



# FCG Agenda

Tuesday 12th September 5.30pm

## Fan representatives

Joe Costello	Heroes & Villains
John Gillett	Lions Clubs
Gary Kilburn	Lions Clubs
Jonathan Fear	Vital Villa
Michael Steede	Avillafan.com
Karl Bowater	Aston Villa Supporters Trust
Steve Gough	Aston Villa Independent Supporters Clubs
Dan Bardell	Villa View
David Michael	My Old Man Said
Scott Jones	Villa Talk

## Club representatives

Keith Wyness	Chief Executive Officer
Luke Organ	Chief Commercial Officer
Brendan McGlinchey	Operations Director
Steve Round	Director of Football
Tommy Jordan	Head of Media & Comms
Lee Preece	SLO

### **1. Why has the discount at the shop and the AVTV access been taken away from the season ticket package? It seems to devalue the season ticket, as there is nothing to the package now apart from the ticket.**

Fanatics have removed any and all discounts (including for club partners) in order to ensure returns to profitability and in exchange for a generous minimum guarantee to the club which reverses significant losses. We are working to try and ensure delivery of benefit to fans from Fanatics once we have an established position and equally we are looking at integrating any payments made via STH cards accrue loyalty points.

AVTV Live – a paid for premium content for live broadcast and game replays would in an ideal world be free for all Season Ticket holders, however this is against the EFL regulations as they protect their primary broadcast revenue streams. No club can bundle or provide for free the streams. It should be noted the EFL are breaking ground here and if we were to return to the PL we would not under current regulations be able to stream any non-broadcast game.

AVTV and Youtube hosts our generic content for free which has improved significantly in the last 12 months and we now host all non-live televised content here for people to access.

### **2. In terms of the 'Villa Engine' is it possible to have some specific examples of what has been implemented so far, beyond marketing/motivational taglines such as 'Pride, Passion & Purpose'?**

In terms of a style of play for the first team, it's been said that the focus is currently promotion and the ethos of "only results matter" is being practiced to achieve this. If Villa fail again to get promoted this season, when does the style of play of Villa come to the surface and become a focus of the engine, as a way to be successful?

It is the longer term vision that we are developing and will start to flow through the club from all age groups. We recognise there is a short term imperative to get promoted and that means the total concept may not manifest itself in the first team as yet.

### **3. What is the situation being reported at the moment about the Chinese Government clamping down on investment in football clubs and how will this impact us? In the context of being in the Championship and also if/when Villa are promoted. In terms of the PL, obviously there is an outstanding debt to Randy Lerner to be paid upon promotion, so what will our immediate ambition and capacity be in the PL?**

This is a complex issue and one we are closely involved in as you can imagine to see how this develops. The government has gone as far as naming companies that it sees as problems and we are not on that list. It seems the main aim is companies that have bought assets with debt which is not our case. There is little doubt that this is all about the China debt bubble and that football is being used as an example in key cases where debt has been used ie the purchase of AC Milan.

### **4. Are there any plans to align the Pride Rewards scheme with Villa tickets or Villa's retail merchandise?**

It's the expectation of a lot of people that they'll be able to use the points on items in the shop and against tickets - the current scheme has some good ideas on collection of points, but the rewards don't seem linked to the everyday things fans want.

When will we see the full functionality of the Pride rewards scheme? We have no date yet on when the cash loading will be available and there are still lots of people that can't log into the system.

We are the first sports Club in the world to integrate contactless payment via pre-paid card, therefore we have no reference point and we're working through some complex issues ahead of launch (FCA, MID's, Payment gateways etc). That said, we're nearly there and we'll communicate more over next couple of weeks.

Top up of cash is restricted at the moment until testing is complete. We will likely conduct testing with small user groups and then expand to a stand at a time.

We commissioned an independent piece of research (online survey with 9k answers & several focus groups) to try and understand what fans wanted from a rewards scheme. The overwhelming feedback was to feel valued as a fan and rewarded with Matchday experiences over tangible, everyday products. We've tried to incorporate this – Saturday for example:

- 65 fans in Cornerflag pre-match event
- 4 fans in new hospitality suites
- 2 fans Dinner, B&B at the Belfry
- 8 fans giving a guard of honour to the players
- 25 fans in the programme, shout at half time and names on the big screen
- 2 fans on the pitch at half -time taking a selfie in front of the Holte End
- £5000 worth of Under Armour products collect at Rewards point

Tonight the mascot has come from Pride Rewards.

Clearly the project is in its infancy so any ideas and feedback are welcome, we have to cater for Season Ticket holders from ages of 6 months to 97

**5. A common complaint is the 50p booking fee, especially by fans on the away scheme. They pay their money to join the away scheme, and then, if they go to every game, they have to pay half again on booking fees. What's the club's thinking on this?**

The £25 entry fee to the away scheme guarantees those joining an away ticket for every League match with the ability to return the ticket should it no longer be required.

The 50p per ticket booking fee helps to cover the bank charges for payment of the ticket using credit/debit card and the fulfilment and posting. We've tried to be transparent by keep fulfilment charges etc on the 'outside' of the ticket price.

**6. Transport – whilst being aware of this new coach partnership that Villa have recently announced, what is the possibility of getting the old football specials – trains & buses - from the City Centre & other locations to VP back into operation? Leeds for example, run a shuttle bus before & after the game.**

In terms of trains, would there be any scope in doing some kind of advance football train ticket related/linked to specific away match tickets? That has the flexibility to be used on a different date, in case Sky TV moves the date of the game? But still be a cheap 'advance' price.

The new coach partnership with Zeelo is in an initial trial phase. We had decent take up for the first fixture and good feedback from those that used it (9.2/10 average for 'would you recommend').

The benefit of using Zeelo is their flexibility – they build custom routes based on demand and the location of our season ticket holders and match ticket purchasers.

If the trial continues to go well and we get more fans using the service the number of routes that they offer will continue to grow and we hope to integrate them into app and with Season Cards.

The club have met with the West Midlands combined authority to discuss train travel and, whilst the CA are keen not to favour any club in particular, there will be opportunities to have a conversation with the new franchise expected to come in in December to replace London Midland. The club's marketing department have requested they be a part of the initial kick off meeting with the new franchise and expect to hear back shortly on whether this might be possible.

Further, we have active dialogue with two train operators and a taxi company so hope to be able to announce further initiatives for fans soon.

**7. Repainting the Witton Railway Bridge. The promotion precursor doesn't apply here in terms of affording it, as it's something the club has offered to do on numerous occasions. This is something that would improve the experience and first impressions of going to Villa Park via train dramatically and also benefit the local community at large.**

**If you were on the Commonwealth Games committee choosing the city for the games and you visited Villa Park by train, it's not going to be too impressive! Can we use this Commonwealth Games angle to finally leverage action from Network Rail?**

Using the Commonwealth Games as leverage is a great idea. We hoped the Rugby World Cup would also convince Network Rail to paint the bridge for similar reasons. We entirely agree it needs painting and are aware of the impression the bridge has on visitors to Villa Park and the local community.

Our last contact with Network Rail (following a previous FCG in March 2017) indicated that they will look to combine the painting of the Bridge with other essential maintenance work, minimising the disruption to road and rail users. They have to prioritise work with the greatest risks to safety first, and have plans to work on the bridge in 2019 / 2020.

*Letter from Network Rail:*

*Our Structures Engineer has advised that the bridge is regularly reviewed to ensure it is in a safe and serviceable condition.*

All repairs and maintenance required for this bridge is put into our work bank, and prioritised with all our other structures. As I am sure you can appreciate we have to prioritise work with the greatest risks to safety first. We will, in order to minimise disruption to both road and rail users, always try to combine painting with other essential maintenance work required on the bridge, and based on our current work bank are looking to do some maintenance work in 2019/2020.

With regards to the support team sending in a petition. They can do this by contacting our National Helpline on 03457 11 41 41 or by visiting our website [www.networkrail.co.uk](http://www.networkrail.co.uk)

Regards - Community Relations Executive

Along with asking them about the repainting itself we also added the question of supporters petitioning for the bridge to be painted. Their response is in the above and this would be supported by the Club

**8. Is there scope for supporter consultation through the FCG group when it comes to kits? For example, there seems to be a different shade of claret & blue with every new shirt.**

We run a very strict brand guideline colour match process. Whilst we are acutely aware of colour variances this is wholly dependent on material uptake of colour and the brand manufacturer. We test each garment very closely against our pantone references and we now have two people in our brand team helping amongst other brand challenges control colour.

**9. In terms of the various plans for an expanded Villa Park... Can you make any assurances that the architecture style will be congruous with the nearby Aston Hall and Jacobean style it mimics in places.**

Villa Park should remain as the grandest old lady of football theatres in the UK and indeed the world. Much of the character has been lost with other stadiums, which is impossible to replicate in Steel and Glass.

**Would it remain true to the style of traditional Leitch style grounds?**

Of course any developments will be totally sympathetic to the present look and feel of Villa Park - that is our strength.

**10. In terms of secondary ticketing agencies, while this isn't a real issue while we're not currently selling out games, can the club look into the Twickets model, where face value is the maximum cost for a ticket that can be advertised to a fellow fan.**

Twickets have been successful in creating a morally sound alternative to secondary ticket agencies and has entered the football industry with Crystal Palace partnering officially with them.

This is an interesting one for the club. First and foremost we absolutely want ticket prices to be fair and representative of their face values. We are currently in an exclusive relationship with Seatwave (a subsidiary of Ticketmaster) who invest a significant amount on an annual basis to be our reselling platform. Our balance is thus commercial, do we receive the large investment accepting that a couple of games will see high prices (with the majority of games trading around £10 a ticket) or do we negate the large investment and work with a service provider who does not invest in the club?

We can and have reached out to Twickets and will report back. We can also look to restructure the deal with Seatwave in the New Year.

**11. Can you please update the group on developments and plans for half-time entertainment at Villa Park?**

Our plans for half time aim to cover 3 key areas:

- Engage and involve supporters
- Showcase the Aston Villa Foundation
- Retain a positive atmosphere across the ground for the start of the 2nd half

**Engage & involve supporters**

As part of the new Pride Rewards scheme we're looking to involve more and more fans in half time. The two main activations we have are;

- Half time selfie
- Name in the programme and a half time shout out:
- We have plans to extend even further (e.g. use your points to come onto the pitch to take a penalty, or crossbar challenge from the halfway line) very soon.

**Showcase the Aston Villa Foundation**

- Owprofile with our supporters.
- Mini tournaments between local schools that the Foundation work with,
- Games between our Walking Football team and the oppositions Walking Football team.
- Displays be groups that the Foundation work with, etc.
- Started slightly at Brentford with the presentation to the 'Aspire and Succeed' group which volunteered to refurbish a community centre in Lozells, but will form much more of an 'entertainment/display' segment at half time in future (hoping to start at Nottingham Forest).
- The final of a local schools tournament is generally held at Villa Park at half time during a game in late April/May – but this will be much more of a regular feature.

Another activation for the Foundation and Club will be the launch of Fifty:50 – our new version of Villa Lotto. More details will be announced next week, with this looking to launch at the game against Nottingham Forest. The premise is a lotto where supporters buy a ticket and the funds go into an Aston Villa pot. The winner is then drawn at random from supporters, with the funds being split 50% to the winner and 50% to the Foundation/Club CSR programmes. Our plan is that the draw for this will be made and winners announced/presented with their prize cheque at half time of each game.

**12. Can you please update the group on the Holte Car Park food/drink/entertainment initiative?**

We have had to go through a licensing request with the council to license the space. The license was granted two weeks ago. We are now in the process of working through configurations, max attendances, ops, catering solutions etc.

More news to follow.

**13. In terms of match day catering, is there a possibility for Coeliac (gluten free diet) options. The statistics are 1 in 100 people have this intolerance.**

The request for Gluten Free options has been forwarded to LEVY for their consideration.

**14. What is the possibility of having a dedicated area for Lions Clubs and other supporters groups to display their individual flags (in a location that could be picked up on TV – for overseas groups etc to see), which will add to the match day experience for everyone.**

The Club is always keen to support. Any new displays would need to be agreed with our Operations & Commercial team. We've supported Project B6 with the design and placement of their 'Claret & Blue army' banner at the front of North Stand Lower. There are many more areas like this where we could support fan flags/banners. As mentioned – any displays/flags/banners and their placement would need to be agreed with our Operations & Commercial team in line with security and H&S procedures, but this is something the Club would like to support.

Please email [lee.preece@avfc.co.uk](mailto:lee.preece@avfc.co.uk) should you wish to bring a flag in to the stadium.

**15. How involved will Aston Villa be now with the Commonwealth Game Bid? With Birmingham now representing the UK, would there be any grants/funding from that which may see improvements at Villa Park as a result? Are there any upgrades that are required?**

We have already played a very active part in the bid with the city and region. We hosted the main inspection team already and have worked on a number of PR initiatives and interviews etc. Our senior team has great event and Games experience which is recognised. We will do all we can going forward.