



# Crowd Wise

## Case Study: AFC Wimbledon

### Introduction

AFC Wimbledon was formed in 2002 after the original Wimbledon football club defected (as the fans of the current Wimbledon see it) to Milton Keynes and became 'MK Dons'. The club is wholly owned by its supporters via the one-fan, one-vote Dons Trust. At the time of writing, in April 2011, the club stands second in the Blue Square Premier League. If promoted, it would return to what supporters regard as their rightful place in the Football League.

The Dons Trust Board decided to use Crowd Wise to engage with its fans, especially those who belong to the Dons Trust, to set the strategy for the club. Key issues included:

- How ambitious should they be? Would fans give up their ownership of the club if a sugar daddy promised to take them back towards the Premiership?
- The club currently has a ground in Kingston. How important is it to return to Wimbledon, or at least to Merton, the London Borough of which Wimbledon is a part?
- How much energy should the club put into its local community – whether that be Kingston, Wimbledon or elsewhere?

### Developing the options (May – October 2010)

The options were developed by a 'Survey Working Group', open to all Dons Trust members. This settled down with about a dozen regular members. The Group brainstormed ideas, then sorted them into five themes:

Ambition – Funding – Ownership – Location /Transport – Support/Community

The Group then identified six stories that covered the main possibilities facing the club:

1. A sugar daddy paying for promotion and a stadium in exchange for ownership of both.
2. Remaining resolutely where we are, small and fan-owned in Kingston
3. Partnership/funding deal with/within Merton
4. Staying small and fan-owned and thus an affordable small stadium in Wimbledon
5. Go aggressively, Premiership-or-Bust to be South West London's 'local' club
6. A partnership/funding deal with Kingston

Each of these options – which the Group renamed scenarios - was then worked up so that it covered all of the themes – although of course each option emphasised some themes over others. Regular items in the programme for home matches kept the supporters at large in the picture.

## Voting on the scenarios (November 2010 – 5<sup>th</sup> February 2011)

In November, the scenarios were road-tested on supporters at a couple of home games. They passed the test: no additional scenarios were identified, and no significant changes were needed to the existing ones.

The scenarios and a ballot paper were then handed out at further home games. Ballot papers could be filled in by hand or online. Christmas and postponements meant that the voting period ran until February 5th. There were 730 valid and completed ballots.

## Drawing conclusions (February 2011 onwards)

The main conclusions were:

- There was a strong desire to retain ownership by the fans. This applied to the ground as well as the club.
- There was a desire to get back to Merton, with Kingston in particular and south west London in general as acceptable but second best.
- Wimbledon fans are cautiously ambitious. They do not want ambition to jeopardise fan-ownership, and balance it against the wish to return to Wimbledon or Merton.

The next stage will be to decide whether this gives the Board enough of a steer, or whether further refinement is needed.