

Buxton Tennis Club AGM, 02 March 2023 @ Cavendish Golf Club

Present: Allan Ramsay, Kate Tagg, Mike Badman, Helen Bates, Simon Bradbury, Mark Edwards, Liz Blyth, Richard Blyth, Tracey Ellis, Lin Robinson, Sally Gould, Carol Bassett, Wendy Solman, James Stuart, Carol Taylor, Steve Thompson, Dan Osborne, Robert Turnbull, Peter Coward, Pauline Salt, Sue Turnbull, Anne Thompson, Catherine Reeds.

Apologies from Mike and Julie Meaton, Geoff Milner, Joy White, Catherine Spriggs, Dave Forshaw.

Minutes of the 2022 AGM

The minutes of the previous AGM had been made available via the club website. These were accepted as a true record of that meeting, and there were no matters arising not dealt with later in the current meeting.

Membership secretary's report

Anne Thompson reported that our current adult membership stands at over 90, with around 40 juniors. The adult membership is the highest it has been for some years, with a good number of people who had joined at the reduced rate for the first year in 2021-22 remaining as members during 2022-23. We do still need to increase the number of junior members, since many of these are the people who will turn into long term adult members – the age profile of the club is heavily skewed towards older members, and we need somehow to redress this. Increasing the number of junior members will help, though it is recognised that many of these move away from Buxton when they leave school and hence this is not a complete fix for this issue.

Chair's report

Steve Thompson noted that the club's financial situation looks reasonably healthy, particularly given that the main club's officers have agreed a 50 year lease on the ground with increases tied to inflation but capped at 3.5% pa. This is a major boost to the club's stability – to have secured a lease of that length at all is excellent, to have it capped at 3.5% is a major achievement, and thanks are owed to the people who made it happen.

We need to make court maintenance more regular. For the past few years we have ad hoc working parties, generally led by Mike Badman, to sweep and clean the courts, deal with the hedge, apply moss killer, ... but it would be good if these could be made more regular and systematic.

The club runs reasonably well-attended open sessions on Saturday mornings, but we need more social events and tournaments to get people more involved and to help members mix with a wider range of other members. The fact that this AGM was so well-attended suggests that there is an appetite for more social interaction (holding the meeting in a comfortable setting with the possibility of having a meal together beforehand has roughly tripled the usual attendance at the AGM). There was general agreement that we need more activities. Allan Ramsay volunteered to run a tournament, along lines to be decided, on either the last weekend before subs are due or the first weekend after, as a season opener. Liz and Richard Blyth volunteered to try to make the Monday night club session work – as with the Saturday morning session a few years ago, the problem is largely that people don't go down spontaneously because they're not sure that there will be anyone else there, so that there is a vicious circle of people not going because they don't know that anyone else is going. Liz and Richard will undertake to be there on Monday evenings, thus guaranteeing that there will be at least someone there and making it worth turning up. There was some discussion of the use of online tools so people can indicate that they are coming – Carol Taylor suggested using Sponze, but this may be more useful for managing over-suscribed sessions, Allan Ramsay is willing to provide a facility via the club website.

Treasurer's report

Dan Osborne had circulated his usual detailed accounts prior to the meeting, with a few hard copies for people who do not have access to the internet. The meeting thanked him for his work on these, and they were accepted by the meeting. The most important figure is that the club has £31.5K as reserves, which is a good chunk of what we will need for resurfacing the courts (the current estimate for this is £40K-£45K, though this will obviously have increased by the time that we are in a position to actually do it). It is conceivable that we will be in a position to carry this out in two or three years, assuming that we maintain our current membership levels and are not hit by any major unexpected expenditure. This will be quite hard to achieve, but is a reasonable aspiration.

Subscriptions

There had been a meeting of the committee prior to the AGM at which the question of whether to leave the membership fees as they are or to increase them slightly was discussed. The committee had agreed to leave them as they were, but because this is a significant issue for the membership as a whole the question was re-opened at the AGM. Anne Thompson proposed that they should be left unchanged, Allan Ramsay proposed that they should be raised by 5% to avoid the situation we had some years ago when the fee was left unchanged for a long period and then had to be changed by a large increment to cover the club's increased costs. There was some discussion of the issue, followed by a vote, which was overwhelmingly in favour of a small increase now to avoid a large one later. There was some debate about juniors, and it was agreed that the rates for juniors should be increased by £1.00. The earlier committee meeting had discussed changing the student membership to cover all young adults and extending the age limit to 23. Carol Taylor presented the case for this, and meeting agreed that it was an appropriate change.

Teams

The club's participation in the summer leagues was successful – the ladies did well to stay up in their division, the men's were promoted to division 2, and the mixed team also did well in their division. Because the men's team is playing at such a high level it is very dependent on a small number of players, and there are very few people who could take part at this level if any of the existing group were to move on. This is potentially a risk, though there is no indication that any of the current team players are likely to drop out.

The turnout for the winter league was much worse, and in the end we withdrew (and we would probably have been expelled if we had not dropped out, given the number of times we had to cancel matches). This means that we will go back in at the bottom for next year, which may actually be beneficial since it means that people who are not comfortable at the higher levels will have a chance to play matches where they have some chance of success, and this may enable us to rebuild a core of team players outside the current men's team.

Team captains

Sally Gould will continue as mixed and ladies' captain, Andy Storer will continue as men's team captain. Winter league captain will be appointed when we enter a team. Steve Thompson reminded the meeting that we have to get results on time and correct **or we get fined**. The captains are well aware of this, but the rules for reporting results are so tight that it is difficult to avoid occasional errors or delays. Kate Tagg reported that other clubs have an issue with this, and have complained to the league about it, but there is a feeling around other clubs that the league benefit from the collection of fines to the point where it is to their advantage to have these very tight rules. Rob Turnbull asked how much we paid in fines last year. Dan Osborne estimated around £45 (we also get fined from time to time for not attending league meetings).

Club development

The club has been considering the development of a small clubhouse nearer to the courts for some time. The cricket section have substantial plans for the main pavilion, but these are depending on their raising a very substantial amount of money, and would not really address the tennis section's needs anyway. Anne Thompson has had informal discussions with the local authority, and has obtained a non-binding agreement that we can have small wooden cabin near the existing "informal parking area" (which is **not** a "car park"!). This is major progress, since in previous discussions they were insistent that we would have to go for a stone structure, which would have been prohibitively expensive. Anne has obtained a quote, which she was intending to discuss with her contact, but he/she has now left.

We may be able to apply for funding from a local quarry company (with a 10% contribution from us), and the overall cost may be less than £20K. We will need to liaise with the cricket section in order to ensure that we do not both ask for money from the same sources. Steve Thompson will work on the financial details, and the committee will call an extraordinary general meeting when there is a concrete proposal.

This is a matter that the club has been trying to resolve for some time, and Carol Taylor thanked Anne for her efforts, which may finally lead somewhere.

Sally Gould reported that the LTA are making major investments in padel, but since the club already has a very large overlap with the Buxton pickleball group it seemed unlikely that we could benefit from this. There was some mention of replacing our existing playback facility by a proper tennis wall, but Simon Bradbury and Mark Edwards noted that you cannot have a tennis wall next to the courts, so this is also infeasible. There was a brief discussion of having a fixed outdoor tennis table, but it was pointed out that outdoors table tennis is only playable when there is absolute calm, a condition that seldom holds in our setting.

Coaching

Catherine Reeds reported that Shaun does well with juniors and that he has reasonable numbers. There was some discussion of fact the cricket club run "camps" for juniors and that these were something we might emulate, but Shaun ran something similar last year and is planning to do so again in the coming year so it is not clear that there is anything new for us here. He also ran a successful schools event in June last year. As a result, he has been asked to run another one this year, and possibly another two.

Carol Taylor agreed to liaise with Shaun over adult coaching, particularly beginners' sessions. Carol invited suggestions from the meeting, and it was agreed that she would investigate getting him to run an 8 week block for beginners, then an 8 week block for intermediates (and then possibly a second block for beginners with half year membership, since by then we would be at the end of the summer). Carol will discuss the options with interested parties and liaise with Shaun.

Fund-raising

There was a discussion of the need to raise funds, but no concrete proposals. Sue Turnbull noted that will be easier to do if we have a defined project, such as the proposed clubhouse, since that will motivate club members to take part and will also enable us to explain to people why we actually want money. Tracey Ellis agreed to look into forming a sub-committee for funding.

Election of officers:

Steve Thompson nominated Dan Osborne as treasurer, Allan Ramsay as secretary and Anne Thompson as membership secretary, all seconded by Kate Tagg and elected nem con. Steve

Thompson wants to stand down as chair in order to concentrate on the clubhouse project, but there were no volunteers for this post. Kate Tagg nominated Carol Taylor, but Carol cannot take this role on at this point. Pauline Salt indicated that she might be prepared to do it at some time in the future, but is not yet sufficiently embedded in the club to feel comfortable about it. Steve was therefore re-elected nem con, but we really must find someone for next year. The rest of committee is as before, plus Tracey Ellis.

AoB

Sally Gould undertook to look into how the club can use social media to attract new members in the missing age-groups (i.e. over 18 and under 60!). Pauline Salt suggested that we need an information pack for new members. This has been suggested before, and in at least some years such a pack has been distributed, but it was agreed that Pauline and Allan Ramsay would review the website to ensure that everything anyone needs to know is clearly visibly there. The website is fairly tired anyway, and while people seem happy with the booking system other aspects could do with a refresh.

Meeting closed at 20:45