

Begbrook Green Bowling Club



Chairman's Address: AGM: Tuesday 21st November 2023

Thank you all for coming. I should like to start the proceedings this evening by observing a minute's silence for those members and former members of the club who have died in the past year. Would you all please stand and remember.

Stewart James, Gary Warburton.

The purpose of the AGM is to reflect on the past year, to discuss any resolutions and to elect the officers for the next year. This is my fifth year as Chairman, and it is common practice after three years to stand down and hand over to a new person with new energy and fresh ideas. However, I note that nobody has put their name forward and therefore, assuming you are happy for me to continue, I shall be pleased to carry on for the coming year, particularly as the issues raised by Bristol City Council and their Parks initiative, have now begun in earnest. More of this in a minute.

Looking back at the time I took on the role as Chairman, I set in place an ambitious 5-year plan, which we called "Vision 2025". The objectives were threefold:

1. To have a clubhouse with kitchen, bar and space to accommodate our bowling club needs.
2. To increase our membership from the current 74 playing members to 100 with an emphasis on women.
3. To improve the standard of play at Begbrook Green and have both a men's & women's team in the B&D Division 1 and enter an additional mixed team in the North Bristol league.

So far, we have not achieved any of these objectives, which is of course disappointing. However, in between we have had covid, the BCC Parks Initiative has rumbled on, and the economy has not exactly blossomed. Still, we have two years now to achieve these aims and I have not given up hope...entirely, but it will need a combined effort from all our members.

This year, we have gained a lot of new members, some of whom were attracted to Begbrook by our participation in the Bowls England sponsored Bowls Big Weekend. A few statistics:

- In 2017 the club had a membership of 87 which was our previous peak.
- By 2020, this had fallen to 66 following covid.
- The following year, in 2021, our numbers had stabilised at 69.
- In 2022, we gained 22 new members, but lost 12 and our number stood at 79.
- This year, we gained 23 new members, but again lost 12. Our numbers now stand at a record all time high at 90, comprising 35 women and 55 men.

The large influx of new members this year are a credit to the club with their warmth and enthusiasm, and we look forward next year to welcoming more. To put it another way, exactly half our members have joined in the last two years. No club is complete without its tireless members who put their time and energy into the club. In this respect, I should like to thank and pay tribute to all those who helped out at our Bowls Big Weekend, which formed part of our ongoing recruitment program and in particular, Jane Warburton and Ken Willcox, who have coached everyone who has walked through our gates. I am convinced this is an essential step in our ability to attract new members to the club. If any member wishes to train to become a coach, please speak to either Ken or Jane. The club will support you financially on the successful completion of the training.

In addition, we have 18 social members, and I would like to extend our welcome to those members. Social members are often senior players who have retired from the game but want to remain in contact with their friends. We also welcome non-playing spouses and partners and other interested parties as social members. Social members are eligible to stand for committee positions and are paid up members of the Begbrook and Stapleton social club. They are also most welcome to come and play in the livewire on club night, take part in our bonus ball lottery as well as participate in any social events that the club may organise during the year. Our recently held Quiz and bingo night was well attended and proved very popular. Thanks to Suzanne, Mary and Gerry for their sterling efforts. We hope to organise some more events in the New Year including an indoor game at the Bristol bowling centre and much more.

Also, our coffee mornings take place on the second Monday of the month during the closed season. The next one is a mince pie and mulled wine special on 11th December. Please note that rather than have a mass distribution of Christmas cards at the next coffee morning, the club will provide a large Christmas card that members can sign, together with a collection box for a donation towards the club's charity.

On the playing front, it was disappointing that next season we shall again have two men's teams in the B & D league division 3. However, to try and avoid the mistakes made this year, we have instructed the league to rename our teams Begbrook Green Oaks and Begbrook Green Willows and secondly not to have the match between the two sides as the last game of the season.

On a more positive note, the women have quietly gone about their business with purpose and determination, whilst our team in the Friday triples league came third in the league and reached the semi-finals of the cup...a very creditable performance. We also put out a team in the St Andrews Floodlit League.

Our friendly games have also proved very popular. A total of 61 friendly matches were played or 1,276 individual games. If a match was oversubscribed, an innovation this year was to play an internal competition at our home green provided the rinks were available. This seemed to be popular and will be carried forward to next year. I should like to thank the friendly team captains – too numerous to mention individually, 11 in all. You know who you are so thank you.

Next season there will be a new availability system, which will retain the current format in principle, but will be made online via Google forms. This was trialled successfully at the end of the season and as I say, will come into effect in April at the start of the 2024 season.

Our Tuesday evening live wire evenings have been well supported by our new members this year. It has been disappointing not to see more of our experienced players taking part. If anybody has any suggestions on a revised format for club night, the club is keen to listen.

This year for the first time we have attracted some sponsorship, Firstly from Redrow Homes who have subsidised the club for a new set of shirts and then from Willow Chiropractic who sponsored our Fun and Open Day and also entered a team. The Open and Fun Day attracted a record entry in this its third year with 16 teams entered and 48 bowlers on the Green at any one time. We also participated in the BE sponsored Bowls Big Weekend which again attracted interest and advertised our club around the neighbourhood.

Finally, I should like to congratulate all the winners of the internal club competitions. The presentation is at the BAWA club on Sunday 26th November, and I hope as many of you as possible, winners, and those who just like a good lunch, will be able to attend.

Bristol City Council: Before we come to the election of new officers later in these proceedings, I would just like to mention some other matters.

I should say at this stage that the council have agreed to continue with the maintenance of the green for the time being. I can also report from personal experience that our green is currently one of the best in Bristol and a joy to play on. I give credit where credit is due and compliment the council groundsmen on their ongoing professionalism in the face of uncertain times.

I alluded earlier to Bristol City Council and their Parks initiative.

For the benefit of new members, the green, surrounds and club house are owned by Bristol City Council (BCC). The club financed the changing room and white container from club funds.

In May 2018, BCC adopted a proposal to operate "chargeable sports facilities and other facilities in public parks only when they generate no cost to the council".

Basically, this affects football, cricket and bowls clubs who have all been, and continue at present, to be subsidised by the council.

As a part of this enforced process, BGBC submitted an expression of interest to take out a lease on the site. Our club was the only body who submitted an expression of interest in these facilities here. This process had stalled due to covid, lack of council employees, local elections etc. The list goes on while we sit in limbo. However, the club has recently entered into talks with BCC to discuss taking on a 30-year Sports Asset Transfer lease at, hopefully, a peppercorn rent. However, this is likely to double the cost of maintaining the green, whether by the council or by private contractor.

In the meanwhile, BC council has offered an olive branch to the tune of around £50,000 to maintain and improve the facilities. We are one of ten sites who are bidding for money from the total budgeted expense to the council of £0.5m. As anyone who can do maths will calculate, this is something and nothing. Not enough for a new clubhouse to make us independent from the social club here, too much to simply maintain the facility. In true council fashion the money has to be spent within the allotted timeframe. However, we are where we are and the committee has put forward a plan of action, copies of which are available here tonight for your comments and approval before we submit the business plan, which we are planning to do before Christmas, prior to the council's decision in January. The main bullet points are:

- Hollow tine and raise the rink margins on two sides.
- Apply for a club premises licence to allow the sale of alcoholic drinks.
- Apply for a Public Open Space Disposal Notice to allow us to fence off the land in Begbrook Park between the beech hedge and the public road north of the site.
- Strip soils, make hardstanding, move the white container, purchase an additional container, fence off and plant a hedgerow.
- Then purchase and erect a permanent marquee with a design life of 30 years on the newly acquired land.

If any member has any ideas on the subject, now is the time to speak up before it is too late.

Special thanks. I mentioned previously, Colin Dark is our membership Secretary, who puts in an awful lot of work at the beginning of each year and then throughout the season, updating the club membership lists and keeping a record of everything we do. At one time Colin was both the Club Secretary & Membership Secretary until we managed to separate the roles. Colin has decided to step back from the Membership Secretaries role, but will still produce our fixture list and collate the club's record of playing. I know how long it takes for Colin to produce the fixture list. It is a task which grows every year with the recent inclusion of the Floodlit league matches and the increase in our membership numbers which has stretched Colin's imagination of how to fit all the information onto a double-sided sheet of A4 paper. Colin did a quick survey earlier this year and asked a selection of members whether the fixture list was really necessary. I have to say the response was unanimous; the fixture list is an essential document that all club members use throughout the season. On behalf of the club, I should like to thank Colin for his quiet dedication to the cause and make a small presentation as a token of our appreciation.

Also standing down this year is Angela Thoburn who has collated our availability sheet information since its introduction which I think was round about 2009. Angela's husband Pete was club captain and did the team selection. However, Pete was never very good at the paperwork or computers and left this to Angela. Angela devised the first team sheets for Pete so that they could be displayed at the club. Angela never took to bowling but liked the organisation. Anyway, apart from 2 years when Maureen Whittle did the availability it's been Angela who has had to contend with the paper sheets, the emails, text messages and phone calls. In all the time I have been doing the selection, I cannot recall a single error, which must be a record worthy of the Guinness Book of Records. Angela has also been the organiser of the Reg Buston trophy day, which has been a great success year after year, recognised by the very large turnout - "Angela, we do hope and pray that you'll give it another go in 2024". Angela, on behalf of the club, thank you for all you have done for the club over the years and please accept this small gift as a token of our appreciation.

John Sedman

Chairman