



Disabled Supporter Advisory Board meeting minutes

Date: Wednesday 19 April 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
- James Datson, Matchday commentator for blind and partially-sighted supporters

DSAB Members

- Cathy Bayford
- Trevor Bright
- Robbie Cahill
- Neal Crowley
- Terry Dewhurst
- Bradley Donovan
- Gill Fowler
- David Griffith
- Tracy Higgins
- David Puckett
- Richard Pullen
- Helena Reynolds
- Joe Seigel
- Pauline Tanner

INTRODUCTION

Karren Brady (KB) began by welcoming members to the meeting and thanking everyone for attending, before introducing a short presentation to explain the aims and objectives of the DSAB, and to reiterate West Ham United's commitment to achieving the best services, facilities, and experience for our disabled supporters, and leading the way in the Premier League for accessibility.

KB also praised the success of the SAB format, explaining that the meetings help to shape the future of the football club and allow the Board to better understand the issues faced by supporters.

KB confirmed her belief that the meetings work best when open, frank and constructive, and that everyone should have the ability to speak freely and give as much feedback – good and bad – as is relevant.

KB introduced Joe Lyons, CEO of the West Ham United Foundation, who will become closely involved with the DSAB, given his understanding of the Accessible Stadia Guide and ideas for improvements that can be made.

KB then began the presentation by announcing the overall aims and objectives of the DSAB:

- Working closely with the Club to achieve one of our core objectives, which is to be best in class and lead the way in the Premier League in the area of Accessibility.
- To work together to achieve the best services, facilities, and experience for our disabled supporters.

KB then explained the aims of this evening's inaugural meeting:

- To establish a direct, open, two-way communication between the Club and supporters.
- To understand and discuss the key issues currently affecting our disabled supporters.
- To identify any key action points that will enable us enhance the fan experience.

KB then introduced Tara Warren (TW) to continue the presentation and explain in more depth about the Club's current situation in regard to accessibility and the work that has already begun in order to make improvements and enhance the overall experience for disabled supporters.

TW thanked everyone for giving their time and being a part of the Disabled Supporter Advisory Board, and explained that every view that comes out of the DSAB will be fed back into the wider Club strategy through the general SAB.

TW introduced Cathy Bayford and Trevor Bright as the DSAB Chairs and representative on the SAB, adding that Cathy and Trevor have worked hard representing disabled supporters on the SAB and, through working with the Club, have brought the DSAB to fruition.

TW emphasised the aim of the DSAB to discuss key issues and quickly find solutions where required, in order to meet the requirements of the Accessible Stadia Guide, which the Premier League want all clubs to work towards. West Ham are presently leading the way in that field, and the DSAB can help to establish ourselves as the shining light.

TW then explained the process and review of the DSAB format:

- A Minimum of two meetings per season with the Board and DSAB members
- The DSAB, and its processes, will be constantly reviewed to ensure your views are fairly and appropriately represented.
- Members should offer relevant experience and advice to deal with current agenda items.
- The door will always be left open for new members to join
- Disabled supporters can make a great contribution to the wider fan experience by putting their views and suggestions forward to a DSAB member

TW emphasised the fact that Board members will always be present at DSAB meetings, and that DSAB members may also meet separately with CB and TB to discuss agenda for future meetings.

TW then briefly presented details of where West Ham United are now in terms of accessibility and disabled supporter facilities at London Stadium:

- London Stadium is accessible on all levels

- We provide 14 shuttle buses from platform 13 directly into the stadium in car park 2.
- In addition, we have a shuttle bus in the away coach park in Marshgate Lane so our visiting disabled supporters get the same service as home fans.
- Highest number of WAV spaces in PL - 253
- One of only six Premier League clubs, and the only one in London, whose number of WAV spaces exceed the minimum requirements set out in Accessible Stadia Guide.
- No limit to number of seats available for ambulant disabled supporters
- There are 45 accessible unisex toilet facilities at London Stadium available on all levels, 50% are currently fitted with radar locks and all will be by start of next season
- West Ham United are one of only 2 Premier League clubs that meets the minimum number of wheelchair spaces
- Also meets requirements for number of Amenity Easy Access (AEA) seats – 613
- 25% of ticket counters are at an accessible height for wheelchair-users and include induction loops to support hearing aid uses, exceeding the requirements for accessible ticket counters set out in Level Playing Field's guidelines.

Catering:

- All kiosks have low level counters to accommodate wheelchair users.
- At weekend games a number of kiosks are open to enable accessibility supporters while they wait for egress to subside.
- Once Wi-Fi is installed, Delaware North are exploring the introduction of a catering app, where supporters can pre-order food and beverages before the match/half-time.
- In the event that a Personal Assistant cannot attend, DSA's are on hand to assist you in getting to a kiosk.

Additional support:

- The Club now has 16 Disabled Supporter Assistants and 40 Supporter Liaison Officer's on a match day who will be delighted to assist you, wherever they can.
- All DSA's will continue to receive disability and safeguarding training, with SLO's due to start their programme shortly.
- The team will be happy to:
Provide support and directional assistance wherever required.
Obtain and discuss your feedback.
Note suggestions around service and facilities to report back to the Board.
Request a manager should the situation require.

KB rounded off the presentation with a recap of where the Club are currently in terms of accessible facilities

- The Club has reviewed and submitted all information regarding it's accessible facilities and services to EHRC and to the Premier League for the Accessible Stadia Guide
- London Stadium comfortably meets or exceeds all recommended guidelines in terms of:
Step-free access into the Stadium, The number of passenger lifts and parking spaces,
The accessibility of ticket-counters, Toilets and kiosks, Three Changing Places facilities,
Rest areas for ambulant disabled supporters (50m intervals across the Park),
Colour-coding for visually-impaired fans, The location of and sightlines from WAV spaces
- Level Playing Field will conduct a full audit of London Stadium in April 2017
- 24th January, 2018 – Club to be assessed for Intermediate Level under the Premier League Equality Standard

KB then introduced the key personnel on the main panel for the meeting, and ran through the three key points of discussion on the agenda – Shuttle Bus Service, Segregation post-match and Parking – before inviting members to put forward their questions...

Helena Reynolds (HR) expressed frustration that she has been unable to use the Shuttle Bus service and was of the understanding that this was due to supporters booking spaces on the buses in advance.

Julie Pidgeon (JP) clarified that the service operates on a first-come, first-served basis on a matchday, and that supporters only require a permit to prove their eligibility for a space. JP advised HK to apply for a permit that would be issued immediately.

HR also raised the issue of being re-directed by security at the Westfield Shopping Centre when walking to London Stadium from Stratford station on a matchday, and asked if the club would be able to assist in requesting that Westfield grant access for disabled supporters to ensure a shorter route for wheelchair users and those with walking difficulties.

KB confirmed that, while it should be understood that Westfield are a commercial operation who have a duty to their customers, the Club are in regular dialogue with their management and have emphasised the fact that we have a 99-year lease as their neighbours, and are therefore keen to work together in harmony. KB added that the Club will again write to Westfield, and emphasised the fact that, by working together, these were exactly the type of issues that the Club and the DSAB could help resolve.

David Griffith (DG) spoke in praise of the Shuttle Bus service, describing it as a good initiative, very popular and well used, but queried if the type of buses used are suitable enough for disabled supporters and asked why the buses are held for up to 30 minutes after a game to allow the crowd to disperse before departing the stadium, suggesting that crowd flow be interrupted momentarily to allow buses to depart.

KB confirmed that, although she understood the waiting time was a major issue for supporters, the process is not going to change, due to the fact that police and safety certificate won't allow vehicles to leave the car parks unless pedestrians are clear of the area. KB added that the process does not just apply to the shuttle buses, but to all transport departing the stadium after the match, including VIPs and dignitaries leaving the main car park, which only opens when security receive a signal from the safety control room that it is safe to do so.

Graham Harris (GH) reiterated that the road closures are put in place because of the egress operation and that vehicles simply can not be allowed through due to the number of pedestrians. He added that the authorities are looking into possibly changing the route taken by the shuttle buses after matches, in order to make the journey time shorter.

DG then queried why West Ham United supporters leaving the stadium at full-time – including those heading to the pick-up point for shuttle buses – were held up by segregation barriers, when at the Boleyn Ground the policy appeared to be that away fans were held back in order to let home fans depart first.

KB assured members that had not been the case, and confirmed that arrangements are different at London Stadium simply because the stadium has a different configuration – exit routes are different, roadways are different, and there are so many more supporters than at Upton Park. KB also made

reference to the fact that a lot of the area around the stadium is still being redeveloped and that it may be possible to move supporters around in a different way in the future.

TW added that the Shuttle Bus service had also been improved over the course of the season, with the number of buses increased from seven to 14 in order to alleviate waiting times, which are now down to around 20-30 minutes after the final whistle.

KB mentioned that vehicles at Chelsea are not permitted to leave the stadium for 90 minutes after the final whistle, while Trevor Bright (TB) added that the waiting time at Arsenal is two hours.

Going back to the initial point regarding suitability of the shuttle buses, Joe Lyons (JL) stated that the Club and Foundation have worked with the bus providers - the Waltham Forest Community Transport Fund – for many years, and that he would raise the concern with their representatives to look at ways in which accessibility on the buses might be improved, and would report back to the DSAB with any findings.

Terry Dewhurst (TD) raised the point that a consequence of the shuttle buses being delayed from leaving the stadium is that they arrive at Stratford station generally at the same time as large crowds of supporters who have left the stadium by foot at the final whistle, causing congestion and difficulty for disabled supporters to negotiate busy train platforms.

TW reiterated the fact that the decision on exactly when to open the gates for the shuttle buses to leave are made on the day and purely from a safety point of view. Aside from one of two anomalies and isolated incidents, for example someone being taken ill at the Swansea game, the waiting time is as brief as it can be. TW added that everybody involved is working very hard to make the service as efficient as possible, and the Club are constantly looking for ways to improve.

KB suggested there may be areas that Stratford station could make available just for disabled supporters to help avoid congestion, adding that it would be a good idea for the Club to write to Transport for London to explain some of the difficulties experienced by our disabled supporters, and that the Club could also look at sending Supporter Liaison Officers to offer assistance and look into what solutions might be available.

Neal Crowley (NC) raised the idea of placing an SLO or a Disabled Supporter Assistant on shuttle buses to ensure any issues or problems could be identified and resolved quickly. KB said that was a very good suggestion and should be considered if possible.

David Puckett (DP) praised the Shuttle Bus service and added that the drivers do a very good job. KB promised that the feedback would be passed on.

Bradley Donovan (BD) enquired about the possibility of introducing accessible lanes for disabled supporters and wheelchair users on the route between the stadium and Stratford station, as were in place for the Olympic and Paralympic Games to help avoid congestion.

KB made the point that crowd flow for Olympic and Paralympic Games, when spectators are arriving and leaving at different times of the day, is very different to that for a football match, when 57,000 people are generally arriving and leaving at the same time for a 90-minute event. KD added that, while it would not be West Ham United's decision as it isn't the Club's land, there is nothing to stop us talking to the relevant authorities about the idea and asking them to consider it as a possible solution, particularly if the Club help with the stewarding and management of it.

TB mentioned that a number of disabled supporters have said the walk from Stratford station to the stadium is very long and difficult, and could be made easier with the addition of more benches along the route to provide rest points.

TW said that the Club had been informed by the stadium landlords that there are rest benches at 50 metre intervals, and that staff would look into this.

GH confirmed that such matters on the Olympic Park are controlled by the London Legacy Development Corporation, and would take this feedback to them.

KB asked Jake Heath to ensure his team carry out a full study of the route to identify the number of benches, and if the benches should be there then they will be there.

Nicola Keye (NK) added that there should be an opportunity to illustrate benches on a map so that supporters can make informed decisions about the rest points that are available to them.

Tracy Higgins (TH) suggested that much of the issue comes back to the route around Westfield Shopping Centre, and raised concern over the fact that supporters are made to walk through car parks as part of the redirection.

KB agreed that if Westfield want to move supporters around their property, they should ensure that appropriate facilities are available. KB also emphasised the fact that Westfield are not anti-West Ham and the redirections are in place following complaints from one or two stores about being used at cut-throughs, but added that things should improve as time goes on and that the two parties will continue to work together.

Richard Pullen (RP) agreed with previous suggestion that the shuttle buses do not seem to be as accessible for disabled supporters as they could be, and that maybe 60-70 seater coaches might be better for disabled supporters and their carers. RP also expressed his concern over crowd congestion at the end of the match when he uses the lift at the Stadium Store, and the lack of any shelter or benches when queuing for the Shuttle Bus service outside the coffee shop after matches.

In response, KB stated her awareness that the chairs and tables inside the coffee shop were made available for disabled supporters while waiting for the shuttle buses.

TD claimed the problem is that supporters are unable to queue while sitting inside the coffee shop, and therefore risk losing their space on the bus.

KB agreed that TD had a very good point, and suggested a solution of SLOs introducing a ticket system so that supporters could reserve their place in the queue while waiting in the coffee shop. All members agreed this would be an excellent initiative, and KB instructed JH to introduce the system in time for Saturday's match against Everton.

JH informed members that a team orienteering session is also planned for SLOs ahead of the match on Saturday, giving them the opportunity to formulate a map of crucial information around the stadium and Olympic Park – rest points, lifts, accessible toilets, kiosks, ticket collection points and shuttle bus pick-up points.

KB added that the Board would require a detailed list of rest points on Saturday, and instructed JH to send an SLO to Stratford station to observe the entrances and exits for disabled supporters in order to inform the Club's subsequent contact with Transport for London.

TH suggested that one member of the DSAB be accompanied by an SLO to illustrate the difficulties faced – HR volunteered herself and JH agreed to make arrangements after the meeting.

NC raised a concern over rumours that TfL might be looking to terminate their 'Turn Up and Go' initiative, which gives disabled passengers assurances of assistance at stations without the need to request in advance.

KB promised that the Club would raise the issue with TFL during discussions.

TB brought up the subject of the audio headsets used by visually impaired supporters to listen to commentary of the match at London Stadium, claiming that a number of supporters were having problems in collecting the headsets before matches.

DG added that, although the audio commentary was a fantastic service for blind and partially-sighted supporters, he felt some improvements could be made, suggesting that Season Ticket holders could perhaps loan the headsets for the entire season to avoid having to collect and return them before and after every match, and also that the headsets are collected from a dedicated station at the stadium rather than the current format of meeting a Disabled Supporter Assistant at various points.

James Datson (JD) introduced himself as the match commentator for blind and partially-sighted supporters who use the service, and confirmed that one of the main reasons the headsets need to be returned after matches is that they are operated by rechargeable batteries and therefore need to be maintained carefully.

JD added that he has worked closely with JP and her team this season, and that they are looking to upgrade to a new system that will provide a more efficient and higher quality service.

KB then enquired about the current operation for supplying headsets and JP confirmed that 40 headsets were currently available for each match and were handed out to supporters by a DSA without any details or signatures taken.

KB suggested that a dedicated pick-up point in the Stadium Store be arranged, and a clear system be devised for collection and return of the headsets. JD agreed, and added that it might be a good idea to have two separate headset stations at either end of the stadium.

DG's personal assistant David then offered his thanks and appreciation for the great work that JP and her team do on a matchday to assist disabled supporters.

Cathy Bayford (CB) re-visited the subject of post-match segregation and the issue of supporters waiting for the lift being held back until barriers are opened, enquiring as to whether that situation might change in the future.

GH thanked those supporters for their patience, and expressed sympathy for those who are attempting to exit at Turnstile D and waiting for segregation barriers to be lifted. GH confirmed that next season, an airlock barrier system will be in place inside the stadium, reconfigured so that home supporters will be granted access to that area and will be able to use the lift.

Gill Fowler (GF) and Pauline Tanner (PT) both raised concerns about the location of the disabled car park in relation to both the route taken to reach it, and its close proximity to the segregation barriers and away fans exit.

GH emphasised that LS185 are fully aware of the issues, and are working closely with JH and JP match-by-match to ensure the right solution is in place. GH added that parking space is unfortunately very limited at the stadium and car park 1A for disabled supporters is the only option at present. However, plans are being put in place for a solution to access, and supporters will see a difference next season.

RP enquired if the disability awareness training that SLOs are undertaking includes any form of sign language. KB confirmed that SLOs are learning basic sign language skills as part of that training.

Joe Siegel (JS) and his personal assistant praised the work of JP and her team, but admitted they didn't feel information regarding various facilities and initiatives for disabled supporters was readily available, and asked if an information pack was downloadable.

KB advised that the information is all available on the Club's official website, but added that the reason JH and the Supporter Services team are producing an interactive map is so that supporters can access an app while they are at the stadium that provides every single piece of information they require at the touch of a button. KB also suggested that every time a ticket is sold to a disabled supporter they are sent a link that enables them to download the information.

DG raised concern that there are some accessibility issues on the official website, particularly for blind supporters, and offered his expertise to work with the Club's web developers to find solutions.

KB thanked DG for his interest and confirmed that the Club would be looking into improving website accessibility.

JS admitted he sometimes found it difficult to identify Disabled Supporter Assistants on matchdays, particularly where he sits in the Bobby Moore Stand.

JP confirmed that two DSA's are permanently stationed in the Bobby Moore stand.

TW added that a matchday guide is available on the website, and that the Club are in the process of improving inclusion on the website. TW reiterated her hope and belief that the DSAB will be able to help inform and resolve many of these individual issues, and suggested that an email is sent to all disabled supporters to let them know of everything that is available and the improvements that are being made.

Robbie Cahill (RC) raised the issue of non-disabled supporters using accessibility toilets on matchdays, which can be very distressing and intimidating for him, and suggested that stewards are placed nearby to ensure only those with accessibility needs gain access to the toilet.

HR raised a similar concern about the ladies disabled toilet in the Bobby Moore stand.

GH assured members that the issue would be dealt with immediately.

KB agreed that the issues can be addressed immediately with effective stewarding.

BD made reference to the problems he has faced in gaining access when the lift near his seat in the East Stand upper tier is not working, and enquired if a contingency would be put in place for such occasions.

KB confirmed that a lift engineer is employed on a matchday and therefore should be able to solve any such issues quickly and efficiently, but that the Club would look into that process.

JS and his personal assistant raised the issue of assistance for supporters with sensory issues, and what support is available on hand should individuals become agitated or upset in any way.

NK emphasised that the Club would always encourage – wherever possible – that a personal assistant is present with supporters who have sensory issues, as their safety is always paramount.

TW confirmed that the Club are in the process of carrying out an assessment in relation to the needs of supporters with sensory issues, and that the findings of that report will determine what ideas and actions can be implemented going forward.

NK added that the Club and LS185 would also ensure that all stewards have a general awareness of the issue and being very mindful of knowing how to deal quickly with any situations that may arise.

KB asked if members had any further general issues for debate that the Club could look at strategically to improve facilities.

One member raised the issue of queueing before matches at turnstiles while waiting to be searched, and asked if anything could be done to assist those supporters who are unable to stand for long periods of time. KB confirmed that the Club would look into it.

TD then revisited the issue of the segregation barriers at full-time, and the issue of supporters having to wait outside for up to 40 minutes until being allowed through, asking if it was at all possible for away supporters to be held back at the final whistle to allow home fans to exit first.

GH reiterated that a resolution will be in place for the start of next season with airlock barriers inside the stadium, and added that the only reason any away supporters would ever be held back is purely down to risk factor with the safety of our own supporters.

TD suggested that the current format meant that home fans were being held back instead.

KB clarified that no supporters are held back, but accepted the fact that supporters who are physically unable to walk around the stadium to avoid the segregation barriers have an issue, and agreed that the Club look into what can be done to make the wait more comfortable.

One member mentioned the fact that her solution was to wait in her seat for a short time at the end of the game to allow crowds to disperse and the barriers to open.

JS asked what policy is in place if a supporter needs to exit the stadium for a particular or personal reason and then wishes to re-enter using their ticket that has obviously already been scanned.

NK advised that, when ready to come back in, a supporter should head straight to the ticket office, where the ticket can be reset, allowing immediate re-entry to the stadium.

RP and his personal assistant raised the subject of sensory rooms, which are already in place at some Premier League clubs, and asked if West Ham would be looking to introduce the facility.

JP confirmed that it is something the Club are currently looking into.

KB closed the meeting by thanking all members for attending, and explained that the next step would be for Club staff to now consider all the issues and questions raised, and find solutions.

If a solution can not be found to a particular issue, supporters will be informed with honesty why that is, and if a solution is put in place, the Club will explain exactly what steps have been taken.

KB explained the objective is to make progress each time the DSAB meets, to ensure the issues become less and less, and solutions are implemented to make the experience for disabled supporters so much greater.

DSAB Action points:

1. Shuttle Bus Service - Supporter Services to introduce a ticket system for supporters using the Shuttle Bus Service after matches, allowing to wait inside the Stadium Store coffee shop without losing their place in the queue. Jake Heath to ensure this system is in place for the next home match against Everton on Saturday 22 April. Tasked: Jake Heath
2. Shuttle Bus Service - Joe Lyons to contact the Waltham Forest Community Transport Fund and request that their representatives look at ways in which accessibility on the buses might be improved. Tasked: Joe Lyons

3. Transport links - Jake Heath to send an SLO to Stratford station prior to the next home match to observe the entrances and exits for disabled supporters. Tasked: Jake Heath
4. Transport links - West Ham United to write to Transport for London to explain some of the difficulties experienced by our disabled supporters and look at what solutions might be available, along with a request for clarification on their 'Turn Up and Go' initiative. Tasked: Jake Heath
5. Westfield Shopping Centre - The club to continue dialogue with Westfield and investigate ways in which the route for disabled supporters travelling between Stratford station and London Stadium could be made easier. Tasked: Joe Lyons/Tara Warren
6. Rest benches - Jake Heath to ensure his team carry out a full study of the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park to identify the number of rest benches on the route to the stadium. Tasked: Jake Heath
7. Stadium toilets - Graham Harris to ensure that stewards are placed strategically near to disabled toilets to ensure mis-use is avoided on matchdays, starting with immediate effect. Tasked: Graham Harris
8. Headsets for visually-impaired fans - James Datson to arrange for a dedicated pick-up point in the Stadium Store to be confirmed, and a clear system devised for collection and return of the headsets. Tasked: Julie Pidgeon/James Datson
9. Next DSAB meeting date - To be scheduled for a date in September 2017. Tasked: Julie Pidgeon/Cathy Bayford.