



Fans Forum

General Information

Season: 2010/11
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Topic: Catering
Staffing Manager
Venue: Café at the Cottage
Time: 6:30 – 8:30pm
Fan Attendance: 15

Graham Gilmore
Tommy Guthrie

Stacey John

FFC Panel

Head of Business Operations Forum No:
Supporter Relations Manager
Emma Hulme **Catering & Hosp.**

Public Catering Manager

Welcome

Upon arrival fans were invited to sample a range of hot food & drinks, including hot dogs, pies and burgers. Mystery Shopping Feedback Forms were collected from fans by Tommy Guthrie.

Introduction

Tommy Guthrie welcomed the attendees & introduced the panel. A brief overview of catering was given to the fans, which included the aims of the Mystery Shopping programme, some of last seasons' scores & key statistics on purchasing habits and average spend.

Werder Bremen Mystery Shopping Review

Each fan in turn was asked to provide a summary of their shopping experience at the game two days before against Werder Bremen. Tommy Guthrie stated that the results would be passed to the Catering Dept. & Management Board for review and action.

Over the course of the evening feedback was gathered on a variety of areas, which included:

Cashless System

- Every fan agreed that a cashless system inside the ground would improve service and be a positive addition.
- Fans felt that an integrated system would be of benefit. (i.e.: retail, ticketing, catering etc).

Catering Outlets

- There was broad consensus that the catering outlets were clean & well maintained.
- It was noted by fans that catering signage has improved in recent years.
- It was generally accepted that the catering offer would always be restricted by the limitations of the ground.

Hawkers & Mobile Sales

- There was a broad consensus that the Club could make better use of mobile hawkers and that this would help to alleviate queues.
- Some fans stated that they were unaware that the Club currently used mobile hawkers at all and that they had never seen them at a game.
- There was general agreement that hawkers selling items in the stands during the game would be distracting & annoying.
- Fans were broadly in favour of more hawkers in the stands at half-time and also the deployment of more hawkers at the front gates of each section of the stand. It was pointed out that parents would be happier to allow their kids to make purchases at the front of the stand unaccompanied.
- The distinction was made between football and other sporting events, such as cricket or baseball, where catering is a more integral part of the overall experience.

Johnny Haynes Catering Outlets

- Concerns were raised about the organisation of the outlets on the Johnny Haynes concourse.
- Specifically it was pointed out that the condiments should be moved back to the main counter from their current location on a shelf on the back wall.
- It was noted that some units had no milk or ketchup available at the Bremen game.

- It was suggested that deploying hawkers at the front of the stand at half-time might help to ease congestion in this stand.
- One fan felt that the overcrowding on the concourse was 'potentially dangerous'.
- One regular who used the Putney End at Europa games states that the Putney facilities were far superior, mainly because there was significantly more space.

Pre-Ordering

- There was general agreement that the Club was not yet ready to operate a pre-order service.
- Fans were sceptical about the value in operating such a scheme and felt queues would be just as long and mistakes more frequent.
- Only two fans were aware of the half-time beer pre-order service that operated during 09/10.

Prices

- The majority of supporters stated that the current catering offer was generally expensive.
- Some fans felt that whilst prices were in line with other stadia, on the whole the product was not currently value for money.
- Drinks prices (in particular soft drinks, tea & water) came in for heavy criticism.
- Fans felt the price of a pint was realistic, but that it was unacceptable to charge only 20p less for a smaller plastic bottle than a draft pint of beer.
- The general price rise was noted and the majority felt it was unfair to ask fans to pay more in the current economic climate.
- The majority felt that the Club had made a mistake by removing the Meal Deal offers.
- It was pointed out that burgers sold by unofficial vendors in Bishops Park are cheaper than those inside the stadium & often of a higher quality.

Product Availability

- One fan stated that it was frustrating that not all products were available in all areas of the ground. He cited as an example Magners Cider, on offer in the Riverside only.
- A few fans felt it was fine to have different offers in different parts of the ground if ground restrictions meant that this was unavoidable.
- One fan stated that he often had to queue twice, as many items were not available at a single unit and his children had differing tastes.
- Some fans noted that the Beer Only stalls were a success and felt these should be expanded to all areas of the ground.
- It was generally agreed that the rule prohibiting the drinking of alcohol within sight of the pitch was archaic and ought to be reviewed.

Product Range

- Opinion was split more or less down the middle on the merits of either reducing the range & focussing on improving quality or adding to the current product offer to make it more diverse & appealing.
- The most popular suggestions for new drinks products were fruit juice & smoothies.
- The most popular suggestions for new food products was chips.
- Other suggestions included Chinese food (such as noodles), Indian food (samosas), ice cream, balti pies & bagels.
- There was broad consensus that the Club had made a mistake by removing the Cottage Pie, which was viewed as unique and different from the generic range on offer at other grounds.
- There was broad consensus that the Villis pie range was of good quality for stadium catering.
- Some fans noted that whilst they enjoyed the pies, they still felt they were too small.
- There was general agreement that none of the current hot food offers are substantial enough to be termed as anything other than a snack.
- One fan noted that the Catering offer had improved dramatically since the Club was in the lower divisions.
- One fan noted that she felt the quality of catering had declined steadily in recent years.
- One fan noted that there was a lack of chocolate & confectionery on offer – mainly plain crisps.

Product Quality

- The pies received the best feedback, concerns were expressed about the general quality of burgers & (in fewer cases) hot dogs & pork baps.
- One fan expressed his delight that the pork bap would be retained this coming season.
- The main problem was temperature of food, which was often tepid.

- Burgers were said to be dry and lacking in garnish.
- Hot dog rolls were said to be often hard or even stale.
- It was noted that other grounds such as Wembley offered 'proper meals' such as fish & chips and that heartier fare would go down well amongst many fans, even if it cost a little more.
- It was noted that catering standards & expectations had been lifted by the offer at newer venues such as the O2.
- Some fans were disappointed that the milk was not fresh but instead in cartons.

Promotions & Marketing

- Few fans were aware that the Club sometimes run 'come early' drinks promotions at games.
- The view was expressed that information on catering generally was scarce.
- It was suggested that a catering page be added to the programme & prices to the website.
- There was general agreement that offers designed to make fans stay behind after the match would be a useful addition. Fans felt price offers would need to be compelling in order to make fans stay.
- Most fans stated that they tend to eat or drink at another location after the match.
- The view was broadly expressed that fans feel the Club don't really care about the quality of catering and view it merely as an easy means of extracting more money from supporters.
- Approximately half of the fans felt that the Club's catering offer was 'boring', 'unexciting' or 'unappetising'
- One fan stated that he felt expectations were a little high and that the majority of fans merely wanted fast food that was served efficiently.
- A minority expressed the view that they would like to see healthier snacks, drinks & fruit made available

Queuing Times

- Fans had noted that queues were significantly longer at half-time than Pre-Match.
- There was a broad consensus that waiting times were a problem and that this deterred some fans from purchasing food & drink on matchdays.
- One fan stated that during his Mystery Shop many fans left the queue when the second-half began without making a purchase.
- One fan stated that the queues were disorganised and felt that barrier systems and queuing lanes might help to organise this better and speed up the process.

Staff

- There was a general feeling that most of the catering staff don't really care about the Club or take a great deal of pride in their work.
- Some fans felt that there were sufficient staff to cope with demand, but the outlets were too often poorly organised and managed.
- One fan stated that he felt the managers 'tended to hide' whenever it got busy.
- One fan stated that she was ignored when trying to request a refund for a drinks purchase.
- It was suggested that in addition to training, staff take part in Mystery Shops on matchdays to allow them to see first hand the service issues faced by supporters.
- Some fans noted that staff tended to want to help but often were let down by a lack of knowledge of the stadium or the catering offer.

Club Comments

Emma Hulme provided an overview of current staffing levels, turnover, deployment on a matchday and training procedures.

Graham Gilmore informed supporters that the Club were investigating cashless options and working with companies who would be coming in to review the catering procedure at forthcoming home games, starting with the visit of Manchester United on August 22.

Graham also noted that deploying queuing lanes was in all probability a non-starter due to the tight constraints of the concourses. He also provided a comparison with the prices, product range and typical complaints at the Emirates Stadium, pointing out that the same service issues in evidence and prices were higher.

He went on to explain that the General Manager of Catering had recently left the business and that the catering procedure currently remained under review.

Stacey John explained the limitations of kitchen space and cooking on-site and also the method used for hot-holding products, and how this limited the scope for introducing products such as chips without greatly reducing the quality of the product. She also outlined the refund procedure and stated that she would be investigating the product suggestions and speaking with staff at the kiosks where low scores or problems were recorded.

AOB

Graham Gilmore fielded general enquiries from the fans on other subjects, with a view to feeding these back to the CEO.

Fans noted a general disappointment with the lack of public thanks from the Club for the work of outgoing manager Roy Hodgson.

An objection was lodged concerning the problem of persistent standing, namely that it is tolerated amongst away supporters but stamped out quickly in home areas of the ground.

The issue of the Exit Gate into Bishops Park was raised again, and fans were advised that this remains under review.

Some fans complained about the poor running of the Fulham Flutter and the reduction in prize money in recent years. They were informed that the Flutter draw is now operated directly by the FFC Foundation and that wholesale changes were planned for the coming season. Details were currently TBC.

Mystery Shoppers

Tommy Guthrie closed by thanking supporters for attending. 11 supporters were signed up to take part in ongoing Mystery Shopping assignments during the 2010/11 season. He stated that further details would follow in the course of a few days time.

The Club will now be arranging an internal group to investigate some of the suggestions made and also the specific problems noted by Mystery Shoppers at the Werder Bremen game.

Ends.