

Dons Trust Special General Meeting (SGM)

7.30pm on Wednesday 31 March 2021

London Broncos Use Of Plough Lane – Explanatory Notes

Further to the 'temperature test' conducted in December, AFC Wimbledon has continued dialogue with the London Broncos over the possibility of the rugby league club playing home matches at Plough Lane.

Talks are now at a stage where AFC Wimbledon are putting in planning application to seek permission for Plough Lane to be used as a rugby venue.

Should this application be successful, the Club would be in a position to enter into an arrangement with the London Broncos.

The Dons Trust Board are seeking approval from the membership before instructing the Club whether to proceed.

The Dons Trust Board have therefore called a special general meeting which will take place at 7.30pm on Wednesday 31 March 2021 and will be held online due to current Covid restrictions. At the end of the SGM, there will be a vote of the membership. Should you be unable to attend the SGM, a voting slip is enclosed.

The deal would be worth between £200,000 and £500,000 per year - a wide variance largely depending on whether the London Broncos play in the Championship or the Super League. They are currently in the Championship but ambitiously seeking to return to the Super League. This figure will be made up from guaranteed ground rental fees as well as additional commission on matchday income such as tickets and beverages.

As previously stated by Joe Palmer, this would make a significant difference to the Club's finances and be used to support stadium loan repayments. This in turn would mean the Club could use operational budget elsewhere.

What this vote means

If planning permission is granted and the result of the vote is in favour of allowing London Broncos to play home games at Plough Lane, the Dons Trust will instruct AFC Wimbledon to enter into an agreement with the London Broncos for their use of the stadium for home matches.

In order to obtain approval from the membership, voting intentions, if not given at the SGM, will need to be received by the Dons Trust Secretary no later than midday on 26th March 2021. The vote will require a simple majority. A voting form is enclosed with this correspondence.

For further background on the non-financial implications of the agreement, we include below an updated version of the Q&A club CEO Joe Palmer prepared at the time of the indicative temperature test vote.

Q: How much is the potential deal worth to the club?

A: The deal will be worth between £200,000 and £500,000 per year depending on which division the Broncos play in and how much additional income is generated on each matchday.

Q When would the Broncos play at Plough Lane and can you guarantee Wimbledon will play in front of crowds first?

In terms of timescales, there are two scenarios, both of which will ensure the Broncos don't play in front of full crowds before AFC Wimbledon do.

Following our first test event in May, we will have a licence to play under limited capacity crowds. Broncos will only be able to play under this scenario after we have played our first limited capacity crowd match which would likely be a preseason match in mid July. (Please note all these dates are subject to the government's national roadmap for Covid restrictions). So once we have played limited capacity matches, Broncos will be able to play games under the same limitations.

When we are able to have full crowds, Broncos will only be able to play in front of a full crowd after we have completed our final test event and received our safety certificate from the council. This is most likely to be in August 2021, but at this stage is impossible to confirm. What we can confirm is that the final test event will be a near full-capacity preseason friendly or league match, so Wimbledon fans will again be the first to watch a game with no restrictions on crowd capacity.

Q: How long would the deal be for?

A: The current contract on the table is for ten years with a break clause earlier on in the term for either party.

Q: I thought other sports were not allowed to be played at Plough Lane?

A: The club and Trust have always taken the view that we wanted the stadium to have the potential for multi-use and as a result the stadium has been future proofed for hosting additional sports like rugby. Some sports will require additional planning changes and regardless of whether this specific deal is agreed, we are looking at undertaking a planning permission change so at the very least we could host one-off events.

Q: I'm worried about our beautiful pitch being destroyed and would hate to see rugby markings on it...

A: While there will undoubtedly be more demands on the pitch, we have spoken to our head groundsman who assures us that as a hybrid pitch, it will be more than capable of standing up to extra rugby league games. Rugby league pitches take a lot less damage than rugby union pitches and they don't play many games compared to football (circa 13-15 max). With regards to the visible line markings, there are modern solutions that now mean any rugby markings will be temporary and remove easily, so should be barely visible during our home games.

Q: What impact would this have on other AFC Wimbledon teams such as the ladies or youth teams playing at Plough Lane?

A: Whilst we are still in discussion as how to best maximise usage of Plough Lane for all our teams, as rugby league is mainly a summer sport, we do not foresee any issues.

Q: Would we make any alterations at Plough Lane to support rugby league?

A: Not really, Plough Lane was designed to accommodate other sports. Our dressing rooms are larger than required for football and were built with future proofing for other sporting uses in mind. We also installed rugby post sockets during construction of the pitch to be ready for any such use. There may be a need to upgrade the floodlights to meet rugby super league requirements.

Q: As a debenture holder, would my seat be guaranteed for London Broncos matches?

A: No, Broncos fans will have first priority for their matches. We are still only at a discussion stage with the London Broncos and if any kind of agreement were to be reached, debenture holders would get priority ahead of other club ticket holders for any potential opportunities but this would not guarantee your current debenture seat.

Q: I don't want Plough Lane to be plastered in London Broncos advertising and branding...

A: The joy of Plough Lane is that our advertising hoardings and scoreboard will be electronic and therefore can be altered on a match-by-match basis. When sharing with Chelsea Ladies at Kingsmeadow we used a series of displays and poster sites where images could be swapped in and out depending on who played there. A similar system would also be used at Plough Lane. *There is nothing planned currently to be permanent.*

Q: Who would own Plough Lane?

A: Plough Lane would still be solely owned by AFC Wimbledon.