

Bees United AGM - questions for Cliff Crown

OPENING - general question to Cliff about how things are going and club accounts

TICKETING - access to tickets

What can the club do to reduce the number of home match tickets ending up on 3rd party resale websites and thereby ensure that more tickets go to genuine supporters in the first instance?

We share fans' frustrations about tickets appearing on 3rd party resale websites. We have a team of people in our Box Office team monitoring these tickets and we switch off any tickets that have no price attached as these tend to. That means that supporters who buy from these sites are not able to access the stadium but instead have to go to the Box Office to have their tickets checked (and then rejected). We also communicate on a regular basis to fans to advise them not to use any 3rd party resale websites (given that these can often be scam sites) and any supporters found to have sold their tickets on these sites at higher than face value risks having their season ticket or membership being revoked as this is against our terms and conditions – we've revoked more than 150 memberships so far this season that have been involved in sales through 3rd party websites.

Can parents transfer TAPs to their children to assist with booking tickets together?

Unfortunately, this was always going to be a challenge when we reached the Premier League which is why we encouraged everyone that could do so to become a season ticket holder. When we consulted with our fan groups, including Bees United, the very strong view was that tickets should be allocated on the basis of TAPs which we do appreciate makes it difficult when other members of the family don't have the same number of TAPs. In order to assist this, we divided the games into Category A (the highest demand games) and Category B games. For Category B games at home, match tickets are on sale on a first come, first served basis so these are the games to target if you would like to bring along other members with less TAPs. In line with our ethos as a family-friendly club, we will also consider allowing parents to transfer some TAPs to children on a case-by-case basis. Please contact the Box Office team if you would like to do this.

Can I transfer TAPs to other friends?

No, we don't allow the transfer of TAPs between friends.

Could we offer TAPs for attending B team fixtures

We would encourage all fans to go along to watch B team fixtures. At the moment, there isn't an obvious way we could include TAPs for these fixtures, but we will certainly consider that.

Why is the Ticket Exchange not available for Premium ticket holders and are there any plans to introduce one?

Following feedback from fans, we have reassessed the need for the Ticket Exchange for our Premium Seat Holders and the Club will be sending communications to all our Premium Seat holders about this in the coming days.

TICKETING - volume

Are there any plans next season to increase the volume of season tickets? If yes, from how many to how many? I'm on a waiting list but I'm sure thousands are also.

We want to keep season tickets to a maximum of around 10,000 so that we have a good number of match-by-match tickets for our MyBees Members. We expect that the majority of our current season ticket holders will renew for next season but there may be a few that are not renewed – in situations where fans have moved away for example. So, it's possible there may be a very limited number of season tickets on sale for next season. There was a "register your interest" list running for season tickets in previous seasons – however everyone on that list was contacted with the opportunity to buy a season ticket for this season so that list is no longer active. The priority for buying any of the limited season tickets for next season has yet to be confirmed but is likely to involve TAPs.

Are there any plans to extend the capacity of the stadium?

No, there are no plans to extend the capacity of the stadium. When we looked for a new site for the stadium, the location in Brentford was seen as paramount – rather than moving out of the borough to a larger site. Any extension would require us to acquire new land and build over the railway line which is prohibitively costly. Our preference is very much to keep the stadium at the current capacity and focus on selling out for each game and creating an incredible atmosphere that supports our players and ensures a great matchday experience.

TICKETING - pricing

Over the past two years, fans have suffered COVID-19, rising inflation and cost of living. The club is now in receipt of more than £100m of income this season with at least another £100m to follow next season if we stay up. Given that 90 per cent of fans loyally deferred their season ticket refund to assist the club, can you tonight explicitly rule out season ticket and matchday admission price rises for next season? And if not, why not?

We are extremely grateful to each and every fan that chose not to take a season ticket refund during these difficult times. We showed our thanks for this loyalty by:

- Providing free iFollow access to all season ticket holders for all games when it was available instead of charging for this service (as many other clubs did) – saving more than £300 over the season for those loyal supporters.*
- Abandoning a published 25% price increase on season tickets when we were promoted to the Premier League.*
- Allowing supporters who moved up a concession to renew without extra charge.*
- Showing considerable leniency around deadlines for paying for season ticket holders who were struggling financially due to COVID.*

Affordable football remains a key priority for both Matthew Benham and the Club. We are considering season tickets for next year at the moment and will be engaging with our fan groups before any announcements are made.

TICKETING -website

The ticketing site is clearly not for purpose. The staff operating it share the frustrations of the fans. It needs to be replaced with a system that works.

No ticketing site is perfect and we accept that there have been frustrations with the ticketing system over recent seasons. However, our ticketing provider is one that's been chosen by many other football clubs and despite the challenges, we feel that the system is fundamentally sound, although we agree that the user experience needs to be improved.

That's why we set up a dedicated Ticketing Working Group this season, involving representatives from both Bees United, BIAS and other fan groups. We prioritised a list of required improvements and are having regular meetings to review each of these and are making good progress on implementing these improvements.

Next season, we are also planning to replace our website with a brand new one – moving away from the EFL Digital template. This will allow us to redesign the user interface for the ticket system (as Everton have done with the same ticketing system) making it much more user friendly.

TICKETING - away supporters in home areas at BCS

At home games, what is the percentage of corporate membership/season ticket sales in the 'premier seats'. At the game vs. Aston Villa, in section S205 there were Villa supporters which was made evident when they scored. This fortunately did not lead to further issues, but what security checks are taken by the club in such instances?

Given the level of demand for premium seats, we don't knowingly sell any tickets to away fans and we are looking at ways to tighten up those processes if that is found not to be the case. That said, premium seats were sold on the basis of being "fully transferable" which we are aware has led to some issues, particularly when those guests are not respectful of the home supporters in those areas. Hopefully you will have seen that a strong message went out on this from Jon Varney recently and we will continue to do so. A particular focus will be on ensuring that the Legends, Orchard and Railway Lounges are for home supporters only – we have obligations to the Premier League, away club and other stakeholders that means that there will be some visiting supporters in the Legends Lounge. We have reminded all premium seat holders that they are responsible for the behaviour of their guests and any behaviour issues may result in ejection and/or them losing their premium seats.

I recently saw figures quoted of 11,000 season ticket holders & 40,000 members at Brentford Football Club. Nice for the football club but are all of the members 'true' Brentford supporters. Hence away supporters gaining tickets in 'home' areas'.

There are currently just under 10,000 season ticket holders, with around another 1,500 premium seat holders and 18,500 MyBees Members. We are very proud of this and delighted to have attracted such levels of interest – it's a long way from the just under 6,000 season ticket holders and members we had at Griffin Park.

We will take action when we see supporters openly supporting away teams in home areas and will continue to do this, reinforcing the importance of this with our stewards.

Match tickets are not transferable but if supporters transfer their season tickets, they remain responsible for their behaviour and should therefore not pass them onto anyone that they do not know.

TICKETING – seat moves

Will it be possible for season ticket holders to move to new locations next season?

Our priority for next season is to move season ticket holders who are currently in the West Stand but don't want to stand (given the planned installation of rail seating)– and to move those that would like to stand into the West Stand! Once that is completed, there may be some options for fans to move to other locations but there is limited availability. Anyone wanting to move should ensure they carefully read the instructions sent out as part of the season ticket renewals process.

TICKETING - away tickets

Is there some way of ensuring that fans can choose to be at the front of the area if they can't stand all game?

The allocation of tickets for away games is subject to the rules of the away club. We do typically request some seats for fans that have accessibility requests or do not want to stand for games. Some clubs do keep a number of seats at the front of the away section and our Accessibility team will then influence the allocation to place those fans that want to sit in these areas. Please do email us at accessibility@brentfordfc.com if you haven't done so previously and we can put a note against your booking to try to assist in this way.

MEMBERSHIP SCHEME

My brother and his partner became members of Brentford at the start of the season at a cost of £40. There have been no communications or contact from club in regards ticket availability. Please advise on what the "Membership" actually provides.

Please ask your brother and his partner to contact the Box Office so we can check their email preferences as it sounds like they may perhaps have inadvertently “unsubscribed” from emails. We definitely send out emails to MyBees Members about ticket availability on a regular basis!

The benefits of the Membership packages are detailed on our website – the main benefit relates to access to tickets but there is also free access to BeesPlayer and other Member events during the season.

WOMEN AND FOOTBALL

Why are there not more women watching football? It is fun, exciting, a great day out, family friendly and never queues for the toilet. So perhaps I would ask how Brentford can encourage more women to the stadium and to get involved. They have no idea what they are missing! Since being a Bees member, I have told every woman I know how amazing football is!

We are delighted to hear that you are doing your bit to encourage more women to come along to games! We share your desire to encourage more women to come along and are about to announce a more focused programme of activity covering our work relating to women and girls at Brentford – to encourage more women to come along to games, build our female workforce and also support our women's teams – particularly in the lead up to the UEFA Women's Euros tournament where we're proud to be hosting four games this summer.

EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

Is the club continuing its work to increase the diversity of the fanbase?

Creating a welcoming, inclusive environment for all is at the core of the club's work. Under our BeeTogether campaign, we continue to strive for improvements in this area and we will be applying for our Foundation Level in the Premier League Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Standard later this year. One reason why we haven't continued to sell more season tickets is to ensure that we have sufficient match tickets available to encourage new members from diverse backgrounds to come to games.

RECRUITMENT

Given we could be embroiled in a relegation dog fight, and it is becoming clear that we need additional player resources which we have been unsuccessful in pursuing so far in this transfer window, do we have the financial clout to be successful both in bringing in new players now and in the future?

There is a good deal of work going on behind the scenes to support Brentford in its ambitions to become an established member of the Premier League!

Our excellent reputation as a club is helping us to continue to attract some impressive young players and develop them through the B team set-up as evidenced by the number of B team players making their Premier League debuts this season. The access that we have to data also allows us to spot players that may not be on other clubs' radars. And we've shown with the recruitment of Pontus Jansson, that we will also bring in experienced players when we think they will add to the squad.

Clearly, we don't have the biggest spending power in the League, but we are most grateful to Matthew Benham for his ongoing financial support of the team, and we are in a good position at this moment in time.

Accepting the need to buy in experienced players when needed, does the mainstay of Brentford recruitment policy remain primarily at bringing in relatively inexperienced players suitable for training up?

As Thomas and others at the club have said, there are very few clubs globally that are not "selling clubs" so there will continue to be an element of player trading in our business model. However, it was fantastic at the start of this season to be in a position not to have to sell any our best players.

Our player recruitment remains in good hands with Phil Giles at the helm and Lee Dykes and his team but I think that it's fair to say that we will continue with a blend of both experienced and less experienced players. Given the impact of Brexit, we will also need more focus on some younger homegrown players and, in the longer term, we may consider a new Academy facility as part of our plans for investment at Jersey Road.

What plans do you have in place to ensure Thomas Frank and his coaching staff remain our manager for years to come given the incredible job he has done, given other clubs must be looking carefully at him?

Thomas has a good relationship with Phil Giles and Lee Dykes and he is happy at Brentford and is fully invested in the Brentford culture. We are looking forward to continued successful times with Thomas but as we all know, there are no guarantees in football!

Since the meeting, Brentford FC Head Coach Thomas Frank and Assistant Head Coach Brian Riemer have both signed new long-term contracts. The pair signed their new deals at the end of last week, committing their futures to the Club. They are now under contract until the end of the 2024/25 season.

They are fantastic people to work with and I'm sure everyone at the Club will be pleased that they have committed to stay with us until 2025. They have been integral to the success that we've shared over recent seasons, culminating in achieving our shared target of playing in the Premier League. We want to continue to take Brentford forward, to compete with clubs far bigger than us, and to see how far we can progress. We hope to build on the success that Thomas and Brian have helped deliver along with all of the other staff and players and look forward to what we hope will be a successful conclusion to the season and beyond.

Will we have an Academy again in the future? Are the plans for the training ground dependent on Premier League status?

You may have seen that we have prepared some plans for longer term development at the training ground – a Performance Centre, including an Academy. It remains part of the club's long-term ambitions to play in UEFA competitions which would require an Academy, so we certainly have plans to support this – dependent on our long-term future in the Premier League. Even if we get relegated to the Championship, we will be looking to improve the facilities at the training ground.

We are thankful for the fantastic work that Rasmus Ankersen did for Brentford, but as he was fully aware of all current and future transfer target identified by Brentford, is he and/or Southampton restricted from using that information?

We want to thank Rasmus for all he has done for the club to get us to the Premier League and wish him well at Southampton. We don't have any concerns about his work at Southampton having a detrimental impact on our club.

On the topic of Rasmus' move to Southampton, how long were the club aware of his intentions to move whilst continuing to work for Brentford?

This is not a matter that the Club will speak about publicly. As mentioned above, we don't have any concerns about his work at Southampton having a detrimental impact on our club.

MATTHEW BENHAM

Is there an approximate date by which Matthew can expect to recoup his investment in Lionel Road and if not is there a danger that some ne'er do well will come along like at Newcastle or Southampton and swallow up his debt and our Club?

As you know, Matthew is a life-long fan of the club and his investments are long term, with no specific dates in place by which he is looking to recoup his investment.

We don't have the luxury of being able to anticipate all eventualities in the future, and the club, under the leadership of Jon Varney, will continue to focus on ways to increase revenues and the financial sustainability of the club, reducing the reliance on Matthew's support – but we are confident that Matthew will continue to do the right thing by this club and not allow anything to jeopardise the future of his beloved Bees.

A broader question about the future philosophy of the club

Do we stay as a fan-based club with its existing ethos and culture or do we transform into a fully corporate entity to survive and progress in the Premier League? Do we stick with our existing value for money approach to transfers, salary budgets, ticket prices etc or try and compete with the big boys on attracting established international players and competitive salaries. Or will we accept that our current approach may mean we will have to accept periodic returns to the Championship. I have found that most fans I have spoken with would rather retain our current culture and strategy, our unique Club appeal to fans, even if it is at the expense of retaining our Premier League status on a long term basis?

We don't see it as an either-or option in the way you've phrased it. Our core values as a club are:

- *Togetherness – one team, one family, one community, one club*
- *Respectful – letting our actions speak for themselves*
- *Progressive – taking calculated risks*

So, our ethos and culture are very much central to our club's DNA, and we won't abandon that. Our role in the local community and the family-friendly nature of our club is paramount. But, at the same time, we will seek to be professional and progressive when it comes to improving how we do things, with a clear business strategy and taking calculated risks to achieve the rewards we all want.

The pictures on the club website and the television coverage confirms the multi-generational make-up of the Brentford fanbase. How does the Club intend to retain this family fan base structure in future years, when existing fan couples start having children and when demand for season tickets increases amongst the wider population? And how can they be seated together. Any thoughts?

This is difficult given the demand for seats and the fact that we can't increase the capacity of the stadium. It's the main reason why we didn't choose to sell more season tickets when we clearly could – we need to have a good number of seats available for Members (both old and new) so we can attract future fans.

We will have a "movers and shakers" week where season ticket holders who want to look at moving to include an expanded family can do so – but this may mean that they would have to change stand to do so.

SPONSORSHIP

It seemed that the club were close to agreeing a stadium name sponsorship at one stage and were just waiting to see what league we were in before finalising the deal. However, things have gone quiet on this issue for some time so what is the latest situation please Cliff. For my part I am very happy with the Brentford Community Stadium.

We're continuing to work very hard on securing a stadium naming sponsor – it's a key element of the financial sustainability of the club over coming years and clearly COVID has made this a very tough market indeed for naming rights. But we won't accept just any sponsor – it needs to be the right fit and the right deal for us. We've rejected some deals so far because they didn't work for us. In the meantime, "Brentford Community Stadium" as a name continues to serve us pretty well and emphasises our desire to be a valued and valuable asset to the local community.

I understand the demands of sponsorship but why are we never able to wear our club colours (home kit) away from home when there is clearly no clash with the home team. Other Premiership teams appear able to do it'

The Premier League doesn't specifically prohibit us from wearing our home kit when playing away as long as there are no colour clashes. There are some other demands that feed into this including the playing kit that we've put aside for this season, commercial demands and player preferences but we can certainly pass on your feedback on this.

INTERNATIONAL MEMBERS - all from fans in the US

How will the Club maintain or grow its international fan base with the additional global exposure that being in the Premier League brings? Will the Club consider international memberships next season that would help make it easier for overseas fans to plan trips with the assurance of a match ticket? Understandably season ticket holders and members with high TAPs points have been prioritised but international fans will not meet wither criteria.

It's great to have supporters from the US! International memberships are important to us – particularly as we continue to build our international fan base – so we will pick this one up next season (we had hoped to do so this season but the demands of COVID and other matters put this on the back burner). We have however started to work with Bees United on how we would go about setting up some official international supporter groups who would then have access to a small number of seats at games during the season without the need for the requisite TAP criteria.

FAN BRICKS

At the time BU was formed he bought a number of bricks at £100 each, engraved with a message 'all dedicated to my Dad', a long time supporter. The bricks were removed before the gradual demolishment, they were to be displayed in any new development. What are the Clubs plans for them?

The bricks are currently on display at London Museum of Water and Steam as part of our Farewell Griffin Park – the Fans' Story exhibition.

As you say, we made a commitment to display the names of all those who bought a brick as part of the Bees United campaign at the new stadium. We haven't been able to do so as yet because of a number of logistical issues and other priorities – but we are hoping to have this in place in the next few weeks – along the back of the North Stand.

We did look at incorporating the actual bricks themselves, but the condition of many of the bricks and the design at the stadium made that impossible.

PROGRAMME COLLECTORS CLUB

Is it possible for the Programme Collectors Club to have an outlet at the new ground. We had one at Griffin Park.

Our challenge at the new stadium (believe it or not) is that there is very little storage space, and every inch of the stadium is used on matchdays. However, we would like to support the programme collectors club if we can – our Fan & Community Relations team would be happy to set up a meeting so we can discuss any options we might have to make that happen.

COVID

For those supporters who only have paper certificates of their COVID vaccination records, once this has been viewed by the relevant staff at a home game, will an indicator or status code be placed on their season ticket.

We looked at various ways to manage the COVID vaccination status and opted to go for the self-declaration route online. We are very grateful to everyone who has supported this as it helps us to provide clear evidence to our local Safety Advisory Group that our fans are aware of the latest COVID guidance and are willing to support it – by either bringing along evidence of vaccination, exemption from vaccination or evidence of a recent negative lateral flow test.

In any case, the Government have announced that it will no longer be a requirement for fans to show their NHS COVID Pass to gain entry to the stadium from 27 January.

LOCAL COMMUNITY

With the new apartments going up around the stadium, are there any plans to create a community or engage with those residents? He also wonders 'Are there any plans to be out in place for matchdays for those residents? e.g. tighter security, one-way systems etc.

We will certainly be looking at ways that we can engage with residents in the new apartments and to ensure they have clear information in place around matchdays – for example, it won't be possible for residents to access the apartments by car for a period of time both before and after games.

Are there plans to keep the connection between the Club and the Griffin Park area active, especially after the closure of Braemar Road store?

The Club does have plans for a Commemorative Garden where fans can come to reflect on times at Griffin Park and the fans who have sadly passed away over the years.

We have also recently installed some of the Griffin Park turnstiles in the North Stand, and the crossbar to keep the connection to Griffin Park.

OTHER

Can we play a pre-season friendly against FC Midtjylland?

We would love to organise something – so far the season dates haven't worked out to support this but we'll continue to look at it.