

Premier League Disability Advisory Group

Meeting held at London Stadium West Ham Football Club
20th April 2022



Guest Attendees :-

Julie Pidgeon	Host Club	West Ham Disability Liaison Officer
Martyn Henderson		CEO SGSA
Jon Burr		Brentford Community Manager
Sophie McGill		Brentford Fan Relations Executive - Supporter Liaison Officer
Millie Crowhurst		Brighton Disability Liaison Officer
Diane Piggott		Chelsea Disability Liaison Officer

DSA Attendees :-

David Butler	DAG Chair	
	DSA Chair	Watford
Ted Morris	Chair	DAG Vice Chair
Cathy Bayford	Co-Chair	Liverpool
Kevin James	Chair	West Ham
Andy Mather	Chair	Norwich
Joanne McKibbens	Chair	Southampton
		Aston Villa

Apologises for absence :-

Anne Hyde	DSA Secretary	Arsenal
Sandra Fixter	DSA Chair	Leicester
Chas Banks	DSA Chair	Manchester United
Amy Wilson	DSA Chair	Everton
Stuart Ramm	DSA Chair	Leeds
Darren Cash	DSA Chair	Wolves
Stephen Miller	DSA Secretary	Newcastle
Jo McNicol	DSA Chair	Tottenham

At the outset David informed the meeting that Amy Wilson, Everton DSA Chair, was seriously ill in hospital. We all sent her our love and support and wished her a full and speedy recovery.

David thanked Julie and West Ham for hosting our meeting and Cathy for her invaluable support.

He also warmly welcomed all officers from the clubs who joined us today and hoped they would have a interesting and enjoyable time and welcomed their participation.

Although this meeting is billed as an AGM there are no formal elections as the Officers have a three year tenure. Elections will take place in 2023

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DAG Chair's Report

I am sorry to say that we are depleted today as there a number of the DSAs are in disarray, four currently do not have a Chair and I am aware of other changes being imminent. In total 7 are not fully functioning.

However we have today an important compensatory factor being the number of DLO attendees which I am hoping will give the meeting a different perspective during the discussions.

The formation of our group was prompted by the Equality and Human Rights Commission's suggesting that the Premier League needed to communicate more directly with its disabled supporters. The DSAs are that link.

I will talk to the PL about gaining extra support for these Associations who after all are run by volunteers and are that vital voice for disabled supporters.

I have always felt that my responsibilities are not just for Enables members while they are inside Vicarage Road but also for their safety and easy of access when they visit other stadiums.

Equally I feel a responsibility to away disabled supporters when they visit Vicarage Road and I know our DLO Dave Messenger feels the same way.

By working together – DSAs and DLOs we can make a significant difference.

At Aston Villa, with pressure from Joanne and the new DLO Anthony Richards plus DAG direct support, they have now fully opened the away wheelchair area which is now situated in with the away fans and new safety gates have also now been added – with more improvements to come.

We must thank Joanne for her tireless efforts over many years to make this happen. Not for her fans but for the away visitors. Well done.

Crystal Palace occupies an older stadium and complaints go back years concerning away fans obstructed views and no improvements have been made!

So, I have raised all the issues directly with the owner Steve Parish, making it clear that the views for away disabled fans are unacceptable and may even be unlawful.

I am awaiting a response but will come back to the potential legal issues in a moment.

If I may explain how I am dealing with these issues in the light of the licencing of Permitted standing which if sight lines are not protected could make the situation far worse particularly for the ambulant supporters.

Last year the Government agreed that Licenced areas for standing can be applied for and be operational by January 2022.

5 clubs applied and were licenced plus Wolves had already installed the railed systems.

I have sent out an email to you all requesting feedback on your experiences in the stadiums selected for the experiment – **copy in the meeting papers**.

Please let me have as much input as possible and I will continue to send your reports to the Sports Ground Safety Authority who are monitoring the impact of the change.

Martyn Henderson CEO SGSA will be attending this afternoon for a discussion on the subject.

Permitted Standing is unanimously supported by DAG for the increased safety aspects preventing crowd surge but with the strong caveat of protecting sight lines for disabled supporters.

However, the advent of permitted standing appears to have been taken as a green light for standing in all parts of the ground – home and away, that has not been experienced in recent decades since Hillsborough. Sight line protection is therefore more important than ever.

Standing up in front of the disabled supporters in wheelchairs and also ambulant fans, who cannot stand and where they are not in an elevated position, ruins their view and the enjoyment of the game.

Let me come to a potential legal question.

I am now attempting a different tack to gain solutions, that of disability discrimination, and I am using the continued problems at Crystal Palace as a test case.

If you view the Level Playing Field website you will see complaints going back many years and nothing has been done or changed!

As a simple short-term solution I have suggested to Steve Parish that he net off the two rows in front of the wheelchair area and have it adequately stewarded. No response as yet.

I believe that, as these disabled fans are not afforded unobstructed views that they have paid for and are entitled to, this is clear discrimination under the Equality Act 2010, as the affected clubs cannot claim to have made a “reasonable adjustment” under Section 20 to deal with these genuine concerns.

I consider that Crystal Palace are therefore in breach of the Equality Act 2010 for being fully aware of the problems but not making the required “reasonable adjustment”.

The photographs and videos DAG members have sent me of the away end problems provided the evidence I needed.

I have now formally requested from EHRC, a legal opinion as to whether discrimination has occurred and they have committed to providing this to me.

It could be a landmark decision.

I have also asked them to consider whether the “obstructed view” ambulant seats and “obstructed view” wheelchair positions should be excluded from qualifying for a club’s ASG Table 4 compliance.

Working together our Disabled Advisory Group really can make a difference to overall safety and accessibility and improve the match day enjoyment for our members.

Accessible Stadia Guidelines are being revised and should be published by the end of this year.

This is a once in a decade opportunity to influence the rewrite and input clarification into many areas.

Ruth Hopkins of LPF is compiling ASG2, which DAG, included as one of the consulting associations, will gain access to a draft in late May and will review it in detail and report back to LPF and the Premier League.

There are four particular areas which will affect all disabled supporters where definitions are omitted in the current version and are of vital importance. We can discuss these and any other ASG issues in this afternoon session in more detail and I would welcome your views –

Firstly - What is meant by “elevation”. Currently there is no definition so clubs can ignore this important requirement.

Secondly - For ambulant supporters – there is no definition as to what constitutes “extra legroom” so again many clubs don’t bother providing any designated seats with this facility.

Often these supporters are invited to sit anywhere or have easy access seats on the end of an aisle. Hopeless when fans stand in front of them!

Thirdly - that where stadiums segregate the supporters - home and away - disabled facilities must be available in proportion to the split (PL = 10%). Often the clubs meet the overall facility requirement for their stadium but the split favours the disabled home supporters.

Fourth - The requirement for each category of disabled seating to be 75% elevated must be retained.

May I thank all the DSAs for input to our 71 page Report reviewing all clubs that have played in the Premier League since 2015 against their ASG commitment.

The report was compiled as input into the EHRC's three year strategy review. We await a response from them. I am particularly grateful to Ted Morris for pulling the whole report together. It would not have happened without his efforts.

Out of 31 clubs only 15 were fully compliant at the base level. Very few reported elevated percentages or extra legroom provisions.

Not all the stats were correct – we had non-cooperation from some clubs (particularly those that have dropped into the championship) and incorrect stats on club websites where it was sometimes even difficult to find an Access Statement but the non compliance point was made.

In my correspondence with Richard Masters (PL CEO) I agreed with him that the PL have made great strides in many clubs, but not all, and we disagreed on money “not being a determining factor” in making changes.

The question of lost revenue from the permanent removal of seats has always been part of the conversation. In most cases the construction costs are easily affordable however for every wheelchair position 9 seats are lost plus a ramp can remove another 30 or more seats dependent upon the gradient.

That said, they shouldn't have committed to complying if they had no intention of doing so!

We will continue to push for beneficial changes to make the lives of disabled supporters more enjoyable, that's always been our goal.

I think the next few months will be critical to meeting our objectives.

David Butler - DAG Chair

PL DAG Vice Chairs' review 2022/22

Firstly, I wish to say that the last year has been a great pleasure and an honour, and a privilege to be guided by our chairman, David Butler, I have learned so much from him.

His qualities shine through and his knowledge of issues affecting disabled football supporters are something that we could and should all learn from.

ASG

Earlier this year David tasked me with compiling information on all of our club's compliance with the Accessible Stadia Guidelines, this was eye opening, disappointing and to be honest quite saddening.

Premier clubs 'pledged' that they would be compliant with the ASG by 2017, sadly as most of you are aware this never happened. Because of this lack of compliance so many of our disabled supporters do not have a satisfactory match day experience. The issues that have been raised recently concerning ambulant seating/standing at Stamford Bridge only go to enforce the lack of compliance and the work that needs to take place.

We have an obligation as chairs of our respective DSA's to engage with our clubs to get them compliant if we are to ensure that the disabled supporters that we represent are treated with equality and fairness. The guidelines are there for that purpose, but some clubs are not being challenged.

We have so much work to do as the report clearly shows.

DAG

I believe that the DAG is a powerful group. Combined we speak for thousands disabled supporters. To be a force for compliance and change takes unity, it is this unity that provides the strength.

My hope is that we can unite and ensure that all of our club's disabled supporters are treated equally at every ground that they visit, irrespective of the size of the club or the size of its fanbase.

My advice would be to always seek David's advice and expertise, I have witnessed the difference it makes when his intervention is sought.

My review is brief as most topics have been covered in David's annual report.

It is a massive year ahead for disabled football supporters, let us take the opportunity to unite and ensure that David's goals are met. I will give everything to achieve that and ask for everyone to take up the mantle.

Ted Morris DAG Vice Chair

DAG Mission Statement

As David had circulated this document beforehand, he noted that it appeared to be fully accepted as agreed objectives and the way forward.

We have, on numerous occasions, made the point that as there appears to be no other organisation other than ourselves challenging clubs over ASG non compliance.

DAG would therefore support the Independent Football Regulator envisaged by Tracey Crouch MP but only if it has sufficient powers to challenge and enforce change upon clubs.

Peter Kay - Reponse to our non compliance review

Peter was unable to join us but confirmed that the PL had commissioned a detailed ASG Club Update Survey to which clubs have until 22nd April to complete.

Hopefully the results will be made available to us.

Both Permitted Standing and Revision of ASGs were subject of a [Power Point presentation](#) by David -

Personal note: It was quite emotional to return to the Olympic Stadium as it was called then, after ten years since I drove the 12 ton Orary (the fiery eye of the storm) in the Paralympics Opening Ceremony so please excuse the first three slides as I couldn't resist - David

Permitted Standing discussions

Controlling obstructed views and anti-social behaviour.

There was general agreement at our meeting that there should be far less reliance upon agency stewards, often young and inexperienced, and the key to control is for the continuity that comes from employing stewards directly and then training them adequately for the long term. That is a generality but more specifically it should be introduced in the areas occupied by vulnerable supporters.

We believe in these areas it is a question of safety, as regular stewards would have an understanding of the capabilities of the disabled fans in their care, valuable in the case of any kind of emergency.

Stewarding has to be the key to taking back control.

David asked all DSA's to continue to report on permitted standing issues with photos and videos where possible and we will continue to input our experiences to SGSA. The original short questionnaire is available on this website - [Click here](#)

Revision of ASGs

David produced a power point presentation to highlight the main areas of concern that need rectifying and clarifying as mentioned in his Chair's report.

Given the size and complexity of the revision document David suggested that a small sub committee be formed to review the draft in detail.

Andy Mather volunteered to be a member.



AOB Joanne gave an update of the improvements at Villa Park.

"The changing place has now been installed in the trinity road stand. The away wheelchair platform was installed with some problems being that the wheelchair platform was not gated off which caused problems with supporters walking in front of the wheelchair fans and been open to crowd surging.

I addressed the problems with the club and there are now gates in place either side and nobody is permitted to walk in that area. They have also netted off the front row so that no one can come into the wheelchair area. We have three new disabled toilets that have been built in the away end.

In the closed season we will be installing a low-level access counter and phase 2 of the elevated platform will be put in place giving an additional fifteen wheelchair places."

David thanked Joanne for her continued efforts on behalf of away fans visiting Villa Park, these changes will make a visit much safer and more enjoyable than in the past.

Meeting closed at 4pm and a tour of the disabled areas of the London stadium followed.

