**Chair’s Report**

Obviously the last couple of years have been challenging for us all, in different ways and to varying degrees.

I’m so pleased though at how we, as a Branch, have come together in our own way.

An email sent out in the first lockdown offering help to anyone who needed it was met not actually with any requests for support but by a number of members offering help to anyone that needed it.

Lockdown quizzes, put together by a number of members, were well attended and always a great laugh. Stephen Davison (our COO, not the Branch’s resident daft lad)’s presence at one of our online events was very welcome and attended by a good amount of members.

Post lockdown away matches have been busier than ever, no better evidenced than last week at Cambridge where the Branch got 12 men out to play football against some locals in the morning, then retired to the pub pre-match where there must have been c70-80 other Branch members.

I always say in these messages that this Branch is only as strong as its members and the last 24 months have proved we’re still a joined-up, supportive, loyal group of mates who all happen to be Sunderland fans.

On the pitch there’s been little to shout about, even the Papa John’s final win felt a little hollow, but off it our membership continues to make me proud.

Matt Woolston, Chair

**Secretary’s Report**

Not unsurprisingly, since the last AGM, we have only had 2 Committee meetings. Hopefully things will follow a more normal course of events in the period to the next Annual General Meeting.

We have three Committee members up for re-election at this AGM – Matt Woolston, Helen Wright and Richie Cockton, all of whom are willing to re-stand for election

Richie Cockton, Secretary

**Membership Secretary’s Report**

Our current membership stands at 310 members (477 if linked and family members are included). This is a slight increase on the figure of 458 reported at our last AGM September 2019.

The lack of activity in 2020 caused by the Covid-19 pandemic meant that we understandably only attracted six new members! However with our relative good form in the league this season plus a great run so far in the Carabao Cup there has been a surge in new members joining. In fact 50 have joined the branch since the summer months.

Due to the pandemic the Committee decided to halve renewal rates for existing branch members for 2021 renewals. These have been reset to normal now that we are able to attend matches.

Some members include a donation to the branch when joining or renewing and so this year we have received a generous £993.00 in donations.

The introduction of the membermojo online membership and payments system has greatly eased the burden of handling payments for new and renewing members. It has also made things easier for any SAFC fan wishing to join the Branch via our website. The only problem with the system is if members pay by BACS, standing order or cheque (which many of our older members tend to do) then I need to manually acknowledge payment receipt on membermojo.

Bernie Hutchinson, Membership Secretary

**Travel /Ticketing report**

Generally demand has remained strong or even increased with games at QPR (58), Cambridge (48) and Arsenal (99) attracting more applicants than any in the previous 3 seasons.

In 2019 when Donald and Methven were running things, the Branches were told that we needed to provide Season Card numbers and Black Cats points for all of our members applying for tickets. We appealed this due to our location and it was agreed that we wouldn’t need to do this.

This still appears to be the case but we haven’t really had anything formally communicated with us by the club. I have been emailing applications to Lesley Campbell, Chris Waters and the ticket office email address and then receiving a call back to take payment.

My regular contact, Vicki Gough, left the Club at the end of last season and I have been speaking with different members of the ticket office staff each time.

All dealings with the club have been extremely good and aside from some tickets taking a long time to arrive (this could be the ticket office being slow or it could be the Royal Mail being slow) everything has run relatively smoothly.

We’ve had a couple of instances of missing out on tickets. For Rotherham, despite only wanting 7 tickets, we left it too late to apply and the game had sold out. At the time of writing I have only been given 40 tickets for Arsenal but have been advised to apply again in week commencing 29 November for the remaining 59.

Deadlines have been extremely tight with, I suspect, all clubs at League 1 level struggling resource wise and earlier in the season varying allocations due to stricter safety (Covid related) considerations.

Aidan and I have been toying with the idea of introducing a form / automated process to apply for tickets although this is in its infancy. Currently, it’s very difficult for Aidan to reconcile payments with names and tickets in the bank statement.

An appeal to members: it’s very helpful if you can provide postal addresses, put your name and the match in your BACS payment, and stick within deadlines I give in my email. We can only purchase one ticket per London branch membership. And don’t forget the 75p postage fee as well please! For the 99 Arsenal applicants – they were from 48 different people so that’s a lot of 75 pences!

Andy McIntosh, Travel / Ticketing Officer

**Newsletter Editor’s Report**

It has obviously been more difficult to produce Wear Down South in recent years, thanks to the pandemic and the general apathy down to poor results. With no formal branch travel etc there is little in the way of Branch news to report, so I am dependent on your contributions and my own random rubbish. However a new issue for this season should reach you before Christmas.

I have provided pdf copies of previous issues of the newsletter for the Wear Down South website but whether they are worth including or ignored needs to be agreed.

Thank you as ever for all who have sent in contributions over the last few years – regulars or not – as without input from the Branch members Wear Down South can’t exist.

Eileen Sproates, Newsletter Editor

**Sports Report**

A relatively quiet year on the sports front.

The quiz team hasn’t been active since March 2020, and as of yet has no restart date.

The darts team has also not played a fixture since March 2020, and the 2019/20 season will not be completed. However, as it stands the team are to begin fixtures once again in January, 5 a side with Sunderland competing in division one.

The 6 a side football team were another victim of the March 2020 lockdown and whilst there is nothing concrete as of yet, we are looking to begin again in the New Year.

The pool team had neither league nor cup fixtures last year. This year they reached the semi-final of the APFSCIL pool cup, beating Hearts in the quarters before losing to Southampton 5-4 in a very tight affair that went down to the final frame. They will complete in a 10 team league this year; first fixture yet to be played. It’s worth noting that the first game back was a great evening, the games played in great spirit and really highlighted some of the best things about our supporters club. Members who hadn’t seen each other in well over a year finally getting out and seeing one another. Thanks go out to Jim Minton for keeping it all together and everyone at the Southwark Brewing Company for not only hosting us, but making sure we have top facilities, and decent beer too.

The cricket team report will be given verbally at the AGM.

Andy Jordan, Sports Officer

**Sunderland Ladies**

Members will recall that for a number of years now the London Branch has entered into an annual sponsorship with the Sunderland Ladies team. This initially manifested itself in a board on the perimeter fence at the Hetton ground advertising the Branch. Other means of recognition followed in subsequent years but when the team’s games were moved away from Hetton the board disappeared and has been lost.

At the 2018 Annual General Meeting members agreed to renew the usual £400 sponsorship but I was charged with the responsibility of discussing with the club means by which our involvement could continue to be recognized. As you will be aware the team then suffered a double relegation at the hands of the FA and due to the pandemic the last two seasons were abandoned incomplete, the previously approved £400 remaining unspent.

A recent Committee Meeting considered our forward approach to this aspect of the Branch’s activity and marketing. For reasons of inflation and in recognition of the team’s promotion back to Tier 2 (the FA Women’s Championship) the Committee is recommending to the AGM an increase to £500 per season, with a ceiling of £1000 in the current year to include the previously approved £400. The club has already agreed within this overall sum to replace the advertising board in a prominent location at the Hetton ground.

Ian Todd