



PRESS RELEASE

The Football Supporters' Federation

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Liberal Democrats ready to back safe standing at football matches [Embargoed 00.01 - Saturday September 13 2008]

The fan-lead campaign to reintroduce safe standing at British football stadia could this weekend receive a crucial boost as the Liberal Democrats debate the issue at their Annual Conference in Bournemouth on Sunday (September 14 2008).

The Football Supporters' Federation (FSF) understands that Shadow Culture, Media, and Sport Secretary Don Foster will vote in favour of safe standing alongside many others including Bob Russell MP and Mike Hancock MP, who has in the past introduced Early Day Motions into Parliament backing safe standing.

And if, as looks likely, the Liberal Democrats vote to make the motion into policy, the safe standing issue will become a major one as campaigning for the next election gathers pace.

Surveys amongst football fans have demonstrated nine out of 10 support safe standing, while a 2007 report by the Independent Football Commission (IFC) concluded the introduction would save public money as less policing would be required in standing areas.

There is no recent evidence to suggest that standing is anymore dangerous than sitting, while the IFC even suggested health & safety figures would improve with safe standing areas.

Liberal Democrat Shadow Culture, Media and Sport Secretary, Don Foster said:

"This is a sensitive issue. But we cannot ignore the large numbers of fans who want to stand, and are doing so in seating areas, despite the existing regulations and the danger it causes.

"Given the seeming impossibility of policing existing regulation and recognising that some passionate fans want to be able to jump up and down when watching their teams each week then we need to look at technologies that allow them to do that safely.

"Football has taken enormous steps forward in recent years with more diverse fans, improved stadium designs and better policing. These proposals would in no way seek to undermine any of that progress and would only allow future ground developments that meet the most stringent safety requirements.

"But if some fans want to stand and clubs want to let them, then we should at least explore safe ways of achieving it."

The FSF has long campaigned on the issue of safe standing, alongside Stand Up Sit Down, and backs the Eurostand 2008 campaign which runs this weekend from September 13 to 14 and will see fans from more than 14 different countries uniting to demand the right for fans to stand (see Notes to Editors).

Malcolm Clarke, Chair of the FSF, said:

"The FSF congratulate the Liberal Democrats' decision to debate safe standing and would encourage all political parties to follow suit. We welcome the increased momentum that this brings to the issue and it's very encouraging to see a mainstream political party onside.

"When nine out of every 10 fans want the option to stand, it's something that should be provided. Standing still occurs in the lower divisions, and the government acknowledges it is not inherently unsafe.

"Safe standing isn't just about those who wish to stand, it's about those who want to sit and view the match in comfort too. Many have their enjoyment spoiled by those who do wish to stand.

"We would strongly urge all Liberal Democrats to vote for safe standing at their Annual Conference. Give fans the choice."

- ENDS -

Notes to editors:

The Football Supporters' Federation (FSF) is the national supporters' organisation for all football fans from England and Wales comprising over 142,000 individual fans and members of local supporters'

organisations from every club in the professional structure and many from the pyramid. For more info <http://www.fsf.org.uk/about-the-fsf.php>

Liberal Democrats' Autumn conference 2008 runs 13 to 17 September, the debate on safe standing will take place at 16.55 on Sunday September 14 2008. For more information on the Liberal Democrats' safe standing motion (F20) please visit:
<http://www.libdems.org.uk/assets/0000/6185/A08motions.pdf>

For more information on the FSF's safe standing campaigning, or to download our report visit:
<http://www.fsf.org.uk/campaigns/safestanding.php>

For more information on the Independent Football Commission, or to download their 2007 report, visit:
<http://www.theifc.co.uk/home/default.php>

For more information on Eurostand 2008:
<http://www.fsf.org.uk/news/eurostand.php>

For more information on Stand Up Sit Down:
<http://www.standupsitdown.co.uk/>

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