Dons Trust Board Meeting, Wednesday 14th May 2025, Plough Lane

In attendance	Apologies	Also in Attendance
Angus Fox (Vice Chair)	Sean McLaughlin (Chair)	George Jones (Secretary)
Martin Drake	Simon Hood	Reece Wheeler-Kelly (Assistant Secretary)
Alex Folkes	Hannah Kitcher	Mick Buckley (Club Chair Item 2)
James Longhurst	Michele Little (Treasurer)	
Graeme Price		
Ian Robinson		

1. Introduction, Apologies and Protocols

The meeting began at 6.05. Apologies had been received from Sean (long standing commitment), Simon (In USA for work) and Hannah (Stuck on a train from work). Michele also sent her apologies. George advised the board that they were quorate for the meeting and that in the absence of the chair, Angus as the vice chair would chair the meeting.

The board thanked the club staff for their work on season ticket sales. The board put on record that their thoughts were with Sam following the incident in the Grimsby away game. The board also put on record that their thoughts were with Mat the Club's Head of Retail who was off sick.

2. Club Chair presentation

Angus welcomed Mick to the meeting and congratulated him on his reappointment to the Club Chair position. Mick began his presentation by saying this is the next in the series of his quarterly reports. Mick began by noting that the club was making a huge amount of progress in introducing processes towards ensuring the sustainability of the club, internal processes and praised Michele for all her work on these topics. Graeme added that this was something the DTB had instructed the club to do following the club's initial focus on setting up the new ground.

Mick went onto explain that they are continuing to add experience at board level, and praised James Woodroof and James Wilcox for the impact they have made since joining. Mick believed that the club staff understand the culture and ethos of the club.

Mick noted that he had concerns about the training ground which continues to be an issue and requires significant work in the summer. The main issue at the training ground is the quality of pitches, which have not been useable at times. Mick added that we really need a new training ground and are looking at alternatives.

Mick highlighted the biggest issue currently facing the club, being the average annual losses of circa £1 million (excluding player sales, depreciation and interest expense), which whilst good compared to other League 2 clubs, was clearly not sustainable in the long run. Looking at the draft budget for next season, Mick confirmed to the board that as it stood we would currently have the 14th biggest budget in League 2 or the 24th in League 1. Mick highlighted that once a club is in the bottom half of the budget table it would be looking over its shoulder at relegation, as opposed to looking towards promotion. He added that the draft playing budget was reliant on “football fortune”. Mick concluded that he believed that the state of wider football finance is a major concern.

Following a question from Ian, Mick said he believed that we had to take the opportunity of promotion if we do achieve it. He explained that when we were promoted in 2016, we had an 80% chance of relegation the following season, but we were able to survive, however he added that statistically we would now be more likely to go down if we do achieve promotion. Mick added that he believed that we are the only club in the ninety-two that had been EBITDA positive over the previous three-year window. James highlighted that this was why messaging was key to help raise awareness at the right time, to alert members to potential future financial problems and drive a fundraising drive.

Mick concluded that we were now approaching a crucial time for the club, and that in his opinion it was the most critical time he could remember at the club. In this respect, Mick noted that there was a significant trend in the US for private equity firms looking to invest in the EFL Clubs looking at potential growth. Graeme and Mick concluded that as a result they believe that the recent trend of wage inflation for players was likely to continue. Angus added that this was also true with US equity looking to invest in Women’s teams. Mick summarised the discussion by saying that finance was the elephant in the room. Graeme concluded that we had now reached the point where the time for talking was over and it was the time for action.

Mick said that he believed that the wider fanbase were not fully aware of the size of the issues facing us in the short term. Alex advised that he felt that it was key to get the message out after Wembley.

Graeme brought up the level of the membership fee, and whether we should be looking at increasing it. He noted that other clubs charge £120 for membership, and that the 2002 prices for membership of £25 if adjusted for inflation would be £72 so this was an issue. We felt that we would need to revisit this in the future. Martin highlighted that we needed to remind people that they were owners and they had the responsibilities that come with that. James asked what the actions needed to be to get the comms sent out. Mick confirmed that James Woodroof had written the first draft of this which Graeme had reviewed. It was agreed to let James Longhurst review it, as the board felt that we needed joined up comms and a united front. James added that the biggest issue was reaching a wider demographic than those who usually actively interact with the club.

A discussion took place on how to interpret reactions online to decisions the club make. Mick added that the results of the matchday surveys are overwhelmingly positive which will be helped with the new catering contract which is due to be announced shortly. Mick added he had met the new catering firm earlier in the week with James W and was very impressed with them. Mick confirmed that the new company would be onsite on Saturday to meet staff who might move across.

Mick left the meeting at 6.45.

3. **Approval of previous minutes**

The minutes from the April meeting were approved subject to some further redactions.

4. **Ratification of email decisions**

The decision to appoint the membership and marketing manager was ratified. The new member of staff will begin in early June.

5. **Club board meeting summary and questions**

Graeme pointed people in the direction of the papers for the PLC meeting the following day. Angus informed the board that there had been some resistance to upgrading the floodlights to the UEFA standard due to budget constraints. Mick had asked for everyone's views and the DTBs reps were clear that the decision should be to do the full upgrade.

A discussion followed on the item that was a closed session in the PLC Meeting.

A discussion took place on the recruitment of a Legal NED for the PLC, and Graeme highlighted that the club had shortlisted over thirty candidates. The board discussed the decision to appoint Dan Norris to the Club Board who is a longstanding volunteer for the club and undertakes a large amount of work "pro bono" for the club. Graeme confirmed that this would continue. The board voted unanimously to approve this appointment and instructed the PLC reps to vote accordingly at the following day's Club Board Meeting.

Graeme confirmed he had submitted a document which he will share, for the following day's meeting, to begin the process of a share revaluation.

Graeme initiated a discussion on the issue of losing our identity and becoming more corporate.

6. **MD's report discussion**

Discussion took place on the report which was very positive. James Longhurst praised the quality of the data included in the report and praised the team.

A discussion took place on the role of the membership and marketing manager, with James commending the incoming member of staff who he believed would massively benefit both the DT and the Club marketing team.

7. **DTB Actions List and Club Board Action Monitoring**

It was agreed that Martin would set up a single calendar for events across the club.

The Actions list was reviewed, and it was agreed that all actions that were due for completion had been completed.

8. **Dons Trust Finance, PLB, Debt and Equity Update**

The board reviewed a paper submitted by Michele which provided a finance update on the financial position of the Trust. Hannah had sent her views on this topic to the secretary.

A discussion took place on what to spend the excess revenue on. Hannah sent her views that £20k should be used to allow the Women's team to put everyone on FA approved minimum wage contracts.

It was agreed to delay the vote to allow Sean to speak to the Women's team.

9. **Women's team**

A closed session was held discussing the Women's team.

10. **SGM Planning**

George provided a summary of the recent SGM, with online attendance higher than the November SGM and December AGM, and on par with the October SGM. This was the first time we had used the Club App to host the stream which was promising. There was positive feedback received for the opening session with Jacqui Oatley hosted by Maddi Sweetman, with Jacqui also giving great feedback about Maddi's hosting of the session.

The board expressed thanks to Jacqui, Maddi, George, Stu and everyone else involved in making the SGM a success.

James felt that having the presentation before the meeting helped to set a positive tone and redefine the meeting. Alex also mentioned that the more informal table set up contributed to a more positive tone. Graeme noted that Craig Cope had been suggested as a speaker for the next SGM but that he might not be available due to the transfer window, and asked if any other guests were lined up.

George advised that the provisional date for the next meeting was Monday 4th August. If there was a Carabao Cup game scheduled for that date, then the meeting would be pushed back to the following week. The election was likely to be brought forward, with the process starting in September and continuing into October, in line with recommendations from the ESG, and that was was possible that another RA would be run before the AGM. This would mean a lot of meetings in a short space of time. James asked if the meeting could be held on another day of the week, with George replying that Mondays and Wednesdays were the only options for volunteer availability.

Martin asked if the ESG were prepared for the election happening sooner. George mentioned Graham Stacey would be involved informally to promote the election. Martin added it was important to think about organising Hustings and having a non-standing board member as a point of contact. James volunteered to be the point of contact with the ESG as a member of the Comms working group.

11. Youth Engagement and Shadow Board

George presented a paper proposing the formation of a group of younger members to act as a working group or shadow board. This group would meet monthly and discuss similar topics to feed views into board meetings, as well as looking to drive engagement of younger members and provide insights to younger members of how the board operates.

A vote was held, with proposal being approved unanimously by those in the room. James agreed to act as a point of contact for this group.

12. PLC Chair Job description

The board were informed that the job description for the club chair has to include reference to supporting ED&I to comply with EFL regulations.

The board agreed this unanimously.

13. Board Working Groups

A. Communications

No meeting

B. Constitution

The line by line review of the existing constitution has been completed, with the writing of the new constitution to begin once the FSA had provided the updated model rules.

C. Culture and mission and Oversight

No meeting

D. Fundraising

Graeme said this was mainly covered off in Mick's section and James will review Comms.

14. Floodlights

Covered in other areas.

15. Strategy Update

Feedback on the presentation at the SGM had been very positive, with many people being engaged with it, who had not previously engaged. Nic Cave from the FSA was very positive about the presentation, and had advised that she was now using it as best practice for FSA training. James advised that the next step was to turn into a published document. With an online meeting to be scheduled to allow people to discuss it with it being completed before the SGM.

16 & 17 Closed Session

A closed session took place when covering agenda items 16 and 17. No one entered or left the room.

18. Risk Register

George highlighted the risk register included in the board papers, and asked board members to advise him of any changes that they believed were required.

19. Replacing Board Vacancy Update

George reminded the board to fill in the skill audit if they had not already done so, to enable him to present the results at the June meeting, and highlight what skills were currently missing.

20. Sky TV Survey Update

George provided a snapshot of results from the recent survey. There had been a very good response rate so far and higher than surveys from last season. George advised that he planned to push the survey again before the final at Wembley. The results so far were summarised in a paper and looked broadly as expected. An interesting result was only 60% saying they could watch more games because of the new deal. James also mentioned 55% having a positive opinion of the deal was a surprising outcome. 44% felt 4-6 weeks was the best notice period for fixture rearrangement. A discussion was held about the notice period, with the board noting that there was a shorter notice period allowed for final games of the season in the contract.

Angus asked what the board planned to do with the survey results, with Alex mentioning the Comms working group would discuss at their next meeting and write something up. James added that the FSA were collecting feedback on the new deal.

21. AOB

A. DT Rotas

Already covered in discussion about DT calendar.

B. DLAG and Old Ruts Fun Day

A discussion took place on the DTs presence at the event, and on how to improve the DTs representation at such events. It was agreed we needed to look into purchasing a stand for future events. It was agreed that unfortunately there would not be any stand presence at this particular event.