

Minutes from the Senior Member Forum meeting on 11th June, 2pm in the Garden Room



Forum: Brenda Nixon, Charles Shiplee, David Blackburn, Harry Alvarez, Marc Newey, Pam Waring, Sarah Owens, Richard Storer, Vivien Harris

In attendance: Alan Jenkins, Tristan McIlroy, Mariya Vlaykova

Apologies: None

1. INTRODUCTION

AJ welcomed everybody and talked about the circumstances that led to the formation of the Senior Forum. AJ assured Members that the Board very much values both the Young and Senior Member Forums as important channels of communication and initiatives. He hoped that they will be constructive bodies. The Board as always has to balance the interest of all Members, but Members voices and opinions needed to be heard. AJ thanked all Members for volunteering to be part of the Forum.

All Members around the table introduced themselves and told how long they have been Members and what sports and activities they were interested in.

2. DISCUSSION/ SUGGESTIONS

MN started the discussion by asking Forum Members what they think the Club is doing well and what could be improved.

PW thought that the new Piazza Coffee Shop was an example of a good management response to an external factor and has proven very popular with Members. On the improvement side, she considered that the communication should be better.

RS found the Club very inclusive; he was delighted to be a Member of Roehampton Club. He also considered that the Club was offering such amazing facilities, many Members were using the facilities more often and consequently, this had led to operational and parking issues.

BN thought that the Board and the management had coped very well throughout the pandemic, have kept Members engaged by online offering. She felt that Seniors have been overlooked slightly and pushed a little bit aside and said that more social events such as Christmas canapés, Bridge Dinner or even BBQ and Jazz or dinners with live music will be very popular for their age group.

RS queried what was the age profile of the Club? MN responded that it was younger than ten years ago. According to the full survey from 2018, 52% of the membership were women. The average men's age has reduced from 55 to 52 years and for women from 58 to 55 years. MN reiterated that those figures did not take into account the age of juniors.

BN also talked about the pressure to book tennis courts or golf at the time that suits you. MN agreed to some extent and said that more Members were using the facilities but since Covid, they have learned to manage their time better. MN reported that there were off peak times when the tennis courts were available, but the issue was that Members wanted to play when they like or when their playing partners prefer. MN hoped that Seniors had the opportunity to choose off peak times. BN stated that most people preferred to play in the mornings as this fitted in well with their daily routine.

DB praised the overall management of the Club and said that it has done well through Covid. Concerning communication, he was aware that the Board had to take some challenging decisions (the comment was regarding the 70/30 discount). About the long term issue with the congestion and parking, he suggested that cycling to the Club be encouraged. DB considered that there were some issues with tree management.

SO said that the one thing that stands out for her was how wonderful the staff are. There are very friendly, and she enjoys seeing and talking to them. The management should be congratulated for motivating everyone to give their best.

SO was concerned that there was a fundamental change in the ethos of the Club from being a Member's Club to more of a facility. She also said that the Masterplan concept of plans and ideas that seemed imposed on the membership did not help either. Some plans have not been correctly communicated. Members felt disempowered. She gave examples with the Walled Gardens and the Board plans to remove them. MN commented that there were no plans to remove the Walled Gardens. They were very important feature of the Club.

AJ reminded Senior Members that the Board had accepted that they had mishandled the 70/30 discount explanation, however, the Board had tried to involve Members far more than previously. The Board had undertaken extended consultations with Members regarding the Masterplan. He agreed with SO that there was an idea to take part of the gardens for tennis

courts but considering Member's feedback, the Board had stepped back from this proposal. AJ reiterated that it has never been a Board decision, but an Architectural proposal that had been tested with the membership. AJ did not want the issue with the 70/30 discount to be considered as a template of how the Board communicates with Members. AJ stated that he was very happy to take any feedback to the Board for consideration, considering that the Board was the only place to make final decisions.

SO explained that she was talking about perception. There was a difference between the original intention when communicating information and, as a result of the way it's communicated, how this communication was ultimately received. Overall, she thought that would be better to go back to more of a Members' Club feeling. SO meant that some, probably new Members treated the Club badly, as a facility. She gave an example of a mother changing nappies at the swimming pool while other Members were eating.

RS said that he felt like part of a Members Club. BN added that Seniors were very passionate about Roehampton Club and felt that it was their Club.

MN clarified that there is a perception that New Members with young families mistreat the Club which is not true - Members of long standing cause just as many issues. MN thought that having better facilities, Members would be pleased and proud of their Club. He would be upset if Members treat Roehampton Club as a leisure centre and do not feel that they belong to a Members Club.

RS thought that it was a fine balance – people become Members because of the facilities and the balance was different for each Member. Some of them were coming occasionally for a game or gym, for others, the Club was an integral part of their life. CS added that priorities changes as people evolve, and most likely Members do not have the same priorities as when they had joined.

AJ said that one of the strong Board beliefs was that the Club was not just a sporting Club, but a social Club, where Members can come relax and socialise with each other. That strong belief was confirmed by the Survey 2018 and Masterplan in process. It was clear that there was a need for increased segregation, where families could be families and people who preferred peace and quiet, had peace and quiet. The plans (Clubhouse refurbishment) had to be pushed back by at least 18 months due to Covid 19. The Board will review again priorities for the years to come.

HA thought that the best asset of the Club was the grass tennis courts which were superb and amongst the best in the country. He was also pleased with the good job done by the grounds team looking after the grass courts, the croquet lawns, and the golf course. HA was delighted that all grass courts were preserved, and the Club did not make a mistake to transform Roehampton club to just another tennis centre. According to him, the negative was lack of communication, a view expressed by many around the table. He thought that there was a lack of community feeling and gave an example with tennis, Members were playing with the same

playing partners, week after week. HA admitted that he also used to do it before. In his view, by doing so Members missing out on the Club's feeling. He was happy to give a number of suggestions on how to improve communication and community feeling. HA reminded that in the past Members used to meet regularly on a bi-annual basis in the Roehampton Room for a discussion and questions.

RS queried what the people understand by communication – what was lacking in the Club's communication? HA responded that for him it was the way the Club communicates. He did not do social media, for example, many people did not read the Recorder, same with update emails, many people did not look at them.

DB reiterated that many Seniors do not do social media and added that many people did not want to get involved but were happy to complain.

BN added that the lack of communication led to a lack of representation. MN considered that there should be a mechanism - if a Member has an issue, who could be contacted, what was the outcome and what was the reason for the outcome. MN reminded the Forum that the Survey in 2018 showed that Roehampton Club was in the top five of UK and North American Clubs as 95% of Members were happy with the way the Club communicates with them. From 3 700 adult Members, 3 500 have subscribed for the Recorder and 2 000 were opening it. MN thought that that was a very good result. He asked Seniors how they would like to receive information from the Club and suggested that if he feeds information to Forum Members, then they can circulate it between their groups. MN considered that Members will be more interested when the information is coming from the Forum Members and asked them to support the Club and be Ambassadors.

HA talked about the Vet's tennis group and a lady who had stopped coming because she thought that they will be uneven number. The group had asked DL to send reminders each week to the people who had originally signed up. **MN confirmed that he will ask DL to send reminders each week.**

DL/MN

VH believed that there were many examples of a strong community feeling in the Club. Bridge and golf sections had a very strong community feeling. She thought that the issue was how to collate all the different groups in the Club and let them all come together. VH said that 10 years ago when she was writing articles for the Recorder as Lady Golf Captain, about 300 people were reading it. VH was impressed by what they have achieved because 2 000 people reading the Recorder made it totally worth the efforts to write it. She also added that if she has to compare Roehampton Club to the way Royal Mid- Surrey GC was communicating with its members, this Club was miles ahead. There were very positive messages about the Club's communication.

RS reminded Senior Members that if there was an issue with an individual sport, they should talk to the staff dealing with the relevant section and not bring it to this Forum. It was important how the Club communicate with Members on a macro level. If only 2 000 of 3 500

subscribed were reading the Recorder, then those who do not read it should take responsibility for this and stop complaining. AJ agreed with RS and reiterated that the specific matters should be dealt with by the relevant Committee or Management body. This Forum should be clubby with Seniors as a class.

2.1 Communication and social media

MN would appreciate it if he can get volunteers from the SMF to distribute the Club's information further to Members who cannot access it by themselves. He would like to get feedback on Management's plans and ideas.

2.2 Health Club dry and wet activities

HA complained that early morning and late evening were not the most convenient time for his wife to use the swimming pool. MN explained that Health Club Forum (HCF) was very strict about what time should be adult only swimming. HCF Members considered that early morning before work and late evening after work were the best times for adults to use the pool. MN considered that Luke Fenton, Health Club Manager, had done a really good job to programme and fit all different groups within Covid 19 restrictions.

VH commented that currently the booking system was working very well as there were family lanes and adult lane swimming. She said that from six people allowed that day only two or three were swimming at lunchtime.

SO asked who was on the HCF. MN replied that the list with Committee Members was displayed on the Notice Board.

RS said that Members should accept that they will not necessarily have their preferred slot every week and that they should be flexible in their timings.

The SMF considered that the booking system should be kept at peak times in the Health Club after Covid 19.

MN

2.3 Golf, rackets, and other sports

VH reported that the Bridge section will have their prebooked face to face sessions in the Bridge Room from 4th July (if the Government lift the restrictions from 21st June as intended). There will be one online session for Members who are not confident to attend in person. It was a little challenge to set up those Bridge sessions socially distancing, with sanitiser on each table and strict rules who can pick up the cards. VH was grateful to Kate Blake and TMI for organising the protocol in place.

VH stated that Bridge has been a lifeline opportunity for many Members, financed by the Club. The section was very excited about the return to face-to-face Bridge and the Bridge Summer Party (*now postponed till September*).

VH added an observation that Members were happy to continue with the bookings for golf. They liked the pace of the game and the opportunity to go and play with other Members. The interaction between the golfers has improved due to the booking system.

BN said that she would prefer to turn up and play than to book in advance. MN reiterated that many more Members were using the Club on a regular basis. Pre- Covid 19, there used to be around 32 000 rounds on the golf course and currently they were around 50 000. Of 2 000 eligible golf Members over 800 were playing regularly. The booking system has become essential, but without losing the Club feeling. Off peak times will be monitored to allow the use of some facilities without pre-booking.

RS suggested looking at off peak types of membership, Seniors from that category could use only off peak time to book and give priority to Members having full membership. MN said that they were different modules, but it was something that the Membership and Marketing Committee could consider. **Membership and Marketing Committee will review the different types of membership.**

The SMF discussed the proposal. HA disagreed with it. DB said that if more Members were using the Club on a regular basis and the Club does not get any bigger, they were forced to consider restricting membership usage. HA thought that the Club should be more selective about who they were letting in and how many become Members. MN responded that they were, the total membership was restricted to a maximum of 5 000, but Members were using the Club more often.

AJ said that there was a strong argument, hugely unpopular with Members about reducing the size of the membership. The Board has been firmly against it considering the long term consequences, becoming like Hurlingham with a closed waiting list and the huge financial impact on the current Members – no entrance fees and substantially expensive subscription. AJ considered that the most democratic way for Members was having booking systems.

HA asked when the Croquet Hut on lawn 4 will be replaced. MN responded that the new one will be bigger with a veranda and will be installed in mid July. TMC has worked closely with the Croquet Section on the project and should be completed by the end of July. HA queried about the size of the lawn and when will be reversed to full size. TMI responded that it has been done on that Tuesday. HA has noticed in the past some issues with the grass on the far end of the lawn. MN agreed and said that the area will be reurfed when the works finish. MN then talked about the Bandstand project, the area was glazed, with sittings and vending machine. HA was concerned about the noise coming from padel tennis courts. MN responded that they have done everything possible to reduce the noise impact, but inevitably the croquet players will hear the noise from the padel tennis players while playing croquet. MN said that one possible solution would be to move croquet lawn 4 next to the other three lawns in the place of two grass courts. HA strongly disagreed with the idea. According to him, the grass courts were the best in the country after Wimbledon and reducing their number with two will increase the wear of the others. It may make the Masterplan look neater and make sense

operationally with four lawns next to each other, but from the croquet section perspective, lawn 4 was one of the prettiest in the country according to the HA.

RS stated that at some point the only way to resolve the issues with limited space and increased demand for use from Members would be for the Board to consider how best to utilise the current space and facilities leaving the sentimental view of the prettiest and the best in the country on side.

DB agreed that grass courts are magnificent but in use for less than five months. Therefore, strategically, the whole membership through the Board should decide how to use the area and how many grass courts should keep.

BN expressed her view that the clothes in the Pro shop were absolutely “hopeless”. She had spoken with the staff and they had said that between them (mainly men), they were doing the clothes ordering. MN said this is not true and Tilly has joined two Pro Shop team two months ago and she oversaw all racket equipment and clothes ordering. Nicole was the new female in the Pro Shop, and she would place orders for female golf equipment and clothing. MN added that Matthew Paget pays rent to the Club for running the Pro Shop and he was an excellent retailer. For MN was important that the Member service was very good and Members complimented the retail offering. MN also said that there was an issue with deliveries nationwide. Everything that was coming from abroad, was taking longer to be delivered.

MN

SO suggested selling gym gear in the Pro Shop and displaying it at the gym. **MN will discuss it with Ricky Pharo.**

HA notified the SMF about the loose sand on the Astroturf tennis courts and that it was a hazard. He reminded of an accident with John Evans’ son four years ago. **MN will look at it.**

MN

All

SMF requested specific tennis matters to be discussed at the Tennis Committee.

2.4 Social Events and F&B

MN informed the Forum that the Club has a new Executive Chef. Arnaud has started in November last year and has worked on raising the standards. Very good feedback about the food quality has been received.

BN suggested working with Mark Staniszewski on organising live music evenings. MN responded that they had worked with him in the past. To keep the cost low, the Events team should organise the evenings. MN considered that the Club should subsidise live music evenings to encourage Members to come back and use the catering facilities.

VH, Chair of the House Committee, was receptive to any ideas to optimise the use of the catering. She considered that the prices were cheaper than the local restaurants, the food quality had improved noticeably and there was a scope for a better service.

CS thought that the restaurant service has improved Member experience and the service was much better.

VH reiterated that the House Committee wanted Members to come back and use the food and beverage facilities. To come to play and stay for a meal or socialize with fellow Members.

SO considered that the Dining Room ambience was not welcoming. MN responded that the House and Property Development Committees were looking at the Clubhouse refurbishment and how to improve the social area. MN explained that at the moment, they had to keep converting rooms, but if the rooms were not needed for events, Committee meetings, etc. and only used as member social area then the décor would be changed.

The SMF suggested organising evenings with live music, Dinner Dance Events, Afternoon Teas and Garden Evenings. The Forum considered that Club Evening on Wednesday should be revived. The Forum thought that immediate improvements such as plants, candles, napery, new pictures on the walls at a small cost should be done in the dining area.

SB/ND

3.5 Environmentally friendly and sustainable practices

SMF was pleased with the initiatives that the Club has undertaken.

4. AOB

MN asked Forum Members to be Club Ambassadors and talk with other Members about the discussed subjects and bring back feedback. He invited them to not wait for the next meeting but to send him any feedback directly.

BN suggested a Roehampton Club email, which Members could use to communicate with the Forum Members. SO suggested individual emails, so Members feel more confident to share their thoughts with people they know. **MN will review with the IT provider.**

MN

CS wanted the Forum to recognise that it was the very first meeting. Once Forum Members start to discuss with other Members and bring feedback the communication will be effective.

VH and SO thought that the meeting has been very constructive.

SO asked for the breakdown of the membership by age group. AJ confirmed that in principle they were happy to share the information but had to confirm what they were allowed to share under the Equality Act 2010.

AJ thanked Forum Members for their time and contribution and he was looking for further progress.

BN suggested mentioning the new emails in the Recorder, so Seniors could contact the Forum Members. The Minutes of the meeting will be circulated to the SMF and published on the website.

DB reiterated that in order for the Forum to be effective, individual problems and operational issues should not be discussed at the meetings. He permitted his email to be circulated to Seniors.

RS thanked Board Members for joining and was pleased to meet Forum Members.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING: TBC – Friday in September 2021 at 2pm.