Fan Advisory Board (FAB) 22nd May 2024 Villa Park

FAB representatives

Joanne McKibbens	Aston Villa Disabled Supporters Association
John Gillett	Lions Clubs
Lena Curran	Fan Representative
Gurpal Sandhu	Punjabi Villans
Connor Smith	Fan Representative
Karl Bowater	Aston Villa Supporters Trust
Sarah Breslin	Villa Bellas
David Michael	My Old Man Said
Dave Woodhall	Heroes & Villans
Scott Jones	Villa Talk

Apologies

Julian Bristow	Independent Supporters Clubs

Club representatives

Ben Hatton	Chief Operating Officer
Chris Hornbuckle	Vice President, Business Development & Fan Engagement
Lee Preece	Supporter Liaison Manager

Agenda items and comments provided by FAB Representatives are shown in normal text.

Club agenda items or responses are shown in blue italics.

The FAB wished to place the following statement on record:

On behalf of the Villa fanbase we would like to extend our appreciation and thanks to Unai Emery and his staff for their efforts this season. Getting the club into the Champions League is a fabulous achievement and thank you also for allowing us to dream again.

A further acknowledgement and thanks to club owners Wes Edens and Nassef Sawiris, for being true to their word.

Upon meeting with the Villa Fan Advisory Board in 2018, when they bought the club, they were asked why they chose Aston Villa over a MLS venture they had been attached to at the time - the first two words they answered in response were “Champions League”.

1. Communication

First of all, we are disappointed that Chris Heck, the President of Business Operations, can’t attend the end of season FAB meeting. Since this consultation group started eight years ago, Villa CEO’s (or the equivalent position) have always found time to attend such timely meetings. With the amount of transformation expected at Villa Park over the summer, it would have been a key time to communicate to supporters directly.

Ben Hatton is Club Chief Operating Officer and the best placed individual to communicate the current changes to the FAB. Chris will attend a meeting at the start of the season to lay out the strategic priorities for the next 12-months.

2. Club communications

There are concerns over the consistency of the club's communication to supporters.

Announcement of Aston Villa Football Club deals, achievements etc on personal social media accounts are inappropriate and unprofessional and should be shared principally on Aston Villa channels first.

For example, the season ticket price increase was dropped in mid-conversation in a staged PR video, as opposed to a formal club release, that this group has to respect the embargo of.

Chris has taken part in two club interviews this season which we believe is the right number. One earlier in the season as a way to an introduction to supporters and the most recent one with Gabby Agbonlahor to update the wider fan base on various topics. The interview seemed to be well received and was viewed by over 82,000 fans. There will be times when the club decides to publish information directly in a similar way moving forward – as most clubs do.

It was noted from feedback that such videos should include subtitles and/or be accompanied by a transcript to ensure the information is accessible for all.

3. Avoidance of consultation on heritage assets

Heritage assets are the most important factor when it comes to supporter consultation, as highlighted in the government's fan-led review. The right to such supporter consultation has been entrenched in FA Rules, the Premier League's Fan Engagement Standard, and the club's own fan engagement plan related to this FAB for the 2023/24 season.

Yet, despite repeated requests for these basic rights of consultation to be upheld on the latest badge change - that marked a move away from a badge that had recently received a supporter mandate through a consultation process - they were refused.

Why was this?

The Club is of the opinion that there has been no breach of the FA Rules as they relate to Heritage Assets. There has certainly been no suggestion from the FA that there has been a breach.

Our consultation process, whilst different from the previous process was no less robust. We sent the survey to more than 85,000 fans – season ticket holders, members, waiting list members and the FAB – and we received more response than were received the first time around. We also consulted with a wider stakeholder group including staff, commercial partners and the ownership group before embarking on a redesign exercise based upon the output from that consultation process.

Given the feedback, would the club reconsider its approach to consultation on Heritage assets in the future?

Whilst further changes to Heritage Assets are extremely unlikely, we acknowledge that certain groups of fans believe that the consultation process should have been run differently. We will take these views into account should we find ourselves in this position again in the future.

4. Villa Park

Please could provide clarity on the timeline of works on Villa Park and expected capacity for the start of next season.

Works have already started and will be largely complete by the start of the 24/25 season.

The list of seating works as follows:

Holte Lower – rail seating above vomitories and seating / gangway re-alignment.

Holte Upper – rail seating above vomitories.

North Upper – seating / gangway re-alignment.

Doug Ellis Lower (away fans) – rail seating.

The seating works will see a marginal overall increase in capacity to approximately 42,900.

Other Projects across the summer include:

Increase of 1,300 Hospitality spaces, a new club shop, a new Fan Zone (housing up to 1,500 fans – replacing the Trinity Road Fan Zone) and LEDS inside Villa Park. Work will also commence on the Academy building with a view to completion towards the end of 2025.

We note the advice given by the FAB that we should consider communicating significant changes outside of the FAB meeting minutes to provide clarity for fans and avoid unnecessary speculation.

With the North Stand rebuild not happening, can supporters expect 'fit for purpose' facilities next season?

It is an old building and therefore comes with some insurmountable challenges. However, we are looking to improve the environment for GA ticket holders in all stands to the extent we can. Adding additional premium seating has the knock-on effect of relieving over capacity in certain areas.

We are also removing all betting kiosks from the stadium and are looking to use these spaces to enhance the concourse experience.

Will the Warehouse project be open for the start of the 2024/25 season?

No. The work to convert the Academy building is extensive and the new facilities will not be available until part way through the 2025/2026 season. We are looking to provide a space that will allow multi-use as a ticketed venue space with capacity of circa 3,000 people.

Supporters would appreciate clarity on the 900-seat displacement, which has caused some panic. Some supporters have suggested it would have been good to know their situation before the last game of the season, so they could say goodbye or inform their immediate 'Villa family', who they've sat next to for several years.

Our priority has been to ensure that those who will need to be relocated have been notified by the club, and have not found out through social media etc.

Letters have now been sent to all affected season ticket holders and explains the process on how we will find them alternative seats. We have worked as fast as we could to identify them. Unfortunately, we were not able to complete this work ahead of the end of the current season.

For clarity, everyone that needs to relocate will be offered a seat for the 2024/2025 season.

In what has been a frustrating legacy issue for this group, can the club please provide supporters with a hard deadline as to when they will be compliant with Premier League rules for wheelchair bays and accessibility seating.

As this group is aware, we are working towards compliance. We are aiming to be fully compliant by the start of the 27/28 season.

Also, for the purposes of the meeting notes, can you please confirm that the club has no intentions of moving from Villa Park.

We have no intentions of moving from Villa Park.

5. Ticketing

While a 5% season ticket increase has finally been announced, will there be any further category or zone shifts?

There are no further category changes or zone shifts. A number of U18 and U14 prices will see an increase of more than 5% although their price for 2024/2025 will still represent a significant concession.

Can the club clarify the locations of the blocks where season ticket holders will be asked to move this summer in order to put those season ticket holders who aren't moving at ease?

As above, all fans affected have now been sent letters to inform them of the need to relocate.

Will single match day ticket pricing match the 5% raise in season ticket prices?

No. As discussed at the consultation meeting there will need to be a bigger increase in match-by-match pricing in order to support our ability to limit the rise

in season ticket prices to 5%. As we committed to in that meeting, we will ensure that the blended average price increase is kept to 12%.

Are the club able to provide the traditional 'grid' of season ticket prices, ideally for all supporters, or if not, to the group?

We will share in the coming days.

In terms of the physical season card, the FAB is concerned about a proposed charge for hard copy cards. Considering some supporters like the elderly would struggle with phone season tickets and the fact there's been issues with scanning some phones, it's not really on for supporters to have a price increase and then expect to pay a fee on top of that.

We propose an opt-in type box to receive a card at no extra charge, with small-print detailing environmental benefits to encourage not having a physical card.

We are moving to digital only so that will be the default. Only by exception will a card be issued, and an online form will need completing to request a card. Any fee for this service is TBC.

Clearly elderly or disabled who have a medical requirement will be given a card free of charge, and we will identify how fans can apply.

What is the current number of season ticket holders, compared to two seasons ago?

We have 27,000 season ticket holders (this figure does not include GA+ or hospitality season ticket holders). Two years ago, we had 29,000. As a result of the small net reduction in GA ticket availability for the 2024/25 season we will not be offering new season tickets to those on the waiting list this summer. We will however be offering a dedicated sales window for match by match tickets to ensure that waiting list members are prioritised before tickets go on general sale.

6. Champions League Pricing

The new format lends itself well to the Categorisation of tickets used in the Premier League. Will the Pot numbering reflect ticket prices and categorisation of tickets in any way? We would hope that a high-profile Champions League game (Barcelona, Real Madrid etc) wouldn't be more expensive than a Cat A Premier League game.

There will be no categorisation. There will be one price for the League stages of the Champions League played at Villa Park.

Will there be any 'bundle' benefits as seen in the Conference League. This was widely appreciated by the fanbase.

We have not discussed this yet, but it is unlikely.

Are the club exploring different options for the membership structure, particularly as it will become increasingly difficult to obtain non-hospitality tickets, which is one of the main selling points of memberships?

There are wholesale changes to our membership scheme on the horizon.

7. FFP / PSR – Champions League Squad Improvement

With the increase in related revenue from improved performances in the 2023/24 and with a projected increase from CL football, are there any FFP or PSR concerns in the short-term? Should we measure expectations?

FFP and PSR is at the forefront of everyone's minds and is always a consideration from a planning perspective.

It was noted that Villa decided to vote against the new rule structure along with the Manchester clubs, please can you provide clarity behind why this was?

How each Club voted at Premier League meetings on any issue is confidential and as such we have no comment to make on this.

8. VAR

Wolves have recently tabled a vote for VAR to be scrapped at the next Premier League meeting. While this shouldn't necessarily be a binary issue, it has impacted on match-going supporters' enjoyment of football and has improved over subsequent seasons.

What is the club's feeling on the issue?

As per item 7, how each Club vote on individual matters raised at Premier League meetings is confidential and as such we have no comment to make on this.

9. Aston Villa Women

After much progress from the previous season, there has been a drop off from last season in terms of momentum and the team also needs a new manager.

What's the outlook in terms of investment compared to the previous summer? What are the short-term aims and the bigger picture for the women's team?

Aston Villa Women are an important part of the football club. We are focussed on how to grow the business of women's football, generating important additional revenue streams, and are working closely with the WSL to ensure we maximise the potential.

The football department, led by the President of Football Operations Monchi and supported by existing members of the Women's football management department, are currently working their way through a list of potential candidates. There have been a lot of meetings across at BMH dedicated to ensuring the Women's team flourish again next season and beyond.

Does investment in the Women's team impact FFP / PSR?

Investments in the Women's team and operations are allowable expenses.

10 AOB questions

1. Will Villa Park be a host stadium of Euro 2028? It was our understanding that the capacity and travel upgrades were a vital factor of this.

Yes. We continue to be in liaison with the UEFA and relevant authorities. This includes the newly elected Mayor who has expressed his support for our aims to support Euro 2028.

2. We have consulted with the West Midlands Police football unit and have been told that Aston Villa fans have been great on their travels in Europe this season.

We'd like to pass on our thanks to the club's ticketing department for organising some first-rate ticket pick-up venues, especially in Amsterdam and Lille.

It would be good to have a quick summation from the club on their experiences of Villa's away games in Europe.

As expressed by the Manager and Players, our support in Europe was fantastic and our fans did the club proud. The thanks for our ticketing department and the additional work required to support our campaign is noted and appreciated.

The ECL experience was very positive and a great learning curve as we head for Champions League Football.

The club will provide a travel option for away Champions League matches.

3. Aston Villa Women had a season closer at Villa Park, yet the club shop was already closed for a refit after the men's Liverpool game and stadium seats had started to be ripped out - which arguably wasn't a good look for players and fans. The thought processes behind those decisions would be good to hear.

This was not an easy decision to make but we were already two weeks behind where we would like to be in order to be confident that we can open the new store ahead of the first game of the 24/25 season.

4. Birmingham Senior Cup…the concourse situation seemed to exemplify what has become a legacy issue for the group. Only one kiosk was opened on two fronts, and the queues were quickly frankly ridiculous - both a hundred long and snaking around the concourse.

It's disrespectful on what should be a pleasant evening supporting the U-21's in one of the West Midland's longest traditions.

Is it true that players were only given two complimentary tickets (on the Racing Club Warwick side, at least). Why not increase that number's attendance and open more kiosks?

We echo the disappointment at the lack of catering provision for the event. We have taken this up with LEVY for future events.

Racing Club Warwick have contacted us after the event to share their appreciation for our hospitality and the great memories we provided. Birmingham County FA have also contacted us to thank us for hosting the final, the level of support

received from all at Villa Park and are happy with the number of complimentary tickets that were issued to each club.

5. Can the club summarise their thoughts on the atmosphere in the final two home games, specifically with the displays in mind. Is this something they would look to be continue regularly?

The atmosphere was phenomenal and most definitely something we'd like to continue with. New LED will only serve to enhance this.

6. Are there any thoughts of an extension to the current fan zone area pre-game (particularly with the coach introductions, which is seemingly a huge success). If so, where?

Yes. We are building a new structure in the current players car park which should accommodate up to 1,500 fans.

7. What is the club doing about the general state of the facilities in washrooms around the ground - who is responsible for this on matchdays and are they sufficiently staffed and empowered - for our last home game there were flooded urinals in both the Upper and Lower Holte from some time before kick-off. Also, the disabled toilets have been in poor condition.

As per item 4 in the main agenda "..we are looking to improve the environment for GA ticket holders in all stands..". We also have a programme of maintenance planned for the summer.

8. Attendances - why has the club stopped announcing them? Why is the figure in the programme different to the figure provided to the Premier league and published on their website? After years of being simple, what's changed that's made this suddenly so secretive?

There is a difference in approach as to what number is actually announced by what clubs and so we don't feel that announcing the number is additive. We don't believe that there is a difference in the numbers presented but if there is then please show us and we will dig in.

9. Access and egress - supporters are reporting safety concerns over access and egress, in particular around the use of the smaller staircase in the Holte car park pre-game as a result of the Holte End fan area, congestion at the exit of the Holte End car park to the Trinity Road post-match and at the exit of the North Stand where the stairway has been closed off post-match causing bottlenecks on the ramp.

How can the group and supporters work with the club to help solve resolve problem around these pinch points?

The club has noted these concerns and will review accordingly.

10. What is the club's thinking as to the Lions Club network going forward, as they have no home at VP anymore and with all the GA+ add ons the chance of a home is looking unlikely.

We have plans for the Lions Club network in line with the development of our membership program. The club will consult with the appropriate Lions club representatives in due course.

11. For each match, there are many seats that become available only a couple of days before the match. Are these GA+ seats that are unsold?

Our selling procedures for the sale of GA+ has improved greatly from the start of the season. Any unsold seats are drip fed back to GA and made available dependent on demand.

The largest release of seats near to a fixture is when we switch on season ticket re-sale, which is not activated until we have sold out.