

CV19 hit at the start of the year. In the first instance this seemed to be a very big problem for the club, and, whilst it did prove to present many challenges - it has also produced some unexpected benefits.

The lockdown was announced on 23rd March, although it had seemed likely for some weeks previous to this. As a result we had begun to formulate a survival plan, based around cutting costs to a minimum and trying to raise some revenue from subscriptions and 59club. We also had some reserves in the bank - should a really rainy day arrive. The response to our offer to all members to re-join for £12 was very pleasing, exceeding our guesstimates. At the time, we had planned to ask tennis /cricket members to pay a supplement should their seasons start later in the year.

We were very pleased to receive info from Chorley BC regarding rate relief and also the info on applying for grant support. CBC were charged with distributing the Govt's Covid Relief Packages - and have continued to do so through the year - whilst sometimes the various packages have taken longer than expected to arrive - it seems that they are operating better than many other local authorities - & let's not forget, they had to cope with CV19 impact on their working practices. We have received several CV19 grants throughout the year (as there have been various levels of restriction) and so our worries behind our survival plan proved to be a little misplaced.

As CV19 grants were designed to replace the lost income for all types of business, including ours - so once we had received the monies, it would not have been reasonable to then ask tennis/ cricket members to pay a supplement and so subscriptions remained at £12 for everyone.

Early May - outdoor tennis was allowed. So (all) members were able to use the courts due to the exceptional circumstances. News of the standard of our outdoor courts and the annual cost reached various members of David Lloyd Gym - and a good number of their tennis playing members joined us. This produced a big impetus for the club throughout the year - many of them have got involved in activities like working parties / helping out with bar rotas / and providing us with a Publicity Officer after the 2020 AGM.

Tennis also led the way on the coaching front, with both adult and junior coaching resuming as soon as it was permissible. Another successful initiative was the holiday tennis 'camps' for juniors - so much so that extra sessions had to be added to some camps due to the level of demand. Cricket were not so fortunate, as the lockdown lifting was too late for the junior season to restart.

We also had an approach from Athletico Buckshaw JFC - who were not allowed to train indoors due to the CV risk - to use our outfield for practice session. This provided us with another income stream, and also enabled ABJFC to keep going.

The weather was kind in the April - June - so some families were able to utilise the field for recreation purposes. This outdoor theme was followed by the Pilates groups, club & U3a - who used the club gazebos and worked out on the bowling green.

Cricket was a bit later. Restarting in July. With precautions- no use of changing rooms / separate cricket bubble of 30/ no teas etc. The PS organised a localised competition to minimise travel.

In early July we were able to open the bar. Extra precautions were required - such as no queueing in the clubhouse, a one way system through the club & one person only in the toilets. However, members took these in their stride, many had been cooped up for 2-3 months so a few simple rules were easily accepted. We chose to open on Saturday afternoons, beginning with a 'garden party' - where members were encouraged to bring a blanket & park out on the field. Whilst the weather was not as hot as it had been earlier in the summer, it was still a successful event.

The following week, cricket returned on Saturdays, providing a focus for the bar opening, and the ground staff adapted the boundary to facilitate groups sitting and watching. By this time we had developed a team of bar volunteers & we were able to open each weekend until the introduction of stronger 'tier3' restrictions in October which prohibited all indoor activities including hospitality & we were not to re-open until April 2021.

Tier 3 also brought the end to any club based sporting activities - Pilates/ yoga / table tennis - we had put table tennis on the the club website to facilitate members booking the clubhouse & thereby minimising any cross contamination. Pilates and yoga continued throughout the winter via internet classes (Zoom) - in fact this was the state of play until May 2021!

The tier system of regionalised restrictions became a full national lockdown in early December, and this continued through the early part of 2021. By the time we were looking to set subscription levels for 2021-22 it was fairly certain that many CV19 restrictions would be lifted over time. The Govt had announced a staged plan, with outdoor sport being allowed from March 29th. This proved to be a opportunity too good to miss for some of the tennis section - who braved the elements and limited light to play on the courts at 00:01 on 29th March! Thanks to the good offices of our Publicity Officer, this had been well trailed and their efforts were recorded for posterity and further viewing by the press. The spectacle generated much interest, 2 radio interviews and a TV appearance on Granada Reports and various newsprint articles & social media posts. The coverage even made it to Australia and USA thanks to the internet - all clearly presenting the club in a very strong light.

As we knew that tennis would be allowed by the end of March and that cricket would very likely start as planned in April, it was agreed that we should set subscriptions at the levels of 2019. So social / indoor activities at £12 & tennis/cricket at £75. It was very encouraging that many of our newer tennis members rejoined - even though David Lloyd was also opening.

I would like to thank the committee for their continued work throughout the year. Many of our meetings have been via zoom - which is less than ideal - but it did allow us to communicate to a limited extent.

One particularly pleasing outcome was that the club was granted planning permission for the installation of floodlights on the tennis courts. This has been rumbling on for longer than we might like to remember, so to get to this point is great. The next part is to put together the funding for the work, but our reserves are good and we are working to organise the project.

It has also been notable to see the greater community engagement with the club. This has been developing over the last couple of years or so - eg U3A & more youth activities - but it did seem to receive a boost from the various lockdown relaxations - which were limited in their effect and it seems the local sports & social club fitted the bill for many locals. Clearly retaining this level of interaction will remain an aim for the club.

The pandemic has brought some unexpected benefits and we will strive to build upon them. Our bank reserves have increased, our profile has been raised in many ways and membership remains strong. We have achieved several of our long term targets from our development plan and there are exciting possibilities ahead regarding further club developments. In summary, the club has had a good year given the circumstances and can look forward with confidence.

Addendum:

1. Grant from Sport England - £25k - for floodlights - now need to organise the work. In fact there is a meeting Tuesday 25th to this end.

2. Approach from Primrose Holdings - The farm next door is for sale. Someone will purchase it. The club has been approached by Primrose Holdings (Ivor Farnworth) with a proposal to support a potential purchase and subsequent building of 4 dwellings on the farmhouse complex at Brandwood Fold. Should we allow access to the property via our track for building traffic and for the potential residents - they would pay a cash sum per dwelling, upgrade the track to cope with the traffic and put a maintenance requirement charge on the properties. It would be sensible for any improvements to include some speed limiting measures.

In a subsequent negotiation I.F. agreed to give us some land behind the clubhouse - for potential clubhouse development/ extra parking and even a 3rd tennis court in the medium term (all of which are in the club development plan). The committee took the view that this was a good offer.

The farm will sell at some stage and it may be a case of 'better the devil you know'. Primrose Holdings may have other options to access the property - across the fields - in which case we would not benefit nor would we be able to influence matters to our advantage.

The outcome that has been negotiated may extend the club land holding to three fields down -which would protect the club from any future development. It is also worth noting that whatever happens, the club will still own the track. Any legal agreement with Primrose Holdings will reflect this and that the agreement will only be for a maximum of 4 dwellings.