

WHUST

THE TRUST OF THE FANS

ANNUAL REPORT 2023





WELCOME

West Ham United Supporters' Trust continues to be a strong advocate for Hammers at a national level, providing valuable contributions on the FSA's Premier League Network, which features supporter reps from all clubs.

At our most recent official meeting with the Premier League, WHUST was one of six reps chosen to attend the meeting at which supporter engagement, VAR, fan behaviour post-Covid and fixture scheduling were debated. WHUST was also one of the first groups to flag the problems with crypto in football. Keep up the great work WHUST.

And if you're reading this and are not already a member of your local supporters' organisation, join up and get involved!

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allowing the group to vote)
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WHUST Chair Sue Watson



Welcome to the first annual report of the West Ham United Supporters' Trust (WHUST). This is the first year of our conversion to WHUST and much has happened in that year.

Converting to a trust has grown our influence and broadened our appeal. We have attracted experienced, professional, passionate West Ham supporters to our board. The extensive range of expertise they have brought has enabled us to increase the work we can do for the entire West Ham fan base.

We have subcommittees that focus on key issues – ticketing, women in football, stadium and atmosphere, media and communications and membership. We

also have high-calibre volunteers who work with us through our specialist subcommittees and we thank them too for all their hard work. We are always on the lookout for more volunteers, so if you would like further information, or to work with us, please contact us at info@whust.org

The work of the board and the subcommittees has led to many achievements on behalf of our members and the fanbase. You can read about some of these in this report.

We have worked to build a sensible, professional relationship with the club. We want to be West Ham's critical friend. We have challenged where needed and won some changes as a response.

But we're not hectoring. And we don't complain just for complaining's sake. We are assertive and we get results. The club has positively responded to numerous ideas and suggestions we have made to improve the matchday experience and on other supporter issues. We have represented individual members and achieved positive results for them.

Additionally, we have built working relationships with the stadium owners and operators (LLDC and LS185). All this has led to many successes for individual members and the wider fanbase.

Much of our communication with the club and others is confidential and we are professional and courteous in our approach, so we choose not to publish all of our achievements. Others may protest loudly, but it is often WHUST's quiet diplomacy that has made the gains. We will continue to work in this pragmatic and effective way.

We have also worked with other supporter groups and supported their specific campaigns and events. In April 2022 we supported the Inclusive Irons excellent evening – **50 years, 3 pioneers** – which

focused on West Ham being the first club to play three black players (Clyde Best, Ade Coker and Clive Charles). We will certainly be supporting other, similar events, in the future.

We have also worked with other supporter groups through the **Independent Supporters' Committee** (ISC), where we have met with senior board members of the club as well as heads of ticketing, matchday operations, supporter engagement, disabled supporters and other club employees.

We have been active, on your behalf, on the ISC ticketing sub-committee, the matchday experience sub-committee, on meetings with **Newham Safety Advisory Group** and in how the rich and vibrant history, heritage and identity of our club needs representing.

Additionally, we have linked with other supporter groups not on the ISC around matchday atmosphere and women in football. WHUST will work with all who want to achieve improvements for the fanbase. That is one of our driving principles.

The latest fan engagement publication has stated the club was second to last in the entire English football league system to engage with fans and has done so reluctantly and with often poor and late communication.

The ISC has been less effective than we would have hoped. Clearly this needs to improve and we will continue working to get meaningful consultation and fan representation at West Ham so our views, ideas and concerns can be heard and acted on.

We will be discussing fan representation and engagement, at our members meeting where questions can be asked.

We are aware of a new structure under emerging Premier League fan engagement standards as well as the long anticipated White Paper arising from the Fan Led Review.

This will include expectations around fan engagement set by the independent regulator for English football. WHUST stands ready to fill that role and will do so politely and professionally with commitment and drive.

Our work continues. There is so much still to do, to achieve and to improve for us the loyal fans of our club, West Ham United. We are keen to hear your views, opinions and ideas in anything to do with our club. Contact us at info@whust.org let us know what you think, what you would like to see improve, how you would like our history, heritage and identity represented.

I would like to formally thank the board for all the hard work they have done in improving things for our members over the past year.

It is a privilege to represent you and work on your behalf. Thank you.





Casework

We continue to help our members and fellow supporters with a range of issues. If they matter to you, they matter to us. They include:

TICKETING

Before the start of the season the club tried to implement a policy of digital ticketing only – replacing season ticket cards and insisting tickets were transferred to friends and family digitally. Numerous supporters struggled to use digital tickets. We identified two vulnerable groups who might not have a smartphone or were unable to use one easily – over-65s and disabled supporters. We worked with fellow ISC members – Any Old Irons and the Disabled Supporters Board – and the club agreed to issue season ticket cards to any season ticket holders in these categories. It then agreed to provide season ticket cards on an individual case-by-case basis to any season ticket holder. With problems transferring digital tickets, the ticket office made paper tickets available to all and ended up recommending using the paper version – a complete U-turn.

The club issued European away tickets too late - blamed on foreign police forces - and we had to help individuals get their tickets. Away tickets seemed to go missing in the post far too often. But we also had to chase up the ticketing office late at night, early in the morning and over weekends when the club's own ticket server malfunctioned and the club was unaware many cup match tickets had not been issued just a day before the game.

We repeatedly offer to test-drive new initiatives and help the ticketing office and have drawn up a ticketing manifesto of easily achievable improvements – detailed in [Blowing Bubbles](#) magazine.

STEWARDING

Stewarding issues are one of the most frequent reasons we are contacted. At the London Stadium these have included how searches are conducted, how stewards speak to supporters, where stewards stand, how U16s are stewarded, how stewards in the stands act around fan behaviour and general stewarding concerns.

We have been able to share positive feedback with the club and LS185, which sources the stewards. We have met with LS185 and the club around specific stewarding issues, as well as bringing this up at the Newham Safety Advisory Group. Whilst we have made progress, there is a significant amount of ongoing work on this.

For away games, we have been contacted over numbers of WHUFC stewards and how they monitor and interact around fan behaviour. As requested by members, to help us respond promptly to reported issues, we are re-introducing our Matchday Service provision. Any supporter will be able to contact us via twitter [@whust_whufc](#), email info@whust.org and via **07596 216787**.

MATCHDAY SUPPORTER LIAISON OFFICERS (SLOs)

As part of the expansion of the SLO matchday team, we have attended their briefings and training sessions. As part of this we have provided your perspective on what Junior Hammers might



like and how SLOs could respond in a range of situations that have been raised with us. We have worked with the SLO team leaders on how to approach and interact with us and to provide guidance and information. We have suggested the sort of information fans might like to know. We are pleased to continue to work with SLO leaders and matchday staff to improve this part of matchday experience.

SECURITY AT EUROPEAN GAMES

We have met with [Football Supporters Europe](#) (FSE), club representatives and supporter representatives for several away games to discuss arrangements around stewarding, safety and how to report any concerns WHU supporters may have.

To further help travelling WHU supporters, we have shared how FSE can help. FSE has followed up on issues we have brought to its attention – such as broken toilets; stewards and how they respond to supporter behaviour; and travel to and from away stadia.

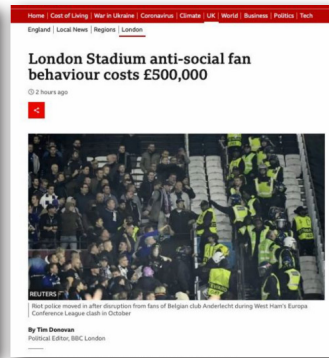
For our European games at the London Stadium, we have met with the Metropolitan Police match commander, the dedicated football officer, club representatives and supporter representatives from visiting clubs. We input into the planning for policing and security. Following the Anderlecht game, we put a range of questions to the Newham Safety Advisory Group, which the Met Police attends. We need to work with those responsible for our safety, to make sure what happened that night is never repeated.

TRAVEL ARRANGEMENTS WHEN MATCHES MOVED

Changes to match fixtures are unwelcome. However, for some of our supporters and members, it also affects pre-booked travel arrangements and has a financial impact. We have approached train operators and applied pressure around compensation.

Additionally, we have worked with the FSA to explore options to compensation. When meeting the Premier League we have raised the impact of the changes and gained an assurance they will work to minimise the number of changes. When the West Ham vs Chelsea game was within five days of being played with no confirmation of KO time, we produced a joint letter with Chelsea Supporters' Trust laying out the impact on both sets of supporters. The time was announced within 24 hours of our letter.

We have formally requested additional club coaches for anti-social timed games to enable the maximum number of us to attend games. The latest request is for the rearranged Newcastle game, ▶



where there is a late KO but the last train home leaves Newcastle at 7.35pm. We will continue to work where rearranged matches impact us to get the best deal possible.

MASCOT QUESTIONS

The suspension of mascots during Covid lockdowns has led to several issues for those who have paid for the experience for their children. Ensuring the club fulfils the opportunity as mascots return as part of the matchday experience for our youngest Hammers has been a priority. Those we have worked with are due to have their mascot opportunity honoured. We are genuinely pleased to have been part of making this happen.

CLUB CASH

After being approached by members, we worked with the Independent Supporters Committee to get an extension on when Club Cash could be claimed. Originally it was June but we got it extended to the end of August. We will remind the club to clarify the use-by date for those who have Club Cash and give plenty of notice. Effective and timely communications will be another focus here.

SAFE DROP-OFFS

We were approached by a number of our female members who explained they didn't feel safe when club coaches dropped them off at the London Stadium. This was a particular problem when coaches returned in the early hours of the morning and compounded if returning from a late KO.

Our members said the area around the London Stadium and any possible routes to get home left them feeling vulnerable and on many occasions unsafe. We requested safe pick up/drop-off points and worked with the club to identify two possible options. We were pleased to see the club instigate this. We will continue to monitor how this is going and appreciate feedback.

CHAMPIONS STONES

A request we often get is: "Where is my stone?" We asked the club to produce maps detailing where individual stones can be found and link these maps to the fan section on the [WHUFC website](#).

We have raised the need for cleaning and maintenance for individual stones. We have ensured bins and programme sellers are not placed on the Champions Stones. These stones represent our loved ones and commemorate someone important to us, so must be treated with respect. We continue to work with the club on a maintenance programme and will monitor how this goes. We have worked with the club to ensure those who have bought stones are kept up to

date with how the laying is progressing. Where necessary we have asked the club to update you.

REPUTATIONAL PROTECTION

There have been several incidents where we have stepped up when West Ham fans have been unfairly labelled or misrepresented. The latest was when the [BBC called us "hooligans"](#). This was picked up by numerous online newspapers and repeated. We think this is wrong and took action. As a result, the story was amended and the word "hooligan" dropped and we were able to get a comment around the Anderlecht impact into the articles.

West Ham supporters are passionate, loud, loyal and proud – but we are not hooligans, nor dangerous, and WHUST will challenge anyone who promotes this image of us.

CATERING

WHUST has been tracking the prices of food and drink as part of monitoring the concession agreement. At the start of this season, we raised the overpricing with the club and Delaware North during the first game. This was followed by the Boycott the Bars campaign. We applied pressure to bring the prices down. We were pleased to see the club was clear around possible legal routes and understand this is still under consideration.

The prices have come down but we continue to push for cheaper options and have put forward a range of suggestions – we have requested a meeting with Delaware North to discuss these. We will be part of discussions ahead of next season to ensure the eye-watering price hikes of this season are not repeated next season.

We have published a comprehensive list of [places and prices in Hackney Wick](#) that offer alternatives to the Island.

STRATFORD STATION

Stratford Station is due to have two new entrances built. Whilst this is planned to allow easier access, as the work is being done it may have an impact on match going supporters. We have been monitoring the planning and are in dialogue with Newham Safety Advisory Group, TFL and the club around this.

We will update our members as soon as we have more information and will work with the club to ensure early and effective communication on how this will impact us.

We are proud to have helped our fellow West Ham United supporters and will always work to achieve best outcomes for you.



Community event proposal

The WHUST steering committee, in association with the FSA, considered how it would be possible to remove the barriers felt by some local communities to supporting West Ham.

An outline plan for an event to begin the process was discussed with various

organisations, including Show Racism the Red Card, Kick It Out, Inclusive Irons, Any Old Irons, Pride of Irons, as well as the West Ham United Foundation.

Following their suggestions, and with their support, Jake Heath from West Ham United was approached to gain support.

At a meeting with Jake and two other club representatives, it was clear that the club was wary of supporting the proposal, fearing that it would be used as a means of criticising the club.

Attempts have continued to engage the club, with little success to date.



West Ham supporters in the safe standing area at Brentford

Safe standing at London Stadium

WHUST agrees with the [Football Supporters' Association](#) (FSA) that supporters should have a choice whether to stand safely at games or to sit. Many of us remember standing to cheer our team on, remember that feeling, remember the experience and what it meant to us and want that option again.

WHUST followed the safe standing pilot at several football clubs, visiting them and discussing how this had enhanced supporter experience. We spoke to FSA representatives, senior staff at West Ham United and Newham Safety Advisory Group.

The Club informed us they are in principle, in favour of safe standing at the London Stadium. We think this is good news and starts the process of bringing safe standing to the London Stadium.

We also received frequent requests from members to pursue safe standing at the London Stadium. So we put out a supporter survey to gauge the wider interest in having this option at the London Stadium.

The results were clear – 81.83% strongly agreed with the statement 'I am in favour of the introduction of safe standing at the London Stadium' and 9.63% agreed. That means 91.46% of respondents indicated they are in favour of safe standing at the London Stadium.

OVERWHELMINGLY POSITIVE RESPONSE

The most popular stands to install safe standing in are the Bobby Moore Lower (81.14%) and Sir Trevor Brooking Lower (68.08%). The stands, which are behind both goals, are seen as the favoured options, with numerous respondents stating that this will add to the atmosphere during games.

There is indication that some supporters would look to relocate to a safe standing area (28.33%), with 27.97% relocating depending on price, areas of the ground, ability to be with family/friends.

This is a further aspect we will look at as we work with the club and stadium owners (LLDC) and operators (LS185). Any issues with potential relocation, stand redesign, communications, stewarding, considerations for accessible supporters and other issues that may arise will need to be worked through carefully and WHUST will expect to be involved at every step of the way.

You clearly told us you feel safe standing will add to the atmosphere, the chanting and potential territorial advantage. You explained how this would enhance safety at games, many replies emphasised how football supporters have stood in the past and they see that as part of football culture.

Generally the responses were that we want safe standing at the London Stadium and want it as soon as possible. We wrote more about this in [Blowing Bubbles](#).

We have heard you and have started working to bring the option of safe standing to the London Stadium, possibly extending it into the spaces behind the lower stands where the big screens are currently located.

We want the option to stand and chant, sing and celebrate when those goals go in. The option to add to the atmosphere, the option to continue the football tradition of standing to watch and experience our games should be part of our matchday at the London Stadium. We will update you as this work proceeds.

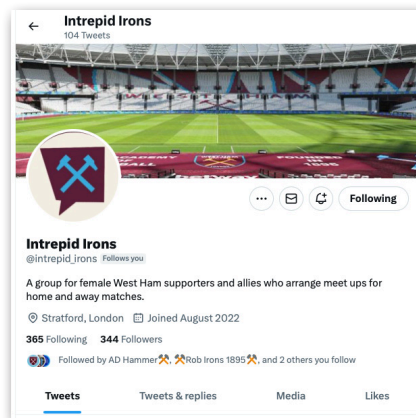


Intrepid Irons

As the profile of women at the game has continued to grow, we have started to establish a viable women's supporters group to connect and support the growing number of women who attend games.

With the support and guidance of Fulham Lilies, Villa Belles, Women of Watford and Pride of Irons' co-chair, Intrepid Irons was born. You can find us on Twitter and Instagram at [@intrepid_iron](#)s

As a supporters group we have met with representatives from the FSA to discuss issues on stewarding and antisocial behaviour at games to ensure all women feel safe at games. In response to that, the trust has liaised with the club on ways to improve matchday experiences through better training for stewards and SLOs.



Further to this, we would like develop work with [Her Game Too](#) to promote an environment where women and girls of all ages feel confident to share their opinion about football both online and in real life without the fear of sexist abuse.

If you would like to find out more about this please use [this link](#).

Our next step is to establish a committee to discuss principles and aims for like-minded female supporters (and allies) to work alongside the club to fulfill agreed objectives from the committee.

If you feel that you would like to be part of this then please email us at intrepid_iron@whust.org

Focus on VAR

West Ham United Supporters' Trust punches above its weight on VAR.

When the Football Supporters' Association (FSA) met with referees' body the [Professional Game Match Officials Limited](#) (PGMOL), WHUST chair Sue Watson was there too.

The referees' side had Select Group director Adam Gale-Watts, plus recently retired refs Jon Moss and Martin Atkinson.

Two West Ham VAR decisions topped the agenda.

Jarred Bowen's alleged foul on Chelsea's goalkeeper Edouard Mendy was one. The referees admitted the decision was wrong and this is now being used as an example of how not to do it when training VAR assistants.

The second incident was the treatment of an alleged handball in West Ham's match



against Fulham. There was a Twitter storm afterwards because West Ham's second goal was awarded despite an accidental handball when Antonio went to chest down the ball.

The referees explained it had not resulted in a goal-scoring advantage. In fact, the ball was played by two Fulham players, including the keeper, before Antonio scored.

Seven incidents this season are being used to better train VAR officials. They are

selected by a Key Match Incidents Panel and then discussed by a group of referees, the Premier League and "independents" including several former players. WHUST wants fans to be involved.

A big problem identified by the fan reps was the lack of communication with supporters. The referees accepted this and will explore ways to improve it.

● Read more on VAR in the [Blowing Bubbles](#) article.



Terrace Talk

One of the most powerful things in football is how it makes you feel and what it brings to your life. We have been told football is “a release”, “has highs and lows”, “reminds me of great times with my dad” and so many other things. No-one can doubt the power, the range of emotions football can bring.

We also agree with the Football Supporters’ Association view: “One of the many lessons learned from the pandemic and our collective experience of lockdowns was a greater appreciation of the value that the matchday and our social interactions around it can have on our mental health.”

Recognising the positive role OF football in supporting good mental health, we’ve been working to bring #TerraceTalk to our club.

In 2021 the FSA launched #TerraceTalk, a supporter-led mental health initiative, which included a series of events from panel discussions to training for FSA staff and volunteers, and the sharing of resources with supporter groups.

The aim is to encourage open and honest conversations about mental health and encourage supporters who need them to seek out mental health support services. A central theme of #TerraceTalk is to remember and recognise the value that the social aspects of the matchday routine provide to fans up and down the country.



We have spoken with [James’ Place](#) and formed a partnership to move #TerraceTalk forward.

In September 2022 West Ham partnered with [R;pple](#), a suicide prevention charity set up by a West Ham fan after the death of her brother. We are looking to discuss how we can link with this charity too, to promote both charities as part of our work.

We are looking to signpost supporters to a range of charities that offer different kinds of help.

Football can bring so much that is positive, including to our mental health, however there are times all of us need some support. This is where signposting and #TerraceTalk will come in.

We will update you as this work progresses.



Broadcasting and late fixture changes

The past couple of seasons have seen barely a Saturday match at the London Stadium, let alone one at 3pm.

That’s partly down to the broadcasters demanding changes. WHUST broadcasting rep Mark Inskipp works with the Football Supporters’ Association in meetings with the broadcasters and Premier League.

Seven different TV packages are distributed between the three broadcasters. And there are minimum and maximum times each broadcaster can show an individual team (forcing West Ham fans to subscribe to all

three packages to view all matches). Some broadcasters’ choices are designed to undermine a rival’s reputation.

Broadcasters also save some picks for later in the season when they work out which matches are going to be crucial at the top or bottom of the PL.

Sky wants to be sure it broadcasts the match that determines the league champions, for example.

But they also check if a broadcaster has used up its quota with individual clubs. Sky may use a much lower pick for a decent match as they know BT has already maxed out on a club so they can’t choose that match as their second pick.

Then the police and councils chip in. The broadcasters don’t want two televised games at the same time. But the police will argue that a later KO for a particular match poses a greater risk or a policing problem and effectively prohibit it.

The Chelsea v West Ham game was only announced as a 3pm Saturday kick-off after the broadcasters gave up trying to find a unique slot.

This was just a few days before the game. WHUST is demanding changes to the next broadcasting rights tender document to stop these things happening.

● Read more on broadcasting in the [Blowing Bubbles](#) article.



Independent Supporters' Committee

Until 2021, West Ham was one of just two football clubs not to engage directly with an independent fan committee, (the other was Hull). The [Independent Supporters' Committee](#) (ISC) was set up by supporters with the help, advice and guidance of the Football Supporters' Association.

However, the ISC is often not consulted in a timely manner, being informed of club decisions after they have been taken.

Despite the pitfalls of the ISC and its limited scope, WHUST, along with most

other supporter groups who are members, tries to make it work as best we can. Most members want to work in a collegiate way, to compromise where necessary and to focus on areas of consensus.

For a range of reasons, the ISC is not working well. ISC member groups and the club must reflect on why the ISC doesn't work and commit to collaborating for the benefit of all fans.

Supporters deserve to have representation that works to bring real improvements, deals

with problems that arise and pulls in the same direction.

WHUST's view is that the ISC cannot continue in its current form. WHUST keenly awaits the White Paper and the legislation that will lead to independent supporter representation that can impact decisions made at our club.

We will be calling a general meeting in 2023 to discuss, among other things, our position on meaningful fan engagement at West Ham.



House of Lords, November 2022, sat at the table facing from left: Football Supporters Association CEO Kevin Miles, Tracey Crouch MP, FSA chair Malcolm Clarke, sports minister Stuart Andrew, APPG for Football Supporters' chairman Clive Betts MP, WHUST chair Sue Watson, WHUST's Chris Wheal, House of Lords adviser Chris Waterman

PHOTOGRAPH: FSA

Progress on the Fan Led Review

It's been a busy year for the trust politically. We've been part of the Football Supporters' Association (FSA) team keeping up pressure on the government to implement the [Fan Led Review](#) (FLR).

We have been part of a small working group of fans with experience of government drawn from clubs around the country and from different parts of the football pyramid.

Throughout the year, this FSA group has worked with the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) to offer insight, help and support as we pressed for the government to set up an Independent Regulator for English Football (IREF).

It's been challenging. As everyone knows, there has been unprecedented political instability. We've had three prime ministers

leading three governments. We've had two secretaries of state and two ministers for sport. Our chair, Sue Watson, attended the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Football's event in the House of Lords, when Tracey Crouch reiterated her demands for action and Sports Minister Stuart Andrew said it was his top priority.

Through all this uncertainty, the FSA group has worked to ensure the FLR continues to get priority within government and to help shape and inform next steps.

The new government has now said it will implement the FLR. That's excellent news. There's more to do but we can expect a White Paper on IREF in February this year. We'll continue to work with the FSA and others to press for the legislation needed to make IREF a reality to be introduced as soon as possible.