

SWANSEA CITY STRUCTURED DIALOGUE

Wednesday, 9 November 2022
Held at the Swansea.com Stadium, 6:30pm

PANEL	
NAME	POSITION HELD
Julian Winter	Chief Executive
Gareth Davies	Chief Financial Officer
Andrew Davies	Head of Operations, Facilities and Development
Josh Marsh	Head of Football Operations
Paul France	Head of Swans Foundation
Chris Golledge	Supporters Trust
SUPPORTER ATTENDEES	
The meeting was attended by two supporters, who put their questions to the panel.	

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: OBJECTIVES

As the football club, what do we define as success? And what objectives have been set to ensure we are successful? Is success defined by revenue, team performance, player development creating sell on value?

Julian stated that Swansea City's Senior Management Team (SMT) and Russell have worked on an overall club strategy plan, with our aspiration to be in the Premier League and how to be sustainable within the Premier League. There are a range of success measures across the club. The main goals for the club are community, financial stability, people and football identity.

Julian was asked, do you believe we have the leadership team to produce these goals? Julian responded that we do have the team able to deliver the goals. Julian highlighted joining the panel that evening was Paul France, who has newly been appointed as the Head of Foundation. This position may be integrated into the clubs SMT in future years. Julian strongly believed that the current leadership team is the perfect set up to achieve success.

A further question was asked as to why aren't the owners involved when speaking about the leadership of the club? Julian responded that 90% of work is completed and delivered by those physically at the club and that he sees it as a good thing that staff are able to get on with it. The other 10% is where owners are involved in player trading and for this there is open communication and, quarterly board meetings with the owners.

Julian says that recently Jake Silverstein has been the voice for the owners. He is more than open to regular communication. Steve and Jason are happy for Jake to speak on their behalf.

Chris says that Jake will be over here a lot more often, and when he's here he's very up for engagement with supporters.

Catherine stated he participated in other community activities, that were not published on our socials when he was here, for example he went to a DSA coffee morning and the Jac Lewis Foundation mental health drop in hub.

Andrew added that we have a good balance between the link with ownership, and what SMT need about delivering the objectives the club has.

Julian says that regarding ownership we are in a really good place in that they do not become involved in things they don't need to.

QUESTION 2: COMMUNITY

What is Swansea City doing to support local charities in the area and raise awareness of the current plight of some? How is support provided and evidenced?

Paul says he's a massive advocate of working closely with the club and the foundation, stating we are lucky here that there is a big sense of togetherness. Trying to find local charities which need help to deliver their work.

It was questioned whether the smaller charities in the local area that need help, would receive the backing and support of the club. Awareness is what local charities are looking for and a platform, not money.

Paul commented that we are doing what we can to help local charities, but we need to do a lot more. We are going in the right direction. We get funded by Premier League to work in primary schools which has been successful. We have a geographical challenge to cover all of these projects as it's not just in Swansea it's a lot of West Wales. Paul says we need to do better locally, working with the local health boards, council etc to tackle the local needs. Paul stated the Foundation are keen to do work with older people, and is happy to work with Age Concern Cymru to support the older people in our community.

The participant stated that Age Concern Cymru just need awareness for local people to show that they are there for help for over 50s.

Catherine stated a separate meeting would be arranged very quickly to see how the club could help and how this could be included in the clubs overall Equality, Diversity and Inclusion strategy

Julian summarized that the concept of Foundation is coaching, educating, working on people's health and social inclusion. A lot of clubs do not know how to utilize their Foundation. We have renamed and rebranded to become the Swans Foundation. The Swans Foundation and Swansea City's offices are next to each other so we feel connected. Fans need visibility of what the Foundation do.

QUESTION 3: MATCHDAY EXPERIENCE

Given the success of guardrails (safe standing) at stadia across the English leagues (including at the Cardiff City Stadium) and the support for its implementation for match-going fans, can the club clarify its current stance on this issue?

Safe standing (at least in some areas) would greatly benefit the experience and safety of supporters in the east stand and in the away end, and there is definitely scope to trial this in the away end.

Julian challenged the question, asking how has it been a success? We shouldn't be pressured into getting safe standing rail seating. Our challenge is, if we allow 1000 home fans to have rail standing, then what is the next step on from there – will the regulatory authorities then say the seats next to the rail seating need rail seating. Our stadium is bowl shaped, and we have no records to say our current seating format is unsafe. The very concept of the words 'safe standing' indicates we are not safe now, and this is simply not true.

The participant asked whether the costs were large for the club – Julian stated it is.

It was commented that fans think an atmosphere is created from the rail seating like Borussia Dortmund etc.

Andrew commented that there is no evidence to say rail seating is a success. The club risk assess every event at the stadium and manage it so we have a safe environment for our supporters. There has not been any recorded incidents where any supporters have been injured in our current seating as a result of issues arising from supporters standing in the seating decks.

The Club's position is that the responsible managers are going to monitor and evaluate the examples where rail seating has been installed to see if it is successful in demonstrably evidence safer environments for supporters. If we have to consider having rail setting further down the line, we will look into it then. We are a multipurpose stadium with different demographics of spectators for different events., We need to be mindful of the fact t that the venue is used by others and is not just the home of the Swans. For example, for another event spectators may be forced to stand for the duration of the event due to the rail seating. If we go down the rail seating road, we want to work with our supporters not against them. If we spend money on introducing rail seating, then it takes away budgets which can be spent better elsewhere. We are working with other clubs and licensing authorities to monitor it.

Julian stated there was a report on early adopters of the rail seating, the differences are so marginal it's not worth it.

QUESTION 4: MATCHDAY EXPERIENCE

Matchday atmosphere massively improves with more away fans at the stadium, and where they are situated, when away following is small they tend to be housed next to the west stand, could they be moved next to the east to generate a better atmosphere?

Andrew stated that one reason is the configuration of the stadium, and the other reason is the cost. It is difficult to move the supporters around due to the two central North stand blocks and how the concourses work below. We can do it, but it brings its own challenges, stewarding and policing bills will go up if we put supporters closer to each other. By housing the away fans in the left side of the North stand, it lowers the match day cost for stewarding and policing.

Having the away supporters in the West side of the North Stand mean that the services in the concourses are better for the home fans in the East side of the North stand.

QUESTION 5: PLAYER RECRUITMENT

Is there a possibility of recruiting young players that have options to buy if they sign on loan rather than loaning players in to lose them half way through the season or not re-loaning them? (eg Hannes Wolf or Ethan Laird).

Julian stated that in January we can utilize options like Hannes Wolf etc. Manchester United wouldn't entertain an option for extending Ethan Laird's time at the Swans. The loans that we have are mainly coming from the Premier League, which means they either are too expensive to buy, or they won't give us an option to buy the player. Too often it's not a sensible valuation given by the loanee's parent club. Loan players should be players that can have an instant impact. If you're loaning top talent, you aren't likely to get an option on them.

We put players out on loan and don't give them options as we are in control of our players and their valuations, so it's very difficult for us to pressure clubs in higher divisions to allow us to have an option on purchasing the player.

Loans are also a good way to get a better understanding of a player before exercising an option to buy. For example, if we got promoted, we would have had Luke Cundle for a season and know how valuable he is to us, we would have tried the player should we consider then buying him.

QUESTION 6: OWNERSHIP

With the current form of the squad and the good work of the manager can the fans expect the owners to show up more and see for themselves first hand what is needed to push for promotion or at least become one of the league's dominant forces? Wrexham seem to have overseas owners who GENUINELY care.

The owners watch every game, all of them. They are all supporters of the club and are very engaged in the transfer window.

This questions was answered in more detail within question 1 already.

QUESTION 7: FINANCE

Should Swansea get promoted to the Premier League, what measures would be taken financially to ensure that Swansea are competitive?

Julian commented it revolves around strategy. Manchester United turns over half a billion a year, we can't be competitive with those clubs. Our goal is to be financially sustainable in the Premier League. We need to have a model with player sales, management of the wage budget and academy development to be sustainable.

A participant commented that when we first went up, we had a sustainable model, then towards the end of our time in the Premier League it went downhill.

Julian claimed it's very easy to be sucked into spending more as the other Premier League clubs are doing it. The plan/strategy we have now is to be successful sensibly like we were in our early years in the Premier League.

Julian says that we were overstaffed in the Premier League. We would say that 10/15 roles would be needed if we went to the Premier League to meet the demands. Player contracts are essential in making sure clauses are in the players contracts say that if we went down their wage goes down. If we do that it saves infrastructure at our club.

Gareth commented that in the last couple of years in the Premier League we were in relegation battles, so we made mistakes on player signings/player wages etc. We have learnt from them and have a strategy for if and when we go back up.

QUESTION 8: PLAYER RECRUITMENT

Are there any future plans to increase investment in the Academy setup? The club has made a lot of money from player sales that have come through our Academy. Whilst I appreciate that a top level Academy is an extremely expensive entity, as a club I believe we've had huge success in this area. The benefits of a top level academy beyond just player sales is that it can bolster our first team without needing to pay over the odds in the transfer market. I appreciate that our current crop of youngsters coming through are doing well (Cooper, Congreve etc), I think that we're only scratching the surface.

Julian stated that we have a top-level Academy. It's easy to get consumed by a category system. We were spending between 6-7 million a year on the Academy at Category 1 in the Premier League, that would be a third of our revenue currently. We are a well-resourced Academy at Category 2 currently with great leadership and coaching all aligned with our coaching strategy.

The first question we would ask if a player gets injured or a player leaves, is are academy players ready to play. Julian commented that a piece of work was undertaken to determine the Academy players who made it to the first team through Category 1 2 so we could evaluate how effective it is being a Category 1 Academy. It depends on how you measure the success, is it player sales or time playing for the Swans? We need to get the best players from the younger age groups so we can grow

and develop them as players in the Academy like Joe Rodon etc. Nobody can acquire our players before the age of 16 so we have up until then to develop them as much as possible before offering pro contracts. The only way players sign a professional contract for us is if we think they can play for the Swans. When they do sign a professional contract, we are then in control as other clubs would have to pay for the players due to the contract.

The participant asked, due to our limited movement in the transfer market would the Academy then, with more investment, attract younger players from elsewhere? Julian responded by stating that we tried this last year and only 2 out of 6 Academy players we got from other clubs are still in our Academy. We have 3 sections Primary, Secondary and Professional Phase. We need to be good at all three areas, if we can get them in the primary stage then it helps us to produce better players from a young age. The player development plan is different for each section.

The Academy has changed the landscape locally, we have the pull from all local players over Cardiff.

Morgan Whittaker and Kyle Joseph were brought in for the first team squad, they were sent on loan for them to improve in the short term which will hopefully help us in the long term.

QUESTION 9: SUSTAINABILITY

Can the club look into promote shuttle buses, maybe Swansea train station to Landore P&R to meet its sustainability objectives? The congestion post match also discourages supporters.

Andrew commented that travel arrangements for supporters attending Club matches and other events are an ongoing challenge. The stadium is operated on a long-term Lease from Swansea Council and the parking arrangements on site are limited to those provided for by the Lease. Outside of this there are limited off site parking options available. We understand that this is problematic for our supporters and we acknowledge the difficulties this presents for residents locally

The Club has, over the seventeen seasons the stadium has operated, attempted various schemes including Park and Ride services and working with the Council to provide additional off site parking opportunities but these continue to present their own challenges. Public transport was, and remains, a problem with rail and bus services incapable in their current form of providing an effective solution

The simple fact of the matter is that with ongoing development around the stadium site and the ongoing loss of the local parking sites the Council developed when the Club got promoted to the Premier League, there will need to be a fresh approach to travel and this will inevitably lead to consideration of options such as shuttle buses. The imminent development of the existing Park and Walk facility at Landore is subject to consultation currently and the Club is going to be engaged in this. However, as a tenant with no other land available to it through the Lease arrangement, the Club is wholly reliant on other bodies in this matter so it is hoped that co-operation will be forthcoming and a solution found.