

Season 2019/20 Summary

Wow! What a season. In normal circumstances this season would only have just completed. Sadly, we weren't able to get together for some of the usual end of season events. But I just wanted to send you all a note about the club, and some of the things that are going on even though rugby has stopped.

The Challenges

This season proved to be particularly challenging for a number of obvious reasons and the extent of that impact never encountered before.

Firstly the weather affected the usability of our main pitches. Trying to trace the root cause and how to rectify it proved difficult. The risk was that overuse, in the condition they were in some weeks, may



could have caused irreparable damage. The ability of our landlords, Lewes District Council (LDC), to address the situation with the other lessees of the Stanley Turner Ground also proved difficult. Ultimately the ability of their contractors and LDC to rectify the issues meant we needed to protect the pitches for their future use for everyone.

We do have plans to try and mitigate the situation in the future by marking out a XV-a-side pitch on the minis pitches (the old hockey pitches) which are positioned higher than the main pitches and drain a lot easier. This won't stop the minis using the area, but will provide an alternative site for senior matches if needed. Plus, the intention is to try and apply for various grants to purchase lights that could then allow evening training during the week.

Then, just as the weather showed signs of improvement and the pitches started to recover, the world was hit by the Covid-19 outbreak. Off the back of HM Government instructions for social distancing, the RFU rightly called the season to a halt.

We therefore lost out on some of our usual income from a number of events and end of season activities. Via Lewes Sports Club, the joint Rugby Club and Cricket umbrella entity and as the club house business rates payer, we have been able to acquire some money from the Government grants. This will sit with the Sports Club until both parties get a better picture of when we are able to resume

our respective sports and get a better idea of any associated impacts.

Rugby

Moving on to what it's all about and why so many people turn up every week!

With the publication of the final league placings, it is apparent that Lewes Rugby Club has, all in all, had another good season. Follow this link to the final senior league placings based on the RFU calculations (and how they were arrived at) [Final league positions](#)

Ladies

The Ladies this year had a great season building on their successes from the previous one. In the Women's South East leagues, Lewes Ladies 1st XV



finished second in Championship 2 South East and the 2nd XV, a very creditable fourth place in the National Challenge 2 South East (South). This

was rewarded with 16 players being named in the Sussex squad for the County Championship, which, alas, did not take place this year.

Men

Following what is a growing problem in men's rugby across the country, if not the world, Sussex had three clubs pull teams out of the Sussex 1 league plus others from some of the lower leagues. Due to a lack of numbers being able to commit to playing rugby every week, we had to call up 61 different players for the first team. We managed to just about get 2 Men's sides out for most of the weeks that they were able to play and the effort required to do that has to be admired. The approach applied in the leagues below Level 9 (1st XV), to allow teams to still have a match, even if one side does not have 15 players, is a great and sensible idea.

Some of our usual 2nd XV players stepped in to help out as the 1s became impacted by injury and unavailability, when rescheduled matches occurred on what had been spare, but international, weekends. They acquitted themselves really well and it was a great squad effort by all.

Eventually, though results and performances were somewhat erratic, the 1st XV finished 7th in Sussex 1 but were the only team to beat the eventual league winners, Crawley, at their home at Willoughby Fields.

Minis & Juniors

In the juniors we have a number of our Lionesses and boys making it to County teams, with some also selected for the Harlequins Surrey and Sussex Developing Player Programme. It's great to see them doing Lewes RFC proud. Importantly we were able to get some of the Colts playing time in the



senior sides and are actively planning how we best integrate them for coming seasons.

The minis just continue to grow in numbers, which is great news, and it's a treat to see so many

running about on a Sunday morning, along with some very patient Coaches!

I know it's been frustrating for everyone that has missed out on training and playing time and we appreciate everyone's patience.

Lewes RFC In The Community

Since the onset of Covid-19, assisting others has been a priority. I know that there are a lot of us volunteering in our own local areas, helping those that may be isolating or have been impacted by the outbreak.

Foodbank – Lewes LCV

During April, the club was able to assist with foodbank collections in Lewes. If anyone is interested in supporting the foodbank/LCV the link is <https://www.crowdfunder.co.uk/lewes-coronavirus-volunteers>

Assistance offer

We have also launched an offer of assistance to any of our members that may require it. We can provide help picking up a prescription, some emergency essentials or even just a chat. Everything done will have to follow all of the distancing guidelines.

Obviously, for anything requiring medical help, you should still call your doctor or the NHS on 111 directly.

Follow this link to make a request for help and someone will be in contact - [Assistance Request](#)

Please be rest assured that all requests and information supplied by you will be kept in strictest confidence.

Creating Scrubs & Masks

Some of the Ladies have signed up to the Dolly Scrub Hub in Lewes to stitch and sew scrubs, masks and scrub bags for RSCH and PRH. Others have made generous donations towards materials in lieu of sewing skills. If you are able to offer help with sewing or can make a donation to purchase materials then please use this link: <https://uk.gofundme.com/f/dolly-scrub-hub>

The Future

Although, at this point in time, we have no idea when we may be able to resume any semblance of training together and we will be guided by the RFU primarily.

Changing room refit

By the time next season begins we will have updated changing rooms.

As you may know, this has been a long time coming, to say the least! Working with LDC, Paddy Henshaw has been able to help reduce the original plans, to fit the available budget. These were duly approved in February and a contractor assigned by the Council. They are due to begin work imminently, starting with new windows. There may be some tidying up and painting that I'm sure we can rely on finding some willing volunteers to help complete. Either way there should be visible improvement by the time we are able to start any rugby related activity.

I want to thank the numerous people that have been involved in trying to get this done over the last 20+ years. I know it's not been easy.

Clubhouse repair concerns

The external fabric of the clubhouse is also a cause for concern. Despite numerous pleas directly to LDC, they have finally admitted that they have no money to spend on maintaining the properties under their stewardship. However, we do now have their agreement to find ways to raise funds and carry out work ourselves. As a result, we are also exploring if they will agree to a rent holiday, to enable us to invest that money in the funding of the work.

New coach for the men

We can announce that the Men have a new Head Coach in Brandon Palmer. Brandon is currently

teaching at Plumpton Community College. Although he hails from South Africa, he most recently was playing as a prop at Blackheath and Rotherham Titans. He moved down to Brighton just under a year ago and is very keen to get back into rugby and getting to know the club.

Possible risks

The full impact of Covid-19 will not be known for a while and there will be potential for challenges on club resources for some time. Currently we have no idea when rugby, in any form, may be able to restart and we, like many other clubs, are lobbying the RFU for any information, as soon as they have it, on what that may look like so we can prepare.



We may find our valued sponsors finding it hard to support us as they have to date, and we are currently forming a group to identify and research new ways to raise funds to cover any potential gaps and enable us to continue to operate effectively. That will be a key challenge going forwards.

I must point out that the club is currently in no specific financial danger, but reviewing potential risks is the correct thing to do. We are currently carrying out a root and branch review of our income and costs to try and ensure we utilise all our resources to their fullest and ensure they provide benefit across the club.

As members of Lewes RFC you all need to be able to trust that the committee will do their best to effectively manage that. The current situation has given us some valuable time to review and improve some of our processes to ensure we manage resources prudently and correctly.

Long term aspirations

The biggest and longer term aspiration is to explore opportunities to have a new clubhouse in time for the club's centenary in 2030. This will require a lot of time and effort to work with the appropriate organisations to achieve.

Fund raising

One scheme already launched is the Lewes Lottery with a £25,000 prize every week. If you participate in a lottery, we hope you might consider diverting some of that to support Lewes RFC via the [Lewes](#)

[Local Lottery Support Lewes Rugby Club](#). It's £1 per ticket and the club gets £0.60 from each one sold. Ensure you select Lewes Rugby as your chosen cause.

We are also exploring a cashback service that provides funds back to the club from members shopping online, with 4,000+ retailers including some major ones such as Amazon UK, Waitrose, M&S, Argos and many others. More of that once we get more information.

If you have any experience of fundraising at any scale, please do consider offering the club your expertise.

To finish

So you can see, we are currently working very hard on a number of fronts to try and identify the risks and mitigate any potential gaps in future income.

November last year seems like an awfully long time ago now! But that was when I informed the Management Committee that I would not be seeking re-election as Chairman for next season.

We should be due an AGM, and last year's minutes set this year's date for 24th June. That maybe unlikely, but Club rules state that it must be held before 31st July. So please watch this space for more information on when that may be.

I would like to thank everyone that has been on the various Committees during my tenure, and all the volunteers that have, and hopefully will continue, to give up their time so that everyone can enjoy playing rugby at Lewes safely.

The Committee have spent the last 5 years trying to get all parts the club into a One Club ethos. We have been successful to a degree and there is more we can do to effectively work together and support the common goals.

I would ask again, that if you have any time available to help the club move forward and continue to develop a better experience for all of its members, past, present and future, to offer to assist in whatever way you can. This club has existed for 90 years and I believe it's got another 90 in it at least!

I'm not disappearing totally, and can't simply walk away from this great club and the wonderful people in it. I will still be involved and you will still see me around.

All the best

Nick