

Tony Goodall Fans' Conference

Wednesday 6th December – 6pm



Attended:

Andrew Cullen, Rich Hughes, Tony Brown, Mark Judges & Johnny Moore (PFC)

Adrian Foster (South Wales Association of Pompey Supporters), Barry Dewing (Pompey Independent Supporters' Association), Ben Hardinge (South West Supporters' Club), Donald Vass (TGFC Secretary & Chichester Portsmouth Supporters' Club), Gemma Raggett (London Supporters' Club), John Cannings (Northern Blues), Leon Tricker (Social Media Groups), Pam Wilkins (Pompey Disabled Supporters' Association), Roy Gregory (Central Branch Supporters' Club), Simon Colebrook (Portsmouth Supporters' Trust), Steve Heaven-Gandy (Isle Of Wight Supporters' Club), Steve Tovey (Legends Lounge) & Vicky Lamb (Her Game Too).

Apologies:

Ian Marshall (Chimes Lounge) & Mike Whittle (Pompey History Society).

1. Ticketing

Q: The club have recently trialled the introduction of a fourth loyalty point window during away ticket sales (in addition to the previously-used three), and increased the duration of the opening two windows to give supporters longer to purchase tickets. Have these changes been helpful to supporters, and should these changes be made permanent?

MJ: Based on feedback from fans, we added the fourth loyalty point window to enable more regular travellers to get access to tickets before we reached general sale. We also had some comments from fans who felt the windows weren't long enough, meaning some who had the right number of loyalty points weren't getting to purchase tickets in their priority window. We've recently adopted both of these suggestions as a trial.

In practice, the vast majority of sales in each window occurred during the first hour irrespective of the window length. We had a very low uptake of sales in the additional hours – on average, only 24 tickets were sold in the additional hours we extended the windows for. That highlights that ticket purchasing windows are probably long enough without needing to be extended. Anyone who doesn't purchase in their first available window will of course still be able to purchase in the following windows, subject to availability.

Increasing the quantity of windows has proved a positive step to help more supporters attend matches together with friends and families. The additional tier is a more accessible one added in before we reach general sale and has proved really popular.

[A general discussion was had on the topic. It was felt that there is merit in having an additional purchasing window, but that the data made available from the ticket office showed that there was not a need to extend the length of time of each purchasing window. The club will therefore continue

to use four loyalty point windows for away ticket sales, but revert to the original length of time for each window.]



Q: The club have sometimes put two away matches on sale at once, or sold tickets on the same day fans are travelling to an away game. Please could this be avoided in future?

MJ: We received feedback on this topic at the last TGFC meeting and have taken this on board. Since selling tickets to Cambridge and Reading on the same day, we've gone on sale with 7 further away matches, and none have been grouped.

Tickets for the AFC Wimbledon EFL Trophy game did go on sale on the same day of the Burton Albion away league fixture. I'd like to give our apologies for this oversight – we will avoid this in future, apart from exceptional circumstances when out of our control. It may occasionally be deemed necessary, for example if there are cup games to go on sale and we have a really short turnaround time in which to sell tickets.

Q: How many fan groups are now using the new template provided by ticket office when submitting ticket requests? Is this working well?

MJ: 75% of supporter groups are using the new template. That's helped the ticket office considerably – it ensures the data we receive is accurate, and means we can assign tickets more easily as a team. It also helps us with data moving forward, for example making it easier to find each supporter group's average take-up for away games so we know their allocation for high profile fixtures. As with any new process, there is a period of taking on feedback. We want to keep tweaking and amending the process to make it the best it can possibly be. Our aim is to get 100% of supporter groups using it.

Q: Season ticket seats were not reserved for the AFC Wimbledon EFL Trophy game. Several wheelchair supporters found their seats were sold very quickly before they could purchase them. Could an exemption be made to reserve the seats of disabled supporters in future, who have more specific access requirements than most supporters?

MJ: We've not reserved season ticket seats for any supporters for any of the EFL Trophy games, due to parts of the stadium not being opened. This was a matter raised and discussed at the Disabled Supporters' Association meeting last week. There are arguments for and against reserving disabled season ticket seats, and I understand the frustration from supporters who couldn't get their own usual space. However, for the AFC Wimbledon EFL Trophy game we've currently sold only two disabled spaces in the Fratton End and two in the South Stand, so the quantity available far exceeds what's being booked, so I'd question the need to reserve. We want to enable as many wheelchair fans to attend as possible, and if we restrict sales to existing season ticket holders unnecessarily then other supporters won't be able to access them.

Q: Does the club still plan to phase out the Away Season Ticket Holder scheme next season? Does this need any further consultation?

MJ: Yes, that's the plan. The away season ticket holder scheme will be dissolved in June 2024, as discussed with the away ticketing consultation group and agreed at the TGFC. We committed to, ahead of the 2024/25 season, ensuring that affected fans are given the correct loyalty points on

their ticketing account to be certain they're not disadvantages moving forward, and to provide them with details of their local supporter groups, so they could continue to receive a managed service through them if they prefer. We will write to all away season ticket holders with further details in the first quarter of 2024.



Q: How long do loyalty points remain valid?

MJ: Loyalty points don't currently expire. As previously discussed, we will explore the potential of a rolling 2-year window for loyalty points from the 2024/25 season and beyond, We won't implement this unless we've got complete confidence in the accuracy of our loyalty points data, and until we've consulted with the TGFC.

Q: Half-season tickets have proved very popular, and quickly sold out. Do fans who purchased them benefit from the same loyalty point gain as full season ticket holders, ie. 1 point per home fixture?

MJ: Yes – they'll receive 9 loyalty points for the 9 games covered by the half season ticket. These will be added at the point of fulfilment. It's an automated process. Half season tickets will be fulfilled following tickets for Cheltenham away reaching general sale.

Q: The club apply a £3 booking fee for tickets purchased over the phone or in person, but some fans report that this is not applied consistently. Why do some transactions attract this fee while others do not?

MJ: Apologies – it should be applied consistently. In summary, if the club require someone to attend the ticket office in person or book their ticket over the phone because their tickets are not available online, they shouldn't be charged a booking fee. If it's a supporter's choice to buy in person, or over the phone, when the tickets are available online, they will incur the offline cost. If any supporters feel they have been incorrectly charged the booking fee, please contact us and we would be happy to investigate. Incorrect charges will be refunded.

Q: Fans report receiving fantastic service the staff working in the ticket office, who are clearly working very hard, but that it does appear to be understaffed and under-resourced. Are the staffing pressures there alleviating?

MJ: Vish has worked tirelessly for the supporters of the football club. He's incredibly passionate about his job, and wants to make sure our fans have access to the matches that matter to them. He is an absolute shining light. We did have some changes in the ticket office during the off-season, and it took us a while to replace them. In the interim, Kate stepped up and filled the void. That position has now been permanently filled by Ollie, who did some great work with us previously on the seat move projects during the stadium development work. He's completed a degree in sports science, and is now also using this working with Pompey Women. It's disappointing that fans have sometimes had an inconsistent ticketing experience during that interim period, but there are calmer waters ahead.



Q: Some fans are disappointed that they can buy a ticket in person at the ticket office, but don't go away with a ticket in their hand. Why are these posted out, rather than printed off as a physical ticket in person?

MJ: When I joined the club last year, we routinely had tickets with the wrong dates printed on them, as games were being moved for international call ups, frozen pitches and so on. We occasionally ended up with fans turning up for games on the wrong date. We now sell all matches to hold – we don't print and dispatch tickets until one week prior to the fixture. That means we now have the correct date on everything, and can also insert relevant information on the tickets, for example for our Remembrance Day fixture we printed a message reminding fans to be in their seats in time for the minutes' silence. It has also reduced the number of reprint requests we receive – because fans are getting their tickets closer to the fixture, there are far fewer fans who lose them who then have a poor fan experience having to get this sorted at the stadium on a matchday.

Q: Why is the ticket office cashless, but the club shop a few metres away will accept cash?

MJ: These are, in effect, two different businesses operating in the same building – Just Sport operate the club shop while we run the ticket office. It's interesting to hear they're operating differently in this respect – we will look into it.

Q: Some fans who can't attend games regularly are finding it hard to purchase multiple seats together for fixtures now, with availability very limited. Will some blocks of the Milton End be available to Pompey fans for every fixture from now on?

AC: Yes. For the next 2 or 3 games until the lift is in place, Pompey fans will be able to buy tickets on the north side of the Milton End, then this will revert to the permanent configuration and Portsmouth fans will be able to buy tickets on the south side of the stand.

MJ: Milton End tickets will be going onto the system on a game-by-game basis so that we can learn from the gradual growth of the Milton End. The final toilet blocks are not yet operational for example, and we need to see how those perform, as well as monitoring egress in and out of the stadium. We will monitor these things, work out where the pinch points are during games, learn the lessons needed and put the next fixture on sale quickly. We want people to have a good experience – the football club has worked very hard to ensure the Milton End is now a great place to watch football from.

2. Stadium Redevelopment / Network Rail

Q: Will planned post-season work on the Victory/Warrior lounges have any impact on the Legends Lounge hospitality offering?

Q: Is the TV gantry work going to begin this summer?

AC: We have several other projects which will get underway very quickly once the season finishes. Michael Eisner and the Board have committed to a further capex spend of well over £2m for five projects. It's a really exciting package which will enhance things for both staff and supporters.

The South Stand TV gantry will be at a high level and be sympathetic to the original Archibald Leitch design, which supporters will have already seen and will look fantastic. The gantry will not only be Championship-ready but Premier League-ready. The Premier League broadcasting requirements are quite exacting – but that would be a nice problem to have! Work will start on the

gantry immediately after the last game of season. It's a 4-5 week project, a huge structure and involving steel cranes. We obviously don't have any access from the back of the stand – it will have to be front loaded via the pitch.



The new gantry will mean that the temporary TV gantry behind the dugouts will then be made redundant, which in turn will release 60-70 seats immediately that can then be sold as premium tickets.

We will also move the club media team to the new TV gantry, releasing the new building in the south east corner of the stadium as a new hospitality suite.

The North Stand has seen a phenomenal increase in food and beverage sales over the last two seasons. We've increased milling space and added two new mezzanines, but that's still not proved sufficient for the extra demand, so we will be adding more toilets and mezzanines into the existing space in the upper floor of the stand. There will be more mobile bar areas here to help alleviate some of the queues in other areas. These changes will require some further modifications to meet fire regulations. This work will all be completed over the summer.

The timing of the planned work to the Victory & Warrior Lounges is still to be confirmed – we have some further design work still to do, and also some weddings booked in for the summer which we don't want to interrupt. If the redevelopment of these areas does run into next season, we will always keep a part of the lounges open to fans on matchdays.

The final project involves moving all the first team coaching, medical, analysis staff at the training ground from the Portacabins to the main building. Work on that will begin in the Spring.

Q: At October's TGFC meeting, emails were shared from supporters detailing matchday safety concerns in relation to Goldsmith Avenue and Fratton Station. Given that the long-term solution - a direct pedestrian link between station and ground - isn't likely to be in place for many years, how is the club working with other parties to mitigate the risks raised in those emails?

AC: Ultimately, it's not the football club's responsibility to conduct risk assessments along Goldsmith Avenue. We continue to work behind the scenes to bring the relevant people together in order to bring about change. We had both the Managing Director of South Western Railway for the region and Stephen Morgan MP at the Charlton game, so they were able to see the situation for themselves.

I'm really grateful to fans who continue to share their experiences with us. Every letter I get, I contact the individual to see if they're happy for me to share it with Stephen Morgan MP and Portsmouth City Council. It's been really helpful to do this - thank you. I've also encouraged supporters who have experienced difficulties at the station to write to the CEO of Network Rail. Network Rail's strategic business plan promises to improve passenger safety and support projects which deliver better accessibility and which will help to economically regenerate local areas. We have support from the city council on this. We're committed to sharing in the cost of a feasibility study, and we want everyone who will benefit from regeneration to share the load. We're committed to getting this done with the help of others.



Q: Who is ultimately accountable if an accident were to happen on Goldsmith Avenue after a match? Many different parties seems to acknowledge the risk but little appears to have been done to reduce it.

AC: It's a public highway – all we can do is continue to communicate the risk to the public bodies involved and review through the appropriate channels that safeguard public safety both on matchdays and at other times. Fans continue to email me, with one saying they've stopped coming to games due to the risk along Goldsmith Avenue post-match and the associated queuing to access the bridge because platforms are closed off.

Q: If the problem is deemed bad enough, could the council close the road on matchdays?

AC: That's certainly an option those responsible can consider. Cutting off access along a major arterial road which serves homes and a major shopping centre will make travel harder for local residents and those with retail and commercial business interests. The planned developments and economic regeneration of the area with increased activity and associated greater use of Fratton Station will only increase the problem on non-matchdays. The solution is a footbridge and route away from the narrow pavements along Goldsmith Avenue.

Q: Are there any plans to improve internet access at the stadium?

TB: We are looking into it as part of our wider stadium redevelopment works. The current stadium development works which started in 2021 will take Fratton Park infrastructure spend to £19m under Tornante by the end of the season – and the new works mentioned earlier will take us beyond that.

AC: The cost of improving internet access at stadiums is coming down as time goes on and technology improves. It's something we'll continue to monitor with a view to the future.

3. Training Ground

Q: Can changes be made to the viewing area at the training ground for Academy matches, particularly more provision for wheelchair spaces and a bigger seating area to accommodate more parents?

RH: There's lots of work going on at the training ground and we want to continue making positive changes there. We'll keep monitoring this as part of our ongoing improvement work.

4. Matchday Experience

Q: Fans leaving the North Stand slightly early during evening games have reported that the exit via the rear of the Fratton End is locked off. This means they need to walk a longer route home via Tesco to get to the train station – exacerbating the need to leave early. Why is this?

AC: Because we open up the Fratton End concourse for supporters at half time, we need to close these gates completely off. If we left them open, people without tickets could access the stands and compromise safety. We keep these gates closed until 10 minutes before the end of the game, then open them so that fans can exit through these gates. We'll review this though – it could be that we could bring this forward slightly for evening games to help supporters get back to the train station on time. I would encourage the group that asked this question to discuss further with Marie Stedman.



5. Club Shop

Q: The online club shop appears not to have any stock of home shirts currently available, in any size, and fans report that it's been sold out at the club's store on Anson Road as well. Is this acceptable going into December?

AC: Like everyone else, I'm really disappointed we don't have home shirts to sell at the moment. In 2018, there was a huge clamour to move to a really top, prominent brand. Mark, Anna and Tony worked hard to deliver a brilliant agreement with Nike, which has proved incredibly lucrative for the football club and one of the best I have seen in all my time in football. As part of the arrangement, it is a condition from Nike (and one across all their supply agreements outside their major global clubs) that their partners run the club store. It's still a fantastic deal for us - Just Sport, Nike's partners, take on all the liabilities, stock, staffing and operations while we just provide the premises. PFC don't need to provide anything more and have no cash tied up in stock or staff. We then benefit from a good share of turnover.

The thing to recognise when working with a major brand like Nike though is that there are very long lead times for kit. Kit designs need to be signed off in the September prior to the next season for delivery following July/August. So, for 2023-24 the kit has to be ordered in September 2022. Just Sport review sales figures from previous years, then forecast their retail orders for that season. Sales of all our shirts have been phenomenal this year. That's partly down to an early launch, one month earlier than normal on June 30th. In that first week, we sold extraordinary numbers - over 2,000 in 2 days. That compares to 900 in the whole of the first week the previous season. The marketing launch and reveal was really good - take a bow Ryley Towler and Dani Lane! Then team performance kicks in, and we've had such a positive start to the season. We're at 14,000 sales already, compared to 9,000 for the whole of last season. That incredible success and increase in sales has led to Just Sport exhausting their entire stock of home with no opportunity to order more from Nike.

I'm disappointed, but we have not just sat back and accepted the situation. We have been persistent on the matter, met with Nike, and we've sealed a deal with them which they've not done for any other club. They've agreed to produce 2,000 adult home shirts to us just in time for Christmas. They are doing their best to ensure these arrive with us week commencing 18th December. Because of Christmas delivery times, these will go straight to our club shop - we won't initially do online sales. If there are any left post-Christmas, these can then go online. I was unable to secure more children's shirts due to the minimum volumes needed. There won't be any new kids shirts coming in, but Just Sport will continue to discount the remaining 125 third shirts available in both adults and children's sizes.

We're in a good place with overall retail performance - the 125th anniversary range has proved successful, we have vastly increased the range of merchandise for children following meetings I had with supporters last season and retro shirts have been hugely popular. Our retail revenues are at record levels this year, even beating the season the club went to Wembley.

MJ: I've never known Nike to do this [agree to an extra print run at short notice] - it's a great result.



Q: Are there any plans for more Retro Kits to be made available from the club? These have proved very popular with fans.

AC: We initially introduced these for sale in March – the 2,500 units quickly sold out. We've been able to get more 1978 shirts and 1991 shirts, and have 750 of those in stock at the moment. We previously received feedback from this meeting about going up to 3XL, and these shirts are now available in those larger sizes. We've got two new retro shirt design coming in March which we think will be popular with supporters.

6. First team

Q: The club is coming through a difficult period of injuries – have we just been unlucky, or is there something more to take from this?

RH: The best thing for me was Marlon Pack's [articulation in the news](#) – I thought that was a very balanced reflection. Look at Newcastle, Tottenham, and many others – an increase of injuries is a theme across the game at the moment. The variation in added time this season, playing more minutes at the end of games than in previous years, has meant some players have done the equivalent of two extra games across the season. That will take its toll.

AC: The Athletic recently run [an article](#) showing that injuries this season had increased by 30% in the Premier League with a 55% increase in hamstring injuries.

RH: We're constantly doing what we can do to review our processes and look at what we're doing. We're in a nice spot, and feel we're coming through our 'injury crisis'. We want to change the narrative at the club. It's frustrating to get injuries – we want our players available – but our mantra is 'next man up'. We want a culture of players coming in, stepping up and performing. That's the mentality we're trying to create. We have a very strong 18. We've just won two games in a row without Colby Bishop and Joe Morrell. We've bounced back well after an incredibly disappointing afternoon against Blackpool. The fans were outstanding that day – it didn't go unnoticed by the staff and players at the club. To follow that up with two wins, five goals and two clean sheets has been really pleasing. We're delighted with the group, and want to keep pushing forward.

7. Other

Q: There has been discussion on social media about the recent release of stretcher bearers employed at the club, who were well regarded, long-standing fans who had performed this role for many years. They were disappointed by the manner of their exit. Please can the club explain the reason for this decision?

RH: This change came about from changes in the football/medical department. We replaced our medical team in the summer, bringing in Steve Hard as our new Head of Medical, as well as a new Fitness Coach and First Team Physical Performance Coach. After reviewing our entire setup, one of the recommendations was that we should not continue with independent stretcher bearers. This came about as a result of our medical restructure, and represents a similar setup to that Steve worked with at his previous Premier League club.

AC: I was made aware of an email circulating on social media, sent by our HR team attaching a P45. I asked for and have seen all the other chain of other correspondence sent to those concerned in this chain of communication and can confirm that proper employment processes were followed throughout. However, I do believe that we could have handled this better. I will be

speaking to those impacted to express the club's appreciation and gratitude for their work over many seasons



8. AOB

AC: As a football club, we'd like to recognise the fantastic service and achievement of Simon Colebrook, who is standing down as Chair of the Pompey Supporters' Trust. Simon's work has been invaluable to both the football club and to me on a personal level and that special relationship has helped us to make better and more informed decisions on behalf of supporters. We hugely appreciate Simon's efforts and delighted that Simon will be staying on the PST committee. We very much look forward to working with the new Chair, Donald Vass

- Minutes by Donald Vass