

Points of Blue

Minutes of Meeting – 15 March 2011

Club represented by **Steve Sayer**, Operations Director, **Danny Wilson**, Head of Sales & Service, **Peter Fletcher**, Head of Safety & Security, **Steven Robinson**, Ticket Sales Manager, **Neil Worcester**, Head of Catering Operations and **Andrew James**, General Catering Manager – Lindley.

Ticketing

Points from last meeting:

“A new ticketing website with improved functionality will be launched in April/May” – this could cause difficulties if there are teething problems and we have Cup Final tickets to sell.

CLUB RESPONSE: This will be first used for Seasoncard renewals in late May.

Selling tickets for cup ties – Supporters being told that particular seats (individual or in a particular stand) were not available (eg for the Villa game being told Level 2 was sold out when it wasn't). Others have experienced the website not showing all available seats. There were many similar complaints.

CLUB RESPONSE: For certain matches we do not make all areas of the stadium available from the opening day of sale. For home cup matches, Seasoncard holders have the opportunity to purchase their regular seat in an exclusive window (unless it's located in an area that is initially closed – eg Colin Bell Stand Level 3) after which we may decide to restrict sales in certain areas to fill Level 1 (see point below on 'Level 3 closure').

The link from fixtures on the 'Fixtures' page of the website isn't always connected to the respective ticket sales criteria story.

CLUB RESPONSE: This should not be the case and it will be addressed.

Level 3 closure:

Why close Level 3 of the East and Colin Bell Stand for cup games?

CLUB RESPONSE: The original impetus came from the players who want the best possible atmosphere in the stadium, so we try to fill from Level 1 up. We recognise the inconvenience to supporters who have Seasoncards in Level 3, especially if these areas are subsequently opened up, but we believe it does have a positive impact on the atmosphere as was the case at the Reading match.

Is there any better way of “pacifying” Level 3 Seasoncard holders in such situations where Level 3 is supposedly closed only for it to be reopened due to ticket demand once most people have relocated? This was made worse by the differential pricing for the Reading game (a “bizarre pricing policy”). Could displaced Level 3 customers at least not have to pay more?

CLUB RESPONSE: Building on the response to the previous point, we would like to open up all areas of the stadium for all home cup matches. However, we want to do everything possible to fill the lower tiers first. Seasoncard holders in Level 3 do have an exclusive window to purchase tickets in other areas of the stadium following the window for Seasoncard holders who are not impacted by closures. The pricing for the Reading match was again introduced to encourage supporters to buy in Level 1. When Level 3 of the East Stand opened, ticket prices reflected those in Level 1 of the East Stand and Colin Bell Stand.

Pricing:

I accept that ticket pricing has to be agreed by both clubs for cup matches, but surely it would be better to sell at something like £10 per adult and £5 per junior for all cup games.

CLUB RESPONSE: Consideration is always given to ticket prices for Cup matches. The recent run of seven home matches in 26 days has further highlighted the importance of affordable pricing. That said, The FA rules state that we must charge a minimum of £15 for an adult ticket to FA Cup matches from Round 3 of the competition.

How much is a Seasoncard on East Stand Level 2 going to cost next season? If as indicated last year we are going to get an enhanced experience, what does this consist of? Some people around me (including me) are worried they will not be able to afford the massive increase in price mentioned last year. Executive boxes are not being filled, so where's the demand?

CLUB RESPONSE: The proposed changes for 2011/12 are still under consideration and indicative prices were published last year – with more expensive seats towards the halfway line. This is not a 'corporate hospitality' offering. Information will be communicated in the renewal pack. (Details now published). As discussed at a previous PoB meeting, the enhancements are in response to feedback from supporters.

POINTS OF BLUE: Feedback from where? People expressed scepticism about the validity of skewed questions in surveys, and whether many people in those seats really want the change.

CLUB RESPONSE: We are always receiving feedback from supporters on all aspects of the club. Online surveys and focus groups are frequently used to gauge the views of supporters on new initiatives and developments.

General:

Can the Family Stand be opened up to "anyone" after the initial "claim your own seat" period has expired?

CLUB RESPONSE: For evening Premier League and Cup matches, junior Seasoncards can be upgraded for adults to use, and the access criteria is relaxed to allow adults to purchase without accompanying juniors. For weekend League matches, Level 2 is almost filled to capacity with Seasoncard holders. 80% of seats in Level 1 are held by Seasoncard holders with the remaining seats sold in line with the access criteria.

Can tickets be sold again in town? Not everyone can get to the Stadium during the week.

CLUB RESPONSE: In previous seasons, ticket sales through the CityStore in the Arndale were very low. The new CityStore on Market Street is managed by our retail partner Kitbag. We continue to discuss ways in which we can work more closely to improve the service to our supporters and this continues to be on the agenda.

Chelsea tickets. It sold out at 5750 loyalty points, even at £55. The club only took 1,500 tickets allegedly but even after selling out, they were still advertising hospitality packages.

CLUB RESPONSE: 10% of the club's allocation of tickets for away matches are held for seasonal supporters in hospitality areas. A number of these tickets are often used for hospitality packages. This has been the case for a number of seasons. As has been covered at previous PoB meetings, ordinarily, 50% of the allocation is provided on a 'sale or return' basis where the club can return any unsold tickets without financial penalty and the second 50% is available on an 'all sale' basis where the club must pay for all unsold tickets. As in 2008/09 and 2009/10, we

took the 1500 allocation based on historic demand, ticket price, day/time of the match and live television broadcast.

POINTS OF BLUE: Given players' wages, would it be such an unacceptable loss to have to pay for unsold tickets if it satisfies fans and creates a better atmosphere for the players away from home?

CLUB RESPONSE: Financial impact is a consideration, as is the level of anticipated demand. Each match and decision will be considered on its own merit.

Update: The club took the full allocation of tickets for Liverpool away – 50% of which were taken on an 'all sale' basis. Over 300 tickets were unsold.

Cup Scheme:

People who are on high loyalty points and on the Cup Scheme should get priority over non-Cup Scheme fans. Then maybe more people would sign up for it next season.

CLUB RESPONSE: Interesting point. The majority of Seasoncard holders who are on the Cup Scheme have a high number of loyalty points too. We are always looking at ways to improve the loyalty point system and qualification criteria for away/Cup match tickets.

Update: Tickets for the FA Cup Semi Final were made available to Seasoncard holders on the Cup Scheme on the opening day of sale, regardless of loyalty point status.

Loyalty Points:

Can we have an indication of the points distribution? We can find out how many points we have but we don't know how many people are in front of us in the queue.

CLUB RESPONSE: Loyalty point levels change on a daily basis as supporters purchase tickets for home and away matches. As a result of the points allocation for home Cup matches, supporters can accumulate a significant number of points in a short period of time which may move them from one loyalty point band to another. Whilst we could provide a table of the number of supporters within each band and we already communicate the ticket allocation for a respective away match, it's impossible to predict how many supporters in certain bands would buy a ticket for the match. The data would be indicative and may create confusion. The current system does not facilitate the delivery of such data automatically.

Obtaining the loyalty points from EDS home games. The scanning of the cards never works and you have to chase the ticket office to make sure that you have got the points.

CLUB RESPONSE: This is being addressed.

Why are Accesscard holders with lots of points behind Citycard holders with fewer points? I'd guess this applies to former Seasoncard holders mainly.

CLUB RESPONSE: The primary benefit of Citycard is priority ticket access. Accesscard holders can upgrade to a Citycard.

Do we have a definitive time when points are awarded?

CLUB RESPONSE: Points are awarded at point of sale. The only exception is for EDS home matches and some European away matches where proof of travel is requested.

Why is attending a cheap home cup game deemed worthy of more points than attending a full price home or a full price away fixture?

CLUB RESPONSE: The number of loyalty points attributed to matches is based on a number of factors including location of match, day/time and competition. Loyalty points are also used to encourage and reward supporters for attending certain matches.

Merchandise

The ladieswear collection in the Citystore is very poor. Are there any plans to improve this?

CLUB RESPONSE: New products (Citizens and Retro ranges) should be in store by the end of March. There are minimum order levels for all clothing products and in recent years a number of ladieswear products haven't sold as well as expected.

Catering

Why during UEFA games do the bar sections not have a full complement of hot drinks available instead of just tea and coffee?

CLUB RESPONSE: With no alcohol sales, there is some rearrangement of stock needed but this isn't a big challenge. We will address ahead of next season.

The lack of staff on the food bar section in East Stand Level 3 at the last couple of matches has caused virtual complete blockage of the concourse; there is just no room for people to get through. Is this being addressed?

CLUB RESPONSE: Any physical barriers to create a better queuing system are regarded as a hazard to safe and quick evacuation. We are experimenting with ways to get round this on East Stand Level 1. Whilst there are ongoing issues with training for casual staff, we now have more regular staff and fewer hired from agencies. This will also improve the situation.

Car Parking & Transport

Parking in the North Car Park (Car Park 1). This has always been a difficult place to leave due to the limited exits. However, within the last few weeks the arrival has become more and more difficult. There are a huge number of parking attendant/stewards. I suppose their job is to make life easier but sadly they make it a whole lot worse. (Detailed suggestions were made for improvements.)

CLUB RESPONSE: Use of the fire gate at the north end of the car park (opposite Philips Park Road) is not an option for various reasons. To avoid conflicting movements, it would make sense to allow people wanting to turn left at the main exit to be in the section nearest that exit, and those turning right to be in the section the other side of the pedestrian crossing. The East Car Park may be back in use before the end of the season, and we'll review operations for next season.

Ashton New Road is shut to allow away coaches to depart but it's up to quarter of an hour waiting time before the coaches start to leave the car parks.

CLUB RESPONSE: This is a police matter but we recognise that reopening the main roads after the game, when most pedestrians and away coaches have gone, needs to be done as quickly and safely as possible. This issue and others are being considered as part of a review of the Sportcity Traffic Management Plan.

Car access to the Ticket Office and CityStore on matchdays - the stadium needs to be cleared some hours before kick off, but prior to that why can't supporters drive round to get a ticket? You could operate a validating system on the entrance and exit if you think people might abuse the system.

CLUB RESPONSE: Our experience is that supporters did abuse the system, creating issues for supporters with valid passes for certain bays. Parking is made available on Car Park 1, at the bottom of Joe Mercer Way, accessible from Alan Turing Way. For night matches access to the stadium site through Gate 11 is provided until 2.00pm.

Website & New Media

Can we have an Android version of the City App?

CLUB RESPONSE: We've received a lot of positive feedback on the iPhone app. We are keen to perfect this app before developing an Android version.

I have paid for the City iPhone app, but it is rendered useless at the ground because of the total lack of Wi-Fi connectivity. Do the club have any plans to improve this situation?

CLUB RESPONSE: We are working with a major mobile provider on plans to boost the mobile 3G signal as well as wireless connectivity within the stadium bowl ahead of the 2011/12 season.

There is too much video content on the website and not enough static pages.

CLUB RESPONSE: It's a matter of personal preference. On average, we post 1-2 videos and 5-7 static text stories each day. We consider this to be a good balance.

Stadium

Can some of the toilets be classified as non-smoking and signposted as such so we know which ones we can go in without cutting through the fog?

CLUB RESPONSE: As previously reported, at each match around 20 supporters are ejected for smoking and banned for a number of matches. We will continue to work to improve the situation.

Paper hand towels: complaints of dispensers not being replenished.

CLUB RESPONSE: This should be picked up in the regular service checks. We'll look at the specific cases.

There's a rumour amongst East Stand Level 3 Seasoncard holders that they'll be moved so that away fans can have that area next season. The club has always said this can't happen due to the police wanting away fans to be near their coach park. Has the situation changed?

CLUB RESPONSE: We are continuing to explore the possible relocation of away fans but the safety issues of not using the present south-east corner are challenging. If a solution can be found the club may look to trial this for cup games.

Exit from the East Stand heading south to Ashton New Road. We are channelled down the exit walkway (where the 'B of the Bang' was) which has had fencing on it for over 18 months which restricts the space and makes it very crowded at times.

CLUB RESPONSE: We'll look at what can be done to improve this.

Tannoy in 109/110. My hearing isn't what it was but it seems like these have been switched off completely. Is this the case?

CLUB RESPONSE: Televisions and speakers across the stadium are tested before every match. A number of televisions that are damaged will be replaced in the summer.

Any update on the redevelopments around the stadium?

CLUB RESPONSE: Nothing to report at present. Any updates will be communicated via the website.

Other

When we go to European away matches and we get kept in after the game, can the club make sure that toilet facilities are available?

CLUB RESPONSE: This was an issue at the Aris away game. Ensuring that our supporters have access to appropriate facilities is a key consideration when club officials travel to host venues as part of the planning process for matches in UEFA competitions. Toilet provision in Greece was not as agreed.

Standing in Block 119 - Until the last four or five games, people only stood up at corners or goalmouth activity in this corner of the stadium. However, they are now standing up for all of the game which makes it impossible for many to see. Can this be addressed?

CLUB RESPONSE: We support the idea of safe standing at stadia, but taking a more relaxed attitude to standing in some areas does not mean we can relax enforcement across the stadium. This will be given attention.

The "roving reporter" feature on the big screens where the said chap with a microphone randomly stops City fans in CitySquare and asks them what they think the score will be is, for me, utterly pointless.

CLUB RESPONSE: We have received a lot of positive feedback from supporters on this subject. It's one of a number of ways that we are interacting with supporters on a matchday. We respect that different supporters have different opinions.

Points of Blue: Most supporters at the meeting didn't see it as a problem.

Why do we need such heavy-handed stewarding at CoMS?

CLUB RESPONSE: Maintaining the segregation lines is a difficult job, but we do not think that the stewards in this or any other area are 'heavy-handed'. A recent case of a supporter keeping a match ball and being ejected has been amicably resolved. Any supporter ejected for swearing is given fair warning before action is taken.

Are there any plans to have a non-matchday restaurant again, providing somewhere to go for a meal during the week?

CLUB RESPONSE: We're looking into this as part of a wider project to encourage more visitors to the Eastlands site on non-matchdays.

Policing - massive police presence at the Villa game, far more than we ever see at Villa Park. Is it really necessary to that degree?

CLUB RESPONSE: Aston Villa supporters are not always the best behaved. Policing levels are agreed between the Club and GMP for all fixtures, based on the respective match category and risk of incident.

Museum update?

CLUB RESPONSE: There is an appetite within the club to revive a tour and incorporate a museum. Work is ongoing.

The next meeting of Points of Blue will be early next season.