

DEESIDE RAMBLERS

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting for the season 2021/22

Held at the clubhouse on Monday 5 September 2022 at 7.30pm

Attendance

Howard Green took the chair. The meeting was declared quorate with 33 members in attendance. In addition apologies had been received from a further 7 club members.

Minutes of the previous meeting & matters arising

The minutes of the previous AGM held Thursday 2 September 2021 had been made available and their approval was proposed by Ollie de Braekeleer, seconded by David Linton, approved by the members present, and was signed as a true record by the Chair.

There were no matters arising which are not covered by the agenda for this meeting.

Annual Report from the Executive Committee

Howard started the review from the Executive Committee by recording the death of two longstanding members of the club.

David Evans apart from being an ever-present player and tourist has left his mark on the club in two important ways. Firstly, as part of the team that gave us the first Astro in 1996/7 and secondly, as one of the originators of the junior section of the club.

And Charles Elphick, better known as The Cat for his goalkeeping exploits, who probably had one of the longest associations with the club as a former pupil of Hampton House School which was situated where the current Gardenhurst houses are now located. Importantly, Charles was also the Honorary Examiner of the club accounts and kept a watchful eye over all things financial within the club.

Both were loyal supporters of the club who contributed significantly to its growth and development over many years, and both will be missed. Their passing and their contribution was noted by a round of applause.

The death of Charles in late July also left us with a governance issue to handle. The Honorary Examiner is elected by the AGM and the person in that post has the responsibility for reporting on the accounts to the AGM. The Executive Committee asked Jack Hardman to fulfil the role in respect of the 2021 – 22 accounts and Howard requested that the meeting formally endorse that decision through a show of hands which was carried unanimously.

The playing highlights of the last year are contained in the Season Review. Howard reminded the meeting that if members haven't seen a copy, it can be found on the website and there are hard copies available at this meeting. Howard said he will not repeat what is said in the review except to say that the club has had a good year both on and off the pitch. The Women's Section achieved an

A+ which was sufficient to offset the B- achieved by the Men. The junior section again had a fine all-round year.

Other notable events and developments were:

1. Surviving the implementation of the new Game Management System – thank you again Yvonne Meadows for all your help.
2. Relaunching the club social programme post-Covid and which has been very well supported.
3. Initiating an additional Back-to-Hockey session and also Walking Hockey which both take place on a Tuesday morning.
4. Relaunching the Primary Schools Programme using our own coaching resource to manage both the in-school training and the management of the interschools tournaments.
5. Expanding the hockey camp initiatives which have been really well supported.
6. Launching a Wellbeing through Hockey programme which when I look at the feedback makes you proud to be a Deeside Rambler.
7. Expanding the summer hockey programme through the Summer-7s; two Deeside teams in the mixed summer league, and participation in the new Northwest 500 mixed competition.
8. Installing LED floodlights with an important fundraising activity throughout the year. This included the Dawn-to-Dusk hockey marathon which raised over £19,200 with more than £9,600 of that going to the oncology unit at Alder Hey Children's Hospital.

Many of these initiatives were led by Beth Alvey and the meeting gave Howard the chance to publicly thank Beth for her leadership and energy and for just getting things done.

At the backend of 2021 we also took the decision to seek accreditation as a Talent Centre which is one of the core building blocks of the new Talent Strategy launched by England Hockey – in effect it is a kite mark for what we do in terms of junior development and of how the club is run. Working our way through a series of workshops, receiving a visit from EH to experience first-hand the work we do, and submitting numerous documents that underpin what and how we go about our coaching and club management activities has all led to us gaining Accreditation.

Dickie Wallis has been our leader through this, has kept us on track regarding the various submissions, and with great wisdom kept us engaged when internal doubts arose about the commitment required.

This is a great achievement for the club. We are one of a limited group of clubs that have been successful in this first round of applications, and we are expecting a formal announcement from EH during the coming week.

We will be communicating more widely once the shackles of the EH communication purdah is removed.

Howard expressed the hope that this overview gave those present a shared sense of pride in what we do and the way in which we do it.

But he went on to point out that it doesn't happen without a lot of work, often unseen, almost always unheralded, but without which we would not be able to enjoy our game of hockey, in our own facilities, and in a safe environment. Our volunteers, just as much as the players, are the heartbeat of the club. Thank you to all who give up their time to make us the club we are.

And if you want to help as a coach, as an umpire, team manager, or help with match teas on a Saturday afternoon then please tell one of the Exec.

Accounts for 2021 -2022 and report from the Honorary Examiner

Anne Bailey presented the accounts.

It was noted that from a financial perspective we had performed well during the year with an excellent contribution from fundraising, improved income from match fees through better collection controls and an increased activity programme, improvement in the returns from bar and refreshment sales along with good control of costs. We had ended the year with some £75,000 in the bank although you need to also consider the current liability position to properly understand the underlying position.

There had also been a number of generous donations from club members, and we had successfully applied for a number of grants. Donations & grants almost matched the figure from last year.

In answer to a question Howard said that he would cover the assumption re the cost of energy within the budget in the next section of the meeting. There were no other questions arising.

Jack Hardman as deputed Honorary Examiner had confirmed to Anne via email that he was happy with the Accounts as presented and that they had been prepared on a consistent basis and properly reflected the underlying records of transactions. The move to Xero had improved overall visibility of the make up of the accounts including the avoidance of 'netting-off'.

Howard thanked Anne for her work on the accounts throughout the year.

Approval of the Accounts was proposed by Brian Tenner, seconded by Isaac Deakin, and approved by the meeting.

Subscription and match fee proposal

Howard started by saying that given the current complexities in the world he wanted to try and keep this part of the meeting as straightforward and transparent as possible as decision making was not simple.

It is, however, worth starting by recording that we are in a decent overall financial position, but we need to shore up our defences to meet both existing and impending economic challenges.

As the accounts show, and as pointed out earlier by Anne, we have £75,000 in the bank. Creditors including the donation that the club will be handing over to Alder Hey and the provision for 200 Club prizes reduces that to some £60,000.

We also need to spend around £10,000 to address safety issues in the fencing around the pitch and to support becoming a Talent Centre.

Our longer-term health as a hockey club is dependent upon our ability to fund the replacement of our assets as it becomes necessary. To do this we create a 'sinking fund' with the current objective of putting £21,000 per year into the fund. The amount is determined on the assumption that there are going to be grants available from EH or Sport England.

That assumption has become less secure over the last couple of years given:

- firstly, changes in priorities from these two bodies; and,
- secondly, higher oil prices and a weakening of £Sterling which will inevitably drive up the cost of asset replacement.

We will need to revisit our sums, but need a more stable environment to make sensible assumptions.

On the existing basis and given this is the 9th anniversary of the opening of the new pitch we should currently have £189,000 in the sinking fund. Including the transfer of the £21,000 shown in the Balance Sheet as current liabilities we are at £175,000.

At the appropriate time we intend to transfer an additional £10,000 to the sinking fund.

All-in-all and under normal circumstances we are in decent shape and are carrying a prudent cash balance into the new financial year given that some of our annual costs are front-end loaded.

Unfortunately, that is where life becomes a bit more challenging.

Howard first dealt with the cost of energy.

In the last year of normal operations pre-Covid we spent nearly £7,000. In the past financial year and despite the saving from LED we have had to spend around £11,500. In that time the unit cost of electricity has gone up 2.5x and the total on-cost in 2022 – 2023 was estimated at £5,500.

However, in mid-August we were informed that there was going to be a further doubling of the cost/kWh which puts a further hole in our accounts equivalent to £10,000.

There are other cost increases which we know of – just to mention a few: Affiliation and umpires (£2,500); match teas (£1,000); pitch hire (£1,250); and maintenance costs to club and grounds (£2,000). Affiliation now includes the cost of Personal Accident Insurance as required by EH.

We have not yet been able to fix our electricity contract. That is not for want of trying but our current supplier is Bulb who went into administration in November 2021 and since then it has not been possible to communicate sensibly with them, to extract information enabling us to switch, and structure a longer-term contract that made sense in terms of our revenue generation capacity or our ability to flex it in line with the contract lengths currently available. The advice we have received is that we should now wait and see what happens over the next couple of weeks.

In these circumstances our proposal to the meeting is as follows:

1. We will carry on working on securing an appropriate electricity supply contract but will need to see how our politicians decide to shape the market.
2. We propose holding subscriptions at the current rates.
3. We propose raising match fees to £13 and £7.50 for juniors.

This will partially close out the financial challenge we face but it does still leave us with a gap of around £8,000 based on what we currently know of energy costs.

To close this, we ask that those who can afford it, to support the social and fundraising programmes as this will help us fill the 'hole'. One immediate quick win would be to buy a ticket in the 200 Club with a chance to win prizes of £5,000 per annum including a top prize of £1,500 drawn in December and another would be to tie your on-line shopping to Easyfundraising.

If that support is not forthcoming, we will need to make other changes to, for example, subscriptions and match fees but to decide on the right approach we would want to consult more widely and properly evaluate the options we might have.

Howard added that we will be evaluating energy savings projects to rationalise and simplify the hot water and heating systems to the club, to install LED lighting to the playpen, and will be investigating the potential returns from investment in renewable energy sources. Howard asked that if anybody has expertise in these areas, then would they please contact him as these projects require specialist knowledge that was not something immediately available from within the Executive Committee.

Howard then opened the meeting for questions re the proposal.

Clarification was sought re the age-profile of the assets and the timetable for replacement. Major expenditure was some 4 or 5 years away (carpet replacement on the main pitch and carpet + shockpad on the playpen). The lifespan of the carpet on the main pitch would be prolonged by a more even use of the pitch for training and it was agreed that coaches would be reminded of this.

To questions in respect of the pattern of usage there are various ways we could improve energy consumption including half-pitch lighting, dialling down the lux level for training, and voltage optimisation. Howard would investigate these with Musco.

Clarification was sought re the cost of usage of floodlights on the main pitch (+/- £8/hr at the current cost) and playpen (+/- £3/hr at the current rate). At the new rate you would need to double these costs. The suggestion was made that we could shift the start times of games to earlier in the day and save on lighting late afternoon. This was certainly a possibility but at the moment it was not the preferred way forward as it was felt it would detract from the social/family element of what creates 'a club' and savings would be marginal in the overall scheme of things, but the option would certainly be kept under review.

It was noted that the major energy consumption came from training during the week and that there were inconsistencies in the way in which training fees were levied and the efficiency with which they were collected. It was not currently possible to manage this through Pitchero unless you follow the approach taken by the women's section of creating a 'product' that covered training for the season payable in two tranches. The general sense from the meeting was that this needs to be addressed which Howard acknowledged as being correct but he urged that a considered, structured view serving the longer-term interests of the club was needed.

It was also noted that the fee on a Sunday morning was 'cheap' relative to the market for other junior sporting activities. Howard said he shared this view but felt this needed to be considered amongst the other potential sources of financial headroom referred to earlier when discussing options the Exec had to close out the financial gap. Any changes would also need to be thoroughly discussed with those individuals managing those parts of the club, in this case Brian Tenner.

No options should be left on the table as we considered how to increase revenue and better manage costs but within the available 'levers' there were some philosophical issues that needed wider discussion and consultation than was going to be possible in this AGM. In particular Howard mentioned he believed there should not be a requirement for training fees, that this was a benefit of being a member of the club, and that the cost associated should be part of the subscription. Amongst those present there were nods of agreement and shakes of the head showing that there were different views which needed to be understood and reconciled.

The Executive Committee had decided as part of their last meeting that a working group needed to be established to consider all such issues.

Several people expressed the view that against the financial background described earlier there was a need to 'get on with it' even if it meant a rise in subscriptions. To try and manage this Beth Alvey stepped forward and offered to bring the previously mentioned working group together to explore possible solutions.

Howard, was clear that he fully supported the principles of the review but did not consider the 'do it now' timescales consistent with the complexity of the issues and the decisions that needed to be taken and certainly not within the context of this meeting. He suggested that the right course of action was to create the working group but take the required time to come up with a proper plan that could be implemented in the best interests of the whole club. That view was not shared by a number of members present who felt that the issue was straightforward and there could be a quick resolution.

In order to find a way through the impasse and enable the ordinary business of the club to continue it was agreed that the proposal as formulated by the Executive Committee be put to the meeting.

This was proposed by Ollie de Braekeleer and seconded by Lucy Woodside. The proposal was approved by a clear majority of those present notwithstanding a number of abstentions.

Stephen Cheshire asked that the scope of the review be signed-off by the Exec, and that the membership of the group be truly representative of the club. Beth said she would ensure this was done.

It was noted that if there was to be a change to subscriptions this would need to be the subject of an EGM which itself would require a decent period of notice. To enable the club to operate within its normal revenue cycle this meant that a decision that involved any changes to subscriptions would be needed by w/c 19 September.

Within the club's governance and constitution, it would be necessary for any plan produced by the working group to be agreed by the Executive Committee and for that body to then recommend it, if it involved a change to subscription levels, to an EGM.

Howard did not consider the timing and thus the process practical and again asked for a proper period of reflection, consultation, and with sufficient time to dig out the required facts. This would not impact on the validity of, or the need for, the review but the analysis of options would then be possible against a better set of financial assumptions, would allow for proper fact finding and consultation, and be based on an appropriate understanding of the competitive environment.

The Executive Committee would be responsible for mapping out the best way forward.

Appointment of the Honorary Examiner

Given the death of Charles Elphick and not knowing if Jack Hardman was willing to continue to fulfil the Honorary Examiner role, Howard asked that the meeting delegate responsibility to the Executive Committee with the decision to be ratified at the next general meeting of the membership.

This was proposed by Howard Green, seconded by Anne Allwood, and was approved by the meeting.

Election of the Officers of the Club, members of the Executive Committee, and Vice-Presidents

The re-election of Anne Allwood, Treasurer and Financial Officer, and Simon Stacpoole, Honorary Secretary, was proposed by Brian Tenner and seconded by David Jones and were both by those present.

Other members of the committee had offered to continue in office and their re-election was proposed by Anne Allwood and seconded by Howard Green and approved by the meeting.

The names of the Vice Presidents were read out and their reappointment was approved by the meeting.

Howard announced that he was not seeking re-election to the Executive Committee and would thus be resigning as Chair.

Howard regarded his inability to deliver agreement on the proposal re subscriptions and match fees allied to an orderly process for the working group to be a failure of his leadership, which will result in unwanted instability. Perhaps more importantly as he listened to the discussion, he had come to the conclusion that after 11 years he no longer had the energy or the commitment to face yet another major initiative in the life of the hockey club or to reconcile the different points of view that had been expressed. There was not the unity of purpose he had hoped for and new leadership was required.

David Linton asked that there be an orderly transition to which Howard agreed.

Any other business

Keith Hindley asked that thanks be passed to Sue Green for her contribution to the club and particularly stepping in at the last moment to manage the catering for the LX games in July. Howard promised he would do this.

There being no other business the meeting closed at 9.10pm.

Signature of the Chair:

Date: