



**Swansea City AFC**

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# SWANSEA CITY STRUCTURED DIALOGUE

SWANSEA.COM STADIUM | THURSDAY 30 NOVEMBER 2023 | 18:00

PANEL	
NAME	POSITION HELD
Andy Coleman	Chairman
Ken Gude	Chief of Staff & Head of Strategy
Richard Morris	Head of Commercial
Josh Marsh	Head of Football Operations
Gavin Levey	Academy Manager
SUPPORTER	ATTENDEES

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

Meeting minuted by Rhian Morris, Executive Assistant to the Executive Management Team.

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

## QUESTION 1: ACADEMY DEVELOPMENT

***How does the Academy develop young players towards first team participation?***

Specific interests were expressed in various aspects of the academy, including management, recruitment, coaching, and more. Concerns were raised about the high turnover of staff and sought clarification on whether these roles had been adequately replaced, despite praising the academy's progress and clear U18-U21 development.

Different stages in the academy were outlined in three stages, starting from junior levels, progressing through scholarship, and reaching the professional level. To gain a deeper understanding, sub-questions were asked, focusing on the number of staff involved, quality control mechanisms, decisions on coaching adequacy, a typical schedule for academy players, and the factors influencing player progression between levels.



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Gavin acknowledged the passion and addressed the challenge of staff turnover, emphasising the need for stability. He outlined a comprehensive club-wide strategy covering two-and-a-half years, targeting initiatives at various levels to promote togetherness. The upcoming season was referred to as a “reset season,” aiming to optimise the academy’s performance. Gavin shared statistics, highlighting the need for a smaller, locally identified squad and increased integration of U18’s with the U21’s and first-team training.

Looking towards 2025-26, Gavin articulated a vision to become the best in-class academy, potentially reaching category one status. He highlighted the importance of succession planning, building relationships, and strategic value addition for this goal.

Gavin was asked if we have a head of a recruitment for the academy?

Gavin assured intentions to appoint a head of recruitment for the academy who would be involved across both sites liaising regularly with Josh Marsh and Paul Watson, actively participating in meetings at Landore. This would be through a formal process, prioritising sustainability. He noted that recruitment wasn’t the immediate focus, as the emphasis lay on developing existing talents and working with younger age groups.

## QUESTION 2: MEN’S TEAM

***Almost half the match day first team squad is made up of loan players. How can that possibly be healthy in the long term?***

The impressive standard of the younger players was highlighted, emphasising their readiness for the field. Doubt was raised on the contribution of loan players to the club’s future. In response, Josh explained the strategy utilised during the summer transfer window, detailing the comprehensive approach to squad transition. He explained the reasoning behind utilising free agents, permanent transfers, and loan markets to facilitate a positive transformation.

Josh acknowledged the current reliance on loaned players but expressed a desire for a reduced dependence in the future. He emphasised the club’s commitment to succession planning, preparing for the upcoming January transfer window. While recognising the proven advantages of utilising the loan market in the club’s recent history, Josh highlighted the goal of having fewer players on loan.

Josh discussed the fine balance between the benefits and challenges of loan players, citing their historical impact on the club’s performance. He highlighted the crucial role of the recruitment team in ensuring that loaned players offer a distinct and valuable contribution, addressing specific needs within the squad.

It was suggested that local, committed players might provide an intangible five per cent extra effort compared to loaned players. Josh explained the intensive research and thorough decision-making involved in the loan signing process. He stressed the significance of securing motivated



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players who stand to gain, creating a mutually beneficial scenario for both the loaning and parent clubs.

**QUESTION 3: PLAYER RECRUITMENT**

***Is there a clear and concise plan for the January window and beyond in terms of recruitment? Have we identified potential incomings already?***

Josh explained the existence of a clear and concise plan, highlighting discussions with Andy regarding the pre-transfer window strategy. The positive and active summer transfer window was acknowledged, with a keen awareness that decisions made in January hold implications for the subsequent summer window. Despite having a clear understanding of what the squad is lacking, the dynamic nature of the industry and external factors sometimes can result in things changing quickly. Josh also pointed out the development of shortlists for each position, emphasising collaboration between key individuals, such as the first team manager and the scouting team. Their joint efforts are dedicated to assessing feasibility and thoroughly exploring potential opportunities in preparation for the upcoming January transfer window.

**QUESTIONS 4 & 5: OWNERSHIP & FINANCE**

***What are the objectives of the ownership and sustainability of the club? How do you anticipate the long-term financial state of the club to look like if we fail to get promoted in the next 5 years?***

Andy highlighted the importance of strategic vision for the club, emphasising the necessity of building a sustainable business model over the next five years. This plan is designed to ensure financial viability, adherence to FFP regulations, and positioning the club as highly competitive. Andy added this will be a holistic approach, not only concentrating on on-field performance but also driving initiatives within the stadium.

Significant efforts have been invested in collaboration with Richard Morris, Head of Commercial, to build the commercial aspects of the club's operations. The goal is to diversify revenue streams and enhance cash flow, addressing areas that might not have received adequate attention in recent years. This includes a thorough examination of opportunities at the club level, aiming to fortify the financial foundation in the result of challenges like the prolonged closure of the stadium during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Andy acknowledged the challenging business model for lower league football clubs, particularly evident during disruptions like the pandemic. The majority of revenue being derived from game day ticket sales makes the club vulnerable to external events like this. Andy commended the hard work of the team, particularly Richard, in identifying opportunities and navigating challenges at the club level.

Emphasising a dual focus on on-field success and business sustainability, Andy outlined the main objective of achieving promotion. The club's history and potential success on the pitch are



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seen as pillars that, when joined with a solid commercial strategy, can lead to sustained success. Andy expressed a commitment to safeguarding and strengthening the club, aligning investments with a clear belief in achieving success in both sporting and business endeavours.

**QUESTION 6: WOMEN'S TEAM**

***How can we encourage more of the men's supporters to watch the women's games? I have a season ticket for the men's game, but as someone who doesn't use the app much, I don't know what the women's schedules are. I download the men's dates at the start of the season, can we do this for woman, or promote it more on men's games day?***

Andy stated it ties in with the sustainability of the club which is built around its entire community. This is not a community of men in the club, it's a community of people who live and breathe Swansea. He highlighted the expansion in global participation of women's football, and stated there should be a focus around this if you are trying to build sustainability. He added there are a lot of factors that need to be addressed and improved, particularly fixing social media inequalities for the women's team.

Andy added the club feels more family, community orientated and inclusive of all supporters since the success of initiatives such as pre-game festivities and inclusive events we started in the autumn. The success of these efforts is evident in the enthusiastic response from supporters, especially young families, with thousands of kids participating and expressing their joy through waving flags and posting on social media. This promotes a vibrant, inclusive community.

**QUESTION 7: MATCHDAY EXPERIENCE**

***When can we expect to see popular outcomes of the fan match day experience survey enacted within the club?***

Andy's communication on the broader football community and its reflection in local football activities and stadium dynamics is often aligned with Swansea City Supporters Facebook groups, emphasising the need for the club to strategically boost its commercial aspects to enhance revenue. Issues were raised around the cost of food and beverages in the stadium, along with concerns around the transition to a cashless stadium. It was highlighted that addressing these issues is crucial for the club's aspiration to be viewed as an integrated community-orientated body.

Paul expressed thanks for promoting the Supporters' Trust survey on Facebook, revealing a substantial response of 930 participants across 300 categories. Key themes include leveraging the Welsh identity of the club and addressing concerns about the pre-match experience, concourse amenities, and team entrance. The analysis will be finalised soon, informing future actions and recommendations for the club.

Richard highlighted the details of decision-making around pricing, especially in the context of the ongoing cost-of-living crisis. He added that the club prioritises supporters but also faces



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challenges due to rising costs. Richard also explained the approach taken in pricing, including benchmarking with other EFL clubs and analysing historical ticket pricing.

It was highlighted that supporters are not travelling to away games due to the costs of tickets and travel, with suggestions that the club consider providing free buses for away fixtures, increasing the potential for enhanced fan engagement and positive public relations. This would have been a great opportunity for the Leeds fixture.

Richard explained that the tickets prices for away fixtures are set by the other club. However there are existing negotiations and reciprocal deals in place with other clubs such as Stoke City and Watford to make away tickets more affordable. While we have a tiered ticket pricing model and are very open to reciprocal deals, in some instances it is not in the best interest of the club to agree to what the other club wants.

Andy provided a comprehensive overview of his background in football and finance, emphasising a holistic approach and a commitment to improving the hospitality experience. He referred to the fan zone as a step toward inclusivity and expresses a desire for fans to feel appreciated by giving people a better product with a fair price for sustainability.

Ken referred to the point around providing complimentary buses for away fixtures, demonstrating the club's responsiveness to fan concerns. It was acknowledged that improvements were made in Level 2 catering since previous CEO Trevor Birch, highlighting the club's receptivity to constructive feedback.

Catherine praised the group for their contributions, expressing gratitude for their involvement in the survey, and connecting them with Andy for continued collaboration on survey results, affirming the importance of their representation in the club's narrative.

**QUESTION 8: SAFE STANDING**

***Do the club have plans to introduce safe standing areas and if so when and where in the stadium and how many seats?***

***A further question was asked around the clubs plans to assist fans who me be suffering financial hardship as part of the cost of living crisis?***

Ken revealed plans to implement safe standing areas at the beginning of the 2024-25 season. These areas will be strategically placed in the North East corner of the home end and a select number of seats for away supporters, comprising a total of 2,000 seats. 1,500 seats will be allocated in the home stand, and 500 for the away stand. The decision to choose these specific sections is based on the observation that these are where supporters tend to stand the most during matches, indicating anticipated high demand.

The installation of these standing areas is scheduled for the close season over the summer, with careful consideration given to the fact that these sections are also used for non-sporting events. It has been assured that this addition will not impact the stadium's capacity for these type of events.



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Ken clarified that there is no intention to adopt heavy-handed tactics to enforce sitting. The decision to introduce safe standing has been influenced by the regulatory body, particularly the stadium licensing authority, which has been pushing for stricter enforcement of standing vs sitting. This led to a choice between modifying or reducing seating capacity in these areas for a safer standing environment. Despite the management's confidence in their current standing management practices, the regulatory requirements led to this decision.

Ken highlighted a collaborative effort with the regulatory bodies during this process, expressing a mutual willingness to work through the transition. The commitment to ensuring fans' enjoyment of their preferred match experience is emphasised, with plans to collaborate with staff and stewards for a smooth implementation. That said, the expectation will be that fans not in standing areas will be seated for the majority of the match.

Cath added the identified area for safe standing does not disadvantage fans with mobility requirements, underlining a consideration for inclusivity in the decision-making process.

**QUESTION 9: COMMUNITY*****What are the club doing to support young people in our community?***

With the cost-of-living crisis, on top of there being a significant impact on young people as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, times have never been tougher for children and young people. Ken explained that he and Andy want to take advantage of being present and engaged with community activities and events, and having a community-oriented approach. Recognising their identity as a football club, they plan to channel their efforts into facilitating access to football and sporting activities, particularly for those affected by the cost of living crisis. Ken referred to the recent free, open training session held at the stadium in August. The goal is to establish regular, cost-free events that enable the community to connect with the club and its players.

Ken added the Foundation plays a pivotal role by directly collaborating with the community, offering complimentary football-related activities such as training, camps, and games. The club's commitment extends beyond its immediate realm, as they actively support various charitable organisations and activities. The overarching intention is to build direct and impactful connections with individuals across Swansea, demonstrating a sustained dedication to community engagement throughout their presence.

**QUESTION 10: TICKETING*****Is anything been done to get away tickets cheaper than £45 for Leeds and £37 for QPR – they are too high especially with the cost of living, everything should be set at £30 and no more than that?***



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In addition to the above question, the group were asked how supporters know when tickets will be going on sale and will anything be done to get supporters and the stadium back to where the atmosphere was bouncing?

Richard explained that ticket sale announcement dates will be on the website in the next week. With regards to the stadium atmosphere, there are a number of factors that are being taken into consideration and we are working towards improving the matchday atmosphere. The significance of making the overall experience more exciting for fans was highlighted. They named successful initiatives like half-time activities and drew attention to the positive outcomes of the Swansea Women's fixture v Wrexham. Supporters arrived at the stadium earlier than men's fixtures and there was an increase in spend on the concourses.

Cath expanded on the grassroots engagement strategy, emphasising the positive response to last year's offer. This season, they've seen a significant increase in grassroots teams participating, and have employed an individual to manage this offer. This has been encouraging a fan base and enhancing the atmosphere, particularly in the South stand. Cath highlighted the nearly sold-out bookings for the sensory room, adding the club's unique inclusion room as an alternative, expressing pride in its availability. Plans were outlined for CT and NS to meet with disabled supporters to showcase this facility, emphasising the club's commitment to inclusivity.

**Extra Questions:**

Who is the new head of recruitment?

Josh stated that Martin Hodge has recently joined the club as chief scout and will be heading up the scouting and recruitment department. The club's strategic focus includes data insights and emerging talent, particularly at the top end of the academy.

The necessity for sustainability was emphasised as well as the importance of promoting from the academy and adhering to the club's style of play. Concerns were raised about the purchases of players that don't offer a lot of resale value which is vital for the club, along with poor performances, decreased attendance, particularly in the family stand, and the potential struggle in the league. Linking in with the cost of living crisis, fans don't see the value in paying money to come to games which is causing challenges around illegal streaming. Richard highlighted the volatile nature of the football industry, urging the club to stay proactive during challenging times. He added it is hard not to get emotionally invested and it is important that we as a club stay on the front foot and not hide when things aren't going how we want them to. Richard emphasised the need to showcase what is going well, like the amazing work are doing in the academy and the foundation firmly in the knowledge that everyone is working hard to turn the performances around on the pitch.

