

BERKHAMSTED BOWLS CLUB
Minutes of the Extraordinary General Meeting (EGM)
Sunday 7 July 2024 11AM
in the Clubhouse, Berkhamsted Bowls Club

Invited chair of the meeting: Brian Ralphs

Committee Members present: Christine Sims

Resigned committee members present: Janet Hart (minute taker for the meeting), Colin Shortall, Chris Gray, Bob Anderson, Becky Davis

Apologies: Kevin Clarke and various club members not specifically listed

Members present - 49 plus a few social and junior members

Brian Ralphs introduced himself as the invited chairman to the meeting. He commented that he was pleased that so many members were present, indicating the amount of support in the club and its future. He mentioned that he had been asked by the outgoing committee to chair the meeting, which had arisen as a result of Kevin Clarke and then 5 other committee members resigning on 18/19 June leaving just one committee member – Christine Sims. The constitution requires at least 5 committee members to form a quorum.

Brian then explained how he planned to conduct the meeting. He did not expect to resolve all the issues which had caused the current impasse in one meeting, they were too numerous and complex, but he wanted to create a process which would allow all the underlying issues to be analysed and processed a timely manner. As part of this process, he would allow everyone just one chance to have their say at the EGM. These comments would be noted and included for later attention.

Brian then read out Kevin's resignation letter, a copy of which is attached to these minutes, as he said they give a good background to the issues. He then read out a copy of a letter from Jacqui Woodhead (Kevin's wife) which explained Kevin's position even further. That letter is also attached.

As a first step, an interim governance process was needed, to see the club's affairs through to the next AGM in the autumn, compatible with the Constitution. In addition to this, Brian proposed to establish an independent task force to note all the issues, then investigate and propose a way forward, at a meeting to be held in a couple of months time, ideally before the AGM, so that these issues not be a distraction at that important meeting.

It was noted that club had been through a major organisational structure change, which was approved at the November 2023 AGM. When the new committee was established at the AGM part 2 in January 2024, not all positions were filled, but the position of Members' Representative was proposed and added.

In preparing for the EGM, Brian spoke with the outgoing committee members, to understand their positions, especially with regard to resuming their roles through to the AGM.

These were their responses:

Kevin Clarke: Although he has stood down as Interim Chairman, Kevin will continue to work on tasks at the club and continue his role as Grounds Manager.

Bob Anderson has stated that he is not prepared to resume the Clubhouse manager role nor the committee position of Facilities Manager.

The other committee members each indicated that they had concerns, but would be prepared to resume their roles through to the AGM.

Then there was a pause for comment from members present. For fairness, each member would have one opportunity to talk. There was to be no debate at the current time. Everything would be noted and investigated following the meeting.

Comments:

1 Peter Batchelor: Obviously there are issues over emails and complaints. Surely we should be able to review the emails and complaints.

2 Anne Cox (associate member): Surely communication - verbally is the right mode. Social media – whatsapp and email not the right media for contentious comment.

3 Jackie Cormack: Its difficult to decide who she wants on the committee. She want s to know what is going on. She cannot do so without all the evidence.

4 Marcia Dunstone: We had a very good reminder from Kevin over the good things. Lots of positives. She would like the committee to restand. If the Constitution needs update – there should be a sub committee to get it done.

5 John Bell: The committee on balance – has largely has done a good job. It appears to only be a few people who have criticised them. A committee retiring on block is unusual. John thought that this morning everyone would have had opportunity to discuss the issues.

6 Rod Hattan: For the whole committee bar one to resign, he does not see how the whole meeting can continue without seeing these emails. Someone should have sent to the members a summary of all the issues.

7 Brian said that it was not just one issue causing the committee to resign, There were various matters over an extended period.

8 Janice Murgatroyd: One of the biggest issues is when the club started the WhatsApp community chat. People have lost the ability to talk to each other. Committee should have talked over the issues with the relevant people – not communicated by social media or email. Social media is so damaging.

9 Colin Shortall: The club needs to be more forward looking. He is quite happy to move on, but will not have his time and energies brought down by the comments of others.

11 Ian Muir: it is an extraordinary situation to have an EGM – without any document to consider. There should be at least a proposition to considered generally. Constructive criticism should be encouraged if it includes suggestions for improvement. Anything else should be dismissed instantly.

12 Hayley Hobley: Social media should be used, it's part of the modern world. People need to get used to it.

13 Colin Shortall: There are currently 2 main WhatsApp chats available – 1 is for information only. The Community Chat is the damaging one. Care needs to be taken when putting comments on it.

14 Mike Low: Dacorum Borough Council needs to be informed if there is no committee. It always was a requirement of the lease.

15 Christine Sims: She is the only person still operating within the committee. No one has directed comments at her since the announcement of the committee standing down and the need for an EGM. The Constitution is out of date and needs to be rewritten.

She then read out a rewritten version of Kevin's recommendations which included:

A A clear code of conduct that includes ALL forms of communication including email, WhatsApp & Social Media

B Respect for the management of the club from the Membership, whilst the management remains accountable to that membership.

C Any grievances shall be dealt with openly and in accordance with the Clubs Constitution (Clauses 2.2.8 & 3.1.12)

- The Club's code of conduct is applicable at all times through the agreed structured disciplinary process as laid out by Herts Bowls/Bowls England

Brian reminded the gathering that the EGM was called because constitutionally the club cannot operate without a committee. 5 people minimum were required to form a quorum.

The options were:

(A) Appoint a new committee or

(B) Ask the existing committee to resume their roles. With neither Bob Anderson nor Kevin making themselves available, some adjustment of roles would be required.

David Brown then mentioned that we were currently operating under the existing (old) constitution and that a new draft management plan is still being developed. The existing constitution covers most things that have been brought up.

Carole Dunn said that she cannot understand why people do not come forward to do jobs for the club. There were several jobs (non committee tasks) introduced in the January 2024 AGM that have still not been filled. Has anyone done anything about filling those jobs ?

Colin Shortall: In the AGM part 2 – this club needed more people to come forward to fulfil roles. Colin currently does the job of Greens Manager as well as Treasurer. The club needs more people to help. He mentioned one positive thing that has happened this year – and that is in the reintroduction of the Friday night socials. It brings people together socially, as well as bringing money into the bar.

Chris Gray: We are all volunteers. However, having committee meetings starting at 5.30 that don't finish until after 9 o'clock is too much. Chris will carry on with his job, but with the proviso that there is no more undermining of the work the committee do. We need more people to step up. Let us continue our roles. Club is losing money. We need to look to the future. Be positive.

Peter Batchelor: There is a lack of information about the reasons why the committee had resigned. We need transparency and all important items should be communicated to all members.

Janet Hart: Membership fees cover only 30% of total costs. Need to concentrate on recruitment and other income generating items. That should be where our focus is – not internal members minor disagreements.

Colin Shortall: Some costs have gone up by far more than inflation – energy and some supplies. He wants a financial review team set up - covering a good spectrum of peoples views, so as to work on a solution for long term stability of the club.

Brian then recommended that a small review team is set up – to cover all concerns raised by the committee and members. They then need to be able to assemble, summarise and investigate the issues arising and report back to the members in another meeting in about 2 months time – well before the AGM.

Liz Temple: She and Lesley Brown have run the bridge club for a number of years. Pre covid – it had about 17 tables of players. They have now built it back up to 12-14 tables. They have also put their prices up by 40% and it brings in a significant income to the club (now almost £6,000pa). Have other clubs done the same? What is their contribution?

The committee members who have just resigned were asked if they were willing to continue in place until the AGM. Colin Shortall, Janet Hart, Chris Gray and Becky Davis confirmed that they were all willing to continue. Bob Anderson declined. Christine Sims said that she was

willing to act as chair until the AGM. With these appointments, a working committee of 5 people will now be in place.

Alison Maddison then offered to take up the role of Members Representative on the committee. Her appointment was then proposed by Paul Mackness and seconded by Jackie Cormack.

Brian confirmed that a review team of around 3 people would be set up. Alison Maddison offered to lead this team. This was proposed by Paul Mackness and seconded by Jackie Cormack. Following this, Tony Smart, Jackie Cormack and Hayley Hobley were also accepted as part of that team (making 4 members).

Linda Howard (associate member) then spoke and mentioned that there were several other jobs – as indicated by the notices on the board, that were still unfilled and that members were required to step up to help.

Brian then read out the various vacancies and asked if there were members present willing to take any of them up. Those positions are as follows:

Committee:

Vice Chair	Vacant
Facilities Manager	Vacant

Non Committee positions with persons willing to take them up:

Communications officer – working with secretary	Hayley Hobley
Events manager – working with secretary	Sheila Bell
Greens manager – working with Facilities manager and team	Vacant – currently done by Colin Shortall
Compliance manager – working with secretary	Vacant
Recruitment Manager	Vacant – currently done by Kevin
Catering Coordinator	Jackie Cormack – will continue until AGM
Clubhouse supplies	Christine Sims
Clubhouse manager	Carole Dunn
Grounds Manager	Kevin Clarke continuing

Brian then confirmed that the reconstituted committee would continue until the AGM. The new review team would report to the members in another EGM will before the AGM. If members have issues that require review, these need to be made to the review team.

Christine Sims said that the Agenda should be published about 4 to 5 days before the meeting.

Lesley Brown; The date of the committee meetings should all be published in advance.

Peter Batchelor confirmed that Friday Night Socials would continue, but needed more volunteers to ensure that these can continue.

Alison appealed for help in running a Bowls Bash for her old company's Away Day. The facilities were being provided in exchange for the company doing a Thermal Report on the clubhouse.

Brian then thanked everyone for coming and giving their input into the meeting. Christine then thanked Brian for taking on the role of chair.

The meeting closed at 12:20pm.

Kevin's letter:

18.6.2024

Dear fellow Committee members

I have decided after chairing tonight's meeting I will be resigning my position as your Club Chairman forthwith.

I undertook this position to help the club through a transitional stage which included a thorough analysis of how our club is run and the resultant re structuring of it to deal with the challenges it now faces. Over the past six months a very small group of people have constantly challenged and criticised the process, and the results of it. Last evening the Secretary and I received yet another long email taking us to task and pointing out, and I quote 'the committee should be aware it is not operating or following the club constitution'.

As your past President and current Chairman I should not stay in office if this is the case as this is clearly a serious accusation. I have already conceded to these members that oversights and procedures 'may' have been breached in this process but we will try to address and correct them over the remaining term. It appears this is not enough for them.

This persistent forensic criticism is extremely undermining and exhausting especially as we have larger and more productive projects we should be focusing on. I would like to think the majority of members are more interested in seeing tangible results like the ones to-date this year:

- Providing one of the best greens in the County despite the atrocious weather this year
- Enjoying our modernised clubhouse facilities that include new decoration in the bar & kitchen
- Having more parking and viewing options inside our grounds with the removal of large bank trees
- Running another highly successful Gala Day with a new team
- Driving strong recruitment campaigns over several months
- Signing on twelve new members to-date
- Setting up and delivering more extensive coaching than ever before inside & outside
- Addressing our financial issues with bold and imaginative initiatives like solar panels
- Inviting & organising outside organisations to our club for paid taster sessions
- Repairing our gate over three days with the help of five members
- Rebuilding our Friday club night social calendar
- Planning our 40th Anniversary year events this year already
- Having two Juniors in the County White Rose squad

... and there is more to come.

These are the things a club should be striving for in my opinion, instead we are having the life sucked from us through bureaucratic point making that is the stuff of election tv nightmares. This has been going on for the past year and at times it has felt very personal, but now it is being aimed at committee members who volunteer their own time to help run this club. This is the sort of stuff you might expect at a large corporate company, not a little old bowls club who rely on goodwill and teamwork to survive.

For that reason, I am sorry to say I'm out.

Regards

Kevin Clarke

Message to committee, members & friends at BBC EGM

Please read at EGM.

From Jacqui Woodhead, (wife of Kevin Clarke)

Firstly we apologise for not being here today . At short notice we have to attend a 'no miss' hospital appointment.

Way back in 2013 Kevin told me he was considering whether to stand as President of this Club, I encouraged him, I could see his vision & knew he would dedicate himself to making your/his club the best it could be.

Now I'd like to ask those of you who were members of this club to cast your minds back to 2015 . This club won the Bowls England club of the year award I remember how excited we all were at the award ceremony. This club has gone from strength to strength and is the envy of many other clubs.

Life throws us all many challenges . Choosing to Oversee a bowls club is a tough task, it helps if others come with you on the adventure & also see & embrace the future with positivity & appreciation. For the most part I believe you all do.

However a **Darkness** has arisen among a few long term/older members. They keep looking back with rose tinted glasses thinking things were better in the old days. These people have spoken & written unkindly, provoked unrest. I ask these people & you'll know if you're one...**STOP** ...please just open your heart & mind to new ideas.

Your committee needs support, respect & trust as they take the club forward. it's not easy and becomes a thankless onerous task when club members undermine their efforts in various ways.

BBC club is a wonderful club, with wonderful people, a fantastic green, amazing club house. Be proud & grateful you are a member.

Kevin needs to step back for a short time , we have a few life complications that need our attention.

I thank the present committee members for sticking with kevin, you're doing a great job carry on , he's still around when & if you need him.

I appreciate you for being here today & ask you please remember two things

In a world where you can be anything be Kind

Teamwork makes the dream work.

Kind regards Jacqui.