A Report offering recommendations for the reconfiguration of Old Trafford seating plans in conjunction with the redevelopment of the ground for the start of season 2006/07

Prepared by The Independent Manchester United Supporters Association (IMUSA)

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Executive Summary

IMUSA is delighted to have the opportunity to respond to Manchester United’s request for a proposal for the reconfiguration of Old Trafford.

IMUSA is proposing a solution which will meet long standing core objectives of our members and regular match going supporters across a wide cross section.

In meeting these objectives, 44,000 supporters can have home ticket prices reduced, the Stretford End can become again the heart of United's vocal home support and finally, the introduction of the next generation of local Manchester United fans can be encouraged.

In addition, match day revenue can be maintained and indeed increased.
Introduction

This report has been drafted as a result of a request from Manchester United Football Club via the “Fans Forum” (30/11/04) relating to desired input and recommendations from the Independent Manchester United Supporters Association (IMUSA) when the club re-develops The Old Trafford football stadium for the start of the football season 2006/2007.

The recommendations contained within this report take into consideration IMUSA policy relating to ticket pricing as well as guidelines and recommendations previously made by the Football Task Force (FTF). References to these are made throughout this report.

Whilst IMUSA would never claim to speak for every supporter, we would also stress that we are one of only two groups on the Fans Forum who democratically represent a constituency and as such we would argue this lends weight to our proposals. Further, due to our conviction that this is a key opportunity to address configuration and pricing issue we have also sought input from all three of United’s fanzines, a large number of supporters beyond our membership, academics, and the Manchester United Disabled Supporters Association (MUDSA) when compiling this report.

IMUSA recognises and appreciates the opportunity for input and welcomes the growing relationship and openness between Manchester United and IMUSA. We believe that the recommendations contained within meet with the fiscal objectives of MUFC PLC in delivering additional shareholder value whilst ensuring that IMUSA policy and FTF guidelines referenced in this document are maintained.

Whilst a number of recommendations will be proposed, the document will centre on two key proposals. It should be noted that these two proposals have long been at the core of IMUSA policy and subsequently the acceptance of this document and recognition from IMUSA that Manchester United have done so, will rest solely on the undertaking of these two key proposals.

However IMUSA also recognises the need for co-operation between vested parties and will therefore, where possible, provide a number of solutions for any perceived obstacles and hopes to continue the dialogue further, once this document has been presented.

We trust that MUFC agree with our recommendations and implement the changes accordingly for the start of the 2006/07 season.
IMUSA Ticketing Report (30/11/00) & Football Task Force Report

IMUSA submitted a report to the Fans Forum on November 30th 2000 relating to ticketing issues surrounding supporters of Manchester United. Whilst it is frequently acknowledged that some of the recommendations made in this report have been (in whole or part) adopted by Manchester United especially the away ticket loyalty system, greater policing for touting on the Internet and the allocation of tickets for supporters travelling abroad for Champions League games, there are many other important concerns and recommendations were largely ignored or played down. The following extracts from the document in November 2000 are related to this report directly and have been taken into consideration when making our recommendations.

The Government Football Task Force thoroughly investigated ticket policies during its tenure. This is leading to changes in the governance of football, not least over ticketing policy. It is important that whatever reforms are made to ticketing policy at Manchester United FC, they are in line with these new national guidelines.

IMUSA has publicly backed the more radical Majority Report from the Task Force, Report One. However, IMUSA finds little to criticise in many of the recommendations contained in Report Two (known as the ‘Minority Report’) written by the FA and Premier League, of which Manchester United are members, and the Football League. The Chair of Manchester United Plc, Professor Sir Roland Smith, a member of the Task Force Working Group, has also backed the recommendations in Report Two. Indeed, IMUSA feels that implementation of the following recommendations made by the football authorities would make a substantial contribution to resolving ticketing problems at Manchester United.

Report Two stated:

- Clubs should promote inclusionary ticketing policies and greater accessibility through the use of more flexible and imaginative ticketing and general marketing policies;
- Clubs should commit to stretch prices, thus providing a wider range. This will allow more access at the less expensive end, these tickets being effectively subsidised by those at the higher end;
- Clubs should promote accessibility through appropriate concessions tailored to take account of individual club economics and area demographics;
- Clubs should offer where possible payment for season tickets by instalment at reasonable interest rates;
- Clubs should establish and publicise a policy for the return and distribution of unwanted tickets.
These recommendations have also been supported by research commissioned specifically for the Task Force, undertaken by John Williams of Leicester University’s Sir Norman Chester Centre for Football Research, who also conduct the Premier League Fan Surveys. Their report for the Task Force, Ticket Pricing, Football Business And 'Excluded' Football Fans, concluded that:

- 68.9% of existing season ticket holders feel that high prices in football mean that 'hard core' supporters are finding it difficult or impossible to attend games [2.16];
- 62.7% of season ticket holders thought that pricing structures prevented them from taking children to games [2.19];
- There was a generalised sense... that the game had moved on and had left behind many of the people... and that it was now catering only for some of the older fans who had managed to stay connected, but also for money people, the rich, or posh people, who it was alleged make up the typical crowd these days.’[4.15]

IMUSA policy towards ticketing pricing remains consistent and our concerns raised in November 2000 remain as strong. We believe that by inviting IMUSA to propose recommendations relating to the reconfiguration of Old Trafford, that Manchester United accept that alterations to seating / ticket pricing can and will make a real contribution to a more inclusive and fairer ticketing policy at Old Trafford.
**IMUSA Objectives & Recommendations**

IMUSA policy has long been centred on the provision of a fair ticket pricing policy to ensure that supporters in the areas of Old Trafford with poor views pay the lowest prices and that likewise, those supporters in non executive premium seats pay the highest prices. IMUSA believe that although this practice is currently in operation, the delta between the prices paid between poor and premium seats is too close and that a greater spread in ticketing prices need to be enforced to recognise poorer viewing and premium viewing areas in the Ground.

IMUSA will continue to strongly campaign for a wider distribution of concession tickets at Manchester United.

A concern, which has been expressed countless times by IMUSA’s membership, has been the relocation of supporters who were dispersed during the development of the Stretford End back to this iconic home. IMUSA recognise the current facilities in the Stretford End Tier 1 and this report offers recommendations as to how best address and issues with the re-introduction and changing landscape of the Stretford End in its current configuration.

**KEY RECOMMENDATION ONE – RECONFIGURATION OF THE STRETFORD END/WEST STAND.**

IMUSA has long asserted that the configuration of the Stretford End needs addressing not only on a basis of principle, namely it traditionally being the ‘spiritual home’ of United supporters, but also one of atmosphere. In addition, this would also be a positive step taken in support of the Atkins Risk Assessment report for Trafford MBC which recommended moving the Singing Section from West Tier 2, to groundside

IMUSA would prefer not to dwell on past decisions taken with regards to this stand, but instead point to the opportunity that the expansion of Old Trafford provides and as such propose reconfiguration of this stand on two fronts:

1) Relocation of the executive facilities from the Stretford End.

IMUSA has no contention with supporters who sit within this area of the ground, more the location of this section within the Stretford End, and similarly always contested that those choosing executive facilities would be better served in a more premium location such as those within the North and South stands, rather than seats behind a goal.

We do however recognise that those supporters within this section are likely to want to retain their facilities. Similarly we also recognise that Manchester United PLC will wish to protect the revenue that this section generates. As such we would propose one of the following options to relocate the 862 seats currently held there.
• Expansion of North Stand executive facilities.
• Expansion of South Stand executive facilities.
• Full relocation to one of the new quadrants (or a split between the two if necessary)
• A combination of two or three of these options, whilst keeping the numbers constant.

2) Relocation of the Family Stand from the Stretford End.

As with the previous proposed relocation IMUSA has no issue with those who sit in this section. Indeed, as an organisation who have long campaigned for greater accessibility for under-16’s, it is an imperative that it should be retained in similar numbers to its current form. Our only motivation is a desire to see the Stretford End, returned, atmosphere-wise, to its former glories. We recognise the success of West Stand Tier Two, and the role the club played in configuring this part of the ground and as such would like to see it extended to the rest of that End. Therefore we would recommend the Family Stand be relocated to:

• One of the new quadrants once developed.
• A split between the two, if that is the decision made with respect to relocated executive facilities.

Note: Whilst the above two relocations are listed separately, they form part of the same key recommendation and should be addressed as such.

These proposals obviously raise issues as to those who would be relocated and as such IMUSA would recommend that anyone who wishes to retain their current seat can do so, albeit under the new ‘guise’ of the stand. Similarly the current executive facilities underneath the stand would require addressing. As such we would recommend the following secondary proposal:

• Existing Executive facilities under West Stand should be turned into a social facility for “ordinary” (non-executive) Manchester United supporters to utilise on pre/post match- and non-match days.

This social club we believe would offer supporters a long overdue pre-match gathering place, whilst also bringing revenue benefits to the club.

KEY RECOMMENDATION TWO – FAIRER TICKETING PRICING POLICY BY MEANS OF PRICE STRETCHING.

• Ticket prices should be stretched to give a greater spread between highest and lowest prices tickets (tickets at the lower end should be reduced).
• Ticket prices in future should be fixed in percentage terms as a factor of the cheapest tickets (subsequent price rises should retain the ratios of the prices for the different parts of the ground – i.e. percentage rather than flat-rate increases should be implemented in future). This
will prevent the compression of prices that has been seen when flat-rate price rises are implemented.

- Any season-ticket / LMTB holders who, subsequent to the introduction of these proposed ticket recommendations, sees the price of their ticket increase should have the opportunity to relocate to an alternative (cheaper) area of the ground.
- All future price increases to be no greater than the rate of inflation and for this to be covenanted in order to protect supporters in any instance of a takeover.
- Executive facilities should be priced according to principles of supply and demand due to the nature of them being primarily corporate, as opposed to personal, facilities. Prices for these facilities should be raised to a level comparable with similar facilities at comparable clubs (Chelsea, Arsenal, Liverpool, etc) as long as it is felt that the market can sustain such price rises.

**Secondary Proposals:**

- Pay-on-the-day is introduced for under-18s for a section of the ground (such as Stretford End Lower). Tickets could be sold in advance or indeed on the days of the game (assuming weekend / holiday match) for example a system of first come, first served when ticket office opens at 9:00 am. Juniors would have to get there early to get tickets, which would benefit local juniors. Any potential problems with touting can be fairly easily overcome - especially if these are for a 'junior section' - if those who utilise the scheme are required to produce identification details to enable spot checks to be made at the turnstiles and in the ground.
- All junior tickets within the ground should be at the concessionary rate, not just limited to certain sections or the family stand.
- All over-65 tickets within the ground should be at the concessionary rate.
- Manchester United to consider an unreserved section for supporters who want to sit with friends. Seats could be allocated at the turnstile on production of a qualifying season ticket and match voucher.
- Discussions with MUDSA indicate their concerns relating to standing during moments of extreme excitement in the small section of East Lower in front of the existing disabled section. IMUSA would consider as acceptable any plan for the redevelopment of this section for additional disabled spaces and recognise this may also meet with regulations pertaining to development and facilities for disabled supporters.

**Notes:**

1. See Appendix B for proposed price bandings within the ground.
2. See Appendix C for proposed pricing as per our recommendations
3. IMUSA recognises the need for Executive tickets in their role of subsidising ticket prices elsewhere in the ground. IMUSA suggests that these should be an increase in the cost of Executive facilities to bring them into line with similar facilities as other comparable clubs. However, these
financials have not been taken into consideration within this proposal due to lack of pricing information for existing and proposed Executive facilities.

4. IMUSA will demonstrate in this proposal how ticket pricing can be “revenue positive” for United (i.e. increasing current levels of match day revenue) whilst also reducing significant numbers of tickets in price.

5. IMUSA recognises that Premium seating areas highlighted in our proposal are subject to disparities in perceived difference of quality and viewing standards themselves (based on elevation, position in relation to close proximity of pitch and the position of seat in relation to the half way line / paddock areas) and whilst our proposals do not allow for the diversities this offers nor does our proposal include any “banding”, we acknowledge that discussions on these particular seats may need to take place between IMUSA and Manchester United in order to address these discrepancies.

6. IMUSA financial proposals have not taken into consideration higher pricing charged for members / non-members nor the implications relating to revenues generated from away supporters.
**Conclusion**

The proposals put forward by IMUSA on the reconfiguration of Old Trafford contain two key recommendations that IMUSA sees as crucial to the acceptability of the exercise:

- **Re-pricing of match tickets.** Involving a “price stretching” exercise whereby many tickets are reduced significantly in price, in conjunction with future price increases being incurred in percentage terms in order to maintain the post-reconfiguration spread. Executive facilities should in future be priced appropriately according to demand.

- **Relocation of the existing family stand and executive facilities within the West Stand to an area of the ground more suitable in order to allow the perception of the West Stand/Stretford End as an area for “ordinary supporters” to return**

In addition, IMUSA wish to put forward a number of secondary proposals the implementation of which would also be considered by our membership, and we believe the majority of match-going supporters, to greatly increase the quality of the match day experience. IMUSA are also keen to stress that a key aim of this reconfiguration should not only be the retention of the traditional match going support, but also the cultivation of new and younger match going support who are currently deterred by a combination of high prices and the lack of a simple and convenient mechanism of purchasing match tickets.

- **Existing Executive facilities under West Stand converted into a supporters’ club incorporating bar areas, etc for use on match- and non-match days**
- **Pay-on-the-day is introduced for under-18s for a specified section of the ground**
- **All junior tickets within the ground should be at the concessionary rate, not just limited to certain sections or the family stand.**
- **All over-65 tickets within the ground should be at the concessionary rate.**
- **Manchester United to consider an unreserved section for supporters who want to sit with friends. Seats could be allocated at the turnstile on production of a qualifying season ticket and match voucher.**
- **Consultation on expansion of disabled section of the ground**

IMUSA welcome the invitation by MUFC to provide recommendations for the plans to reconfigure Old Trafford and see this as a further example of how much the club recognise our strong ties to Manchester United supporters from all demography’s.

We also recognise that as a PLC, Manchester United is compelled to deliver value to its shareholders. Whilst many romantics believe a football club should offer the most attractive football and best facilities for the lowest cost, IMUSA are only too aware of the perils facing supporters of clubs who over invest on a restricted / limited revenue income.
We believe the recommendations contained within this report strike a fine balance between the city and supporters. You can deliver enhanced shareholder value by increasing the facilities at Old Trafford, offering a greater number of highly profitable Executive facilities and by encouraging the greater use of facilities of supporters pre and post match.

In producing a fairer ticketing price system based on a greater spread between the prices of poorer view seats and the best view seats, Manchester United Football Club will be making a powerful statement to supporters in recognising their value to the continued success of the team on the pitch, whilst accepting that many supporters feel that they are being priced out of the game. In addition the introduction of additional concessionary prices will ensure that the lifeblood of Manchester United (its youth supporters) will feel that watching Manchester United is affordable and thus the chain of long-term & ongoing support remains unbroken.

Finally, providing the method for supporters to “reclaim” the Stretford End many supporters (after years of campaigning) will be able to return to their “spiritual home” with fellow supporters (some of whom will have been there for over 30 years) and will indeed return to Old Trafford the vocal assistance often missing. In offering facilities pre / post match to supporters in the Stretford End, Manchester United will be providing a focal point for supporters to meet, whilst allowing the utilisation of existing facilities for food and beverages.

In summary the recommendations will deliver the following (as per table in Appendix C):

- The reduction in prices of tickets for some 44,000 supporters
- A gross increase in match day revenue (excluding revenue from new quadrants) of £57,000 – In excess of £1 Million for a season of League games only.
- An (as yet unquantifiable) increase in Executive facility generated revenue
- Additional increased match day income through the use of supporters facilities inside the Stretford End.

IMUSA see this as an excellent opportunity for Manchester United to demonstrate to supporters the value the club places on them. In this proposal we have suggested ways in which Manchester United can maintain, and even increase, match day revenue whilst also instigating a ticket pricing policy which will see the majority of ordinary tickets reduced in price and a ground configuration that will fulfil the demands of our members and the majority of the match going supporter base in returning the West Stand/Stretford End to the traditional core support. 
Appendix A

Manchester United Proposed configuration

TOTAL STADIUM CAPACITY = 76313

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Appendix B

IMUSA Proposed Configuration

TOTAL STADIUM CAPACITY = 76313

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## Appendix C

### IMUSA Financial Proposals and considerations

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<th>Stand / Area</th>
<th>Available Seats</th>
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<th>Match day Revenue</th>
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**Total Match day Revenue**

£1,629,457

£1,844,535