

WE
are
the
GAME

FOOTBALL SUPPORTERS' CHARTER



manifesto



WE ARE THE GAME

A CHARTER FOR FOOTBALL FANS

‘The scorn of many conservative intellectuals comes from their belief that soccer-worship is exactly the religion people deserve. Possessed by soccer, the proles think with their feet, which is the only way they can think, and through such primitive ecstasy they fulfil their dreams. The animal instinct overtakes human reason, ignorance crushes culture, and the riff-raff get what they want.

In contrast, many leftist intellectuals denigrate soccer because it castrates the masses and derails their revolutionary ardour. Bread and circus, circuses without the bread: hypnotised by the ball, which exercises a perverse fascination, workers’ consciousness becomes atrophied and they let themselves be led about like sheep by their class enemies.’

Eduardo Galeano – Football in Sun and Shadow.

‘It is true that football is the most important of life’s unimportant things.’

Arigo Sacchi.

THE CHARTER'S DEMANDS

1 FANS' RIGHT TO PARTICIPATE IN THE RUNNING OF THEIR CLUBS MUST BE ENSHRINED IN LEGISLATION

2 END THE FINANCIAL EXPLOITATION OF SUPPORTERS

3 RESTORE STANDING AREAS WITH SIGNIFICANTLY REDUCED TICKET PRICES

4 MAKE IT IMPOSSIBLE FOR LARGE MONEYED CLUBS TO DOMINATE; SHARE THE WEALTH AND ENSURE THE GAME STAYS COMPETITIVE

5 SAFETY: CLUBS TAKE DIRECT RESPONSIBILITY FOR ALL ASPECTS OF FAN SAFETY INCLUDING SAFETY FROM THE ABUSES OF RACISM, SECTARIANISM AND HOOLIGANISM

6 INSTIGATE A ROOT-AND-BRANCH INVESTIGATION OF THE GAME'S FINANCES, INCLUDING WHY TICKET PRICES ARE SO HIGH

7 INSTIGATE AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE OPTIMAL OWNERSHIP MODELS FOR CLUBS

8 FIXTURE TIMINGS: END THE CAPITULATION TO TELEVISION



Football – Why it Matters

Sacchi has a point, but not the full three available for a win. Football matters a lot, and is by no means unimportant: apart from the passion and devotion felt by so many for the game in general, not just their own club, it is hugely consequential economically.

In February 2022, The Times announced that the Premier League's income from broadcasting deals will see English soccer's top flight break the £10 billion barrier over the subsequent three seasons.

<https://www.sportspromedia.com/news/report-premier-league-tv-rights-revenue-to-pass-uk10bn-over-next-three-years/>

The report also said that for the first time the league's overseas broadcast partnerships will be worth more than the domestic rights deals. **International deals will be worth £5.3 billion, up 30 per cent, with domestic deals bringing in £5.1 billion, other commercial partnerships taking the total to £10.5 billion.**

In 2019 a Visit Britain Survey showed that **1.5 million inbound visitors to the UK went to a live football match in 2019, nearly a quarter of visitors.** The average expenditure per visit for football spectators in 2019 was £909, 31% higher than the average UK visitor (£696).

<https://www.visitbritain.org/inbound-football-tourism-research>

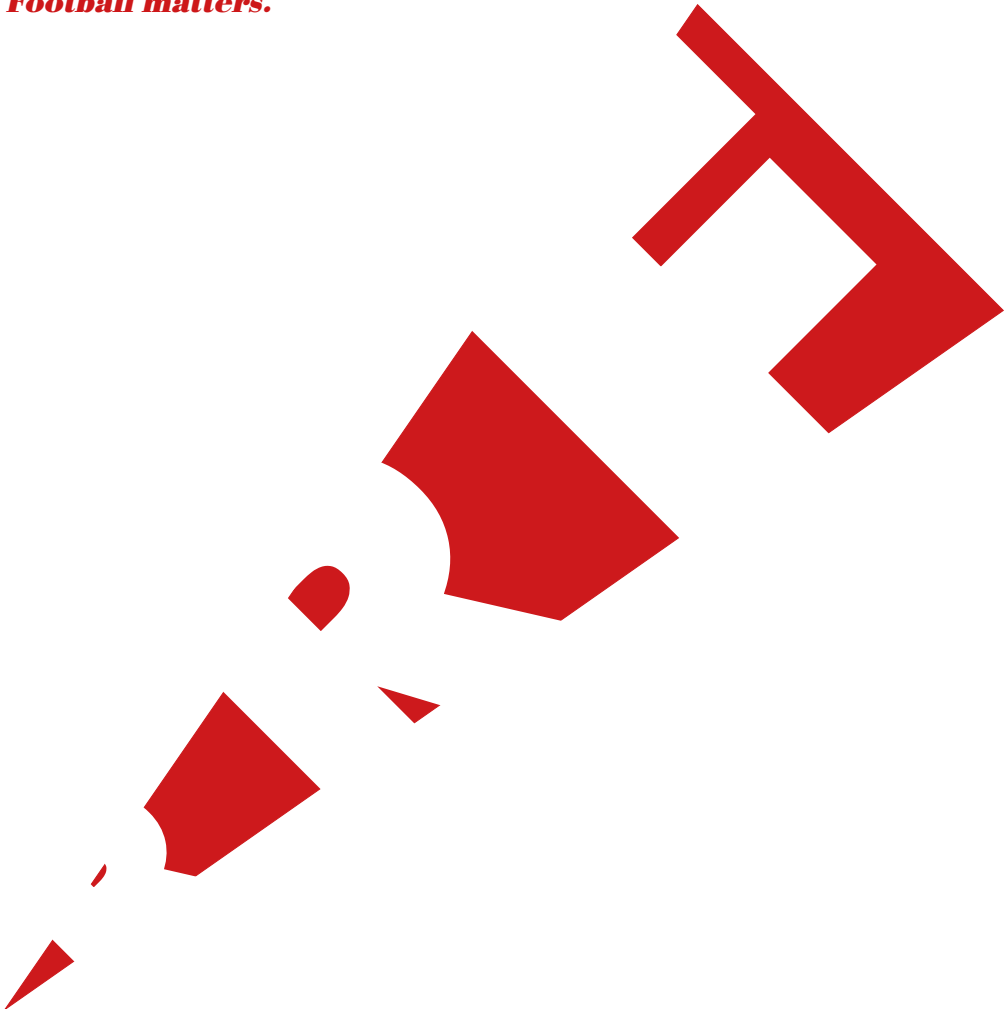
Premier League football clubs generated a total tax contribution of £3.6bn to the UK Exchequer in 2019/20, according to a report by Ernst & Young.

<https://www.accountingweb.co.uk/business/finance-strategy/exchequer-scores-billions-in-tax-from-premier-league>

The English second division is regularly the third or fourth most-watched league in European football.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/football/42704713>

Football matters.



Why We Need a Supporters' Charter

The fans are the main sponsors of the game, they also provide the atmosphere that makes the spectacle so internationally attractive. For the reasons described by Galeano in the above quote - and an unfortunate, albeit exaggerated, problem with violence amongst a minority of supporters - we still get treated dismissively as an unavoidable problem. We receive nothing like the respect that is afforded to the fans of cinema, theatre and supposed “high-end culture” in fact **no other majority male customer or sponsoring group is treated with anything like the same aggressive contempt as are football supporters.**

The UEFA champions league final is a huge event in the football calendar: at both the last two matches, fans have been treated with fear and contempt.

In May 2022 the French police treated Liverpool fans at the European Cup final as criminals: **it was only the restraint of the supporters that prevented a catastrophe, that restraint being afforded partly from the collective memory of the Hillsborough disaster, another product of police aggression.**

At the June 2023 final, the kick-off time was put back to 10pm Istanbul time in the interests of TV coverage. Fans said they were treated like “cattle,” with supporters unable to return to their city centre hotels until past 3am after the late kick-off and a scramble for shuttle buses at the end of the game.

A chaotic “free for all” outside the Stadium caused buses full of fans, which had been laid on to return them to the centre of

Istanbul, more than 15 miles away, to stand for more than 90 minutes before they could start to make the journey back. **Many supporters of both clubs were unable to even get on a bus and were charged as much as €300 (£256) for a taxi from the remote İkitelli district on the far western outskirts of Istanbul. Such a journey would normally cost about €15.**

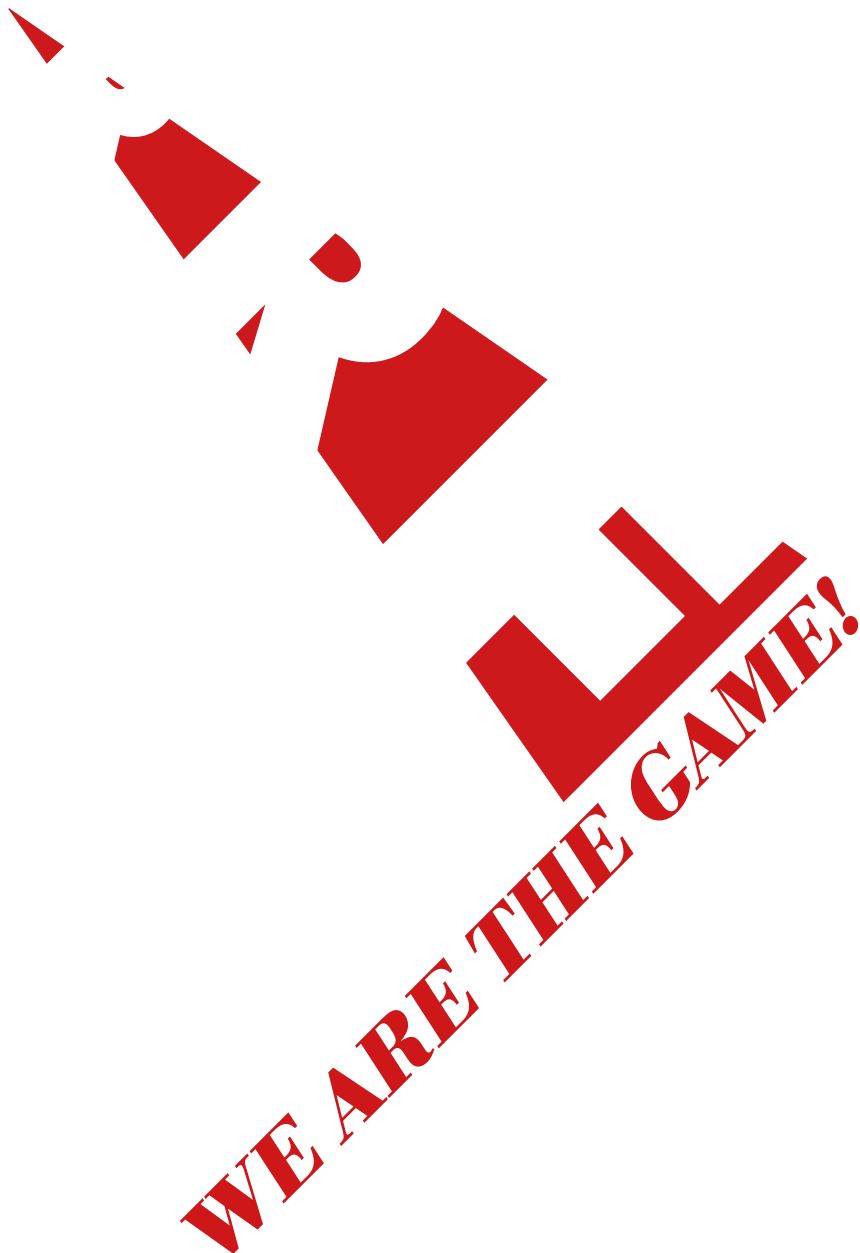
To these crimes of disrespect at specific events can be added those of general exploitation: ticket prices, merchandise rip-offs etcetera.

The disastrous attempt to form a European Super League completely disregarded fans' feelings and demands. The idea has not disappeared as the rise of the state-owned clubs such as Manchester City, Newcastle and Paris St Germain will force other big clubs into money-generating ventures in order to compete.

We have had enough, this is a charter primarily for the British football fan, but will also resonate with our friends overseas: we all deserve respect, reverence and protection from those who run football, predators who despise the people who continue to form the bedrock on which our game has been built over the last 150 years. **These people will not grant us the Charter's demands, these will need to be put in place and enforced by the democratic, legislative process.**

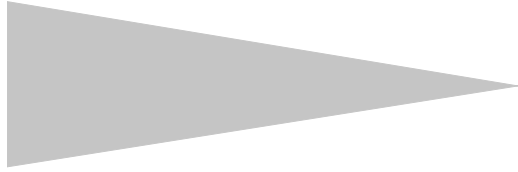
This Charter applies directly to the professional leagues in England and Scotland, this is where the biggest problems occur at the moment, and this is where the changes proposed will make the greatest difference. However, we look forward to soon preparing a Charter for fans of the non-league game, who are also deserving of protection.

We all need to take this game back, not just because it's ours,
but because



CHARTER DEMAND ONE

ENSHRINE IN LEGISLATION THE RIGHT OF FANS TO PARTICIPATE IN THE RUNNING OF THEIR CLUBS.



Fans will be allowed to form a Supporters' Union for each club in the Premiership and the Football League. The Union will have elected officials and agreed internal procedures, similar to other unions.

An agreed percentage of season ticket sales will go to the running costs of the Union. The Union will also be able to fund itself through membership fees and other means.

The Union will have a right of veto over any proposed changes that profoundly alter the nature of the club from the supporters' viewpoint.

These include:

- 1** Joining a new league
- 2** Moving to a new stadium
- 3** Proposed ground shares
- 4** Name changes

At least 20% of Board members should be drawn from the Union. The Union representatives will be non-executive Directors. At least one Union representative on the board should be a woman.

These Directors and the Union will have full access to the club's finances and application of funds statements.

Changes to season ticket prices, and others such as major items of merchandise and food/drink sold at grounds, should only be agreed after consultation with the Union. The Union's board members will have full voting rights on these board-level decisions.

The Union will be similarly consulted over the allocation of tickets and seats to overseas visitors, away supporters, corporate entertainment, and other non-regular supporters

Club management and the Union should meet at least once per month, the agenda should always include:

- 1** How the club is advancing the women's game
- 2** How the club is advancing its responsibilities to the various local communities (for example: children's academies, use of catering facilities to provide community kitchens, donations to foodbanks etc.
- 3** How the club is advancing the anti-racism/anti-sectarianism and anti-sexism cause amongst the various local communities.

CHARTER DEMAND TWO

**END THE FINANCIAL
EXPLOITATION OF SUPPORTERS.**



A freeze on ticket and catering prices in stadiums should be implemented immediately and extended until the outcome of the Financial investigation outlined in Charter Demand 6.

No more than 2 replica shirts to be released each year.

Make it illegal for transport companies to gouge prices on routes related to big games. West Ham fans were charged £799 and more for flights to Prague for the Europa League conference final in 2023, return flights are currently available at £67. This is naked exploitation of fans' love for their clubs and should be outlawed.



CHARTER DEMAND THREE

RESTORE STANDING AREAS WITH SIGNIFICANTLY REDUCED TICKET PRICES.

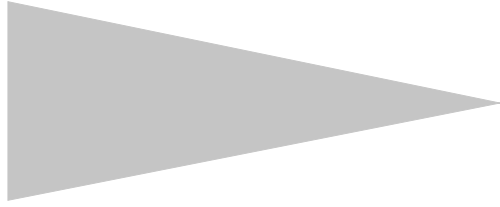
Many fans prefer to stand, it's part of our football culture and makes for a better atmosphere. A significant number of fans stand throughout matches even in the all-seater stadiums that were imposed a few decades ago.

Through consultation with the Union, **clubs should agree to build standing areas for home and away supporters.** The size of the areas will be agreed through a consultative process, **any unresolved disputes will go to an arbitration process established by the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport.**

Prices for these tickets will be agreed through a similar consultative process, they should be at least 50% less than the seats replaced by the standing areas.

CHARTER DEMAND FOUR

MAKE IT IMPOSSIBLE FOR LARGE MONEYED CLUBS TO DOMINATE; SHARE THE WEALTH AND ENSURE THE GAME STAYS COMPETITIVE.



Between 1961 and 1991, 11 separate clubs won the league championship, including the likes of Ipswich Town, Derby County and Nottingham Forest.

For the 30 years of the Premier League, only seven clubs have won the title, including five victories each from Manchester City and Chelsea, two clubs financed by extremely wealthy foreign investors.

The league is predictable, at the start of the season it can be safely forecast that the winners will come from the two Manchester clubs, Arsenal, Liverpool or Chelsea. Blackburn's solitary win came in 1995, facilitated by a wealthy benefactor, and Leicester's recent victory was an extraordinary one-off that looks unlikely to be repeated.

Return to the system that applied for much of the game's history in which the *away clubs were rewarded one-third of the gate receipts*, this would mean smaller clubs playing at places at the likes of Manchester City would not fall so far behind the big clubs financially.

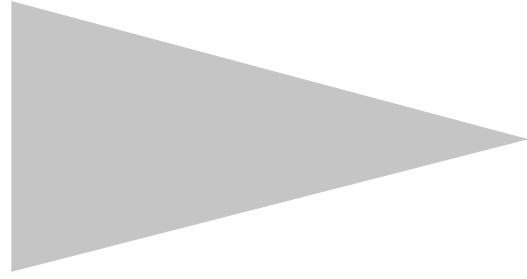
50% of the monies received by UEFA Champions' League and Europe League participants should be distributed amongst other clubs, with greater proportions going to newly promoted clubs and those that finished in lower positions in the league table.

Introduce a Player Salary Cap consistent with the findings of the Financial Sustainability Investigation referred to in **Demand 6** below.

Impose a limit on the size of squads. Currently the big clubs with substantial financial backing are able to accumulate top players and pay them well despite their not playing very often; this **effectively deprives their talents to the opposition and prevents spectators from seeing some top players in their prime years.**

CHARTER DEMAND FIVE

CLUBS TAKE DIRECT RESPONSIBILITY FOR ALL ASPECTS OF FAN SAFETY INCLUDING SAFETY FROM THE ABUSES OF RACISM, SECTARIANISM, SEXISM, AND HOOLIGANISM.



Every club in the Premier League and the three divisions of the football league should appoint a **Safety Officer responsible for all aspects of fan safety**. The club officers should liaise regularly with the club Union, the police, and Safety Officers of other clubs.

All Unions should appoint a Safety Official.

One of the women Union officials on the club board will be charged with ensuring that all matters pertaining to women's safety, comfort, and right to watch the game in a non-intimidating space, are recognised and enforced.

(These and similar issues are covered in more detail in the Football Charter for Women's Football)

All police forces should appoint an officer responsible for football safety in their region/city, unambiguously accountable for the safety of all supporters.

Before big European games, such as the near-fatal European Champions League final in 2022, the Premier League Safety Officer and the appropriate police and club officials will be responsible for liaison with the appropriate European bodies covering all aspects of local safety including the policing.

Procedures will need to exist that allow for the elevation of identified problems to the appropriate level.

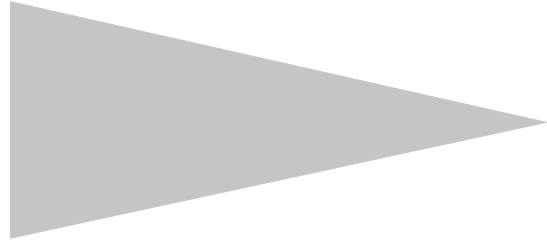
Ideally UEFA will also appoint a Safety Officer.

Responsibility and accountability are key in this area and targeting should engender a culture of protecting all fans through the entire process of watching a match, not just separating the minority who want to fight. However, all Safety Officers and Union officials will also have a responsibility to minimise hooliganism, racism, sexism, sectarianism and other anti-social activities inside and outside stadiums, and to oppose and resist the hooligan culture wherever it manifests itself. Procedures and mechanisms should be put in place to allow this.

Club and Union officials should conduct an annual stadium safety inspection. If the Union official is not content, **a mechanism should be in place to enable the issues to be elevated to the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport.**

CHARTER DEMAND SIX

INSTIGATE A ROOT-AND-BRANCH INVESTIGATION OF THE GAME'S FINANCES INCLUDING WHY TICKET PRICES ARE SO HIGH.



In total, Premier League clubs spent \$2.46 billion on players this summer, almost as much as Spain's La Liga, Italy's Serie A, Germany's Bundesliga and France's Ligue 1 clubs combined.

Their net spend was \$1.49 billion, La Liga's, the next highest, was \$57.7 million.

The president of Spain's La Liga, Javier Tebas, recently questioned whether the Premier League is financially sustainable in the long term given it has "converted into a competition where all clubs lose money." (not 100% accurate but the point remains.)

Speaking at a conference about how to protect European football's ecosystem, Tebas also promised to fight the rules that allow Premier League clubs to "distort" the transfer market by spending huge sums on players despite making losses.

The immense amount of money generated by the Premier League, and the vast inequalities generated by a free-for-all that perpetuates the wealth and dominance of an oligarchy of top clubs, is leading to serious competitive distortion across the European and world game as well as in domestic leagues.

The need to compete with huge clubs that command financial resources leads the tier below into serious indebtedness. Arsenal

have very high debts, failure to achieve a Champions League place puts further pressure on revenues so they need to maintain an expensive squad of players and spend money on a series of calculated gambles to maintain their position.

This all helps perpetuate a cycle of debt-propelled unequal competition and dangerous accumulation of financial obligations that undermine resilience and sustainability. A large part of the motive behind the ESL was the perceived need of hugely indebted clubs like Tottenham, Manchester United and Barcelona to generate greatly needed additional funds, many smaller clubs are also in difficult positions.

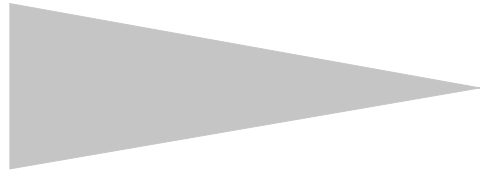
There should be a full-scale investigation of the financial sustainability of the English football business model; the investigation should also be charged with making recommendations on how that model should be changed to protect the ability of all clubs to compete regularly for success.

The investigation should also cover ticket prices, and recommend structures that ensure that watching the game is sustainable, and possible, for all income levels.

The investigation should cover the permitted debt:income ratios for clubs, and whether takeover should be permitted that increase a club's debt levels over a certain amount.

CHARTER DEMAND SEVEN

INSTIGATE AN INVESTIGATION INTO
THE OPTIMAL OWNERSHIP MODELS
FOR CLUBS.



This can be done in conjunction with the Financial Investigations at Demand Seven or be fulfilled as part of that investigation.

The investigation will be charged with recommending the ownership structures that best facilitate:

- 1** the leagues staying competitive
- 2** fans having an appropriate voice in the running of the club
- 3** clubs fulfilling their role as an integral part of the community with an important part to play in the development of that community
- 4** optimising the incentives for owners to develop the club and the community rather than awarding executives, shareholders and creditors



CHARTER DEMAND EIGHT

FIXTURE TIMINGS: END THE
CAPITULATION TO TELEVISION
SCHEDULING PRIORITIES.

Scheduling for television's requirements has a damaging effect on the supporters who actually pay to see the game and provide the atmosphere. The most recent egregious example was the UEFA champions League Final being moved to 10pm local time to accommodate European schedules: the game did not finish till well after midnight in a remote area. Some fans faced 6-hour walks back to their city centre accommodation or rip-off taxi fares (see above).

Scottish clubs have had fixtures rearranged, causing massive inconvenience to supporters, as English fixtures are given priority on television on both sides of the border.

This has to stop. The scheduling of games will have to be agreed with clubs and the supporters' Unions, with the latter having the right of veto.

The Future

Ideally, the pursuit of this Charter will inspire a similar drive across European clubs and investigations into financial sustainability at UEFA level.

However, we need to focus initially on that which we can directly influence, **with the guiding principle being not ‘rebranding’ or some other corporate mantra, but rebuilding, and restoration of the game to the working-class people whose passion built it in the first place and still underpins its global success.**

WE ARE THE GAME!



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