



Committee meeting - 01/04/2023

In attendance	Rob Mason, Joanne Youngson, Billy Wright, Chris Tague, Gaz Nash
Apologise	Gordon Armstrong, David Newham

Agenda

Introduction of committee members and apologise.

Journey of branch from formation to how it has grown.

Dedicated Memorial Day

Spreading of ashes

Funding

Future ideas

Action points

Introduction

Joanne delivered a presentation explaining how the branch started and a timeline of events to the present day including:

- 2 pebble painting events
- Remembering by candlelight
- Plaque unveiling
- Fundraising
- Forming as an official group
- Future

Dedicated Memorial Day

All in attendance agree that it is important the club move forward with a dedicated Memorial Day for those who have passed away in a calendar year. Individual applauds during games are increasing which could potentially cause issues for the club as well as families involved.

Issues arising from increased individual applauds:

- Consent – may not have all family in agreement of applause.
- A branch member requested a name on scoreboard but was never responded to – some families appear to have more success than others depending on social media capabilities or people they know who can offer help.
- Other fans becoming unsupportive on the increase of applauds through the game.



Joanne has researched what other clubs do and all agree that the branch we could support the club and making the Memorial Day better for all concerned. This could include involving the travelling supporters to include their recently lost fans. (As Millwall did with us)

A supportive, caring but standard response could be given out to family's requesting applause describing the dedicated Memorial Day and how their loved one will be remembered. We could arrange for the bereavement councillor from Washington Mind and some of our recently bereaved branch members to help with the wording of this.

Suggestions of what club could offer:

- Loved one involved in a minute's applause on a particular date alongside all fellow fans players and club staff who have passed away that year.
- Their name to appear on the scoreboard alongside others.
- Their name to appear in the dedicated Memorial Day match day program.
- Signposting to Club memorial area and explanation of laying pebble in memory of loved ones.
- Signposting to Heaven branch.

Chris suggested a joint public announcement from the club and Heaven branch could be a good way of publicising this as a new way forward in remembering fans as well as players who have died that calendar year.

Spreading of ashes/ Memorial area

Since becoming custodians of the memorial, we have improved the area and continue to maintain it as much as we can with rubbish and cigarette ends removal. The increase in pebbles placed and reports from club security have shown a massive increase in fans visiting the area. The introduction of love bugs for fans to take away has been a comforting addition to all, especially to children.

At present fans are being informed by the club that ashes are to be laid at the memorial area. Our branch has been contacted numerous times regarding this and have repeated what the club are recommending, as this is the only option open to fans. We have had a mixed response; some fans do not feel this an appropriate area specifically due to the amount of rubbish and cigarette ends that it collects. However, with no other option there has been several fans who have chosen to lay ashes of loved ones in the bushes at the back of the memorial.

A recent visit to the memorial with Sunderland's players liaison offers and a 1st team player highlighted how inappropriate we all feel that people are laying ashes in this area. A recent visit to West Brom's memorial area is just one example of how other clubs place and importance of having an appropriate place for ashes. All in attendance agreed we should investigate improving the memorial area further, more room, better seating, and a more appropriate place for ashes.



Funding

Now we have our own bank account we can apply for pots of funding, particularly to fund 2 pebble events per year and an annual candlelight remembrance. Joanne to start looking at possible funding sources.

Additional ideas

Chris asked Rob whether we have much information regarding former players resting places with the view of the branch celebrating or highlighting these with fans being able to visit. Rob does have some information but feels it would need a conversation with families before we publicise graves. This could be a page on our website showing a map of where Sunderland greats are laid to rest, all agreed families would need to give consent first.

Bereavement group

Although the branch signposts to local support groups and the matchday mental health hub it could be that a dedicated group for members would be beneficial.

Action points

1. Arrange to meet with the club to update about the branch and share ideas.
2. All in agreement that memorial area – spreading of ashes should be a priority from this meeting. We need to clarify people are allowed to spread ashes (is it council or club) then can we have permission to improve the area.
3. Ideas and research for a dedicated Memorial Day to be shared with the club.
4. Two painting events and Christmas candlelight remembrance to be planned for next season, these hopefully to be funded by funds raised through bids made.