



AFC Wimbledon



Dons Trust

7th April 2009

Dear Fellow Member,

Dons Trust Special General Meeting (SGM) – 7:30pm on Thursday 23rd April 2009

Attached to this letter are the notice, agenda and papers for the SGM that we are holding on Thursday, 23 April.

The Board has decided to devote the whole of this meeting to a discussion of the Strategy that it has drawn up in the light of the many helpful contributions made to the Strategy Review. I would like to take this opportunity of thanking everyone who took part in this exercise and to apologise for the time it has taken us to bring the exercise to a conclusion.

Attached to this letter is a summary paper (pages 4 to 9 below) and a more detailed report (pages 9 to 24). I urge everyone to read these documents carefully because – if we decide to adopt the Strategy – it will be the compass by which we will seek to steer the club over the next 5 years or so.

At this meeting the Board will be unanimously commending the membership to adopt the nine sections of the Strategy devoted to senior football, youth football, the community football scheme, ladies and girls football, business development, financing, people, stadium and community.

This leaves one section where the members of the Board could not reach a unanimous view: governance. The Board decided that the members should be given the opportunity to hear and discuss the different approaches to this matter and we have tried to arrange the resolutions accordingly. There are two resolutions which will allow the members to vote formally on 23 April on nine sections and defer a decision on governance.

At the meeting we will be discussing and then voting on the Strategy section by section. If one of the sections falls then this will not mean that they all fall. The Board thinks that this is the fairest and most sensible way of allowing members to show if there are any sections with which they disagree - something that would be difficult to do if we tried to discuss and vote on the document as a whole.

As for the governance section, we will explain at the meeting the different views held by different members of the Board, hold a discussion and take feedback from the floor. As chair I propose to take an informal, indicative vote of those present but we will not as a Trust make a final decision

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on the governance issue until the Board is able to come forward with a formal resolution (probably at the September SGM).

I look forward to seeing you at what I hope will be a lively and constructive debate on 23 April.

Those who cannot make it can if they wish submit the proxy form at page 25. In view of the long term importance of the Strategy I want as many members as possible to be able to cast their votes. I therefore propose as Chair to invoke Rule 46 and direct that a poll be taken when we vote on each section so that every member present in person or by proxy will have one vote.

Best wishes

David Cox (Chair)

NOTICE OF SPECIAL GENERAL MEETING

Notice is hereby given of a Special General Meeting of the members of the Wimbledon Football Club Supporters' Society Ltd to be held at The Cherry Red Records Fans' Stadium – Kingsmeadow, Jack Goodchild Way, 422a Kingston Road, Kingston-upon-Thames, KT1 3PB on Thursday 23rd April 2009 at 7:30pm

SPECIAL GENERAL MEETING

AGENDA

1. The Strategy Review (Summary at pages 4 to 9 and detail at pages 10 to 24 below)
2. Resolutions proposed by the Board¹.

Resolution 1 "To approve separately and in turn each of the nine sections of the Strategy for AFCW PLC and its subsidiaries as set out in the summary and detailed papers dated April 2009 and headed as follows

- Senior football
- Youth football
- Community football scheme
- Ladies and girls football
- Business development
- Financing
- People
- Stadium
- Community"

Resolution 2 "To defer a decision on the governance section of the Strategy with a view to finalising the Trust's policy on that topic so that a formal resolution can be put before the AGM scheduled for 24 September 2009."

2. Any other business ²

By order of the Board

[*David Wilkinson*]

Secretary, Wimbledon Football Club Supporters' Society Limited ("The Dons Trust")

¹In issuing this notice and in accordance with paragraph 5a) of the Schedule to Rule 22 of the Constitution, the Secretary certifies that none of these Resolutions constitute a Restricted Action. Accordingly, these Resolutions will be subject to a simple majority.

² The minutes of the AGM held on 22 January 2009 is deferred to the next SGM in September.

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THE STRATEGY REVIEW - SUMMARY

Quite some time ago the Dons Trust board (DTB) launched a review with the intention of setting out a number of strategic decisions about our future direction, both on and off the pitch. The project stalled about a year ago, but recently we revived it.

The board has now agreed that we should launch the key recommendations and the main actions and invite feedback. Everyone who has an interest in the recommendations is welcome to contribute, although only Dons Trust (DT) members will be able to vote on them.

What we've done so far

This article summarises the process to date, draws your attention to some potentially contentious issues, and then sets out the recommendations. Since we started such a long time ago, here is a summary of the steps we have taken so far:

1. The Strategy Review Steering Group developed the key issues.
2. These issues were debated by the DTB to ensure that all the key ones were included.
3. We distributed a report to all DT members, including:
 - summaries of the issues that we believed members should discuss
 - a background document explaining the issues
 - a summary of the comments on the issues made by the DTB.
4. We held open discussion meetings at Kingsmeadow and in Central London.
5. We created an online debating forum, "Stratchat", for people to put their views.
6. We also asked for feedback, thoughts, opinions, etc. to be sent to the club.

Over the past few months we have taken all this information and consolidated it into a series of recommendations, supported by a longer document which sets out a lot more detail about the background. The summary, which is published here today, and the more detailed document will be published on the official website in the next few days.

Some of the recommendations in the paper are likely to be controversial. In particular, there are two we draw to your attention:

Who can be elected to the DT board?

The recommendations propose some changes to the way directors are appointed to subsidiaries such as the football club. However, directors of the football club will still be allowed to be elected members of the DTB.

The main reason for making scarcely any changes to the current structure was the view that the board is working well at the moment, so why change things? Some members of the board strongly disagree with this. The DTB is the body that monitors the way the football club operates, and they argue that it doesn't make sense for directors of the club to be on a board that oversees their own performance.

Whatever the answer, this is a critical subject. Some of the problems at other clubs are almost entirely due to a lack of appropriate structure and checks. You need to be confident that the DTB is as effective as it can be, and so we urge you to read the more detailed papers and then give us your thoughts.

The community

The report recommends doing a lot more community work. It also specifically says that we should put effort into the Kingston area, while not forgetting our roots in Merton. We expect that some fans will feel that we are not giving enough emphasis to our traditional home, so we need to hear your views on this.

What next?

We propose to discuss and vote on the major issues at a DT Special General Meeting on 23 April. Before then, however, we will welcome feedback from you, whether you are a DT member, a PLC shareholder or a fan. So let us know what you think.

If you would like a copy of the more detailed paper, please call the club office on 020 8547 3528 or watch out for it on the website.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS AND ACTIONS

Senior football

1. We will aim to reach the Conference National as quickly as possible.

2. On reaching the Conference National, we should consolidate with a view to going full time no earlier than our second season, before making a drive for League football.

Youth football

Youth football will continue to be a cornerstone of our development, with the following objectives:

3. Consistent with the aspirations for the senior team, aiming for Centre of Excellence level accreditation within two seasons of the first team going full time.
4. Providing young players for the senior squad through talent identification and development, thereby helping to manage the overall football costs.
5. Aiming for a high level of integration throughout the football parts of the club – delivering a “one-club” approach to player development and progression.
6. Specifically, we propose that youth football will:
 - a. Have even greater emphasis than in the past
 - b. Benefit from diverting some money that might otherwise be spent on paying players who have been recruited from other clubs.

Community Football Scheme

7. The Community Football Scheme will continue to operate as a profit centre but it will widen its geographical scope. Specifically, it should be looking to operate in areas such as Kingston, Sutton, Epsom, Croydon and Wandsworth.

Ladies and girls football

8. We will continue to support and encourage the Ladies team and the development of a girls section that will provide players for the senior team.
9. The Ladies and girls teams should be largely self-funding.

Governance

10. The Dons Trust will retain control of the club.

11. The roles of the board members of the Dons Trust should be revised. Specifically, this would involve:
- a. Requiring that all subsidiary company directors be appointed by the DTB
 - b. Removing the requirement that a majority of subsidiary company directors must be DTB members
 - c. Otherwise maintaining the current position, whereby:
 - there are 12 elected members of the DTB
 - members of subsidiary companies may continue to stand for, and be elected to, the DTB.
 - d. As a result of these changes, the Legal and Constitutional Working Group should be instructed to prepare the necessary changes to the Constitution, to be voted on by members.

Business development

12. The club will develop a “relationship management” database which integrates details of fans, shareholders, DT members and other individuals who have been in contact with us or with whom we wish to develop a relationship. This would involve the following actions:
- a. Appointing an individual to develop and implement a plan to find a solution to meet these needs
 - b. Appointing an individual to implement and maintain the solution.
13. The club will seek to maximise the use of Kingsmeadow, both to increase income and also, in liaison with the community representative, to increase our presence in the community.
14. The club, and what it stands for, should be promoted on a consistent basis to the fans and also to the outside world. This would involve:
- a. Publishing a statement of what we stand for and reflecting this in everything we subsequently publish
 - b. Developing a plan for actively promoting the club.

Financing

15. On reaching the Conference National we will consolidate and then reassess what we need to do to survive (and hopefully thrive) financially in the league. In the meantime, we will rebuff any would-be investors who wish to take control of the club.

16. We will seek to increase the number of major financial supporters of the club, so as to spread the load away from any one individual and reduce the risk of substantial funding being concentrated in one source.

People

17. In our first season in the Conference National, we will:
 - a. Develop a plan and budget setting out how we can convert to a full-time playing staff
 - b. Increase the number of young players who train four times a week
 - c. Identify the most appropriate training facilities for a full-time team.
18. We will review the responsibilities of the AFC Wimbledon board with a view to increasing the number of directors and staff, and considering which of these may need to be paid roles. This requires:
 - a. An analysis of the roles and workloads of the current football club directors, taken together with a review of other clubs' practices
 - b. A similar analysis of areas where full-time or permanent staff are needed and an assessment of the relevant costs.
19. We will remain committed to the active encouragement of involvement by volunteers in all aspects of the club.

The stadium

20. We will continue to develop our ideas for the possible development of a football stadium on the site of the Greyhound stadium in Wimbledon. The resulting actions are:
 - a. The Stadium Working Group will formalise our ideas for the use of the site
 - b. We will continue to try to establish a discussion with Risk Capital Partnership (the owners of the site).
21. At the same time as pursuing objective 20 above, we will continue to develop Kingsmeadow to meet our needs as a Football League club. Specifically, we will:
 - a. Initiate a review of all our options at Kingsmeadow (some work has already been done as part of the preparatory work for the stand extension), taking into account other aspects of the agreed strategy. This review should involve Kingston Council representatives (see also below)
 - b. Press forward to complete the arrangements for the perimeter lease as soon as possible

- c. Instruct the Stadium Working Group to monitor developments in stadium requirements for Football League membership.
22. As part of our involvement in the community, we will seek to expand the use of the stadium to a wider audience. Specifically, this will include:
- a. Talking with Kingston Council about a more integrated approach to the whole site
 - b. Reviewing what we might build into the stadium as part of a more community-focused approach to its development
 - c. Talking to other local businesses about possible joint developments.

Community

23. We will invest time and effort into community support on a local (i.e. Kingston area) basis. Specifically, this will include:
- a. Appointing a person into a senior role to take responsibility for our community activities
 - b. Taking steps to seek the support of local people for our initiatives, for example if we want to revise our planning permissions
 - c. Engaging Kingston Council in what we are doing and demonstrate that we are a force for good in the local community and, to the extent possible, the borough.
24. We will define and agree the communities in which we operate. Specifically, this would include:
- a. Devising a plan that sets out our aims for involvement for the following four key communities:
 - the residential community, i.e. residents in close proximity to the stadium
 - the supporter community
 - the local business community
 - communities of the disadvantaged, i.e. individuals and groups who are excluded from contact with clubs on the basis of economic or other disadvantage.
 - b. Recognising that a key element of our community is based around our current stadium, and in Kingston generally, but that our history and heritage are based in Merton and therefore Merton needs to be part of our plans and activities.

Dons Trust Board
April 2009

THE STRATEGY REVIEW - DETAIL

Senior football

At the time that this document is being circulated, the team is in strong contention for promotion to the Conference National. Should this attempt not be successful, the strategy for the men's football team should still be to achieve promotion to the Conference National as fast as is practicable, with the important caveat that it must be done without spending rashly.

Once in the Conference National, we believe that we need to appraise our situation as a part-time team, in the light of our likely funding at that time. At present, our view is that we should plan to go full-time in our second season in the Conference National. However, this decision is subject to the current financial problems facing everyone, and we should make a considered decision about whether to go full time in the January or February of our first season in that league.

In summary, the objectives are:

1. We will aim to reach the Conference National as quickly as possible.
2. On reaching the Conference National, we should consolidate with a view to going full time no earlier than our second season, before making a drive for League football.

Youth football

We have separated 'Youth' and 'Community' in this report. For the purposes of this section, 'Youth' comprises youth team football up to and including the Under 19 team.

The draft report reiterates the current Youth strategy, agreed with the football club and DT boards, namely:

1. *'Consistent with the same club aspirations as the senior team, aiming for Centre of Excellence level accreditation within two seasons of the first team going full time.'*
2. *Providing young players for the senior squad, through talent identification and development, thereby helping to manage the overall football costs.*
3. *Aiming for a high level of integration throughout the football parts of the club - delivering a "one-club" approach to player development and progression'*
4. *Specifically, we propose that youth football will:*
 - a. *have even greater emphasis than in the past*

- b. *benefit from diverting some money that might otherwise be spent on paying players who have been recruited from other clubs.*

The report goes on to describe the reasons for this strategy, which we summarise as follows:

- Economic; this is the most cost-effective way of building a team (and, without outside investment, it is arguably the only way to build a team)
- Historical/cultural; this is the way that Wimbledon FC succeeded
- Community; it offer opportunities to local players, giving them a chance to develop and force their way into the sides on merit

Other than in the time scales, which may need accelerating if the club is promoted rapidly, there is nothing in the report to indicate that the strategy needs substantial change. In our view, however, it needed some enhancements which have now been added (see paragraph 4, above):

- even greater emphasis than in the past
- we should be willing to divert some money that might otherwise be spent on paying players who have been recruited from other clubs

Community football scheme

The draft 'Community' report says:

'It is important that AFC Wimbledon is seen as a community club that runs a wide ranging and successful youth football section that is integrated with its community football scheme and offers young people from the locality both elite and development level coaching and playing opportunities.

The CFS is the principal means by which the club's name gets out into the community other than through the performances and achievements of its teams. It is run on a commercial basis and aims to run at a surplus to help fund both expansion and support for the club as a whole.'

Nothing in the strategy review suggests that we should change this, except in the scope of its coverage. The draft report on Community says:

'There was an almost unanimous agreement that Kingston is now an important area for us. Furthermore, the consensus was that we should be looking to compete with Fulham, Chelsea and Crystal Palace in areas such as Kingston, Sutton, Epsom, Croydon & Wandsworth'.

We propose that a formal part of the CFS strategy should be to seek such an expansion of coverage.

Specifically, the strategy will be that the Community Football Scheme will continue to operate as a profit centre but will widen its geographical scope. Specifically, it should be looking to operate in areas such as Kingston, Sutton, Epsom, Croydon and Wandsworth.

Ladies and girls' football

The board considers that it is desirable and an important part of our wider role as a community club that we continue to run a ladies team. The cost of the team is a contentious issue and the board believes that while some funding should continue to be made available through the Dons Trust, the ladies team needs to become more self-sufficient and, eventually, largely self-funding.

We consider that a girls' section, to act as a feeder for the ladies team in the same way as is intended for the boys' teams, is desirable for the same reason as the ladies team. However, the recent problems with the girls section have illustrated the need for control over the use of the club's name. Therefore, we commit to the establishment of a thriving girls' section which operates on an integrated basis with the ladies' team management. This may mean some short term expenditure to get the teams running.

Governance

A report on Governance was prepared following the strategy open meeting, with input from David Cox, who chaired that segment of the meeting. The report addressed the following 'key strategic issues':

- The role and responsibilities of the Dons Trust Board;
- Directors of subsidiaries also being members of the Dons Trust Board.

The role and responsibilities of the Dons Trust Board

The report discusses the evolution of the role of DTB members, from initially having executive roles (e.g. running the Ladies team, CFS etc) to its current role where it acts as a monitoring body, as set out in its current terms of reference:

"To uphold the principles of the Trust and to promote the achievement of its aims as endorsed from time to time by the members, paying particular attention to the Trust's position as the majority shareholder in AFCW PLC. The board shall be responsible on behalf of the Trust as a whole for setting objectives and holding to account the Management Committee of AFC Wimbledon Limited."

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The DTB receives monthly reports from the CEO and can question him on the report at meetings. Currently, the other directors of the club attend in their roles as elected members of the DTB as well as being there to respond to questions about their roles as directors of the club.

The report examined the pros and cons of the DTB taking an executive role compared to the non-executive function it currently carries out. It reported:

‘The key to effectiveness of the DTB is its ability to communicate with the directors of the subsidiary boards and hold them accountable. The unanimous view of the current DTB is that the current working relationship is effective and the board has a good grasp of the issues facing the club and how its directors are responding to those issues.’

It went on to say:

‘Therefore, this working group concludes that there should be no changes to the way the board works at the moment. In other words, the DTB should continue to have an overview role and not an executive role.’

Whether directors of subsidiaries should also be members of the Dons Trust Board

The report considered the concern that the directors of subsidiary companies might hijack control of the club from the DTB members but concluded that since, in effect, there are now only three directors of the football club on the DTB, this was very unlikely to happen. It concluded:

‘The working group believes that the DT must remain flexible in our approach to management structure; what is appropriate now may not be suitable in five years or vice versa. Overall, however, the working group recommends no changes to the current practices and policies on the simple grounds that, since the SROB experiment, the board members feel that the current systems work well.’

The Dons Trust Board debated these points at some length and decided that the proposed strategy should be as follows:

The roles of the board members of the Dons Trust should be revised. Specifically, this would involve:

- d. Requiring that all subsidiary company directors be appointed by the DTB
- e. Removing the requirement that a majority of subsidiary company directors must be DTB members
- f. Otherwise maintaining the current position, whereby:
 - there are 12 elected members of the DTB

- members of subsidiary companies may continue to stand for, and be elected to, the DTB.
- g. As a result of these changes, the Legal and Constitutional Working Group should be instructed to prepare the necessary changes to the Constitution, to be voted on by members.

Some members of the board disagree fundamentally with this proposed strategy on the basis that it makes no sense for members of a subsidiary board to be part of the group (i.e. the DT board) which supervises them and holds them to account. They argue that this is illogical and that, while the current arrangement works well enough, in future it could put the safety of the club at risk.

Business development

The business development open meeting came up with little of a strategic nature and most of Stratchat is about specific ideas for increasing revenues, rather than a strategic focus. To fill this gap, this section focuses on some key strategic issues and makes recommendations about them.

Marketing to our fans

One of our key issues is that we don't know who our fans are. We have a number of discrete databases containing information about our fans, such as the season ticket database, the DT membership database, KM Live attendees, etc. The ST database contains about 2,500 individual records of current and former ST holders. This is fewer than our average gate and, at best, no more than half of the total fan base.

If we are to keep our fans informed, feeling a part of the club and if we are to communicate directly with them in a more effective way, we need to know who they are and in what ways they are in contact with the club, whether it be as a ST holder, a DT member, someone who buys merchandise, someone who comes to KM Live etc. To do this effectively, we need a Customer Relationship Management database (CRM is the generic name of such software). In the medium term, we need such information and we propose that a key part of the commercial strategy should be to develop a CRM database.

Making more use of Kingsmeadow

There are three bars at Kingsmeadow, with capacities of 290 (main bar), 320 (back bar) and 80 (President's Lounge) respectively. As a generalisation, these bars are only fully utilised on Saturday nights and are reasonably heavily utilised on Friday nights. For the rest of the week, they are not used extensively unless there is a midweek game.

We need to increase our income from every available source and making greater use of these rooms is an obvious opportunity. We should make this a strategic aim of the business.

Promoting the AFC Wimbledon brand

We have an incredibly strong brand with recognition across the UK far in excess of what would be appropriate or normal for a non-league club, even one with Division 2-sized attendances. We have not defined what we think the brand comprises and we do not have a plan for actively promoting it.

A key part of our commercial strategy should be to promote the AFC Wimbledon brand and use its strength to increase our ability to bring in even better commercial deals.

Financing

Financing comes into two main categories, which overlap:

1. Obtaining funds for day-to-day operations of the club
2. Funds for long-term investment and capital projects etc

Financing and control

First, however, there is the over-riding issue of control and to what extent members ought to be/might be willing to cede some or all control in return for significant investment.

The report resulting from the open meeting says:

‘On the question of whether there is a choice between selling out to a “Mr Big” to achieve league football, or retaining complete control at the price of stagnation, there was a general feeling that these were not the only two choices.

There was limited support from those at the meeting for both of these “extreme” positions but generally discussion centred on how to achieve a “middle way” – characterised by slower progress but with the supporters retaining substantial control over the club.’

To a large extent, the option of selling control to an outsider has been reduced, although probably not eliminated, by the Restricted Actions that have been passed since the strategy review started. It is possible, we believe, for power to be invested in an individual or company but they would be very restricted in the things they could do, which would probably make the idea of investment rather less attractive.

The issue was agreed to be complex by all the contributors but the overall conclusions were:

- nobody was in favour of giving up complete control
- there was significant doubt as to whether anybody seeking control would be a true “benefactor”
- the need to retain sufficient safeguards was paramount in this case but there was scepticism as to whether these safeguards could ever be effective once we had lost control
- if major investment is needed, we should seek support from a number of “medium size” investors who would not individually seek control rather than a single major investor
- we should focus on getting to the Conference and then consolidate and re-assess what we need to do to survive (and hopefully thrive) financially in the league

Day-to-day operations

With these thoughts in mind, we now look at the two key issues. Consolidation and cutting our cloth to match our income are all ‘good things’ but to put this into context and explain the need to spread the load, in the current season, we received about £200,000 in donations from three individuals. Our current projected spending on football management and players’ wages is about £520,000. Losing this source of funding would require a major restructuring of the team and management.

The board’s recommendation is that we must seek to increase the number of major supporters in the club. This would spread the load away from one individual (which is what he wants) and reduce the risk of substantial funding being concentrated in one source. Whether we do this by seeking more funding from supporters who put money into the club as part of their business, or by looking for more donors, needs further thought; the best answer is probably both.

Funds for long-term investment and capital projects etc

The money that we currently receive from donors is used, as is their intention, to help to increase the amounts available for players’ wages and thereby to strengthen the team. None of it is intended to be used for longer-term investment.

The main long-term investment that we need is in connection with building a stadium that can meet the requirements of the football league. These requirements are set out in broad terms in the relevant section in this paper.

We do not have a good estimate of the likely costs of improving the stadium to meet football league requirements but a back-of-the-envelope calculation suggests that developing the John Smith and Kingston Road stands would cost £2m - £3m. As we understand it, we might be able to recover 50% of the eligible spending from the Football Stadia Improvement Fund, up to a limit of £750,000 on each individual application.

However, we could probably get by with improving only the John Smith stand in the short term – this would require further analysis.

Setting this aside for now, a best guess, which is all we can do at this time, is that we would need at least £1m of new funds, plus a £750,000 grant, to enable us to develop the John Smith stand to the standard we would need.

Where might we find this money? The potential options are:

- *A new share issue.* This is unlikely to succeed in our view and is a very expensive way of raising the funds
- *A Bond issue.* It looks as if we may not need to issue more Bonds to fund the current projects, so this would be a possible source of funds. It is almost impossible to assess accurately but a sum of about £200,000 would probably be achievable and perhaps a lot more if we make it clear the investment is essential to our being able to be a league club
- *Further bank lending.* Our assessment is that we will not be able to extend our bank borrowing a lot further, if at all. We should not rely on this as a major source of funds
- *An investor.* This takes us back into the debate about what an investor might get for his or her money. Given the Restricted Actions, we think this is an unlikely source of funds
- *Enabling development.* We believe that this might be available if we can win over the council to the idea of developing Kingsmeadow (or if we could become part of a development at the Greyhound Stadium).

It is clear that obtaining suitable finance is the major obstacle to us being able to afford to develop the stadium sufficiently to allow us to stay in the league, once we get there. This is why we recommended the urgent need to become a far more visible and active participant in our communities.

People

So far as ‘people’ is concerned, there are many things which need to be in place, including planning for business needs, recruiting effectively, training, developing and appraising people, etc. This was the thrust of the draft ‘people strategy’ paper that was developed last year.

Most of these things are currently done, although some could be done better and more consistently. However, this paper is about key strategic decisions that need to be made, not the underlying policy and infrastructure issues – the latter will follow from the former.

In our view, the following strategic decisions need to be made regarding people:

- Should the club go full-time? And if it should, when should that be?
- Is the current working model, drawing heavily on volunteers for most roles, sustainable? If not, how should it be changed?

This paper makes recommendations about these issues.

Full-time football

Of the 24 teams in the Football Conference, about 18 are full time, or very close to it. Notably, of the top 15 clubs, only two claim to be part time.

Most teams that gain promotion stay as part-timers at least for the first year. The main reason for this is that it is usually only May when a team can be certain that it is promoted and many decisions about players need to be made at pretty much the same time; clubs need to notify players of their intentions to take up options by the end of the first week in May.

The received wisdom is that while it is technically possible to go full-time overnight, it is fraught with difficulty and better done over a period. Certainly, this is Terry Brown's view, following his experience of this at Aldershot.

The club is edging towards full-time players with up to eight players who train on Mondays, as well as with the more senior players on Tuesday and Thursday evenings. Our recommendation, supported by Terry, is that we should extend this format but avoid the formal leap to totally full-time footballers until we are in the Conference and can plan it over one or two seasons. Terry is firmly of the view that consolidation using part-time players in the Blue Square Premier is an achievable target for the first year or two.

Therefore, our recommendation is that while we should continue to expand the number of youth players who would train four times a week (Wednesdays would be added), we should not go full time until, at the earliest, our second season in the Blue Square Premier.

The current working model

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In many ways the current model of employment works well. Paid staff typically occupy roles where availability and consistency of approach are needed, for example, bar manager, commercial executive, football secretary etc. Meanwhile, volunteers effectively run merchandise, most of the operations that are specific to matchdays, etc. All the AFC Wimbledon directors are volunteers, each putting in a significant number of hours each week.

It is widely believed that some of the people working within the football club are overstretched, even allowing for the fact that almost all small businesses demand work well beyond the standard working week. The rationale for working this way is that we need to keep costs down. Clearly keeping costs down is an admirable aim, but there is anecdotal evidence that the football club is suffering as a result, for example our inability to deliver a range of projects, including work on the stadium (see paper on the stadium), work in the community (see paper on that subject), developing and working on relationships with local councillors, plus more support in the everyday running of the club, etc.

We believe that we need to spread the load among the directors more evenly and this may mean appointing more directors. Our proposal is that we analyse the current directors' roles so that we can redistribute them into more manageable parts and recruit people to take senior responsibility for those roles – possibly as members or attenders of ManComm. This would allow an appraisal of how well things are working before consideration of an appointment to the AFC Wimbledon board.

In addition, there are key areas of the business where we may need to spend money to get things done more quickly and efficiently. We should be willing to do this.

The strategic issue here is the one of making a decision to spend more on creating the appropriate support infrastructure and, eventually, expanding the board.

The stadium

There are three potentially realistic options for the development of a stadium to meet the club's needs (assuming that the strategy of becoming a football league club is accepted):

- Long term - moving back to Merton by means of a joint development of the greyhound stadium
- Medium term - implementing the current planning permissions, with minor amendments, on Kingsmeadow
- Long term - seeking permission to develop a larger stadium on the current site, or nearby

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Long term - moving back to Merton

If this was to prove possible and economically viable it would be the ideal solution for many/most fans. The current situation is:

- Some members of the Stadium Working group have developed a proposition for developing the site with a stadium for us on it
- We have informally talked Merton planners through the plan and they supported it, in principle
- We have written to, and phoned, the owners of the site, Risk Capital Partnership ('RCP'), and had no response at all. We have tried indirect various approaches without success and are in the process of preparing another approach

Conclusion:

We should keep developing our ideas and trying to contact RCP

Medium term - Implementing the current planning permissions

- The current permissions are now secured following the work to extend the stand
- We still fall short of what we need to become a member of the football league, i.e. by 31 March in the third season after entering the league we would need to have 5,000 capacity, including 2,000 seats under cover
- This is perfectly attainable if we can get what appear to be minor amendments to the current permissions. The experts' view is that this is possible
- However, if we are to stay within the current footprint we must acquire the perimeter lease. Excellent progress has been made recently with the agreement of RB Kingston to our joint propositions with Kingstonian

Conclusion:

In parallel with the watching brief on the Greyhound stadium we should immediately:

- Initiate a review of all our options at Kingsmeadow (some work has already been done as part of the preparatory work for the stand extension), taking into account other aspects of the agreed strategy
- Continue our progress in acquiring the perimeter lease
- Keep a watch for changes in stadium requirements for football league membership

This work should also be done irrespective of the third area for consideration, which follows.

Long term - seeking permission to develop a larger stadium at or near Kingsmeadow

Now that the planning permissions for Kingsmeadow appear to be secured, we should take the opportunity to review a wider range of options for the development of the stadium. In particular, we should review, including discussions with the council, the possibilities for development:

- This should include talking with them about a more integrated approach to the whole site
- Reviewing what we might build into the stadium as part of a more community-focused approach to its development
- Talking to possible other local businesses about possible joint developments

Conclusion:

We should initiate a project to explore the wider possibilities when developing the site. This should include talking to local businesses about their possible interest and must involve discussions with Kingston Council

Community

As previously mentioned, for the purposes of the strategy, we have separated ‘Youth’ and ‘Community’.

The draft report from the youth and community group described the community part of the strategic vision as follows:

“(To) ensure that the AFC Wimbledon name is recognised as a community club and to run a wide ranging set of activities in schools and holidays for all the community.”

The report went on to say:

“It is important that AFC Wimbledon is seen as a community club that runs a wide ranging and successful youth football section that is integrated with its community football scheme (CFS) and offers young people from the locality both elite and development level coaching and playing opportunities.

“The CFS is the principal means by which the club’s name gets out into the community other than through the performances and achievements of its teams. It is run on a commercial basis and aims to run at a surplus to help fund both expansion and support for the club as a whole.”

We believe that we should look at ‘Community’, from the point of view of assessing the benefit to the club of any general community work that we might do. In our visits to other clubs, we have been struck by the links with the local councils which have been forged by, for example, FC United of Manchester and Brentford, through their community work.

There is evidence that several clubs have found that the work they have done in their community has been a significant help in clearing the path for getting permission to build a new stadium. FCUM will no doubt be having discussions with Manchester City Council about a possible new stadium and will use their community involvement as a key aspect of what they propose. And, of course, Tooting and Mitcham have been able to build a very large facility (and get substantial extension plans agreed) in an area where planning permission should have been very difficult; they appear to have overcome this issue largely through their community work, some of it done jointly with the council.

This opens up a major strategic issue for us, as we don’t think we have ever formally linked the issues of Community with a stadium in any of our thinking.

We recommend that we should invest time and effort into community support on a local (i.e. Kingston area) basis, for the following reasons:

1. As we grow, we will need the support of local people for our initiatives, for example if we want to revise our planning permissions
2. Council support is fundamental to us continuing here successfully. Although they have been supportive to date, to build on that support, we should engage them in what we are doing and demonstrate that we are a force for good for the local community and, to the extent possible, the borough
3. Investing time and effort into the local community will have some benefit in terms of people through the gate on matchdays, although this will be difficult to measure

For us, the key issue is number 3. We believe that any future growth or development will be at risk if we don’t have the local council behind us. We can do all the work in the world on building relationships with councillors but the real measure will be what we do to help, not what we say.

This is a major decision for us as it would mean putting a lot of effort into the Kingston area – with all that this implies for our hopes of a return to Merton. We should also do some work in Merton, but the chances of a new stadium there are limited than in Kingston. It is also a major issue for us as it will increase our workload substantially – we will need to recruit someone specifically to focus on this area. We believe that we should try. However, it does appear at first sight that much of the cash cost of what we might do can be raised from grants.

Our specific recommendation is that we appoint someone (preferably a volunteer) to map out what community work we might do, with the specific and overriding objective of supporting our case for building a larger or new stadium.

There are other aspects of community that we need to address and we believe that the draft report on Youth and Community makes many useful points about them. But for us, THE strategic issue re community is the potential business benefit we've described in this paper, because it would make working in the community absolutely core to our strategic objectives.

What is our community?

As worded, this presents 'community' from the point of view of the Community Football Scheme, whereas the previous section of this report argues that our presence in the community should embrace a wider range of activities. Nonetheless, there is a debate to be had about what and where our community(ies) should be.

One posting on Stratchat referred to the Football Foundation's report on *Football and the Communities* which, in summary, suggested that there were four types of community, as follows:

1. *Residential communities – residents in close proximity to football stadiums and also the diversity of views and needs associated with the demographic variations amongst those residents. We might want to include residential communities such as our home borough on this definition*
2. *Supporter communities*
3. *Business communities – businesses which are brought to the heart of the club for commercial reasons, but also local businesses whose trade is affected*
4. *Communities of disadvantage – individuals and groups who are excluded from contact with clubs on the basis of economic or other disadvantage*

At present, we carry out various levels of our activities in 1, 2 and 3, i.e. the residential areas where we provide our CFS offerings; the supporter communities, where we are very active, mainly in connection with the first team; and our commercial activities, although with little emphasis on businesses that are local to our stadium.

We do very little on item 4 and our argument, which follows from the section on using our community work to obtain the support of Kingston Council, suggests that we need to do a lot more work in this area, while extending our activities in the other areas too.

Our recommendations are, therefore, that our strategy should encompass a formal definition of our communities, based on the Football Foundation report. Specifically, it should make quite plain that a key element of our community is based around our current stadium and in Kingston generally.

Dons Trust Board
April 2009

Wimbledon Football Club Supporters' Society Limited ("The Dons Trust")

FORM OF PROXY

I,
of.....

[Please see Note (1) on next page] being a Member of the Dons Trust, hereby appoint
.....or the Chairman of the Meeting **[Please see Note 2]**
as proxy to vote for me on my behalf at the Annual General Meeting of the Society to be held on 23rd April
2009 and at any adjournment thereof. This form is to be used in accordance with my instructions below. I
instruct my proxy to vote as follows:

(Please place an X in one box ONLY in respect of each of the nine sections of the first Resolution - that is
you are invited to vote nine times - and in one box in respect of Resolution 2). **[Note (3)]**

Proposed Board Resolutions			
The first RESOLUTION will be voted upon in nine separate parts: "To approve separately and in turn each of the nine sections of the Strategy for AFCW PLC and its subsidiaries as set out in the summary and detailed papers dated April 2009 and headed as follows	In favour	Against	At my proxy's discretion
1. Senior football			
2. Youth football			
3. Community football scheme			
4. Ladies and girls football			
5. Business Development			
6. Financing			
7. People			
8. Stadium			
9. Community			
The second RESOLUTION will be subject to a single vote "To defer a decision on the governance section of the Strategy with a view to finalising the Trust's policy on that topic so that a formal resolution can be put before the AGM scheduled for 24 September 2009."			

Signed this day of April 2009

Membership Number (if known)

Please ensure that this form is returned so as to reach the address below **no later than noon on Tuesday
21st April 2009**. Proxy forms should be addressed to the Secretary at the address below:

Notes to the proxy form

- (1) Please print your name and address legibly. If your form cannot be checked against the Dons Trust's membership records because of illegible handwriting, your vote will not be counted.
- (2) If you wish to appoint the Chairman of the meeting (who may or may not be the Chair of the Dons Trust) as your proxy, you may leave this blank. Otherwise, please enter the name of your chosen proxy.
- (3) If you leave a row blank, your vote will be counted as an abstention.

The DT Board has resolved that a DT Board member should chair the AGM and should vote proxies in accordance with the Board's recommendations.

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