

# VICTORIA PARK CLUB

## Minutes of the 143<sup>rd</sup> Annual General Meeting held on 23 February 2023

Don Mitchell addressed everyone present and, as the Club currently had no overall Chair, nominated Tim Cartwright to be Chair of the meeting. This was seconded by Mary MacMullen.

**Present:** Tim Cartwright (Chair & Tennis Chair, TC), Elizabeth Ambler, Liz Bell (Honorary Secretary), Owen & Joan Bennett, David Brice, Lance Cresswell, Cliff Dampney, Margaret Fuest, Adrian Gaunt, Alistair Macintosh, Mary MacMullen, Cheryl Mitchell, Don Mitchell (Bridge Chair, DM), Nigel Parker (Honorary Treasurer, NP), Jon Rycroft, Mike & Sue Sanderson, Henry Gent, Stephen Schlich, and Sue Stott.

### 1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Joan Bolden, Don & Sarah Branton, Peter Cornelius, Gail Dixon-Smith, David Evennett, Jo Hawkins, Diana King, Ed MacMullen, Etta Mitchell, Jill Murdoch, Matt Olczak, Chris Pennington, Dilys Thorp, and Kai Kin & Judie Yung.

### 2. Minutes of the 142<sup>nd</sup> AGM held on 17 February 2022

The minutes were accepted as being a true record.

### 3. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

### 4. Chair's Report

TC reported that, in a year of rapidly rising prices, he was pleased to report that the Club remained in a very healthy position. Despite retro-fitting LED lights to all four courts (something that had vastly improved night-time playing conditions but would also save us money on electricity costs), the Club had again returned a profit – something the Treasurer would elaborate on later. This was mainly because of the increased tennis membership (numbers had almost doubled in the last five years from just over 100 juniors and 200 adults to over 200 juniors and nearly 350 adults) and, with nearly 100 potential members still on the waiting list, we could reasonably expect to keep these numbers and the revenue they provided relatively stable.

TC had stated last year that the Club had always prided itself as being a community-based Club offering accessible membership fees, a friendly and welcoming atmosphere, and an opportunity for all to get involved. With this in mind, he was pleased to inform everyone present that, later in the meeting, we would propose to once again keep membership fees static – something we hoped would enable our members to continue enjoying the Club's facilities despite the many hardships many of them have faced and will continue to face over the coming months.

Running a club takes a lot of work and TC was pleased to say that both the tennis and bridge sections had welcomed new Committee members to help lighten the load over the last year. This was really important in terms of maintaining energy and enthusiasm, so he urged anyone present to think if they could spare some time to help the Club. And on that note, he thanked Nigel, Liz, Alistair and Don for all their hard work this year - it was massively appreciated.

One last point – we had been very happy to welcome three Ukrainian families to the Club this year. As well as free membership, they were given free access to Jon Rycroft's coaching program and were lent racquets to play with. Thanks to the members who hosted and nominated them. We would be looking to formalise this category of membership later in the meeting. There was now just one Ukrainian family remaining as members but the offer was still open. Alistair Macintosh thanked TC on everyone's behalf for the huge role he played on the tennis side.

## **5. Treasurer's Report**

NP reported that the accounts for 2022 showed a surplus of £14,560 for the year which was slightly lower than the previous year due to an increase in depreciation charges following replacement of the floodlights. Overall expenditure for the year was £46,813 which was £20,916 higher than the previous year. This was mainly due to increases in coaching fees of £12,235, energy costs of £3,172 and depreciation of £6,542. Energy bills were up significantly, partly due to rising energy costs but also because the Club was now being fully utilised. The new LED floodlights would help to reduce energy costs.

The balance sheet remained strong with the Resurfacing Reserve in place to cover the planned court resurfacing work. Overall, the Club finances remained in a healthy position and we were positioned favourably to ensure our continuing support to the Club and its members. NP thanked David Brice for reviewing the accounts and for all his help with them, and also Lance Cresswell for all his work as Assistant Treasurer. Sue Stott proposed accepting the accounts and this was seconded by Cheryl Mitchell.

## **6. Bridge Chair's Report**

DM reported that at last year's AGM he had noted the debilitating effect the pandemic had had on bridge activities. Membership had fallen and attendance had dropped away dramatically both as a consequence of the Government's Covid restrictions but also as a result of continuing Covid anxieties within our membership.

To help address these problems, the AGM had voted generously to set £0 bridge subscriptions for the past year and members of the bridge sub-committee were grateful for this assistance.

The effects of this intervention had been mixed. Despite the temporary fee waiver, bridge membership dropped again (albeit by a very modest 2%). Attendance at playing sessions was up markedly (four-fold) compared with the previous year, but still remained at less than 40% of pre-pandemic levels. Over the coming year we would continue to encourage members to return to Clubhouse play.

One modest innovation seemed to have worked quite well in attracting members. During the year we introduced very informal Wednesday afternoon sessions. New members joined as a result of attending these sessions and they had also drawn one or two 'Covid-anxious' members to return to Clubhouse play. DM thanked David Brice very much indeed for his prominent role in running these sessions.

Responding to shifting Covid rules and conditions had made it a tough year for the sub-committee and DM thanked them for their help throughout this period.

Following DM's report, there was discussion on the worrying fall in numbers playing bridge and the popularity of online bridge since the pandemic. It was noted that other Clubs were experiencing similar problems. It was suggested that this be considered actively at sub-committee meetings but equally there was some optimism that numbers would rise naturally in due course.

## **7. Tennis Chair's Report**

TC reported that regular mixed tennis tournament days for match players were being held every few months on a Sunday afternoon and our first junior club championships for several years would be held next month. There had been an influx of new women team tennis players which was a great help to the B team who had had to drop a couple of divisions over the winter because of the number of matches not fulfilled last year. For those who are interested in current progress and past results of our tennis teams, this can be found on the following website: [Exeter & District Lawn Tennis League Website](#). We also have a mixed team in the East Devon League.

Social tennis continued to be strongly attended – thanks were expressed to Barry Flicker and Sue Stott who continued to be the unofficial organisers of these sessions. Going forward, we were looking to build more of a playing development pathway to ensure we were able to encourage all members, whatever their standard, to get the most out of their membership.

On the coaching front, TC thanked Jon Rycroft for all he had done this year - he represented everything TC would like the Club to be – welcoming, friendly, encouraging and fun. His junior program was full and continued to represent great value for money and an affordable way for parents to encourage their children to develop a real enjoyment of the game. Many thanks also to Matt Olczak for his help on and off court with the coaching program. As regards adult coaching, Jon Wills had left us. He had done a brilliant job of starting up our rusty racquets program and was extremely well liked and thought of as a coach. TC said he was keen to ensure that we continued to develop the Sunday coaching and adult coaching in general.

Finally, TC said he was happy to announce that the resurfacing works talked about over the last couple of years had been scheduled in for the summer. The courts had not been resurfaced for 15 years – surface and drainage work had been carried out every three to four years – so this would entail full resurfacing being done. There would be an inevitable disruption to play, possibly over as much as 4 – 6 weeks, whilst the courts were prepared, resurfaced and painted. We were looking to offer alternative social sessions at Exeter School during this time and would keep all members updated on progress and timings.

As mentioned above, there were now roughly 100 people on the waiting list. The list was looked at twice a year, in March and September, and decisions made at that point as to how many to allow to join depending on current numbers in each category of membership.

A question was asked as to how the LED lighting worked and TC explained that it was very straightforward with no need to let them cool down after use as with the previous lights. A question was also asked about modernising the Club to include for example a padel tennis court, as many other clubs were doing. Jon Rycroft said that padel tennis was becoming very popular and was a good alternative for those who struggled to play tennis.

## **8. Proposed Changes to the Constitution**

Part A: Proposed changes to Paragraph 8 of the Constitution to allow the General Committee to sanction the attendance of other members of the Club who were overseeing major Club projects or initiatives. Mary MacMullen proposed accepting these changes, seconded by Adrian Gaunt. All were in favour.

Part B(i): A motion required under Paragraph 12.1 of the Constitution to add a new category of membership – Family Tennis (Ukraine). This offered full membership at no cost to a family hosted by a Victoria Park Club member under the Government's Homes for Ukraine (HfU)

Scheme. Joan Bennett proposed accepting this addition, seconded by Cheryl Mitchell. All were in favour.

Part B(ii): Approving this membership category for future use in the event of the termination of the HfU Scheme by proposing that the conditions for this category of membership be altered such that the family hosted by the Victoria Park Club member must at one point have participated in the HfU Scheme. This would ensure continuing eligibility for existing Ukrainian family members as long as they were staying in the home of a Club member. Sue Stott proposed accepting this change, seconded by Adrian Gaunt. All were in favour.

#### **9. Nominations to the General Committee**

All were willing to stand again for the following year. We were actively looking for a new Chair and would welcome any enquiries about this role from anyone who may be interested and would like to get more involved in the Club.

#### **10. Membership Categories and Subscription Rates for 2023**

As previously discussed, tennis rates had once again been frozen to take into account the difficulties still being experienced by many, and to reflect the additional income brought to the Club by its increased membership. Bridge members would be charged for their membership this year, at the rate it was prior to Covid. A 5% discount was being offered to existing tennis and bridge members who renewed by 1<sup>st</sup> April. This would be the last time we envisaged offering a discount. All were in favour of accepting these subscription rates.

#### **11. Honorary Membership**

There were no nominations for Honorary Life Membership. Following recommendations by their respective sub-committees, the General Committee had unanimously agreed that Matt Olczak, Jon Rycroft and Catriona Nicholls be nominated for Temporary Honorary Membership in recognition of their ongoing contribution to the Club. All were in favour.

#### **12. Any Other Business**

There was no other business.