

Ashtead Squash & Tennis Club

Chairman's Report for the AGM, 21 October 2016

It's hard for me to believe that I have been Chairman of this Club for 4 years...During this time I have had the support of a wonderful, forward thinking Committee that were prepared to humour a Chairman with vision to take the Club forward.

Running this Club is rather like running a small business, it's all about the people, whether they are staff or members, it's all about communication and having an understanding of what our customers require from us in order that we can stay in business.

The business in our case is providing a sports and social facility for the local community where members can enjoy a hard game of racket sports, be that tennis, squash or racket ball followed by a drink and idle banter at the bar, or indeed as a social member utilising the bar and enjoying the television entertainment...every single member is equally important.

Interestingly, as Vets captain I have the pleasure and enlightenment, of visiting a number of other racket clubs during the squash season. These range from the likes of Colets, a very large and in my opinion, an impersonal club, to somewhere such as Reigate that is very personal, but lacks the professionally run bar that we enjoy as Ashtead. You only have to look at the bar income and associated profit to see that without the bar income this Club would struggle to exist...of course the converse of that is if we did not have the bar we would not have the staff expenditure, so the overheads would be considerably less. The point of this example is very simple: We are incredibly fortunate to have the balance of facilities which we enjoy at this Club...I know I have said it before, but so many visiting clubs are hugely complementary of what we have here, whether that is the colourful welcoming flowers in the entrance area or the camaraderie around the bar, we should never under estimate nor take for granted what we have.

Anyone who bothers to listen to me waffling on about the Club will often hear me talk of transparency and balance...These two subjects are very high on my list of what I believe make for a good leader of people. To have transparency means that the members are fully informed of what the Committee are doing, which in turn brings on much needed feedback. The balance is to understand all aspects of the Club and pay equal attention to what the membership is expecting of their Club. As Chairman and leader of the Committee, I really do try and put myself in a position where I can see everyone's point of view, which in turn allows the Committee to make well informed decisions. Any officer of this Club has to be in touch with the membership and be well aware of what the members expect and require.

I was reminded this week with a comment from one of our long standing members who said something along the lines of, "I remember the days when we had a polite Club Steward and hot food on offer". It is interesting how things have changed at the Club over the years...my answer to this is very simple: I think we can all identify with selective memory and looking at the past with rose tinted spectacles. I personally can recall times when both of these comments are completely not true. Times have changed, local facilities have changed...I can remember when the only way we could watch football on the telly

was with Jimmy Hill hosting Match of The Day, great memories but things have improved immeasurably since then.

During the past four years this Committee has achieved unparalleled success in improving the facilities for the members, this includes refurbished Men's and Ladies Changing and Shower areas, the introduction of the hugely successful Fitness Studio and taking the Club to CASC status. What has allowed this to happen is the generation of a considerable income surplus year on year...the 2015/16 accounts are no different with a surplus in excess of £23k. This in a year when we have spent considerable amounts on squash court refurbishment and a number of other maintenance projects.

It's all very well talking about the success' of the past, but as a Committee we have to look forward as to how we can continue to make improvements to the Club. For the coming year we propose to carry out a carefully constructed member's survey on a number of large capital projects, these will include:

- Refurbishment of the bar and lounge area
- Construction of a gym
- Construction of disabled facilities
- Modification of court 4 into a singles and doubles court with a movable outer side wall, similar to the one at the RAC in Pall Mall
- Construction of a multi-function outside court facility

Depending on the results of this survey will depend on how and what we need to fund, but it might be that we look to raise funds against the value of the property...borrowed funds are currently at their lowest level for decades, so it makes complete sense to raise funds in this manner and crack on with well thought out capital projects to further enhance the facilities of the Club for the next generation of sports people.

Another opportunity which we are investigating is the possibility of modifying the membership subscription to include a partial donation fee. This we can do because we have CASC status. The main benefit of this option is that we can claim gift aid from those members who are tax payers. This could result in an additional income of several thousand pounds per year. I have to thank Steve Hanrahan for coming up with this initiative...let's hope we can make it work.

Most of you will be aware we applied for and successfully received planning permission to erect and use tennis court flood lighting on court 1. This is being partly funded by an interest free loan from the LTA and partly from Club funds. The Committee recently voted in favour to go ahead with this initiative and are currently waiting on approval from the Board who are responsible for any changes to the physical structure of the Club. There may well be some who suggest this is not good use of Club funds; given the amount of tennis players we have vs squash players. A reasonably valid point, but of all the racket sports at our Club, tennis is the one sport which is being heavily promoted by the LTA following on from Andy Murray's success and that of our Davies Cup Team. The costs are circa £15k, of which the LTA interest free grant over five years is £10k, so the impact on cash flow is minimal. This is one of those expenditures which if we do not do it, some will say we saved the money, well done, but on the other hand, if we spend the money we are opening up another opportunity to increase the membership numbers and offer additional

facilities to our existing members.

This Club is just a small part of the community of Ashtead, but the awareness of the Club and its role as a sporting and social venue in the area is so important. We as a Committee, and with the support of our members, will continue doing the very best we possibly can.

During the year, we have said a fond farewell to a number of members: Cindy Bayat-Fealey, John Knight and Keith Gandar. All of whom have left their indelible mark in the history of the Club.

As always, its an honour and a privilege to head up the Committee and to be part of the continuing success of Ashtead Squash & Tennis Club.

Thank You and Regards

Michael Standring
Chairman