

Meeting Minutes of the All Together Town (ATT) Panel – 14.03.2024

Wednesday, 14th March, 2024 – 18:30

Hosted at the John Smith's Stadium

Note: These minutes were taken by the Huddersfield Town Supporters' Association (HTSA), not Huddersfield Town Association Football Club.

Present

Club representatives: Andy Booth (Supporter Services – AB); Gina Buckley (Head of Ticketing – GB); Jake Edwards (CEO – JE); Robyn Kennerdale (Head of Supporter Experience) – RK); Domenic Notarfrancesco (Director of Global Brand – DN); Rachel Taylor (Supporter Services – RT); David Threlfall-Sykes (Marketing and Communications Director – DTS)

Supporters' Groups: HTSA; Huddersfield Town Disabled Supporters' Club; Cowshed Loyal

+ Multiple panel members

Agenda

1. Season Cards
2. Stadium Ownership
3. Stadium Connectivity

4. Frequency of ATT Panel Meetings

1. Season Cards

Jake Edwards began the meeting by providing a brief overview of the club's commercial strategy.

He explained that, over the past nine or so months, the club had begun the process of benchmarking itself against other Championship sides across a range of categories. Mr. Edwards pointed out that this was particularly important in light of ongoing negotiations between the EFL and Premier League with regards to a new financial settlement for the professional game in England and Wales.

He added that although a new deal would involve immediate financial benefits for clubs such as Huddersfield Town, it would also likely come with certain strings attached. Mr. Edwards gave the example of performance (i.e., final league position) playing a more prominent role in the revenue distribution formula and core spending being directly linked to revenue. In addition, he predicted that the ability of owners to subsidise losses would be somewhat curtailed.

Mr. Edwards continued, highlighting the fact that this will force all clubs to prioritise financial sustainability. It will also make it harder for Town to compete with other teams, including those in receipt of parachute payments and with bigger stadia. As a result, Mr. Edwards concluded, the club will have to work much harder to generate

additional revenue. He said that much of this will come from the rewards of up-front investment (i.e., stadium infrastructure, academy expansion, player trading, etc.), but some will inevitably have to come from season card sales.

Continuing this line of reasoning, Mr. Edwards observed that Town offer one of the cheapest season card deals in the EFL and remain one of the only clubs not to use a zoning system.

To emphasise this point, David Threlfall-Sykes presented several slides to the panel which showed that Town's adult season cards are cheaper than the average equivalent in the National League North (Step 2).

Mr. Threlfall-Sykes argued that, first and foremost, low prices have a negative impact on the club's ability to generate revenue and thus compete with its peers. On top of this, he suggested they devalue the product itself, with up to 4,000 season card holders regularly not attending games.

Mr. Edwards said the Board had therefore concluded that the club must gradually increase the price of season cards over the next five years to meet the average Championship price point.

In the short-term, Mr. Edwards clarified, this could involve the introduction of zoning across the stadium. The new system will follow a simple and largely universal logic: i.e., the cost of a ticket will be determined by the quality of the view. Season card prices could therefore be lower in the North and South stands and higher in the Riverside and Kilner Bank stands.

Mr. Edwards stated that categorisation (Under 23, Under 18, Under 16, Under 11) will be preserved and incorporated into this system and the 65 and over price will be reintroduced. The cost of matchday tickets, which are closer to the Championship mean, will increase only slightly. Mr. Threlfall-Sykes added that the new prices will be decided with a view to retaining as many current season card holders as possible.

A HTSA representative questioned the notion that football in general and Huddersfield Town specifically have a revenue problem, pointing out that both make more money than ever. They proposed that football has a cost control problem, which is not something supporters are either responsible for or capable of solving. They added that there is no proven correlation between the price of season cards and success on the field. The representative pointed to the fact that other clubs at the bottom of the table charge far more than Town but do not perform any better. The risk, they argued, was that ever-increasing prices would, in the grand scheme of things, do little to remedy the club's revenue problem or make it more competitive, while gradually eroding its active fanbase.

Another HTSA representative asked on what the extra projected revenue would be invested. Mr. Edwards replied that the club was planning to invest heavily in the playing squad, academy, and stadium to improve the club's position in the league and enhance the matchday experience – both of which, he claimed, would offer fans more value for money.

Several panel members expressed concerns that the zoning system would add an unnecessary level of logistical complexity for some fans, potentially deterring them from renewing for the upcoming season. Others stated that, in the end, the team's performances drive demand for season cards and fans' perception of their value.

Mr. Threlfall-Sykes assured the panel that the club was aware of these issues and committed to resolving them. He said they were especially focused on improving the level of service from the ticket office. One of the main problems on this front, he explained, is the impact of high demand at peak times. The club is examining different options to address this, including the possibility of splitting season card renewals across two different periods. Under this scenario, the North and South stands could open for renewals first – because more people will likely move down a price category – followed by the Riverside and Kilner Bank stands. Mr. Threlfall-Sykes said this could deliver an improved service through reduced phone queues and

email backlogs, but would come with a downside – namely, a shorter timeframe for fans to renew.

A number of panel members suggested that a shorter renewal window may pose challenges for some, specifically those who buy season cards on behalf of family or friends. A HTSA representative worried that simultaneously introducing higher prices, zoning, *and* a split-renewal system would create too many new obstacles. The representative added that if the latter was implemented, fans should be given *at least* one month to renew.

Representative of HTDSC enquired as to the car parking situation and particularly accessibility spaces. Mr Edwards advised this is still under discussion.

Mr. Edwards brought the discussion to a close by stressing that the season card policy is a work in progress, promising an announcement on the outcome before the end of the season.

2. Stadium Ownership

Mr. Edwards reported that there was no significant update on the stadium ownership situation, reiterating the club's desire to take operational control of or a long-term lease on the site.

He stated that the new ownership had invested a great deal of time and effort into building relationships with the Huddersfield Giants and Kirklees Council to better understand their interests and aims.

Mr Edwards confirmed that despite the slow progress of negotiations, the club was determined to invest in the stadium, beginning with key improvements in the summer.

A HTSA representative asked whether there were any risks to taking on the stadium's liabilities. Mr. Edwards disputed the premise of the question, arguing that the main risk would be to continue to pay 90 percent of the costs while holding only 40 percent of the shares.

The same representative enquired who would pay for the estimated £8-10 million of required infrastructure investment to extend the stadium's lifespan to 2050. Mr. Edwards responded that the costs would be covered by the club and Kevin Nagle.

3. Stadium Connectivity

A panel member enquired about the potential for the installation of wi-fi at the stadium.

Mr. Threlfall-Sykes said the club was examining the possibility of doing so. He also confirmed that the club was in the process of developing a new website and app.

4. Frequency of ATT Meetings

HTSA said that it would be useful to hold meetings of the ATT panel every three months to make sure that the club was consistently engaging with fans on important matters.

A panel member also raised the issue of short notice periods, suggesting that fixed dates would encourage higher attendance.

Mr. Threlfall-Sykes said that, from next season, the club aims to host four meetings a year if possible.

5. AOB

None.

The meeting adjourned at 20:32.