

2008_04_21_draft_SGM

Wimbledon Football Club Supporters Society Limited

Draft Minutes of the Special General Meeting held on Monday 2^{1st} April, 2008 at
The Cherry Red Records Fans' Stadium - Kingsmeadow, Jack Goodchild Way, 422a Kingston
Road, Kingston-upon-Thames, KT1 3PB

These minutes were endorsed by the DTB at its meeting on 6 May on the basis that they will be submitted for approval by the members at the next SGM of the DT

0. Introduction and Apologies for Absence

0.1 At 19:10pm the Chairman of the Trust Board, David Cox (DC), declared the meeting open. As well as the 120 or so members who attended the meeting in person, 127 members had submitted proxy forms¹. Welcoming members, DC conveyed apologies from Zbig Blonski, Ivor Heller, Sean McLaughlin, Iain McNay and Mike Richardson.

1. The Main Stand Extension

This was a single issue SGM with a single paper (that had been issued on 11th April) and a single resolution: "That the Dons Trust Board should be empowered to authorise AFC Wimbledon Ltd to issue a Letter of Intent to, and subsequently enter into a contract with, the successful bidder in the tendering process for the extension of the West Stand in accordance with the proposals set out in the paper sent out on 11 April."

Erik Samuelson (ES) introduced the paper on behalf of the DT Board who were unanimously in favour of the paper and resolution that had been the subject of full and detailed discussion at the Board meeting on 2 April. He and the Board were grateful for all the professional help and advice they had received from the Stadium Working Group.

ES first took the meeting through the paper. He reminded members of the importance of the planning permission to the club's future. It was a significant asset that had been an important element in our initial decision to buy the ground. It meant that the club could be secure in the knowledge that, promotions permitting, it could play in the football league at its current home (Kingsmeadow). The permission expired in March 2009 and relying on a simple renewal and extension was fraught with risk; waiting and hoping was not an option that we could adopt if we wanted to maintain our aim of football league football.

It was against that planning risk that the DT Board had decided that it was willing to run the financial risk entailed in implementing the planning permission. The Board had sought to minimise the risk by identifying the least cost building extension that would be sufficient to secure the permission. This explained the proposal to extend the main stand, a course that was not dependent on securing the perimeter lease.

The estimated essential cost of the project was £626.5k. With builders on site, it seemed sensible to consider whether any other work might sensibly be done at the same time in order to gain the economies of scale that would be available over the period of the project. The Board had decided that it made a lot of sense to take the opportunity to refurbish the toilets at the main entrance at a cost of £24.5k; so long as these were in their current state they would act as a serious disincentive for functions at the stadium. The Board was very conscious of the need to maximize the commercial income derived from the stadium. The proposal was that there should be continuing discussions with the consultants and the successful tenderer to establish what might be possible within the envelope of £135k with the Board making a final judgement on what

¹ 94 cast their votes in favour and 17 made the Chairman their proxy in the clear knowledge that, as made clear in the papers, he would cast their votes in favour of the resolution. 16 cast their votes against.

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further optional work might be done. The resolution invited the members to give the Board the authority to make this judgement based on a fully informed appraisal of the costs and potential benefits.

ES ended his introduction by emphasising how important it was for members to know that the Board did see and recognise that there was a financial risk to the course that it was now recommending. Its judgement was that it was better to run with this financial risk rather than countenance the even graver risk of losing the planning permission. Nonetheless, the Board did not seek to hide the real element of risk entailed in the venture. ES stressed that a vote in favour should only be given if there was a genuine understanding that meeting the cost of the extension would require financial commitments and contributions in money or in kind from members and the fan base.

There was then a prolonged Q&A session.

- Q. If we took on this degree of debt, where would the money come from to pay the wages of the players we would need if we were to get the promotions that were the ultimate purpose of the investment?
- A. We had assessed the required playing budget for a Conference South team. There would probably need to be a cut in this year's budget but we would not be out of our depth and, in any event, the Manager's strategy was to build a team drawing on a pool of young (and consequently cheaper) players.
- Q. £401.5k seemed a lot of money for a relatively simple and small structural extension? Similarly, refurbishing the toilets for £24.5k seemed steep. Were we paying too much?
- A. We had taken professional advice and the bids that came in were very much in line with expectations.
- Q. 15 years of raising £100k a year was going to require an enormous and sustained effort of will – were we confident we could do it?
- A. It was a big ask but the original commitment at the time we decided to buy Kingsmeadow had been made in pursuit of Wimbledon regaining its proper place in the football league. This commitment to implement the planning permission was a natural progression. Taking the £60k to £65k brought in annually by the two big constant fundraisers (Golden Goals and the Dons Draw), the task was to pull in a further £35k to £40k a year. Mark Davis was heading up the fundraising group to close this fundraising gap and the meeting agreed that he needed our collective and active support in the task. Recent events had demonstrated that there were some fairly basic sources of funding still to be tapped – for example through signing up more people for the Dons' Draw.
- Q. Would the extension of the stand reduce our facilities for disabled fans?
- A. ES promised to have this looked into further to maintain the level of facilities currently provided.
- Q. Was the resolution all or nothing or was it possible to set aside the optional elements (£159.5k) and limit the work to those elements necessary to implement the planning permission (£626.5k)?
- A. The resolution was framed to cover the entire project, both the compulsory and the optional elements, on the basis that the DT Board would make the final decision in the light of the further detailed analysis that was to be done on costings and potential income flows. The Board would only proceed if it judged that proceeding made good commercial sense.
- Q. How confident were we that a further DT Bond would draw in the sums estimated?
- A. The finance working group had looked very carefully at this and had taken full account of previous investments and extensions. Even so, the

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- Board had decided to go for a conservative sum of £100k in making its calculations of funds deemed “definite/very confident”.
- Q Had we analysed the potential effect on supporters from the CPZ – might we not end up losing fans and losing revenue?
- A There was a limit to the valid analysis that could be done but general experience suggested that fans would be willing to park and walk from the roads that bit further away. In any event, we were very fortunate in the parking facilities available to us and we would be looking to build on this by talking with local schools about using their facilities. Also we would use the discussions on the CPZ to enter into discussions on making improvements to the public transport options.
- Q Does Kingsmeadow meet the ground standard necessary for playing in the National Conference?
- A It was very close to the standard. We would need an extra turnstile, a treatment room that could be readily accessed and a control room. Going beyond this would require significant further investment. A significant amount of this would come from the League’s ground improvement fund and the strategy was to defer the major investment until we were in a position to access these funds.
- Q Where were we on the perimeter lease?
- A It is owned by the RB of Kingston. They agreed to sell it to us for £100k and use the proceeds for the benefit of Kingstonians. We, the Borough and Ks have been in negotiation to try to come up with a mutually acceptable deal that the Borough’s officers can take to their councillors for approval. The current negotiations are at a sensitive stage but it was likely that the £100k would be provided through the provision of services in kind rather than as a cash sum.
- Q Wasn’t Kingsmeadow now effectively our home and shouldn’t we be targeting more of efforts in the surrounding area?
- A We maintained a close watching brief on developments at the Greyhound Stadium in Wimbledon. The members and the fans had made sure that we should remain alert for any opportunities that might arise. But we also intended making sure that our current home was well looked after and that we got the best out of it. As for our fans, the post code analysis suggested that we already attracted quite a few from the Kingston area.
- Q How long would the building project take?
- A Assuming a positive vote, the Letter of Intent would issue to the builders on 22 April and this would trigger action designed to get the work done and finished 3 weeks into the next season. We had alerted the leagues to this possibility.
- Q On a 100% turn out how many members were eligible to vote?
- A John Stembridge said there were 1,259 members.
- Q Did we not realise that Barnet’s experience showed how we could end up repenting at leisure a failure to take the opportunity while we have it to expand our covered seating in preparation for admission into the football league?
- A Some did and this intervention was marked by a round of applause.
- Q What is the level of demand for seats under cover?
- A There is a queue to get seats towards the back and in the centre.
- Q Why did such a high proportion of season ticket holders not take up their seats?
- A Because many of them could not make it to the ground for all the games – however, their purchase of a season ticket marked their commitment to support the clubby paying for an annual ticket all the same.

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- Q Was the contingency figure (£50k) a sensible amount and would it be used to pay for overruns?
- A It was a standard percentage item and there was no implication that any of it would be used to pay for the project taking longer than planned for.
- Q Would we consider the possibility of naming the new stand for a sponsorship fee?
- A Yes, we would look into this and would also give consideration to potential relaunches of fundraising efforts timed for the opening of the extended stand (eg of the Dons Draw and the DT Bond). .

The SGM voted by a large majority in favour of the resolution at paragraph 1.1 above. There were 7 votes against and 6 abstentions. DC thanked ES for answering so fully all the questions that the membership had rightly posed on such an important issue. The meeting closed at about 21:30pm.

David Cox
Chairman of the Board

David Wilkinson
Secretary of the Trust