

**WEST OF ENGLAND BRIDGE CLUB**  
**Minutes of the Annual General Meeting**  
**Wednesday 18 May 2022**

**Committee present:**

Alan Evans (Club Chairman), Bill Ashford (Treasurer), Chris Frew (Secretary), Jan Duncan (Tournament Secretary), Jen Challoner (Minister for Fun), Bridget Johnson (Membership Secretary), Bernice Horseman

**Members present:**

Tom Nolan, Paul Brown, Jackie Cole, Gordon Allen, Jane Drew, Alan Peak-Payne, Lesley Russell, Peter Russell

**Apologies:** Jane Chapman, David Jones, Sandra Cooper, Christine Dean, Phil Seymour, Lorna Renshaw, Ian Mundy, Margaret Mundy

**1. Minutes of the last AGM Meeting – 15 May 2019, and the SGM meeting – 2 March 2022**

These were accepted as correct and approved by all present.

**2. Matters Arising**

Addressed in the Chairman's Report.

**3. Chairman's Report (Alan Evans)**

Alan reported:

"The last AGM was held in May 2019. In May 2020, two months after the closure enforced by Golden Hill because of the pandemic, we produced committee reports and made them available on the website. So, to summarise from then:

We agreed the terms of a Licence to Occupy with the RAFA Club, though that was only signed formally in January this year. Financially, we paid no rent when Golden Hill was closed, but paid the RAFA Club a small retainer fee from July 2020, when we officially left Golden Hill and moved our equipment out. We paid for the redecoration of this room while the club was closed (though the colour scheme was chosen by RAFA). We reopened in September 2021, and in preparation we purchased new tables, new chairs, new tablecloths and two cupboards. RAFA made numerous improvements, including the lighting. We sent our Duplimate dealing machine away for a service to prolong its life. We purchased two air purifying machines as an anti-Covid measure, which remain on continuously, and completed a formal risk assessment before reopening. Earlier this year, following Government guidance, we had to enforce mask-wearing for a short period. We continue to ensure adequate ventilation and other safety measures.

We sought members' views before reopening, and there was support for all our previous sessions, so we ran all five sessions from September. It was soon clear that table numbers were consistently down and not as good as we hoped, but nevertheless just about viable. Most sessions improved a little in time but not Monday evening, and we were forced to cancel this session in December through shortage of players. Numbers generally continue to remain low but viable, although attendance on Monday afternoon has been strong, even prompting requests for another, similar session. This was launched on Friday afternoons from 1 April though numbers are low so far.

The trend that has become apparent since restarting face-to-face bridge, here and in other clubs both locally and nationally, is that the better and more experienced players are more likely to stay away and to play more of their bridge online, where in particular a revitalised BBO (Bridge Base Online) and the newly developed RealBridge platform have gained a lot of players. Playing online has some obvious advantages, but the newer and less experienced players seem more willing to come out and play face-to-face, for the benefits of the social interaction, which may or may not be about bridge.

So we hope to continue the five weekly sessions we have at present, with new members joining our Thursday Improvers, gaining experience and then progressing to the competitive afternoon sessions and then the evening ones. We have not restarted our leagues or cup events since reopening, but we will review this if numbers grow further.

Our liaison with the RAFA Club continues to work well, with Jane Chapman recently overseeing various day-to-day interactions and joining their committee. They have responded helpfully to our requests, and the only significant downside of our partnership is the complications of membership.

We note with sadness the passing away of a number of our members during the past three years: Alan Williams (a former Chairman), Peter Randell, Suzette Worthington, Cedric Gunson, Shirley Brown, Alan Reid, Ted Cox and Lesley Reed, and I apologise if I have omitted anyone else.

I am grateful to all the committee members for their work during the past three years in such a strange and unprecedented period."

#### **4 Treasurer's Report (Bill Ashford)**

The Accounts, and Notes to the Accounts, were distributed. Bill then made the following report: "Given the unusual circumstances relating to the Covid pandemic, this report covers a 29-month accounting period from April 2019 to August 2022. In addition, preliminary figures are available for the new accounting year which runs from 1st September 2021 to 31st August 2022. I will not cover what is already outlined in the notes to the accounts, except if I feel a point needs emphasising.

##### **1. Year April 2019-2020**

This year was a comparatively "normal" year until the middle of March 2020 when the pandemic struck, and all Face-to-Face bridge was suspended for an unknown period. The profit shown reflected the increase in player numbers, continuing a trend from the previous year. A large proportion of this was down to the "Improvers" graduating from the Thursday afternoon supervised sessions into the competitive sessions. The cloud on the horizon was the proposed hike in the rent at Golden Hill which would have made it virtually impossible for the club to break even unless there was a dramatic increase in table numbers. This scenario was deemed unlikely, a view which proved prescient when the pandemic arrived.

##### **2. 17-month Period April 2020 to August 2021**

It was agreed at the SGM to extend the accounting period to 31st August 2021, covering the 'Covid months' when play was not possible. As we had already agreed to move to new premises at the RAFA club, we were able to terminate our residence at the previous premises without incurring extra costs. We did start paying a greatly reduced rent to our new landlords from August 2020 out of goodwill and an acknowledgement of how supportive they had been in a very difficult time. There

were considerable expenses incurred in the relocation which is reflected in the substantial loss incurred. It should be noted that the situation in the current account was helped by the receipt of subscriptions in February and March 2020. These will be applied to the next accounting year.

### 3. Current year September 2021 to August 2022

With no income for 17 months, it was decided to transfer £3000 from the Hampshire Trust deposit account which arrived in the account in late October 2021. This has ensured liquidity in the current account. Since the resumption of play in September 2021, player numbers have not returned to pre-pandemic levels for understandable reasons. The arrival of the Omicron variant in early December made December and January very difficult. Monday evenings were particularly poorly attended, and it was decided to suspend this session in December 2021. However, a new session was started on Friday afternoons. At the time of writing, it is too early to predict its impact. As at the end of April 2022, we have made a trading loss of about £1600.

However, aside from the factors already mentioned, there are mitigating factors. Firstly, the accounting year will be bolstered by the receipt of the subscriptions paid in February/March 2020 to an extent that it is likely a small accounting profit will be made for the period. Secondly, table receipts have been lower than usual due to the change in the subscription process. This resulted in members who had pre-paid their subscriptions becoming entitled to 2 free games.

A final factor affecting the finances is the increase in table money from £4 to £5 per session. This is contrary to the note to the accounts in March 2020 but the committee felt it was justified on 2 grounds: (i) Covid transmission: £5 would reduce the number of objects passed when collecting the money (ii) the uncertainty surrounding player numbers following the pandemic. I do not feel that the increase has been the major factor in the reduced table numbers but that is a personal view.

This has been a very difficult for all clubs and I am grateful to everyone who has continued to support the club through this period.”

The accounts were accepted and approved by all those present.

## 5. Membership Secretary's Report (Bridget Johnson)

Bridget reported:

“This report gives an overall picture of where our membership numbers stand and how many active members we have.

According to Pianola, the club has a total of 233 members: this includes 17 ‘Life Members’, 6 ‘Country members’ and 210 ‘Ordinary Members’. The category of Country Membership has now been abolished. From that overall total of 233, 91 have not played at all since reopening (about 40%).

There are 40 people who were members in 2019/20 who have not yet renewed: 13 of these have attended one or more sessions since reopening. We are still including all these as ‘Ordinary members’ until end August 2022, after which they will be removed from the membership list and categorised as ‘Lapsed’. Fifteen new members have joined since reopening along with three returning members from before 2019/20.

To illustrate the drop-off in attendance since reopening:

- 142 members have attended at least one session since reopening (60%)
- 61 members have played more than 10 times (26%)
- 16 members have played more than 32 times (i.e. averaging once a week) (17%)

If you define an 'active' member as someone who plays once a month on average (i.e. 8 times to mid May), we have a grand total of 74 active members (just 31% of the membership).

These are rather poor numbers. Unfortunately, the coinciding of lockdown with the need to move premises has made it more difficult to pin down exactly why so many people have not returned: covid-related factors, a preference for playing online, dislike or inconvenience of the new premises or any combination of these or other reasons may be significant."

#### **6. Tournament Secretary's Report (Jan Duncan)**

Alan explained that there would be no report, as none of our regular tournaments has resumed since we reopened, and nor have the quarterly competitions for regular players at evening sessions. In answer to a question, Alan said that Committee had judged that player numbers had been too low so far to make such competitions sensible, but the position will be kept under review.

#### **7. RAFA Club Liaison Officer's Report (Jane Chapman)**

In Jane's absence, Alan summarised by contrasting the happy and constructive relationship we enjoy with the RAFA Club to the awkward exchanges and unrealistic demands we experienced with Golden Hill towards the end of our tenancy there. The RAFA Club have bent over backwards to be helpful and accommodating.

#### **8. Fun Events Officer's Report (Jen Challoner)**

Jen said that there have been no such events since the reopening, and will need the regular playing membership to increase to make such social events viable again.

#### **9. Motions submitted for Discussion**

None

#### **10. Election of Officers and Committee**

Chris Frew reported that he had received only one nomination for four of the Officer roles, and no nomination for the fifth (Vice Chairman). As the Committee is limited to eight people in total this would allow for four 'Ordinary Committee members'. Six nominations have been received. Chris proposed that all nominees to the new Committee should be elected *en bloc*, and - to comply with the Constitution - the first Committee meeting should decide which two of the 'Ordinary Committee Member' candidates should be treated as a supernumerary secondment, which carries no vote. Chris said that, in practice, voting was extremely rare, and meanwhile the Committee needed all the people it could get to prepare for future Officer turnover.

This formulation was put to the meeting, and agreed by all members present. The Committee until the next AGM will therefore be:

Chairman: Alan Evans

Treasurer: Bill Ashford

Secretary: Chris Frew

Membership Secretary: Bridget Johnson

Other Committee Members: Jen Challoner, Jane Chapman, Jan Duncan, David Jones, Bernice Horseman and Alan Peak-Payne

## 11. Any Other Business

Paul Brown asked for Match Point scoring to be reintroduced on Wednesday evenings, with prominence given to Handicapped, as well as Unhandicapped, results. He felt this would encourage the transition of some players from Monday and Friday afternoon sessions; and this was agreed.

Tea/coffee are free in the afternoons, but charged at 50p in the evenings. The meeting agreed this anomaly was an irritant. Alan said that it had arisen by accident from the playing out of events since the original negotiations, but that he appreciated it now looked odd, and committed to raise the matter with the RAFA Club. **Action: Committee.**

Gordon Allen said that he found the new chairs uncomfortable: why could we not have had chairs such as those at Bristol Bridge Club, which are very comfortable? Alan said that, at the time we needed to purchase, a requirement for the new chairs was that they be stackable and reasonably priced. In the event, the stacking requirement has fallen away, but we were not to know that. We did save four of the padded chairs with armrests used at Golden Hill, and these are available – though not practical unless you can book a ‘sitting seat’.

The uncertainty about the intentions of the large number of ‘members’ who have not been seen since lockdown was discussed. It was agreed that Committee should actively follow up by making contact and divining their thoughts and intentions. **Action: Committee.**

Alan Peak-Payne queried the size of our cash reserves; how do they compare with other such organisations? Do we have any target or rationale? Chris quoted another, similar-sized sports club that had similar reserves, but the answer is probably that our reserves are the unintended consequence of successfully planning to trade at a small percentage profit each year. The reserves proved vital to tide us over lockdown, and we are insulated against similar future shocks.

Why do we have to pay table money in cash?, asked Lesley Russell. The card readers used at BBC and by Friendly Bridge are more convenient. Bill replied that he was against them for a couple of reasons; the suppliers skim a small percentage for the service, but - more importantly - he had seen a situation where the technology failed, resulting in a complete shambles. Bill is more comfortable with the minor inconvenience of cash.

Gordon complained of a situation one Friday night of excessive noise, which has made him reluctant to return until something is done. Alan said that it is a duty of Directors to keep noise levels down to acceptable levels, and he will arrange for this to be made clear to Directors. **Action: Alan.**

The meeting concluded at 19:00.

Signed

Date