

Premier League Disability Advisory Group

Meeting held at Villa Park Stadium Aston Villa Football Club
6th October 2021

Guest and Premier League Attendees :-

Anthony Richards	Aston Villa Disability Access Officer
Millie Crowhurst	Brighton Disability Liaison Officer
Owain Davies	CEO Level Playing Field
Peter Kay	Premier League Consultant
Stewart Bladen	West Midlands Police - Football Unit

DSA Attendees :-

David Butler	DAG Chair	
	DSA Chair	Watford
Ted Morris	Chair DAG Vice Chair	Liverpool
Chas Banks	MUDSA Secretary	Manchester United
Jo McNicol	Chair	Tottenham
Trevor Bright	Co – Chair	West Ham
Paul Lucas	Secretary	Southampton
Kevin Holden	Chair	Burnley
Joanne McKibbens	Chair	Aston Villa

DAG Zoom invitees / attendees

Anne Hyde	Chair DAG General Secretary	Arsenal
John Kenny	Chair	Manchester City
David Smith	Chair	Crystal Palace
Darren Cash	Chair	Wolves
Stephen Miller	Secretary	Newcastle
Kevin James	Chair	Norwich
Amy Wilson	Chair	Everton
Stuart Ram	Chair	Leeds
Sandra Fixter	Chair	Leicester

The Summary of Main Topics, Comments and Actions Points

Points arising from the Minutes of the last meeting

David Butler - Chair's Report - Please find this at the end of this document.

Special Guest - Stewart Bladen

Dedicated Football Officer and Public Order/Public Safety Advisor (POPSA) | Force Football Unit

Stewart explained the activity he is involved with to ensure visiting supporters receive better protection when sitting in the wheelchair platform in the home end at Aston Villa.

He is training special constables in better fan engagement with the Villa supporters with the specific aim of reducing or indeed eliminating abuse towards visiting disabled supporters. This is a significant step forward in supporting disabled supporters and the meeting thanked him for his contribution.

Often, visiting wheelchair users and their PA's are left without support or protection when in the home end, which the meeting found deeply troubling.

Minutes of meeting on 14th November 2019

These minutes were published on our website. There were no items arising and the meeting voted to approve them as being an accurate record of proceedings.

Confirmation of Election of Officers

At the meeting in November 2019 we approved our constitution which required the three Officers to be elected at an AGM for a three year period of tenure. As you are all aware due to the pandemic we were not able to hold a face to face AGM and held an email vote in March 2020 which resulted in the following being elected :-

David J Butler - Chair

Anne Hyde – Group secretary

Steve Daniels - Vice Chair

Regrettably Steve resigned having also resigned from Chair of Wolves DSA

An electronic vote was held in August 2021 to elect a replacement for the period ending March 2023.

Ted Morris – was elected Vice Chair

Given the unprecedented situation David asked the meeting to confirm they were happy with the election process.

All agreed

Accessible Stadia Guidelines (ASG) revision update

Level Playing Field - Owain Davies presentation

Level Playing Field CEO, Owain Davies, gave a presentation relating to the Accessible Stadia Guidelines revision process and timetable and indicated that DAG would be involved after the draft stage and David agreed to encourage all DSA's to fully support level Playing Field with their review of the ASG and to provide constructive comment and input.

Action: David to follow up with Owain who has provided some additional points below plus the slides from his presentation which can be viewed by [clicking here](#)

- **Neurodiverse Sports Fans** – Safety, accessibility and experiences when attending live events (research) [Click Here](#)
- **Club information update** – We discussed that LPF is currently asking clubs for updated stadia info. If you have any information from the DAG that you could share, please do pass it on to me.
- **Proof of Disability LPF Guide** – This is having a final edit, and I should be able to share it next week.

Premier League Stadium ASG continued non compliance / Analysis

David produced a detailed form and requested that all DSA's review their clubs ASG compliance and feedback to him on the current status. All DSA's were asked to complete this form and return it to him no later than end of November 2021. He advised all meeting attendees that they may require assistance from their clubs DLO's to collect all of the information. Owain suggested that some of the information could be obtained from the LPF website.

Safe Standing

It was explained that the SGSA has offered an early adopter Licence to enable Licenced areas in stadiums for safe standing. David requested that all DSA's liaise with their club to see if they have taken up a license. If so, it was suggested that the DSA becomes involved particularly with reference to the Code of Conduct and the preservation of sight lines for our disabled members.

Disability Liaison Officers

Premier League rules :- Concern was expressed about the employment of a full time Disability Liaison Officer. Many DLO's are now being given additional functions thereby diluting their disabled fans duties.

David will seek clarification from the Premier League on rules relating to DLO employment.

Action: David to follow up

Rule 9 of Section R interpretation

Rule 9 requires that 10% of the accessible places in the stadium be allocated to visiting disabled supporters.

In many cases away disabled fans are not treated proportionately according to your input. To verify the allocation you have to be aware of the total number of accessible spaces in the stadium or you cannot calculate the 10%. David stated he believed that the away end 10% allocation in total should

be treated in relation to Table 4 in a proportionate manner in respect of wheelchair and ambulant spaces, 75% elevated, number of accessible toilets and the 40m rule applied.

David will seek clarification from the Premier League on how the calculation is arrived at concerning the amount of wheelchair/ambulant spaces that are available to away supporters.

Action: David to follow up

Impact of digital ticketing

The main impact appears to be with digital tickets for carers who may change regularly. Many clubs have reverted back to plastic season ticket cards which can be passed around to facilitate this problem.

Chair's Report 6th October 2021

Thank you all for making it here today, your efforts are much appreciated.

As a cohesive body we have successfully persuaded – some might say coerced - four clubs Southampton, Norwich, Aston Villa and Bournemouth to make substantial changes to their stadiums.

I find it frustrating that these changes, all to do with safety of away disabled supporters, only happened after physical harm has occurred or by their positioning of away disabled fans the abuse suffered was such that the police believe that it has become a safety issue.

After two similar serious incidents at the same ground where two wheelchair away supporters were hurt, one very seriously, the required safety changes were made in three weeks when I contacted the CEO and informed him, after checking with a QC, that should a fatality occur the club would be up for Corporate Manslaughter.

Surely it doesn't have to come to that!

I now receive regular reports and photographic evidence from away disabled fans to pin point individual club problems.

But the Accessible Stadia Guidelines are not helpful on some safety aspects.

There is no specification or requirement for safety barriers or handrails to protect disabled supporters – surely the most vulnerable of fans in the stadium. No away proportionate disabled facilities, no definition of "elevated", no definition of extra legroom for ambulant supporters – all of these topics are omitted in the current ASGs.

The relook at the guidelines relating to ambulant supporters will become very relevant due to the aging of supporters – the average age of a Man Utd supporter is now in excess of 55 years. This is a trend at every club and needs recognising. To counter this Man Utd have now offered 4,000 season tickets to young supporters.

I continue to re-iterate that our overall objective is to ensure that all Premier League stadia are fully compliant with the Sports Ground Safety Authority's (SGSA) Accessible Stadia Guidelines while at the

same time trying to update and improve them. I am hoping we can work with Owain at Level Playing Field to achieve this objective.

At the last meeting we discussed various issues around all clubs having had the two year period to become compliant. Such a period, it was clarified, could be split if they were promoted, relegated and then returned to the Premier League. Two clubs, Norwich and Aston Villa have completed this loop and therefore should now be fully compliant.

Together these two clubs have received £165 million in parachute payments!

We will observe very carefully their progress and support their DSA's involvement in the commitment to the necessary changes.

My view is that clubs that have exhausted their two year period, collected tens of millions in parachute payments, without becoming compliant, must be legally forced to act as were Chelsea. Only the EHRC appear to have that power!

Relating to this point I am currently in correspondence with the new head of EHRC, Baroness Falkner as she has directed a 3 year strategy review and I have requested that it includes a revisit to Premier League ASG compliance as many of the current clubs were not included in the original investigation.

To assist with this campaign I am going to ask all of you later in this meeting to assess and record the degree to which your own club is compliant. You will need your DLO's help – I did at Watford - as it is quite detailed.

Safe standing was a major topic at our last meeting. As a group we have always been unanimously in our support of Safe standing as we believe the necessary rails will add additional safety aspects especially in the away end where they stand throughout anyway. It could prevent crowd surge which we know endangers our members.

Trial Licencing is now on offer. The SGSA criteria has been well thought out and today is the last day for applications for early adopters Licencing.

Clubs will have to meet a number of criteria in order to receive Government and SGSA approval to have licensed standing areas, including:

- The necessary infrastructure being in place – such as seats with barriers/independent barriers – which must be in both home and away sections.
- Fans must be able to sit or stand in the licensed area – the seats cannot be locked in the 'up' or 'down' position. There must also be one seat/space per person.
- The licensed standing areas must not impact the viewing standards or other fans, including disabled fans.
- There must be a Code of Conduct in place for fans in the licensed standing area.
- The ground must consult with its Safety Advisory Group about plans for the licensed standing areas.

The licensed standing areas will be independently evaluated from their introduction in January for the remainder of the 2021/22 season.

May I ask you all to get involved in this project with your club if they decide to make an application particularly with the Code of Conduct and the preservation of sight lines for the disabled fans.

Being in the DAG Chair is at times a frustrating task as I am invariably dealing with the Premier League who I believe probably see us more as a nuisance now the PL structure has changed and Bill Bush, who founded DAG, has left the scene.

We must also remember that the Premier League itself is an administrative body implementing a set of rules and regulations that 20 powerful independent businesses have created with overarching input from the pay masters – pay to view TV companies!

Such individual decision making across the clubs and with different interpretations of the rule book and ASGs therefore creating difficulty in having continuity across all 20 in many areas where disabled supporters are involved. You have identified digital ticketing problems with carer tickets, differences of qualifications criteria for disabled and free assistant tickets, tv camera and steward positioning – and many other examples.

Also there are, regrettably, a variety different Accessible Stadia Guidelines interpretations amongst the clubs.

I gave you some not so good news about the PL but on Monday of this week I had a very encouraging and productive meeting with the new Premier League Director of Fans and Development - Anna Deignan - and we are now working together on the priority issues we identified. Anna also accepted an invitation to meet you all at our next DAG meeting.

Current problems aside, these must not deflect us from our vital task of caring for the thousands of disabled supporters who directly elected us to represent them. It may be difficult and frustrating at times but very worthwhile to enable all supporters, with whatever form of disability, to fully enjoy their match day experience.

Finally, may I thank you all for the tremendous support I have received. It is difficult job but someone has to do it - and I will continue to do so as long as I continue to have your backing to the end of my tenure in 2023.

Thank you.