

The Dons Trust
Minutes of SGM held at 7.30pm on 26 April 2018
The Cherry Red Records Stadium

1. Introduction and apologies

Chair of the Trust, Mark Davis, opened the meeting with apologies from Dons Trust Board members, Tim Hillyer and Sean McLaughlin. Apologies were also received from Dons Trust members, Monica Hartland, Robert Farrance, Rupert Jeffery, John Barbus, John Talbert and Mick Pugh.

Mark Davis passed on the sad news of the passing of Jacqui Forster of Supporters Direct, who was involved in the supporter-owned Trust movement for 15 years, and sent condolences to her family.

Open meeting 19 April

Mark reiterated his message from the open meeting held on Thursday 19 April at the Cherry Red Records Stadium. The Trust recognised that the Club was at a time of significant change as it was in the process of moving to a new stadium at Plough Lane. He noted that, in order to make the transition successfully, the Club would need to be innovative and open to change whilst also respecting the culture of the Club and ensuring that fans and Dons Trust members were properly engaged in the process. Mark explained that the Club and Trust acknowledged that they had not communicated effectively on recent issues, including the move of the date of the AFCW PLC AGM, and on proposals for ticketing changes. He apologised for this and explained that the reason for the bumpy communications had been because there had been a lot happening across the Club and Trust at the same time.

Mark explained that the boards would be talking about all of these things with fans and Dons Trust members going forward, and about what sort of Club our fans and members wanted AFC Wimbledon to be as we move to the new stadium. The Dons Trust was putting into place a new strategy and would be seeking to get input from fans and members on this.

Mark noted that there had been a good, lively and energetic discussion at the open meeting and said he thought it was worthwhile and worth repeating, alongside SGMs with Dons Trust members.

Turning to the evening's meeting, Mark said there was the one formal item regarding the DT logo, on which only Trust members could vote. There would be an intermission for the AFCW plc meeting, in which only its shareholders could vote.

2. Annual General Meeting held 21 December 2017 (Agenda Paper 1)

The Dons Trust members voted unanimously to approve the minutes of the December 2017 AGM.

3. Stadium Update

Erik Samuelson provided an update on the stadium. Erik showed pictures of the progress on the demolition of the greyhound stadium which had been taken that day and noted the pictures would be uploaded onto the Club site. He then showed an

image of the model of the completed 20,000 seater stadium, which he reminded everyone we would not be building initially, due to budget constraints. Erik showed images of the stands we would be building in the initial stage.

Potential development options

Erik then ran through a list of stadium options the Club had asked the stadium contractors, Andrew Scott Limited, to price. The Club would present the results of this for consultation at the upcoming SGM (date to be scheduled). Erik explained that the purpose of running through the list was to provide a taster of the options to be presented at that meeting. The Club did not currently have the funds to put them in place and therefore would be asking fans which of these they would want to prioritise from the proceeds of crowd funding. The options include:

1. South Stand Upper Concourse, which would replicate, as far as possible, the family atmosphere of the Cherry Red Records Stadium.
2. Completing the West Stand to the goal line at the northern end of the stadium.
3. Adding a temporary roof behind the temporary stands.
4. Making the South Stand a terrace. Erik noted he had discussed safe standing in his programme page and on the Club website. The Club would have to repay £600k of grants on Cherry Red Records Stadium, which would be transferable to the new stadium as long as it was all-seater, because of government legislation. He also explained that a terrace was not a cheaper option than the relocatable seats we would otherwise be fitting - it would be likely to cost around £1m extra to put a terrace in over seats, including the grants foregone. It would be possible to turn the stands from seating to a terrace after any potential change in government legislation on safe standing.
5. Putting in permanent WCs and concessions.
6. Fitting out the upper level of the West Stand with further boxes and hospitality areas.
7. Putting in permanent seating (the current seating, apart from in the West Stand, is costed as temporary seating).
8. Extending the event space.
9. Building a permanent roof around the whole of the stadium.

There was a question on where the disabled seats would be located. Erik explained that the guidelines on disabled seating required that they include a fair proportion of seats at an appropriate height, and which comply with requirements of the Green Guide. The stadium architect was also on the board of the Sports Ground Safety Authority, and would be paying careful attention to being fully compliant with the regulations.

Concluding this item, Mark invited further questions at the stadium break-out group later in the meeting.

4. Introduction to Joe Palmer, AFC Wimbledon Chief Operating Officer

Mark introduced the recently appointed AFC Wimbledon Chief Operating Officer (COO), Joe Palmer, by explaining that the decision to appoint him was made as it was currently a busy time at the Club ahead of the move to the new stadium. He explained that his recruitment was a competitive process led by Dons Trust Board members Sean McLaughlin and Roger Evans.

Joe introduced himself to Dons Trust members and provided some details on his background, explaining that he had a breadth of sports marketing experience that included working with Manchester United TV and Portsmouth FC before working with

Ukrainian club, Shakhtar Donetsk in 2010. He said that the latter had then been in a similar situation to AFC Wimbledon currently; they had just built a new stadium and Joe was recruited to provide expertise on how to move the club forward. Joe then joined Sheffield Wednesday and was attracted to apply for the role of COO for AFC Wimbledon as he was from the area originally and used to live in Haydons Road. His children attend local schools and he wanted them to be AFC Wimbledon fans.

Joe explained that, as COO, his role included doing 'a bit of everything' - looking after the running of operations across the football club: ticketing, merchandise, retail, utilities, commercial, sponsorship and advertising. He said that he hoped to make improvements and provide a better service for fans, as well as make sure the systems put in place were optimal for the Club, generate an income, and ultimately support and improve what happened on the pitch. He was focusing on putting the appropriate systems and structures in place to ensure that the new stadium was a good capital investment for the Club. Joe noted that there was currently a lot going on at the Club without a huge amount of resource to support it.

Season Ticket Changes

Joe discussed season ticket changes, along with general changes in the ticketing system. He said that the changes would provide an opportunity to generate extra income for the Club and make the system fairer for everyone. He acknowledged that communications were rushed and that the Club should have provided more details on the full intent of the scheme and consulted fans on certain elements of the proposed changes.

Joe explained that the need for making these changes came with the move to the new stadium and the need to attract new fans. He said that it would be important to develop a structure to encourage and enable new supporters to integrate with current fans but also reward long term supporters of the club. The changes were also intended to help avoid any potential problems further down the line that would come with not having a system in place that was robust enough to handle larger numbers. The proposals would also protect the Club from the possibility of people buying up seats and not using them, except to attend or get priority for big games. Joe explained that he wanted people to attend, use their seat and ensure the stadium was full, so as to create a better atmosphere. The changes would encourage new fans to develop better habits - they would appreciate the value that handing back tickets gives to the Club.

Some of the Proposals and Ideas for feedback

1. **Season Ticket Cap** – to avoid it being difficult to introduce new people to football. The cap would be based on the German model (55%).
2. **Empty seats** – the average season ticket attendance was 80%. On average, there tended to be about 600 places available on a matchday. Approximately 150 were currently given back to the Club. The club would be able to recoup £23k each year in VAT alone if all 600 places were handed back and there was value to get season tickets back to sell on again. The Club wanted to continue this because it was a useful income stream. The proposal for season ticket holders to attend, or inform the Club when unable to attend a match, for at least 80% of matches over the course of a season was on hold for the time being.
3. **Non season ticket holders** – there was currently no system in place for non-season ticket holders. Through introducing a cap and requirements on season tickets, it was important to also introduce a secondary-level ticketing system.

This would include cards with benefits for discounts on matchday prices, benefits for attendance, priority and rewards.

4. **Priority** – a priority programme would be built into the scheme so as to reward current Season Ticket holders, provide an opportunity to take a break without losing your seat and an opportunity to buy seats for family members.

Joe ran through initial thoughts on the priority for allocating seats at the new stadium. They were suggested to be as follows:

1. 5-year season ticket holders and anyone who has held a season ticket for any 5 seasons since 2003 (not necessarily consecutively)
2. All other ST holders
3. Junior Dons members that have a family member in priority groups 1&2
4. Dons Trust members
5. AFCW PLC shareholders
6. General public

Feedback on proposals

Comments and questions from Dons Trust members included:

- The proposed priority structure for allocating seats at the new stadium does not do enough to incentivise Dons Trust membership. The member who raised this would like to see DT membership given higher priority.
- The proposal was quite similar to the Brentford model.
- Could Dons Trust membership be included in the Season Ticket price.
- Did the Club plan to increase prices in the new stadium for those who have purchased a 5 year season ticket. Joe replied that the price of previously purchased 5 year season tickets would remain the same and would only change when it came to topping-up. Joe noted that they were currently looking into how to set prices of tickets for the new stadium, and that there were likely to be more, and different, categories to the number that there currently were for Cherry Red Records Stadium.
- One fan noted that whilst the 80% attendance proposal had been taken off the table for the time being, they were concerned with how the approach was taken, and how the proposal dealt with season ticket holders who didn't attend matches. They noted it was not an issue of how it was communicated, but rather how the Club viewed its supporters: rather as customers as opposed to a valued part of the Club and to be treated with respect. They explained that currently, when emailing the club to note non-attendance at an upcoming match, season ticket holders do not receive any notification, feedback or word of thanks from the Club. They said that it should be a two-way relationship and the Club should work to improve the way this was done. They also expressed concern that the 80% rule only applied to fans who had been season ticket holders for less than five years. This suggested that some fans were more valued than others and implied that newer fans were on a form of probation, or viewed as second class citizens.

Mark Davis explained that the Dons Trust Board recognised that the proposal on 80% attendance for season ticket holders was more controversial than expected, and the board accepted responsibility for approving the proposal. Mark highlighted that there were likely to be further issues that emerged with the move to the new stadium and

therefore the board recognised the importance of engaging fans and Trust Members properly with any such decisions or issues as they arose.

5. Dons Trust Logo (Agenda Paper 2)

Mark Davis introduced Charles Williams to talk through the proposals for a new Dons Trust logo. Charles Williams introduced himself as a member of the DTB who had been co-opted to look at engaging younger supporters (16-35 year olds) to make them more involved with the Trust. Charles explained that currently less than 30% of Trust members were under 35, and noted that this was unsustainable for the future of the Trust.

Charles explained that in order to engage younger fans with Dons Trust activities, it was not about introducing niche activities aimed at younger people, but about making the Trust more accessible, engaging and relevant to younger people. That meant some changes to the experience of being a Trust member and what being a member feels like.

Changing the logo was part of this. The current logo was complex. The purpose of the new logo was to make it more consistent with the AFC Wimbledon brand, and to make it clearer what the Dons Trust was at a glance.

Charles showed the two proposals for the new Dons Trust logo to members. Both had the Club crest as a central feature, included a clear description of what the Dons Trust was and were easy to apply across different formats and merchandise. Charles thanked Marc Jones for coming up with the design options presented.

Charles explained that members were being asked to vote first on whether or not to change the logo, and then separately to choose the preferred logo (or neither of them).

Some questions and comments from Dons Trust members, with answers when given, included:

Q: The proposals for the new logo did not include a reference to the original Dons Trust logo in its design. The member raising this thought that there should be such a reference.

Q: Would the logo be used on football shirts?

A: No, the logo would only be used on DT materials e.g. Junior Dons gifts.

Q: Was it possible to add the date the Dons Trust was formed in the logo? Making the history of the Trust and Club clear across all communications was important.

Voting on the new Dons Trust logo

The Dons Trust voted on Resolution 1:

"The membership authorises the board to discontinue use of the Society's current logo in favour of a new logo more closely aligned with the AFC Wimbledon logo and crest, and also authorises the board to make further minor modifications thereafter, as necessary, to ensure conformity with any forthcoming revisions to the AFC Wimbledon logo and crest." (Agenda Paper 1).

Members voted in favour by a large margin, on a show of hands, and the resolution was carried.

The Dons Trust then voted, on a show of hands, for the preferred option for the new logo:

- Version A
- Version B
- Neither of the above.

(See meeting [paper 2](#) for the two alternative logos.)

50 members voted for Version A and 25 members voted for Version B. 13 members voted for neither. Mark Davis reported for information that, in the postal vote, the ratio of votes was approximately 2:1 A:B. Version A was duly adopted as the new Dons Trust logo.

Charles explained that the new logo would now be progressively rolled out through different Dons Trust media over the coming months.

BREAK:AFCW PLC AGM AND REFRESHMENTS

6. Organisation of Dons Trust Board in 2018

Resuming the SGM, Mark Davis ran through the ownership structure, and reporting lines of the AFC Wimbledon family. (*Secretary's Note: These are available on Webjam and the Dons Trust website*).

Mark explained how the Dons Trust Board was organised for 2018. This included five committees: oversight; strategy & organisation; engagement & communications; operations; and stadium project oversight.

Break out groups

Mark then invited members to join four break-out discussions, themed according to each committee, and led by those DTB members who were at the meeting:

Strategy & organisation – Matthew Breach and Nigel Higgs.

Communications & engagement – Jane Lonsdale, Charles Williams and Cormac van der Hoeven.

Operations – Mark Davis.

Stadium project oversight – Roger Evans and Colin Dipple, plus Erik Samuelson.

Mark said questions of the oversight committee could be asked at the plenary Q&A.

Diversity and Inclusion Group

Following the break-out discussions, Jane Lonsdale reported that the Dons Trust Board had appointed five people to support the administration of the Junior Dons. She also reported that the Board's Diversity and Inclusion group, which was made up of eight Trust members and was part of the communications and engagement group, had their first meeting, and she encouraged other members to get involved. Jane also explained that they were arranging a pre-season game for Women in the Game, designed to encourage women who had never been to a football match before.

7. Discussion and Q&A

Mark Davis said that this item could cover topics of the oversight committee. Questions from members included:

Q: Would the wall of bricks be moved to the new stadium?

A: Erik said that we would move the bricks if we could. If not, then we would aim to create an equivalent in the new stadium, confirming first with fans whether they still wanted to have their brick.

Q: The catering and bar facilities were currently very limited for vegetarians and vegans, and there were also long waiting times in the back bar after matches. Increasing options and improving speed of service provided an opportunity to maximise revenue.

A: Erik noted that Ivor Heller would be best placed to respond to the question but said that the service could be faster, but there was also a physical limit and it was unlikely we would be able to double sales.

Q: Was there a limit to the number of matches that could be beamed back to Cherry Red Records Stadium per season, and was it possible for the Doncaster match to be beamed back?

A: Erik explained that the Club needed permission to do this on a normal matchday. We were constrained on Saturdays and it was now too late to arrange to beam back the Doncaster game.

Q: Was it 600 seats or season tickets not returned¹?

A: 600 season tickets, not seats.

Q: Would the roving microphone used on the pitch be fixed?

A: Erik said he could not promise that it would be fixed in time for the Bury game but it would be fixed.

Q: On a matchday, in the Rygas stand, there were regularly groups of children standing in front of the terrace barrier and who remained there even when asked to move on. This blocked the view for others who were standing in the correct place and was also a health and safety risk.

¹ This has been clarified in the reporting of the season tickets discussion further above.

A: Erik explained that this was not permitted and that there was a mobile number in the programme for fans to alert stewards to such issues. He noted that if there was anything fans see that they were concerned about, they were encouraged to text this number and there should be a response.

Mark brought the Q&A to an end, but told members they would have another opportunity to ask questions at the upcoming SGM.

8. Any Other Business

MD wished to put on record the Board's thanks to Neil Messenbird who was stepping down from the Dons Draw that he has administered since 2005, and Roger and Linda Dennis who were also stepping down from running the AFC Wimbledon Golden Goals and overseeing the Junior Dons since its inception.

The meeting concluded at 10pm.