

RYE LAWN TENNIS CLUB

Minutes of the 92nd Annual General Meeting of the Rye Lawn Tennis Club

Held at the Clubhouse, Military Road, Rye at
6.30pm on Saturday 9th December 2023

Robert Dolman welcomed everybody to the AGM

1. The Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on 10th December 2022 were taken as read and agreed as a correct and proper record.

2. Chairman's Report

I'm afraid I must start by giving you the bad news, which is basically that we have been living above our means because of the ever-increasing costs of running our grass courts which are an integral part of the ethos of our club and of keeping the rest of our facilities in tip top shape. We have managed to keep the club running in spite of increasing losses partly because of fund raising which cannot be guaranteed and mainly because of the generosity of a few donors but donor fatigue is setting in and we need to make some radical changes as the current state of affairs is unsustainable.

The club is run by honorary volunteers for the benefit of us all and some of these volunteers have been involved for years and are getting a bit long in the tooth so we must have a succession plan to support them going forwards. Often in the past year or so criticism has been levelled at some of the decisions made by these volunteers but without full knowledge of the facts the details of which are not always possible to share for legal and ethical reasons. The succession plan is being worked on and details will be sent to members as soon as they are finalised.

We need more volunteers and we must therefore ask anyone who can please to offer their help so we can widen the scope and range of our operational organisation.

Our treasurer will report in more depth on the accounts shortly, but basically we need more tennis members and we need to be more commercial. We have already done a few minor things such as our link with the Kino and more adverts in the opera programme. Robert is working hard to get more sponsorship for the main tournament next year so we take maximum advantage of the presence of the Harvard and Yale Prentice and Seabright Cups team who will be competing.

But we need to do more than this and David and Amanda have drawn up a turn-around plan which will involve more subcommittees with more autonomy within pre-set expenditure rules and the plan at present is for them to be as follows:.

Marketing and communication

Membership

Clubhouse bar and catering

Social events

Coaching

Facilities

Welfare

Treasury/finance

Fund raising

Sporting subsections: Tennis, Squash, Padel, Croquet, Table Tennis

IT

Development of Poole Field and site generally

Environmental

Admin - hopefully Sharon

This will enable us to broaden our management and to bring younger people into the arrangements so that when I kick the bucket you won't even hear it.

On the plus side in the past year we have run some very successful tournaments with the help of many members and the padel section is thriving, again with much help from some of our members. As we'd all rather be having a drink I won't mention them all by name but they know who they are and we thank them.

Since last year we have re-sanded and treated our function room oak floor and we are very grateful to Sophie McLaren, Simon Lambert's wife, for taking on the role of safe-guarding officer.

Our tennis coaching subcommittee has done a lot of thankless work trying to inject more life into the club's coaching which is an important factor in finding and keeping new members from local schools and from the locality generally. As you all know, Tanya is now our new head coach and works through Hotshotz. Her reign has sadly been greeted with a lot of rain but we very much believe she will do a good job for us so I would ask members please to give her their full support.

Tania McCully our new tennis coach then confirmed that she is in touch with local schools to attract more beginners and members. She also confirmed the coaching and other arrangements she is making on behalf of the club the details of which can be found on the website.

3. Treasurer's Report

The year to 31 March 2023

The Club is run as a company (Rother Meads Tennis & Games Club Limited) with an accounting year end of 31 March. The accounts are audited and the auditors have indicated that they will issue a clean audit report, but please note my comments below in relation to the company's status as a going concern.

You will find attached extracts from the accounts to March 2023 (Accounts papers A1 to A3) as well as a set of graphs (Papers G1 to G7) detailing the financial trends over recent years.

The key points to note are as follows:

The total profit for the year has remained just into the positive, at c.£17k, due to donations. These fund-raising events contributed a total of £84,000 (which comprises donations and grants of £48,000 and fund-raising of £36,000), which can be seen in the income breakdown of the financial trends graph as making up an increasing part of the total income. 22/23 was our centenary year, and the figures were distorted by one off events, and associated income, and also the cost of redoing the astro courts at the beginning of the 22 season.

Stripping out the non-recurring items to compare each year with the other is never an exact science, so I urge you to look at the graphs as these show the trends over several years, as this is a better guide of the direction of travel. Please note that the graphs split out fund-raising activity from pure donations.

My interpretation of the trends is as follows:

1. We have become far too dependent on donations to keep us going. Whilst they used to pay for capex, they are now needed to make ends meet. This is not sustainable. The donor base is small with most funds received over the last several years coming from the same very small number of individuals.
2. Inflation has impacted significantly on costs, most notably on the cost of heat and power, and contractors' charges, but essentially on all costs, to some extent.
3. Income from Padel subs continues to grow and makes a useful contribution to overall overheads.
4. The key issue is tennis income versus tennis expenditure (see page 4). For 2022/23 tennis income, including income from the tournament and all subs (which fell in real terms) did not cover the direct cost of maintaining the courts, so made no contribution to running the clubhouse or general overheads. Although distorted by higher repair costs the position has been getting worse for years but has now reached the position where it puts the Club's future at risk if the trend is not reversed, and quickly. To ensure that the Club has sufficient funds to keep going an agreement has been reached whereby certain funds given for the development of the field will, if necessary, be made available to meet general running costs, to buy time and ensure that the company remains a going concern. This will give reasonable time for the finalisation and implementation of a turnaround plan.

The Board has agreed several actions:

- the tournament needs to be more commercial.
- a review is taking place as to how the grass courts can be maintained with less expenditure on contractors, and whether they need to be redone in full each year.
- there is ongoing widespread review of all of the Club's activities, its income and expenditure

4. Update on Planning Issues for New Field

Jonny Dunn reported that the Rother District Planning Department is short staffed and under-resourced which has resulted in delays and misunderstandings; however, the Club's plan is to carry on with our planning application for indoor courts as this will no longer attract any further costs and once we have a final decision on this which should be soon we can then make decisions as to where we go from there. If we can't source sufficient funds then we will aim to submit a planning application for more outdoor courts. It was noted that we should ideally also have one or two more padel courts whether indoors or outdoors.

5. Robert thanked all those many members of the club who have helped organise events during the past year and who have worked hard on various committees.

6. JEJ reported that Ant Hill has resigned from the Executive Committee and Sally Watson and Clare Crawshay-Williams have agreed to come on board. JEJ thanked Ant Hill for his input and Sally and Clare for joining up.

7. Any Other Business

- Various questions and points were made from the floor. The Tennis Sub-Committee is looking closely at the erection of LED lights and the replacement of our old-fashioned meter systems. However this will involve significant expense but we could take advantage of an interest free loan from the LTA and will also have to do some fund raising to cover these costs.

- In terms of the need for the club to be more commercial, Robert explained that we are seeking sponsorship for the main tournament this year and, if any of those present had any contacts (local or otherwise) and proposals for such sponsorship, they were asked to put these forward. The same applied to possible further use of the club and the clubhouse facilities for events.
- Should we turn over some of the grass courts to hard? The board is aware of this possibility and will continue to review it but it was pointed out that this would be not much less expensive than building new courts in the Poole field and would also impact negatively on our annual tennis tournaments which were special because they were on our excellent grass courts.
- Andrew Hitchings complained that there are pinch points on various afternoons and evenings, particularly in the winter, when 3 hard courts are insufficient. The tennis committee will try to assist with this but, until we have more courts, members are asked to seek to play at other times or on other days when the courts are not so much in demand.
- Christopher Strangeways pointed out that there were some positive figures in the accounts, in particular with regard to higher membership income thanks to the popularity of padel, and perhaps some cause for optimism.

Robert closed the meeting and thanked everybody for attending.

Apologies for absence had been received from:

Chris Gorringe

Michael Gradon

Keith Thomas

Pat Cassey

Heather Mott

Jon & Pepe Leslie

Gary Marshall

Mike Stotesbury

Fred Menzies