

# The Telegraph

## Three weeks for the Dons to save themselves

By Mihir Bose

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Wimbledon may have until the end of this month to prove that they can fulfil their Football League fixtures for next season. If they cannot then the club could fold.

The administrators met Andy Williamson, the Football League's director of operations, yesterday. Today the Football League board are holding a meeting at which Wimbledon will be high on the agenda.

Andy Hosking, one of the two administrators, is maintaining a brave face over the club's prospects, and when I suggested Wimbledon had only weeks to live, he said: "Why? Bradford told the League the night before the start of the season."

However, while the League would be loath to see any club go out of business, even one with [as chequered a recent history](#) as Wimbledon, League insiders have told The Telegraph that the Bradford analogy does not hold.

One said: "Remember, Bradford had a ground. If you don't have a ground, you can't say 'Yes' the night before. There are policing and other arrangements to make and they take weeks."

The irony is that by now Wimbledon could have been saved. I understand that there was an 11-hour meeting at the administrators' offices in Euston 10 days ago to discuss a rescue plan put together by Wimbledon chairman Charles Koppel.

Koppel presented a funding package worth £8.5 million: £4 million up front and £4.5 million conditional on the Milton Keynes planning application being accepted. Koppel had put together a consortium consisting of a Stock Exchange-listed property company and other investors. Wimbledon's Milton Keynes development was always a property deal dressed in a football shirt. The council provide the land and the developer funds the development, which will include a 150,000sq ft Asda store, a 125,00sq ft non-food retail store, such as B&Q, plus hotel, health club, restaurant and office facilities. Everyone is a winner: Wimbledon get a 28,000-seat stadium, Milton Keynes a football club and the developer the profit.

Present at the meeting were John Cove, Milton Keynes Council's head of community and economic development, and Peter Winkleman, the music promoter whose idea it has been to take Wimbledon from south London to Milton Keynes.

Everything seemed to be going well until Winkleman spoke. He has a 25 per cent stake in Wimbledon's Milton Keynes project, but said he wanted 51 per cent. He was also upset that, under the Koppel plan, Wimbledon would initially ground share with Watford or Northampton, only moving when the development was completed.

Winkleman said Milton Keynes was tired of waiting for its football and the club must move immediately, even to a temporary ground.

He has an exclusive 10-year option from the council on the land and is key to the deal. When he said no, Koppel's plans failed.

Winkleman has been working on his own consortium, believed to include the property company, Abbeygate Developments, and is hoping to raise £5 million.

He has also given the administrators just over £300,000, which was used this week to pay the June wages of the players - May's wages remain unpaid. This gives Winkleman an inside track with the administrators.

But how he can get Wimbledon there immediately is not clear. The plan to find a temporary home at the National Hockey Stadium has been blocked by the National Hockey Foundation.

Meanwhile, Selhurst Park - where the Dons have been tenants since 1991 - may no longer be affordable. Wimbledon still have a contract with Crystal Palace, the landlords, and must pay them £40,000 a month for the next two years. Palace had agreed to accept £150,000 in lieu, but that looks dead.

Wimbledon could always sell players. Sam Hammam, their former owner and now in charge of Division One rivals Cardiff City, has been in touch with the administrators several times. He offered £1 million for five players: Mickele Leigertwood, Joel McAnuff, Nigel Reo-Coker, Lionel Morgan and David Connolly. That was rejected. He has since upped his offer to £1.5 million and dropped Connolly from the list.

Winkleman refuses to discuss details but said: "We are at the beginning of the process that everybody wants. The end of the road must be Milton Keynes. Technically, the club is dead. I don't want to give false hopes but you can't keep Milton Keynes waiting for its football."

Koppel said: "I put a proposal which would have allowed us to move forward, but without the support and endorsement of the Milton Keynes consortium there is no opportunity for the club to survive, and my consortium has withdrawn its proposal."