

UPDATE TO MEMBERS – JULY 2021

Looking back at the Club's website I see that some six months have passed since my last update. That was last December, and the tiered restrictions of lockdown #2 had just been introduced. Rowing was limited to single sculling and single-household crews, and no indoor activity – gym, erg, social etc – could be permitted.

Things have of course moved on now, by degrees and with a great deal of uncertainty along the way. Happily, the gym and erg room are now operating again and the bar eventually opened on 23 June. It has been good to see members – of both the Club and the public – enjoying drinks and the best view in Bedford on our balcony. More crews have been able to return to the water. Competition has resumed, including at Peterborough and Henley Masters with upcoming regattas at St Neots and Sudbury opening for entries as I write. We hope very much that it will be practicable to run our usual October Small Boats Head this year – watch out for announcements on the Club's social media channels.

I will leave Captain Mike to report on the rowing outcomes. Suffice for me to say that despite the extended lay-off, our Learn to Row courses have resumed with – still – a long waiting-list. This augurs well for the ongoing development of our rowing squads and groups. "Coach the Coach" sessions on Friday evenings have also caught on. Hopefully this will increase the coaching we can provide across our range of rowing crews. If you are interested in coaching, or learning to coach, please contact sara.reay@bedfordrowing.co.uk. It need not stop you rowing as well....

At last September's AGM it was resolved that we should effect changes to the constitutional structure of our rowing and social clubs by incorporating them as limited companies. This is for the better protection of members and officers from personal responsibility for the Clubs' liabilities in an increasingly litigious and 'blame-game' age. All being well, the move may also encourage members to put themselves forward to join the Committee and help with the running of the Clubs.

The agreed target was to implement the changes with effect from 1 April 2021. Regrettably we have not been able to achieve this yet due to technical hurdles introduced by our bank, HSBC. We hope those are now overcome. An unforeseen consequence of Covid-19 has been that HSBC (in common with other banks, we believe) suspended the opening of new accounts for business customers for some months. Our Clubs are regarded as businesses for these purposes. As the new companies are separate legal entities from the pre-existing Clubs, new bank accounts are necessary for the receipt of subscription and other income and for paying outgoings.

Apparently the banks' approach resulted from large numbers of fraudsters setting up shell companies, drawing down Government Covid support funding, then disappearing with the money leaving the companies to go bust. Despite our best efforts to persuade HSBC of our bona fides (why should we have to??) they remained unmoved. As so often, the respectable and responsible many suffer for the wrongdoings of a heinous few.

HSBC has now lifted its embargo on new business accounts, so our Treasurer Shane Roberts and other Committee members are working hard to get the new arrangements in place as soon as possible. An announcement will be made when this has been achieved.

Our Clubs are quite complex organisations involving a significant workload to keep them running as they should and to achieve the developmental goals we set ourselves. We are fortunate in having a hard-working and cohesive Committee but even so, the workload falling on individuals' shoulders, although rewarding, can be substantial. Support from members can make a massive difference. Indeed this will be necessary if we are to achieve the goals sought by members and set out in our developing five-year strategy – of which more shortly.

Meanwhile some specific roles are coming vacant offering opportunities for volunteers from among the membership to get involved in the running of the Club. Please consider what you can do to help your Club. Voluntary roles such as those we can offer provide members with great opportunities both to utilise their existing skills for the good of the Club, as well as developing new skills and areas of experience, which can really help with CV building and employability outside the Club. Committee members will attest to the value of their voluntary Club involvement in their wider career development.

At this time of year we typically hold an Extraordinary General Meeting to elect our Captain who holds office for one year from September and serves on the Committee. Formal notice of this year's EGM will be given imminently. We will send this to all voting members for whom we have email addresses, but in case we are lacking any you should regard the Club's Facebook page as the primary means of formal communication. Please watch out for this accordingly, and consider whether you would like to stand for election or to nominate anyone else. Candidates need a proposer and seconder, and must agree to be nominated.

If you have not given your email address to our Membership Secretary, or are unsure, please send it to sara.reay@bedfordrowing.co.uk.

Our Deputy President, Hugh Maltby has tendered his resignation owing to unexpected pressure of work. In a comparatively short time in this period of office he has made a considerable impact. He has been pivotal in the development of the five-year strategy, and has worked hard to produce a job description and contract documentation to enable the Club to engage paid, part-time administrative help. You may have seen the advertisement for this on the Facebook page or the website. Hugh's resignation is therefore a disappointment but of course we wish him well and sincerely hope we shall continue to see him at the Club on a regular basis.

Safety Officer Mike Biggs is a familiar figure, both in his frequent FB posts on practical safety measures and on the bank in his regular coaching role. He too has decided to stand down from the Committee with effect from this year's AGM (September). He is embarking on a major career change and the even more life-changing voyage of discovery and sleeplessness that is new parenthood. Mike, don't be a stranger!

John Mingay has been a fixture at the Club for – he proudly tells me – over sixty years. Yes, sixty! With a landmark birthday approaching John has told me he “may wish” to step down from the Chairmanship of our Social Club, again with effect from this September's AGM. Some have murmured to me that “it will never happen” but I think we must be prepared. It will be John's choice, and he has urged me to put out the call for candidates to succeed him. I need hardly add our collective thanks for his unceasing and unselfish hard work, or our good wishes, but I do nevertheless.

The Committee has been made increasingly aware over the last couple of years of the burgeoning importance and administrative burden of data management. Data protection regulations require meticulous record-keeping and control of the personal information we keep concerning members and others, and an understanding of the rights of those whose information we store. I have therefore been asked to put out a call for a volunteer from among the membership to take on a new role of Data Officer to take responsibility for managing our data. If any of you has specific skills in this area, that would be particularly valuable but otherwise a person willing to undertake suitable training would be much appreciated.

[Mark Redman has valiantly coordinated the rota of marshals and umpires for our Head events over many years but has previously advertised that he now needs to stand down. We really need a volunteer (or more than one) to step up to this plate also. The racing itself is organised by our Events Committee but the Heads cannot take place without a team of helpers manning the start and finish marshalling, the timing and the monitoring of crews going up to the start and during each Division. It is the coordination of this rota for which a specific volunteer is needed.

The Committee has been conscious that the coordination role is made more onerous than it might be by the reluctance of some to help on the day. This has reached the point where we are seriously considering introducing – and enforcing – a policy that if you don't help, you don't race. You have been warned!]

If you might be able to help in any of these areas, or can suggest anyone suitable, please contact president@bedfordrowing.co.uk. It is anticipated that a handover period leading up to the AGM would begin straight away in each case. Officers needing to be elected at the AGM will require a proposer and seconder in due course and to agree to serve in the role and on the Committee. Currently the Data Officer and Event Marshals Coordinator roles are not specifically identified in our constitutional arrangements so are not necessarily Committee positions. We will see how that develops and whether any changes need to be made.

I look forward to seeing everyone at the Club in the coming days.

MARTIN BANHAM-HALL
Club President