



RED & WHITE ARMY

THE INDEPENDENT VOICE FOR ALL SUNDERLAND SUPPORTERS

Attendees	<p>Elected Interim Representatives</p> <p>Andrew Hird (AH) Chairperson Jane Hughes (JH) Vice Chair Michael McAllister (MM) Vice Chair Cath Reid (CR) Secretary David Rose (DR) Policy co-ordinator</p> <p>Co-opted Representatives</p> <p>Martyn McFadyen A Love Supreme Paul Nelson LGBTQ Stephen Goldsmith Wise Men Say</p>
	<p>Tuesday 3 October 2017</p>
Venue	<p>The Peacock, Sunderland 18:30</p>

Introductions

AH opened the meeting thanking the staff and management of The Peacock for providing the accommodation, to social media platforms – A Love Supreme, Roker Report, Ready to Go, Wise Men Say for their support and promoting of the group and to you, our members. Over 2,000 have signed up in 12 days.

AH introduced Interim and co-opted representatives to the meeting.

AH and DR explained Red & White Army (RAWA) is a fully democratic, inclusive and independent supporters group which aims to give a voice to all Sunderland Supporters which was created by a group of like-minded supporters who saw a disconnect between SAFC and supporters dwindling attendances not only due to relegation but also a result of apathy from supporters.

RAWA is not here to replicate existing groups, we have a social media presence where we feel we can get a wider section of supporter opinions. AH acknowledged the good work carried out by existing groups.

MM advised RAWA is not a reactionary group, we had plans to set this up whether we were top or bottom of the league. It has been a work in progress since the end of last season.

In response to a question about whether we will have actually have influence DR advised as our membership is now 2,000 strong in 12 days, we already have some leverage.

Aims and Structure of RAWA

DR advised he is Deputy CEO of the Football Supporters Federation (FSF). He gave a background of his involvement with the FSF including fighting bubble matches, the capping of Premier League away ticketing at £30 (unfortunately Sunderland only got to enjoy this for one season!). He has vast experience of meeting with the FA, The Premier League and The EFL. He explained he would be drawing on this experience to support and advise RAWA.



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DR explained all football clubs must meet a minimum of twice a year with fan groups, these groups shouldn't be handpicked. In the national structured dialogue meetings with the Premier League last year (which the FSF arrange) only three clubs didn't have a highly visible, independent, democratic and representative supporters' organisation; Southampton, Middlesbrough and Sunderland.

DR advised the ethos of the group is to be fully independent democratic organisation to represent fans, the group is independent of SAFC. We want the views and concerns of all fans, this can be provided direct to RAWA via Facebook page, website, twitter and Instagram, additionally an email address is shortly to be issued to our members, keep a watch in your emails.

DR was asked if there are any other independent groups in the UK? He responded yes, FSF has over 300 supporter organisation as members in England and Wales, although not all set up as RAWA. We're fairly unique in that we have co-opted members in attempt to be as representative of our fanbase as possible. DR has experience of other supporter groups and their engagement with their clubs that we can learn from.

Communication

DR explained a group of supporters contacted him to discuss their thoughts and concerns, in a bid to gather thoughts across social media, an invite to a steering meeting was extended to A Love Supreme, Wise Men Say, Roker Report and representatives from other groups. When setting up the group an interim committee was formed, this will remain until our first AGM.

A discussion took place on communication from SAFC, AH gave an example whereby at the end of last season, the owner promised to detail his plan going forward, to date, the owner has not shared this with supporters. This is a total lack of transparency from SAFC. It is the intention of RAWA to open and transparent in our meetings as well as in our communication with SAFC, minutes; feedback will be issued to our members as quickly as possible.

As it is the intention to represent fans of all ages and groups it is important to have a co-opted representative from our wide fan base. If you would like to represent a fan group, please contact a member of the RAWA interim committee. Looking at existing entities are you happy with the list provided? It was acknowledged that Senior citizens has been omitted from the list, RAWA will look to cover this.

AH confirmed our position doesn't necessarily have to be against SAFC. In the past communication from SAFC has been poor, we can assist with this by relaying messages to supporters in the way other groups are restricted.

AH stated RAWA will have a diplomatic but firm approach.

Questions from the floor

Stephen: Who do RAWA intend to meet with from SAFC, will it be hierarchy or senior management?

AH responded we would like to meet with the owner and/or CEO, a formal request has been submitted to SAFC. AH confirmed Sophie Ashcroft from Sunderland PR department has since contacted RAWA. Further details will be released shortly.



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John Ainsworth raised a number of concerns regarding the connection between SAFC and The City of Sunderland; for decades. The City of Sunderland has been integral to SAFC; this now appears different. JA advised it is important future discussions be held between SAFC, The City of Sunderland council and supporters.

Rebecca – Sunderland: “What makes you different to any other group that meets with the club?”

AH advised we are different to existing groups as we have a wider reach, are democratic, with representatives from a wide range of supporters. All questions put to SAFC and responses will be published in a timely manner. He confirmed the club are building bridges with Sunderland City council in the background, but not always sharing this information with fans. It is important that there is interaction from existing groups, JH confirmed she, CR and JG will represent the BLC.

Paul – Ryhope: At the start of your journey how do you see yourself being everything to everyone? There is a lot of online negativity, if going in that aggressive you won't get anywhere. A joint response by DR, AH and MM confirmed, RAWA will not relay messages and concerns by being rude or aggressive. There is a fine line to take to be credible, do too much and the club will 'shut up' and not engage with the group. It is a fine line to walk, we'll look for common ground for both the club and fans. We might start off by getting little “wins “ but this won't be at the expense of bigger issues like club governance and communication etc.

In response to some negative comments about RAWA on social media, an open invitation was issued on social media inviting anyone to come to the meeting. RAWA does not want to fall into the trap of being an online “talking-shop” but recognises the importance of such platforms and will use them to provide updates on progress to the membership and wider fanbase.

Michael from Seaham: Wanting engagement with the club is great, don't want to run before you can walk. Going forward, can we get someone from the club to come along to future meetings? AH & DR responded: We have to be careful, Chris Waters does a hell of a job, there is a possibility of Chris attending but we need to err on the side of caution, if club came to meetings would we remain independent? It is something to look at, maybe invite a speaker from the club; this is something we will discuss and consider as the group develops.

Ryan - Sunderland: Is there any chance of an ex-player on board with RAWA? MM responded this is something we can look at, watch this space.

Matthew – Seaham: People are sick and want to see something straight away. For example, communication of club, 20th celebration, which was a disaster. David Moyes is staying and he's gone. AH good point and thank you Matthew. We need people like yourself to raise concerns and let the club know your feelings. On Celtic attendance - why didn't club publish attendance?

John: I'm very sympathetic and want you to be a success. Problem for you and all of us is; how do you hold the club accountable? DR responded -by meeting with the club and being visible and transparent in our meetings. Everyone will want to know what was asked of the club and the answers received. If we have not received answers from the club, RAWA will publish this.

AH confirmed there is a lot of negativity with the club on various social media. RAWA will shortly issue an email to members providing an email point of contact, all emails will be read, logged and grouped together. We will issue key notes and action points to club, if there is no response from club, you guys will know.



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Sorry “name unknown” – York: The PR of the club is a laughing stock. Are the PR department aware we are a laughing stock around the country? They don’t seem to understand; the image being portrayed is breaking my heart. What can be done? DR responded by thanking him for such passionate feedback and agreed that it feels as if the club has lost its soul.

Kenny – Ryhope: The owner doesn’t attend games; board meetings are held in London. The manager has said he doesn’t speak to the owner, all dealings are with the CEO. You look at big clubs like Leeds and Coventry and what has happened to them. It feels as if the owner has fallen out with his toys. Without the owner selling we are in trouble. AH responded regardless of who the owner is, RAWA still want to be here and long into the future.

Hayley – Sunderland: I’m really happy that LGBTQ have been included. I would like to see representation for Sunderland Ladies. Hayley will speak to a member of RAWA after the meeting.

Agenda items for discussion with SAFC

A discussion took place involving members of RAWA committee and attendees, the aim to obtain the views and concerns of those present, highlighting issues they wish to discuss with SAFC. The following list was identified.

Communication – All present supporters feel there is a lack of communication from the club to fans. We want the club to be more honest with all fans.

What is the strategy of the club: Is the owner still selling SAFC, or is he stabilizing the club? What is the owners vision for the future/ Spending £1.5 million is not sending a clear message of commitment? Moving forward. Why was a striker not brought in before the end of the season? DR said that a supporters group must be a bit careful about getting too involved in on-the-pitch matters. Whilst it’s glaringly obvious we need a striker, longer term, supporter have varying thoughts on style of play, formation and individual players. It can become a distraction from things that can be more directly influenced and almost impossible to represent the variance of views.

Club Governance – Who holds the board accountable? Is there a Business Plan? What is in place to make sure we don’t make the administrative mistakes in recent history (Alvarez for example)

Atmosphere at Ground – Some feel the since the movement of away fans to the premier concourse, there has been a major dip in atmosphere. If you’re sitting in the east stand, you can hear a little of away supporters and a little of south stand. Jim – Jarrow and JH confirmed this has been raised at the BLC meeting and has been confirmed by the Safety Officer since moving the away fans there has been a significant decrease in arrests and trouble.

Fans away from home: It was acknowledged fans away from home have generated a brilliant atmosphere. At home cup games in the early rounds why do SAFC open the premier concourse? It would help to create a better atmosphere by moving all supporters to the lower bowl.

Rewards: Will the club look to give a reward to those supporters who have held a season ticket consistently since the stadium opened? The meeting expressed they are happy for SAFC to continue to provide reduced tickets to schools as this is our future generation of supporters. It was also acknowledged that SAFC advise they have stopped free tickets, yet free tickets are still provided to Sunderland University.

Scouting: Who are the scouts at Sunderland? Why have they not unearthed any gems.? They need to be thinking outside of the box, getting value for money and going back to basics. How many scouts are there at Sunderland? It’s alleged SAFC have 30 while big clubs have up to 300.



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Music Festivals: It was the opinion of those present the various music festivals put Sunderland on the map and showed Sunderland as a centerpiece. It was also thought with Sunderland being nominated as City of Culture to hold music festivals would benefit both the club and the city.

Fans Zone: The fans zone over the past couple of years has been very popular and received positive feedback from both home and away supporters. With the closure of the fan zone in the previous format, the general feeling of those present is SAFC have taken a backward step in match day experience.

AH thanked everyone for their input tonight, RAWA now have a list of concerns supporters have and will continue to develop this through further interaction with members. RAWA will meet as a committee to discuss the issues we initially want to put to the club. As previously mentioned, a dedicated email address will shortly be emailed to our members. Please use this to raise any questions or concerns you have, RAWA will respond to you, but please bear with us, we all have full time jobs and do this in our own time.

On behalf of the interim committee AH thanked everyone for their attendance tonight, to see over 70 people come along to our first meeting is tremendous.

To join the Red and White Army visit www.redandwhitearmy.co.uk