**Coventry City Supporters Forum**

**13th March 2025 @ the CBS Arena**

1. **In attendance:**

Doug King (DK) – Executive Chairman

John Taylor (JT) – Chief Operations Officer

Jodie Jones (JJ) – Head of Supporter Services and Fan Experience

Mark Hornby (MH) – Head of Marketing and Communications

Rasoul Didarzadeh (RD) – Head of Retail

Eamon Collins (EC) – Disability Access Officer

Pete Griffiths (PG) – Chair and London Supporters

Billy Bell (BB) - Former Player’s Association

Alan Ludford (AL) - Diamond Club

Simone Seth (SS) - Disabled Supporters Association

Paul Maddox (PM) - South Wales Supporters

Matt Loveitt (ML) - Proud Sky Blues

Claudio Cardellino (CC) - Leamington and Warwick Supporters

Jack Saunders (JS) – Leamington and Warwick Supporters

Mark Silvester (MS) - Rugby Supporters

Paul Armstrong (PA) - Coundon Supporters

Alan Wing (AW) – Coundon Supporters

1. **Apologies for absence**

Colin Henderson - Forum Chair & London

Kevin Heffernan – Vice President’s & Irish Supporters

Steve Moloney – Welsh Supporters

Dave Eyles – Sky Blue Trust

Laura Smith - Family Zone

Daren Cowley – Southam Supporters

Ian Davidson – London Supporters

Steve Harding – Bedworth and Nuneaton Supporters

1. **Matters arising from the minutes of the last meeting - not covered on the agenda:**

None noted.

1. **Equality and Diversity (EFL Mandate) – John Taylor**

JT advised it would be more beneficial to pass over to EC and JJ to discuss some of the EDI related progress we have made over recent months.

EC says that the Away visitors’ wheelchair platform is still an ongoing process. The temporary platform has received fantastic feedback so far with away fans saying they have noticed a difference; we have made positive improvements and have even circulated this to other clubs within the league. We are working with the CBS Arena for a long-term solution.

EC discusses the sensory room, with the major change being the location on the room. This used to be situated in the south-west corner between home and away fans which was not ideal, this has now moved to the end of the balcony on level 2 where it is a much more relaxed environment and has its own designated seats outside. The sensory room is now being used at every game, and we look forward to improving this more over the summer with new equipment.

EC tells us of additional ‘little wins’ that have made significant improvements for our disabled supporters with additional signage and reserved tables in hospitality lounges, all of which have been received well. EC has also been able to have an input in to steward briefings over recent games and is able to include his own accessibility- related information to help educate matchday staff; something that has not been done before and shows the progress being made.

EC confirms that this weekend will be our Level Playing Field ‘Unite 4 Access’ matchday which hopes to give our DSA a much-needed spotlight, in order for them to be the main conduit between the Club and Disabled fans and celebrates all things ‘accessibility’.

The entrance for Away wheelchair visitors in gate twenty-five had become a hazard and no longer accessible with the bricks sinking and creating a lip. The Arena have worked alongside us and had this fixed recently. We also now have a ‘stock’ of ear defenders for fans to be able to make use of on matchdays, should they get overwhelmed. They key is to raise awareness of disabilities overall and supporting each other.

MS asks- How can we help to educate the fanbase to assist with this?

EC urges people to come to him directly, or the DSA, who are all willing to help and educate. In time, we hope to have much more information on the Club website and will continue to raise awareness.

JJ reminds us of the recent themed matchdays that have been organised to support International Women’s Day, Football v Homophobia week-of-action and Unite for Access, all to create awareness and understanding.

JJ announces that the Club were shortlisted at the Football v Homophobia awards in Glasgow last week for last season’s awareness matchday. From all of the PL, EFL, WSL and Scottish Leagues, Coventry City came away with third overall which is a huge achievement in itself.

JJ tells us that alongside this weekend’s ‘Unite for Access’ matchday, the Club shall also be marking ‘World Down Syndrome Day’ at the end of next week, having had two mascots with Downs Syndrome at recent games.

JT reiterates that the clear message from the Club is that ‘everyone is welcome here’ and, whilst we may see some negative feedback online, we are proud of the steps being made and achievements being recognised by professional football bodies. We urge all our fans to keep up the same message of support for everyone visiting us.

1. **Club up-date - Doug King**

DK touched on the recent Club accounts that were published. The Club is still losing £5-6million each season at an EBITDA level. Given the distortion to the Championship from the Parachute payment regime, to be competitive warrants as it stands a negative operating environment that is not sustainable unless owner funded. He hopes that the new football regulation bill will firstly increase appropriately funds from the PL through the pyramid and secondly address once and for all the hugely distorting sums paid to relegated clubs from the PL.

An important change over the last 2 years is the increase in revenue at the club. This might have been used to narrow operating losses however basis our gameplan it has been deployed on constructing a stronger first team squad (higher squad wages). The sale of two exceptional players has been reinvested recruiting this squad alongside further inward investment (from the owner). As such the squad quality and depth now matches other top-Championship (non-parachute payment) clubs who are our natural competitors in reaching the play-offs whilst also minimising the risk of relegation. This transition has been done whilst maintaining a similar annual operating loss as reported by the club over the two years preceding the 23/24 season.

Frank Lampard, Joe Edwards, and Chris Jones have settled in quickly and professionally. Their impact is now being strongly demonstrated with an average of nearly two points/game over an extended series of fixtures (automatic promotion form).

Given the slow start to the season and high-profile change of Head Coach in November, the club has moved into the play-off places and are challenging once more at the upper end of the championship.

As the club once more prepares another Season Ticket campaign, the focus remains on retaining our current fan base and engaging with new members of our community to enjoy the spectacle of fantastic live sport at the Arena and supporting our journey to the top division of English football.

CC and AL both comment on the drastic changes with record Season Ticket holders.

DK mentions the need to increase the Commercial side of the business. Monzo, a new sponsor for this season, have been a great company to work alongside, and reveals that there has been 50,000 people personalise their Monzo app to a CCFC theme.

DK also notes that the Club underwent a digital marketing audit some months ago with IMG, who will also be working with us as we move towards to the new Season Ticket campaign.

MH comments on the huge increase in engagement from fans across all social media platforms, which is down to the much-improved content being put out by the Club.

DK confirms the strong working relationship with the CBS Arena which has helped us make positive changes to the matchday experience which we are continually looking to improve and enhance.

It was also mentioned that the Club brought in and covers the cost of a shuttle service this season to get fans to and from the ground which has gone down well. We will continue to work on this going forward.

JS comments on the level 2 balcony not being full and asks how we change that.

DK and JT both discuss the difficulties with the capacity of the lounge not matching the seats on the balcony. There is a fine line between filling the room and not ruining people’s matchday hospitality experience. There has been lots of growth in this area with 550 expected in the Balcony Street Bar for Sunderland, but still, lots of work to do on the hospitality offerings.

JT says there is around 350 seats being left empty on the balcony currently given the capacity numbers for the lounge, and the numbers do alter dependant on furniture in the room, too. We have had largely positive feedback regarding the Balcony Street Bar, more so when it is full as it creates a real atmosphere.

AL asks if the 12:30pm kick offs for ‘Sky TV’ make much of an impact to sales, and whether the Club get much say on these fixture changes.

JT thinks it does have some impact, but the Club has no say at all over this. It is slightly better with the longer notice time, however.

PG says he has had comments from supporters worried they may lose their Family Zone tickets if not attending games and asks if any had had tickets taken away.

JT responds by saying the Ticket Office are keeping an eye on this and have sent pre-warnings out to people who have breached the conditions or are close to breaching as reminders. Given this is the first year of the new scheme, the club is being pragmatic but are clear that this will continue to be policed properly, and any persistent offenders will have their access revoked. At this point though, there have been zero cancellations.

DK says how the Stoke game showed the potential of the South stand with so many fans so close to the away end, and what a buzz it created. The aim is to have a full stadium with season tickets an extremely valuable commodity with more demand than availability that could merit a wider ticket exchange system. Huge progress has been made there but there remains a long way to go.

1. **Responses to submitted questions – John Taylor**

PG asks for clarity on the lease of the stadium.

DK states that by the end of this season it is a requirement to have a 10-year agreement in place or we shall receive a fine. The Arena owners are aware of DK’s long-term plan, and we continue to invest in the Arena. From next week, the Club will take control of the CBS Arena pitch to give consistency across both Ryton and the stadium.

PG asks if there is a published plan or timeline of the work being done/ due to be undertaken at the Arena. He sees many comments on forums regarding cleanliness or bits that need updating/ upgrading.

JT states the Club have invested in the pitch, safe standing, the matchday activity area and branding across all areas. The cleaning comes down to the Arena which has improved but is still being worked on. We upgraded some hospitality seats over last summer, as well as the PA system, but this still is not ideal and will need more investment along with the floodlights. It all comes down to prioritising.

AL and CC comment on ripped seats and the roof of the bowl still leaking, JT confirms these shall be looked at again.

1. **Family Zone up-date – Jodie Jones**

JJ gives detail on the new matchday activity area that has opened in the north-west corner with merchandise and family zone units. This is a small-scale temporary solution until we can move on to the bigger project but has already had lots of positive feedback.

JJ relays Laura Smith’s notes to the group: There has been a significant increase in visitors since the units were introduced and there is a great buzz in the area pre-match. There are more comments via social media and word of mouth, and the volunteers are happy with having a ‘home’ to call theirs.At the Stoke game we had away families that made use of the area and gave lovely feedback.We have started up the dug out draw again at the Preston game, which was very successful, and have the next one planned for Sunderland. We are slowly introducing more activities/prize draws/ competitions. We now have a Face painter and balloon modeller for every game which are a fantastic addition, too, and in general the zone has a real buzz to it.

JS asks if there is a policy on away supporters being in the Fan village, as there has been mixed messaging from stewards.

JJ confirms that both home and away fans are welcome in the fan village areas as this helps to create a happier atmosphere and changes the mentality of fans.

JT notes that supporter behaviour has dramatically improved, and we have had no issues in these areas.

1. **Any Other Business:**

AW asks to discuss the road closures post-match and whether there could be somebody controlling the traffic lights manually, as used to happen years ago, to hold the crowds and help with traffic management.

JT states that the Club are working hard to find a better solution but, ultimately, the decision is made by the City Council and Arena safety teams. The Club have to pay for the road closures at a cost of circa £120,000 per season, which is far from ideal, particularly with the negative feedback we receive.

AL says even once the roads are opened, they will often see multiple carparking stewards standing and talking rather than directing traffic.

JT confirms that we are constantly communicating and will keep working towards the safest and quickest solution for everyone, with all parties involved.

MS reiterates how frustrating it is and how long it takes to get home, specifically when people are travelling home from night games.

DK says he has seen the footage of near misses from people running across the carriageways and this would not be allowed to happen again. Any delays to the road closure reopening sit with the safety control team at the CBS Arena, but we are working hard to communicate with fans more, should we have to delay for any reason.

DK asks if people leave early to get out before the closures and is a met with a resounding ‘Yes.’ He carries on saying this is frustrating, disappointing and must dampen the experience, whether winning or losing.

SS asks why we cannot have kiosks or food outlets open post-match, as this would give people chance to get some food or keep entertained whilst waiting for the roads to open and, ultimately, people just need to have some patience.

ML asks about the relationship with West Midlands Railway and if the rail service to the Arena has improved.

JT responds to say there has been minor changes to accommodate a Saturday 3pm Kick-off, but that is all. The Club is continually trying to engage but progress is slow-moving. We will continue to push for increased trains and look at the shuttle bus offering going forward.

1. **Date of next meeting:**

JJ states that the next meeting is due around the end of May, however, a date has not been confirmed yet. The Forum will be updated in due course.