

Draft minutes of the Special General Meeting of the Wimbledon Football Club Supporters' Society (the Dons Trust) held at The Fans' Stadium, Kingsmeadow, on Thursday 22 April 2010.

David Cox began the meeting with some thanks - to Geoff Seel and the members of the Election Steering Group for overseeing the Board elections; to Dean Parsons and Aideen Rochford for their service as Board members; and to Kris Stewart as Board Chair during 2009. He also welcomed Nicole Hammond and David Gowns, newly elected to the Trust Board, and the re-election of Tom Adam and Kris Stewart.

Apologies

Apologies had been received from: Matt Breach , Paul Jeater, Rupert Jeffery, Dennis Lowndes, Dean Parsons, John Perriam, Toni Shepherd and John Stewart.

Ivor Heller reported that Dickie Guy was making an excellent recovery from a heart attack and would be out of hospital in a few days.

Minutes of the AGM

Members suggested revisions to two sections of the draft minutes. A vote was taken on accepting the draft subject to these suggested amendments or returning for final approval at the next SGM. Forty six members voted in favour of each of these proposals. The minutes therefore remain a draft.

Discussion with the manager (Agenda item 5)

Terry Brown said that looking back it would have suited him to end the season in February. Serious injuries had played a part in the struggle for form since then; there was no clear explanation for the six cruciate ligament injuries in 18 months. The team had been on target for the play-offs until fixtures got congested. Loans had also not worked out as hoped. In the end the benchmark had been set by Stevenage and the other big professional clubs. Although they might pay higher wages this had always been the case; the difference had been their physicality and training full time. For next year, he planned to retain a nucleus from the current team. Going full-time meant the squad would be smaller but he would be recruiting young, strong, 'hungry' players who would benefit from training all week.

In discussion 10 members asked about aspects of the decision to go full time, the financial implications this had and whether members should have been consulted, the reserves, the juniors and departing players.

David Cox described the decision process in which budget proposals, supported by detailed analysis and options, had been prepared by the Executives, and presented to the Board, who endorsed them after careful discussion. In his view this was the appropriate process and decisions of this kind were what the Board was elected to make on behalf of members. Last year, after a similar process, the Board had decided on continuing part time. Erik Samuelson said that there were indirect costs of about £50,000 in going full time - for training facilities, food, physiotherapy and so on; wages would also be higher because they would be paid for 44 weeks, but this would have to be managed by reducing the size of the squad.

Terry Brown said that with the budget available it was not possible to compete for promotion except by building a young full-time squad - a team of experienced 'enforcers' would be too expensive. However, the team needed more leaders. He suggested that set-piece play would benefit from more training time and recognised the possible need for one, perhaps two wingers to give more width. In his view the reserves were not yet ready to move up to the Combination league; this remained a long term ambition but it also had costs and was not necessarily viable for the Club. He reminded members how long it had taken Stevenage to get back to the top of the Conference; training facilities had been an important factor. The Club needed to build from the bottom and have the patience to create a strong base over time - just as Wimbledon FC had in the past.

Nigel Higgs reported that the budget for junior sides was remaining much the same. It continued to be helped by lots of donations. The systems were in place for the coaching to 'go professional' but this would not happen in the immediate future. Terry Brown said that keeping juniors, who could go to other clubs without compensation, was a significant problem and the FA was poor at protecting young players. Erik Samuelson reported that he had been prompting the Conference to take up the need for improvements.

Erik Samuelson noted that all leaving players received a personal letter of appreciation.

Surveying members' views (Agenda item 2)

Nicole Hammond introduced Perry Walker from the New Economics Foundation (nef), who had been commissioned to explore the attitudes and expectations of members and other stakeholders in the Club about future priorities, using a consensus-building method in which they had substantial experience. The Board had been committed to surveying members' views for more than a year but had been slow to proceed because there was no agreement about the questions to be asked and, in particular, how to frame questions on difficult issues in a neutral way.

Perry Walker explained the process which nef planned to use, initially gathering ideas, then grouping these to develop them into a short list of propositions which would then be debated and finally put to a consensus voting procedure. He envisaged inviting initial input at two home games early in the new season, and then developing the propositions from this for discussion at a general meeting in the autumn.

Members asked a range of questions about the methodology, its use elsewhere, who would be involved and the timetable. Perry Walker said that initial ideas would probably be collected by inviting people to write their thoughts on post-it notes; these would then be grouped according to their theme/issue, and a central idea developed from each group. He envisaged the ideas process being open to all stakeholders in the Club's future but that debating and voting on the propositions which emerged would be for DT members. It would be best to have more than one occasion for collecting ideas. He was reluctant to have the SGM impose constraints about what could be considered - the process needed to be flexible to achieve the best results. Impractical ideas would be managed by limiting the number of options put for final debate and voting to no more than six. He gave an example of the methodology being used in another organisation. The cost of the programme would be £5000, which included a discount for a community organisation.

Kris Stewart (who had first approached nef about the survey) said that nef would be applying an approach to identifying what mattered most to members, not a fixed and detailed methodology - the detail would be determined within the process. Nicole Hammond confirmed that aim was to complete the process as soon as possible. Members variously

suggested that it should be done by September and that it was more important to get the right answer and to be inclusive than to meet an early deadline.

The Club and the World Cup 2018 (Agenda item 3)

David Cox and Erik Samuelson summarised the background and the options set out in the papers. After Milton Keynes had been listed as a possible match location for the World Cup bid, the Club had expressed its concern that the unacceptable events which had led to the creation of MK Dons were being endorsed, if not positively rewarded, by this development. Now AFC Wimbledon had been invited to apply to be a location for training sessions to which there would be public access. Since the deadlines were very tight, the Club had registered its interest. But opinions were sharply divided about whether to pursue this application. The papers set out options to: withdraw immediately; maintain the application pending confirmation of whether Milton Keynes would be named in the official bid; and to pursue the invitation if it was in the interests of AFC Wimbledon, whatever happened to Milton Keynes.

Julian Edwards confirmed that the Board was seeking an indication of members' views through a vote at the SGM but that there was no formal resolution and proxy voting had not been set up; the intention was to invite members to make a final decision at a future SGM/AGM when more information about the status of Milton Keynes' interest and our own initial application would be available.

Tim Hillyer said that he had briefed the National Council of the Football Supporters' Federation (of which he is an elected member) about the developments. The FSF had asked for the ground selection criteria to be published and had emphasised that the success of the bid for the World Cup depended on transparency. Andy Anson (Chair of the World Cup bid) had written to the FSF recognising that the listing of Milton Keynes was controversial but noting that it was based on an excellent bid, made by the city, not the football club. The FSF AGM in July would be debating the issue.

Members expressed a wide range of opinions. Several spoke in support of doing whatever was in the interests of AFC Wimbledon, ignoring other issues, even if the invitation to apply as a training site was a 'bribe'; MK Dons should not determine our policies. There was an opportunity to bring something to the local community and to our stadium. Cities all over England were desperate to be part of the World Cup bid and both Merton and Kingston would be delighted if the Club was involved. And many things might be different by 2018.

Others supported immediate withdrawal from the invitation, suggesting that the FA could not be trusted, the Club might well end up spending money and getting nothing in return, and that since our ground is not in Wimbledon it would not be our community which would come and watch training sessions. We should also stick by our ethical principles in relation to MK Dons. Milton Keynes should not have been in the stadium list and we should say so very clearly and act accordingly.

Yet others endorsed maintaining an interest but awaiting events. The decision would be affected by whether Milton Keynes remained on the stadium list and whether there turned out to be significant benefit to the Club in being a public training location.

Erik Samuelson said that public training locations were an innovation for this World Cup bid. He believed that the FA had a lot of money and that although the Club complied with the specified requirements in most ways the FA would pay for necessary improvements.

Members were asked to vote on the three options. There were:

34 in favour of Option 1 (withdraw immediately)
8 in favour of Option 2 (stay in pending further information)
66 in favour of Option 3 (pursue the application provided it benefits the Club)

Other business

Members asked about a variety of matters:

- Announcement of **pre-season friendlies**. Erik Samuelson said that the policy was not to announce games until they had been confirmed in writing. Millwall had recently jumped the gun.
- Improving/professionalising **the website**. Erik Samuelson said that everyone agreed that improvements were desirable but the cost of developing a new site from scratch, or of employing a full-time journalist, was beyond the Club's means. However, plans were under review with a hope of moving to a different site in the next few months and this should make its use much more flexible.
- Delay in improving **Communications**. David Cox recognised that changes had taken longer than they should have. David Gowns, recently elected to the Board, was now working on the strategy and this should lead to rapid progress. He noted a complaint that e-mails to the Trust were not answered promptly
- More about the **budget**. Erik Samuelson offered to take any members who were interested through the detailed analysis which lay behind the proposal and decision to go full time. He confirmed that price increases had been agreed for next season and noted that the Club spent the third lowest proportion of its turnover on wages among Conference clubs.
- Payment by **credit card**. Erik Samuelson said that the Club had tried on various occasions to get a credit card service agreement. A recent deal had looked hopeful but had been withdrawn at the last moment; another was now being pursued. One problem was that credit card companies were wary of football clubs because of their mixed financial record.
- **Community liaison**. Members had supported appointing a community liaison officer for Merton a year ago but nothing had happened. David Cox said that this would be reviewed by the Board. Nigel Higgs reported that work was in hand to establish a Community Trust for all football-related activities.
- Members should thank the Board and executives for their excellent work and do more to **celebrate and promote the success of the Club**.

David Cox closed the meeting at 23.30