

Notes from the LFC SC fan forum on 07.02.2014
‘Pricing structures: the cost of being a fan’
The Sandon 1900-2030

LFC SC Members present:

Bob Humphries (BH), Chair; Jeanette Dodd (JD); Karen Gill (KG); Damien Moore (DM); Abu Nasir (AN); Richard Pedder (RP); Matthew Selby (MS); Sam Armstrong (SA); James Benson (JB) Paul Amann (PA) and Anna Burgess (AB).

Apologies: Laurie Whitehead; Laura Woodcock

BH welcomed everyone present and introduced the topic of ‘Pricing Structures – the cost of being a fan’, which would be debated with the LFC Board on Sunday 9th February. He said that supporters had sent questions in via an online form and that the results of the Spirit of Shankly (SOS) questionnaire would be used to inform the debate. Anything asked at this forum would also be raised at Sunday’s meeting. BH then invited each Committee member present to introduce themselves.

Questions for the club from Attendees at the meeting

1. Have there been any discussions yet with the LFC SC re: next year’s ticket prices? The club will have had internal discussions by now and Season Ticket Holders’ payments will be due soon.

LFC SC: Regular dialogue occurs with regard to fees and costs and this is ongoing. The club handled it badly last season - BH was contacted individually and told to keep the information confidential. Prices were pitched too high last year and the LFC SC is pushing for cheaper tickets. This year the club have not said what they are doing, but have asked the LFC SC for feedback. This forum will form part of that feedback. However, the LFC SC is not party to club discussions and final decisions.

2. Why is no-one here from the club? There should be a representative present.

LFC SC: Not happy that the club have not sent anyone, as this has been requested several times. BH even sent a personal request prior to the forum, but LFC replied stating that this is LFC SC meeting and we need to feedback fans views to the club.

3. The club says that the increases in ticket price charges are necessary so that LFC can remain competitive, yet the club keeps dithering on the transfer market and is not even signing players.

LFC SC: We raised this issue with the Head of Ticketing recently and suggested to him that the price of tickets should not affect how competitive the club is, other revenue can be used to offset this.

LFC SC: The LFC SC raised the issue of official club sponsors subsidising ticket prices at the very first meeting.

LFC SC: The club should not link the cost of players on the transfer market to the price of tickets.

4. We are the best supporters and the best away fans, the club should not milk fans.

5. If we are competing with other teams and this is used by LFC to put prices up, then let's compete in a better way. The club should compete at all levels for pricing, not just the top end. Technically we are competing with Everton FC, where the most expensive adult season ticket is £599 and under 11's pay £95 for a season ticket. The SOS survey showed that this is what fans want. Chelsea's benchmarking exercise showed how clubs can measure themselves on good aspects of competition. Stop levelling the need to be competitive at fans, in doing this the club are deliberately dividing supporters.

LFC SC: There are a few issues there. The club could make the lowest category cheaper, but would make the highest category more expensive, e.g. hospitality seats, half way line. Although the tiered pricing structure seems to be accepted, the pricing level is not.

LFC SC: Categorisation - how should this work? Should it be removed?

6. There were 25 pairs of tickets (50 tickets) given out by Paddy Power for the derby game. Why were these not given to local school children?

LFC SC: Paddy Power is a club sponsor and will receive an allocation of tickets. Perhaps they used their allocation to make this offer.

LFC SC: The LFC SC has suggested to the club that Paddy Power and other club sponsors income should be used to offset ticket prices. Tiered pricing is about the price of those tickets within the tiers.

LFC SC: Tiered pricing - restricted views should be far cheaper than other seats with clear views.

LFC SC: Tiered pricing – for example the LFC SC argued for lower priced tickets for disabled supporters, who had some of the worst views in the stadium.

7. If we get Champions League football, the club will put pressure on fans to pay CL prices. Season Ticket Holder' (STHs) used to get a substantial reduction, but this has been eroded over the years. STHs deserve more respect from the club and better deals.

LFC SC: STH used to get four free games, now this is approximately two games. LFC SC is happy to raise the differential between the match day ticket and ST price again with the club.

8. At the derby game, kids aged 14, 15, 16 wanted to be on the Kop, but can't buy single tickets in the ground. Yet Arsenal bring in kids to their ground, who can sit together - LFC is diluting the fan-base and in a few years there will be no kids at the match.

LFC SC: Agree, we will lose these kids to Everton and need a commitment from the club on a longer term basis.

9. LFC hide behind saying that the club needs to be competitive, but can you ask them what does competitive mean? Who are we competing with and how is this measured? We need a definition of what they mean by 'competitive'.

10. How does the club decide on the categories A, B & C? The belief is that this is based on supply and demand.

11. Last season the ticket price increase covered 1% of the player's wages bill. Have the players been asked if they will subsidise any increases in ticket prices, as their wages increase?
12. What are the increases next season going to be based on? Inflation or average wage increase? (the wage increase is the best RPI as this is the money that people have in their pockets)
13. Why don't LFC develop their own model for tickets? Don't copy everyone else, but lead the way.
14. Will the club enter into an open and honest dialogue about this?
15. Do the committee think there should be an increase next season? Unanimous NO

LFC SC: We want to continue with this debate in future and run these sort of events all the time. The LFC SC wants a reduction in ticket prices.

LFC SC: But remember that we do not represent ourselves, we represent the fan base, so it is doesn't matter what we think. It is about what you think.

LFC SC: With regard to ticket pricing, the local fan base should always come first.

LFC SC: Agree that linking the revenue the club gets from ticket increases is irrelevant to how competitive the club is or whether or not we can afford to buy players.

LFC SC: The club has referred to the 'pinch point' – they seem to use ST prices as the pinch point.

16. Can the committee suggest to Ian Ayre that he and Tom Werner discuss ticketing policy at the Boston Red Sox? If he and Tom look at the Red Sox ticket pricing, they will see that their tickets are a lot cheaper than ours, priced between \$11 - \$55, yet the Red Sox are a very competitive club who have just won the World Series.

17. Why don't you show the club some of the photos of the fans flags? At every game they say the same thing. When they try to fob you off show them visually and say "that's what the fans think".

18. Can you ask about the lack of a Supporters Liaison Officer (SLO) and why the Spirit of Shankly's (SOS) offer to assist with specific issues was not taken up? SOS contacted LFC earlier in the season, but neither the SLO, nor anyone else at the club would agree to meet with the SOS. In terms of the SLO role, the fans have a lot of experience.

19. Ask the club to look at the Greenbay Packers example, which demonstrated that cheaper tickets build loyalty. At LFC, fans will buy scarves down the road where their loyalty is valued, not from the club where they feel they are being ripped off with ticket prices. Cheaper tickets help to build a sense of pride in the club and this increases revenue in sales of merchandise.

20. When the main stand expansion happens, are we just going to see a load of expensive tickets? This is the ideal opportunity for the club to introduce a fair pricing structure.

LFC SC: Number of issues, which we will raise with the club. We are prepared to show the pictures of flags etc., With regard to ticket prices, where is the pinch point as this is what the

club will ask? Is it Season Ticket prices? Match-day ticket prices? Kids ticket prices? We will say all of them.

BH then informed the attendees about a meeting in January with the owners and the three topics discussed, which were (i) Lack of them being at the meetings; (ii) Stadium redevelopment, and (iii) Ticketing. LFC SC told the owners that fans won't buy a shirt if they feel they are being exploited with high ticket costs.

LFC SC: In terms of ticket revenue, the majority comes from corporate fans. Surely ticket prices should come down for the ordinary fans who are paying stupid prices.

LFC SC: The LFC SC has been told how tight the finances are operated, but for 1%, why are they looking at fans?

LFC SC: Photos of fans are a good idea, please send them to us.

21. Where is the credibility of the SC? The Club has used the SC to filter the fans views, but isn't listening. At what point do you turn around and say "You are using us". The only way you will win the fans trust is if you start getting results

LFC SC: Do they listen? We don't know. There is a dilemma for us as committee members and we often feel like that, but whilst we have a chance, we will continue to raise issues and tell the club what the fans think.

22. (i) Shirt issue - most shirts are bought internationally, not in Liverpool. (ii) Ticket prices - Whilst demand outstrips supply, there is little that can be done. If you look at the match day supporter, the people that are missing are the 16-25 year olds and their absence speaks volumes. The ticket prices for young people are a key issue.

LFC SC: Agree that there should be an under 16 ticket – Arsenal have 1,000 seats at £10 a ticket for under 16's and there is no reason why LFC can't do something like that.

23. Tried to interview the LFC SLO re: their role. The reply sent indicates that the SLO role doesn't exist at LFC! Does anyone at the club know who the SLO is? I was sent an email in which referred me to the PL, UEFA and other clubs for information about the role!

LFC SC: The debate surrounding the role of the SLO has gone on for some time and the SC have constantly raised their concerns with the club. It is still being finalised at LFC.

24. These is a designated SLO at the club, but that person doesn't seem to know that they are!

LFC SC: There are six people at the club responsible for the SLO role. Cathy Long of the PL has confirmed that the club is meeting the guidelines. There is a Meeting on the 24th to discuss the SLO role further.

25. Bring back the Boys Pen!

26. The club has received a hike in income due to new TV deals etc., and the income received is significant. Can you ask whether they will use some of this income to subsidise future ticket prices? LFC has an educated fan base and this will send a message out that the club had the opportunity to do something with the increased income. We are not every club, we are unique

and the fans are unique. If the club believe this then they need to do something unique to demonstrate the value of LFC supporters.

27. Can you get an update on why the other two organisations representing Hillsborough families and survivors don't seem to be recognised on the LFC official website? This was asked and raised at an LFC SC meeting 18 months ago, but we need to know the outcome as there has been no response yet

LFC SC: We will raise this as a separate issue and is get a response.

28. The new turnstiles have caused delays in the Kop end but more recently at the away end, particularly for the derby game. This was blamed on fans turning up late, which was not the case and is a disgrace. The stadium manager is responsible for the safety of fans and should be sacked for their comments about fans after the derby game.

29. The Liverpool Disabled Supporters Association (LDSA) has been campaigning for years on the subject of ticket prices for disabled supporters. In particular, wheelchair users miss part of the match because the location of the wheelchair bays means they have the worst views in the ground. Tickets for disabled supporters should continue to be discounted and wheelchair users should be in the cheapest price-tier.

LFC SC: Confirmed that the board would be asked to continue with the discount for disabled supporters and also that wheelchair users remain in the lowest priced tier.

30. Is the SC happy with the official minutes and reports on the website? There seem to be items missing, which is not fair on the committee. The club is managing the consultation and what is reported.

LFC SC: Whilst the full dialogue is not recorded in the official minutes, they are becoming a lot more detailed.

LFC SC: New arrivals on the SC remind us of how things appear on the other side. We are always working towards fuller and more accurate minutes, but the seven day timeframe to read everyone's changes and respond, makes it difficult in practice. We will continue to improve them.

BH thanked everyone for coming and brought the meeting to a close. Further discussions with fans and fan groups took place following the closure of the forum.