Chelsea Digital Media, a joint venture between the Club and Sky, which was arranged in the Bates-era when some of the media rights were sold. Directors include Simon Greenberg, Peter Kenyon and Sky, so there is an editorial balance. We would like to see the station support the Club to a greater extent. It's a very complicated arrangement. We are not in complete control.

Fans: Is the Club limiting itself by working only with Sky?

In the Middle East, the channel is available for an hour, yet Real Madrid TV and Manchester United TV are permanently there.

Club: It is available on other providers than Sky, such as on cable. Sky Digital gives big penetration, but there would be more if it was on the "a la carte" range of channels. It could be a non-subscription service alternatively, though the standard would have to be raised dramatically to justify that. We want better programming and less repeats, but this is costly. We can have more reports from Cobham, for instance.

We have just started Bridge Kids, so are getting there; there is a revamp of programming. It will be profitable for the first time this year.

DWI are our international agency and they wouldn't have struck the same deal as those other clubs in the Middle East. A three hour block is standard though, but they would have secured the best deal. We are shown in around 30 countries.

Fans: There is a Teamtalk option for phones with messaging overseas. This could provide scores and updates.

Club: That won't be the same level of service as Chelsea TV though. We have changed the phone service from Orange to a non-specific provider service.

Fans: What is the position with Chelsea Radio? Can live broadcasts be carried on Chelsea TV?

Club: It is online but there is only so much you can do.

Club to explore if live commentary broadcasts can be carried on Chelsea TV.

Fans: Can we get some new fans on the programmes; it seems to be the same names all the time. Also, can we have more on the community role of the Club.

Club: We agree with your latter point, and involve first team players, so this would be of interest to fans. Our new executive producer is more on that wavelength.

Fans: CFCnet can ask readers what content they would rather have.

On the subject of the website, there are complaints about why we have a US website.

Our website is still difficult to navigate. Many of the articles are poorly written.

Club: The US website is in html only and is very linear. Some say it is easier to navigate. We disagree about the global site being difficult to navigate though. We will probably move away from having an all-flash site with an html option on the global site. All media will come under the media department, so there may be changes.

As regards having a separate US website, we feel it is right to customise for such a sizable potential market. There will be other international sites developed over time, as this is the right direction for the Club.

We know the writers are not yet at the top of their profession but we feel the standard of journalism is improving.

Fans: Why do clips from Chelsea online run out over time?

Club: This is a move to prevent copying and redistributing. In effect, the clips have a limited shelf life intentionally.

We would appreciate feedback as to the content you want included on Club media.

Trizia to collate fan responses on media content.

Fans: What is the circulation of the magazine?

Club: We circulate about 90,000 per month, of which 8,000 are sold as retail.

MATTERS ARISING

Chair: There are several action points from our last meeting that we have not yet covered today. Firstly, Club to provide allocation proportions as percentages from the Cup Final.

Club: This was publicised and is on the archive news.

Chair: Club to consider providing loyalty points for corporate seats.

Club: There is a loyalty system for away games that our Hospitality department use for corporates. The more away games you go to, the more points you get.

Chair: Club to consider extending “friends and family” purchase limits for away games.

Club: We are hoping to increase that next season to over ten.

Chair: Club to remind the stewards about flag policy.

Club: We did that after the last Forum.

Chair: Club to follow up details of incidents from the Liverpool match where possible.

Club: That was carried out.

Chair: Club to check and ensure sufficient quantities of food and drink in the Matthew Harding Upper.

Club: We are dealing with that at internal meetings.

Chair: Club to check that automatic ticket readers are working well and being operated correctly (in the East Stand).

Club: Everything is working fine, but we think the fastest system is for stewards to take the cards to ensure they are inserted the right way round.

Fans: To update the atmosphere situation, the sub-committee has been meeting and Toby will email minutes and other developments to the Forum. We are also hoping that those will be included on the Club website.

What is the situation with Purples bar? Also, where can fans sit in the ground and eat now? We don't have Drakes and Bluebells any longer for members to sit for a meal.

Club: Purples has been closed but we are looking at putting a new venue in there.

Club to review where members can eat in the ground on match days.

Fans: Why do season ticket holders not get the pack that members do?

Club: We are considering this for next season.

Fans: For a recent home match, our fans were trying to get to the East Stand via the Shed End walkway, then found they had to turn back as there was no access. More notice to fans would help.

Club: That should only be the case when the whole Shed End is used for away fans. We will look into covering up those East Stand signs, or take them down, when there is no access.

That will happen for the Liverpool match where we expect them to take all 4,600 seats.

Fans: What happens to our renewal form financial details? Is it possible to have renewal details for each season ticket holder held online so it's possible to double-check what you have applied for?

Club: They are all destroyed, as we know they contain sensitive information. We are planning to introduce the online checking system, including a receipt.

Fans: The montages before the match and at half-time are popular, especially the "London Calling" video. Can they be available to fans?

Club to consider selling Chelsea-themed videos shown on the screens in the ground.

Fans: At gates 5 and 7 the queues go round the back of the East Stand. No stewards monitor this queue so fans push in.

Club to check on stewarding for gates 5 and 7 for the East Stand.

Fans: Why were Schalke fans all over the stadium for the match here?

Club: Tickets were on general sale. We stopped a lot of fans going in on the night and also tracked a lot of tickets.

Leicester sold their allocation in hours and wanted another 6,000 tickets when the home tickets went on general sale. We thought it unfair to move our season ticket holders at that point though. We were strict on not dealing with memberships from the Leicester area until after that match, if they arrived shortly before the match.

Chair: The next Forum is likely to be on 9th February, or at least on the match day that weekend. The date previously set was for the Spurs match, which is now provisionally on a Monday.

I will get the minutes section featuring Avram Grant out tonight so that fanzines can report on that.

Fans: It's a poor show that Peter Kenyon hasn't turned up again. He made two meetings out of five last season and hasn't attended either of the meetings this season.

Club: It was Peter's intention to be here today, but he had to go to a meeting. There is no decision that can't be taken by the directors who are here today.

(The meeting closed at 12.15pm)