

Chairman's Report 2020

The year has been dominated by two things: the negotiations with Golden Hill Sports (GHS) and subsequent search for premises, and the ongoing shutdown as a result of the pandemic.

Just a few days after the 2019 AGM we received notice from GHS of their new terms, their aim being to increase income, from WoEBC and other hirers, to offset their investment in the refurbishment of the club. The new rates of hire were far more than we have paid hitherto, and substantially more than we could afford in the long term without a steady and unrealistic increase in income. GHS offered to negotiate, and this we did, in person and by email for over six months. We could agree on all terms except the rates of hire, where each increased offer we made was rejected. Eventually, in mid-December, GHS terminated the lease, giving the required notice and a final date to quit of 30 June 2020.

The committee then drew up a list of our requirements and began a search for new premises. I thank members for their suggestions. Many places were considered and visited throughout north Bristol and beyond. Very few could offer a suitable room for several sessions a week at a reasonable rate of hire. Naturally, the most attractive such places were already booked up. Eventually, with thanks to Chris Frew, we investigated the RAF Association (RAFA) club in Westbury-on-Trym. Their attractive main room with bar is used by RAFA members, but the potential of their downstairs 'games' room was spotted and discussions started.

The committee visited the club and was made welcome. We are now at the point where we have drawn up an agreement, awaiting only formal signature, to hire this room for the club on terms that are attractive to us but also will provide a steady income to RAFA. The room requires some refurbishment to make it suitable for playing bridge, and this has already started, with electrical work nearly complete and decorators lined up. The premises would have been ready for 1 July, but the date has slipped in the current circumstances.

The current circumstances, indeed, are that the clubroom at GHS is closed and the activities of the club are suspended until such time as national guidelines will permit us to reopen, in agreement with the RAFA club. I regret that the shutdown happened very suddenly: we had debated for only a few days about how long we could continue as the pandemic grew, when the matter was taken out of our hands by GHS closing the club with just a couple of hours notice on the evening of Monday 16 March. We retrieved a few items, such as the laptop, from the club, but our other equipment remains safely locked up there. We will purchase new card tables and storage cupboards for the new venue. Our other equipment will need to be moved out of GHS on some date in June and stored temporarily elsewhere.

Returning to the past year of play, I am pleased to note that most of our weekly sessions were averaging a healthy number of tables, with just a slight drop on Monday evenings. Those who enjoy our supervised play on Thursdays can play a competitive but relaxed game on Monday afternoons but are also moving into full duplicate sessions on Wednesday evenings, with some also playing teams on Fridays.

We note with sadness the passing of one of our members during the year: Adam Price.

I am grateful to the committee for their work during the year, particularly Jen for organising the social events held at Henleaze Bowling Club and Chris for being our main contact with the RAFA club, and to the four members co-opted onto the committee specifically to advise on the move to the RAFA club: Bernice Horseman, Dinah Moore, David Jones and Mike Huggins.

Alan Evans, May 2020