

AFC Wimbledon Community Report 2013



The Launch of the AFC Wimbledon Foundation

Foreword by Erik Samuelson (Chief Executive, AFC Wimbledon)

Welcome to AFC Wimbledon's Community Report.

The story of AFC Wimbledon is widely known, not only within football circles but also by people who may not be very interested in football but who love a good story about overcoming adversity. But my guess is that a much smaller number of people realise the full range of activities we carry out in our community. This report sets out to remedy that.

A football club is diminished unless it is an active part of the community in which it operates. So from the very beginning we have sought to establish ourselves as a community club. We are owned by our fans, and our parent company board is elected by those fans, so our very ownership is rooted in the community. And, despite limited resources, we have always sought to be active in the community and to be good citizens.

As you will see from this report, we have had many successes. Some are public, like the Merton Partnership Volunteering Award from Merton Council and a Big Society Award, while others are less public, but just as valued by us. The list is long and varied, and many of the projects are run by volunteers.

And now we are about to take another giant step. As I was writing this foreword, we received official notification that the newly-formed AFC Wimbledon Foundation had been accepted by the Charities Commission. As a result we can now bring all our many projects under one roof, with a clear identity and ambitious objectives to build upon our work to date.

We hope that in the not-too-distant future we will be able to base ourselves in a new stadium, back in Wimbledon, which will put us at the heart of our home community and enable us to open up our facilities in ways that aren't possible at present. Until we can do that, the AFC Wimbledon Foundation is a clear statement of our enduring commitment to extending our role as a community club.

Please do read this report – I thought I knew everything we've been doing, but even I have been astonished at the range and scale of our activities.

The AFC Wimbledon Foundation

The AFC Wimbledon Foundation is a charitable organisation whose overriding objective is to operate for the benefit of the public generally and Merton residents in particular. It will be responsible for bringing under one roof the many and varied activities described in this report.

The Trustees of the Foundation are:

Erik Samuelson, Chairman

Baroness McDonagh, life peer and former General Secretary of the Labour Party

Mick Buckley, Dons Trust Board member and chief executive of MB Comms

Nigel Higgs, AFC Wimbledon Youth and Community Director

The Patrons of the Foundation are:

Sophie Hosking

Sophie won gold in the London 2012 Olympic Games in the lightweight double sculls. She is an avid Wimbledon fan and played for the girls' team before switching to rowing. She lives in Wimbledon.

Alun Armstrong

Best known for his role as Brian Lane in *New Tricks*, Alun is a multi-award-winning actor and won the coveted Olivier Award for his role as Sweeney Todd. He also starred in *Patriot Games*, *Braveheart* and *Van Helsing*. He is a regular at AFC Wimbledon games.

Wimbledon & football: It's a Community Thing



The Dons have been central to Wimbledon's cultural heritage for nearly 125 years. Ever since a group of old boys from the Central School started a team back in 1889, the club has been proud to be associated with Merton and the surrounding boroughs. The first sides played on Wimbledon Common and changed in the Fox and Grapes pub, before successive moves to pitches off Worple Road West, Pepys Road, Merton Hall Road and, in 1909, Burlington Road.

Eventually, Wimbledon Borough employees found the club a ground on the site of the modern-day greyhound stadium. Shortly before the start of World War I, the club moved a few hundred yards along Plough Lane to a piece of swampy land just north of the River Wandle that had been used as a refuse dump. Over the years, fans developed the facilities there as the team progressed from the Athenian League up through the Isthmian and Southern Leagues, until Football League status was achieved in 1977.

During the next 25 years, the name of Wimbledon FC became synonymous with achievement. The supporters who had cheered the club to success in the amateur game watched as the team rose up through the divisions until, on 14 May 1988, the world looked on as the Dons won the FA Cup at Wembley Stadium. Even more astonishingly, within four seasons they had become founder members of the FA Premier League.

Forced to relocate to Selhurst Park by the demand in the Taylor Report for all-seater stadiums, the Dons continued to play reserve-team games at Plough Lane until just before the Millennium.

With Wimbledon's proud reputation for developing local-born players and its award-winning Football in the Community programme, the connection with the local community continued to flourish until the Football Association allowed a town in Buckinghamshire to take Wimbledon's Football League place. Formed by its supporters in response to that uprooting of Wimbledon FC from its community, the newly formed AFC Wimbledon was determined to keep its roots in the area. It is a commitment that is enshrined in the aims of the Dons Trust.

Since then, the club and the Dons Trust have been hugely active in the local community, from village fairs to school literacy projects, from holiday football programmes to elite youth development, and from hospital visits to social inclusion projects.

Football has the ability to inspire all types of people in a way that is true of no other sporting activity. As Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher put it in a speech in 1986, "If we can sell Newcastle Brown to Japan, Bob Geldof can have us running round Hyde Park, and if Wimbledon can make it to the First Division, there is surely no achievement beyond our reach."

The Dons Trust

The Dons Trust is the club's Supporters Trust and owns AFC Wimbledon.

Vision

"To maintain supporter ownership of a successful, financially stable, professional football club playing at the heart of our communities."

Values

To support this vision, the Dons Trust has developed a number of values by which it operates:

- passion and commitment
- integrity
- open and honest communication
- involving people in decisions
- respecting other people's opinions.

Aims

The Dons Trust's aims are:

- continued Trust ownership
- to ensure sound financial management and governance
- to operate as a genuine community club
- to deliver a "one-club" approach to player development and progression
- to continue work to obtain a new stadium
- to improve communication
- to improve fundraising.

AFC Wimbledon is also keen to make young people familiar with the idea of club ownership. The Junior Dons were set up in 2002 to encourage under-16s to become a part of the club and of the Dons Trust. Membership costs much less than the adult rate for Trust membership, and brings a number of benefits, including birthday and Christmas cards signed by the first-team players and free entry to selected events, including the Junior Dons' Christmas party. The hope is that, by establishing a connection with the club and Trust at an early age, many Junior Dons will continue with Trust membership and become active members of the Trust after their 16th birthday.

“ I started volunteering just before the meeting at Wimbledon Theatre in February 2002, at which it was decided to set up the Dons Trust – I organised the stewarding at the event. Once the club was up and running, my wife Linda and I organised the Golden Goals competition, which has now raised close to £150,000 for the Trust. I also administer the Junior Dons section of the Trust. In my view, owning a football club is a bit like owning a house: ownership brings with it obligations that don't otherwise apply. While not everyone is in a position to be actively involved, the more supporters that can help meet those obligations, the better. It's rewarding to help the club you part-own. I have an excellent team of Golden Goals ticket sellers, and there is a real spirit of comradeship among us. That's true for most of the volunteers I meet. ”

Roger Dennis

AFC Wimbledon and Dons Trust volunteer



Our volunteers

AFC Wimbledon has 300 active volunteers who fulfil a remarkable variety of roles: from architects to accountants, from child protection officers to classroom assistants, from design to data entry, from finance to first aid, from photography to pitch maintenance, from social media to sound engineers, and just about everything else you could imagine.

Wimbledon in the Community

AFC Wimbledon's work in the community has gone from strength to strength since the club re-formed in 2002. A combination of dedicated volunteers and the club's Community Football Scheme (CFS) has helped deliver a wide range of projects in Merton and the surrounding boroughs.

“I firmly believe that the club has a responsibility to its community and everyone who lives, works or goes to school in that community. AFC Wimbledon has always been at the centre of its local community, and I am keen to carry out my part in that. I have seen how much impact positive role models can have on everybody, especially young children, during my time as a player and now as a manager. As manager of the first team I will do all I can to ensure that Wimbledon can have a significant positive social impact on both education and health in the community.”



Neal Ardley
AFC Wimbledon first team manager

In the case of the CFS, it all began at Wimbledon Park in 2003, when a few volunteer coaches worked tirelessly to convince local parents that AFC Wimbledon's scheme was the continuation of the one that had formerly been run by Wimbledon FC and was so successful across Merton and the surrounding boroughs.

Fast-forward a decade, and Wimbledon's CFS now has a 15-strong team of coaches and a large number of volunteers who reach out into the community.

AFC Wimbledon's Community Football Scheme Manager Paul Foley has this to say: "The CFS has had to follow the rest of the club and become more professional as AFC Wimbledon has been rapidly promoted through the divisions. The hard work we have put in is underlined by the large numbers of participants on our courses – that shows we must be doing something right.

"We are working regularly in 15 schools, providing 50 hours of coaching to approximately 600 children a week. On top of that we do Saturday morning and holiday courses, along with Walking Football sessions for over-50s. We have a team of very good coaches – a small team, but one that works very hard. Just like so many other people at this football club, they are willing to go the extra mile because they know that what we are doing here is different – and there is a special feeling about the place."

But it's not just about the CFS. Community volunteers have delivered outstanding projects for schools on literacy, maths and art. They have ensured that the club has a presence at numerous local festivals and fairs, and they have worked closely with local charities to help raise much-needed funds for a wide range of good causes.

A selection of some of the work conducted by those volunteers and AFC Wimbledon's CFS follows.



Sports Participation

After-School Clubs – AFC Wimbledon provide football, tag rugby and kwik cricket coaching sessions to between 15 and 18 schools per week, amounting to around 40 hours of coaching per week and reaching approximately 600 children per week.

Saturday Football Club – This is a football coaching session for boys and girls of all abilities, aged from 4 to 14, held at Wimbledon Park every Saturday morning during school term time. From September 2012 to July 2013, AFC Wimbledon provided 48 hours of coaching and reached on average 75 children per week.

Holiday Football Courses – For 11 weeks a year, AFC Wimbledon run holiday football courses at Wimbledon Park. The courses run from Monday to Friday, from 9.30 am to 3.00 pm. From September 2012 to September 2013 an average of 50 participants took part each day.

Football League Kids Cup – The Kids Cup is a six-a-side school tournament for boys in years 5 and 6. It is organised by the Football League, and each League club runs the early stages of the tournament for schools in its own area. Last season, AFC Wimbledon's tournament took place on 29 November 2012, with 20 teams from Merton and the surrounding boroughs taking part. Each team had 10 registered players – a total of 200 boys.

Football League Girls Cup – The Girls Cup is a six-a-side school tournament for years 7 and 8, run on similar lines to the Kids Cup. Last season AFC Wimbledon's tournament took place a day after the Kids Cup, and attracted 21 teams, with 210 girls taking part.

Football League Kids Cup Regional Finals – In recognition of their success in hosting the Kids Cup in the 2011/12 season for schools in their own area, AFC Wimbledon were selected by the Football League to host the southern-area regional finals in 2013. These took place on 14 March, with 140 children and 14 school teams taking part, all representing League Two clubs.



“Wimbledon football club has always played a big part in the community, and seeing the return of the club to its home will only serve to increase its impact. As a patron of the AFC Wimbledon Foundation I feel passionately about the club increasing its activities in the community.”



Sophie Hosking MBE
Patron of the AFC
Wimbledon Foundation and
2012 Olympic gold medal
winner

“Street League wanted to work with AFC Wimbledon because they share our determination to make a real and lasting difference in the community. We have a lot in common with the club – they too see social objectives as key to their growth.

“What impressed me initially about AFC Wimbledon was how they worked with all members of the community, from programmes aimed at under-14s to the introduction of Walking Football for over-50s. Similarly, they have recognised the gap in the market for services for 16- to 25-year-olds and the success of our pilot Academy, run jointly with the club, has paved the way for a lasting partnership where I hope we can continue to build and grow together to reach out to yet more members of the local community.”



Oni Oviri
Street League

Education

Stadium School Mathematics Project – For the past two years, AFC Wimbledon’s Stadium School Mathematics Project has provided a stimulating opportunity for children at Wimbledon Chase Primary School to explore the use of mathematics in a real-world setting. The young mathematicians engage in a variety of activities based on problem-solving in a sports stadium. How many people can pass through the turnstiles in 10 minutes? How many light bulbs are there in all the floodlights? How can you measure how fast a ball has been kicked? League tables provide opportunities for problem-solving, as do the AFC Wimbledon matchday programmes. Activities are tailored to the appropriate Key Stage.

Flying the Flag – In 2010 and again in 2011, AFC Wimbledon challenged all the primary schools in Merton to design and produce their own large banners and flags featuring their school badges and symbols. The club encouraged schools to look at the themes of recycling and ecological awareness. The events started with a flag show at a school assembly and the presentation of a flag kit to the participating teacher. Completed flags were flown as part of AFC Wimbledon’s pre-season events and even featured in national newspapers. The children who took part were invited to the ground to see their flags flying, and displays and videos of their work could be seen in Morden Hall Park and at Wimbledon Library.

School Literacy Support – AFC Wimbledon volunteers have been working since 2012 to encourage literacy in junior schools by conducting reading sessions using football-related materials. This has been especially beneficial in encouraging participation by young people who normally find little to engage them in other forms of literature. In 2013, several of the club’s first-team players

and the club’s Community Football Scheme team visited Hillcross Primary school in Morden to help with their literacy initiative day. Before the visit, the school was provided with 50 AFC Wimbledon matchday programmes. On the day the players and the CFS team visited five classes with 30 children in each class, reaching a total of 150 children.

School Poetry Competition – Following the donation of junior AFC Wimbledon kits to St Teresa’s RC Primary School for their twinned school in Africa, AFC Wimbledon invited the headteacher of Chinamorah Primary School to a game, along with pupils from St Teresa’s. Then, in autumn 2011, AFC Wimbledon organised a poetry competition between the two schools with the aim of engaging youngsters who normally wouldn’t be interested in literary pursuits. The competition encouraged students to imagine what it feels like to be either a goalkeeper facing a penalty or the player taking the kick. The winning entries were featured in the AFC Wimbledon matchday programme, and the poets were presented with awards on the pitch at half-time.

RESPECT and “What’s Your Goal?” – Since 2012, in partnership with the Football League, AFC Wimbledon have

been delivering the annual RESPECT and “What’s Your Goal?” programmes in local schools. RESPECT is aimed at years 5 and 6 and uses young people’s love of football to encourage good behaviour. In January and February 2013, AFC Wimbledon delivered 33 sessions to 15 schools, reaching approximately 530 pupils. “What’s Your Goal” is for students in years 10 and 11 and is designed to get them thinking about their personal attributes and qualities, and how they relate to different careers. From January to March 2013, AFC Wimbledon delivered four sessions in two schools, reaching 83 students.

Social Inclusion

Street League Academy – In early 2013, AFC Wimbledon were approached by the respected national charity Street League about the possibility of joining forces with them in an attempt to improve the lives of local young people. The first AFC Wimbledon Street League Academy programme began on 27 July 2013, with more than 20 people aged from 16 to 25 enrolled.

The Street League Academy provides opportunities for young people who are not currently in education, employment

or training. The participants, who were recruited through various outreach programmes, had a two-hour classroom session each day followed by two hours of football coaching.

The Street League Academy ran for four days a week over an eight-week period, with the participants working towards one of two qualifications: a Community Sports Leaders Award or a National Open College Network qualification. The participants also worked on CV writing and mock interviews as part of the training experience to complement their qualifications and make them more employable.

The graduates of the scheme were presented with their certificates on the pitch at half-time during an AFC Wimbledon home game.

Football Fans Against Homophobia – In October 2013, AFC Wimbledon became the first British football club to support the Football Fans Against Homophobia campaign, which was founded in Berlin in 2011 to foster a more LGBT-friendly atmosphere in the game. AFC Wimbledon is supporting the campaign in conjunction with the Football Against Racism in Europe network, an umbrella organisation for football supporters, community groups, ethnic minority groups, clubs and

“ Merton Music Foundation and AFC Wimbledon are not the most obvious of partners to work together on a community project, but the aims of our charity are similar to those of AFC Wimbledon – a commitment to outreach, and serving our local community. For us it is reaching out through the arts. So a phone call from Clive Yelf to see if we might like to be involved in a project to work with disabled football fans from High Path Centre to create a “band” to play at a home game was an irresistible offer. The weekly practice sessions on Monday afternoons became the highlight of the week. It became a real community project, and we look forward to working together again.”



Elisabeth Wigley
Programmes Director,
Merton Music Foundation



NGOs that are all committed to fighting discrimination and working towards social inclusion in football.

Raising Stars Development Programme – AFC Wimbledon have worked in conjunction with the Metropolitan Police and St Marks School in Mitcham on a project to develop young people through football and build stronger relationships between them and the police. AFC Wimbledon provided coaching, kit and first-team players to help.

The AFC Wimbledon Experience – Started in 2011, the AFC Wimbledon Experience takes place at most home games and provides a full day out for young people who, through disability, personal circumstances or other misfortune, would otherwise be unable to attend. The experience is targeted mainly at Merton-based children's

charities and has so far worked with the likes of Merton Young Carers, London Borough of Merton Fostering and Adoption Services, The Endeavour Youth Club, Merton Sickle Cell and the Thalassaemia Group.

The Big Blast Band – Running from December 2011 to April 2012, this project involved a dozen adults with learning disabilities who attend the High Path Community Resource Centre in Merton and introduced them to the world of terrace anthems and drum beats. For ten weeks the participants attended workshops under the expert guidance of Elisabeth Wigley (Merton Music Foundation) and John Merriman (Crown Lane Studios). The band members wrote their own songs, learned how to play percussion and developed a range of other skills. The project climaxed with the group performing their version of the song “We Are

Wimbledon” live at half-time during an AFC Wimbledon home match. The Big Blast Band next took to the studio, aided by members of the AFC Wimbledon first-team squad, to record a song that was available to download from iTunes, with all proceeds going towards community projects. An exhibition telling the story of the Big Blast Band was held at the Civic Centre in Morden, and the project was a finalist in the Merton Partnership Volunteering Awards 2012.

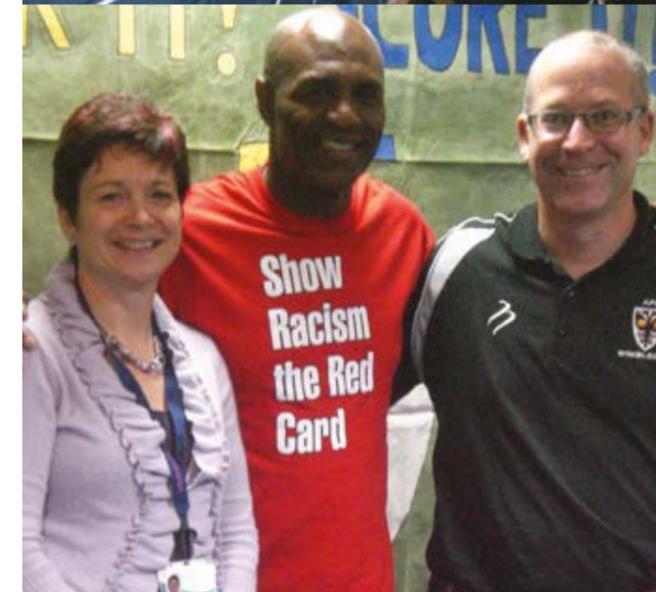
One Game, One Community – AFC Wimbledon have a long-standing commitment to working with Kick It Out, the anti-racism campaign supported by English football's main governing bodies. The club have actively supported the campaign's One Game, One Community weeks of action, an annual initiative that spotlights some of the positive work being done by people in football to help to make the sport accessible to all.

The Big Challenge – Since 2011, AFC Wimbledon have regularly arranged inspirational visits for young people aged 16 and 17 who are undertaking National Citizen Service. The visits include a tour of the ground, an explanation of the history of Wimbledon's football club, and discussions about the importance of volunteering and citizen action. The visitors also pitch ideas for community projects to AFC Wimbledon staff, and the best of them get further support from the club in the form of time and equipment. One such project involved Deen City Farm.

Comic Relief and Sport Relief – Each year, AFC Wimbledon give one of the people who attend the High Path Community Resource Centre the chance to be a hero for a day. An appropriate activity is devised in consultation with the individual and developed with them. The event is widely advertised to the club's fans, and money is raised for the individual's chosen cause. The individual then undertakes the activity in front of the crowd at half-time during a home match. In past years, Marie Miller ran a circuit of the pitch with AFC Wimbledon goalkeeper Seb Brown, and Warren Palmer took a penalty with the world's longest run-up.

Health

Walking Football – On 27 March 2013, AFC Wimbledon launched their weekly Walking Football sessions. This sports participation, social inclusion and health initiative is completely free of charge and is aimed at men over 50 living in Merton or in Merton Priory Homes' sheltered accommodation. It provides the opportunity to take part in football – at a slower speed – and to make new acquaintances. It is an indoor activity run by the club's Community Football Scheme in partnership with Merton Priory Homes and the Sutton & Merton NHS LiveWell organisation and



takes place every Wednesday from 6.00 pm to 8.00 pm at Raynes Park High School. Each session includes an hour of football, ideal for players who may not have the fitness or desire to play at a faster pace, followed by an hour of social interaction, some free health advice from NHS LiveWell, and free healthy snacks.

Blood Pressure Awareness – In collaboration with NHS South West London, AFC Wimbledon provided free blood pressure checks and information on the dangers of high blood pressure to all fans before a home game in September 2013.

Prostate Cancer – AFC Wimbledon work closely with Prostate Cancer UK to help raise funds for



“The local community is the foundation and core of AFC Wimbledon. The club rose up when Wimbledon FC was torn away, reaffirming its existence and identity and standing for justice, reason and hope. In turn the club gives to and works for the community, and in so doing its own values and energies are nurtured: children’s clubs, teams for girls and boys, education for mathematics and literacy, getting 16- to 25-year-olds back to education and into the workforce, and health action on blood pressure and prostate cancer. This mutual relationship is of the deepest and richest, demonstrating in its unique way the real meaning of community.”



Baron Nick Stern
Economist and academic

the charity. The charity is the Football League’s official charity partner, and AFC Wimbledon have held bucket collections at the ground to raise money for Prostate Cancer UK as well as encouraging supporters to take part in the Prostate Cancer UK Total Football Cycle ride from London to Amsterdam last March.

Community Events

Merton Abbey Mills Kidsfest – AFC Wimbledon has a regular presence at this festival, held at Merton Abbey Mills for children in Merton and the surrounding community. In 2012 and 2013 the club provided an inflatable shoot-out competition for the event. In 2012 around 100 children took part, rising to around 150 the year after.



Winter Wonderland – Winter Wonderland is an annual Christmas festival held in Wimbledon town centre. Each year the club’s first-team squad and dozens of its Academy players attend and join in the parade. At last year’s event the CFS took along its inflatable shoot-out competition, which had roughly 100 visits during the two-and-a-half-hour duration of the event.

Wimbledon Village Fair – The club’s CFS always takes part in this popular summer fair on Wimbledon Common, which features over 200 stalls. In 2013 the CFS inflatable shoot-out and beat-the-keeper competitions attracted around 350 people over the course of the day.

Mitcham Carnival – This carnival is held every summer and consists of a funfair, stalls, music, a little league football tournament and various arena events. In 2013 the CFS staged its beat-the-keeper completion and had roughly 150 visits during the afternoon.

Paint a Womble Day – The club played host to an arts day at Morden Library in July 2012. Young visitors to the library were encouraged to experiment with techniques and create their own Womble using a range of different artistic techniques, from pencil to charcoal, watercolours and acrylics. AFC Wimbledon’s club mascot, Haydon the Womble, was available for life modelling.

The Wonderful Wall of Wombles – Three months after the Paint a Womble Day, the club encouraged young people to create their own Wombles on a giant banner that filled one wall of the junior library. The completed banner later went on display at an AFC Wimbledon home game.

Scout Movement Badge Work – AFC Wimbledon work with local cub and beaver groups to help them gain their artist and community badges. The badges are for individual drawing and design, group work on larger pieces, and the design and production of posters. Finished artworks have been displayed at the club, and some of the cubs receive their badges on the pitch on match days.

AFC Wimbledon Events

Matchday Birthday Parties – AFC Wimbledon’s matchday birthday parties are held before home games. The parties feature up to 90 minutes of football coaching, birthday food, a tour of the ground, seats for the game, vouchers for a future game, and a special pack for the birthday boy or girl. From July 2012 to July 2013, the club ran 11 parties in all, attended by over 160 children.

Matchday Inflatable Shoot-out – AFC Wimbledon’s inflatable shoot-out competition runs from 1.00 pm to 3.00 pm outside the stadium before every Saturday home game and attracts 60–80 visits per game.

Haydon the Womble



To help entertain the younger fans on match days, AFC Wimbledon have a giant Womble mascot called Haydon. Haydon was named after Haydons Road, the road which led to the club's former ground at Plough Lane. Haydon the Womble is brought to life by volunteer Dean Parsons, who describes how his role has inspired him to be an ambassador for the club.

"So why did I start volunteering for AFC Wimbledon? Well, I saw others helping with smiles on their faces and full of pride, and I wanted to help too. I started off selling Golden Goals tickets and programmes or helping on the turnstiles. I enjoyed those roles, but when the opportunity came up to be the mascot of our football club, it was like a dream come true.

"I have loved every moment, from match days to mascot events and community events. Community events to me are the most important, whether it is the Wimbledon Village Fair, the Winter Wonderland parade, or helping out at Merton Abbey Mills. I get great satisfaction from helping in the community: it is my small way of giving something back to Merton, somewhere I am very proud to live.

"After being the top fundraiser at the 2007 mascot grand national, I was invited by the charity I raised money for, The Children's Trust at Tadworth, to see how it would be

spent. I went as Haydon to visit the children, not realising how one visit could literally change my life. It was my most memorable moment as a volunteer.

"I went along one evening to meet the children and I spent three hours visiting every ward, every room. I had a fabulous time, and when I was leaving a mum said thank you to me. I said it was a pleasure, but she held my arm and said, 'No, seriously, thank you – you have given me hope.' Apparently when I put my fluffy arm on her daughter's arm, she lifted her finger to touch me back – and that was the first movement she had managed to make since the accident that had hospitalised her. That really touched me and made me realise that a big furry Womble can make a difference. The little girl is now managing to walk with assistance.

"The whole experience inspired me. Soon after that I entered my first marathon, having never previously run further than five miles, and to enhance my chances of raising a great amount I decided to run it as Haydon. Since then I have run two half-marathons and I am hoping to run my third marathon soon. I have also taken part in about 40 mascot events, to help raise money and awareness, not just for The Children's Trust but for other charities too, while helping to spread the good name of AFC Wimbledon."

Fundraising

Charity Mascot Races – Haydon the Womble has appeared in numerous charity mascot races. These include an annual mascot race on Wimbledon Common as part of Wimbledon Common Stables Open Day, which raises money for charities such as Centrepunt and the Children's Liver Disease Foundation; a mascot race staged during an FA Cup tie to raise money for Children in Need; and a race during the Olympic celebrations on Mitcham Common which raised funds for local charity Home Start Merton. Haydon makes many other appearances for local charities and at local community events.

Bucket Collections – Each season, fans vote for which charities they would like to support. In 2012 they chose Merton Mencap and The Royal Marsden Cancer Charity. In 2013, the winning charities were Merton Vision and Kingston Hospital Radio. During the season, bucket collections are held on match days for each of the charities, and also for Prostate Cancer UK, the Football League's official charity partner. The club provides guidance and support on how to maximise the amount collected.

Minithon – Wimbledon have organised two minithons, one in 2010 and another in 2012. These were sponsored 5km fun runs held in Morden Park to raise funds for local charities and the Dons Trust. Both events attracted 80 runners, including AFC Wimbledon fans, managers, coaches, the fitness coach, physios, the safety officer and the club's chief executive. The 2012 run also saw club fan, AFC Wimbledon patron and Olympic gold medal winner Sophie Hosking take part. The charities that have benefited include Macmillan Cancer Support and the Wimbledon Civic Theatre Trust, the Mayor of Merton's nominated charities for 2010, and, in 2012, St Raphael's Hospice and the Mayor of Kingston's nominated charity Born Too Soon (Kingston Hospital Neo-Natal Unit).



Youth Development Programme

AFC Wimbledon's Youth Development Programme has come a long way in a very short space of time. Nigel Higgs has led the transformation, and is proud to say that his single biggest achievement was the creation of the club's Centre of Excellence in 2010.

Nigel was on the Dons Trust Board in 2003 when he was tasked with looking after the youth and community schemes. "The first youth teams were led by the club's first-team manager, Terry Eames, and some of his friends. They looked around the local area and persuaded teams to play under the AFC Wimbledon banner. Within a few years the club had two teams in each age group from under-7s to under-16s. However, they were basically Sunday league sides made up of a coach, his son and his son's mates. They were all good-standard footballers, but there was no real connection with the Dons Trust."

It was then that Nigel was appointed to the AFC Wimbledon Board as youth and community director. With a new budget, the club set up a strategy and developed a more fit-for-purpose youth set-up, with professional coaches, good facilities and subscriptions coming in. But the main priority was recruiting people who believed in the Dons Trust and AFC Wimbledon. The club lost a few teams, but the community ethos of the club was strengthened and now it is integral to the set-up.

"We have our own set of values, our tradition and our history, and we tell our young players all about it from day one. We want them to believe in the shirt. So when the crunch comes and a Premier League side, who they have no chance of playing for when they are older,

“It has been a great pleasure and honour for me to be involved with the AFC Wimbledon Community Football Scheme for the past five years, and I am truly excited about the future of The AFC Wimbledon Foundation. When I first became involved with AFC Wimbledon, I soon realised that this club holds a special place in the hearts of so many local people because of its history. By being active within the community, AFC Wimbledon can and will strive to help achieve local benefits in areas such as sports participation and exercise, social inclusion, health, reduction in crime levels and antisocial behaviour, and improvements in education levels.”



Paul Foley
Community
Football Scheme
Manager

comes in to entice them away, they choose to stay with us. Reece William-Bowers is an excellent example: as an under-13 he turned down Fulham to stay with AFC Wimbledon."

In the years that followed, new coaches were appointed to run the scheme, and the youth teams began to get some amazing results, notably the under-13s, who in 2010 became English champions. The big turning point came in 2011, when the club was promoted to the Football League. In the space of six weeks the club applied for and gained Centre of Excellence status, allowing the Academy to join the Football League games programme and access central funding.

"It was a great achievement and it showed just how far we had come. It was a big step and one which personally filled me with great pride," says Nigel. The majority of the youth teams now train and play at the King's College training ground in New Malden. And the Academy as a whole has grown with the introduction of full-time staff, a physio department, a talent-spotting department, education and sports science programmes, and a new under-21 development squad.

The Academy has a pyramid structure. At the bottom is the Foundation level, for under-9s to under-12s, and above that are the Youth Academy for under-13s to under-16s, the Professional Development Academy for under-18s and the Professional Development Squad for under-21s. The Development Squad provides a bridge to the first team. Throughout every level of the Academy, one motto is used to define and promote the club's ethos: "Home-grown and hungry".

English champions

AFC Wimbledon's various youth teams have achieved a huge degree of success, but pride of place goes to AFC Wimbledon's Under-13 squad from 2009/10. The team had been together and hugely successful since Under-9 level, but that season they won the Tesco Cup to become champions of England.

They had already won league, league cup and county cup titles, and were selected to represent Surrey in the Southern England finals. The team won their group and went on to beat Middlesex 1-0 in the final. As Southern England champions they travelled to Pride Park, the home of Derby County, for the national finals, where they beat the West of England 2-0 in the semi-finals, before seeing off the North of England by the same scoreline in the final. The team achieved further success as Under-16s and the players have continued to progress. By 2013 striker George Oakley had already made a handful of appearances for the development squad.



Advanced Coaching Programme

This invitation-only programme, now operated as a Youth Development Programme development centre, is run from Raynes Park High School and is for boys aged from 7 to 14 who show outstanding ability when attending our after-school clubs or our Saturday Football Club. Between September 2012 and July 2013 we provided 54 hours of coaching and reached 35 to 40 children on average each week.



A history of youth

Wimbledon has had a long history of unearthing and nurturing young talent in Merton and the surrounding boroughs. Dave Willis and goalkeeper Mike Kelly played in the club's 1959 Surrey Youth Cup winning side in 1959 before becoming first-team regulars in the 1960s. Brian Martin and George Coote came through the ranks in the 1960s. Then there was Wally Downes, the club's first YTS player in the late 1970s. Glyn Hodges, born and bred locally, went on to become the club's first full international, representing Wales. Andy Thorn, Dean Blackwell, Chris Perry and Peter Fear would all play for England's Under-21s; Brian McAllister and Neil Sullivan played for Scotland. Current manager Neal Ardley was another product of the Wimbledon youth system, and he also played for the England Under-21s. AFC Wimbledon continues this tradition of developing young local talent, and Jim Fenlon is the latest: by 2013 he had graduated from the youth set-up to become a regular in the first-team squad at AFC Wimbledon.

Awards

Big Society Award – In March 2012, AFC Wimbledon's community programme was given a Big Society Award. The awards were set up by the government to recognise individuals, groups or organisations that are demonstrating the concept of the Big Society in their work or activities.

Merton Partnership Volunteering Awards – In 2012, AFC Wimbledon picked up two of these awards. The club won the Volunteer Host of the Year, while the Big Blast Band project was shortlisted for Volunteer Project of the Year.



Tariro Organisation Award – In 2012 Clive Yelf, who is instrumental in much of AFC Wimbledon's community work – most notably the school arts, maths and literacy programmes – was awarded the prestigious Tariro Organisation Volunteer of the Month award. Tariro is a chain of Fairtrade coffee shops across South London.

There are numerous people to thank for putting together this report, most notably Niall Couper, John Woodruff, Clive Yelf, Stephen Crabtree and Nigel Higgs.

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“In a sense, AFC Wimbledon is a perfect example of what we want to create across sport. The link between the team at the top end and the community is so strong here. One of the things that is difficult about English football is that there are so many ownership issues, and it is difficult to say what works and what does not. But there is no doubt that the achievements of AFC Wimbledon in such a short space of time are extraordinary and are a remarkable tribute to the club, its supporters and the community.”



Hugh Robertson MP
Former Minister for Sport

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“I am thrilled to be a trustee of the AFC Wimbledon Foundation. I watched Wimbledon with my dad as a young child. We lived at the back of Colliers Wood and used to walk through Summerstown to Plough Lane. I quickly learnt that Wimbledon was greater than the sum of its individual players, and that together we could achieve great things. And so we did, with the creation of the Dons Trust and the rebuilding of Wimbledon from scratch. The AFC Wimbledon Foundation is one more step in bringing our culture and beliefs to life. If we are to continue to grow we must be for, and part of, our local community. After all, it's what Wimbledon is all about.”



Baroness McDonagh
Labour life peer

“ If you’ve had any sort of contact with AFC Wimbledon, then you’ll be in no doubt that this is a very different sort of football club. Being owned and run by the supporters often creates opportunities that you wouldn’t normally expect, and my involvement as a community volunteer has definitely been one of those. It’s been a hugely enjoyable and rewarding experience and has introduced me to organisations and individuals that really are the bedrock of the local community. I’m immensely proud that the club have been able to work alongside them, and I’m looking forward to that relationship deepening and strengthening over time.”



Clive Yelf
AFC Wimbledon
community volunteer