

Dons Trust Special General Meeting - 9 April 2015

Draft Minutes of the meeting

Apologies from Dons Trust Board (DTB) members were received from Nigel Higgs, Zoe Linkson, Sean McLaughlin and Moorad Choudhry. DTB members in attendance were Matt Breach (Chair), David Gowns (Vice Chair), Kris Stewart, Jane Lonsdale and Mark Davis.

Matt Breach (MB) introduced the evening and explained that this was a Special General Meeting for Dons Trust members to find out more about the stadium and ask questions about its layout, how it will operate and other related issues about the process.

MB explained that the room had been organised with round tables instead of lecture theatre format in order to try and encourage and better engage with members. There were 79 members in attendance.

MB then handed over to club Chief Executive Erik Samuelson (ES) and Andrew Williams (AW). ES and AW did their presentation to a backdrop of slideshow images and other information on the stadium.

ES presented first and explained the presentation would be split broadly into three sections. He said he would focus on timing and finance. AW would then focus on design followed by a question and answers session.

Timing

ES explained that he was hoping that the planning application would be considered by Merton Council towards the end of May but may be delayed. Various queries were being dealt with including from the Greater London Assembly (GLA).

The Stadium design process is expected to be completed by mid October. The current timetable assumes that the tender process for the stadium would be completed by the end of December. Construction of the stadium is expected to start around April 2016 following the clearance of the site and is expected to take 13 – 14 months. The first game would be scheduled for July 2017 in time for the first competitive match in August 2017.

ES explained that this was a challenging timetable and the planning meeting could be pushed back to June. This would probably still be alright. We are hoping there are no further delays.

ES went on to explain that the tender timetable should be alright but a risk is that the construction process may take longer than is currently assumed. It will need to be tightly managed and there is scarcely any 'fat'. ES view was that we should still try to build as soon as possible even if we miss the start of 2017/18. If that was the case we would need to consider carefully the pros and cons of moving mid-season.

Finance

ES then explained that the construction costs were expected to be in excess of £20m+. The extension of the East wall had pushed up costs.

The funding would be made up of a contribution from Galliard as part of the overall deal, the sale of Kingsmeadow to Chelsea and a bank loan. We also had naming rights and the Community Share issue to help meet costs. ES believed we may need to call on all of these.

ES went on to explain that the new stadium would require various legal agreements between Galliard, NAMA and Merton Council. A separate legal agreement with Chelsea is being drafted for the sale of Kingsmeadow.

Design

AW then introduced himself as the lead advisor working on the stadium development. He explained that his background was in costing and managing major projects and he had specialised in sports stadia for the last 25 years. He had also run a major business employing around 500 staff.

In particular AW indicated that he had been involved in stadia at Huddersfield, the new Wembley, the Twickenham south stand, the Watford Rous stand (completed in 17 weeks), the Aviva in Dublin and the Le Havre stadium in France (the International stadium of the year in 2012).

AW said his main role was to be guide for the club and whilst he's not an expert on things such as plumbing and electrics he knows people who are! He said his current task is to collect information and data and put that into a document for the club to make decisions.

AW then showed an image on screen of the 20,000 seater mode and described the geography of the stadium. He then proceeded to describe each stand.

The West stand is the most important stand as this will be the permanent fixture with the offices, media areas, players' and officials' changing rooms. He said it will be the heart of stadium and the primary hospitality area capable of holding around 5,000 people and over 600 for hospitality on two levels. This stand will also include a separate bar space which will have a capacity of around 450.

The South Stand will be at the Plough Lane end and is designated for the home end and will be capable of seating around 3,750 people. In the initial mode there is the option of making this terracing with a smaller capacity (around 2,750). There is also hospitality planned at the back of the stand for around 500 people. There is expected to be ground level parking underneath for around 70 spaces.

The East Stand will face onto the residential properties on the other side of the North / South street. AW explained this stand is currently designed to include the dedicated family area and is aimed to hold around 7,000.

The North Stand is currently assumed to be for away fans and is scheduled to hold around 3,000 – or about 15% at maximum capacity in line with FA Cup requirements (only 10% needed for League games). This end can nevertheless be segregated into sections.

AW then proceeded to show some slides 'slicing' through the buildings and showed where the kitchens etc. would be in the West Stand and the Concourse level incorporating a mix of boxes and suites. It is anticipated the South Stand will have 2 levels of hospitality. The East and North Stands will be made of a single rake with a concourse. Essentially the stadium concourses will be made up of two interlinking L shapes.

AW then went on to explain that as is well known not all of the 20,000 capacity will be constructed in the first phase. AW displayed a screen image to show the position with the initial 11,000 capacity. AW explained that the stands will be close to the pitch. The East / North and South Stands will be temporary in order to enable easier dismantling in due course for the larger capacity.

AW explained that the initial concept design is going through the planning process. There are various further constraints. It is a tight site and there are financial limits on what we can do. There are also Building Regulations and planning laws which guide us as well as licensing and Football League requirements.

AW indicated that the next stage he is embarking on is to review what we need to have and what we want in the stadium in order to determine priorities. He said the consultation is a two-way process. He explained that he had been engaging with various parties including the Football Club Board, the Dons Trust Board, ES in his role as Chief Executive plus David Charles, Ivor Heller and Neal Ardley. He said he had also been speaking to Jeremy Sauer (Academy Manager), Kay Skelton (AFC Wimbledon Foundation), as well as the Safety Officer and Merchandise team and ground staff.

Other parties that have been consulted include Merton and Wandsworth Councils, Transport for London, Level Playing Field and the Wimbledon Community Association. He indicated others that he would be talking to include local schools and catering specialists.

Some of the main lessons to date have been (unsurprisingly) that demand for space is greater than supply. There will need to be prioritisation in use of space e.g. size of changing rooms, size of kitchens. AW estimated that the current wish list was oversubscribed by 100%. A key issue for the architects and designers is how we make it work as it grows. He said we are focussed on making sure the new stadium makes a difference and allowing it to expand to 20,000 in time.

With regard to the pitch AW said that at this stage it would need to be grass as the FL had made a decision on no artificial pitches at this time. It wouldn't be affordable to install a pitch up to the Arsenal standard, for example, but the pitch would be better than many. It needs to be capable of adaptation in the future but the present plans are for it to be in line with FIFA size minimum requirements pitch (105m x 68m) with a 4m run off in line with FL requirements.

AW said a further discussion point has been whether it should be all-seater or part standing. Some provision is assumed for a standing terrace in the South Stand at present. At Championship level this would need to be all-seater so some flexibility needs to be built in.

AW indicated that there would be around 70 parking spaces in 20,000 mode but less (around 20 – 40 spaces) in 11,000 mode. There needed to be some decisions made around the concourse space or parking space.

Questions

MB thanked ES and AW for their presentations and then opened it up to questions. Questions towards the end were those received by email / twitter and were read out by David Grows.

1. Would it be possible to put in safe standing along the Bundesliga safe standing model?

AW – yes it may be possible to enable that. There appeared to be a growing movement towards that.

ES – before we make a decision we need to establish the effect on the grants we have had as they may be repayable if we don't build an all-seater stadium.

2. Is the £20m+ cost for the initial or later stage? When is the trigger point for expansion?

ES – the £20m+ cost is for the 11,000 seater stadium. The trigger point for expansion is success on the pitch. It may be possible to expand the SW corner but that will cost a few more £million.

3. Do we know how much it will cost to expand?

ES – It will depend on the phasing. We may not want to expand to 20,000 all in one go. It will be important to construct it so that it is demountable at the NE end so that cranes can be brought onto the pitch to carry out the construction work.

4. Which stand would we do first?

AW – the answer isn't straightforward as when you expand it is also necessary to allow for more away fans. A tipping point is when you need to build more permanent stands rather than temporary stands.

5. What plans are there for the functions areas?

AW – the plans can be drawn up with a number of suites in the West stand but these can be designed to link up. The structure for the upper level of the hospitality areas will be put in place but not fitted out initially. The big function

room in 20,000 mode will be very large. There are ongoing discussions about the animation of the East Stand with the GLA but the main capacity for extra income will be in the West stand.

6. The parking spaces (70 or 40) both seem small. What difference does it really make?

AW – We have limited space for parking. Within the on-site parking provided we need to make provision (min 6% of the total parking provision) for disabled users.

ES – there is an outside area in the NW corner which may have 20 – 30 car parking spaces when there are no live broadcasts and there may be space for parking on non-match days in the service road underneath the West stand.

7. There continues to be concerns raised about potential flooding (e.g. by the WPRA). How are we mitigating this?

AW – Our team of experts has been in contact with the Environment Agency (EA) and have sought to meet the EA conditions regarding the flood plain. When the site has been developed we must not leave it in any worse state from a flood risk point of view than it is at the moment and the proposed design will improve the position.

8. At present some of us are 5 year season ticket holders in different parts of ground. How will this be translated in practice at the new ground?

ES – We haven't yet decided what prices to charge for the stadium. Existing ST holders will get the first chance to decide where they want to go. It seems likely, but is not yet decided, that five year ST holders will be offered equivalent discounts for equivalent seats in the new stadium

9. When will the club / DT be seeking views on this?

ES – We will develop proposals which will go to the Football Club Board and then to the Dons Trust Board.

MB – We will be consulting later but nothing is ready to distribute yet.

10. The second tier function room – will this have capacity for up to 1,000 people?

AW – The future expansion in the SW corner should be big enough. Decisions still need to be made on whether to apply the available cash on expanded function areas.

ES – There are other options – if we were to raise more funds than we need for the basic stadium there are some key decisions to take - for example we may want to spend excess funds on a new training ground.

11. One of the biggest concerns locally is for the local facilities for the additional flats as well as flooding and car parking.

ES – our proposals for relief of the flooding risk will be better than the existing position with the greyhound stadium. My understanding is that there was a requirement for facilities for a GP service on the site of the old stadium in Plough Lane. If this is true, it would make sense to focus on that first. The housing development allows for one parking space for every 3 flats. It is likely that there will be some further discussions around the Controlled Parking Zones with the Council.

AW – We are addressing the technical issues although other factors may come into play. My order of concerns is broadly car parking, then flooding then local facilities.

12. What will be done with the patrimony of honours currently at the Civic Centre – will there be provision to store and show these? They need to be within the borough.

ES – That decision will need to be made but my opinion is that a permanent museum is not the best use of space and it might be better to have something visible throughout the stadium to reflect our history.

AW – One option may be some form of stadium tour. Every part of stadium could deal with some part of our history possibly using CGI to display our memorabilia?

13. Will the entrances / exits be at the back or front – e.g. so that people leaving before the end don't obscure the view?

AW – The design team are aware of this issue. The vomitories currently have to be accessed via the lower level in 11,000 mode apart from the West Stand.

14. Three quarters of the stands are temporary seating. Which stadiums have we looked at? Will the design have green credentials?

ES – The main architect is Derek Wilson (a Burnley fan) who sits on the Sports Ground Safety Authority committee and has therefore been exposed to many stadiums, as well as being involved in designing some, so he has excellent experience on the technical aspects. The floodlight proposals for example have been well thought through and are as we had hoped.

AW - A key Issue will be to ensure it doesn't look like a warehouse whilst meeting safety standards. The plans for the East wall for example may for it to be a green wall with plants growing on it and a mesh around it – arguably providing some visual link to Wimbledon's tennis legacy as well.

There won't be much chance to see a 'warehouse wall' as the West stand faces onto electric grid. It may be possible to get the North stand greened up too?

AW – The North / South street is one of GLA's main concerns as this is a long wall. How do we animate the street? We want to make the wall as soft as possible. There are no other green stadium walls and this option may make it more visually acceptable for residents.

With regard to the green credentials it is proposed that there will be a combined heat and power system – the residential homes will run off same supply as the ground. There will also be solar panels on the roof. There will need to be special arrangements to deal with issues of peak supply.

15. What happens if there are delays in starting construction? What comes first the residential or the stadium? How might the property market in 2017 effect this?

AW – we have mapped out the timing of the residential developments with Galliard. Blocks at the south and north end might be finished first. The Council will want to ensure that we are in the stadium first before they agree to release the final apartments for occupation.

With regard to the housing market in 2017 our agreement with Galliard is not predicated on the market. They have made assumptions on the sale prices and this will not affect the deal with AFC Wimbledon.

16. Is there any scope for getting financial support from the Council?

ES - We have not approached Merton about getting any financial support.

17. With regard to the planning how long do we have to build it?

ES – We understand that there is a period of 3 weeks for potential call in by the GLA and a further 2 weeks by the Secretary of State. We are assuming that after 3 months we will be ready to proceed. We will need to build within 3 years but we will want to get going as soon as possible as the construction price is likely to go up in that time anyway.

AW – The build period for the initial 11,000 stadium is approximately one year. Some details on the initial 11,000 will be different from the 20,000 mode. We still need to go through some of that with the Council but are confident it will meet the necessary requirements.

18. Have we thought about ensuring that our contractors are part of the Considerate Constructors scheme? For example reusing materials, minimising lorry and other vehicle movements, noise and dust restrictions.

AW – Considerate Constructors is now pretty universal. Galliard will be in charge of the demolition. Most of the demolition is of precast concrete and steel so there is less chance to reuse. Other conditions will be imposed by the Council.

19. What about legroom for taller supporters?

AW – The ‘stepping’ depth will be 800mm – this should be alright for most people but depends where you are tall - leg or body length!

20. Will we own the new ground?

ES – The freehold will be owned by the Council. We will have a long term lease. We’d like 250 years but this will be subject to negotiation.

21. What about man of the match awards? It has always been an important opportunity for fans to mingle with players in the bar.

ES – This is an important cultural point – we need to find way of getting access to fans – design of the bar area facilities will be important.

22. Will there be a separate area for volunteers on match days?

ES – I am sympathetic to that view.

23. Will we be sourcing food and drink from local suppliers?

ES – This is really one for Ivor Heller. Ivor does foresee opportunities for lots of local concessions.

AW – This has also been an area of discussion with potential caterers.

24. Will there be a Junior Dons pre and post-match fun area?

ES – There is likely to be space beneath East stand. This is less settled because of discussions with GLA but we will be trying to accommodate this.

AW – This is unlikely to be possible in the 20,000 seater mode.

25. Are we thinking of introducing Park and Ride – should we be doing this?

ES – Possibly. We could explore it but there may be a cost. We went to see a local school who were keen to sell parking spaces on match days. We will try to speak to other local schools and businesses re parking but we want to encourage people to come by train and public transport.

26. What about space for pushbikes?

ES – Merton want us to provide 2% (around 400 bike spaces in 20,000 mode). We may have enough space for around 100.

AW – We don't want to bring bikes into the stadium really. There is space for around 100 within the public realm on site. From analysis at Kingsmeadow 100 might be enough. There is the option of concierge parking where you park the bike and they take it away and return at full time.

27. What about ongoing maintenance costs?

ES – This is being considered as part of our operational budget. We spoke to other clubs with new stadiums and our draft budget reflects their experience who indicated that costs will be higher.

28. Could we use the river Wandle for borehole water extraction to help water the pitch?

AW – It has been explored but would not be viable.

29. What will be the arrangements for submitting specific ideas? Will there be a bidding process that fans can formally submit?

ES – Today is one of those opportunities but it will be up to the Dons Trust Board to determine how best to facilitate any future involvement in this process.

30. Is there scope to access to Lottery funding towards the new stadium?

ES – Our major potential source of funding is through Sports England. Kay Skelton now plays a key role on bidding for funds at the Foundation so her input is being sought.

31. Is there scope for fans to assist on any minor projects? For example with a new scoreboard?!

ES – We may need a new score board at the new stadium. But you raise an important point of maintaining the culture of volunteering at the new stadium which we need to factor in.

AW – It will be important to keep that engagement with fans. The final dressing of the stadium is something fans could engage with (for example banners and flags on a temporary or permanent basis). There is a separate budget for construction and fixtures & fittings

32. What about new training facilities?

ES – As many of you will know we currently train off Windsor Avenue at the Kings College sports ground. If there is enough money it would be nice to have our own but it is a later decision. We've just agreed some extra spend to improve the quality of our training pitches for next season.

33. What about naming the main bar in the new stadium the Batsford Arms and having statues of Dave Beasant and Roy Law? Mick Pugh is willing to look into the costings.

ES – I would welcome any information and costings on that. Let's commemorate our history pre 2002.

34. What is happening to the bricks in the Fans Wall?

ES – We are reasonably confident that they could be moved though we need to agree where.

MB then asked if there were any other questions not relating to the stadium. There was one.

Q. How have we done this season relative to our playing budget and what did we make from the Liverpool game?

ES – I use as a reference point on this a book entitled 'Why England Lose'. In it the author shows a very close correlation between money spent on the team and position in the league. Neal's target is to finish 4 places above our

position in the spending league which we think will be about 16th this year. If we use a similar target next year then in order to get in to the playoffs or higher we need to be ranked around 11th in the spending charts. The net income we made from the Liverpool match was around £250,000.

MB closed the meeting by thanking everyone for coming and contributing (including those who had sent questions by email / twitter) and ES and AW for their presentations and answers. He finished by saying the DTB would be interested in any feedback on the format of the evening and any further questions fans may have on the new stadium.

David Hall

DT Secretary

May 2015