

**At a meeting of the SUNDERLAND STADIUM OF LIGHT SAFETY ADVISORY GROUP held in the STADIUM OF LIGHT on WEDNESDAY, 5<sup>th</sup> DECEMBER, 2012 at 10.00 a.m.**

**Present:-**

**Sunderland City Council:**

K. Scott	-	Development Manager (in the Chair)
P. Baxter	-	Principal Chartered Building Control Surveyor
R. Dobson	-	Deputy Aquatic Centre Manager
S. Mitchell	-	Technician, Network Operations
P. Lewins	-	Network Operations Manager
D. Noon	-	Principal Governance Services Officer

**Sunderland AFC:**

P. Weir	-	Safety Officer
P. Weymes	-	Facilities Manager
L. Coley	-	Club Secretary
M. Smith	-	

**Supporters Association:**

S. Simpson

**Northumbria Police:**

D. Gould  
P. Orchard  
G. Jones

**Sports Grounds Safety Authority:**

S. Storey	-	Inspector
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**St. John Ambulance:**

J. Purvis

**North East Ambulance Service:**

Y. Raimbault	-	NEAS Match Commander
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## **1. Apologies**

Apologies for absence were submitted to the meeting on behalf of Dave Turnbull, Gary Yates, Dave Pryer and Steve Neill.

## **2. Minutes of the Last Meeting held on 5<sup>th</sup> September, 2012**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the last meeting of the Group held on 5<sup>th</sup> September, 2012 be agreed as a correct record.

## **3. Matters Arising**

### **i) Disability Audit.**

Mr Weymes and Mr Weir advised that the Disability Access Audit had been carried out and that the Club's auditors would be on site to ensure that everything was up to speed.

## **4. Standing in Seated Areas**

The Chairman stated that the problem was continuing to grow both at Sunderland and nationally. The FSA were asking the Authorities to look again at allowing standing to return.

The Chairman advised that the SAG and the Football Club were concerned with 3 main issues arising from standing in seated areas:-

- i) Safety (increased risk of accidents and the potential for progressive crowd collapse),
- ii) Blockage of the aisles and gangways (preventing access by the Stewards and the Emergency Services),
- iii) Customer Care (supporters not wishing to stand or unable to do so for long periods because of age or disability being prevented from watching the game).

To mitigate these problems, proactive measures had been taken including restricting the number of tickets offered to visiting clubs whose supporters had persistently stood at Sunderland and at other stadiums.

Of growing concern at Sunderland was the fact that the pocket of persistent standers, (previously confined to the South West Corner), was now spreading to the new home supporters section behind the South Stand.

With the relocation of the visiting fans to the North Stand upper, a lot of the former Blackcats bar supporters had chosen to move to the South Stand, only to find they were surrounded by supporters who refused to sit. This had generated a number of complaints.

CCTV was being used to identify persistent standers. Warning letters had been issued and where the standing had continued, season ticket had been deactivated for one game with the holder notified accordingly. If the standing continued thereafter, the ban would be increased. Discussion ensued as to how other supporters could be made aware that the empty seats were as a result of the suspensions rather than supporters failing to turn up.

With regard to the fixtures against Newcastle United and Middlesbrough, it had not come as a surprise that being local derbies, both sets of away fans stood for the duration of the match.

Ms Storey stated that Sunderland had always been proactive in trying to tackle standing in seated areas. Additional measures other clubs had tried included behaviour charters although their effect had been patchy. Some had also tried relocating persistent standers to the rear and although it tended to half the problem it also gave the appearance that standing was being condoned.

## **5. Relocation of Visiting Supporters**

Mr. Weymes briefed the Group on progress following the relocation of visiting fans to the North Stand Upper. 3 new digital cameras had been purchased that had pan, tilt and zoom facilities as part of the migration from analogue technology and the review of CCTV across the Stadium.

The viewing platform for disabled supporters and been installed and was working well.

In response to an enquiry from the Chairman, Mr Weymes advised that the split between the level 3 and level 1 bars was not causing problems. In response to an enquiry from the Chairman, Ms Storey advised that rather than being relaxed, it was more likely that the prohibition of alcohol on the seating decks and terraces at football grounds would be extended to other sports, with particular attention being paid to cricket.

From a supporters perspective, Mr Simpson stated that he had heard some complaints of missiles being thrown from the upper tier down onto the home supporters seated below. With regard to movement of Newcastle fans in and out of the new away section, before and after the game, this had worked well and he commended the Club and Northumbria Police on their operation.

The Chairman echoed Mr Simpson's comments. It was a testament to the planning undertaken by the Police and the Club that in such a potentially volatile game only 6 arrests had been made.

## **6. Report on recent Development Squad fixture v Newcastle United.**

Mr Orchard advised that Northumbria Police had undertaken a review of the planning process for football matches in the Force area. If invited to Police a game the appropriate command and control would be deployed. Being a

Development game, the match versus Newcastle fell outside the previously agreed Framework. It was the view of the Police however that the same rationale and thought processes with regard to match planning should be applied to games which fell outside the categorisation.

Mr Weir advised that he would have been happy to have had the previously agreed Police presence of a sergeant plus 7, but had felt the extra deployment was not appropriate for the level of risk posed by the fixture. He had therefore decided to operate on a stewards only basis for the game.

Mr Orchard advised that the Police had maintained a presence outside the Stadium and in its environs and had operated against a group of 40 – 50 rival fans engaged in disorder. No arrests had been made however a number had been stopped and searched.

With regard to the Police review, Mr Orchard advised that it was about being more professional in the service provided by the Force. If invited into the Stadium it would be on the basis of a Commander together with a Serial Sgt plus Comms.

Ms Storey stated that this was at odds with the majority of Football Clubs who were looking to lessen the impact of Policing on football.

#### **7. Update on Works to the Wheatsheaf Gyrotory.**

Mr Lewins briefed the meeting on the current position with regard to the work on the Wheatsheaf Gyrotory. The temporary lights were now switched off and the junction was under signal control. The timings for the lights were not yet finalised. The situation would be monitored and adjustments made in the light of experience. Loop cutting work was still required and would commence in January. This would give the junction greater capacity. The signals at the Grange and St Mary's Way junctions would be upgraded to enable them to link to the Wheatsheaf. It was envisaged that the junction would be fully operational by April with the Tesco store opening in May 2013.

#### **8. Stadium Accident Reporting**

Mr Weir advised that there had been 2 heart attacks at the stadium since the last meeting. A supporter had also suffered a stroke at the match versus Newcastle and the prompt action of the medical team had been life saving.

Mr Raimbault believed that it was best to have the crowd doctor on the ground as it bought the patient and the paramedics time straight away.

#### **9. Sports Grounds Safety Authority Issues**

In addition to briefing the SAG on the new address for the Authority, Ms Storey raised the issue of training for Stewards. She referred to the recommendation in the Green Guide that Stewards should be in possession of or working towards a level 2 qualification in Spectator Safety. Given the

reductions in public sector spending, clubs and local authorities would need to be aware of the potential for funding streams to disappear in relation to such training.

Mr Weir advised that currently if a Steward was unemployed then the appropriate training was provided free of charge. If employed then £90 would be required to fund the training.

## **10 Certifying Authority Audit by SGSA**

The Chairman advised that the audit of the Local Authority with regard to its responsibilities under the Safety of Sports Grounds Act had been completed and feedback received. There were areas in which the Local Authority had done well and others which required improvement. He advised that he would forward a copy of the Audit to any interested parties.

Ms Storey replied that perhaps the Chairman was selling himself and the Local Authority short. It was in fact an excellent report.

## **11. Any Other Business**

### **(i) TRO Wearmouth Bridge**

Mr Lewins referred to the post match lane closures on the Wearmouth Bridge. He stated that the Council funded the traffic management aspect of the closure at a cost of £20 - £30,000 per season however he no longer had a budget to cover this. He asked if representations could be made to the football club for assistance in the matter.

It was agreed as a way forward that Les Clark the Council's Head of Streetscene should put the request in writing to Margaret Byrne, Chief Executive of the Football Club.

In addition Mr Weir asked if the restrictions in respect of the park and ride could now be waived. The Chairman replied that restrictions were part of the conditions attached to the planning consent granted to the Stadium.

### **(ii) Media Facilities**

Mr Weymes advised that a review of the facilities for the media was under way and may involve the relocation of the current press desks. Once the position was clarified he would report back to the Group.

### **(iii) Aquatic Centre Car Park**

Mr Dobson advised that on the day of the Middlesbrough match the Police had asked for the staff car park at the aquatic centre to be vacated in order to accommodate some of their units. The request had been made at the last minute and had caused a number of problems.

Mr Weir stated that the same request had been made in respect of the Club's disabled car park. It was an example of Bronze Commanders taking unilateral decisions on the ground.

## **12. Date of Next Meeting**

It was agreed that the next meeting would be held at the Stadium on Thursday 28<sup>th</sup> March, 2013 at 10.30 a.m.

The Chairman then closed the meeting having thanked everyone for their attendance and wished them a very happy Christmas and a prosperous new year.

(Signed) K. SCOTT,  
Chairman.

