

UPDATE TO MEMBERS

In July, our Captain Mike Baker was re-elected unopposed for a fourth consecutive year. Of course, the effects of Covid-19 meant that our activities over the Spring and Summer – especially competition – were severely curtailed, with the usual April Small Boats Head and the annual Regatta being cancelled. So our Captain, along with our crews, has had to make the best of a rather indifferent season.

Nonetheless every effort has been made to facilitate rowing to the maximum extent allowed by Government and British Rowing regulations. Single sculling resumed in May, with smaller crew boats creeping back into use as regulations eased. Many thanks to Captain Mike for organising the booking system that made this possible. It has been very popular, and it has been a delight to see scullers and crews taking advantage of (mostly) benign conditions to get out on the water.

With most inter-Club competition still prohibited, we are still only able to use the boats fully for training, and even then subject to scrupulous regulations designed to minimise the risk of infection to members. Thank you for adhering to these requirements, for the safety of all.

The AGMs of our Rowing and Social Clubs took place on 17 September, on this occasion by Zoom video conference – a first for the Club. Many thanks to all who joined the meetings.

One main item of business was the election of Officers and Committee members. A list of all current post-holders for the rowing year 2020-21 is attached. Heartfelt thanks to those who stood down at the AGM – Treasurer Sandra Perry, Secretary Will Everitt, Social Chair Simon Thomas who remains on the Committee and Dave Catlin, Ryan King and David Glasspool who also leave the Committee.

Another was the proposal to re-structure the Rowing and Social Clubs as limited companies, for the better protection of members, Officers and Committee members from personal responsibility for the Clubs' liabilities. This was overwhelmingly approved – thank you. We are now working on implementing the arrangements to take effect from the end of the Clubs' current financial year on 31 March 2021.

Concern was expressed at the AGM that members were asked to approve draft accounts that many had not previously seen. I recognise that communication in this respect has left something to be desired over a number of years. In the past we have relied on pinning a notice to the noticeboard in the Clubhouse and handing out documents on the night. The limitations brought about by Covid have highlighted that this is not a sufficient process in all circumstances. Our first attempt at electronic communication in advance had mixed success. We are working towards compiling a comprehensive list of members' email addresses so that important notices and documents can be communicated electronically. In that way we can send more information to everyone, and at lower cost than if we were to post it out by snail mail.

The intention is that draft accounts and other documents to be discussed at members' General Meetings will be sent out by email together with the formal notice convening the meeting. Please help us by ensuring that our Membership Secretary Sara Reay (sara.reay@bedfordrowing.co.uk) has your current email address.

I'm delighted to say that at the AGM, Paul Crouch was unanimously elected a Vice-President of the Club. This recognises Paul's exceptional and selfless contribution over many years in coaching Juniors and Learn to Row candidates, through towing trailers to numerous Heads and Regattas far and wide for the benefit of racing crews, not to mention his loyal support for other Club events and social occasions.

In a season otherwise largely shorn of opportunities for competition and high-level progression, I'm thrilled to report that our own Ellie Cooke has been accepted onto British Rowing's GB Start programme for budding international athletes. Many congratulations to her – and for smashing it in her first race in this new capacity at Holme Pierrepont. Congratulations also to her coaches Jo Moss, and formerly Lynda Higgins, who have been so influential in helping Ellie to achieve what she has.

Sadly, the pandemic has extinguished most other opportunities for competition including Henley Royal, Women's Henley and the various national championships. We long for the return of full-scale training and competition, and the opportunity for our rowers to show what they can do in 2021. This is an evolving process, and we are relieved that light has been gradually emerging from the end of the tunnel in recent times. A conversation has been opened with Star Club with a view to a competitive event between the local Clubs within British Rowing rules.

The Committee has kept the prospect of re-opening the bar under close review. We have targeted several successive dates, most recently 1 October, only to have our plans dashed as new infection rates or Government restrictions came into view. The 'Rule of Six' makes opening uneconomic for the time being: we derive most of our bar income from private parties rather than individual members or passing trade. Nonetheless a working group is actively engaged on forward planning in terms of marketing and promotion, to try to ensure that we hit the ground running when the time comes. Watch this space!

We need a volunteer to take responsibility for oversight of the condition of the Clubhouse. Professional skills in building surveying or construction would be a bonus, but are not essential. Drop me a line (president@bedfordrowing.co.uk) or give me a call (07581 255666) if you are interested.

We also need a volunteer to take over Mark Redman's responsibilities in organising helpers' rotas for our Head events and for our contribution to the Regatta. Huge thanks for Mark's hard work over the years. Nonetheless this will be an easy job for anyone who can persuade members to fill the rota slots at the first time of asking! Again, please contact me in the first instance if interested.

Our best efforts to maintain and demonstrate the vigour of our Club are also tinged with sadness. I have to report that Christine Gleave, a stalwart of the Recreational group and for some time Minutes Secretary of our Committee, has passed away. In my conversations with her she showed a lively and penetrating appreciation of all that goes on in the Club. However she had been afflicted for some time with the merciless and debilitating motor neurone disease to which she eventually succumbed. Her service to the Club, her cheerfulness in the face of adversity and her indomitable enthusiasm for her time on the water have been an inspiration to all who knew her.

We have also just learned that Rocky Bright has passed away. He was one of the Club's longest-serving members, and formerly was for many years a dedicated coach both on the water and for land training. His understanding of the biomechanical aspects of training was, I suspect, unparalleled

– his explanatory posters still adorn the erg room and gym. As for Rocky the person, I don't think Ian Pendall's tribute on the Club's FaceBook page can be improved upon.

RIP Christine and Rocky. The Club flag has been flown at half-mast for them, and they will be sorely missed.

Finally, a big thank-you to all members for your continuing support for your Club at this challenging time. Your patience and your contributions both financially, and in person to the many tasks that must be undertaken, enable us to look forward with optimism and confidence to a better future.

MARTIN BANHAM-HALL

Club President