



Chelsea Supporters' Trust



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8th March 2024

Chelsea Supporters' Trust Letter to Owners 8.3.24

Dear Todd and Behdad,

As we head towards the final months of the season, we wanted to write to you regarding your plans for next season and beyond. As you know, the Chelsea Supporters' Trust has always sought to be constructive in our dealings with you and your colleagues at Chelsea FC. It is in that spirit that we would like to highlight and address some serious supporter concerns and the disconnection felt by supporters towards the majority of the team, the manager, the club ownership, and the board.

Current supporter mood and anxiety due to lack of clear direction off the pitch

The current feeling amongst Chelsea supporters in our opinion is at its lowest since the early 1980s. While this may be expected with our current run of form and position in the league table, a significant number of supporters that we speak to are quick to express concerns that the lack of any public-facing vision from the new ownership has led to an overwhelming sense of helplessness, frustration, and deep concern. Supporters are saying that there currently seems a fast-growing lack of trust from much of the fanbase, especially matchgoers towards the board, partially due to severely limited communication. Many supporters have significant concerns about the short and long-term future of our football club.

During our latest result at Brentford, the views of a quiet few became a vocal expression of a larger number of Chelsea supporters present at the game. Several anti-ownership chants could be heard even when we were winning and much of our recent dialogue with supporters reveals a widespread and significant lack of belief in the decision-makers at the top of our club. The current mood amongst supporters is critically low and cannot be ignored. The feeling that the club has become a 'laughing stock', both on and off the pitch, is growing.

The Chelsea Supporters' Trust regretfully believes that we are close to, if not already experiencing, a significant shift in supporter opinion that could result in irreversible toxicity, almost irrespective of results on the pitch. Unless the situation improves, this seems likely to manifest itself in more targeted chanting, especially at televised games, and quite possibly more organised, overt, and impactful forms of protest by some sections of the fanbase.

We call on the club to work hand-in-hand with the CST to improve the supporter/board relationship. The existing supporter engagement mechanisms are clearly not currently working at an optimum level, and we believe we should work together to improve this situation.

Growing financial revenue streams at the expense of your supporters

When you began your stewardship of Chelsea FC, you communicated to supporters that you would look to grow every commercial revenue stream and double the income to bring us in line with other major Premier League clubs. We were informed that only once all commercial revenue streams were exhausted would the club hit the pockets of the supporters.

Supporters are frustrated and angry that this pledge has been broken. Since May 2023, a number of public-facing supporter budgets have been cut or tightened, and prices increased. Examples include:

- Coach prices: up to £53 more
- Shirt cost: £5 increase
- Cup fixtures ticket: £1 - £13 increase
- Programme cost: 50p increase and approx. 30 fewer pages
- Food & Drink in General Admission areas: 5% - 15% increase (estimate)
- Youth fixtures ticket: £2 increase
- Chelsea Women ticket price increase by record amounts

Obviously, an additional way for you to further increase matchday revenue is via ticket price increases and we understand that the club is currently assessing different scenarios, different options, and decisions around ticket pricing for next season.

The Chelsea Supporters' Trust acknowledges you are seeking to optimise income, but we have significant concerns regarding ticket pricing going forward, for both Season Ticket Holders and General Admission.

The UK currently faces one of the most difficult financial periods in its history. It is important that you are aware that the cost-of-living crisis has created huge financial difficulties for many people and matchgoing supporters, the lifeblood of the club, are certainly not immune from these pressures. You should be under no illusions of how concerned many supporters are about the potential of significant ticket price increases. A CST membership survey received responses from thousands of supporters, a significant number of whom are fearful that they will be priced out of watching the club they love by above-inflation increases.

We believe that any significant ticketing price increase at this time would be extremely unwise and, that all other ideas around price points or changes to senior concessions should be considered at a later date.

This belief seems especially pertinent given the record-breaking expenditure on players that has produced a far from positive impact on the pitch. We are very aware that the increase in ticket prices will only add to the 'penny pinching' narrative and we have obvious and real concerns about how supporters would react to this combination of increased prices and mediocre, inconsistent performances on the pitch. We would strongly caution against such a move.

Urgent requirement to engage with the wider fanbase

The CST has been greatly impressed with Chelsea's willingness to work with us on a number of community and foundation projects to help to foster better supporter relationships.

That said, we believe that we are at a stage where a new wider supporter engagement approach needs to be urgently adopted to address the serious concerns held by supporters who have demonstrated such loyalty over recent years. We are firmly of the belief that seeking to develop a much greater degree of trust with those supporters would be a net benefit to you, and the club more generally, going forward.

Surely supporters deserve a coherent, detailed strategy update from the ownership on their medium/long-term plans? They have yet to receive one. Included within such an update should be the stadium redevelopment. Even if the club have no strategically important news in this area, periodic statements would certainly not go amiss, given the crucial importance of the redevelopment to so many matchgoing supporters. There has been very little communication with the wider supporter base on the subject, and what supporters see is that we are nine years on from the 2015 Abramovich stadium plan and seem to have gone backwards, whereas our domestic peers continue to progress, harvesting the benefits of stadium redevelopment or rebuild. There seems deep concern, and cynicism, about what is happening, hardly surprising given the lack of updates. In the communication vacuum caused by the absence of any supporter update whatsoever, rumours, some doubtless spectacularly inaccurate, are abound. This cannot be healthy. We reaffirm our assertion that supporters should be involved in stadium redevelopment plans from the very beginning.

We believe that a greater sharing of your vision, including commercial ambitions, with the wider fanbase could be an appropriate way of starting to create a better understanding of what you are seeking to achieve. Communicating how you are hoping to transition into operating on a more sustainable basis is vital if you wish to allay the widespread anxiety currently felt by supporters.

This is where your ambition to lead in the field of 'fan engagement' comes in.

Much of the current 'fan engagement' at Chelsea FC tends to be related to matchgoing issues or more strategic areas of finance and governance (long-term plans, etc), and whilst both are important, there is a nuanced position on this. It is our view, backed up the experiences at clubs such as Brighton and Hove Albion and Brentford, and evidence from experts in the field, that a club being open to the wider supporter base about the wider business objectives - without having to disclose key information that might be subject to commercial sensitivity - can over time build and markedly increase trust between supporters and club. It can also buy time for the leadership of a club where they are making significant changes quickly.

We believe that presenting some of the progress being made directly to the wider supporter base could serve to instil greater confidence in the decision-making at Chelsea, which you will clearly need if you want to carry supporter opinion with you.

We are not suggesting a technical explanation of profit, loss, and revenue generation, but a clear explanation of the journey the club is on under your leadership. Supporters genuinely care about the future of their club and are often more understanding when they are given more of the facts regarding an issue.

This would not mean any changes to the current forms of engagement you use, such as the Fan Advisory Board or even the relationship with us. Instead, more open, large-scale communication is another layer of engagement that clubs frequently use to build trust, especially among newer owners.

We would suggest that you work closely with the CST to develop a supporter communication strategy that works for the club and for the supporter base. We feel that this ought to be an initial face-to-face event, held as soon as practicable, with regular written and video materials after.

We would welcome a continuous dialogue with you on this crucial issue and are happy to hold a private and confidential meeting with you and your team about these proposals.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours Sincerely,

The Chelsea Supporters' Trust Board



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20th March 2024

IN RESPONSE TO THE FORMAL LETTER FROM THE CHELSEA SUPPORTERS' TRUST TO CHELSEA FOOTBALL CLUB

Thank you for your letter and unwavering support for Chelsea Football Club. We deeply value the dedication, commitment and desire from all our supporters to continue to develop Chelsea FC into the most successful and admired Club in the world, both on and off the pitch.

Part of achieving that goal will be done by working with our supporters. Without question, we want to ensure we engage with our supporters regularly to provide them with clear lines of communication and a significant level of transparency. With the establishment of the Fan Advisory Board, who liaise with the Club on a regular basis, we are confident that there is a great deal of shared discussion and an intention to work closely with a number of key stakeholders. In addition, the frequent Fans Forum Meetings representing our Stadium accessibility, Women's and Men's Team highlights the strong level of communication between Chelsea Football Club and its supporters.

We have also seen ground-breaking initiatives this season with the formation of the Jewish Supporters Group and the Muslim Supporters Group to ensure that we have a diverse representation of our supporters that engage frequently with the Club. That work is constant and ongoing. As with all our supporter groups, Chelsea Supporters' Trust is a valued organisation we endeavour to have substantial dialogue with on a regular basis.

Our goal is the same as your goal: to ensure Chelsea Football Club has a bright and successful future. To do so, there is a necessity to increase club revenue to put us on a par with our rivals and allow us to compete in both the Premier League and Women's Super League, as well as in domestic and European competitions. There are several ways we are already doing that and will further explore.

We recognise there is a concern about rising costs on a matchday and the impact ticket prices can have on our supporters. Rest assured, we are taking frequent advice and engaging in regular consultation with the Fan Advisory Board to ensure that we take a holistic approach in this vitally important issue. There is a clear need to work closely with all our supporter groups on this topic to make sure we have balanced and measured representation.

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To be clear, we endeavour to have regular and strong communication with all our supporters, across all our teams, and aim to enhance and improve this connection season-on-season. We welcome the thoughts of our supporter groups on how to further enhance this connection.

We thank you for your support as we move into this important juncture of the season.

Chris Jurasek

Chief Executive Officer





Chelsea Supporters' Trust comment on the response received from Chelsea FC CEO, Chris Jurasek - 20.3.24

Mark Meehan, Chelsea Supporters' Trust Chairman, said:

"We appreciate the response from Chris Jurasek, the Chelsea Chief Executive. However, in our opinion, it doesn't really address the issue we raised, which was about the club opening up to a wider group of fans in order to explain and reassure at what is a difficult and challenging time for everyone. There are serious supporter concerns about the direction of the club, and particularly the disconnection felt towards the club ownership, board as well as the majority of the team and the manager.

"We were not questioning the existing supporter engagement mechanisms at Chelsea FC, including our very open and honest relationships with key individuals such as Danny Finkelstein. We were saying that in order to reassure and reset relationships with fans, a much wider form of communication with fans is necessary. It would also be entirely in keeping with the club's stated desire to be 'leaders in fan engagement', demonstrating that it can change and adapt in response to fan dialogue when circumstances require it. Danny totally gets fan engagement, and we want everyone at Chelsea to do so.

"A football club belongs to its supporters and the CST will continue to do everything in its power to guarantee that the voices of those supporters are heard from the stands to the boardroom and ensure that Chelsea supporters are at the very centre of every key decision made by the club - we are Supporters, not customers."