

# VICTORIA PARK CLUB

## Minutes of the 144<sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting held on 19 February 2024

**Present:** Tim Cartwright (Chair & Tennis Chair), Elizabeth Ambler, Liz Bell (Honorary Secretary), Owen & Joan Bennett, Don & Sarah Branton, David Brice, Paul Creber, Lance Cresswell, Gail Dixon-Smith, Margaret Fuest, Adrian Gaunt, Alan & Ethel Grateley, Jo Hawkins, Hilary Jackson, Mary MacMullen, Don Mitchell (Bridge Chair), Nigel Parker (Honorary Treasurer), Chris Pennington, Jon Rycroft, Mike & Sue Sanderson, and Janie Smallridge.

### 1. Election of Chair of Meeting

In the absence of an overall Club Chair, Don Mitchell nominated Tim Cartwright to be Chair of the meeting. This was seconded by Liz Bell.

### 2. Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Peter and Martyn Cornelius, Maureen Coster, Julie Crichton-Smith, Joy Hailey, David Kernick, Alistair Macintosh, Ed MacMullen, Cheryl Mitchell, Jill Murdoch, Matt Olczak, and Sue Stott.

### 3. Minutes of the 143<sup>rd</sup> AGM held on 23 February 2023

The minutes were accepted as being a true record. Proposed by Tim Cartwright and seconded by Paul Creber.

### 4. Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

### 5. Minutes of the Special General Meeting held on 30 March 2023

The minutes were accepted as being a true record. Proposed by Tim Cartwright and seconded by Mary MacMullen.

### 6. Matters Arising

Don Mitchell reported that legally the three new Trustees, David Evennett, Cheryl Mitchell and Sue Stott, were now in position but the new details had not yet been registered with the Land Registry due to delays there.

### 7. Chair's Report

Tim Cartwright remarked on the fantastic newly resurfaced courts which now played and drained beautifully! He expressed a massive thanks to Michelle Rutter who helped co-ordinate the whole exercise. Thanks also went to all our members for their patience in doing without the courts at various points throughout the year. The good news was that, other than repainting every 4 – 5 years, the courts themselves should last for at least 15 years.

The costs came in at just under £70,000, against an agreed quote of £68,000. Additional costs included the hiring of Exeter School courts, installing new net posts, and temporarily painting lines on the courts so that play could occur whilst the courts continued curing. In the past the Club had had to take out loans in order to cover the cost of resurfacing. This time around we did not even have to access the funds in our National Savings account. Nigel Parker would elaborate on that later in the meeting but, despite significant increases in electricity costs in particular, the Club was in very good shape financially. This was mainly because of a buoyant tennis membership which increased from around 550 to 584 last year, but also an upturn in interest and attendance from the bridge section. The Committee had agreed that the number of

members should be maintained if possible – something that the 50 + prospective members on the tennis waiting list should allow for.

Tim had stated over the last few years that Victoria Park 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. And with this in mind, he was pleased to once again inform everyone that, later in the meeting, we would propose to again keep membership fees static, something we hoped would enable our members to continue enjoying the Club's facilities despite the hardships many of them have faced and would continue to face over the coming months. The Committee had also agreed to offer a 5% discount for those who renewed before 1<sup>st</sup> April.

Finally, Tim thanked Nigel, Liz, Alistair and Don for all their hard work during the year. It was massively appreciated. Nigel would be stepping down this year and Tim thanked him personally on behalf of the Club for helping steer us safely through a particularly daunting and unprecedented few years.

## **8. Treasurer's Report**

Nigel Parker presented his report and said that it had been another strong year for the Club. Income had been over £80,000 with a good growth in coaching income. Roughly £5,000 had been received in growth in tennis subscriptions. Bridge income had been £2,500. Expenses had grown substantially due to coaching costs and depreciation – last year the floodlights had been replaced, and this year the courts resurfaced. There had been an increase in utility charges – gas and electricity had both increased substantially with electricity in particular peaking in the winter, partly due to a rise in floodlighting use. There had been a surplus of £15,700 for the year. In summary, the Club was in a very strong position. Nigel was standing down as Treasurer and Lance Cresswell would be proposed later in the meeting to succeed him. Change of signatory formalities needed to be completed and three members volunteered to witness the form at the end of the meeting.

A question was asked about whether upgrading the single glazed windows and the external walls at the bridge end of the clubhouse was being considered. Tim confirmed that these items were on the Club's maintenance schedule and would be bought forward if funds allowed.

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

Don Mitchell reported that membership had dropped by 21% following last year's reintroduction of bridge subscriptions. Over the year there had been a 16% rebound in subscription numbers. There was a 31% increase in attendance numbers (compared with 2022) - almost entirely due to increased participation in Wednesday afternoon sessions. These sessions had been a notable area of success over the year and he thanked David Brice for his dedicated work to make this happen. Plans for future development largely revolved around cooperating with Exeter Bridge Club, who were very active with training, in facilitating a range of activities designed to strengthen the skills of players who had recently taken up Duplicate Bridge. An article was due to appear in the St Leonard's newsletter shortly which it was hoped might attract a few more people.

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

Tim Cartwright presented his report. There had been the usual ups and down in league tennis this year – some teams did well, some not so well, some had no idea how they did but enjoyed coming out to play and having a drink afterwards! Match practice sessions continued to be well attended, although more female players would be welcome. Social tennis was also well attended (thanks to Barry Flicker and Sue Stott who continued to be the unofficial organisers of these sessions). Thanks were also expressed to Exeter School for allowing us to continue these sessions on their courts at a subsidised rate whilst our court resurfacing was being undertaken. Tim also thanked Jon Rycroft for all he had done this year and said it was no

surprise to him why his groups were so well attended - he had a gentle, fun and encouraging coaching style that allowed good players to improve and new players to really get into the game. Tim also thanked Lee Burrell – the adult program had really taken off and been well received by Club members. It was good to have an active pathway in place for members to progress their tennis. The Sunday sessions were all fully booked and additional sessions were being offered during the week. Discounted beginner coaching had also been offered to non-members thanks to a grant from the LTA.

Tim also extended his thanks to all the Tennis Committee members for all they had done visibly and behind the scenes. He also said a special thank you to Sue Stott who had stood down after many years on the Committee. Sue continued to be fully involved in most aspects of running the Club, but he expressed huge thanks to her again for everything she had done in the past and everything she would no doubt do in the future! Volunteer clubs relied on people like her who so selflessly and energetically give up their time to ensure other people enjoy themselves. In her place, Hayley Baber was welcomed as Social Secretary. A twinning opportunity with a club in Bad Homburg in Germany was also being investigated – Cath Jones had agreed to re-join the Committee in order to take this forward.

It was agreed that successes by our tennis teams should be celebrated more within the Club and it was suggested investing in another cabinet to display trophies won.

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

All were willing to stand again for the following year with the exception of Nigel Parker. This was proposed by Mary MacMullen and seconded by Jo Hawkins. The proposal was approved without dissent.

The Committee had been very lucky to have Nigel on board for the past few years, particularly to help steer us through the difficult times of Covid. He had made a massive effort to not only stabilise and help budget Victoria Park finances, but also enabled those of us with very little financial acumen to understand the dark arts of the accounting world. Tim thanked Nigel very much for everything. Nigel had not actually managed to play tennis in over a year and it was hoped that the offer of an honorary membership for 2024 and a couple of lessons with Jon Rycroft would get him back into the habit!

Lance Cresswell had been Nigel's assistant for the past year and had been handling the day to day administration. He had agreed to stand as Treasurer in Nigel's place and this nomination had been unanimously accepted by the Committee. Nigel was happy to be on hand to help Lance. This nomination was proposed by Chris Pennington and seconded by Gail Dixon-Smith. The proposal was approved without dissent.

The Club still had no overall Chair. Things were working well at present but it would be helpful to have a Chair in place and any nominations for this post would be very welcome.

#### **12. Proposed Membership Categories and Subscription Rates for 2024**

As mentioned above, the membership rates had again been frozen to take into account the difficulties being experienced by many and also to reflect the additional income brought to the Club by its increased membership. A 5% discount was being offered to members who renewed by 1<sup>st</sup> April. Last year we had stated that we did not envisage continuing with this discount. After discussion however, the Committee had decided to change this position based on the healthy financial state of the Club, as well as a review of the newly installed budget template which was introduced this year, plus forecasts that, even with some planned maintenance items (including the renewal of the bridge felt roof), the Club would likely make a healthy profit over

the year. All were in favour. There had been no changes to membership categories. Last year, the Ukrainian family membership category had been introduced and this was still open.

### **13. Honorary Membership**

There were no nominations for Honorary Life Membership. The Tennis and Bridge Committees had nominated the following at their respective AGMs: Barry Flicker and Matt Olczak for the large amount of work they had done on ClubSpark and membership; Ethel Grateley and Catriona Nicholls for their social and outreach activities. The General Committee had unanimously agreed that these four members, as well as John Rycroft and Lee Burrell, be given Temporary Honorary Membership this year in recognition of their ongoing contribution to the Club. In addition to these and as mentioned above, it had been proposed that Nigel Parker also be granted Temporary Honorary Membership for 2024 and thanks were again expressed to him for all his hard work. All were in favour.

### **14. Any Other Business**

There was no other business.