



Disabled Supporter Advisory Board meeting minutes

Date: Tuesday 5 September 2017

Time: 6.00pm – 7.30pm

Location: Press Conference Room, London Stadium

Key personnel

- Karren Brady, Vice-Chairman West Ham United
- Tara Warren, Executive Director of Marketing and Communications, West Ham United
- Julie Pidgeon, Disability Access Officer, West Ham United
- Jake Heath, Supporter Services Manager, West Ham United
- Nicola Keye, Head of Ticketing, West Ham United
- Joe Lyons, CEO, West Ham United Foundation
- Graham Harris, Deputy Safety Officer, London Stadium 185
- Andy Sheldon, Dedicated Football Officer, Metropolitan Police
- James Datson, Matchday commentator for blind and partially-sighted supporters

DSAB Members

- Cathy Bayford
- Trevor Bright
- Robbie Cahill
- Neal Crowley
- Terry Dewhurst
- Bradley Donovan
- David Griffith
- Tracy Higgins
- Steve Lowe
- Richard Pullen
- Helena Reynolds
- Joe Seigel
- Jerry Gibson

Apologies

- Terry Dewhurst
- Gill Fowler
- David Puckett
- Pauline Tanner

INTRODUCTION

Karren Brady (KB) began by welcoming back members after the summer and thanked everyone for their continued commitment and dedication to the DSAB. KB paid particular tribute to Trevor Bright (TB) and Cathy Bayford (CB), thanking them for doing so much to assist the Club in helping disabled supporters, and reiterating her pride at how well the two parties work together.

KB then confirmed that West Ham United had last season commissioned an independent and transparent audit – from Level Playing Field – of the Club’s disabled facilities and services at London Stadium. The audit flagged 107 issues and objectives to work towards in all areas and, following the appointment of a new task force of staff to work through those issues and implement changes – including Tara Warren, Joe Lyons, Nicola Keye, Jake Heath, Ben Illingworth and Julie Pidgeon and her team – 46 of those items have already been completed.

A further 53 are on course to be completed this season, leaving eight ‘big-ticket’ items that are a long-term working progress, including website accessibility.

Tara Warren (TW) then presented the agenda for the evening:

1. Welcome DSAB members
2. Accessible Stadia Guide – Where are we now?
3. Joe Lyons, CEO of the West Ham United Foundation
4. Update on action points
5. Key discussion points submitted by DSAB
6. Future plans
7. How can the DSAB help?

Before kicking off the agenda, KB asked if any members had any burning issues to raise separate to any pre-submitted discussion points.

Jerry Gibson (JG), a new member on the DSAB, raised the question of why disabled supporters have to wait for a period of time after the match for the Shuttle Bus service to depart, and whether the club could make representations to the police about reducing wait times. JG also asked if supporters were permitted to board the shuttle buses in order to stay dry and warm during adverse weather conditions.

KB explained that the subject had been discussed in great detail at the previous DSAB meeting, and would be updated by Graham Harris (GH) on the agenda, but that predominantly the reason for the wait time was simply a safety measure, to ensure no vehicles are on the move when 57,000 supporters are leaving the stadium on foot.

Ben Illingworth (BI) added that, since the end of last season, 18 shuttle buses have been parked by the pick-up point and the service runs for up to 90 minutes after the final whistle.

JG then placed on record his thanks to the club's accessibility staff who assist supporters on a matchday and praised the wonderful job they do.

Graham Harris (GH) then provided an update on behalf of LS185, confirming that the intention is always to release road closures as quickly as possible, but that the safety of pedestrians has to take priority.

Neal Crowley (NC) asked why vehicles leaving the stadium car park could not turn left out of the car park after the match and continue on the loop road.

GH confirmed that it contained part of the egress route that could not be opened until clear, and explained the other routes available to vehicles leaving the stadium, via Marshgate Lane or Clarnico Lane.

TW kicked off the agenda for the evening by starting introductions around the table, with every member given the opportunity to introduce themselves and explain their reasons for wishing to become a part of the DSAB.

Accessible Stadia Guide – where are we now?

TW gave a detailed insight to West Ham United's current position in relation to the Accessible Stadia Guide that all Premier League clubs are committed to complying with this season.

TW reiterated the fact that an independent audit of our disabled facilities had been commissioned, with Level Playing Field selected in order to ensure a brutally honest report.

As KB had previously stated, 107 issues were raised, of which 46 were already complete – many that were discussed in the previous DSAB meeting, including enhanced training programmes for accessibility staff.

The 53 items still to be achieved consisted mainly of issues that can only be addressed now that the season is underway – such as information for steward briefings and use of facilities at London Stadium.

The eight 'big ticket' items are where DSAB members and their fellow supporters really come into play. The club will be forming a sub-group to manage the development of the accessibility section of the official website, with the ambition of having the most fully accessible, interactive online resource that leads the way in the Premier League.

The Club's Access Statement is now available online in the Fan area of whufc.com – something that was requested at the last DSAB meeting – and Jake Heath (JH) is keen to receive feedback from all members on its content.

Another report is being commissioned by the Premier League – the DisabledGo audit – which is due to be released in October or November, but it is not a test in any way, more an information resource that provides statistics for every club.

Nicola Keye (NK) gave an update on the progress of the online ticket sales mechanism for disabled supporters, something the club are very passionate about. Research has been carried out and a trial will take place shortly that DSAB members will be asked to take part in, ahead of rolling out the service to all disabled supporters.

David Griffith (DG) asked if it was possible to see a copy of the Level Playing Field audit.

TW explained that the audit was an internal report, which obviously contained some sensitive information, particularly in respect of the involvement of other stakeholders at London Stadium. However, the audit has driven a full action plan, which JH confirmed could be shared in part privately with DSAB members.

TW added that, having already completed almost half of the actions, the Club would also be submitting details of the improvements made for the Equality and Human Rights Commission via the Premier League, which would be made public.

NK confirmed that the Club had worked closely with the EHRC, who visited the stadium recently to carry out their own full audit. The first impressions were that, given the work we have carried out with the help of the DSAB, we have met all of their immediate requirements.

What is clear is that there are three arms to everything that we do – one to ensure that everything we have put in place was ready for the start of this season, two to put a plan in place to deliver on the timeline we have for improvements scheduled this year, and three to undertake feasibility studies and plans to think about what we can do in the future.

KB added that when the EHRC visited, the stadium wasn't in football mode, so they have been invited back to observe on a matchday, to ensure we can be as open and transparent as possible.

NC raised an idea about the possibility of images of the various routes to the stadium for disabled supporters being made available as an online resource.

Joe Lyons (JL) revealed that some shorter routes are currently being piloted to identify their potential suitability for supporters travelling to the stadium.

JP then spoke about ongoing accessibility staff training, which had been planned ever since the move from the Boleyn Ground to London Stadium. Thanks to JL, a contact had been made with Enhance The UK, a charity who provide disability awareness training, which had been made available to all departments within the football club.

Secondly, it was identified that we didn't have anyone who could sign for deaf supporters. The club have now put 15 members of staff on the first core section of the British sign language course and, in time, key members of staff will have the ability to communicate fully with hearing-impaired supporters.

JL said that the example showed how much progress has been made, and added that the EHRC had recognized West Ham United for bringing a different approach and culture, and showing a real commitment to wanting to change that culture, not just in a football environment, but in society as a whole.

DG revealed he had spoken to a fan of another club who had been amazed to learn about the audio commentary service that West Ham provide for visually-impaired supporters, which gave the club great credit.

TW then confirmed that the London Stadium Accessibility map requested by DSAB members was now in place, with hard copies handed out to each member, and that the long-term plan is to produce a fully interactive map for the entire Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park.

JH explained the content of the map in more detail, illustrating all stadium facilities such as first aid rooms, water fountains, accessible toilets, internal and external lifts, entrances and exits, assistance dog facilities, accessible shuttle bus arrival and departure points and accessible car park. The map also includes main reference points around the stadium.

A second map of the wider area, to include location of rest benches as discussed at the previous DSAB meeting, is currently being developed and should be available to supporters fairly soon, while the Club are also currently talking to developers about the interactive map, which will essentially bring both the stadium and park maps together.

JH confirmed that an email thread with CB and TB is currently ongoing in order to keep members fully informed of the progress of that matter and to ensure we receive any feedback.

JL added that development of an app to include the interactive map is currently being discussed.

DG drew members' attention to a mobile phone app called Project Tango, that allows organisations to provide a virtual environment service for blind supporters. JH made a note of the information and promised to look into the possibility of using it.

TW revealed that the club's Digital Director Karim Virani had been devoting much of his time to the development of our official website to make it fully accessible to disabled supporters, and that our developers had advised on a plan to gradually implement the improvements once the season was underway. TW added that members were more than welcome to volunteer to assist and give feedback on the website accessibility development.

JH provided information on the improvements to signage and customer counters at London Stadium, particularly at the Ticket Offices, where all counters had been lowered at the North Stand Ticket Office, and four lowered at the Stadium Store Ticket Office. Overhead signage has now been added to identify those lower counters so that all supporters can easily see them, particularly at peak times on matchdays near to kick-off.

Those signs now form part of a wider process to unify all our accessible signage around the stadium, so that all disabled supporters can instantly recognise an accessible service wherever it is located.

GH added that a number of conversations had been taken place to improve all such signage and facilities around the stadium, and that he continued to work closely with JH to ensure progress is made. A number of wide-ranging plans are also in place to improve the segregation process and the access for disabled supporters attempting to reach vehicles or the shuttle bus service, of which updates to action points will be confirmed later in the meeting.

GH confirmed that agreeing placement of the new signage would not be a problem.

JP updated on Disabled Supporter Assistants, confirming that at least one – sometimes two – will be stationed at every accessible entrance and exit for every home match. They can still be identified by the pink tabards they wear.

On the shuttle bus service, TW confirmed that, following the issues raised at the previous DSAB meeting, the service had been increased to 18 buses for the final two matches of the 2016/17 season, against Tottenham and Liverpool, with the club having carried out a full audit on the service.

JP passed on her thanks to members for their help and feedback. The Club had written to every supporter who had used the service and now had confirmation of how many wished to travel from Stratford and how many wished to travel from Stratford International. A shuttle bus will now be in operation from Stratford International going forward.

New permits have also been produced for supporters using the service. KB emphasised the importance of common sense being used if, for any reason, supporters with obvious accessibility needs didn't have their permit to hand but still needed to use the service on a matchday.

BI expanded on the introduction of a shuttle bus pick-up point at Stratford International having taken on board the views of supporters throughout the last year. With a second pick-up point now available, permits will state which pick-up point each supporter should use. BI emphasised that the shuttle bus service continued to improve, and that the second pick-up point would help immensely, particularly in reducing queuing and waiting times.

DG raised concern about not all of the buses being completely suitable for disabled supporters, mentioning a lack of handrails on one that he used previously. BI confirmed that he would be

attending a training meeting with the bus company and would bring up that point, but added that, through continuous training, members of staff are always on hand to assist supporters on the buses.

JL added that, having increased to 18 shuttle buses, not all buses have full accessible facilities, so staff are being specially trained in providing assistance, and also advising supporters of which available bus would be most suitable for their requirements.

NC enquired about the possibility of accessible travel to away games. JP confirmed that the club were able to include an accessible coach within the official coach travel hire for away matches. If just one disabled supporter requests away coach travel, then an accessible coach would be hired.

Bradley Donovan asked if away supporters were permitted to use the shuttle bus service. JP confirmed that any away supporter can request a space simply by sending an email to the club.

Joe Lyons, CEO of the West Ham United Foundation

KB introduced Joe Lyons and spoke of her huge sense of pride at the work that he and his team carry out, adding that one of the ambitions of Joe and the Foundation was to create more social change throughout our community, ensuring that people of all ages, from all different backgrounds and different levels of ability, can live, work and enjoy football together. It really is a passion that has filtered down through all areas of West Ham United.

JL began by clarifying that the West Ham United Foundation is a charity that belongs to West Ham United supporters. It is there to serve every member of our community and its purpose is to 'change the landscape', as sport does have problems on its landscape, in terms of inclusion.

JL spoke of his past experiences with Chicken Shed – an inclusive theatre company based in north London – where he learned to 'not see' disability in a very inclusive environment. He also mentioned DSAB member Robbie Cahill, who also performed with Chicken Shed and has made such great progress.

The whole cultural change is around disability access, engagement and participation. Earlier this year, a question was raised over the job title of 'Disability Officer', with JL suggesting that, if for example the Foundation have 50 officers working across programmes, why should only one of them be dedicated to disability, when all could have the skills to help and assist people of all abilities?

The Foundation carried out an external audit, with Enhance The UK now fully integrated into the framework and sitting independently on the Equality Board. It's a step forward, and the Foundation are trying to be brave, asking staff to be honest about our issues, which is a stepping stone to reaching the ultimate objective of ensuring that, throughout every department of the football club, we are fully inclusive.

Another positive milestone is that we are now graded as Disability Confident, which is the new government-backed scheme that aims to help employers make the most of the opportunities provided by employing disabled people, and showing that you are inclusive in your approach. One element of that is that, once you are employed, a designated officer will be on hand to walk through your daily working routine to ensure that you have everything you need to do the job to the best of your ability.

It is about more than football, it is about society. Anyone who goes to football needs to understand that every club is trying to do their very best. It's not a straight-forward journey, but things like the formation of a DSAB at West Ham United are fantastic initiatives that give us an inclusive voice.

JL added that ultimately, the ambition is that in 10 or 20 years we are not talking in this way and perhaps don't actually need a DSAB, because inclusivity has been fully embraced and the issues that we are talking about now have disappeared.

JL also revealed that a recent case study on an individual within the Foundation who has had struggles with his disabilities, freely told us that, while previous disability specific teams via other Clubs had given him access, he had never felt part of anything real. Now, after participating in one of our inclusion sessions, he proudly stated: 'I feel part of a REAL Club'.

JL concluded by saying that members on the DSAB should be very proud of the commitment and dedication they have shown in developing the initiative, and of the work that is being done to make football more inclusive.

Tracy Higgins (TH) asked if anything was being done by the Foundation to engage and interact with local schools in Newham.

JL explained that the Foundation have a programme called Give Us A Break, which stemmed from a plan that was set up to assist young people with specific educational needs, particularly those children who perhaps go from one on one assistance in primary school to being in a large group of over 1,000 at secondary school.

JL also revealed that the Foundation has just established its first Youth Forum and, as a charity governed by a board of trustees, at the quarterly meetings there will be a representative from the Youth Forum who will challenge everything we are doing from an inclusion perspective for young people.

Finally, JL confirmed that, at the opening home match of the season against Huddersfield, he would be doing a walkaround in order to fully understand the experience of disabled supporters at London Stadium.

KB extended an invite to any members who would like to come in and witness at first hand some of the inspirational programmes and initiatives being led by JL and the Foundation staff.

Update on action points

Accessible Shuttle Bus ticketed queuing system

JH confirmed that, following the last DSAB meeting on April 19, the new ticketing system for boarding shuttle buses after matches was introduced for the subsequent fixture against Everton on April 22. As the weather was fine that afternoon, the majority of supporters wished to remain outside the Stadium Coffee Shop, so staff arranged for seating and free bottled water to be handed out.

Around the same time, the decision was made to increase the number of shuttle buses from 14 to 18, which subsequently meant that, for the Tottenham and Liverpool matches in May, there wasn't a need for the ticketed queuing system. However, the system is still available as a contingency plan in the event of any unprecedented situations.

Review on accessibility of current shuttle bus vehicles

JP reiterated the fact that staff were due to meet with the bus company on September 6 and would feed back the information that had been raised, particularly with regard to the points made by David Griffith in relation to handrails.

Assessment of pedestrian routes from Stratford/Stratford International

KB agreed this had previously covered under the discussion about the interactive map that is soon to be available. KB added that the key factor going forward would be that members provide detailed feedback on how useful and accurate the map is, and if there is anything we can do to make it better.

TfL – Turn Up and Go initiative

JH confirmed he had spoken to TfL and advised that, prior to 2014, any members of the public with accessibility requirements on any TfL services would have to book in advance. Now that isn't the case – any member of customer-facing staff on any mode of transport services managed by TfL are encouraged to assist anybody who requires it.

Update on access through Westfield

BI confirmed that, following a meeting with Westfield earlier that day, a proposal has been put forward requesting that Westfield pilot a trial that will allow supporters with permits for the shuttle bus service to pass through their barriers on both ingress and egress.

BI added he was hopeful of receiving a positive response to the idea and, in principle, to the idea being introduced for upcoming matches against Bolton and Tottenham.

KB emphasised the point that, in the event of Westfield rejecting the proposal, a full explanation and reasoning should be provided, and that every DSAB member should be made aware of the decision as soon as it is given.

TB made the point that he was hopeful Westfield would agree to the proposal based on how difficult the standard route was becoming for disabled supporters. CB added that she had been told by a number of disabled fans that they were not coming to matches because of the difficulty of navigating around Westfield on a matchday.

JL added that the situation was an educational one for Westfield and that they needed support around inclusion and assisting supporters with accessibility needs.

BI added that Sheila Roberts of the Safety Advisory Group thought that the proposal was a fantastic idea and offered her full support for it. BI also emphasised the fact that West Ham United staff would be on hand to assist and support Westfield staff in terms of the management of any access for disabled supporters.

Rest benches

JH confirmed that the new QEOP map identifies the rest benches located throughout the park at 50m intervals, along with all access points. The visual map will be available prior to the League Cup tie against Bolton.

TW added that a key point around the rest benches related to marking their location once the egress route changes, something that has been made clear to the park authorities, who are absolutely on board with supporting that process once the egress route has been finalised.

Accessible toilets

GH provided an update on the actions carried out in response to the complaints about accessible toilets being abused by supporters.

Toilets at blocks 135 and 154 were identified as two of the main problem areas and GH confirmed that a number of changes had been made to LS185's management structure on matchdays, leading to more managers on the ground policing such areas.

GH also urged any members and supporters who do witness abuse of the accessible toilets to directly approach a steward or manager, or ask them to pick up a red phone and contact him directly in the control room.

GH added that the Radar Key plan for accessible toilets is ongoing – at present 50% are fitted with Radar Keys, with West Ham United driving the request for E20 to make that 100%, which he admitted would solve many of the problems.

KB asked if it would be possible to add some signage near the toilets where mis-use had been reported, requesting that supporters show respect for those who genuinely required their use.

GH agreed that such a simple idea could be effective – possibly on every single toilet door - and, having already spoken to the company who produce all branding and signage for the stadium, he would push for the addition of such signs to be agreed.

GH added that policing of the accessible toilets would be top of his list at the first few home matches this season, and offered an apology on behalf of his staff that the problem hadn't previously been addressed in the right way.

KB emphasised the need for GH to make it an absolute priority, adding that if West Ham United had control of the stewards, the problem would have stopped, because we care passionately enough to make it stop and, when we make a promise to get something done, we have to keep that promise. GH offered his absolute assurance that the problem would be resolved as a matter of urgent priority.

DG made the suggestion that smoke alarms are added to deter people from smoking in the toilets, while CB emphasised the need to stress to stewards that, for some people, the accessible toilets act as mini-treatment rooms and must therefore be treated with the utmost respect and levels of hygiene.

GH insisted that, should the problem persist, he would eventually go down the route of having a member of staff stationed on the door of each accessible toilet, ensuring only supporters with accessibility needs were permitted access.

On a separate note, GH provided confirmation that LS185 were about to get the green light to move the security searching process from the turnstile entrances out to the five bridges that allow access to the stadium island. This will help ease congestion and reduce queues on the podium level around the stadium, with an accessible lane for disabled supporters at each security search checkpoint.

Audio commentary

JP gave an update on the process of distributing and collecting the headsets for supporters using the audio commentary service, following discussions at the previous DSAB meeting. Emails have gone out to all visually-impaired supporters registered for the service, explaining that headsets can now be collected from window 20 at the main Ticket Office and be returned there after the final whistle.

Key discussion points submitted by DSAB

Segregation gates outside turnstile D

BI provided some statistics on the time it took to open the segregation gates after matches last season. The longest amount of time they remained closed was 21 minutes after the final whistle, with the average opening time less than 10 minutes and one fixture seeing the gates opened just six minutes after the final whistle. The intention will always be to open the gates as quickly as possible.

BI also recognised the fact that supporters have different requirements in relation to when they leave the stadium – some want to get away as quickly as possible, some want to stay and make use of the late-opening refreshment kiosks – but emphasised the point that shuttle buses are guaranteed to be available for 90 minutes after the final whistle.

GH insisted his team have taken on board a number of comments that came out of the last DSAB, one being that access across raised threshold of the the segregation area could be difficult. Therefore, brand new gates have been ordered for the new season, with no lip or 'cattle grid' design.

With reference to getting through to transport, GH confirmed that an airlock, three-gate system would be added underneath the South stand scoreboard, allowing disabled supporters to safely cross-over the segregation area, managed and supervised by security staff who will be fully briefed on how to help supporters get to their next point of destination as soon as possible.

In relation to signage of that area, GH confirmed he would be working closely with the Club to ensure clear communication, while JL suggested that a sub-audit of all signage for accessible supporters might be worthwhile once everything is in place.

Any other business

JP revealed that she is working with the marketing department on a design for smart badges for supporters with non-visual disabilities, and that the badges will hopefully be approved and ready very soon.

CB asked if the concourses at the stadium could be made a little more inviting to supporters, with screens showing live matches, better shelving for holding drinks, etc. GH confirmed that LS185 are looking at plans for how they can provide those improvements, with the Heineken Bar underneath the North Stand scoreboard one of the key areas identified.

James Datson (JD) raised the issue of how the DSAB could perhaps communicate some of the great work that is going on and have their voices heard among the wider fanbase. JL made the point that the Foundation have carried out a lot of workshops with various partners and groups, and could arrange a mini-workshop to facilitate those ideas.

HR admitted she had been asked by a few supporters about who is on the board and how members can be contacted. NK promised that the Club would look into putting together some ideas with the media and communications team to help promote the DSAB on a wider scale.

TB asked for an update on the addition of a sensory room at the stadium. JP confirmed the issue is still on the agenda, and NK added that it is a key part of the big issues the Club are working towards.

NC raised the point that some clubs have Disabled Supporters Associations who have their own dedicated websites, and would that be an option for the DSAB?

JL made the point that it would fit far more comfortably into our inclusive approach and attitude to create a dedicated area for the DSAB within whufc.com, making it available to our entire fanbase and enabling the club to promote it with the full backing of our media and communication resources.

BD raised the subject of shelving on the concourses and whether low level shelving could be introduced for wheelchair users. GH made a note and promised to look into the possibility.

JG asked if new shuttle bus permits were needed for the new season. JP confirmed they would be dispatched the following day.

Steve Lowe (SL) asked if any toilet facilities could be provided near to the car park 1A, where cars can be held for up to 30 minutes until road closures are opened after the game. GH confirmed he would look into the possibility of adding accessible toilet on the route to the car park.

DG suggested that the frequency of DSAB meetings be increased from two to three a season. JP confirmed that it was the intention to hold three DSAB meetings across the course of the 2017/18 campaign, with the remaining two to take place in January and April 2018.

Andy Sheldon (AS) spoke briefly about his role as the 'community policeman' for the past nine years, and encouraged all DSAB members and supporters to approach him and raise any issues that crop up on a matchday, explaining that his job is all about engaging with supporters and helping them to make the matchday experience as enjoyable as it possibly can be for everyone.

NK rounded off the meeting by thanking everybody for their time and commitment, and looked forward to inviting members back to London Stadium for the next meeting in January.