



Ashton Gate consultation – Next stage

Bristol City Supporters' Club & Trust is pleased to offer the following suggestions and comments in response to the following request from Bristol Sport:

We'd love to hear your ideas for the internal fitting out of the new stands, particularly the new South Stand; the refurbished Dolman concourse; the museum; and exterior landscaped areas. (We'll hold a separate consultation phase for the new West Stand either later this year or next year).

What sort of imagery would you like to see inside the stadium? Should it reflect the history of the football club; the rugby club; Bristol in general? What sort of dedicated areas would you like to see in the new concourses? Should we include a family area for the sort of activities currently carried out in the community park? Where do we put the stage for live bands pre or post match? Are there any names from our history which you'd like to see enshrined in the redevelopment? Where would you like the proposed Atyeo statue to be located?

Ashton Gate – General look and feel

As a basic principle, we believe that the look and feel of a football ground should reflect the club's ownership of that ground. Recalling examples such as Coventry City, Portsmouth and, even closer to home, Bristol Rovers in relation to Eastville, we have seen a history of clubs divested of direct ownership of their home ground subsequently experiencing troubled times. Ideologically, therefore, we believe that it is best for a football club to be the direct owner of its own ground and that this ownership should then be reflected in the stadium's look and feel.

Acknowledging that this is not the case at Ashton Gate and that Bristol City are now merely one of two anchor tenants with no greater direct ownership of the stadium than Bristol Rugby Club, we would like to see every effort made to give the ground the greatest possible 'Bristol City' look and feel on every occasion that City supporters attend what to many is their 'second home'.

With the above in mind, we would like to see the following:

- All Bristol City / Bristol Rugby **branding to be interchangeable**, i.e. City fans should not see any rugby branding.

To be achieved by:

- Widespread use of digital screens in bars, on concourses and on outer stadium facades
- Physical screens, e.g. sliding or hinged panels that can be moved one way or the other to expose/conceal the appropriate branding/imagery

- Seen from the other stands, the South Stand should be **unmistakable as the ‘home end’**.

To be achieved by:

- All seats within the stand (or the central rectangular block between the two corner flags) being of a different (possibly darker) colour than those around them, so that the appearance of an apparently separate (rectangular) ‘end’ is created
- Street art along the full width of the back wall (either right up to the roof or at least 6-7 feet high, the lower section being of little use as advertising space, since it will be largely obscured from general view during a match; dimensions for the available space to be provided ASAP so that interested fans can work on designs and run them past the club for approval)
- Underside of the roof over the (rectangular) home end to be dark in colour (to replicate in a small way the enclosed ‘feel’ of the old East End)

Acoustics:

- Underside of the roof to be as far as possible finished in materials that best reflect sound

Stage area:

- Wherever positioned (under the South Stand would seem a good place, as it’s close both to fans who might otherwise arrive late and leave early and to the main bar), we would like to see, in addition to live acts, on-stage interviews with players / coaching staff / former greats, as this would (a) possibly be more appealing to fans and (b) help to strengthen the sometimes less than strong bond between players and supporters.

Family area:

- We would like to see pre-match activities for youngsters, as provided now in the Hirerite building retained, with the possibility explored of continuing these in or adjacent to the ‘Community Corner’.

Smokers’ facility:

- In order to provide smokers with an area that forms an integral part of the stadium and to discourage illicit smoking in the toilets, we suggest several enclosed, outdoor areas (within the turnstile perimeter) at the back of the stands, e.g. to the rear of the South Stand and adjacent to the main bar, enabling smokers to enjoy a pint and smoke in the open air.

Flag storage:

- In order to assist fans in the South Stand with colourful displays of flags and banners, we would like to see a secure, dry facility provided for storing such materials between matches (this could be within the supporters’ bar facility (see below), but it would probably be best if independent access to it was available from the concourse or stand).

Street art / graffiti on South Stand concourse walls:

- Following on from the premise that the South Stand should have a feel of being very much the Bristol City ‘home end’, we would also like supporters with an interest in street art given the opportunity to consider applying appropriate imagery, e.g. incorporating use of the Robin motif, to the walls and other surfaces of the South Stand concourse. The walls in general should be able to take large murals, while opportunities for brick sculpture within any bare brickwork should also be considered.

Supporters Club & Trust facilities:

- Over 50 years ago, Harry Dolman gave the Supporters Club an open-ended lease at a peppercorn rent of £1 p.a. on bar premises in what is now the Williams Stand in recognition of the contribution that they had made to facilitating extension of that stand during a period of steel shortage. That arrangement later ended during the Scott Davidson era, leaving the Supporters Club with no security of tenure and for a while, though not latterly, having to pay four-figure annual rent for first one and then a second alternative room in the Dolman Stand (the latter subsequently redecorated at the Supporters Club's own expense). It is now understood that the current facility in the Dolman will in turn become unavailable from January 2015, so the Club, now the Supporters Club & Trust, is again looking for a new home. We are conscious that Bristol Sport has been bearing this in mind in plans for the use of space beneath the new and remodelled stands and thus look forward to agreeing on a new long-term home for the organisation. Ideally this would include a members' bar and a small office (if at concourse level, this could double as an information desk with a hatch opening onto the concourse). The two facilities need not be adjoined, though that would be preferred. The preferred location would be somewhere around the South Stand / Dolman corner. Benefits to the football club of providing such a facility would include:
 - Guaranteed regular custom from early arrivals at the ground on matchdays (in the absence of a facility within the ground it is likely that the Club & Trust will establish a bar facility for members elsewhere, with the possibility that then members will not enter the stadium until shortly before kick-off)
 - Opportunity to offer the same facility to Bristol Rugby's supporters' trust / club, with similar benefits from members arriving early for pre-match drinks
 - If made accessible on non-matchdays, regular use of the facility for both organisations' regular meetings and social functions
 - Subject to appropriate security arrangements being in place for the supporters' organisations' own property, ability to hire out the facility to third parties when not being used by the Club & Trust or by Bristol Rugby supporters' groups
 - A tangible sign to all City and Bristol Rugby fans of the importance that their clubs place on the presence of thriving, organised supporters' organisations
 - An element of making good a perceived wrong in respect of how the Supporters' Club was treated with regards to facilities in the past

The Atyeo statue:

- The Supporters' Club & Trust collection to raise money to erect a statue to John Atyeo is well advanced and sufficient funds are in place to commission a fitting tribute to the great man – a final push for contributions over the next few months will add to what has already been collected and ensure an even better statue. With regards to the actual design of the statue (i.e. what pose it should replicate) we intend to ask fans to choose from a shortlist. As for the location, having taken soundings from the Fans' Parliament, we would like to see the statue placed in front of the main stadium entrance in a commanding position as supporters approach along Wedlock Way.

Pricing:

Finally, though not an issue of stadium 'design' a matter of importance in ensuring that the remodelled ground, especially the new 'South Stand', is a new 'second home' that fans take to their hearts and thus populate in ever-increasing numbers, a word on the subject of admission prices.

While we recognise that Bristol City has done some great work over recent years in trying to make admission prices as affordable as possible and that the excesses of £100 or more for a single match ticket are currently limited to a few clubs in the Premier League, even at Ashton Gate the cost of going to football as a percentage of an average earner's income is now a great deal higher than it was when football truly was the 'people's game' and a great deal more nowadays proportionately for fans on low and average incomes than for those on higher salaries. While we don't expect the club to drastically drop prices to address this issue, we would like to see endeavours made over the coming years to redress this disproportionately through introducing greater elasticity into the overall pricing range. This season the adult matchday price range is £23-£25. We would suggest that if £25 is a fair price to ask of a supporter earning perhaps £40,000 p.a. or more, then £23 is an unfair price to ask of a supporter earning only half of that amount or less.

We would therefore like the club to give serious thought to the following:

- South Stand prices to be always at least 10% cheaper than the next cheapest in the ground
- South Stand 'singing section' prices for 2015/16 to be no more than the Williams Stand singing section prices this season
- South Stand prices to be fixed for a period of years thereafter, while other prices gradually rise, in order to create a spread of prices that better reflects the spread of earnings in society than is currently the case
- Age bracket for price discount for young adults in the South Stand to be extended at the top end from age 21 to age 23, recognising the value that such fans contribute to the matchday atmosphere and their very limited budgets

Bristol City Supporters' Club & Trust, August 2014