

AYLSHAM TENNIS CLUB: CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

I would like to start by paying tribute to your Committee who have worked tirelessly for the Club over the past year. Who would have known that the first time we met face to face as a new Committee last February would be our last one we'd attend in person. Yet the team has adapted, gelled and supported each other to achieve so much in this year. Club members too have been incredibly supportive and accepting as we've worked to provide a safe environment in which to play tennis. That's not been easy and I'm conscious that many may have had differing views on what we could or should have done, but you have all accepted and abided by the stipulations with almost exclusively positive feedback. That feeling of unity as a Club "all in it together" has been sustaining for me and the Committee and we're grateful for it.

It's been a hard year, but I'm delighted that so many of the Committee have agreed to continue to if elected tonight and I would commend them all to you. Jane Attewell and John Woodeson have decided to move on to other things, though I'm delighted that they'll each continue to be involved although not directly on the Committee itself. I want to thank both of you for what you've done over the years. John will be stepping aside as Men's B team captain too due to his work commitments, but I'm delighted that he'll still be available for the team squads as we continue to increase the competitive leagues we're involved in as a club. Jane came back onto the Committee for a second spell to ably fill a gap we had on the administration side. We've been glad to have your organisational skills and experience on the Committee again and delighted that you'll be continuing in our Centenary Celebrations team. So, we do enter the new season with a couple of vacancies on the Committee and I'd encourage you to think about joining us. Whether it be helping with administration, maintenance or the social side of the Club, there are opportunities to become involved either on the Committee itself or in a group of close supporters like the Centenary team. It's rewarding and fun if you want to commit some of your valuable time to the Tennis Club.

As we look back over the last year, we've managed to be open for tennis in various formats for about 8 months, including most of the summer period. In the circumstances we feel that's quite an achievement and we very much hope that we'll be able to resume play again this year as we move into the spring, once the vaccination programme brings the pandemic under control. The biggest impact was probably on our coaches and coaching, particularly for our junior groups and we certainly appreciate all the additional coaching that Rachael and Gareth provided when they could and were glad to support their efforts by being as flexible as we could with court availability for this. It's not just on the coaching side that they work so hard, Rachael and Gareth put an enormous amount into the wider Club too as volunteers working on numerous projects. We're lucky to have you both at Aylsham.

We spent a lot of time preparing playing rules for the Club and I'd like to thank the team of Sue, Steve, Alan, Rachael and Robin in particular for their work with me on this, often at short notice and often involving quite some soul-searching. And to Catherine as well for her help on the communication side.

But 2020 was also a time for creativity and development at the Club. Event-based fundraising was out in the main, but our move to grant applications was highly successful. I'd like to thank Alan and especially Sue Appelby for their efforts in this area. The generous grants from Tesco, the District Council members fund and the Town Council enabled us to buy new nets, install the card-key entry system and to purchase a Club lap top to administer it. Rachael kindly sourced the new nets and led the card-key installation project while Robert Harmon has been looking after the membership side of the operations and has been hard at work to implement the new system, helped by Alan Marchbank who seems to deal with all things we throw at him on the computing side. On the sponsorship side I'm delighted to be able to report that we've decided to extend the duration of our banner programme with our sponsors free of any charge through to the Autumn, giving back something to the community businesses who have so generously supported us in the past.

While spending to improve the Club using grant money in the most part, we've been able build reserves towards our target for re-surfacing the courts, helped by the Town Council and the LTA supported us by refunding our rent and membership payments this year. Our Treasurer, Marion, will provide a little more

detail on Club finances, and our head coach, Rachael, will talk about court condition. But it's fantastic that the Club continued to move forward in 2020.

Maintenance has been more complicated due to social distancing requirements, but we've done what we can and what needs to be done. We do have a number of areas that work parties will need to focus on when it's safe to do so, particularly around the Club-Hut. We've had an active group who look after the facilities, again predominantly staffed from the Committee, particularly Robert, Alan and Tony together with Robin who's ensured our regular Health & Safety checks get done. But others too who make sure the Club-House is clean or weed the path to it. And, of course, Keith, the groundsman from the Recreation Ground who regularly services the courts for us.

Club Membership increased by about 20 over the year although we still have sufficient court time to accommodate many more players. We have excellent courts and coaching and activities for a wide range of abilities so I'd encourage you to keep spreading the word about tennis at Aylsham. We did have to limit visitors and guests for long periods due to Covid and some of our normal visitors chose to join as members given our very reasonable subscription rates and, indeed, the reductions we introduced in light of the restricted situation. Others joined from other Clubs because of the tennis opportunities we were offering. Whatever the reason, we hope our new members have liked their Aylsham experience and will stay with us and enjoy more tennis and social opportunities as we open the Club up during 2021.

There were long periods when we couldn't run Club sessions, Ladies morning or competitive inter-Club tennis, but Alan, Gareth Goldson and Phil Slack did a great job setting up and running our Box Leagues. Not only did these provide an opportunity to play games with a bit of competitive edge, but they also provided a way for new joiners to get to know other members at Aylsham and find opportunities to play. I know others have gone out of their way to meet new members, knock up with them and point them at potential playing partners and I'd thank all of you who've been so welcoming.

It's easy to overlook those who work in the background, but often they form the foundation on which a Club is built. Katherine Tulley has been helping with administration for a number of years and has diligently prepared meeting minutes throughout the year and also done most of the legwork for this AGM. Andy Tovell has always been on hand for any welfare related issues. Plus of course Tony who keeps us connected to the Town Council and Recreation Ground Committee and Steve who forms the link to the LTA.

I'd like to end by talking briefly about the Club's Centenary this year. The Recreation Ground itself and the Tennis Club were established shortly after the horrors of the First World War and the Spanish Flu pandemic. The Club has had its ups and downs but is currently flourishing after a brave decision by the Club and the Local Council some ten years ago to lay the new courts at substantial cost. Membership has grown steadily and the way that Rachel and Gareth structure their coaching means that we have almost as many junior members as adults at the Club with a strong vein of talented teenagers now in the Box Leagues and hopefully playing on the teams when we're allowed to resume inter-Club matches. Charlie Blair has done a notable job representing the views of our junior members on the Committee.

So, although 2020 has been such a tough year for the community and for tennis, we have much to be thankful for. And much to celebrate in 2021! I'm delighted that a team has been set up and is looking at a series of events for when our Centenary season which starts in April. That will necessarily involve a rather flexible approach in the circumstances, but we have a great set of activities in mind and a team that is raring to get going on it. Do please contact Jane Attewell if you're interested in being involved.

So, a difficult year and a year in which we've learnt much about ourselves as a Club with many positives. And a new season to celebrate as we look forward to another hundred years of community tennis at Aylsham!

Thank you.