Aston Villa FC Fan Advisory Board



Culture Working Group - Strategic Plan 2025–2028

Prepared for: Aston Villa FC Fan Advisory Board (FAB) / Aston Villa FC

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Executive Summary

The **Culture Working Group** of the **Aston Villa FC Fan Advisory Board (FAB)** exists to protect, celebrate and advance the identity, history and lived experience of Aston Villa supporters. This 2025–2028 Strategic Plan sets out a structured programme of work designed to strengthen supporter culture, ensure transparent and meaningful engagement, and align Aston Villa with the **Football Governance Act 2025**, the **Independent Football Regulator** (IFR), the **Premier League Fan Engagement Standard** (FES), and best practice promoted by the **Football Supporters' Association** (FSA).

The strategy is organised around **five core pillars**:

1. **Values & Inclusion** – embedding Pride, Passion and Purpose while ensuring all supporters feel represented and welcomed.
2. **Heritage & Identity** – safeguarding what makes Aston Villa unique, including co-creating a Villa Heritage Charter and documenting the evolution of the North Stand.
3. **Everyday Culture & Matchday Experience** – celebrating the rituals, atmosphere and traditions that shape matchdays and global supporter life.
4. **Fan Voice, Transparency & Engagement** – amplifying supporter voices through structured consultation, surveys and quarterly reporting.
5. **Governance, Review & Impact** – ensuring accountability, evaluation and continuous improvement.

Across these pillars sit **14 key initiatives**, ranging from the Villa Values in Action Programme and the Aston Villa Cultural Map of Aston, to global storytelling, inclusion campaigns, atmosphere enhancement, and the Annual Cultural Impact Report. Together, they create a long-term cultural vision leading into UEFA EURO 2028, positioning Aston Villa as a leader in inclusive, heritage-rooted, supporter-centred culture.

This strategy provides a clear roadmap for delivery, defines how supporters will shape cultural decisions, and ensures Aston Villa's identity is preserved and celebrated for future generations.

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1. Introduction

The Aston Villa FC Fan Advisory Board (FAB) exists to unite supporters behind one strong, representative voice. Within this structure, the Culture Working Group (CWG) plays a central role in shaping the identity, values and lived experience of Aston Villa supporters—at Villa Park and across the world.

This Culture Working Strategic Plan (2025–2028) sets out a clear mission, governance framework, and programme of work leading up to UEFA EURO 2028, for which Villa Park will serve as a host venue. It aligns the FAB's cultural ambitions with:

- The Football Governance Act 2025 and the emerging framework of the Independent Football Regulator (IFR), particularly around heritage protection and structured supporter engagement;
- The Premier League Fan Engagement Standard (FES), requiring clubs to demonstrate meaningful, transparent and accountable engagement with supporters;
- Guidance and best practice from the Football Supporters' Association (FSA);
- Exemplary models of cultural and heritage engagement from other Premier League clubs and their own Fan Advisory Boards.

This plan strengthens the FAB's commitment to acting as a positive, constructive and strategic partner to Aston Villa FC, while upholding the principle that the club's identity and heritage are co-owned by its supporters.

2. Purpose of the Culture Working Group

The Culture Working Group exists to champion Aston Villa's identity, values and community. Its purpose is to ensure that Villa Park remains a welcoming, inclusive, inspiring, and culturally vibrant home for every supporter—celebrating the heritage that defines Aston Villa while embracing progress that keeps our culture alive and growing.

Drawing on Raymond Williams' influential cultural framework, the Group works across three interconnected strands:

- Ideal – articulating the values and principles that define Aston Villa, including Pride, Passion and Purpose.
- Documentary – protecting and promoting the stories, traditions and artefacts that shape our past and present.
- Social – strengthening the everyday cultural experiences and connections that bind supporters together.

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Together, these strands guide the Group's contribution to the club's wider fan engagement efforts and to the FAB's responsibility to represent supporter voices in strategic matters.

3. Mission Statement

Our mission is to protect, promote and develop the culture of Aston Villa Football Club by:

1. **Living Our Values** – embedding Aston Villa's values in club communications, matchday activations, and community initiatives.
2. **Protecting Our Heritage** – safeguarding the symbols, stories, places and traditions that define our identity, in line with the Football Governance Act 2025 and the Premier League Fan Engagement Standard.
3. **Celebrating the Everyday** – supporting the rituals, friendships, atmosphere, and stories that make matchdays special across generations.
4. **Amplifying Fan Voices** – ensuring transparent, structured engagement with diverse supporter groups.
5. **Bridging Past and Future** – combining tradition with innovation, so Villa's culture remains both authentic and forward-looking.

4. Governance, Membership & Partnerships

4.1 Governance

- Lead: Culture Working Group Lead - Craig Hamilton.
- Reporting Line: Fan Advisory Board (FAB).
- Annual Accountability: Quarterly updates to FAB; annual report aligned with the Premier League Fan Engagement Standard.

4.2 Co-Opted Expert Members

To support effective delivery, the Culture Working Group may appoint co-opted members—supporters or specialists external to the FAB—who possess expertise in areas such as heritage, fan culture, EDI, digital storytelling, archiving, atmosphere management, or community engagement.

This mirrors best practice seen at clubs such as Everton, Tottenham Hotspur and Brentford, whose FABs invite subject-matter experts to strengthen specific projects.

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4.3 Key Partnerships

To deliver its programme, the Culture Working Group will collaborate closely with:

- Aston Villa Supporter Services – operational insight and engagement channels
- EDI Lead (Sam Ghataora) – connecting with Fans for Diversity groups
- Marketing & Communications (Tommy Jordan / Gavin Forbes) – storytelling, branding, Villa TV
- Facilities & Development – stadium projects, built heritage
- Independent Fan Groups:
    - 1897 Group (atmosphere, flags, tifos)
    - Lions Clubs (global supporter communities)
    - Villa & Proud, Villans Together, Punjabi Villans, Villa Bellas
- External Stakeholders:
    - Football Supporters' Association (FSA)
    - Premier League (Fan Engagement Standard)
    - Heritage bodies (e.g., Historic England, Birmingham heritage groups)

5. Strategic Context (External Alignment)

The Culture Working Group's work is framed by major developments in English football governance:

5.1 Football Governance Act 2025 & Independent Football Regulator (IFR)

The Act strengthens supporter consultation and heritage protections, requiring clubs to:

- Protect key heritage assets (name, crest, colours, stadium location);
- Provide structured dialogue mechanisms with fans;
- Demonstrate consultation on major cultural or identity changes;
- Engage transparently on developments affecting club heritage.

5.2 Premier League Fan Engagement Standard

The FES sets expectations on:

- Publishing a Fan Engagement Plan and an annual report;
- Maintaining effective Fan Advisory Boards;
- Ensuring diverse representation;
- Providing transparent consultation pathways.

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5.3 Football Supporters' Association (FSA) Guidance

The FSA promotes:

- Protection of club heritage and identity;
- Democratic supporter engagement;
- Inclusion and anti-discrimination;
- Fair ticketing and supporter representation.

5.4 Best Practice from Other Premier League FABs

Leading clubs highlight:

- Clear heritage strategies (e.g., Spurs, Everton, Liverpool);
- Visible, year-round fan culture programmes (e.g., Brighton, Brentford);
- Strong alignment between FAB outputs and club fan engagement reporting.

These shape the standards and expectations for Aston Villa's approach.

6. Strategic Plan 2025–2028

The Culture Working Group will deliver its mission through a coordinated programme of work from August 2025 to June 2028, aligned with Villa Park's role in UEFA EURO 2028 and the club's long-term infrastructure plans, including the North Stand expansion. This timeframe also aligns with the initial term-lengths of the FAB members who constitute the Culture working group.

6.1 Core Outcomes by June 2028

By the end of the planning period, the Culture Working Group will have:

- Published and implemented the Villa Heritage Charter;
- Enhanced matchday atmosphere and cultural visibility across Villa Park;
- Strengthened the club's identity storytelling (local, national, international);
- Delivered multiple inclusion-focused activations;
- Embedded cultural metrics into fan experience surveys;
- Published annual cultural impact reports;
- Ensured Aston Villa's cultural strategy is recognised as a best-in-class model across the Premier League.

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7. Strategic Pillars

The work of the Culture Working Group is organised into five strategic pillars, each supported by specific initiatives.

Pillar 1: Values & Inclusion

Embed Aston Villa's values and ensure that all supporters—across identities, backgrounds, generations and geographies—feel represented and included. Work under this pillar aligns with the Premier League's EDI commitments and the FSA's Fans for Diversity framework.

Pillar 2: Heritage & Identity

Protect and celebrate what makes Aston Villa unique: our symbols, stories, spaces, rituals and living history. Work aligns directly with heritage protections in the Football Governance Act 2025 and the IFR's regulatory expectations.

Pillar 3: Everyday Culture & Matchday Experience

Strengthen the everyday cultural fabric that defines Aston Villa—songs, flags, atmosphere, friendships, pubs, journeys, rituals and shared moments. Partnerships with groups such as the 1897 Group and Lions Clubs are key.

Pillar 4: Fan Voice, Transparency & Engagement

Ensure structured, transparent and representative engagement. This supports the Premier League Fan Engagement Standard and the FAB's goals of promoting trust and accountability.

Pillar 5: Governance, Review & Impact

Create a culture of continuous improvement, evaluation and accountability. Publish annual reports and support the club's wider Fan Engagement Plan for Premier League compliance.

8. Key Initiatives (2025–2028)

Below are short summaries of the 14 initiatives that will be fully developed in the period 2025-28.

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Pillar 1: Values & Inclusion

1. Villa Values in Action Programme

A year-round programme demonstrating Aston Villa's core values—Pride, Passion and Purpose—through matchday activations, supporter storytelling, and visible alignment across club communications. This initiative brings Villa's values to life by celebrating everyday examples of supporters and staff who embody them.

2. Inclusion Matchday Activations

Delivery of four high-impact inclusion campaigns each season, aligned with Premier League priorities such as No Room for Racism, Her Game Too, Rainbow Laces and Inside Matters. These activations are co-designed with identity-based supporter groups to ensure visibility, authenticity and meaningful change.

3. EDI Partnerships & Representation Strategy

Quarterly engagement with Fans for Diversity groups—Villa & Proud, Punjabi Villans, Villans Together and Villa Bellas—to strengthen inclusion, representation and belonging. The initiative ensures under-represented supporter identities are reflected in club storytelling, matchday visibility and decision-making processes.

Pillar 2: Heritage & Identity

4. Villa Heritage Charter

A formal, co-created framework that defines what constitutes Aston Villa's heritage, how it is protected, and how supporters are consulted on changes. The Charter aligns with the Football Governance Act and Premier League Fan Engagement Standard, ensuring transparency, stewardship and meaningful fan involvement.

5. North Stand Project

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A comprehensive heritage-in-transition programme documenting the redevelopment of the North Stand through photography, oral histories and fan-led storytelling. This initiative ensures that Villa's identity shapes the design and naming of the new stand, embedding heritage into the fabric of the redevelopment and giving supporters a sense of ownership.

6. Villa History in Focus Series

A twice-per-season heritage series highlighting key matches, artefacts, fan traditions and Villa Park memories, around an in-person event held in the new Warehouse and delivered across digital channels and Villa TV. The series strengthens connections between past and present while promoting pride in the club's history.

7. Aston Villa Cultural Map of Aston

An online and interactive cultural map of Villa Park and the surrounding area that showcases historic sites such as the Holte Pub, the former Villa Cross Wesleyan Chapel, music heritage locations (including Black Sabbath's childhood homes) and other significant landmarks. The project has future potential to develop into guided walking tours, plaques, and cultural trails ahead of UEFA EURO 2028.

Pillar 3: Everyday Culture & Matchday Experience

8: Matchday Culture & Atmosphere Programme

A supporter-led programme co-designed with the 1897 Group and the club to enhance flags, tifos, displays and matchday atmosphere. This initiative strengthens Villa Park's identity by amplifying fan voices and celebrating the unique rituals and energy that define the Villa matchday experience.

9: Global Villans Storytelling Project

A monthly storytelling series spotlighting Aston Villa supporters around the world, showcasing the global reach, diversity and loyalty of the Villa family. The project connects international Lions Clubs and global fan communities with Villa Park through stories, features and digital content.

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10: Everyday Culture Documentation

A long-term documentation project preserving the "social strand" of Villa culture—songs, chants, matchday routes, pubs, family traditions and micro-heritage. Through photos, interviews and fan submissions, this initiative creates a living archive of what it means to be a member of the Villa community.

Pillar 4: Fan Voice, Transparency & Engagement

11: Quarterly Culture Updates & Communication Channels

Regular updates via the Fan Engagement webpage and Villa TV, providing transparent reporting on progress, challenges and next steps. Supported by the dedicated culture@ mailbox, this initiative strengthens dialogue and trust between supporters, the FAB and the club.

12. Culture & EDI Survey Integration

Embedding culture, atmosphere, heritage and inclusion questions into FAB surveys and the club's fan-experience surveys. This initiative creates a consistent evidence base for decision-making and helps track cultural progress over time.

13. Consultation Framework for Cultural & Identity Matters

A structured, repeatable process for consulting supporters on cultural issues beyond formal heritage protections. This includes surveys, workshops, open calls for views and "You Said, We Did" reporting, ensuring the everyday supporter voice shapes cultural decisions.

Pillar 5: Governance, Review & Impact

14. Annual Cultural Impact Report & Mid-Season Review

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A robust governance cycle that measures progress across all culture initiatives, aligned with the Premier League Fan Engagement Standard and expectations of the Independent Football Regulator. The Mid-Season Review assesses in-year delivery, while the Annual Cultural Impact Report showcases achievements, insights and next-year priorities.

9. Measuring Success: Metrics, Milestones & Impact Framework

To demonstrate transparency, trust and long-term cultural impact, the Culture Working Group will adopt a structured evaluation approach that measures both **quantitative progress** and **qualitative cultural impact**. Performance will be reviewed at mid-season and end-of-season points, with results feeding into the Annual Cultural Impact Report.

Success will be measured across three dimensions:

9.1 Programme Delivery Metrics

9.1.1 - Initiative Delivery

- % of actions delivered on time (tracked through the Gantt and operational plan)
- Milestone completion rates across all 14 initiatives
- Delivery of scheduled matchday activations, heritage features, global stories, and exhibitions

9.1.2 - Outputs

- Number of Values in Action publications per year
- Number of inclusion activations (min. four per season)
- Number of heritage features produced (two per season)
- Number of global stories published
- Quantity of everyday cultural materials submitted/documented
- Completion of Villa Heritage Charter phases

9.2 Engagement & Voice Metrics

9.2.1 - Supporter Engagement

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- Survey participation rates (target: +10% year-on-year growth)
- Diversity of survey respondents (measured across identity groups)
- Attendance at consultation events and online participation levels
- Engagement statistics for Villa TV cultural content (views, retention, interactions)
- Growth in submissions for storytelling, oral histories and everyday culture documentation

9.2.2 - Representation & Inclusion

- Participation levels from Fans for Diversity groups
- Visibility metrics (feature content, matchday presence, communications)
- Sentiment trends related to inclusion and belonging (tracked quarterly)

9.3 Impact Metrics & Outcomes

9.3.1 - Cultural Impact

- Improvements in fan sentiment related to culture, identity and heritage (survey-based)
- Perceived sense of belonging at Villa Park (baseline established in 2025/26)
- Perceived improvement in matchday atmosphere (tracked across seasons)
- Stability and strengthening of heritage awareness and pride

9.3.2 - Operational & Governance Impact

- Quality and timeliness of Quarterly Culture Updates
- Completion of Mid-Season Review and Annual Cultural Impact Report
- Implementation of "You Said, We Did" actions
- Alignment ratings with Premier League Fan Engagement Standard
- Evidence readiness for IFR cultural engagement audits

9.3.3 - EURO 2028 Legacy & Readiness

- Delivery of EURO 2028 cultural content and installations
- International supporter engagement and multicultural representation
- Heritage-in-transition documentation complete ahead of stadium showcasing

9.4 Key Milestones (2025–2028)

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9.4.1 - 2025/26 – Foundation Year

- Launch of Villa Heritage Charter development
- First inclusion matchdays delivered
- Global Story Hub and Cultural Map of Aston launched
- First Villa History in Focus features delivered
- First Culture & EDI survey integrated
- End-of-Season Review & Impact Report published.

9.4.2 - 2026/27 – Expansion Year

- Increased global storytelling and cultural documentation output
- North Stand heritage capture intensifies
- Expanded matchday atmosphere initiatives
- Mid-cycle Heritage Charter publication (v1)
- Growth in survey engagement and cultural participation
- Second Cultural Impact Report published

2027/28 – EURO 2028 Readiness & Legacy

- Cultural installations and heritage storytelling completed
- Enhanced inclusive representation in club communications
- Full heritage narrative available for international audiences
- EURO 2028 cultural showcase delivered
- Final 2028 Cultural Impact Report published

9.5 Review & Accountability Cycle

Success will be monitored through:

- **Quarterly Updates** (public reporting)
- **Mid-Season Review** (internal self-assessment, stakeholder engagement)
- **End-of-Season Review** (full evidence review and scorecard assessment)
- **Annual Cultural Impact Report** (formal publication aligned with FES & IFR)

This approach ensures that the Culture Working Group remains transparent, accountable, and guided by supporter voice and evidence throughout the 2025–2028 period.

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10. Conclusion

The Culture Working Strategic Plan 2025–2028 positions the Fan Advisory Board as a leading voice in shaping Aston Villa's identity, heritage and supporter experience. By aligning with national governance reforms, the Premier League Fan Engagement Standard, and best practice across English football, this plan ensures that Aston Villa's culture remains:

- Protected by structured heritage governance;
- Inclusive and representative of all supporters;
- Authentic to our history and traditions;
- Progressive in its storytelling and matchday experience;
- Embedded in the strategic operation of the club.

Through the delivery of this plan—and with the support of co-opted experts, supporter groups, and club partners—the Culture Working Group will help ensure that Aston Villa's culture thrives well into the future, culminating in a proud and united presence as Villa Park hosts matches at UEFA EURO 2028.

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