**Newton Abbot Squash, Racquets and Lawn Tennis Club**

**Annual General Meeting, January 9, 2024**

**Chair Report**

In my second year as Chair I wanted to make sure we continued the build on the good progress made in 2022 with the following key objectives:

1. Keep the house in order by maintaining excellence in Safeguarding, Financial, Membership management and record keeping practices
2. Raise the profile of the club to encourage new members to join and ensure the sustainability of the club
3. Continue to look for efficiencies to keep our costs under control and increase our financial security
4. Maintain the best possible club experience for current members

I believe we have fully met the first objective thanks to the excellent conscientious efforts of Andy Lloyd and Denise O’Donnell on Safeguarding, Malcolm Watts as our longstanding Treasurer and Pauline Allsop as Membership Secretary. There’s a great deal of work that goes into meeting this objective which is vital for the smooth operation of the club. This year also included an LTA Safeguarding audit where Andy was able to demonstrate full compliance based on the policies and procedures that Denise had previously put in place.

Raising the profile of the club to encourage new members to join remains a key ongoing objective for the sustainability of the club. With that in mind, the committee held an open day on July 1. Julie Lee did a great job leading the team developing banners, flyers, visiting local businesses and schools, postings on social media, etc. The day went really well with around 50 visitors signing up for the prize draw. The weather was perfect for the Tennis activities and the energy around the club was fantastic. Although the numbers joining directly from the day may have been very few, the initiative overall did indeed raise the profile and our membership has grown by 35% over the year and is now very close to 300. A large proportion of the new members are juniors, who now represent ~20% of the club membership. Maddie Ramsey, Rich Thomas and Rob Alford have all done an excellent job of developing our juniors and we are looking at setting up Saturday morning junior club for Tennis as we have for squash. We also held an England Squash Junior Silver event and Devon Junior events in Squash and Tennis, all with very positive feedback.

The growth in membership has increased our income by over 40%, and as you’ll see from Malcolm’s year-end financial report, our income overall increased by around £14.5k over the year, which is a fantastic achievement. This has allowed us to absorb the increase in utility costs while providing additional funds to reinvest in club facilities. However, we are still currently unable to cover our operating costs when taking into account the £25k+ that now flows through to the Trust each year. In time this should change if we can continue to increase our membership and reduce our costs. At least our utility costs should be much less next year with lower energy prices and the installation of ‘Hives’ to control the Squash court heating which has allowed us to reduce gas consumption by around 50%!

The objective of maximising the club experience for our current members is clearly key and hopefully in 2023 everyone appreciated all the opportunities on offer. It was a really busy year for Squash and Racketball. With the increased membership, Dan Gough, our Club Captain, entered a record ten teams in the Devon leagues. Dave Palmer and Mark Hedge organised friendlies with teams from the USA, Wales and Paignton! The Summerteams competition organised by Steve O’Donnell was a huge success again this year with around half the club membership participating. Steve also organised one of the best Christmas social events ever. The Monday Night club night has proved so popular that we’ve added another on Fridays led by Alan Twelves and it’s great to see the Squash and Racketball box ladders up and running again thanks to Sharon Brown and Dan Wignall. Sam Philips has also done a fantastic job of running all the club competitions but we’re streamlining the number of competitions this coming year as participation seems to be somewhat mixed. For Tennis the regular morning social groups and club sessions with the support of Jane Comyns continue to be very popular. The club is well represented in the league with 7 teams and an additional ladies team planned for next year. Maddie organised a set of very successful summer championships culminating in a highly appreciated finals day. Chris Robillard organised Easter and Christmas doubles events to raise funds for the club and Nell is leading the pavilion refurb following the recent flood.

Unfortunately, there was a major disappointment this year as we were unable to secure funding from Viridor to resurface the tennis courts and replace the tennis court lighting with LEDs. Andy put in a lot of time and effort to ensure the bid met all the requirements but unfortunately Viridor were over subscribed for the funds available. We are now pursuing other potential funding sources. In the meantime, with the help of many volunteers including Mark Laughton, Chris Jones and Tony Lee fixing the cracks, courts 1,2 & 3 have been refurbished to buy us some time and court 4 should be repainted in the Spring.

One highlight of the year is the recent setting up of a weekly tennis session for those with additional needs. It’s early days but the initial feedback has been extremely positive thanks to Julie and Maddie leading this activity.

Finally, I would like to close by thanking all the committee members for their excellent support to the club and me personally again over the past 12 months. We are a small group but with the dedication of each and every one on the committee, we’ve got a lot done and I feel we are making progress to ensure the sustainability of the club. We are always looking for more volunteers to help us out and there have been some great examples of support from many of you as highlighted above. We do have vacancies on the committee! We are looking for a Secretary, someone to take the lead promoting the club through social media, and not least, a new Treasurer as Malcolm would like step back after serving the club so well over the past 15+ years. All nominations are very welcome!

Tim Villis January 9, 2024