

Tony Goodall Fans' Conference

Saturday 25th March – 11am



Attended:

Andrew Cullen, Mark Judges & Johnny Moore (PFC)

Barry Dewing (Pompey Independent Supporters' Association), Donald Vass (TGFC Secretary & Chichester Portsmouth Supporters' Club), Graham Price (Pompey 808), Ian Marshall (Chimes Lounge), John Cannings (Northern Blues), Kev Ryan (Central Branch Supporters' Club), Leon Tricker (Social Media Groups), Mike Fulcher (TGFC Chair & Social Media Groups), Mike Whittle (Pompey History Society), Pam Wilkins (Pompey Disabled Supporters' Association), Peter House (Pompey Independent Supporters' Association), Phil Pike (Isle Of Wight Supporters' Club), Roy Gregory (Central Branch Supporters' Club), Simon Colebrook (Portsmouth Supporters' Trust), Steve Tovey (Legends Lounge) & Tony Howe-Haysome (Armed Forces & Services Club).

Apologies:

Adrian Foster (South Wales Association of Pompey Supporters) & Gemma Raggett (London Supporters' Club).

1. Michael Eisner Video

Supporter representatives from the Tony Goodall Fans' Conference collectively agreed a set of questions which were sent to Michael Eisner ahead of the meeting. These questions included the status of the playing budget to help make a serious challenge for promotion; the future development and timing of further improvements to the stadium; Academy strategy and how to operate competitively and sustainably after promotion to the Championship.

A fifteen-minute video message from Michael Eisner, setting out the overall ownership strategic direction, was shared with members of the TGFC.

Michael began by saying that some of the topics raised by the TGFC had already been covered in the interviews given by Eric Eisner and Andy Redman the previous week as well as in Andrew Cullen's most recent Q and A video released on March 14th. Michael added his message would touch on those topics, but also give a broader overview regarding his overall thinking on club strategy.

The video content was then discussed between the TGFC members, with Andrew Cullen answering further questions from TGFC members on matters relating to the content.

The TGFC recommended that a video message from Michael should be made available to all fans on the club media channels, incorporating the topics which were initially put forward and also the subsequent questions and observations raised during the meeting by TGFC members.

Andrew Cullen agreed to discuss this recommendation with Michael. Following the meeting, Michael Eisner has indicated he will be pleased to do this and will be filmed by the club when he visits Portsmouth for the Wycombe Wanderers match.



2. Stadium Redevelopment

Q: What's the latest update on the ongoing discussions with local stakeholders? What outcome is the club seeking from these discussions?

AC: We have to be careful when discussing this due to commercial sensitivities. All the local stakeholders – the football club, Network Rail, Portsmouth City Council, the Pompey Centre – regularly come together for constructive meetings with Stephen Morgan MP, who has been really helpful bringing parties together. Our most recent meeting was last week. We shared with the group the top line results of our travel survey, the potential impact that would come from any development and what that would mean to the local economy. If we can increase usage of the stadium, with the potential addition of a hotel, mixed commercial and residential development, Fratton Park becomes active 365 days a year, not just for 23 football matchdays. That helps make the case for improved infrastructure. At the moment, Fratton train station lacks accessibility and cycling facilities. These are key points to address. We're currently working on a project to see what progress can be made. We have also talked to Brighton and Hove Albion to understand how their access across the rail line worked. They faced similar challenges. Brighton produced an economic value impact study. That showed in 2016 that the club believed it would create £23.5m of social value annually to the local economy. That figure is now £212m, and the Amex Stadium and surrounding areas have helped to create around 2,500 jobs. Next, we are exploring how we can develop our own economic study to demonstrate the continued benefits of the club to the city of Portsmouth. Our MPs, Portsmouth City Council and the Pompey Centre are all being really supportive as they can see both the progress and the current phase of stadium development plans actually being delivered, rather than just being talked about.

Q: The club recently conducted a travel survey. What were the findings, and how will this assist the club moving forward?

AC: We will look to publish the full results of the travel survey in April. We received 3,890 responses from a wide range of fans - 21% of respondents live on the island, 28% live within 10 miles, while 21% travel from 40 miles away or more. 4% currently use the bus to travel to games, whilst 14% use the train and 16% use a combination of car and train.

Really importantly, 41% of respondents said they would consider using a park and ride scheme if a dedicated bus route from Tipner were to be established – that's really powerful. 65% said they would consider travelling by train if there were better access to the ground via a footbridge. The main frustrations identified by supporters were trains, parking and traffic. The next stage for us is to build the findings into a wider environmental strategy. We can look at the potential reduction of carbon emissions for example, and as part of our greener environmental strategy.

Q: At our last meeting, it was mentioned that further development of Fratton Park is dependent on improvements to local transport infrastructure. What transport infrastructure improvements are needed? If the required transport infrastructure improvements were delivered by other local stakeholders, how would the club develop Fratton Park further, and how quickly could this development begin? What capacity can Fratton Park be increased to without transport infrastructure improvements? What options are the club exploring to maximise capacity within the current transport infrastructure constraints?



AC: I would encourage supporters to refer to [the Portsmouth local plan](#), which details the proposed development of the site and includes the potential planning requirements for such a development. We would have to demonstrate that there is safe access and egress of fans to the ground, including via an off-road pedestrian link from Fratton train station to Fratton Park. You can also see other proposals set out in the plan, including for mixed commercial residential properties, enhanced off-road and pedestrian access and underground parking including sufficient cycle and electric car parking provision. The major requirements are all listed here, showing what they would expect us to deliver. All of these things would go into our development costs. Anything we want to do, we have to factor that in. In order to commence any work, we need to have confidence that these conditions could be fulfilled. The work needed to redevelop the North Stand to achieve all the things we need, extra capacity, hospitality on both matchdays and non-matchdays, offices and other facilities is currently costed at more than £40M which would need to be funded by the type of enabling development highlighted in the Local Plan. Could we increase capacity at Fratton Park without doing these things? Any alternative plans would come with their own set of planning conditions. We could potentially get some minimal increase in capacity at Fratton Park from filling in the corners, but these building corner stands as I know from my previous experience at Norwich City is notoriously expensive. By far the most cost-effective thing for us to pursue – although at a greater overall expense – would be to expand the North Stand to deliver a 25,000 - 30,000 seat stadium.

Q: The club recently installed 'P rails' in the North Lower in response to fan feedback. This is appreciated, but there is currently a handrail every five to ten steps, which appears insufficient for the supporters who need them. Are more planned?

AC: P Rails are designed to work with sight lines above C85, which is a fairly steep pitch as can be seen in the South stand. We were not required to put 'P rails' in the North Stand as the rake is below C85 and isn't as steep, unlike the South Stand where they are needed. Some supporters in the North Lower came and talked to me after the first few games of the season saying that they would like to have them in to assist them getting up and down the steps, and so we put them on every 4th step and staggered them to the left and right of the aisles. That provided some aid for elderly and less mobile supporters. The issue is, if we do put more in, we create some obstructed views for people sitting near the aisles. We have already had to remove three rails due to complaints they were obstructing views. We were not required by legislation to put these P Rails in the North Lower but have recognised issues raised by some fans – that's the right thing to do.

Q: Has a final ground plan been produced for next season showing the new disabled area, and will fans be able to view this? What will the total capacity be?

AC: We're drawing up final numbers of wheelchair spaces shortly. What will significantly increase the number of spaces available will be the new lift serving both the North Stand and Milton End. We have some wheelchair spaces already in the North Stand, which will also become accessible once the lift goes in. We have some new disabled seating in the North Lower, which are already in use. We will liaise with the Disabled Supporters' Association on how existing season ticket holders can access these new spaces and the best way to allocate them. Many disabled fans have expressed their desire to stay in the Fratton End, as that's their preferred and existing matchday experience, but others I've spoken to are keen to move into the new spaces when they become available. We will do a consultation to design the process for that.

3. Fan Behaviour / Stewarding



Q: A prominent supporter has been banned several times this season after a series of widely-publicised incidents. Does the current ban extend beyond the initial two games indicated in the media? What can the club do to help this supporter continue attending Pompey games without adversely impacting upon the experience of other attendees?

AC: It's difficult for me to answer – there is an investigation ongoing and I don't want to prejudice that. We've already held meetings regarding this issue and we have another coming up. Any suspension in place for any supporter, will continue until the relevant investigations are completed. There are a number of supporters at the moment who are subject to bans – we had several ejections at our last home game against Sheffield Wednesday and some investigations remain ongoing. Some of these people have had support from the club, pointing them to various projects and help. I've worked in football for over 25 years –and I was attending games regularly 25 years prior to then. I know a ban is catastrophic for any passionate fan, and I don't take it lightly. One step we initially try to take in preference to bans is the imposition of Acceptable Behaviour Contracts (ABCs). Marie Stedman (Head of Safety and Stadium Operations) works with police to draw up acceptable behaviour contracts prior to any ban – that's often an effective means of dealing with behaviour and has with most supporters acted as a deterrent.

Q: It has been reported that some stewards don't seem to be aware of what is happening during a match and repeatedly stand in the eyeline of fans at critical moments in a game. Who should fans speak to on matchdays if they would like to raise a complaint about the conduct of stewards?

AC: Every steward has a unique number on their jacket – that can be used to help identify them. Fans can report any issues on a matchday to a supervisor, or to our anonymous text reporting line on 07500 778844. Stewards may not realise they're standing in the way blocking a view and we want to quickly resolve that so please do let us know of any concerns.

On a related point, I raised a concern at the last TGFC meeting that we had had 7 reports of fan misconduct submitted in match reports to the FA and were likely to get close to the stage where we could have sanctions of capacity restrictions imposed as a consequence. Since our last meeting, and prior to today's game, we've not since had a single one – that's really good news, and I hope that continues.

4. Ticketing

Q: When can fans expect to hear news about 2023-24 season ticket prices?

MJ: Earlier this week, we held a fan consultation to discuss this. One thing we discussed was the possibility of changing the structure of season ticket pricing moving forward. In League One, we believe it is only us and Lincoln FC who use a flat pricing structure across the whole stadium at the moment. We are considering various options such a 2 tier or 3 tier pricing structure. We're going through a supporter consultation process and will feed back the comments and views raised in these meetings to the board to feed into their decision making. We're committed to getting details of next year's season tickets out to fans by the end of this season. We'd like to do it earlier than that in the future.



Q: Are there any plans to change the loyalty points system used for away ticketing priority next season?

AC: Having held one meeting prior to Christmas, we will establish another meeting in the next month to help discuss this. We would also like to review the processes we used to allocate tickets for the Tottenham Hotspur FA Cup tie, to understand where we can improve and develop the best means to share out very large allocations like this in the future as well.

Q: Are any changes to hospitality planned for next season?

MJ: All of our hospitality packages will be reviewed at the end of the season. My job coming in is to have a look at where we find ourselves, and to evaluate our current offer. We'll do some fan consultation around this – I'd like to get representatives from each lounge and do a workshop to understand the experiences of hospitality supporters and what they'd like to see.

5. Training Ground Expansion

Q: The club are actively exploring ways to expand the training ground and were reportedly interested in the St. John's College playing fields in Farlington. These are now listed as under offer but The News have reported that the club is not currently pursuing the purchase. What can you tell us about the search for more land?

AC: What was said at Christmas was that the site was on the market, and we were interested in that and other sites that might become available. With any site, it has to be priced at a fair value. As Portsmouth FC knows from previous stadium plans, the St John's land at Farlington is affected by ecological factors, which means there are restrictions on what can be built there. The price being asked for, bearing in mind those difficulties, did not represent good value. We will continue to monitor what happens there and evaluate any other available options.

6. Matchday Experience

Q: Trials of different beers have been taking place in some parts of the ground recently. Will these be rolled out more widely, so fans elsewhere can also enjoy a wider range of beer on a matchday?

MJ: One of my roles is to manage our relationship with Piglet's Pantry. We'll do a full review at the end of the season. They've looked at our existing offer and there's an appetite to look at more options, but the caveat is that it must fit within our existing pouring rights agreement with Greene King. Whatever we bring in, the price point must be accessible to our fanbase.

AC: The increase we're seeing in catering revenue this year is really significant. Our average take on a matchday has grown by around 60% on last year. As part of the 125th anniversary celebrations, a new Champions Of England montage will be going up in the North Stand West mezzanine – this should be ready for fans to see next Saturday.

Q: Are there any plans to further develop the fan zone behind the Fratton End next year?

MJ: There's absolutely an appetite to extend and expand the fan zone. First and foremost, we want to develop the food and beverage offering. We want people to come to the ground early to soak up the matchday experience. We'd also like to have the option to deliver more pre and post game entertainment within the fan zone. This would also help ease travel congestion around match day.



Supporters will see a phased rollout of that starting from next week, as part of the 125th anniversary celebrations. We then plan to add more in from next season. We're also looking at the potential of a canopy to protect supporters during inclement weather, and seating. It could become a really versatile space which could be a spill out from the Victory Bar. This would also support growth in our non-match day conferencing and events business.

7. Finances

Q: The next set of accounts are due for release soon. Supporters will be able to see the detail in these when they're published, but what are the overall headlines fans can expect to see?

SC: Tony Brown (Chief Operations Officer) has shared the accounts with me in draft form so that I can write the Pompey Supporters' Trust annual independent analysis of them. The accounts are due to go out next week, as will my analysis. They show a fairly normal season in terms of revenue – it was the first season out of the pandemic with fans back in the stadium. It's already been mentioned in the press that there are some losses which the owners are covering. That refers not to the £9m of equity just announced, but the previous £9m put in. This set of accounts will show where that money was spent. My analysis will also go over 4 years of Tornante ownership – what money has come in and what has come out. A lot of money has come in, and has been spent on infrastructure and covering losses.

AC: Our thanks to Simon – his helpful and in-depth analysis helps to translate the financial accounts into something easy to read, done independently from club. Something for supporters to look out for is the much longer strategic report at the start of the document – that contains a much broader overview of what has gone on at the club in recent years.

8. Other

Q: Many fixtures this season have again been moved from a Saturday to midweek. While the club can't unilaterally change this, would it be supportive of supporters calling for the league to do more to avoid this?

AC: We haven't had any Fratton Park games moved for TV this year. Of the games which have been moved, one was for the death of the Queen, and another was due to international call ups. Two away games were moved for live broadcast. Today could have been off if a third player was called up – we will already be missing Joe Morell and Dane Scarlett. The other factor is inclement weather. At Accrington, there had been snow and we couldn't play the game. We certainly have to be mindful of the income we get from TV and therefore the obligations we along with every other EFL club have to the broadcasters who provide a significant amount of our turnover. Games moving for TV is a bigger problem in Premier League and Championship than in League One. In terms of supporting a total ban on moving some games from Saturday, I'd be nervous of an own goal here. Do we want to play on Saturdays even when our international players are out? There are typically 5 midweek games scheduled when the League One fixtures come out. There's more in the Championship as international weekends are all off at that level. The new forthcoming TV deal may change things – the league are trying to create a more competitive broadcasting space, and so are trying to bundle together packages of games. There are proposals which could see more games streamed, or even the end of Article 48 [The UEFA law which allows for a TV blackout on Saturday afternoons]. It's a debate which will continue.



Q: There have been issues in Club 125 (Legends Lounge) regarding confusion over half time opening this season. Can this be rectified in future?

MJ: It's important to look back to the start of the season – packages were originally sold as having pre and post match access. We listened to supporters, who told us they wanted access at half time as well. We made an arrangement that allowed supporters in the North Stand and Fratton End to be get into the lounge at half time, but unfortunately supporters in the South Stand can't – we have difficulty with access in that respect, as they would need to leave the stadium and re-enter it to get around to the lounge, which isn't practical in such a short half time period. We'll review this again at the end of season.

Q: The annual Fan Engagement Index has been published, which puts Pompey as 16th out of the 92 clubs. That's impressive, but we were scored a '0' for transparency – that's clearly wrong, as this meeting shows. Could we have section on the club website regarding fan engagement, to better demonstrate the club's commitment to fan engagement?

JM: We've been in contact with the individual who puts the index together with further details of how transparent we are.

AC: Thank you - we will look at this.

Q: A potential GDPR issue was raised at our last meeting. You've since investigated this – what was the outcome?

AC: At the last meeting, it was minuted that I was confident no club breach had taken place. Since then, I met with the supporter this concern relates to. I assured him in person that there had been no breach of club GDPR and that his personal details were safe. It was a really constructive meeting – a supporter who had been concerned about their own safety has now returned to Fratton Park, with his family and we continue to look out for his safety.

9. AOB

Q: iFollow is available for UK fans today, as it's an international weekend. Are we still getting a good take-up of streaming passes?

AC: I'm conscious of piracy, as are the league. We do maintain good revenue streams from it and remain towards the top of League One for passes sold.

Q: The Pompey History Society have a collection of archives and memorabilia, but nowhere to currently store these objects. Can the club help?

AC: Michael Eisner is totally committed to preserving the club's rich history, and we'll do what we can to assist with this.

- Minutes by Donald Vass