



Arsenal Football Club Fans' Forum
6pm-8pm September 27th 2021
Online Meeting

Fans' Forum membership 2020/2021

REPRESENTING	FIRST NAME	SURNAME
16-21 Year Olds	Liam	Patel
AISA	Drew	Gray
Arsenal Supporters Clubs - Domestic	Jan	Szbala
Arsenal Supporters Clubs - Overseas	Peter	Høst
AST Member	Akhil	Vyas
Away scheme	Michael	Anjos
Club Level	Fred	Dowd
Disabled Supporters	Anne	Hyde
Ethnic Minority Member	Draco	Wang
Family Enclosure	David	Hurrell
Gold Members	Darren	Epstein
LGBT Supporters	Joe	White
Over 60 Year-Olds	Richard	Stubbs
Red Members	Ben	Buckstone
RedAction Member	Raymond	Herlihy
Silver Members	Jake	Coare
Women's Representative	Linda	Duffy

Arsenal representatives

Arsenal FC (Chair) Mark Gonnella
Arsenal FC Vinai Venkatesham
Arsenal FC Alun Francis
Arsenal FC Peter Silverstone
Arsenal FC John Beattie
Arsenal FC Mark Brindle
Arsenal FC Mic Conetta
Arsenal FC Tom McCann
Arsenal FC Khali Parsons
Arsenal FC Jim Gay

Minutes

1) Welcome - New Members

Chair **Mark Gonnella (MG)** welcomed new members to the Forum – **Linda Duffy**, Women's Representative, **Darren Epstein**, Gold Members, **Liam Patel**, 16-21 year olds and **Richard Stubbs**, Over 60s. They were all elected following membership polls.

2) Minutes & matters arising

Minutes of previous meeting were agreed.

MG pointed out that a date will be set soon for the first meeting of the Arsenal Advisory Board.

3) Chief Executive Update

Vinai Venkatesham reiterated the welcome to new members and pointed out that he encouraged the Forum to share information from the meeting with their respective groups.

He opened by explaining that looking at the end of last season we are not where we want to be on the pitch and to get back to where we want to be will not be a quick fix. He outlined our approach to the summer transfer window saying it was focussed on youth. The aim was to fill our squad with some of Europe's most exciting young talent and supplement them with players from our Academy and our more experienced players.

He said we signed 6 players aged 21-23 who have experience and character. For example, Lokonga captain of Anderlecht, Odegaard captain of Norway, Tomiyasu 24 caps for Japan, Ramsdale played huge amount of football for an U23 goalkeeper. Tavares and White also join with plenty of experience. In addition, he said we have renewed Kieran Tierney and Emile Smith Rowe on long term contracts.

Vinai explained the window was tricky post Covid with sales particularly difficult. Joe Willock has joined Newcastle, and there have been loans for William Saliba, Hector Bellerin, Reiss Nelson, Alex Runnarsson and Lucas Torriera; as well as loans with obligations to buy for Matteo Guendouzi and Dinos Mavropanos. We also mutually agreed a contract termination with Willian who returns home to Brazil.

He said that in terms of finances - with the backdrop of significant lost revenues through Covid, and a challenging transfer market, what we did in the window only possible with direct financial support from our owners.

Turning to the start of the season, Vinai said it had been a very difficult start, compounded by Covid issues in the build up to the opening game against Brentford. He is proud of how the team and staff stuck together in that period and came out fighting after the international break. In addition, the support from our fans has been outstanding. He said the attendance at the Carabao Cup against Wimbledon with over 56,000 tickets sold was astonishing. This was capped off by the atmosphere against Spurs which he felt was as good as it has ever been.

Vinai moved onto talk about the fantastic start to the season by our women's team under new head coach Jonas Eidevall. Significant investment has been made on the pitch in the shape of

Tobin Heath, Nikita Parris, Mana Iwabuchi and more, and off the pitch with Gary Lewin returning and further investments in support staff and facilities. He explained we were looking to hold more women's matches at Emirates Stadium and asked members to encourage attendance at the upcoming cup tie against Spurs at Borehamwood.

He said the Academy continues to flourish with new U23 coach Kevin Betsy settling in well and there have been strong performances across the age groups.

Off the pitch Vinai said things have settled down post the ESL debacle. Premier League meetings are back in person. He's seen suggestions that there had been discussions on moving PL games abroad. There have been no such discussions in PL meetings although work was underway to look at the possibility of more games in pre-season under the PL banner. He assured the forum that should suggestions of PL games abroad ever come forward they would be raised with fans.

He explained that the club is back in the European Clubs Association (ECA). He is on the ECA Board and JV Board of UCC SA, the JV which manages commercial rights to UEFA Competitions. This is further evidence of how respected Arsenal is in European Football and comes at an important time with debates around future financial fair play rules and the international match calendar post 2024.

Covid remains a challenge, he said, with restrictions at the training ground and matchdays for players and staff. All our sites are open but we continue to monitor government's Plan B around matchdays if C19 gets worse.

Vinai also explained how we are supporting local businesses impacted by C19. We have an ongoing programme which includes a 30 second social ad with player, LED and a programme advert. The first two business were the Tollington with Rob Holding and Autoparts with Auba. More are planned.

Akhil Vyas - AST asked about the new Champions League proposals and the status of the Super League.

Vinai explained that the PL is hugely popular and there is not really demand for more European games here. However, he said the picture is different across Europe because those leagues are not in as good health as ours and many clubs outside England see it to redress the financial imbalance with the PL. Ultimately, he said it will be a decision for UEFA. He also discussed the competing views on how any additional UCL spaces might get allocated

On the Super League **Vinai** explained our position is unchanged. We are withdrawing and are working through the complicated legal process.

Peter Host asked about the club's policy on getting players vaccinated.

Vinai explained that the vast majority are vaccinated and we are encouraging all players to be vaccinated. However, as an employer we can't force them to have it.

Richard Smith - AISA asked about whether the timings of women's games could be organised to allow fans to watch both men's and women's teams.

Vinai accepted it is a problem trying to get the schedules aligned. A balance needs to be struck between the broadcaster requirements and protecting players' health and well-being. It's on the agenda and we need to collectively find a solution to allow the women's game to grow.

Richard Smith – AISA also asked whether other local business could contact the club for support.

Mark Gonnella explained that we have several other businesses lined up to support over the coming months. We have been in contact with local MPs Jeremy Corbyn and Emily Thornberry who have made some suggestions. Mark explained that if anyone has further suggestions they should let us know but the programme is already clearly defined.

Operations Director Hywel Sloman provided an overview on what we are doing as a club about safe standing/rail seating. He explained we have been looking at various options, with the support of external consultants, on what could be done at Emirates Stadium. It's made more complicated, he explained, by the fact the stadium is oval shaped, with a shallow rake. Nine potential options have been identified, of which five are viable all of which would involve reducing capacity and substantial cost. These will now be explored further with proposals brought to the forum before any final decision is made.

Raymond Herlihy – REDaction asked if we are seriously looking at taking this forward. **Hywel** explained we are looking at it seriously, it has been delayed by the pandemic and we now need to do extra work to fully understand the options.

Vinai suggested a working group consisting of staff and members of the forum be formed to take this forward.

QUESTIONS

Dave Hurrell – Family Enclosure Rep

When is it expected that the family enclosure will get the same ticket transfer system as everyone else? It really isn't that difficult to check a d.o.b on a membership during the transfer process.

Tom McCann explained this is being worked through with our ticketing provider. It is technologically challenging as we need to ensure that only fans of a certain age can buy tickets in the Family Enclosure area. He said an update will be made in due course when we have some idea of timing for this functionality – it's one of many things we're looking to develop with regard to our ticketing functionality.

Richard Smith - AISA

Box Office: (1) 40 minutes + wait on the phone (2) 'expect 10-15 days' delay on email replies (even if the reality is more like 3-5 days) (3) innumerable complaints about late arrival of tickets, errors and lack of clarity for both men's and women's matches. We appreciate there are new systems but what steps are being made to improve the box office service which is well below the standard one would expect of a club of Arsenal's stature. And why does the Drayton Park box office remain closed?

Tom McCann said he completely appreciates the frustrations suffered by fans and apologised that fans had not received the level of service we and they would expect. The start of the season resulted in a huge increase in direct contact compared to what we would normally expect – particularly with the introduction of My Arsenal Rewards and the requirement to send over

100,000 new membership cards. We have recently increased the size of the Fan Services Team and are looking at additional ways, including advances in technology, to better serve our fans. We took the decision at the start of the season to centralise our matchday ticketing queries at the primary box office, but we will continue to keep this under review going forward.

Stadium entry - different queuing systems for each of the games so far, all with reports and complaints of long waits, bags being emptied (embarrassingly for some women) and the insistence of A5-sized bags. Again, we appreciate the security issues - and COVID passports may well complicate things - but what is the club's internal feedback on how it's gone, and what plans are there to make the system smoother, faster and more customer-friendly? (Waiting without cover on the bridge/podium for 20 minutes in the rain or a biting wind will not go down well.) The bag issue will get worse when people are coming straight from work – what are they to do? (Lockers at Kings Cross is not an acceptable answer.)

Tom McCann said he understood the concerns and apologised for the inconvenience. Tom explained that we have reviewed our approach to stadium access. Going forward we will be allowing bags up to the size of a standard rucksack / laptop bag / handbag (A4) provided they are thoroughly searched prior to entry. We have also reviewed the entry procedures and are conducting searches on the podium rather than the five primary access points as we did for the start of the season. These changes have already smoothed stadium access compared to the first two games and we will continue to refine the operation to ensure the best possible fan experience, while also recognising the unique operational challenges we face. He also pointed out that we are planning for a scenario where the Government mandate the need for vaccination checks to be made for attendance at games which will add a further layer of complexity and impact people's normal matchday routines. No further detail is available on this while we wait for direction from the Government / Premier League in due course.

Richard Herlihy asked if the beer offer would continue and if it had helped get fans into the stadium early. **Tom** explained that it had been effective with double the usual number of fans in early to take advantage of the offer which will continue for a few more games.

Liam Patel (16-21 year olds) suggested we think about ideas to attract young fans or those who don't drink alcohol to get into the stadium earlier.

Draco Wang asked what more the club could do to prevent fans from overseas buying tickets from touts. **Tom** said we continue to do all we can to combat ticket touting and appreciates any support in getting the message out that tickets should only be purchased through official club channels.

Joe White – LGBT rep

There were a catalogue of issues at the Arsenal v Chelsea Women's match at the Emirates – from unclear queuing for entry, lack of programmes and then queues over 30 minutes long for food/drink at half time (to then be told there was no food available when nearing the front of the queue). Why were there not more staff working to minimise these issues? Did the club underestimate how many people were going to attend? What lessons have the club taken from this experience to ensure it does not happen again if (and hopefully when) the Women's team play at the Emirates again?

Tom McCann said we recognise that there were some operational challenges for the Arsenal Women's game against Chelsea and apologised for the wait that some fans endured getting into

the stadium. We have conducted a review to refine the processes and operation moving forward. We adapted the operation that we would normally run for a men's game and some aspects worked well, but others need to be changed for the next fixture. He said we have also taken the feedback onboard re catering and addressed it with our catering provider. We will continue to evolve the operation and we're confident that the operation will be even smoother for the next women's match, which we hope will be soon.

Joe White – LGBT rep

Why have new season ticket holders been given the option of lower tier when many members have been trying to move to the lower tier for years?

Tom McCann said we try and facilitate as many seat moves as we can, but this has been challenging this year due to COVID and the condensed timings. The vast majority of new season ticket holders in the lower tier will be people taking season ticket holiday seats, where there is no guarantee they will be able to retain that seat for the following season.

Anne Hyde (ADSA) asked if season ticket holiday seats had been offered to disabled supporters on the waiting list. **Alun Francis** explained that has not been done due to the very small numbers and tickets were being offered on a match by match basis. **Tom** added that we would be open to reviewing this policy in line with wider alterations to how we service our disabled members.

Anne Hyde - ADSA

Disabled supporters are having an extraordinarily difficult time both joining the club as members and booking tickets. They are finding information is not clear and confusing, contacting the Disability Liaison Team / Fans Services if they have a question or need to book tickets is incredibly time consuming and sometimes impossible and they are not always receiving responses to their emails in a timely manner.

Non-disabled have access to joining online as a Red / Junior Gunner member and this is advertised on various areas of the website and is very clear. However, the disabled memberships are omitted on various links on the website / My Arsenal Rewards and many supporters have reported that links don't work, including the link on the Disabled Supporters page. Disabled supporters are also financially disadvantaged compared to someone who is non-disabled as they are unable to pay by direct debit whereas a non-disabled supporter can.

Disabled supporters do not have the same access to booking tickets either, and currently it is extremely difficult to book. Whereas the non-disabled have access to booking home and away tickets online, the disabled don't. For Purple/Purple Junior Gunner members who need to book home match tickets the links on the Ticket /Membership page are greyed out and there is no information as to how to book i.e., by phone. At the start of the season, supporters have had to book away tickets by calling, they cannot book online yet, and they have much shorter booking periods compared to non-disabled.

The website is still not user friendly for disabled supporters despite this being raised in 2018. It lacks essential information, easy read documents are required, an up-to-date Accessible Guide and user-friendly links to information.

We welcome hearing how the club intends to address these pressing issues.

Tom McCann said we recognise that there are several areas where we need to address the experience that our disabled members have when engaging with the club. We agree it's not acceptable that some aspects of our operation are causing unnecessary stress to our disabled

fans and, as much as possible, we want all our fans to have access to the same systems and functionality. We are also working through changes to the content on the website and will ensure this is kept up to date. In order to address these challenges, we have just welcomed Khali Parsons as the Senior Manager – Fan Services into the Venue Department structure and Khali brings with her a wealth of experience having been a Disability Access Officer at another Premier League club for four years. We will be conducting a thorough review of our approach to disability as a matter of priority and will work in collaboration with ADSA to address as many of these challenges as soon as possible.

Raymond Herlihy - REDaction

Can you give some confirmation of actual attendance for home matches so far this season, versus tickets sold? We are aware of the various initiatives to fill the sold seats, it would be good to get an early overview of any progress on this issue

Tom McCann said we're very pleased that initiatives such as My Arsenal Rewards and the linkage of home attendance to access to Cup Finals have contributed to a strong level of matchday attendance so far this season. In addition, Ticket Transfer is being used by more and more fans, up 25% on comparable fixtures in previous seasons.

Mic Conetta added that My Arsenal Rewards is a new concept and it will take time for people to get used to the programme. He said there has been strong take up, in particular with new members, and work continues to drive the right messaging to people so they understand the programme and use it.

Akhil Vyas - AST

Arsenal have made many changes to ticketing arrangements this season. Please can we have an update on how things are going and a reassurance that there will be an opportunity to input into a process of reviewing how things have gone ahead of next season, particularly on the use of home/away credits and improving the take up of all seats including through the ticket exchange.

Tom McCann said it's early stages, but we're pleased with how the changes to the Away Ticket Scheme have affected availability of away tickets. So far, on average, c.200+ tickets are being made available to fans who would not otherwise have had a chance to purchase them. It's too early to draw conclusions on the effect of the change to award Cup Final tickets based on home attendance, but attendance was extremely strong for the AFC Wimbledon Carabao Cup match, which is fantastic and a positive indicator. We will continue to monitor this moving forward and we're happy to provide updates to this forum as we go.

Akhil Vyas - AST

Can Arsenal review and explain their policies on enabling reduced price ticketing for senior citizens across the stadium rather than just in the family enclosure?

Tom McCann said this is something we continue to review. Depending on the fixture, we offer up to 4,000 tickets in the Family Enclosure, many of which are purchased by senior citizens. The challenge is to find the balance between doing what's right for our fans and doing what's right for the Club. We have shared with this group before that the impact of offering stadium-wide concessions is considerably more than £1,000,000 per year, which presents obvious challenges

in the current environment. We will keep this group updated on any changes to our approach as it relates to stadium ticketing.

Jake Coare – Silver rep

Will the club launch a review into handling of communications with members after the clubs handling of the silver members renewals for this and last season. Some members have not received communication from the club.?

Mic Conetta explained we have to be compliant with data protection rules which mean we can't send marketing communications to people unless they have opted in to receive these. This is an industry-wide issue which we continue to work through and are also exploring ways to make this clearer to people so they receive the right communications from us.

Joe White – Gay Gooners

Will the club introduce gender neutral options on their membership forms and other areas of personal data collection (for example allowing Mx, or allowing people to type in their title)?

Mic Conetta said this is not something we have planned but it is something that we can add to a list of potential developments for future consideration. He explained that the club collects data across several systems (some of which are 3rd party solutions) and therefore has to take into account when changes can be made and the impact those changes will have on the systems that store and process this information.

Raymond Herlihy - REDaction

Pre paid VISA doubling up as membership cards : Can AFC confirm the take up on usage of the pre paid card factor so far?

Mic Conetta said we are unable to share actual numbers due to the nature of the product. However around 10% of issued cards have been activated and had funds put on them. However while it's very early days since launch we have experienced high levels of engagement with the My Arsenal Rewards platform. He said we are looking to add more affiliates to the programme to give people more opportunities to earn points.

Jake Coare – Silver Member Rep

When will the club revamp the outside of the stadium displays since they are looking dated and uncared for?

Peter Silverstone said we agreed with Jake's point about the look of the outside of the stadium and explained we are committed to replacing the "cores" before the end of the current season. We have determined that we will not make a like for like replacement but want to ensure that all Arsenal fans are proud of the displays. The design briefing process has begun and we will share ideas/plans with fans during the process. We expect/hope the new cores are in place in early spring.

Richard Smith - AISA

What are Mark Brindle's roles and responsibilities with the new arrangements (FF and AB)? Also, as we represent – and field questions from – large numbers of supporters, often on similar

themes, we can reduce the pressure on the club by asking the questions just once. Can we have an organisational flow chart - and direct contacts – for people we can approach on specific issues?

Mark Brindle said that his responsibilities for the Fans' Forum and Fan Advisory Board are to organise meetings, make sure the new election process for the Forum is in place and that we have reps for both groups from all the categories. He then works on the agenda with the Senior Management Team, making sure questions are answered and any items that the Senior Management team want to bring to the meetings are in place. He said he should be the first point of contact and can bring any questions to the relevant departments. He explained the Fan Services Team is being and we will have further support for you in the very near future.

Richard Smith - AISA

There were no "Manager's Notes/Diary" in the first match day programme. You have to go back to the days of Bertie Mee the last time this happened. This is quite frankly lazy and a lackadaisical approach towards the supporters. It's a vital tool that the manager communicates with us directly to talk about the previous games, the current opponents and anything else that is of interest

You might argue the website does that, but then, why match day programme? So can we talk about it?

Mark Gonnella said the point is understood but we took a conscious decision to try something different this season and to feature pieces from a range of senior people across the club. This included Josh Kroenke in the first home programme. He said Mikel's views are aired regularly through our own interviews and those with other media. In addition, we're running a new series through social media this year designed to give our fans the opportunity to pose questions to him directly. Mikel will still appear regularly in the programme but we wanted to try something new.

Joe White – LGBT

How does the club's rainbow merchandise support the work of the GayGooners (Arsenal's LGBT+ fan group) and are the club conscious of ensuring they do not engage in rainbow washing?

Mark Gonnella said that we are extremely proud of our ongoing relationship with the Gay Gooners. The intention behind our rainbow merchandise was to celebrate this relationship and the diversity of the Arsenal family. He said we are always conscious of ensuring we do not engage in rainbow washing through activities such as this, and our retail team would welcome a meeting with Gay Gooners representatives to discuss how we can work more collaboratively on future projects.

Akhil Vyas - AST

How is the Amazon Prime filming going - are there any initial thoughts?

Mark Gonnella said things are going well so far. The production team 72 Films are excellent. They have worked in many extreme environments – from Afghanistan to hospitals to prisons – and they have experience of the City and Spurs All or Nothing series. They are hugely respectful and intrusion is at a minimum. He explained that they will be telling the story of the season so the key themes and key characters are not fully established yet. The series is expected to go live next Autumn.

Raymond Herlihy - REDaction

Socios 'Fan Token' options : Again, can AFC give an indication on how successful this has been so far, and give us some context for this?

Peter Silverstone said the AFC fan token launch, which happened in August, was incredibly successful with us selling out our initial offering (2m tokens) in less than two hours. He said [Socios.com](https://www.socios.com) saw the most people they had ever seen take part in a fan token offering and saw a record number of people using their app at one time. Peter said there has been a very good redemption rate of free tokens from paid members and this was shown by the high engagement in the first poll. Our first poll, which ran in conjunction with the fan token offering, saw the highest amount of people vote on a poll on the [Socios.com](https://www.socios.com) app.

Fred Dowd – Club Level

What has the general reaction and feedback been to the partnership?

Peter Silverstone said the results from the AFC token FTO indicate that the tokens have been well received by the Arsenal fan base. [Socios.com](https://www.socios.com) have been very supportive in answering any questions that fans had when we launched the token and we will continue to answer any questions going forward. He said we will continue to gauge and learn from fan feedback as the partnership develops.

Fred Dowd – Club Level

What are the future plans for the partnership? How will it evolve?

Peter Silverstone said more AFC fan tokens will be available soon. He said we will be running regular polls (binding and non-binding) for fans to engage with throughout the season. There will also be lots of opportunities for fan token holders to win Arsenal prizes and experiences, such as match tickets, signed shirts and merchandise, messages from players and the opportunity to play on the pitch at Emirates Stadium

Fred Dowd – Club Level

Does Arsenal Football Club hold any AFC fan tokens and/or the Chiliz cryptocurrency that tokens are tied to?

Peter Silverstone said the Club doesn't hold any tokens or the Chiliz crypto-currency.

Mark Gonnella closed the meeting saying next meeting would be in February and a date will be circulated soon.