



Hartlepool United vs York City FC on 27.01.2024

Report by York City Supporters Trust

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Two handwritten signatures in black ink. The first signature is on the left and the second is on the right.

Seth Sowerby

York City Supporters Trust, Chair

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Introduction

The purpose of this report is to provide an analysis of the incidents surrounding the Hartlepool United FC (HUFC) vs. York City Football Club (YCFC) football match on 27th January 2024. York City Supporters Trust (YCST) is committed to supporting its members and the wider York City fanbase in the wake of these events. Our view from the outset was that an impartial and honest view of the day was the best way to deliver this goal.

Cooperation with key bodies involved in hosting the HUFC vs. YCFC game started well, including an open and honest meeting reviewing footage from the day. Cleveland Police had made promises to share independent reports into events of the day but unfortunately, after a number of requests and delaying tactics, these reports have not materialised and therefore hindered YCST's ability to provide a truly comprehensive account of the day.

When meeting HUFC officials it is worth noting that they have been open about the issues experienced by York City supporters on the day. They have taken clear actions and had already addressed many issues noted in this report including prior to seeing the final report, actioning all of the recommendations we were going to make.

This report does seek to give as full an account of the day as possible and provides recommendations for bodies involved based on the evidence available. However, given the lack of evidence provided by some organisations involved, we cannot consider its findings final and, as such, will be taking steps to request an independent review into football policing in Hartlepool.

Evidence Gathering

In compiling this report, evidence has been received from a variety of sources to provide an understanding of the incidents surrounding the Hartlepool vs. York City football match. These sources include:

Eyewitness Testimonies: Accounts from individuals who were present during the match and were witness to the incidents first-hand have been collected by request over email. These eyewitness testimonies offer valuable insights into the events and the experiences of fans.

Meetings with Officials: We have met with officials from North Yorkshire Police and Cleveland Police.

CCTV Footage: Cleveland Police kindly invited us to view some of the footage they collected on the day.

Social Media Posts: Posts and updates shared on social media platforms by fans, eyewitnesses, and official sources were checked and reviewed to gather real-time information and perspectives on the incidents.

Where possible, evidence sources are included in the appendices.

Report Structure

The report is structured as follows:

- Key issues: Highlights the key issues we discovered divided into three stages, Pre-game, During the Game, Post-Game.
- Conclusions: Summarises key findings and implications drawn from the issues and evidence gathered.
- Recommendations: Proposes actionable recommendations for each organisation and group based on the identified learnings.
- Appendices: Provides supporting evidence, including testimonies and documentation, to substantiate the findings and recommendations presented in the report.

Key Issues

The incidents surrounding the Hartlepool vs. York City match on 27th January 2024 exposed a series of critical issues related to fan safety, crowd behaviour and management, and facility provisions. By identifying and analysing these key issues, this section aims to provide a clear understanding of the main challenges that contributed to the day's events. Issues have grouped on a timeline of Pre-Game, During the Game and Post-Game.

Pre-Game

Away Venue/Pub

- Lack of Advertising & Support for Away venue
 - The Away venue "Rosie's" was only advertised twice by York City Football Club and not at all by Hartlepool United FC.
 - HUFC have advised they were unaware that Rosie's had been made a designated away venue.
 - Rosie's was unsupported in their efforts to be the choice destination for Away support.
- Away venue significantly out of the way
 - Rosie's was some way off the route between the railway station and football ground.
 - The route was not signposted or highlighted by police.

- No consultation on the Away venue
 - Consultation with York fan groups (such as the YCST) would have increased the likelihood of York fans using that venue.
- Necessary routes from the away venue to the ground led to mixing of supporter groups.
 - The routes to the ground meant significant mingling of supporter groups.
 - The route from ‘Rosies’ took Away supporters past a notorious home supporters bar.
 - Cleveland police reported clashes between supporter groups, including intimidation of bystanders by Away supporters.
- Ticketing system allowed entry incorrectly
 - YCST received multiple reports of the HUFC ticketing allowing multiple people to enter the ground on one ticket.
 - HUFC advised that their ticketing system only registered 6 occasions where tickets scanned twice would have allowed for more than one fan gaining entrance on the same ticket. Stewards are advised in these instances to reject entry. We have no evidence to indicate such fans were not rejected.

Police Grading & Management

- Police risk grading is consistent, however policing of grades is not. Grade given to game not supported by both forces.
 - North Yorkshire Police (NYP) advised that risk grading across football games is consistent, with the host force receiving a grading from the Away club's local force.
 - NYP gave this game a ‘Medium’ rating.
 - There seemed to be some discrepancy in the explanation of how the host force then reacts to this rating. NYP said the reaction is not standardised, Cleveland said that it was.
 - The description of a response to a ‘Medium’ rated game differed between the two forces.
- Significant police presence at key locations with an inconsistent approach to interactions with supporters.
 - Police were present in very high numbers.
 - There were reports from the railway station of 20 officers lining the station car park in riot gear.
 - Interactions with supporters ranged from professional direction given, jovial attempts to encourage supporters to “better bars”, and abrupt, confrontational interactions.
 - Significant numbers of police were also present on the road next to the ground.

Supporter Behaviour

- Some away supporters had consumed a significant volume of alcohol prior to arriving in Hartlepool, affecting behaviour towards the police.
 - Videos shown to YCST showed drunken behaviour on arrival to Hartlepool railway station.
 - Initial interactions with police monitoring arrivals on the platform consisted of verbal abuse towards police who has not yet interacted with supporters.

During the Game

Supporter Accommodation

- Significant overcrowding in seated areas and walkways.
 - Supporters reported being stood two to a seat.
 - Tickets appeared to have been sold for a row of seats that could not be found.
 - HUFC advised that they were aware that a row of seats damaged at a previous game had been sold however, the away stand had been under sold which comfortably accommodated the amount of seats lost.
 - Crowding in the surrounding area could have been avoided if it had been communicated to affected fans that additional space was available in other areas of the stand.
 - Walkways and stairways were unable to be cleared due to lack of space.
- Inconsistent reporting of away attendance.
 - Pre-game, HUFC reported the away end as being sold out.
 - The figure provided on match-day by HUFC, and that given to Cleveland police, did not match.
 - HUFC have provided official figures for away attendance
 - Sold Tickets – 1046
 - Scanned (fans entered) – 924
 - Capacity - 1080
- Disabled supporters' match experiences were negatively impacted by a lack of availability of disabled viewing areas, the behaviour of fellow supporters, and stewarding.
 - Disabled access was incorrectly advised, with Away supporters being guided through Home sections to get to the correct area in the Away end.
 - The view from the disabled section in the way end was restricted due to its position between Home and Away support.

- Disabled supporters reported abuse from fellow YCFC support when asking for their view to be accommodated.

Stewarding

- Stewarding approach inconsistent.
 - Stewards wearing HUFC branded attire interacted with Away supporters far more, resulting in better stewarding results.
 - HUFC discussed stewarding and have reviewed their briefing with their stewarding partners to improve consistent messaging from stewards.

Supporter Behaviour

- Home and Away supporter behaviour fell below expected standards.
 - A number of photos showed antagonising behaviour from both Home and Away supporters.
 - Some supporters reported negative behaviour towards YCFC fans from fellow YCFC fans.
 - Pyrotechnics were used by the away support.
 - Coins were reportedly thrown towards the pitch.

Post-Game

Advanced Communication

- Lack of communication to fans on post-game plans for leaving Hartlepool.
 - No expectations were given to the Away support for what the police wanted them to do after the game in order to safely return to the railway station.
 - It became apparent, only through physical policing tactics, that police wanted away support to go directly to the railway station.

Egress from Stadium

- All routes away from ground involved the mixing of Home and Away supporters.
 - Cleveland Police reported that this caused issues for them due to tensions between supporter groups. There appeared to be no plans for getting supporters away from the ground safely to prevent clashes.

Police Management & Response

- All police focus on Away support.
 - A number of videos show Home supporters attempting to antagonise Away supporters.
 - Police focus did not shift to antagonists behind them.
- Intimidation tactics used by police.

- Superintendent John Wrintmore advised that he wanted his officers to “impose themselves on the situation” and “sterilise the space”.
- These tactics were shown by Cleveland Police on body-cam footage.
- Significant use of force by police (canine units specifically) used at Hartlepool railway station.
 - Police moved large group of YCFC Supporters to the railway station.
 - When forming lines, videos showed bystanders with children caught up in physical altercations.
 - Police used the design of Hartlepool railway station to forcefully funnel fans towards platforms.
 - A canine unit was deployed by officers on the ground, not by central command.
 - The canine unit did engage supporters physically.
 - One instance caused significant concern where a fan can be seen trapped behind a door with hands aloft surrendering and cooperating with the dog handler. The fan is physically moved around the door and released, at which point the dog bites him on the waist. The fan is then dragged back behind the police line and arrested with the dog still clamped on his waistband.
 - Video evidence did show aggressive behaviour from fans toward the police throughout.
- Police approach meant that innocent bystanders, including children, had negative interactions with police.
 - Very few reports of positive interactions with the police post-game, including families trying to communicate getting unhelpful responses.
 - A police complaint has been raised about one specific incident where a child was struck by a police officer trying to form a dividing line between supporters.

Public Responses & Review Meetings

- Post-game statements by police and YCST differed significantly in language.
 - Cleveland Police laid the blame entirely on Away Support, which meant the resulting backlash focused blame on YCFC supporters. YCST Statement was more balanced in response, setting expectations on future steps.
- Supporters who required legal support were likely unaware of Football Supporters’ Association (FSA) support available.
 - The FSA provides legal advice for football fans in trouble with the police. Information about this offer was was not readily available from YCFC or YCST prior to issues occurring.

- Approach described & language used by Cleveland Police during meeting with YCST.
 - In a meeting with Cleveland’s football police team and Superintendent John Wrintmore, all phases of build-up, game, and post-game were discussed, as well as body camera videos.
 - Cleveland Police took no responsibility for any errors in the course of the day and YCST officials left with the impression that Cleveland Police felt the operation had been handled correctly.
 - When challenged on language asking officers to “impose themselves on the event” and “sterilise the space”, Cleveland Police referred to it as their typical approach to policing football.
 - YCST challenged that, throughout the day, the police took no time to de-escalate situations which led to tensions incrementally increasing throughout the day.

Conclusions

The incidents surrounding the Hartlepool vs. York City match reveal multiple areas where planning, communication, and management of Away supporters could be improved to ensure a safer and more positive match-day experience. Key challenges were identified in the coordination between police, football clubs, and supporters - particularly regarding pre-game arrangements, police tactics, and crowd management. Addressing these areas will be essential in mitigating similar issues in the future. The following conclusions outline the critical areas of improvement:

- More work needed to develop and advertise pre-game plans for Away supporters, both to increase awareness and attendance.
 - Away pubs could be made more attractive by hosting guest speakers and the creation of events for Away fans.
 - Plans for Away supporters should be more widely communicated.
- Alignment between police game grading and policing tactics required; consideration should be given to involving supporters in creating plans for Away support.
 - Having consistent approaches to grading and resulting policing tactics will help supporters understand what to expect from police at upcoming games.
-
- Volume and behaviour of police at key interaction points should focus on de-escalation, with the knowledge that first impressions count in setting a tone.
 - High volumes of police early in the day incrementally raises tensions.
 - Inconsistent approaches from police officers towards fans creates unease as supporters may see police officers as unapproachable.

- Supporters should take responsibility for their own actions and courtesy should be given to fellow supporters needs, as well as police officers and stewarding officials. In a few instances supporter behaviour from both set of fans escalated and made issues worse.
- Post-game expectations of supporters should be defined prior to the game or during the game via stadium announcements.
 - Providing clear expectations for Away supporters post-game will provide the police with more control of the situation.
 - Holding Away fans in the ground would reduce the mixing of supporter bases.
- Tactics used by Cleveland Police included significant force. The lack of an independent review means significant questions remain regarding the legitimacy of the tactics deployed.
- Public statements made by organisations should be carefully worded, with regard for their potential to inflame tensions.
 - Cleveland Police’s statement blamed York City supporters; taking little responsibility for the situation themselves or placing any blame on Hartlepool United’s supporters.

These conclusions emphasise the need for coordinated efforts to improve planning, communication, and tactics; thereby ensuring that future events are safer, more inclusive, and positive experiences for all involved.

Recommendations

The following recommendations aim to address the issues identified during the Hartlepool vs. York City match, with specific actions outlined for York City Football Club, York City Supporters Trust & Supporters, Cleveland Police, and North Yorkshire Police. Each organisation plays a unique role in ensuring the safety, wellbeing, and positive experience of supporters, particularly at away games. By implementing these targeted recommendations, we seek to foster improved planning, communication, and cooperation across all involved parties, promoting a safer and more respectful environment at future matches.

York City Football Club

- Plans issued by Police for away games should be widely distributed to supporters with clear guidance.
- YCFC should ensure that all social media connected to the football club represents expected behaviour from fans.
- YCFC should be more open about the impact, and potential impact, on the football club by the rise in issues created by supporters.

YCST & YCFC supporters

- Increase interaction with local police forces to ensure better plans for away games.
- Look into supporting away day planning by making away day venues more attractive.
- Educate supporters on resources available should interactions with police occur.
- Make fans aware of their responsibilities when representing their club at away games.

Cleveland Police

- Ensure an independent evaluation is undertaken in relation to police plans, actions, and culture following the events of Hartlepool vs York City
- Include Home and Away supporters in the creation and delivery of match-day plans.
- Recognise the negative impact of high volume of police officers in the early stages of match-days.
- Prioritise de-escalation in all football policing planning.

Hartlepool United Football Club

When meeting HUFC officials it is worth noting that they have been open and honest about the issues experienced by York City supporters on the day. They have taken clear actions and had already addressed many issues noted in this report prior to receiving it, including actioning all of the planned recommendations.

Following the events at the game HUFC have taken the decision to reduce capacity of the away stand from 1080 to 880.

- Plans issued by Police for away games should be widely distributed to supporters with clear guidance.
- Stewarding should be reviewed to ensure consistency in approach, specifically the difference between regular and agency stewards.
- The Club should consider ways of providing better support for disabled away fans.

North Yorkshire Police

- Build closer working relationships with YCST, using YCST as a direct link to the supporters of YCFC.

Actions to be taken by YCST

Below is a list of actions that will be taken to implement the recommendations allocated to YCST:

- Creation of a volunteer SLO role, whose responsibilities should include,
 - Consultation on, creation of, and implementation of Supporters Code of Conduct
 - Hold regular meetings with NYP.
 - Work with relevant parties to improve the implementation of plans for away games.
- Meet with Local MPs regarding a review of Cleveland Police's approach.
- Issue regular details of FSA support available to fans.

Appendix

Video Evidence

All video evidence shows confrontations between police and football fans, some are physical which some may find disturbing.

[Video 1](#)

[Video 2](#)

[Video 3](#)

[Video 4](#)

[Video 5](#)

Eyewitness statements

Eyewitness accounts were collected following the event by requesting statements to be sent to the Trust via email. These statements have been somewhat standardised and anonymised for public consumption.

Eyewitness 1 - P

On Saturday, my partner and I traveled by train from our home in Middlesbrough to attend the match in Hartlepool. We alighted at Hartlepool station along with other York fans who joined us along the route. Initially, the atmosphere was relaxed at the station. However, upon leaving the station to head into town, we were greeted by rows of police vans and officers, creating an intimidating atmosphere unnecessarily. This was just a prelude to the events that unfolded post-match.

The police presence and actions both before and after the match were concerning. Instead of calmly addressing any potential issues, they mixed potential troublemakers with innocent fans and treated everyone as if they were causing trouble. This heavy-handed approach, combined with a lack of restraint, created a tense atmosphere for fans who were simply there to enjoy the match.

In my opinion, the police exhibited old-fashioned and aggressive policing tactics that have proven to be counterproductive in the past. While there may always be a few individuals looking to cause trouble, the police should be trained to handle such situations without inciting further conflict. Fortunately, most fans remained peaceful despite the provocative police presence.

Overall, the actions of the police on Saturday did not contribute to maintaining peace and safety but rather endangered innocent people who had attended the match with friends and family.

Best regards,

P

Eyewitness 2 - A

As a season ticket holder and member of the trust, I attended the match with my two sons, aged 9 and 12. As we walked towards the ground around 2:35 PM, we found ourselves alongside a group of approximately 6 or 7 individuals in their late teens. Approaching the pub on the corner (I believe it's called the Raglan), we encountered a police cordon separating York fans from the other side of the road.

Inside the pub, there was banter from Hartlepool fans. However, the situation escalated when a couple of the York fans began loudly swearing and using derogatory language. In response, a policeman intervened, grabbing one of the individuals by the scruff and pinning him against a wall. The officer warned him that if he continued, he would be taken into custody.

As someone not accustomed to attending away games, witnessing such police behaviour was unexpected and concerning. I am open to further discussion on this matter.

Kind regards,

A

Eyewitness 3 - L

Let's delve into the statement from Cleveland Police, shall we? I'll break it down paragraph by paragraph to pass the time on a Monday night.

Upon arriving in Hartlepool, fans were directed to the marina venue, which can accommodate between 100-200 people, despite there being over 1,050 York fans in attendance. This venue was a considerable 15-minute walk from both the ground and the station. Consequently, many fans opted to visit a nearby club, only to be forcibly removed.

Regarding the flares, they are a common sight at football grounds across the country, and fines will likely be issued. Water is indeed wet.

The request to attend a pub that was ill-suited to accommodate even 25% of the away crowd is perplexing, to say the least.

Additionally, the issue of face coverings is worth noting. While some may argue it's a public place and people have the right to privacy, it's understandable that individuals may not want to be filmed in a public setting, especially when attending a football match.

After the game, fans from both teams could have been easily kept separate with a line of police between them, yet this was not the case. Instead, fans were left to roam the streets freely, only to be separated later with batons drawn.

The use of batons and dogs could have been avoided if proper separation had been implemented from the outset. Video evidence shows instances of people being pushed and struck from behind, including minors and an elderly woman.

While there was no further disorder from York fans after they were corralled into the train station, this came at the expense of a few young lads who were bitten by police dogs while attempting to enter the station with their hands raised in surrender.

Those attacked by the dogs were swiftly arrested on public order offences, despite their attempts to avoid confrontation. One distressing incident involved a father and child being pushed against a wall while the young lad cried—a truly disturbing scene.

Considering Cleveland Police's history of heavy-handedness, as evidenced by a quick Google search, the notion of their "experience" in handling such situations is questionable at best.

Finally, the mention of body cam footage raises doubts about its credibility, particularly when officers were heard joking about their cameras' batteries dying.

In conclusion, painting York fans as "bad, bad people" seems unjustified given the events described here.

Eyewitness 4 - S

I have shared this account both on the supporters' page and with the Cleveland Police Force. However, given the inadequate statement from the force and your YCST

response, I feel compelled to share it again to highlight what happened to myself and my son.

After exiting the football ground, myself, my son, and some friends we had traveled with remained outside the ground. The police presence was already notably excessive. Approximately five minutes later, some officers instructed us to move towards the station. I mentioned that we were waiting for friends to leave, but was informed that this couldn't happen and that we had to move away. At that moment, some Hartlepool fans passed by and began verbally abusing some York fans, provoking a verbal response from the fans. This prompted the officers to push us, attempting to move us towards the station. Despite my plea for them not to push us due to the presence of young children, they continued to do so. My son was also pushed during this altercation, which prompted me to react towards the officers. I found it unacceptable for an 11-year-old to be pushed by someone entrusted with ensuring safety. We then proceeded towards the station, where the police presence and their hostile attitude towards York fans intensified. Outside the station, I voiced my concern to an officer about the escalating situation caused by their pushing, only to be pushed myself, causing me to stumble into my son. When I raised my arm to protect him, the officer grabbed me by the throat and pinned me to the wall. My son, visibly distressed, pleaded for him to stop. Eventually, the officer released me and warned me to enter the station before he arrested me. Despite my attempts to reason with the officer afterwards, he accused me of drinking too much and advised me to leave before he took further action—despite the fact that I had not consumed any alcohol throughout the day.

Fortunately, I managed to escort my son into the stadium before the arrival of the dog units, which blocked the doors with 3-4 dogs.

It's worth noting that if I had been alone, I might not have pursued this investigation. However, witnessing the treatment of my son and experiencing it myself compelled me to speak out. It's one thing to push around grown men, but it's another to disregard the audience and fail to recognise the presence of families. Policing is undoubtedly challenging, and as someone in the military, I understand the complexities of conflicts. However, understanding your audience is crucial, and it's disappointing that not one police officer thought to remove families from the situation.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Many thanks,

S

Eyewitness 5 - R

I wish to share my comments and observations from Saturday's game away to Hartlepool.

Although I wasn't present at the station or in the town centre, I'd like to highlight the issues encountered in the city end during the game. It was the most distressing match I've attended in over 40 years of traveling home and away to support City. Every fan attending a match to support their club deserves to enjoy the game in a safe and relaxed manner.

We left the game early for two reasons. Firstly, because we couldn't see anything (as detailed in the email below sent to both YCFC and Hartlepool FC). Secondly, because we sensed trouble brewing after the match, especially in the last quarter of the game, with constant goading of the opposition supporters. While friendly banter during a game is normal, it was evident to us that this would only escalate post-game. Despite feeling empathy for the innocent people caught up in the trouble with the police, including children and older ladies, I believe as a club and supporters' trust, we must acknowledge that some 'fans' were intent on causing issues.

A significant number of fans appeared to have consumed too much alcohol before the game, which likely influenced their behaviour inside and outside the ground. Additionally, it appears that Hartlepool sold too many tickets, resulting in insufficient space in the seating area for all fans. Despite space being available in the corners for people to stand between seats, many chose to congregate in the centre walkway, obstructing views and the clearway. This obstructive behaviour compounded the already disappointing experience for those of us seated in the front who cannot stand.

York City is a wonderful club with a fabulous fan base. However, on Saturday, I felt embarrassed to be among the supporters due to some fans' dreadful behaviour. The stewards and police at the ground did little to diffuse the situation. Had they intervened to move people from the walkway at the start of the game, the experience would have been more enjoyable for those of us unable to stand at the front. It was perplexing to witness a fan being taken out by the police for inciting opposition fans, only to be allowed back in afterward. What message does that send?

I also wonder if some locals supporting other teams infiltrated the York end due to the absence of Premier League/Championship games, intent on causing trouble. Additionally, the provision for disabled supporters was abysmal. This issue, coupled with supporters standing in the walkway, compounded the difficulties faced by dedicated supporters for whom attending matches is already challenging.

I believe these supporters should all be offered refunds by HUFC, and I wonder if YCFC and the Supporters Trust would advocate on their behalf with HUFC.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Kind regards,

R

Eyewitness 6 - M

I attended the Hartlepool vs. York City match on Saturday, January 27th. Traveling alone in my car, I parked and went to the designated pub. Upon arrival, I noticed at least three police vehicles and several intimidating officers outside. However, inside the bar, York fans were singing and enjoying themselves in good spirits, contrary to reports by the police of rowdy behaviour.

As I left the ground, I witnessed police pushing York supporters around and grabbing them. I saw fathers with their small children being manhandled while their children cried. When I questioned why they were doing this, an officer warned me to stay quiet or face arrest. It seemed that innocence or being a child didn't matter; the police were violent towards anyone.

Fortunately, I did not witness the appalling scenes at the station, but I have since heard stories and seen sickening images of police brutality. I have traveled the country supporting York City since the early '80s, enduring some tough times of football hooliganism, but I have never witnessed police behave in such a disgusting manner.

While there may have been a very small number of disruptive fans from both Hartlepool and York, we're talking about 20 or 30 individuals. However, the police seemed to attack whoever they wanted, fueling a toxic atmosphere.

Keep the faith.

M

Eyewitness 7 - D

I wish to bring to your attention several concerning incidents that arose on Saturday during our visit to Hartlepool.

It all started when we arrived at the ground. I had arranged a disabled parking space in your car park prior to the game. Upon arrival at the ground, little did we know that the main road would be closed off. As we approached the steward at the end of the road closure, I asked him where we should go, as we had a disabled parking space booked. He said that I needed to be down the road towards the other end of the closed road, and he moved the cones to let me through. Halfway down that road, another steward stopped me and asked me what did I think I was doing, couldn't I see the road was closed? I replied that the steward had told me to come this way, and even moved the cones to let me through. Then he muttered something along the lines of "telling me off", when it wasn't my fault.

We parked up, not sure where to go, bearing in mind there were two of us in wheelchairs, and another walking slowly with sticks. We asked a steward where we should be, and he replied York fans need to go through here, pointing to the turnstile on

the main road. Another steward came along and opened the big gate to let us in and scanned our tickets. We then asked where do we go? He didn't know and told us to head towards the tunnel area. It was clear that we were in the home end, but we did as instructed. Then another steward told us to go down the tunnel and turn right at the end. We did that but there was no disabled area there, so we turned back and asked again. Eventually, a Hartlepool supporter went to get a supervisor who knew what he was doing. He said we had come in the wrong end. We said we were told to come this way. Anyway, he told us we had to go back out of the ground, through the car park, and through an entrance in the corner. There was no way the lad with sticks could have walked round there, so he let him through the gate, but myself and the other wheelchair user had to make our way to the far corner.

Upon entering the ground and the disabled viewing area, it was chaos. It is a really poor viewing area for disabled and ambulant people. I challenge any of the staff or directors to go and sit there and imagine you have a thousand fans in the stand. You can literally see very little. This was because our own fans were too busy gesturing and goading the home fans, and the stewards and police weren't interested when we said we couldn't see. One fan came and stood on the wall right in front of me goading. What happened? The police went and got him, took him out, but let him back in again a couple of minutes later.

Luckily for me, I was able to move forward slightly to try and get a better view (not much better), but then a steward said we had to keep the walkway clear. I said that I can't see if I go back to the wall. The lad who was ambulant sat on the seats in the disabled area didn't see a thing.

I feel at the very least we should claim a refund on our tickets. I also think the stewarding standard was extremely poor. As a former Steward Supervisor, I know how to engage with fans. But on Saturday, there was none of that other than the one supervisor who helped us find our way.

I can supply the booking reference number if needed.

I hope lessons can be learned from this shambolic afternoon.

Kind Regards

D

Eye Witness 8 - C

I also wish to register a complaint regarding the Hartlepool game.

We purchased seats E/A/1 to E/A/3 but didn't see any of the match due to our own fans blocking the walkways. We encountered verbal abuse from men who felt entitled to stand at the front. My daughter, who is autistic, and her friend, who was on crutches

after being recently discharged from the hospital, faced difficulties. They were pushed and jostled by drunk individuals, and despite her condition, she was ironically told to put her crutches under her seat. Fans were also standing on the wall, posing a risk of falling backward. One female security officer was hit in the face by a York fan who fell forward.

A lady next to me was recovering from surgery and unable to stand, which made the situation horrendous. Additionally, the fire exits were blocked, and despite our requests, stewards and security refused to help. It was evident that the away end was overcrowded, and the fire exits were not kept clear, creating a potentially dangerous situation.

We were informed that many fans had been given tickets for a non-existent Row J, further adding to the chaos. Despite multiple appeals for assistance from security, stewards, and the police, nothing was done. Some of them seemed more interested in watching the game, as evidenced by our photos.

Eventually, we left the game and waited for over 25 minutes outside the ground for the Supporters Bus driver to return. The lack of respect for less able people was appalling, and my daughter, who paid for the match tickets and the coach, would like a refund from Hartlepool. It was a complete waste of time.

One of our friends who has additional needs, was arrested on his way home towards the station. B, a 21-year-old, gentle young man, was bitten by a police dog and banned from matches for 3 months, which is utterly ridiculous considering his non-violent nature.

I sincerely hope that the club and the supporters' trust take our comments on board and take necessary actions to seek justice for the many fans who were treated appallingly on their way to the station.

Kind regards,

C

Eyewitness 9 - AL

I wish to bring to your attention the distressing incident involving my son, J, at the Hartlepool away match on Saturday.

J, a devoted York City supporter since childhood, attended the game with friends. On their return from the match, they encountered a troubling situation at the railway station. The fans were confronted by police dogs, and despite his efforts to comply with police instructions, he was subjected to unwarranted aggression.

Videos posted on social media depict J being deliberately pulled forward into the path of a police dog, resulting in severe injuries. He was then unjustly arrested, detained for hours, and subjected to verbal abuse without being allowed to make a statement. The

treatment he endured was unacceptable and has left both physical and psychological scars.

J's injuries required medical treatment, and the trauma of the incident has had a profound impact on his life. Additionally, the threat of pending charges has added to his distress and uncertainty about his future.

The conduct of the police on that day was reprehensible, with evidence suggesting a severe collective failing among the officers present. The use of excessive force, wrongful arrests, and intimidation tactics have tarnished their reputation and undermined trust in law enforcement.

As J's father, I am determined to seek justice for him and all the fans who were mistreated. I am willing to pursue legal action independently to hold those responsible accountable for their actions.

I appreciate any guidance or recommendations you can provide in this matter. It is crucial that we address this issue to prevent similar incidents from occurring in the future and restore trust in policing at football matches.

Sincerely,

AL

Eyewitness 10 - J

I am writing to provide an account of the distressing events involving my son at the recent Hartlepool away game.

B, who has special needs, attended the match with friends. Following the game, we received a call informing us of his arrest under a section 5 Public Order offense. Despite our attempts to gather information from Cleveland Police, we were met with resistance and were not informed of B's whereabouts or the details of his arrest until much later.

Upon speaking to B, who struggles with a severe stammer, it became apparent that he had been bitten by a police dog and struck with a baton. Despite his condition, he was not provided with appropriate support or legal representation during his time in custody.

B recounts being pushed by the crowd and attempting to reach his friend before being attacked, handcuffed, and taken to the station. Social media footage corroborates his cooperative behaviour prior to his arrest.

As his parent, I am deeply concerned about B's mental health in the aftermath of this incident. He has been experiencing significant distress and struggles to process what has happened.

We urge for a thorough investigation into the actions of Cleveland Police and seek justice for B and all others affected by their conduct.

Sincerely,

J

Eyewitness 11 – S

Before the game, I was at the Clarendon with my son (6), enjoying lime and lemonade as I was driving. There was no trouble, no loud singing, or abusive behaviour. Just around 40-50 men casually enjoying their drinks. Around 1:30, the police entered the pub and approached several of us, including myself, stating that unless we moved to the pub of their choosing within ten minutes, everyone would be arrested, citing a section 4 dispersal order. They were being aggressive, pushing, shoving, and swearing at people, although the patrons remained calm and reasonable. None of the police officers were wearing body cameras. I asserted my rights to see the dispersal order signed by an inspector before complying, and surprisingly, they left the pub and didn't return. It seemed like they were trying to provoke a response, even though there was no sign of any Hartlepool fans or trouble. In my opinion, the policing was very poorly handled, and it felt like they were deliberately trying to create an issue where there wasn't one.