

PERSISTENT STANDING POLICY

READING FOOTBALL CLUB STADIUM

JUNCTION 11, M4

READING

RG2 0FL

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Background

The authorities involved in football management and football safety rightly require that Reading FC carry out a risk assessment as recommended by the SGSA "Standing in Seated Areas at Football Grounds" (Documents 4.1a and 4.1b). This initiative is supported by Reading Football Club. Persistent standing has historically been undertaken by large groups of fans across Europe in seated areas for many years and in England at nearly every ground. However, it is acknowledged that persistent standing, if not actively managed, can be a safety issue in the case of slip or trip, especially if it overflows on to a gangway, and that it can take away an excellent match day experience for large numbers of football supporters if their views are blocked. Many whose view is blocked are unable to move as areas are usually reserved seating plus some also have difficulty in moving due to age or mobility issues. Persistent standing also poses difficulties to steward/response and the Safety Officer has a duty of care to his staff.

Issues arising include the below:

- a) Spectators purchase a seat in the reasonable expectation that they will be able to see the match. If those in front are standing, spectators of shorter stature, children or those suffering from a disability, may be unable to see unless they stand on their seat or stand themselves. This constitutes a significant safety hazard if they were to topple off.
- b) Once the spectators at the front of a seating deck stand, those behind them may have no alternative but to do likewise, whether they wish to or not. Those who are unable to stand for prolonged periods, or who prefer not to are likely to suffer a significant loss of enjoyment. They often cannot remedy this themselves. This in turn encourages them to stand up to see which is something that they would not have considered doing under normal circumstances.
- c) Spectators who do not wish to stand may feel threatened and intimidated by those who do.
- d) Over recent years, there have been significant increases in the number of, children and older people attending matches as clubs seek to be attractive to a more supporters and develop their fanbase. If they are prevented from seeing or enjoying matches in popular areas, they may choose to stop coming rather than move to other areas, and hence may be lost to the game.
- e) Spectators in wheelchairs and ambulant disabled cannot satisfactorily be accommodated among, or in many cases behind, standing spectators. If spectators stand in seated areas, they prevent the club from providing accommodation for those with such disabilities in all parts of the ground. Under the Equalities Act, RFC must ensure that all supporters are not prevented from seeing the pitch by other supporters standing

even for short periods in seated areas. Reading FC provide dedicated areas for wheelchair users and ambulant disabled fans.

f) Seat backs are too low to fully restrain falls which could potentially endanger fellow fans.

g) There is a low risk of potential progressive crowd collapse which could result in crush or other significant injuries. Although to date this has never occurred at Reading FC due to the way it is managed as the fans in Club 1871, who are close to the segregation railings, tend to move laterally rather than vertically. It is also very rarely reported in the UK and medical records would indicate that at Reading FC it is not reported and is not a significant issue.

It is important that all fans create a great atmosphere for everyone's enjoyment and the stewards are instructed to intervene in those areas where supporters contact the club and complain about the demeanour of persons including persistent standing (Document 8.3).

The Government permitted clubs to apply for a safe standing exemption from the start of the 2023/24 season so long as certain criteria was met after some clubs trialled it in the 2022/23 season. Reading Football Club are not applying currently for this exemption however fully accept that eventually all clubs may need to provide safe standing at some time in the future.

In May 2025 they had a quote for rails and for rail seating as another option which is with the new owners to rule on.

In summary there is mixed information about it and the trials prior to its introduction with some clubs stating that it has increased injury stats and others querying the research data; Reading FC reserves comment on this but the trials were undertaken with dummies who had no arms to break their falls. Also medically it is better to remain standing than to be jumping up and down when periods of excitement occur as this can stimulate dizziness which can result in fan collapse as medical research demonstrates.

The Hazards commonly associated with standing in seating accommodation

- 1 Domino effect - Due to no barrier rails being in situ and subject to crowd surge. *Reading FC have P barriers in place to counteract this.*
- 2 The rake of the stands - The rake of the stands is subject to an acceptable level for seated accommodation and not designed for standing accommodation - this is done by design. ***The lower section is 21 degrees and above the vomitories steepen to 24 degrees and the rear rows are 32 degrees at RFC although there is a larger than average gap between***

seats which assists in mitigating the threat of falling. In fact very few if any stadia have such a large gaps between seats. By netting off the top few rows within the South Stand in high risk matches this mitigates the risk as fewer fans are situated on the higher rake areas.

- 3 Expansion of personal space – Persons seated will take up a space of 440mm as opposed to persons standing will take up a space of 550mm, therefore the space expands and thus can result in the obstruction of some of the gangways, aisles and exit routes. ***Reading Football Club Stadium has been constructed to considerably exceed the minimum requirements as laid down in the Green Guide for new stadia.***
The sightlines give perfect unobstructed viewing of the whole pitch from every seat.
The seating at the stadium has been constructed more than minimum requirements.
Seat Width – Green Guide – 460mm; Reading Football Club Stadium – 500mm
Seating Row depth – Green Guide – 700mm; Reading Football Club Stadium – 840mm
The area per 10 seats equates to 3.68 sq. metres in the Green Guide and 4.2 sq. metres in Reading Football Club Stadium – an increase of 14% above the minimum safe standards laid down.
In the allocated visiting area, of 3,225 seats at Reading Football Club Stadium (South away and GU 1-3) is therefore the equivalent of an area of 3,676 seats constructed to Green Guide minimum standards.
- 4 Trip Hazards – From seat backs or trips from another person's baggage etc. ***Analysis of games reveal that no serious incidents have occurred at RFC*** and no injuries have been reported. Bags are also discouraged.
- 5 Lateral movement – This hazard is associated with persons moving laterally across the seated areas to obtain access to other seats crossing over other persons whilst in situ i.e. two persons crossing over in a one-person width with no barrier rail in front of them, only a seat back which may cause a trip hazard in this circumstance. ***The space between the rows of seats are such that it is safe to walk in the aisle in front of seats without the people sat having to stand.***
6. Moments of excitement from the event – This is when the event comes to a point of high tension and everyone situated in one area is of high excitement (jumping movements whilst celebrating). ***This is a possibility but occurs even when people sit for most of the game. Statistical analysis of the stadium's accident records does not identify this as a problem. Also to purchase in Club 1871 anyone 15 years or under must be actively accompanied by an appropriate adult who can be easily contacted if required.***
7. Front row seating accommodation – The hazard from this area is that should any person stand in that area then the front barrier is at a height at only 800mm, which is the recommended height by the persons seated instead of 1000mm, which is recommended for standing accommodation. ***Stewards will be deployed along the pitch side and be positioned facing the crowd such to discourage forward movement of spectators. This has proved very successful and assists with fan behaviour.***

8. Persons standing on the seats or structures – This is a hazard when smaller persons feel the need to stand on a seat or other types of structures to view the event. ***If observed stewards always challenge and insist upon removing the cause of concern.***

Police Point of View

The Police do not have a significant issue with supporters standing so long as it does not become a safety or disorder issue that the club is required to manage. The main issue for them is that segregation is maintained. Tickets for all League fixtures for both home and away supporters are restricted to allocated seats only save for Club 1871 who are all season ticket holders and so identifiable. To compensate the persistent standing amongst Club 1871 Reading FC have self-imposed a 10% reduction to capacity. Away Club tickets can be purchased from the visiting Club and on specified occasions by visiting the 'away ticket office' between gates 9 & 10 which is outside the Club 1871 area of the footprint but has not caused an issue to date.

Disabled Supporters in Wheelchairs

Reading FC as a matter of policy do not issue to the away Club the seats in two rows in front of wheelchair viewing areas unless it is guaranteed that there will be no wheelchair users attending the match. As a contingency there is another wheelchair area closer to the West Stand. A similar policy is adopted for Club 1871. This is to protect the viewing for disabled persons when supporters stand at moments of excitement.

Public Disorder

A high percentage of risk element of Reading supporters have over the years been banned from the ground. There have been no major incidents of disorder inside the stadium for many years. This was often generated by issues relating to standing in seated areas (Document 8.3) and could result in ejection (Document 8.4).

1871 Club

In late 2018 RFC met with STAR and Club 1871 to discuss where best to locate them. They wanted an area of the ground where likeminded passionate home supporters could have the opportunity to sit together and sing and play musical instruments to generate a more vibrant atmosphere. Some of this group will stand at times of high tension however, the organisers are in regular contact with RFC and are aware of the ground regulations around safety and the safety implications. Persistent standing is not an issue elsewhere within the ground and fans tend to sit down when requested to do

so by stewards elsewhere within the stadium. The Club 1871 flag is sometimes positioned at the top of the South Stand by the segregation rails, to discourage fans from climbing over the railings, to make accessibility to the top of the stand harder, and so the likelihood of a potential progressive collapse is greatly reduced. It also encourages the passionate fans to move closer to the pitch side so making them more accessible to the players. In March 2024 the seg netting position was reviewed and removed from Club 1871 by the seg line but it remains in front of the wheelchair platform and across the front 2 rows. The rest of the netting has been switched over to the away side, unless it is a sell out away following, which has paid dividends and reduces lateral movement considerably.

Away Supporters

With the visiting club, the measures will vary according to the configuration of the seating, the number and type of spectators standing. They are here, probably once a season, and Reading FC concentrate on ensuring that aisles are kept clear and safety remains a top priority. The club recognises that it is impossible to ensure that hundreds or thousands of away supporters sit down in accordance with the ground regulations but by challenging those who initially stand up it can on occasions prevent the issue from growing. RFC recognises that it must do its upmost to prevent fans from standing for long periods of time by using safe tactics which include social media messages, PA announcements, scoreboard messages, messages on tickets and constant patrolling of the gangways to ensure that they remain clear.

This is different from our home supporters where RFC like to ensure that most of our supporters get the best possible match day experience and that standing in seated areas can have an impact on this so it is far less prevalent. By creating the Club 1871 this is, overall, achieved.

S Factor – Green Guide advice

The general considerations when considering the 'S' factor is contained in the Green Guide version 6. The key matters are in the order displayed, with the Reading Football Club Stadium situation in *italic*:

- Ticketing – *Tickets are only issued for useable seats as there are no significantly restricted view seats. Since the season 2022/23 all printed tickets have explanatory words about the stadium being an all seater one. Printed tickets make up around 35% of sales. Printed at home tickets already have the all seater message on them. For those who possess season tickets or member cards they are advised to check ground regulations which are displayed at every entrance. In reality all fans are well aware that stadia in the UK are all seater unless safe standing has been authorised as part of the government trial. There is also guidance on Reading Football Club's website for home*

and away supporters around standing and it being an all seater stadium. It is also part of the pre match safety announcement and a slide appears throughout the match on the scoreboard relating to the same issue.

- Seat & Row Identification – *All seats are identifiable by letter and number*
- Good Housekeeping – *The stands are cleaned and maintained to a high standard.*
- Stewarding – *All stewards receive Module '0' training and all are being or have been trained through recognised stewarding qualifications such as a Level 2/3/4 in Spectator Safety and SIA.*
- Keeping Gangways Clear – *Stewards patrol the gangways and keep them clear throughout the event as best as possible. If present, away stewards carry out this task in the away end but if not available then home match day staff undertake this task.*
- Migration – viewing distances – *High profile stewarding discourages surging and any potential adverse effect on sightlines.*
- Migration – Partial cover – *Not applicable at a fully covered stadium although adverse conditions can cause some attendees who occupy the front row to occasionally be affected.*
- Removal or control of potential restrictions – *No restriction of views is permitted.*
- Segregation Methods – *The east end of the south stand is designated solely for visiting spectators with no restriction of view due to security & segregation methods.*

Reducing the risk

Stewards are engaged to ensure that the access routes, egress routes, vomitories and stairwells are kept clear, these precautions will be put in place as a control measure to manage the crowds throughout the event. The percentage of response and stewarding teams is weighted to be positioned in the away and Club 1871 areas as this is where the greatest threat of adverse issues is likely to occur.

Announcements requesting spectators to be seated is part of the pre match safety announcement. The scoreboard is also used to reinforce this all seater message. Posters are displayed in the South Stand and outside by the turnstiles to again reinforce the all seater message.

CCTV is kept on the away fans and Club 1871 areas throughout the event as this is where the greatest likelihood of persistent standing and any disorder will take place.

The club will, if considered necessary, communicate with the visiting club requesting entries in the club programme and on their club websites. This only occurs where there has previously been an issue or there is intelligence to suggest that it may be an issue. If so, then RFC will provide additional signage advising people as they queue to gain entry and inside the stands that standing is not acceptable.

Our priority is to keep the gangways and vomitories clear, then to deal with those persistently standing who are acting in an anti-social manner. The next group that are approached are those persistently standing and blocking the views of fans who wish to sit on their seats. Next it is those positioned at the top of the stand as Reading Football Club has a duty of care to them as a fall from such height is more likely to result in injury. Then anyone else persistently standing is approached.

Conclusion

The Club believe that standing in seated areas is unsociable as this act prevents children, small adults and disabled from fully viewing the match. However, the Club have found that safety is rarely compromised by persons persistently standing in club 1871 however, it remains contrary to the Ground Regulations but not the law.

On this basis, the Club have in the past and will continue to penalise home spectators for persistently standing in areas outside of Club 1871 and implement robust stewarding procedures when occurring in visiting spectator areas to ensure aisles and vomitories are kept clear. Fans will be asked to sit down and if they persist they will be ejected if safe to do so outside of Club 1871. However, the Safety Officer recognises that due to the numbers involved it is deemed unsafe for mass ejections to be attempted then the issue is monitored by stewards and on the CCTV. If possible, the identified ringleaders are dealt with as and when they leave their seats and enter the concourses.

3 of the 4 stands the issue of persistent standing is very low however the South Stand it still remains a challenging issue. As stated in the WS Atkins report it is most dangerous at moments of excitement, then when fans are leaving the stands and least dangerous during normal play. This research influences deployments of match day staff by the Safety Officer.