

The Dons Trust
Minutes of Special General Meeting held at 7.30pm on
Wednesday 17 April 2019
The Cherry Red Records Stadium

1. Introduction

Chair of the Trust, Mark Davis, opened the meeting and welcomed everyone. Apologies were received from DT members Amanda Ainsworth, Steve Ogden, Laurence Lowne, Mike Terriere, and John, Beverley and David Balchin.

After introducing the other elected Dons Trust Board (DTB) members, Mark said there had also been three appointments since the beginning of the year. They were David Grows (secretary), Mukesh Desai (treasurer) and Edward Leek, who, as a DTB co-optee, would help oversee the club finances.

Erik Samuelson had announced his retirement about two weeks previously, and Mark said that over the previous twelve years under Erik's stewardship as CEO, the club had made enormous strides.

Following a formal recruitment procedure conducted by the DTB, the new CEO had been announced that same day as Joe Palmer, who had been recruited in January 2018 as chief operating officer with a view to becoming CEO when Erik retired.

Joe told the meeting it was a great honour, acknowledging that Erik's boots were big ones to fill, and thanked the DTB for giving him this opportunity. Joe said he would do his very best at what he described as a unique club, recognising that it was his responsibility to deliver the club's return to Plough Lane. It was a club that did things the right way, and with no rich benefactor, he added.

In answer to a question from Colin Harris, Joe said two of his priorities were to deliver an affordable stadium and to have a fruitful summer working with Wally Downes to ensure the club had a team of players next season that would be competitive.

2. Minutes of 2018 AGM (Paper 1)

The draft of the minutes of the 20 December 2018 AGM were accepted.

3. An updated badge for AFC Wimbledon (Paper 4)

Rob Crane, vice chair, recapped the main aspects of this item, which were:

- To match recent branding changes
- Tidy up the existing badge
 - Text inside the main body of the badge
 - Some other minor changes
- To avoid 'The big debate' – for now ...
- Included a 'Neither' option

The blue lettered badge won, with over half of the votes (887 votes, or 54.48%). The black badge had 517 votes (31.76%), and the 'neither' option had 224 votes (13.76%). Rob revealed a large mock-up of the new badge, and he thanked John Mullarkey for its printing.

Rob said the next steps would be to register the new club badge with the English Football League, start rolling it out over time, update subsidiary brands, and have it in place in time for the new stadium.

4. Member's Resolution re: Meet the Manager meetings (Paper 2)

The resolution submitted by Xavier Wiggins was as follows: "I would like to propose a motion that there are four Meet the Manager events per year, with one of those being online to cater for Dons Trust Members who cannot attend meetings. This motion is, simply, to better inform the Dons Trust Members of playing matters."

Xavier told the meeting it would help counter the negative talk around the club about the lack of engagement.

Ivor Heller, AFC Wimbledon's commercial director, said that there had been other occasions to interact with the football management in recent years apart from the one existing pre-season meet the manager, such as the Centre Court event and also children's open days. Mags Hutchinson said that the open days referred to by Ivor normally only allowed children's questions – albeit quite searching ones. Other points made by members were that the location be carefully considered, and that the meetings should be properly advertised and well in advance.

Charlie Talbot was 'baffled' at the lukewarm stance the DTB appeared to show towards this resolution. Mark Davis replied that the DTB was not lukewarm, recognised the potential for more such opportunities and was keen to hear members' views. Noting that planned opportunities for interaction with the management team might sometimes fail to materialise (e.g. if ever there were a change in the management team), Mark invited Xavier to comment whether four events per season was a firm or aspirational figure. Xavier replied that the resolution did indeed call for four such events but that it was recognised that practicalities might sometimes get in the way.

A member named Lee thought it would be best filmed, so it could be more widely shown afterwards. Some thought players, in particular the club captain, should be included, although another member (John) said some players were happier to engage with the fanbase than others.

A vote by hands was taken on the resolution, and all were in favour except for one against and two abstentions. The resolution was therefore carried.

Mark then asked Joe and Ivor to decide how to deliver this resolution, bearing in mind the points that had been made by members. Ivor suggested that there

should be one at an SGM, perhaps as a launch event, to which members responded positively. Mark thanked Xavier for his resolution.

5. Member's Resolution re: Commemorating our history at the new stadium (Paper 3)

Sean Fox started by saying that the club had a long and proud history, and this resolution was made with the clear view that the Dons Trust should determine how this history was remembered. It was not about WISH (Wimbledon in Sporting History), he said, but rather about remembering what we were as a fans-owned club, and to remind future generations of the club's heritage.

Sean then said that **the proposers would be withdrawing this resolution** to allow more discussion between WISH and the DTB. Sean thanked the DTB for the behind-the-scenes discussions that had taken place since the resolution had been put in, which had resulted in this evening's decision.

Mark responded by saying that the DTB had been pre-occupied with other priorities, in particular with the new stadium. The DTB did respect the principles that were in the resolution and wished to arrange a working group, led by a DTB member, along with WISH and general members. Mark thanked Sean and the other proposers for what they had done in taking the evening's position of withdrawing the resolution.

Mark then invited John Lynch to present to members the presentation that he had given previously to both the DTB and the football club board (FCB).

John started by saying that, in 2002, with Wimbledon heritage going out onto the open market, individuals began gathering memorabilia, and ever since 2005 there had been a mission to 'bring it all back home' so as to properly collate the club's history. In 2011, WISA (Wimbledon Independent Supporters Association) had participated in the making of a film shown in the Wimbledon Odeon which included the surviving members of the 1963 Amateur Cup winning squad.

In 2013, recruitment of collectors across the club's supporter base began, and since December 2018 there had been engagement with the DTB and the FCB. A charity registration was in the process of being obtained, which would open up various revenue streams, to enable the development of an interactive physical heritage museum and a digital web-based museum for the club. It was believed that the structure needed was as a registered charity and as a registered museum. The core team were three individuals who had been fans from 1963, 1973 and 1986, representing over 150 years of supporting the club. The Honorary Life president was Maureen Batsford. Dickie Guy (club president) and Barry Briggs, ex-World speedway champion, were patrons.

The aim was to be entirely self-funding, with no monetary contributions asked of either the Trust or FCB. John added that Philip Rudling of the Foundation was content with the proposal – the alignment was done in a similar way, with the DTB ultimately having the ability to nominate the majority of trustees. John estimated there was £300,000 needed to deliver this vision. John concluded with his 'two dimensional challenge' of showcasing the club's complex history.

Mark reiterated that there would be no vote on the resolution. Instead a working group would be advertised asking Trust members to get involved. Mark invited questions from the meeting.

Ian Marriott asked for John's PowerPoint presentation to be circulated to members. Ian added he was somewhat uneasy that John's group was outside of the Trust and Foundation. John said the £300,000 would be raised outside of the club through a separate heritage trust, establishing revenue streams. Mark said that the Trust was not a charity, although the Foundation would potentially have some functional overlap with John's group.

Karen Hardy was concerned that other sports were included, but John confirmed that it was other sports in relation to the club's history – an example being Wimbledon Old Centrals, which had originally emerged from a cricket club.

Mags raised the issue of ownership of the collection, in particular family inheritance. John clarified that items would be donated outright to the charity.

DTB member Cormac van der Hoeven, who had been in various talks with John as the DTB nominated representative, told the meeting that he believed the project very much had the good of the club at its heart.

The current and likely location for a museum in the new stadium was in the west stand, at the south west corner ground floor.

6. Stadium update

Mark said this item would be quite short, as it was planned to have a stadium open meeting in a few weeks. The club was awaiting the final costs for the 'phase 1' stadium and was arranging the sources of funding. Consideration of the various available options open to the club would then be identified.

Since the beginning of March every Monday there had been a stadium working group meeting, involving representatives of the DTB and FCB and the stadium project manager, Joe Giordano.

Mark said the local council planning process was progressing, and on site preliminary earthworks, estimated to take ten weeks, were now underway. The contractor had been changed to Buckingham, as announced two weeks previously. It was now clear that there were more limited physical options for consultation available than had been suggested at the last SGM, such as terracing and pillars in the stands. The consultations on the stadium would therefore be on a small number of physical options and, in due course, on cosmetic and operational matters.

Joe said the overall plan still remained a phased build leading (well into the future) to a 20,000 seater stadium, but phase 1 of the stadium would be a main west stand with three semi-permanent stands. There could be a coffee shop/pub in one part of the main stand. This single facility was considered more cost effective, as well as providing a meeting place for fans to meet throughout the week. The stadium would have to be commercially viable, but also be what the fans wanted within the cost constraints.

Mark concluded by saying the target completion date was July 2020.

Rob shared some photos he had recently taken on site, showing some of the earthmoving works, which would be followed by ground stabilisation with cement and lime.

Mark invited questions from the meeting.

Andrew Fuller asked if the west stand would be full length or just two thirds length, and Mark said full length if the club could afford it, but that this was one of the choices to be made.

Martin asked if the conference and hospitality space in the main west stand would be as originally conceived. Joe said it was, and on a further question from Martin about the extent of outsourcing, Joe said there probably would be a mixed approach, but the success of club's event sales people would ultimately be a crucial factor.

On further questions about the west stand, Joe said there would be three floors, with two tiers of seating, with a capacity of about 5,880.

A member asked whether terracing was no longer affordable because of construction costs or grant issues. Mark said stadium terracing not only meant that we would need to repay / not be eligible for grant funding but was also much more expensive than seating. Some members, including Hazel Potter, said that they would be more inclined to subscribe to crowdfunding if the stadium had a safe standing terracing option.

In answer to a question on consultation, Mark said that Cormac and Luke Mackenzie would be the DTB leads, noting that the consultation on the physical options would need to be rapid.

Laurent Ghibaut asked about disabled access and parking. Joe said that the club would comply with the regulations for disabled supporters, and that parking at the ground was generally very limited. Joe was considering the viability of a 'Park and Ride' scheme, and the availability of local business parking spaces was also being investigated.

A member thought it sounded like the club was being offered a 'final' specification, and asked what wouldn't be covered, and Mark said that there would likely to be design choices regarding the semi-permanent stands.

A member wondered if there could be a big café, and Joe referred to his earlier comment about the plan to have a pub/café which would be open on a daily basis as a community space, and that he was talking to a prospective partner regarding funding.

In answer to a final question on the contractor's overall stadium cost, Joe said it would be a 'job lot' price from which the club may need to take things out.

7. Update on the work of the Board during 2019

Mark said there were the following working groups: Board Secretariat, Membership Secretariat, Elections Steering Group, Strategy and Survey, Golden Goals Team, Junior Dons, Diversity and Inclusion, and Communications Support.

The key priorities for 2019, with DTB member's involvement were:

- **New stadium.** Stadium Committee – Mark Davis, Colin Dipple, Roger Evans and Rob Crane, plus Joe Palmer, Mick Buckley and Joe Giordano (Project Manager), with Ed Leek on finance. Consultation with fans – Rob Crane, Luke Mackenzie and Cormac van der Hoeven.
- **Succession planning** – Mark Davis and Rob Crane.
- **Long-term strategy** – Anna Kingsley, Cormac van der Hoeven and Roger Evans.
- **Engagement & communications.** Comms Strategy – Rob Crane. Social media – Rob Crane, Anna Kingsley, David Gowns and Hannah Kitcher. Surveys – Luke Mackenzie. Junior Dons and Diversity & Inclusion – Jane Lonsdale. Informal member events – Cormac van der Hoeven. Trust volunteers – Mark Davis.
- **Internal workings of The Dons Trust.** Constitution review – Rob Crane. IT tools for DTB – Hannah Kitcher and David Gowns. IT Platform for membership – David Gowns working with membership secretary John Stembridge. Recruitment of working group to support membership secretariat – Mark Davis.
- **FCB oversight** – Mark Davis, Rob Crane and Ed Leek (financial).
- **Fansbet** – Luke Mackenzie and Anna Kingsley.
- **Club badge** – Rob Crane and Hannah Kitcher.
- **Liaison with WISH** – Cormac van der Hoeven.

In addition the DTB were also involved in the following:

- On a matchday
 - The Dons Trust Kiosk
 - Hosting Away Directors
 - Dons Trust Programme page
 - Fundraising, including Golden Goals, Dons Draw and We Are Wimbledon Fund
- Mediation
- Safeguarding
- Liaison with Foundation

8. Q&A

Leigh Rumbelow thanked Rob for explaining in an understandable way via WUP (Womble Underground Press) and Facebook what the DTB were doing and how its decisions were reached. Other members voiced their agreement.

A member asked if the club was looking for a new COO, as she was concerned about Joe's workload. Mark said there were no immediate plans to appoint a COO.

A member asked if there would be a beam back from Bradford on 4 May. Mark believed that this was not possible.

In conclusion, and to end on footballing matters, Mark said that in two and a half weeks the club would know quite a bit about its future next season, and wished Wally and the team the best of luck!

The next SGM was scheduled for Monday 9 September 2019.

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Mark Davis
Chair