

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 14 April 2011.

Matthew Breach began the meeting indicating that there would be no voting procedures during the meeting.

Apologies

Apologies were received from: Kris Stewart and Tom Adam.

Minutes of the AGM held on 9 December 2010

The minutes of the AGM held on 9 December 2010 were unanimously passed by the members.

Club Update and Issues:

Signing of ex-Franchise players (Agenda item 2a)

Iain McNay commented on the loan signing of Drewe Broughton from Lincoln City who had also played for Franchise. He said that he had been shocked by the signing and stated that the player had taken money from franchise by playing for them. The matter had been discussed at a DT board meeting and the majority were in favour of the signing. Iain felt that as a Fan owned club we had certain unique standards. He said that many football fans around the world would be disappointed by this signing and that it was hypocritical and wrong. With regard to Jermaine Darlington, he clarified that the player didn't play under the name Milton Keynes. Matthew Breach said that the board was uncomfortable with the decision. He mentioned that we didn't come up with a coherent policy on the subject and that Terry Brown didn't realize it would be an issue.

Members stated their views on the subject. Some pointed out that the players were professional footballers and many would play for any club. It was also stated that Broughton's connection with the Buckinghamshire club was tenuous and that some fans had gone to support the franchise but changed their minds and had ultimately decided to follow AFC Wimbledon. It was asked 'Where is the dividing line?' It was also mentioned that the members shouldn't interfere with Terry Brown's decision. It was stated that in the future, there could perhaps be explicit guidance for Terry Brown on signing former franchise players. Some members, however, expressed concern at signing ex-franchise players. It was highlighted that the club is built on a principle and that many things can get compromised. Furthermore, it should be remembered what the supporters went through. Most members seemed to agree that it was a sensitive issue but voted that they were 'happy to sign franchise players' but not direct from them.

In response to members' questions, Erik Samuelson provided answers. He stated that no scouts from franchise have obtained complimentary tickets for games. He also said that he knew of no other franchise players being considered for the club.

Offensive Chanting (Agenda item 2b)

Simon Bath introduced the topic of offensive chanting. He highlighted offensive chants at the Darlington game and the Rushden and Diamonds match. It was asked whether these chants crossed the line due to the tragic circumstances surrounding the issue. He went on to say that we are a family-friendly club and invited views on the subject. It was mentioned that this situation was a one-off and there are already rules in place regarding offensive chanting. It was noted in this instance, however, that the issue was clouded by the fact that there was no swearing in the chant. The view was expressed that we do self-police and Matthew Breach mentioned that he has worked in the dugouts for six years and there have only been a few examples of abusive chanting. He also said that installing more seats in the stadium would make a difference. Erik Samuelson said that the guidance written outside the turnstiles could perhaps be updated and better guidance may result if changes are deemed necessary. He also mentioned that we could warn parents with children about the possibility of offensive chants.

Smoking on the Terraces (Agenda item 2c)

Erik Samuelson explained that we are not presently mandated to have a non-smoking area but confirmed that smoking was banned in the main stand six years ago. He went on to say that the Football League stipulates that we must apply a non-smoking rule in the event of promotion. It was mentioned that we could introduce interim measures and only have smoking areas in parts of the ground that are not undercover. Some members that are smokers fully endorsed the banning of smoking and called for a quick implementation. Other members stated that it was a minimal concern and that smokers shouldn't be persecuted.

Trust Update and Issues:

Members Survey (Agenda item 3a)

Nicole Hammond introduced Perry Walker from the New Economics Foundation (nef), who detailed the results of the Members Survey. Perry explained that from the six original options, two options proved unpopular with members and gained a limited number of votes. Option A, Fast Track To The Premier League, attracted less than 20% of votes and was last by a great margin. Option F, Partnership With Kingston was also a long way behind the four most popular options. These four most popular options garnered 60% of the total vote. The most popular option was D - Fan-Owned In Wimbledon, (68%) followed by Option C, Partnership in Merton. Option E, Best Stadium Location In SW London, was third (60.5%) and fourth was Option B, Fan-owned in Kingston.

Three conclusions were drawn from the results. First, there is a strong desire to retain ownership of the club and ground. Second, there is a preference to be based in Wimbledon and Merton over Kingston. Third, there is a belief in cautious ambition.

Nicole Hammond noted that due to polarization, we might not achieve consensus. She indicated that members could vote on the matter at the next SGM or wait for six months and allow feasibility studies to take root. The working group could also explore matters further.

Some members expressed a fundamental desire to return to the borough of Merton. It was also highlighted that there were a small number of responses to the survey considering that there are more than 1600 Trust members and over 3,000 regular attendees at home games. It was said that some supporters may have been unaware of the importance of the exercise. Some voices were concerned that the survey was too complex and were skeptical that another one could produce definite results. Survey weariness was also a concern.

Members were asked to vote whether they would prefer to wait for more information on the subject or see the work to date refined. In the vote, members expressed a desire to wait for more information.

Organisation (Agenda item 3b)

Matthew Breach spoke about the organization of the club. He stressed that the club needed to be more efficient and that the structure had evolved. He said that the club needs the right model going forward. He indicated that the workload for volunteers has increased. He went on to say that there were four people running the club and that the current situation was not sustainable in the long term. If the club gets promoted to the Football League, more people will be needed to manage things. He mentioned that Mancomm have thoughts about what to do.

It was explained that the club will hire a businessman, Mike Richardson, to look at the set up.

Members asked if the club had looked at other clubs of similar size and whether there should be a definition of roles within the Dons Trust Board. Firstly, it was pointed out that other clubs started off higher than us. On the latter point, Matthew Breach said that portfolios had been discussed and that nothing is off the table.

Election Report (Agenda item 3c)

Thanks were given to Geoff Seel and helpers for leading the Election Steering Group. It was explained that Geoff is stepping down and a replacement will be needed. Members were asked if they knew of anyone who could step in. Members should send recommendations through the Official Site.

Any Other business (Agenda item 4)

Update on stadium

A member asked for an update on prospective stadium plans. Erik Samuelson explained that Merton has produced a Local Development Framework (LDF), and that the timeframe is 15 years. It was stated that an inspector will review the LDF and the strategy will be broken down into bite-size chunks. The timescale for this would be May-June. A Stadium Working Group member would then work alongside Merton Council.

Erik said that it will give us options and commented that Merton Council is behind the club politically. He mentioned that he still had to speak to the Liberal Democrats. It was stressed that any enabling development would have to be financed accordingly. It was also mentioned that the process could be slow and could take time.

A Merton cabinet member present stated that a new stadium had cross-party support. Erik Samuelson opined that the club is working with an impressive team in Merton.

A member asked how a prospective stadium would impact on the AFC Wimbledon first team budget. Erik Samuelson responded by saying that the club needs to be in the Football League and that this is a long-term project. When asked about how the stadium would look, Erik Samuelson mentioned that the club could tell the developer what it wanted in this regard. Supporters would be engaged and consultation would also take place with Terry Brown. It was stated that it would be a community-embedded stadium and a good atmosphere would be essential.

In response to a question about contact with Kingston Council, Erik Samuelson said that their LDF is a few months behind. He clarified that the club has to exhaust all options with Merton first. Erik also spoke a bit about Metropolitan Open Land (MOL), which protects inner city green belt land. He did note, however, that development would be easier at Kingsmeadow in the short term.

Comms

Erik Samuelson indicated that we have to be more proactive in the community. He said that we aren't allowed to implement a Football League (FLi) website because of Conference rules. With reference to the existing Official Site, he said that the youth, reserve and girls' results were regularly updated and there were interviews with Terry Brown and highlights of first team matches. He said that some chunks were out of date but overall the site had performed well.

It was stated that the Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system, once fully implemented, would tell us who our fans are. This would consist of a common database which would synthesize communication with supporters.

Ivor Heller mentioned that there had been communication with the local Guardian and the Surrey Comet before Christmas. He said that games were listed. Ivor also said that the Yellow and Blue day had been a great success and a good atmosphere had been generated. Radio Jackie was also mentioned as having a good relationship with the club.

Ivor Heller said that charity collections had taken place for St Anne's, My Voice and Shorty Stars hospice but more work was needed to make sure we work with Merton and Kingston. It was suggested that the Dons Trust Board could come up with a shortlist of charities for next year. Supporters could also make recommendations, it was urged. Matthew Breach indicated that information should be emailed.

Credit Cards

Erik Samuelson said that, with regard to credit cards, the club had decided to apply in the name of the PLC. The company being dealt with said that they had never issued a CC facility to a PLC before. Worldpay have bought the company who dealt with the original application.

It was noted that from June 2011, banks are withdrawing Credit Guarantee Cards.

Meeting closed at 10.15pm.