

## Willow Wanderers FC survey results 2020

Firstly, a huge thanks to everyone who took part. Recognising that some kids would have had both parents complete it, but others just one parent between two or even three kids playing for us, **our response represents around 50% of the kids on our books** – which is pretty astonishing for any survey, and shows the level of engagement our parents have with the Club. That alone is something we're very proud of, even before we look at the results!

But the results themselves are also excellent. They do draw out a few issues, which we expected, and the good news is that there's no new news – everything you want to see improved, we know about and largely already have plans for, albeit some are further advanced than others.

The headline: **the average score was 9.1 out of 10.**

I'm a statistician at heart and I've cut this a few different ways, but whichever way I do so, it still comes out around this number. Any club, any business, any organisation in the world would make huge sacrifices to be getting this sort of satisfaction amongst its "customers". What's more, it's a virtually identical score to our last survey two years ago – despite having doubled the number of teams since then. If we can really grow that fast and keep everyone equally happy, I can't ask for more than that!

**But we of course always want to be better.** The way we hold onto players and attract others is by making Willow somewhere that both they and their parents want to be. So, looking at both the scores and the comments, we've pulled out the main areas where you feel we need to be better, and we've addressed them all in detail below.

We know not everyone will have the time or inclination to read all of this though, so for those planning just to skim this, these are the main themes:

- **Rainwear** – we're going to look into alternatives to the current jackets – this won't be a quick fix though
- **Training venue** – we're moving back to Carlton le Willows on their new 3G 🤔
- **Training times** – again the move back to CLWA will help, although we can't get the timing right for everyone
- **Home facilities** – we'll make sure everyone knows where the loos are – but I need to ask for your help in providing hot drinks and snacks

And on the flip side, our highest average score was **9.51** for this:

**“How much does your child enjoy match day?”**

Job done.

Cheers

**Neil & Tom**

PS – 9.1 out of 10 includes one person who scored us 1 for everything except two questions – we think that's a mistake, especially as the exceptions were in the same categories as our lowest scores. But, we've left it in the results to avoid being seen to try and skew the data. If we took it out, the result would be 9.25 – even more amazing!

## Scores

### Training

Scheduling - day, time and length	8.96
Venue - building, facilities and location	8.2
Quality of coaching - are you happy with how the kids are being trained	9.22
Amount of content - are you happy with how much activity is fit into the hour	9.17
Overall enjoyment - how much does your child enjoy the sessions...	9.44
... and how much do you enjoy them?	8.63

### Matches

Punctuality - starting and finishing on time	9.29
Venue for home game - facilities and location	8.53
Quality of coaching before, during and after the game	9.11
The support given by your fellow parents	9.24
Involvement - how much game time your child is getting	9.27
Position - where your child is asked to play	9.13
Overall enjoyment - how much does your child enjoy match day...	9.51
... and how much do you enjoy match day?	9.42

### Admin

Membership form / welcome pack	9.15
Amount of monthly fee	9.04
Process for setting up standing order	9.11
Information flow from the club and/or coaching team	9.29

### Equipment / kit

Match kit	9.07
Rainwear	7.84
Equipment	9.25
Other	8.88

### Coaches

Knowledge	9.27
Approachability	9.38
Manner with the kids	9.33
Discipline	9.16
Punctuality	9.47
Preparedness	9.45
Appearance	9.35

## Areas for improvement

In assessing this, we haven't just looked at average scores – it's important to pick up on particularly low scores within an average, for example where the overall result is 9.11 but two people have scored 1. Where possible, individual feedback will be given to coaches if it's something within their gift and the team name was given; if not, we'll just take this into account when looking at areas we need to improve. If there is something you feel has been missed out, or that you forgot, that you'd like to see on this list, please just get in touch.

## Rainwear

This was by a distance our lowest score, as it was last time. The jackets are actually more expensive than all of the rest of the matchday kit put together so they're a big investment, and if they're not quite right then we'll look at how we can make them better, or find an alternative. However, we've sunk a lot of money into the existing ones, and they are very durable, so we're not about to get rid of the ones in use today any time soon! Comments focused on them not being fully waterproof, or particularly warm; to the latter point, they're intended to go over other items when it's cold, and to be as useful in a summer shower as winter drizzle, so if we get lined versions then that stops them being useful year-round. However, it's correct that they aren't completely waterproof. This was mentioned enough times for us to spend a bit of time considering viable alternatives.

## Training

**Venue & schedule:** Our long-awaited move to Carlton le Willows is now delayed only by Coronavirus! Thank you all for your patience while we've trained at either PlayFootball or Forest Sports Zone; I know neither facility is ideal, but they've been helpful to keep us ticking over while we've waited for our home 3G pitch to be built. So I hope location, quality and timing concerns will largely be addressed. We recognise also that the timing of the training sessions doesn't suit everyone, but I hope you also appreciate that the scheduling is usually at least partly driven by what suits the coaches – which is only fair, as they're putting in the work to run the team. Also there are only so many slots to go round, so (especially when the new venue is running at capacity) we have to look across the club and spread it out across the week. Most of our training is on a Thursday at present.

The pavilion may not be finished before we restart training, and for those who liked a coffee while waiting at PlayFootball, I'm afraid that's not something we can do just yet – see home facilities below.

**Content:** A couple of you mentioned that you thought a little more focus on the basics during training might help. We have a real mix of skill and experience levels across the club and some, even up to U14, who still have only a couple of years' playing under their belt; so it's a fair observation. This is something we'll discuss as a coaching group.

## Home facilities

**Toilets:** I was surprised to see a few people mention the lack of toilets; we clearly haven't done a good job of pointing them out. I've updated the site map on the website [www.willowwanderers.co.uk/find-us](http://www.willowwanderers.co.uk/find-us) to show where they are. I believe there will also be toilets in the new pavilion when that's ready, but for matchdays that will be even further from the pitches. I know it's a bit of a trek and for those pitches beyond the running track we will see if the school can provide access through from that side rather than having to walk around the Barn.

**Refreshments:** I need to ask for your help again in providing hot drinks and snacks. A couple of our Warriors were doing this a while back but it's not sustainable with only a couple of folks. We really need a few people to put their hands up to run this on a rota – probably half a dozen. If you can help, please just drop an email into the club account.

As for bacon cobs and so forth, that requires a guarantee of a certain amount of sales, and somewhere to cook; I don't believe the pavilion will have these facilities and within the school there's no conveniently located cooking area with a serving window. We might look at inviting a catering van onto the premises to do this for us, but we need to consider whether there's enough footfall to attract someone. It wouldn't be a massive earner so I'm not worried about it generating income really, it's more about enjoyment for supporters. Again, if you know of someone who runs such a van who might be interested in coming along, please let us know.

**Match cancellations:** I completely understand and share the frustration at the number of games which had to be cancelled before Coronavirus hit. For those new to the club, this winter really has been unusual; in six years of managing junior teams I've never known such a prolonged spell of adverse weather. The 3G will help to some extent, but there is only room for one 9v9 and two 7v7s on it, so when the grass is called off we may not be able to accommodate everyone (particularly on a Saturday morning) and those who can play may need to be flexible with times. Meanwhile the school are also looking at what they can do to improve the drainage on the pitches, particularly the 11v11 pitches which are very flat and thus often prone to standing water.

**Parking:** this was mentioned as an issue at peak times (Saturdays around 10:30 when we've got a lot of home games). I'm not sure if everyone knows that there is overflow parking down by the table tennis centre (to the right past the basketball court when you come in the main entrance). Also, the rear car park by the East building is only supposed to be for coaches who have equipment to carry – everyone else should be using the main or overflow car parks. However, it was mentioned the gates along Burton Road are not always open – we've now asked the school to do that for all home fixtures, not just when the 5v5 or 7v7 pitches are in use. So those coming from that side may be able to park on Burton Road, or even walk if local enough.

**Cover for parents:** there was one slightly wistful comment about how nice it would be for there to be protection from the rain for spectators. While I don't disagree, I think this one is always going to be beyond us! Umbrellas are the order of the day here I'm afraid.

## More kit / equipment

Long answer alert! Someone mentioned whether we can have short-sleeved shirts for the summer; someone else suggested additional equipment to help in training.

The short version: in order to keep monthly fees down, we limit what we spend on kit. I actually think what we provide compares well with most other clubs, even the larger clubs who have big pools of volunteers and many decades of building up their capability and experience. But we are trying to expand our ability to bring in more money, and to add volunteers to help us do that.

Longer version. We will certainly look at additional training equipment where requested, as this sort of spend can go a lot further, once we figure out how the finances look when we come back (we normally build up some money over the summer when there's less activity, and that then funds us through the winter – so the longer the enforced break, the tighter funds will be at the beginning of 2021). We'll discuss amongst the coaches what would be helpful, but also what is practical – coaches have to carry this stuff around, so a free-kick wall probably won't be possible!

Additional kit though is a much bigger investment. An extra shirt for every player would cost around £2000. It only works about £8 a month per team, but that's not insignificant when you consider we don't run any profit. We have little currently in terms of additional fundraising: the quiz nights and fashion shows raise a couple of hundred pounds a time, the end of season event likewise although we aim for that to be cost-neutral as well. We don't do raffles – you get hit with enough of those, and we hate them to be honest!

We don't ask our coaches to raise sponsorship for their teams, for three reasons. One, because frankly it's off-putting to many people to have to go and out bring in money – it's hard enough to attract volunteers. Two, because actually the printed logo on a shirt tends to be the first thing to look scruffy through use, so it would reduce the lifespan of our shirts. Three, it means if you change teams or play for an additional one, you need a new shirt – and we do get people who transfer or play with two teams. Thus we've decided only to do shirt sponsorship if a company can sponsor all of our teams, not just one or two. Finally, we are offering alternative sponsorship opportunities, but we've had little interest to date and our very small committee haven't really got the bandwidth to spend time on attracting extra revenue – there's more than enough work in actually running the club. Again, if this is something you feel you can help with, please do put your hand up.

So, it's something we'll bear in mind, but please be mindful that we only have so much money and time to work with. As opportunities arise, we are in a good place to make the most of them.

## Matches

**Assistant refs:** Thank you so much to everyone upwards of 9v9 who puts their hands up to hold a flag for half a match. Given the abuse dished out to officials even at our level this is not taken for granted! There were a couple of comments that it would be nice if more spectators would take a turn so that it's not always on the same few, or in some cases even coaches are having to run the line. I don't like this as they're there to coach and it's impossible to do that and focus on looking for offsides!

I'm arranging for a friendly local ref to come in and give some guidance one evening to those who are looking to be a bit more confident at this; if you've never done it before, perhaps you can come along and help out your fellow spectators. I've heard comments that "well it's all mums that come to watch my games" which I don't buy for one second – men are not any more genetically wired for spotting offside than women and to suggest otherwise I find slightly offensive. Mums, you are just as welcome to volunteer and indeed would be setting a fine example to the girls both on the pitch and around it that football is not just a boys' game!

**Comments in the moment:** I've worded this carefully to cover a few things, but it's a general point about uttering statements during a game that you simply wouldn't anywhere else. For example, you're 1-0 down with a few minutes to go, you get on the attack and the ball is passed to one of your team's weaker players. "Ah no, don't pass it to him!" you might hear one of your fellow parents mutter. The chance dries up and the same parent mutters "See, that's why – we've lost the game now" while shaking their head. Or you're a goal up with ten minutes left, and the manager makes a sub, bringing on a weaker defender for a stronger one, because the stronger one has had his allotted time and the weaker one has only played just under half the game, and your fellow parent mutters "oh what are you bringing him on for at this point? We're trying to hold onto the game!". Now consider that the weaker player in either example is your own child. How would that make you feel?

Football is an emotive game and most of us (I include myself in this) get caught up in the excitement and the desire to get a good result. It can be hard not to groan when a gilt-edged chance goes begging, or a defender misses a tackle, or the goalie fumbles the ball. What I will ask all of you is that you just be considerate of others who might not be lucky enough to have your knowledge of the game or a child as talented as yours. As a rule, use the guidance "if you can't think of anything positive to say, say nothing".

**Game time:** When I looked through the scores I was keen to know how we fared on this front as it's among our most contentious positions as a club and one of the hardest for managers to adhere to because of that natural desire to chuck on your strongest players to chase a result. With 9.27 it suggests I really didn't need to worry, and I'm relieved about that. We make a strong point of fair game time and although it can be implemented in different ways, it's central to our very identity.

However, a couple of the comments came as a slight surprise in that they questioned our adherence to this principle. One said "coaching on match days is too focused on time for each player rather than coaching within context of the game"; another said "some still get carried away and can be negative about the ability of some players and the equal game time ethos of the club".

I'm going to be fairly blunt about this as I have a decreasing amount of patience for this point of view. We make crystal clear that the club's position is equal game time below 11v11, and then fair

game time above that. Whether that is within a single game or across a series of games, we leave to our managers to determine what works best for them. I have a spreadsheet for every game, but even then it's not a precise science as you have to wait for the ball to go out of play, you have to deal with unexpected absences, you might spot a player struggling for stamina or looking peaky, etc. Others just can't work things in that way, and that's fine, everyone is different. But we make no bones about this approach, and if you are not happy with it, you need to take your child elsewhere – we have plenty of rivals who favour their stronger players. Yes, it takes some attention to get right, but most of our teams have two coaches now who can share the load so that it's not distracting from coaching the players on the pitch. But “the context of the game” is the telling phrase for me – in other words, if we're holding onto a 1-0 lead towards the end of the game, don't swap a stronger player for a weaker one. This will inevitably will lead to stronger players getting more game time as you leave them on for longer, or bring them on to “shore up” your team, which means the ability gap can only grow. That isn't how we operate. Please, do not undermine my coaches by openly criticising our stance – just take your child somewhere else that better matches your view on how the game should be managed.

## Admin

**Transparency of finances:** We've been meaning for a while to produce something as a summary of how membership fees are spent – it's just never quite gotten to the top of the priority list. So, we'll commit to putting something out there on an annual basis. For now, some quick approximate insights for 2019 (the numbers won't quite add up as there's a lot of rounding and some sundry smaller amounts not included):

- Monthly fees levied totalled around **£22,600**
- Player payments received totalled **£21,600**
- Additional income from events and donations totalled **£2,000**
- Venues for training, matches and events cost **£11,500**
- Kit, equipment and merchandise cost **£4,500**
- Trophies, entertainment and catering for events cost **£2,200**
- Courses, tournaments, ref fees and ad hoc pitches cost **£1,600**
- Pro coaches cost **£1,500**
- Insurances, League fees and fines cost **£1,500**

**Transport to away venues:** I know some people struggle to get kids to away games. We've looked at funding transport in the past but it's been prohibitively expensive and not popular enough to make it worthwhile as players more normally share cars and perhaps contribute to fuel costs. Talk to other parents if this is posing you a problem, or your team manager – usually someone will be happy to help out, within reason.

**Match reports / social media:** A few people commented about negative match reports, specifically on WhatsApp. We've tried to avoid needing a social media policy, and moderating would just be another job for someone to have to do. I don't want to lose match reports altogether as I think they're particularly valuable for those parents who can't get to games so we'll discuss this within the coaching group and come up with some sensible guidelines.

**Apps:** I can't tell you how many different apps there are out there for confirming availability, and to date I've still not found one that does things quite the way I would want it to. As a result some teams have adopted various apps, others haven't. Ideally the FA's Matchday app should be the answer but that doesn't tick enough of the boxes for me at the moment so I've stuck to good old-fashioned text messages for now. We'll keep looking and if we ever find one that ticks all the boxes, we'll encourage everyone to use it. For now though it's up to the manager to use what they think works best for them, whether that's Matchday, Teamer, Spond, WhatsApp, Messenger or SMS.

**Social:** suggestions were made about doing some social things with the kids away from football, maybe in school holidays and so forth. I think this is a great idea – but our coaches spend a lot of time prepping for training and matches, so it would be really helpful if we could get other parents and carers offering to help organise things like this. A couple of teams have managed to arrange social events, around Christmas or after a presentation, and they've been really well received. If you'd like to help arrange something just speak to your team manager – I suspect most will be only too happy to let you sort something out. Just make sure it's inclusive, so relatively low or no cost – not everyone can afford to do extracurricular events and at the moment we don't have any sort of charitable funding to support in such situations so that players don't get left out. That is something else on our list to add in the coming year.