

VICTORIA PARK CLUB

Minutes of the 142nd Annual General Meeting held on 17 February 2022

Present: Tim Cartwright (Chair & Tennis Chair, TC), Elizabeth Ambler, Liz Bell, Owen & Joan Bennett, David & Anne Brice, Peter Cornelius, Gail Dixon-Smith, Barry Flicker, Alan & Ethel Grateley, Jo Hawkins, Cath Jones, Alistair Macintosh, Edward & Mary MacMullen, Cheryl Mitchell, Don Mitchell (Bridge Chair, DM), Matt Olczak, Nigel Parker (Honorary Treasurer, NP), and Jon Rycroft

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Mark Allen, John Campbell, Peter Caspar, Julie Crichton-Smith, Diana King, Etta Mitchell, Chris Pennington, Morag Reeve, Sue Stott, and Judie & Kai Kin Yung.

2. Minutes of the 141st AGM held on 23 February 2021

Liz Bell proposed that these be accepted and this was seconded by Edward MacMullen.

3. Matters Arising

Tim Cartwright reported that, with no overall Chair in position, he and Don Mitchell had been taking turns to be Honorary Chair at Committee Meetings – based on the constitutional changes put in place last year. It was felt, given some of the content of this particular meeting, especially around membership fee proposals and planned maintenance expenditure, that Tim should chair it. There were no objections to this. There were no matters arising from last year's AGM.

4. Chair's Report

TC reported that, considering the year had been overshadowed by Covid, there had been a lot of positives. The Covid risk assessment procedures put in place had enabled tennis, bridge and various external events to recommence. Tennis membership had increased dramatically and members were now enjoying almost unfettered access to organised sessions, coaching, team events and individual play. ClubSpark had been a big success, reducing administration, enabling more effective communication, allowing visitor and floodlight fees to be paid as part of booking courts, and, perhaps most importantly, taking the guesswork out of knowing when courts would be free and allowing us to move away from the divisive subject matter of membership tags.

Bridge members were enjoying face-to-face sessions and, although numbers were down, it had been particularly pleasing to see a community group especially at risk from Covid once again have the opportunity to socialise and meet up with friends – something the Club was keen to continue to encourage. Victoria Park has always prided itself as being a community-based Club – offering accessible membership fees, a friendly and welcoming atmosphere, and an opportunity for all to get involved. Some favourite memories of this year had been seeing the courts full of families once again enjoying themselves on a Sunday afternoon, juniors laughing and running around in the fresh air at one of Jon Rycroft's many group sessions, and as already mentioned, welcoming back a group of members who had had a particularly scary, not to mention lonely, eighteen months or so.

TC was pleased to announce also that, despite everything the Club had been through over the last two years, it continued to enjoy an enviable financial position meaning that, with careful management and forward planning, we should be able to continue providing an opportunity for those in and around Exeter to play tennis, participate in bridge, and, perhaps most importantly, meet and socialise with family and friends for many years to come.

Edward MacMullen proposed accepting the Chair's report and Alistair Macintosh seconded this and thanked TC for all his work.

5. Treasurer's Report

The Treasurer gave his report, see Appendix 1 attached. Jo Hawkins proposed accepting the accounts and this was seconded by Cheryl Mitchell. All were in favour.

6. Bridge Chair's Report

DM reported that Covid had made this another very difficult year with Government legislation preventing face-to-face play from resuming until late July. The bridge section were pleased to have the opportunity to restart some of their sessions. Strict social distancing rules remained in place and only modest numbers of members had joined these sessions. Over the active second half of the year, about half of members attended at least once or twice, but only about half of those have been attending on a regular basis.

For some months Monday and Thursday sessions have been running each week. Attendance has remained modest: a little more than two tables on Mondays and slightly under four tables on Thursdays. This represented a 50%-70% drop compared with pre-pandemic rates. In an attempt to boost attendance, sessions had been opened to guests (free of charge) and this had had a small beneficial effect and five newcomers had become members in recent weeks.

Soundings indicated that there had been little appetite for restarting the pre-Covid Wednesday sessions, and in recognition of this, associate members had been temporarily invited to attend other sessions. Over the coming year (or years) our task would be first to consolidate our activities and then gradually build up attendance again.

The bridge section very much appreciated the funding provided by the Club for improvements to the room including a new carpet and installation of much improved lighting – DM expressed a special thanks to Edward MacMullen for all his help with this.

DM thanked all the very supportive and energetic members of the Bridge Committee, and in particular Mark Allen who was leaving his role as Secretary. All were in favour of accepting DM's report.

7. Tennis Chair's Report

TC reported that Chris Pennington had stepped down as Social Secretary and thanked her again for all her contributions over the last several years. Lance Cresswell had joined the Committee as Finance Assistant to the Treasurer and was welcomed to the post. Nigel Parker had found it difficult keeping up with the day to day transactions of the Club due to his work taking him overseas for long stretches at a time. As many of the transactions were tennis-related, it made sense that a Tennis Committee member take up the administrative tasks of checking and making payments, reconciling bank statements, and dealing with week by week post.

Safeguarding has always been a topic of utmost importance to the Tennis Committee. Alistair Macintosh, who was last year appointed the Club's Safeguarding Officer, had now become the official LTA nominated DBS verifier of the Club, making it easier for Committee members to get DBS checked and all had taken an LTA safeguarding training course under his supervision. A transport policy for juniors had been drafted ready for approval at the next Tennis Committee meeting – as had a coach recruitment policy from a safeguarding perspective (don't worry Jon, your job is safe for the time being!).

Two planned maintenance activities were being scheduled for this year. The first was the LED retrofitting of the floodlights – which should pay for itself in the next six to ten years with reduced electricity bills and a decrease in annual maintenance expenditure. This would cost in the region of £25,000 to £35,000 and should result in much better night time playing conditions.

The second was the resurfacing of courts – which was overdue four years ago but postponed because of expenditure outlay on the clubhouse improvements. The LTA advised that £15,000 to £20,000 per court be put aside for resurfacing courts with a macadam finish – it may be that this amount would increase because of any drainage remediation work or changes to court surface that are deemed necessary / favourable.

Three quotes would be obtained and reviewed by the Tennis Committee before a proposal was put before the General Committee for the go-ahead. Expenditure for these works had been planned for several years but the Treasurer would be producing a report with his recommendations on what the Club could afford.

There was likely to be some disruption to playing availability – the court resurfacing alone could require closure of the courts for between 3-4 weeks at the end of August / beginning of September – which was why an early payment discount of 10% was being offered to members this year. If possible, the courts and the lighting work would be carried out at the same time. Barry Flicker mentioned that it may be possible to use the courts at Exeter School whilst this work was being done. Barry also advised that, when the courts were wet, the water could be drained more quickly by inserting the rod supplied into the holes at the back of the courts.

Finally, TC thanked Jon Rycroft for all the work he had carried out during the year. His dedication, enthusiasm and above all kindness were central to the pervading atmosphere to be found at Victoria Park.

All were in favour of accepting TC's report.

8. Nominations to the General Committee

All members of the Committee were willing to stand again for the following year. Any nominations for the post of Chair, either now or in the near future, would be very welcome. Gail Dixon-Smith proposed accepting that the Committee remain as it was and this was seconded by Mary MacMullen.

9. Membership Categories and Subscription Rates for 2022

There were no planned changes to the membership categories this year. Tennis rates had been frozen to take into account the difficulties still being experienced by many. A prompt payment discount was being offered to current members renewing – in part because of this, and also because of the disruption that may be experienced due to the planned maintenance discussed. It was proposed that there be no charges for existing or new bridge members. The bridge membership was at a pivotal point with ongoing Covid concerns and a rise in online

bridge playing. It was felt that this gesture could help retain existing members until they felt it safe to attend in person – and also encourage new members to help buoy the membership going forward. Both proposals had been cost impacted by the Treasurer.

Edward MacMullen asked that the term 'free' membership for bridge members be changed to £0 and this was agreed. Barry Flicker reminded members that limited tennis players were not allowed to play in the evenings or in the teams – full membership was required for this.

TC proposed accepting the proposed subscription rates and all were in agreement.

10. Honorary Membership

The General Committee had unanimously agreed that Matt Olczak, Barry Flicker, Joan Bolden and Jon Rycroft receive honorary membership this year in recognition of their ongoing contribution to the Club. Matt Olczak had worked tirelessly getting ClubSpark up and running, and continued to be the focal point of its ongoing development and the upcoming introduction of it into the bridge section of the Club. Barry Flicker had enabled tennis activities to continue where they might otherwise not with his tireless commitment to reviewing our risk assessments, supervising sessions and maintaining hygiene standards. Joan Bolden embodied everything that was admirable in a Victoria Park member. She had gone the extra mile in making new members feel welcome, as well as supporting and caring for ex and current members who had been unduly affected by the impacts of Covid or were going through rough times. All were in agreement.

11. Any Other Business

TC reported that Pete Smiley was offering defibrillator myth-busting sessions later this month and recommended that everyone attend – there had been four further instances of this life-saving device being used successfully to treat tennis players in Devon over the past year. Tennis and bridge members would be advised of the dates.

Finally, TC thanked everyone on the Tennis, Bridge and General Committees for all their work over the last year and for giving up their time and energy to navigate the Club through these difficult times. In particular, he thanked Don, Nigel and Liz for all the hard work they had undertaken on behalf of the Club which was much appreciated.

Barry Flicker asked whether the Committee planned to keep to the current rules restricting use of the clubhouse or to relax these restrictions and allow more flexibility. It was agreed that a risk assessment should be conducted and the way forward then agreed by the General, Tennis and Bridge Committees. All agreed that it would be good to be able to hold social events again, perhaps to welcome new members, and to make use of the bar.

Appendix 1

Treasurer's Report

The Accounts for 2021 once again show a healthy surplus of £16,079 for the year. Despite renewing tennis members receiving a 50% discount on fees due to lack of playing time the previous year, tennis subscriptions received were £31,461, an increase of £4,145 on the previous year, showing that the tennis section continues to flourish with us once again attracting more new members in the year. There were no bridge subscriptions received this year due to all members being given a 100% discount on fees for the year due to their lack of playing time the previous year caused by ongoing Covid restrictions.

Other income was £10,515, down £1,467 on the previous year. However, a significant proportion of this was due to another £8,097 Government grant that was awarded to help the Club through this difficult Covid period.

The grant helped support the discount in subscription renewals for both the tennis and bridge sections that was provided this past year, and also support the proposed further 10% discount for tennis members and 100% discount for bridge members for the coming year.

Overall expenditure for the year was £25,897. This is £8,303 higher than the previous year due to increased maintenance expenditure which included floodlight repairs and a new carpet in the bridge room. There was also a significant increase in junior coaching fees paid to Jon Rycroft, the Club coach, as the Club returned to some form of normality.

A further support payment of £1,000 was made to the Club coach at the beginning of the year to assist during the lockdown period whilst coaching activities were suspended and part of the received Government grant was utilised for this.

Over the past two financial years we have received a total of £18,097 in Covid support grants that have and will continue to enable us to make decisions in the best interests of the Club and its members. These have included support to the Club coach during lockdown periods and contributing towards renewal discounts provided to members due to lack of play and ongoing financial uncertainty. The Committee will continue to use these funds in the future for similar appropriate causes.

On the Balance Sheet, the Resurfacing/Floodlighting Reserve and the Bridge Reserve represent money set aside by the Club for specific purposes. The Bridge Reserve equals the balance on the Bridge bank account and the money set aside for Resurfacing/Floodlighting is held in the National Savings Investment Account.

Overall, considering the unusual circumstances that we have once again found ourselves in during this past year, the Club finances remain in a healthy position, and with the ongoing uncertainty that we are likely to face during this coming year, we are positioned favourably to be able to ensure that we can continue to support the Club and its members.

The Accounts have been reviewed by David Brice and I am very grateful to him for his assistance.

Nigel Parker
Honorary Treasurer
17 February 2022