

Mims Davies MP  
Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Sport and Civil Society  
Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport  
100 Parliament Street  
London, SW1A 2BQ

31 January 2019

Dear Minister,

Improvements in stadium design and technology, the wishes of some fans to stand, and the success of 'safe standing' in European countries, have understandably led to calls for the introduction of standing areas at Premier League and Championship grounds.

From August 1994, under the Football Spectators Act 1989 (as amended), clubs in the English Premier League and Championship have been required to provide all-seated accommodation. This followed Lord Justice Taylor's report into the Hillsborough disaster of April 1989. The 1989 Act applies in England and Wales.

In July 2011, the Scottish Premier League relaxed its requirement that clubs had to provide all-seated accommodation. Celtic opened a safe standing section in July 2016. This accommodates nearly 3,000 supporters. Likewise, a safe standing section at League 1 team Shrewsbury Town opened at the start of the 2018/19 season. The section holds over 500 spectators.

I accompanied Middlesbrough Supporters Forum to Celtic Park last week to see rail seating, one method of implementing safe standing at football stadiums, in action. Several German football clubs use it, including Borussia Dortmund and Wolfsburg. Each ticket holder is designated a seat in the stadium. The design allows for the seat to be locked upright, allowing supporters to stand. Each row has a safety barrier to improve crowd control. For games with all-seater requirements (such as UEFA or FIFA tournaments), the seats can be unlocked, and the rail seating becomes a seated section.

It is clear to me that safe standing areas are popular, provide an excellent atmosphere in the ground and most importantly are safe for fans. Rail seating is definitely a safer alternative for fans who plan to stand in seated areas.

The 'Stand Up for Choice' survey run by the English Football League and Football Supporters' Federation in 2018 found that 94% of fans believed they should be able to choose whether to sit or stand at English Football League matches. In my own constituency, 99% of 3,398 Middlesbrough fans surveyed agreed with the principle that fans should be given the chance to choose whether to sit or stand.

On 25 June 2018, during the debate on the safe standing petition, the then Sports Minister, Tracey Crouch, acknowledged the increasing support for a change to the current policy. She

announced that the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) was commissioning an external evidence review to inform any decision on changes to the all-seater requirement.

In a January 2019 written response, the DCMS said that it expected to receive the final report of the review's findings "shortly". In the same response, the DCMS said that it believed that all-seater stadia were the best current means to ensure the safety and security of fans. However, the DCMS would consider relevant advances in technology and data.

With nearly half of all fans claiming they would attend more games if licensed standing was available, safe standing could play a significant role in boosting attendances, particularly with the under 35s demographic. With stadium occupancy at 61 per cent in 2017/18, a change in legislation would provide an opportunity to increase revenue from gate receipts.

The standard of football on the pitch can have no bearing on whether standing accommodation should be available. If standing is permitted at a football match in League One, then why not a game from the division above if they are designed to the same standards?

I call on the Secretary of State to change the current position by directing the Sports Grounds Safety Authority, through the secondary legislation, to allow safe standing in specified areas of grounds.

I look forward to your detailed response.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Andy McDonald". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Andy McDonald MP

Shadow Secretary of State for Transport