

# Shropshire firm will build first standing area on British football ground since its abolition

One of Britain's biggest football clubs is set to install its first standing area since their abolition in the wake of the Hillsborough disaster – and a Shropshire firm will carry out the work.



Celtic Park

Next year, Scottish champions Celtic will become the first major club in Britain to introduce a “safe standing” area to its previously all-seater ground.

And the Glasgow giants will do so with the support of Atcham-based Ferco seating systems, which has pioneered the use of the adjustable seating in the UK.

## Let us know what you think

Are standing areas at football ground a good idea? (Poll Closed)

Yes 78.18%

No 21.82%

Having installed a test area of around 30 standing spaces at Ashton Gate, the home of Bristol City last year, Ferco has now won the right to install “rail seating”, which can be adjusted to allow spectators to stand at the games, for 2,600 fans at the 60,000 capacity Celtic Park.

The contract will deliver a £250,000 fillip to the £3 million turnover Shropshire business, which employs eight people at its Shropshire-based depot, and makes its products at a factory in Malaysia.

More importantly it marks the company out as the UK’s forerunner in a market that could grow quickly if legislation changes to allow safe standing areas in top flight English grounds.



## Safe seating in action at Germany’s Wolfsburg

“For five years Celtic have been going through the process of convincing each authority involved that this is safe,” said Ferco managing director Michael Burnett.

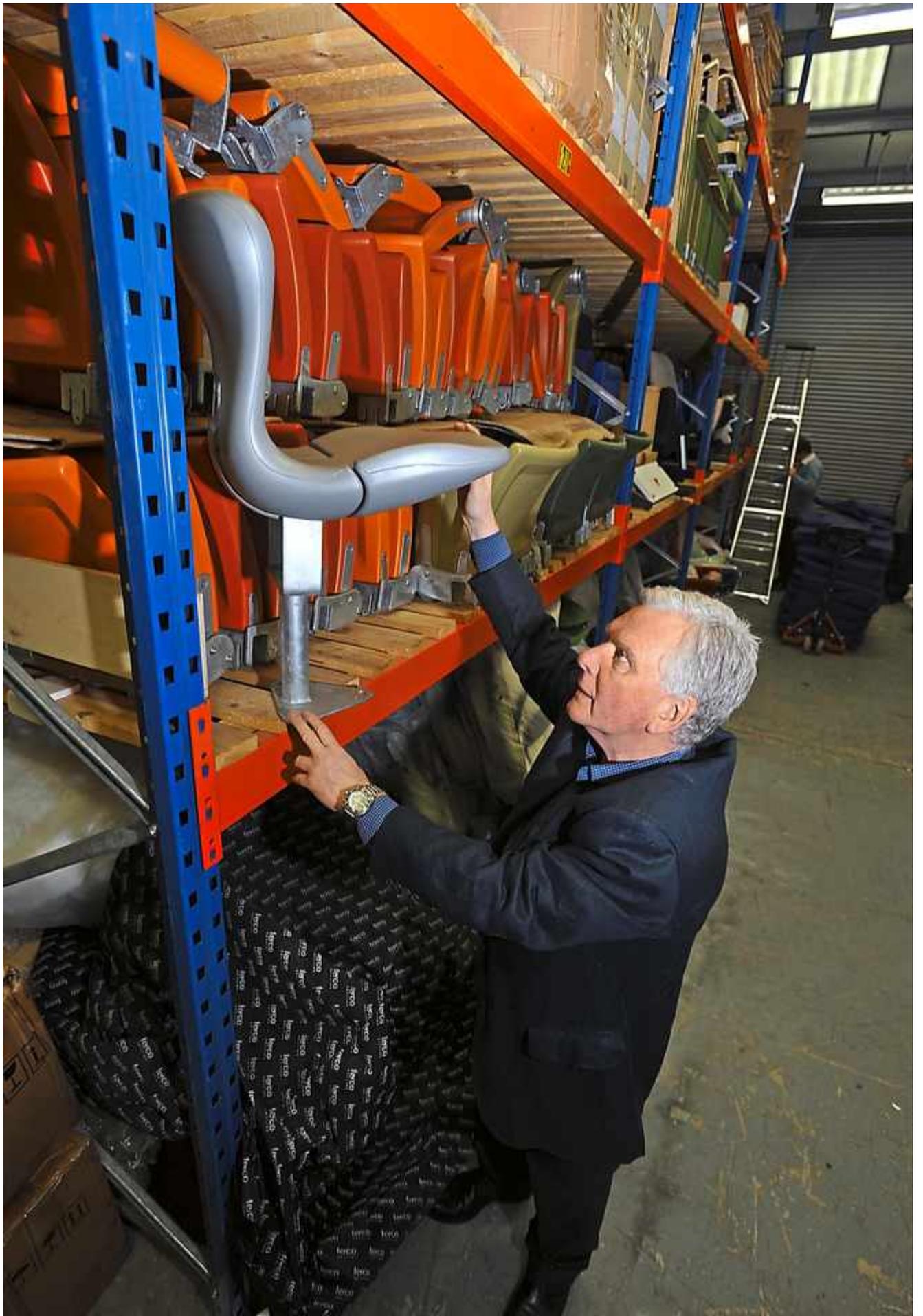
“It has been a slow and tortuous process for them, but they finally got approval from Glasgow City Council on Tuesday.

“It isn’t a huge job for us, and won’t have a major effect on turnover, but if Premier League and Championship clubs in England were given permission by the government I would expect several millions of pounds worth of work.

“I think a lot of people appreciate we have done a lot of work free of charge and given a lot of support to safe standing.”

A number of clubs have backed the safe standing campaign, including Shrewsbury Town, who currently play in the all-seater Greenhous Meadow, but who will continue to encounter clubs with standing areas in their grounds when they begin next season in League One.

Various clubs in Europe already have safe standing – with perhaps the most famous example being the 25,000 capacity “Yellow Wall” at the home of former European champions Borussia Dortmund in Germany.



## Michael Burnett the MD of Ferco Seating at Atcham

But Bristol City's trial was the first time that a club in England had implemented the system – even if they weren't allowed to sell seats for it.

“They couldn't sell them, but they could allow invited guests to use the rail seats,” Mr Burnett added.

“Some visiting directors tried them out and had a look at them, though, and that was always useful in the campaign to make people more aware.”

The landmark decision in Celtic's favour could potentially open up the debate over safe standing areas in England once again, after stricter rules were brought in following the publication of the post-Hillsborough disaster Taylor Report.

The Football Supporters' Federation (FSF) has been travelling the country with some of Ferco's seats to demonstrate how the safe standing could work.

Celtic chief executive Peter Lawwell said: “We have worked tirelessly on this issue and we are delighted that permission has finally been granted.

“Across football globally, the reality is that some supporters are choosing to stand at matches. This is something we must accept and manage and also understand the positive effect which these areas have on atmosphere at matches.”

The Atcham-based business, which has previously worked on grounds belonging to Manchester United and Arsenal, could be set to help transform the face of football stadia across the country. Ironically, though, Mr Burnett isn't a big fan of the game.

“I'm a rugby fan,” he said. “A guy called Jon Darch from the FSF came to see me. He is very passionate about football and support Bristol City.

“He loves the idea that people should be allowed to stand up and sing their hearts out and cheer as loud as possible, and put the case so eloquently that I thought it was worth pursuing.

“In business you make these decisions from time to time, and they don't always work out. It wasn't a personal thing for me, I just thought it was a good idea and something that we could help with – and if it all comes off, then there might be more work for us in it.”