

UPDATE – 16 MAY 2020

I hope everyone is keeping safe and well in these trying times.

At last, a chink of light! Within 24 hours after I completed the first draft of this Update, decrying the continuing enforced absence of any sort of rowing, British Rowing and the Environment Agency reversed their policies. We are now able to re-start in a limited way, subject to some fairly stringent conditions. In brief, this means single sculling only – whether in Club boats or private ones. There are no exceptions. Boats must be booked out via the Captain, and only two boats may launch per 15-minute slot. Heightened hygiene precautions will apply – broadly, if you touch it you must wipe it. The showers, changing rooms and bar will be out-of-bounds (though showers may be used in the event of capsizes).

Look out for Captain Mike's posts on the Club's Facebook pages for the detail. There will also be notices posted around the Clubhouse.

Don't come to the Club if you, or any of your household, have any Coronavirus symptoms.

Please note also that it's a requirement of the Club's insurance currently that only single sculls are used. No other boats may be moved at all, not even to put on trestles on the hard.

British Rowing has extended its suspension of affiliated competitions till 31 July, meaning that sadly there will be no British Rowing Junior Championships this year.

You might be forgiven for thinking that with so little rowing currently taking place and meetings banned, there cannot be much for the Committee to do. Nothing could be further from the truth! We have adopted the Zoom video conferencing app, which enables us to conduct virtual meetings. We meet monthly in that way, and have been busy.

Priorities have included tight control of overheads, and seeking alternative sources of funds to make up – as far as we can – for those lost through the cancellation of events. To our considerable relief these efforts have borne fruit. We've received a grant under the Government's support scheme for leisure and hospitality organisations, and another from Sport England's fund for community sports clubs adversely affected by Covid-19. The Crowdfunder appeal on the BRC Supporters' Facebook page has raised over £2,500 – a terrific and very prompt response from members, friends and supporters. Particular thanks are due to Mike Biggs, Michele Fisher and Sandra Perry as they have undertaken most of the work involved in these initiatives. We have one or two other irons in the fire, which have yet to begin to glow.

These receipts give us a breathing-space, but we still need to review our funding for the longer term. A sub-group of the Committee is looking at projects to boost regular income as well as one-off injections of cash. I hope to bring you news of these as and when decisions are taken. Thanks to those of you who have contributed ideas. These have all been welcome, and all are under active consideration.

Following my call for volunteers in my last Update, I'm pleased to say that we received a number of offers of help. Sam Deane and Shirley Hall will take over Paul Brown's responsibilities as Welfare Officer, as soon as DBS checks and online training with British

Rowing are completed. Paul will stay on the Committee. Shane Roberts will work with Treasurer Sandra Perry pending her standing down at the next AGM. Hugh Maltby has also offered to help the Club in any way he can, which may result in him standing for the position of Deputy President. These new volunteers will be co-opted onto the Committee in the first instance. Many thanks to all of them – I was very heartened by this response from members.

The Committee feels that the time is ripe to designate one of their existing number as Communications Officer, to be responsible for communication both internally with members and externally, in terms of publicity. Kevin Walsh will fulfil this role, with particular responsibility for the website. He will be assisted by Sue Cooke and Michele Fisher (already Committee members) with the aim of enhancing our social media presence.

Simon Thomas having indicated that he would value support from a Vice-Chair of the Social Club, Steven Reece has stepped up into that role – again, from within the Social Club Committee.

It has been suggested that the Club might benefit from a designated Fundraising Officer with a brief to ensure that we maximise our opportunities to raise money from donations, sponsorship, events and perhaps sources that haven't occurred to us yet. We want to keep subscriptions at an affordable level, so that rowing can be as widely accessible as possible. Given the challenges posed by Covid-19, the sub-group I've mentioned above has fundraising under active consideration and will do so for a while to come. However we're keen to know members' views. Under our Constitution we currently have a number of elected Committee members with no specific designation or portfolio. We could create a directly-elected post as an addition to the Committee, or reduce the number of undesignated members by one, while creating the elected position of Fundraising Officer. Either would require constitutional change. The default option is to leave things as they are, so letting the Committee decide when special effort needs to be applied to this issue, as with any other. Let me know what you think, at president@bedfordrowing.co.uk.

We are all, of course, most anxious to resume unrestricted rowing and reopen the Clubhouse fully at the earliest possible moment. We are looking at holding some form of celebration to mark that event when it happens. More anon. Meanwhile, I thought the response to the Crowdfunder appeal on the BRC Supporters' Facebook page, and the offers of help with the running of the Club, showed tremendous spirit. It's clear to me that – despite the current, temporary difficulties – our Club is in good heart. Long may that continue!

The Club's flag has flown at half-mast today in memory of Mike Liggett, a longstanding member who has sadly passed away after a long illness. He was a founder-member of the veteran squad, winning World Championships in 1976, 1977 and 1979.

Finally, for those who both crave competition (most of us) and love the ergo (rather fewer, maybe) I have been notified of British Rowing's inaugural Virtual Championships. Details at https://www.britishrowing.org/2020/05/first-ever-british-rowing-virtual-championships-announced/?utm_source=member-solus&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=virtual-champs&utm_content=member-solus. Over to you, if interested!

Looking forward to seeing everyone back at the Club as soon as we can.

MARTIN BANHAM-HALL, Club President