**SWANSEA CITY**

**STRUCTURED DIALOGUE**

24th November 2020

Held via Zoom, 5.30pm

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **PANEL** | |
| **NAME** | **POSITION HELD** |
| Julian Winter | Chief Executive Officer |
| Rebecca Edwards-Symmons | Head of Commercial |
| Andrew Davies | Head of Operations, Facilities and Development |
| Gareth Davies | Chief Financial Officer |
| **SUPPORTER ATTENDEES** | |
| **The meeting was attended by seven supporters, who put their questions to the panel.**  **Also joining the meeting were Stuart McDonald and Dave Dalton of the Supporters Trust.** | |

Meeting hosted and Chaired by Catherine Thomas, Head of Hospitality, Events and Fan Engagement.

\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*

All attendees were introduced and the following questions were asked, with in depth discussion and answers provided.

**QUESTION 1: COMMUNICATION**

**There are different supporters with different agendas. What is the club’s strategy to unite everyone and to pull us in the same direction? Communication is key and a recognition of a strategy being needed to unite supporters would be helpful. Do the panel agree and, if so, is there a strategy at the moment?**

Julian recognised the good communication that had been undertaken by Trevor Birch, the previous chairman, on a local basis and confirmed it is his intention to continue to provide good communication and open dialogue with supporters. He has engaged regularly with the Supporters Trust representatives and more recently the wider Board of the Supporters Trust.

Julian pointed out the recent post being advertised for a Head of Communications and Media, as the person who held the post has left the Club recently. This role is very important to ensure we have open and clear communication delivered in a professional way. Julian went on to say that he feels the club has very good staff within it with great ideas, but also feels that the club, as a whole, has lacked an overall strategy, let alone a communication strategy. Therefore, this is something that the Club wishes to publicise to its supporters, to state what the club is and what its wishes to achieve. On the back of this will come the communication strategy. Julian went on to say that supporters would be welcome to engage on this strategy and wishes for everyone to really be united and get fully behind the club.

When asked when the strategy is likely to be revealed, Julian said it would be months away yet as even though we have many great incumbent parts to it, we need time to pull it together, coupled with the fact we are bringing in a new Head of Media and a new Academy Manager. He suggested the club do a sharing strategy day to get feedback and input from supporters.

**QUESTION 2: FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY**

**How to the club plan to become financially sustainable when the parachute payments run out next summer? Due to the pandemic, our income is shrinking and will continue to do so, unless we get promoted to the Premier League.**

Julian stated that the club has done well previously and has been reliant on its player trading. Until this year when we had a convertible loan note coming into the club by means of its shareholders. This will also be a factor in its future sustainability.

We need to be more mindful of wages and Julian believes there is going to be the introduction of a wage cap within the Championship, more than likely, at the start of next season. There has been dialogue and agreement with Leagues 1 and 2. The Championship are still in talks and the intention is that this implementation will take place to help the financial sustainability of Championship clubs. Julian stated that the cap does not worry us but does help with the competitive nature of the Championship.

Julian concluded that the club, to maintain its financial sustainability in the short to medium term, relies on player trading and shareholder contributions.

Gareth Davies reiterated that as a Club we need to generate revenue from within, and player trading is at the heart of that, particularly as we have an Academy that we invest in.

**QUESTION 3: FIVE YEAR PLAN**

**What is the five-year plan for the football club? Do the owners have a vision and a plan for a return to the Premier League as it appears at present we need to continually sell our best players to keep afloat, which negatively impacts our on-field performance?**

Julian answered he did not like a five-year plan but works on the principle of a three-year plan. You deliver within a year, review, and then add a year. The first two years is detail and the third year is indicative. Julian also commented that we should not be shy of talking about what that three-year plan could look like and should include making it back into the Premier League. We are in a good competitive position this season and if we do make it into the Premier League, we need to be prepared for it.

The idea of us selling our best players to keep afloat, is in part true, because of the previous question over sustainability of the club. However, the recent trading we have done has allowed for players to also come in and to create a deeper and more competitive squad, with a mix of younger players and more experienced players. Therefore, sometimes you have to do one thing to enable the other. Julian went on to say he thought we are in a much better, competitive, position this year to last year.

**QUESTION 4: RECRUITMENT**

**What are the resources and processes in place for extending the Swans reach throughout the United Kingdom? Are there any scouts in place for up and coming player markets like the Nordic region, or the Middle East? Could you more effectively utilise the competence of Swans sympathizers like myself? While I deeply trust and respect the player recruitment of the current personnel, we cannot rely solely on the British loan market.**

Julian answered that Andy Scott, Head of Player Recruitment, has been with the Club for around 18 months. When his predecessor left the Club, he took with him his knowledge and did not leave much in way of hand over for a new person. We also have Steve Rands who is Head of Football Analysis, but he also has a role to play in the recruitment function. He has built a team of analysts, which includes a data scientist, who support performance, through analysis of our players, other teams, and future player profiling. We are now developing outside of player analysis much more to include the player profiling and targeted acquisitions.

The market itself is a big dilemma at present because of the Government Body Endorsement, as there are challenges between the Premier League, FA and the EFL. With Brexit approaching 1st January, the governing bodies, at the moment, cannot agree on what the Governing Body Endorsement will look like. Julian explained this means for a player to come into this country from anywhere in the world, there is a criteria they must achieve. At the moment they have to have played within one of the top 28 leagues in the world and they have to have played around 40% of the international team’s fixtures from the country they come from. Meeting this criteria would mean they will be able to acquire a Visa. Julian went on to say that prior to Brexit we could go into Europe and find European footballers, however come 1st January we have to treat Europe the same as the rest of the world. So, to be brutal, this will mean that most of the top players in the world will not be signing for Swansea, because they will be going to the top teams in the world. This means it must come from the FA and becomes a worldwide governing endorsement, but the FA wish for the Premier League to reduce their international quota. At present they have a squad of 25, up to 17 international players and 8 UK players. The FA want them to reduce their international players down to between 13 and 15 and that is where the contention has always been. The respective FAs want more English, Welsh and Scottish players to play to help improve the national teams. That is all in flux at the moment.

This needs further diluting to be able to be accessible to us as a club, as there may be great talent in other places like Scandinavia for example, but we may not be permitted to get them in the country. Julian concluded saying it is a really complicated picture right now and fears we won’t get a solution from the FA until the last minute.

**QIUESTION 5: RETURN OF CROWDS – FANS WITH DISABILITES**

**When fans return to the Liberty, how will it be managed for disabled fans in respect to the seating and being 2 metres apart? There is a lot of worry and anxiety within the disabled community at present on this.**

Rebecca started by emphasizing the good relationship the DSA have with the Clubs Disability Access Officer and the Disability Liaison Officer, and the clubs commitment to having a full consultation with the DSA when the club is able to return safely to play in front of crowds. When we are in a position to do so, the Club will communicate out to its disabled supporters, along with the DSA, the measures put in place to hopefully provide peace of mind.

Rebecca ran through the number of wheelchair bays at the club against the number of season ticket holders of those seats. This showed that 52% occupancy of those seats were taken up prior to the pandemic and therefore, felt confident we would be able to accommodate our wheelchair users once the stadium was able to reopen, subject to Government guidance.

Rebecca stated that when we are able to welcome back our disabled supporters, we will put in place that if any are concerned, they can attend at the stadium prior to the match to be shown around their entrances, seating areas and exit points.

A discussion took place on the anxieties of supporters and the mental health issues that this pandemic has brought. Rebecca commented that there is a working group at the stadium in respect to the return to audiences, and we will keep supporters updated as things develop. However, it is very difficult to plan for the return when there is disparity between England and Wales, and there is no clear guidance yet as to when we can return and in what guise.

Andrew stated that the club has been in discussion with the Welsh Government and other sporting clubs in Wales throughout the pandemic, particularly post lockdown. Andrew commented that the biggest challenge we have at present is the difference of approach between the governments, and their approaches towards, in particular, the social distance requirements. We are also in discussion with the EFL and the Sports Safety Authority who are responsible for the licensing at stadiums. Under the current Welsh Government guidance of 2 metre social distancing, we would be able to admit roughly half of our supporters back into the ground.

Andrew stated that when we are able welcome crowds, we will need to do a pilot at a venue before we can get back to admitting fans back into stadiums. Andrew concluded saying until we get clarity from the Welsh Government we cannot properly plan, although the working group continues to meet regularly and we will engage with supporter groups when we can.

**QUESTION 6: SCHOOLS INVOLVEMENT**

**The Swans are getting further and further away from the local club that they once were. Prior to Covid-19 and a paid service to the Supporters Trust, and Lee Trundle aside, there is little links into local schools. Does the senior management have a plan to get back into the community and to reintroduce the family and local feel of the club?**

Rebecca started by stating she is on the Board of the Community Trust within the club. Rebecca highlighted that we are doing a lot in the schools, and the Swans Community Trust has engagement with every primary school in Swansea and they are in contact with other clubs throughout our region outside of Swansea. There are many projects that also go through not only mainstream schools, but special assistance schools, along with doing a great deal of work in schools and the community about inclusion.

Rebecca said the club was extremely passionate about the work in schools and engaging with our young supporters. The club is trying to drive the average age of our supporters down for the next generation of supporters to come through.

Rebecca advised the meeting that the club has worked hard the last few seasons, in particular, to engage with schools for a reward-based programme, to get children to attend matches. The club has run various initiatives such as Kids for a Quid etc. The problem we have presently, is that we are not yet able to go back into schools due to the current situation. The Community Trust have developed video teaching sessions on-line, and these have been distributed out to the schools back in March.

Rebecca stated that we are working with a charity presently helping certain schools who may be struggling with children who are not academic but may focus on sport as a teaching method.

Julian added that he has a strong background in Community Trust, or Football in the Community as it used to be known. Julian stated that this links into the strategy that was being discussed earlier. It is the club’s intention to bring the Community Trust closer into the operations within the football club itself, and not to keep at arm’s length, to truly engage as a whole and as a community club. The Community Trust are physically moving offices to be based at the stadium with us.

Julian encouraged the participants to look into the Community Trust as the work they are doing is amazing. Julian added most clubs say they are a family and community club, although most clubs, in reality, are not. We must be and the only way we can be is if we live and breathe it and make the Community Trust part of everything we do.

**QUESTION 7: INCLUSION FOOTBALL**

**I run in Margam, Port Talbot, inclusion football for children with learning and physical difficulties and those with low self-esteem or struggles financially. Trevor Birch and Jonathan Wilsher stated their commitment to supporting these community ventures. What is your commitment to it?**

Julian commented that our Community Trust should be linked into this and supporting these kinds of community-based initiatives. Their principles are to support with health, education and sport inclusion.

Julian stated he wasn’t aware of what was promised previously, but asked that we have further dialogue to find out and was happy to see how we can support this, as that is exactly what we mean by embracing the community.

It was asked that the club look to support, not by financial means, but help raise the profile to allow them to raise money to try to get buildings and training facilities.

Catherine asked to have a separate call on this as she was keen to find out more about this project and to see how the club can be more involved and help to promote the good work that is being done in the community. Catherine also commented it would be a good idea to get the DSA involved in this as there may be other groups out there struggling at the moment that also need the clubs help and support.

**QUESTION 8: SEASON TICKETS**

**Historically the club go out at the start of December with season ticket renewals. It is felt that this would be a PR disaster and that the club should not go out until the summer, when we know what position we are in.**

Rebecca responded stating that the club have been working very hard on a strategy for season ticket holders. Going on sale in December is historic to the club since the Premier League and this time in the season becomes financially critical to the club. We have been working on simplifying the process and it will become apparent in the next 10 days. Rebecca confirmed season tickets would be going on sale in December, but it will be something very special. It has all been designed around looking after season ticket holders who have left their money in the club this season. It has been designed to give back to loyal season ticket holders, as we never envisaged we would be in this position at the start of this season.

Rebecca stated that the Supporters Trust has been involved in the process and it is very exciting. There will be no pressure put on supporters. Dave and Stuart from the Supporters Trust gave their endorsement.