



Saints Voice Panel – Tuesday 25th May 2021

Southampton Football Club Attendees:

Toby Steele	Managing Director
David Thomas	Commercial Director
Tim Greenwell	Chief Legal & Risk Officer
Anthony Cole-Johnson	Director of Sale & Stadium Experience
Sarah Batters	Director of Marketing & Partnerships
Khali Parsons	Head of Customer Relations & Fan Experience
Matthew Silvester	Head of Ticketing, Memberships & Hospitality
Caroline Carlin	Operational Standards & Compliance Manager
Jim Gay	Supporter Services Manager
Aaron Heskins	Supporter Services Advisor

Mark Underwood	Managing Director – The Elite Group
Tony Crosbie	Regional Director – Gather & Gather

Saints Voice Attendees:

Michael Sadler
James Whitworth
Louise Burke
Rosemarie Robinson
Mark Chee
Tara Doel
Zoe Wilson
Yasmin Wiseman

Minutes

Welcome:

Online Fans' Forum Feedback:

SV – Really enjoyable fans' forum and nice to see international supporters. Inclusive and accessible. Setup was a little confusing to grasp at the start – advanced instructions and guides would be useful if we use it again.

JG – We would like to get back to doing fan forums in person again, but the main consensus is that the format was engaging and inclusive enough, especially with supporters who might otherwise not be able to attend a forum to warrant doing this again.

SV – Struggled to get onto the breakout tables to engage with club staff following the main forum. Could these be increased to allow greater participation?

JG – The breakout tables was in part a test as we didn't know how popular this aspect of session would be. It was great to see that supporters wanted to further engage with club staff on those tables, and whilst we may have to overcome some system limitations, we would push to drastically increase the size of these next time. Additionally, this does also remain an option and something we might consider at in person events.

SV – We felt that some of the questions were a little repetitive

JG – Pre-submitted questions were grouped into several categories, but we will make better use of live questions and players going forward.

SV – How do you see the future of the forums going?

JG – Multiple different forums. Option to return to hosting a live event at St Mary's with additional add on digital events to incorporate both national and international supporters. This will be dependent on restrictions, time of year, numbers etc.

DT – We have a 12-month engagement plan that we are working to as we don't want a long gap between all meetings/ forums.

Retail:

ACJ – To update you on our retail operation we recently went through the process of decoupling from Under Armor and transferring to our principal shirt partner Hummel. As part of this new relationship the operational running of the megastore at St Mary's and our online store will now come under the Elite Group who have a very close relationship with Hummel.

Mark (Elite Group) – A brief overview, we are a 25-year-old establish business in the sports retail industry, and the main UK partner for the Hummel brand. We are excited by this new partnership with Southampton Football Club as we look forward to bringing innovative kit and leisure wear to the whole fanbase, while also Improving the experience of shopping both in store and online.

DT – One of the key reasons to partner with Elite, coming out of our partnership with Under Armor is the great brand and organisation. With Elite we can be more agile with the type and depth of product, as well as the speed in which we can get these on sale.

SV – I think we are all delighted with the Hummel brand coming back. Do we have a rough date for the roll out and what the pricing points will be?

SB – Watch this space, this will be very soon, and we have been busy in the background getting the launch ready.

Mark (Elite Group) – When we launch, the retail pricing is significantly better across the whole range which we think you'll see and be pleased with. The kit and other products are made to a high standard in terms of quality, and we're excited to get going and see what you think.



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SV – Will there be many options for women’s wear or anything interesting as part of the new range due out soon?

Mark (Elite Group) – We will have a women’s collection and a bespoke fit kit. Additionally, we have planned for a leisure range for women. In our first season with Everton, we broken all records with their new kits. On sizing we stock a wide range across our adult, women’s and children’s ranges but will continue to evaluate and be flexible.

Connectivity:

SV – The new App has largely been positive and easy to use. We’ve not encountered too much negativity or feedback but what is the update on connectivity & Wi-Fi at St Mary’s which is ultimately where you envisage the app being used in the future?

SB – It’s great to hear your feedback on the app, and glad you like it. We have recently run a few tests at the Leeds game to see how we can take the next steps. The App has so much potential and to reach that we need better connectivity. We have an ongoing project to improve this and have been actively looking at how we can finance this to make it a reality? In terms of timelines, it won’t be the new season, as we look to open post COVID but this is something on our radar for the future.

SV – Moving forward how close are we to being able to use the app for ticketing purposes and ordering food in the bowl? Is this related to connectivity?

DT - We have been future proofing ourselves – for now, the app is around exclusive content.

ACJ – Our ticketing provider is fully embedded into the app. Ultimately; we don’t want a world of paper tickets. The overall user journey is quite slick, and we should be in a position next season to offer tickets through the app as well as potentially a click & collect service for food.

Catering:

TC – Gather & Gather (G&G) are the new catering partner at St Mary’s as of June 2020. We are an established catering business consisting of over 2,700 employees and have over 89 clients. To give a brief overview of our operation we look after all the royal palaces, as well as Charlton Athletic FC, flower shows, and Royal Ascot.

In the concourses at St Mary’s, we are re-modelling and are currently adding new and additional tills, increasing the flow, adding TV screens (which will automatically provide updates on stock). New kiosks will have new offers which will support local business within the Hampshire area.

ACJ – We want to understand what we can do to surprise & delight – Do fans want noodle bars, curry snacks, Chinese, Fish & Chips, etc. We will be conducting a survey to establish where we go. Outside of the stadium we want to know what you want to see, so we encourage feedback from all fans on what you want.

SV – How does G&G tie into with the club’s sustainability strategy (Halo Effect)?

TC – Being part of the clubs extended family sustainability is one of G&G main pillars. We do things better to make the environment better and will continue to support the club in its drive to become as sustainable as possible.



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Government review/ Fan representation:

SV – What is the club 's view on the proposed Government led task force looking at fan representation on boards following the issues surrounding the super league?

TS – We cannot really answer this at present as we don't have the detail on what the scope of this Government led review is going to be. We attend regular shareholder meetings at the Premier League and will input into any process when invited.

Until we know the outcome of said review our view with SV is that we have a good working relationship, which at the present time I'm not sure if many other clubs have this. Perhaps this is the thing that fans are asking for or something like this. We won't be reducing SV and I think it's a little early to say we will be making changes.

DT – Liverpool have recently created a Supporters Board – the idea is they meet with the board, discuss key issues linked with the club. Same as SV! only we have been doing this for the past 3 years. Looking to the future, this forum is crucial. We can look to refresh it, keep it live and meaningful. We haven't got the full representation we would ideally want i.e., younger fans yet but this is something that we are working on.

SV – It is important to get younger people involved. Rotation seems reasonable, and good idea to retain people to ensure there is overlap. Out of the original 12, there are 7 left. Agree with young people, but difficult to get them to attend. As a group we do represent and have direct access through family, friends, colleagues to the under 25 age group, notwithstanding the older age spectrum of the panel.

Ownership:

SV – Following on from the update provided at the fans' forum are we likely to see any extra investment from the owners? Additionally, what are your thoughts on Southampton Way, as the academy has been poor this season?

TS – Mr Gao is limited with getting money to UK from China. As we have previously discussed and is well documented the Chinese Government have not encouraged further investment following the initial purchase. When Martin says about investment, there other ways of doing that. We have spoken before about loans, which are in position as well as the owners holding constructive conversations in the background.

TS – It is disappointing that the B team have been relegated with the under 18s finishing bottom. Whilst we are not making any excuses and want to be challenging across our academy teams, more B team players went into the first team, so couldn't compete, especially when we had injuries. At the end of the day, it is the goal to bring players into the first team.

Sustainability:

SV – We are very committed, and it is a priority for us to continue to see what is happening across the club?

CC – The Halo effect is in full swing. We've been busy planting more trees when players break through. Important to embed sustainability, it isn't a tick box exercise – it is how we operate. We've been looking at additional ways at recycling furniture and not just chucking it away. We have also been working with Solent University on our carbon footprint to establish where our biggest emissions are and to establish what changes can be implemented both short and long term.



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Ticketing:

SV – From a club point of view how do they think the Leeds game went?

MS – All COVID measures in place for this game which obviously meant that the standard seat selection wasn't fully available online. The way in which seats were selected was clearly not the standard way, but we did get it to a stage where supporters could select the block. We kept windows or priority groups like previously ensuring fairness across the board by starting with those who were selected for West Ham. The way in which seats are allocated and having to have a two-seat gap space wasn't ideal but we made the best of what we could and look forward to getting back to some to full capacity as soon as possible.

In terms of ticket delivery, we had the print at home and mobile option in place. The medical questionnaire was built into the ticket download journey which we felt worked quite well. It was interesting to see the split between mobile and print at home which was around 50-50.

MS – In terms of the COVID questionnaire it wasn't possible to send this individually to supporters for the Leeds game, but should we need this again we will be looking at alternative options one of which is the app.

SV – On the recent Block 31 changes the fans need justification on the price change?

ACJ – Over the last 5 years we made big price reductions and we are one of the cheapest clubs to watch in the Premier League. (£19 u11s, price freezes, concessions in premium.). The most in demand seats have been drastically under-priced in comparison to the market. I've spoken to supporters about this individually and we will continue to do our best to help supporters with renewals whether that is same seats, or in an alternate area.

Social Media & Trolling:

SV: Maybe one that we can take offline or have a separate call on, but can we have a discussion on trolling as this is still a significant problem?

TG: Happy to pick this up and will look to arrange a follow up call to establish how we can help. We have been able to set up a good process especially around reporting abuse where players are concerned, but happy to chat this over and work something out.

Safe standing:

SV: Has there been any updates on safe standing at St Mary's and will this become a possibility?

TG: We've started to talk this through with architects who are looking at other stadiums. It's part of a bigger picture including the Government task force, so for us it's a case of putting in a plan that we can activate in the future.

Next meeting:

JG – Closed meeting. Follow up meeting to be arranged on Trolling, and full SV meeting due in September to be arranged (if possible, restrictions permitting we will look to hold this in person).



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