

SWANSEA CITY

STRUCTURED DIALOGUE

Monday 12th April 2021

Held via Zoom, 5pm

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
Mark Allen	Academy Director
SUPPORTER ATTENDEES	
The meeting was attended by eight supporters, who put their questions to the panel.	
Stuart McDonald of the Supporters Trust also joined the meeting.	

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: ACADEMY

Why was the decision made to not continue to fund the club's category one academy status? What needs to happen for this decision to be reversed?

Julian said that last season the club made the decision to move from a category one academy to a category two academy. He also explained that there is a key economic factor around moving from category one to category two. The cost of running a category one academy is between two and three times that of a standard category two academy; between £5m and £6m.

Julian summarised that the decision was made:

- A) Because of economic factors and
- B) Swansea's ability to develop players and maintain a pathway of player development into the first team is not damaged by moving from category one to category two.

Mark Allen pointed out that what he saw at Swansea was a well-established, clear pathway for bringing players through the development stage and into the first team ranks. He explained that in terms of categorisation, the biggest single difference is on recruitment; a category one academy allows you to recruit nationally, whereas in category two you can't recruit nationally until the age of 16.

Mark informed the attendees that players who have come through the doors comment so well on the football club. In terms of the pathway, the way they are made to feel when they're here, how they are received, how they are treated and the way we play. With this information combined, Mark feels that the categorisation becomes less significant, if significant at all.

Julian pointed out that Swansea have been very good at recruiting from the post-16 group whilst in both category one and category two, and we are looking to maintain a continuation of that.

Mark reassured that we are already recruiting for next season, with six incumbents very close to confirming. They have all come from category one clubs and have elected to join us over category one clubs.

QUESTION 2: FAN ENGAGEMENT

I feel the club is very good at respecting the ethnic minority fan base, far ahead of other Premier League and Championship clubs. It would be interesting to see what the club's future diversity inclusion plans are and how Swansea can assist other Premier League/Championship clubs in being more inclusive towards ethnic minorities.

Julian recognised that the club is very good at respecting and including all supporters, but acknowledges that social media has provided a whole new platform for people to be abusive and racist.

Julian pointed out the recent incidents, specifically against Yan, Ben and Jamal. As a club, but led by Matt Grimes, Wayne Routledge and Steve Cooper, we made the decision to come off social media for a period of time. We have chosen to act and Julian is hopeful that there will be additional activity across the leagues.

When questioned regarding only two other clubs getting involved in the movement, Julian replied by saying he is hopeful that we will see more action across the leagues.

Catherine Thomas is to continue dialogue on the club's inclusion strategy, making introductions to appropriate supporter groups.

QUESTION 3: WOMEN'S FOOTBALL

Given that Swansea City Ladies team continue to be a leading light in Welsh women's football, would the club consider hosting one of the team's Welsh Premier Women's League games at the Liberty Stadium, such as the last game of the season against Cardiff City Women on Sunday, 23 May 2021, when they could be crowned champions?

Rebecca started by saying that we are working to get even closer with the ladies team than we have ever been before. The ladies currently train at Llandarcy but have begun training with us at the academy.

In regards to playing at the stadium, Rebecca said that the ladies were able to play their Champions League fixtures for both last season and this season at the stadium, but they haven't been home fixtures. However, we have also pledged this for next season.

Rebecca explained that we have also been working on sponsorship for the ladies team and have been able to involve them in deals with global brands. We are trying to integrate with them more, to get them completely alongside the men's and to support them in every way we can.

Andrew explained that we have a tight window of opportunity this summer to repair the pitch, as supporters may have noticed some problems earlier in the season. As keen as we are to host the ladies in May, unfortunately this is when the work will need to be done, but there will be the opportunity for us to host fixtures next season.

Julian said that it is an interesting time for Welsh women's football at the moment, with a new national team head coach, but we need to find a way to break through some of the barriers that exist. We will be meeting with the new team head coach along with Lowri Roberts, the Head of Women's Football, as we want to talk about raising the profile of both ladies football and girls football.

QUESTION 4: TICKETING

Will the club be looking at introducing an away season ticket scheme for the upcoming season when fans can return?

Rebecca spoke about our Jack Army membership which currently offers a cap of £20 on away tickets, however, if we are in the Championship next season, we wouldn't continue with this pledge as it isn't worthwhile for us or the supporters. We would then maybe look at revisiting the away season ticket option; we are aware that some supporters would be interested for half a season, or perhaps three quarters, so we are looking at different options at the moment along with revisiting our Jack Army membership together with our Junior Jack membership.

Rebecca concluded by saying that we need to ensure we do the right thing by the supporters and for us as a club, but there will be constant communications about this. We have previously set up smaller groups of supporters who had an interest in certain sides to the business, so we will be meeting with wider supporters to discuss the different membership options and to get supporters involved in further decision making.

QUESTION 5: RETURN OF CROWDS

1. What are your hopes in terms of capacity allowed at the beginning of next season – best and worst case?

Andrew started by stating that there is currently no clarity on the information we receive about what we can or cannot do. However, we are working collectively and cooperatively with other sports bodies, clubs and stadia so we have a representative voice that we can go to the Welsh Government and put our case forward.

He continued by saying that the issue we have is the disparities between the Welsh Government and the UK government in terms of:

- a) The timeline and roadmap back to allowing supporters and
- b) The methodology by which the numbers of supporters coming back will be calculated

We are hoping to set up a friendly for the start of next season, so by the time we get to league fixtures we will have a meaningful number in the stadium. As we have no fixtures during the summer, other

events will need to do the necessary test fixtures, that have been unable to take place so far. Andrew concluded that we are looking initially at having around 12% to 13% of supporters in the stadium, followed by 25%. Ideally, we would like to get to 50% for the start of next season.

2. If there is a reduced capacity, how would you decide which season ticket holders are allowed entry (assuming that more tickets have been sold than the numbers allowed)?

Rebecca stated that a pledge was previously made to season ticket holders for the 2020-21 campaign, that they would have the first seats coming in. This will now be season ticket holders for both the 2020-21 and 2021-22 campaigns. We will communicate with season ticket holders in the first instance to see if there is anyone who does not wish to come back to the stadium yet, as we have had supporters who we have spoken to, who have said they are not yet ready to return. From this, we have a selecting system ready where we will be able to do draws to select supporters.

3. Has there been any mention of covid vaccine passports?

Rebecca stated that currently, we don't know if there will be a passport, but we are trying to plan for all eventualities, so we can be as prepared as we possibly can be. We have been working on our app, so when you are allocated a ticket a form will appear for you to fill in. This would include asking if someone has had their vaccine, if they have had a temperature or feel unwell, and whatever other questions may be necessary. Rebecca continued that there are other things we need to think about, for example, potentially needing to bring toilets and food outside of the stadium instead of in the concourse area. Andrew added that there could potentially be on the day testing, but that there are a variety of variables at the moment.

4. If we get into the play-offs, we could play a team like Barnsley away. They could have fans at their home games and we might not have fans at our home games. What would happen then?

Julian responded stating that this then becomes a question of the integrity of the competition. It has been discussed with EFL and other clubs, and there is a general view that the integrity of the competition comes first, it isn't definitive that wouldn't happen but Julian feels that wouldn't be the case. Andrew added that currently Swansea, Cardiff and Newport are all in with a chance of reaching the play-offs across two leagues, so it would call upon the EFL to make the right decision.

QUESTION 6: PLAYER RECRUITMENT

Will we have funds to get players through the door in the summer?

Julian explained that after the transition the club has been in with three years in the Championship, the general view of the club is that it needs to be clever, trading players and that means buying as well as selling. Gareth Davies added that we will have money available for a transfer budget in the summer. We recognise that we have a number of players out of contract and we will need money to strengthen the squad for next season.

QUESTION 7: FIRST TEAM

How important is the club's style of play considered to be? Do we place a big emphasis on it or do you believe the most important thing is results?

Julian responded by saying that our style of play is fundamentally important for the short, medium and long-term of the football club. He explained that a club doesn't want to move from one style to another as it really effects player recruitment. For example, you wouldn't want to recruit a small technical player if that doesn't work with your style of play.

Julian continued that Swansea's period of difficulty, being relegated from the Premier League, was a line to change the style and therefore effecting results. Steve Cooper has brought back a style of play within a different formation. The attitude of the way we want to play is still the same. In terms of Mark's work and first team recruitment, and in terms of the way you play and how you want your players to develop and to support winning football matches, the better it is.

Mark added that we have a very clear style of play established throughout the academy, one that will continue. It revolves around a very clear understanding of how we want to see football played.

QUESTION 8: COMMUNITY

As I live in Carmarthen and up to two years ago lived in Haverfordwest and regularly travelled on the Pembrokeshire Jacks Coach, when we get back to normal do you see us resuming the fans' forums with the groups in west Wales? If not face to face, via Zoom which Glamorgan Cricket Club have done very successfully with questions being submitted in advance.

Julian stated that it is a definitive yes. As a club we would much rather be face to face than on Zoom, even if it is a great way of communicating during these times. There is nothing like face to face discussions so we will definitely be out and about as soon as we can, as we feel that it's very important that the club comes to you.