

WETHERSFIELD CLUB

Old Mill Chase, Wethersfield, Braintree, Essex, CM7 4EB

Minutes of AGM held on Friday 23 July 2021

The meeting was held in Wethersfield Village Hall, starting at 8.00 pm

There were 73 Members present.

Derek Martin, Acting Chairman, welcomed all to the meeting, advising that he would be chairing the Meeting for the evening, but passing to the Treasurer for the Motions and Amendments.

Minutes of Previous Meeting

The minutes of the previous AGM held on Friday 10 May 2019 had been distributed prior to the AGM. The Chairman asked for approval of the minutes from Members who were actually present at that meeting. A move to adopt the minutes was proposed by Mair Godley, seconded by Bill Norman. They were unanimously agreed, and the minutes signed by the Chairman.

Matters Arising

There were issues in the previous minutes about communication from the Club, all would be aware that the Club now had its own Facebook page and Website, which allowed a more effective way of communication and advertising for the Club.

The previous Minutes also recorded that at the time in 2019 the Club was in support of the CROWS initiative. CROWS was subsequently disbanded and the whole project reorganised as the Wethersfield Hub Group. Its proposed plans were set out in detail in the recent leaflet that distributed around the Parish.

This issue would be discussed in more detail later in the meeting.

Chairman's Report

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the Club AGM, arranged at last after the most difficult of periods in the Club's history and for all in the Village generally after the difficult period of the pandemic.

He advised that as Vice Chair he had taken the role of Acting Chairman for the Club for the time being. However, on behalf of all those present and Members who could not attend, he thanked Cliff Stevens for all his hard work in support of the Club during his time as Chairman, particularly during the last 16 months. This had been much appreciated by the Committee and as a gesture of thanks Cliff was now an Honorary Life Member of the Club.

The Chairman focussed on what had been a difficult year for the Club, for the Village and for the country as a whole, and that we had come through it relatively unscathed in terms of the financial position of the Club/Shop was down to the hard work and continued effort and enthusiasm from several people. However, in particular this had been achieved through the work put in by Matt Suckling and Kim Patmore in relation to setting up the Club Shop and bringing it through to the position it was in now.

Sincere thanks went to Matt and Kim for all the work they had done, from initially providing home deliveries to now having a fully functional shop in place. Those who use the Shop would have seen the changes that have been made over this period, and with the financial support of so many in the Village who have given donations to help with the refurbishment, the transformation has been amazing. A total of £6,199.70 was raised and thanks go to a great many people for the work carried out in the Shop, in particular to :

Mark Rayner – Plastering
Wayne Kennedy - Electrics

Martin Lee & Saffron Plumbing - Radiators
Paul Bragg - General Building
Derek Martin – Donation of Paint and painting
Damian Barber (otherwise known as Jacko) - Painting
Ritchie Morris - Painting
Roy Patmore - Shop Counters
Jason Williams - Carpentry
John Barker - General helper
MKM Haverhill – Donation and supply of materials
Chris McCloud – Donation of Paint
Charlotte and Steve Tilbrook – donation of a freezer

The Members present thanked both Matt and Kim in the usual way for all their tireless efforts over the last 16 months and as a token of appreciation the Chairman made presentations to Matt for him and Kim, who was unable to attend the meeting.

The Chairman advised that the Club had eventually qualified for the Government grants that were made available through Braintree District Council, and that we owed a debt of thanks to Cliff Stevens for pursuing these grants over time after registering the Club to get its own rateable value. These grants had helped keep the Club afloat, but the Shop had provided the basis of income to keep both running as best as possible over this whole period. It had proved a huge benefit to the Village, not only as a physical shop, but also by way of deliveries 7 days a week if required. The loyal support of the Village has been there for all to see. If the Shop had not been operating the financial position of the Club would have been seriously impacted, despite the grants given.

The Chairman advised that the Club Shop now had full planning permission, which provided a great deal of stability moving forward, with the hope it would go from strength to strength.

Whilst dealing with the refurbishment of the Shop, the kitchen had also been finished, which provided a big opportunity for the Club to do food in the future. The Chairman advised that details of these plans would be provided in due course.

The Chairman advised that the Treasurer would provide details of the financial position of the Club shortly but that he wished to thank him for all the work that he had undertaken throughout this tough year, he had done a fantastic job and the Committee were most grateful to him.

Neither he nor the Club Secretary had taken any remuneration for their work for several years now, and the Chairman asked that the meeting thanked them in the usual way for all their work over this year in particular.

He also wished to thank the Treasurer's wife, Madeleine, for all her support to him during this period, her patience had been amazing. Madeleine was presented with some flowers as a token of the Committee's appreciation.

The Members showed their appreciation in the usual way.

Finally, the Chairman advised that Members had never had a chance to vote on the decision to open a Shop during the pandemic, it just happened through circumstance. He would now hand the chair to the Treasurer to work through the next part of the proceedings.

Motions to Members

The Treasurer started this part of the proceedings by advising that the Club Shop currently had stock to the value of £4k, and capital of c£2k. In the course of the last few weeks the decision had been taken to withdraw the Club's VAT registration, and this now meant that the Shop now had a surplus of £2k. The withdrawal of the VAT registration would be an asset to the Club as well as the Shop, although initially it would create more work going back through the books to amend accordingly. All present acknowledged this change of situation.

The Treasurer advised that through the next part of the Agenda he wished to make sure that any debate was orderly, respectful, and democratic. If he felt things were getting out of hand, he would have no hesitation in suspending the meeting, should it become necessary. He advised that the constitution as such did not allow for absentee votes, but that many had submitted their votes in their absence ahead of the meeting and he would take these into account should the voting be close or tied. He advised that he intended to ask for speakers both for and against any motion/amendment, and that each speaker would have 3 minutes to make their point.

He asked the Members to confirm they were all in agreement with this procedure, this was received.

The details of each Motion and Amendment are on the attached schedule.

He moved to Motion 1, Proposed by the Committee and asked all present to vote on this Motion – this was carried unanimously.

Marijke Curtis asked if it was necessary to report every 6 months, rather than annually. The Treasurer advised he would rather the Members be fully appraised of the position of the Club/Shop in 6 months, noting that things are still uncertain after the pandemic. Following that 6 month review he would expect to return to an annual report.

Amendment 1

John Pearce addressed the meeting in relation to the Amendment to delay a decision on the Hub being taken by the Club for a period of six months. He had been unaware there would be a 3-minute time limit on any speaker. He advised he had several roles in the Village, representing the Parish Council on both the Hub Group and as a Trustee of the Village Hall CIO. He confirmed he was also a long-standing Club Member, and he was speaking only as a Club Member at this meeting. He acknowledged that the Village was wholly indebted to Matt and Kim for all the work they had done, and he believed they should be involved in the long-term future of the Hub development.

He gave a brief summary of the proposals, which include an extension across the front of the Village Hall with a retail outlet on the right-hand side, a new Club entrance providing lift and staircase entrance on the left-hand side, with the Hall in the centre of both. He felt there would be a better long-term future for the Club and the Shop if this amendment was supported.

His first point noted the regular review of the viability of the Club Shop and felt keeping the Hub option open would allow the post covid viability of the Shop to be clear, otherwise the Village may end up with no shop at all.

Secondly the Hub would offer many benefits to the Village – greater public presence of the Shop and Club, improved viability as a result of passing trade, accessibility to both the Shop and the Club, providing benefits to the Club long term.

Thirdly the Hub would resolve some longstanding problems of poor accessibility to those with mobility problems. The Hub would offer a high standard, modern way forward to deal with these issues in order to promote fairness, equality and access to all.

Fourth, the change of use to the Club Shop requires a new lease, considerations of restrictive covenants, environmental health standards and building regulations and he could not see how these would be achieved. Therefore, the Hub proposals should remain under discussion until these consents and agreements had been secured by the Club Shop.

The Hub proposals would present an opportunity for the Hall and the Club to move forward and explore new possibilities. He considered this was a strong reason for supporting the Amendment to allow more time to consider all options.

He was unable to make any further points as the Chair stopped him, having exceeded the time limit allowed.

In opposition Mair Godley suggested 6 months was too long to wait for any decision. So far 3 years had passed in respect of the CROWS/Hub proposal, but Matt and Kim had managed to build up and provide a full shop in just a matter of weeks. She considered that the grant money that would be needed to take forward any work would be better spent on those who had suffered such hardship and suffering during the pandemic, and she objected wholeheartedly to Amendment 1 and a deferment of 6 months. The meeting acknowledged her comments.

David Holliday addressed the meeting, advising he felt that Amendments 1 and 2 were complete opposites, and that Members could not be expected to vote on a proposal to stop everything now when it was not yet clear that the Club Shop would have a long-term future, nor was it clear exactly what the new plans would be with the Hub. He stated the plans needed to be thought through and that shutting the door on the project now would be a mistake. Long term the proposals could provide something that would be a better solution for the community if there was further investigation and discussion. He advised he would be extraordinarily disappointed if Members voted against the deferral for 6 months.

Penny James advised that she felt Amendments 1 and 2 were too extreme to decide what would be the best way forward. She considered that deferring any decision on the Hub would give those involved a chance to put proposals out to people, possibly amended from those in place at present, in particular in relation to the disabled access. As a result of the pandemic, she felt it would be beneficial to look at alternative plans and time was needed to do that.

Mair Godley advised it should be possible to provide access for those with mobility needs in the Club without the proposed development and felt that this had not been looked into in enough detail.

Pam Price spoke to express her opinion that the option of using the Playing Field as a location for a village shop should be looked at in more detail. She felt this would be a more practical place to have a shop.

The Treasurer looked to obtain a vote on Amendment 1 but those in attendance did not feel able to vote on this Amendment or Amendment 2 regarding withdrawal of agreement from the Club on the Hub utilising the cellar space without further information.

Hamish Everitt asked that all the Amendments be read through initially as some had not seen the full Amendments before the meeting.

Penny James asked that the Amendments be dealt with in reverse order as this would allow a more logical review of each. The Treasurer agreed to reverse the order of the Amendments accordingly.

Amendment 4 - seeking statutory approval for planning, regulatory, catering facilities, and also exploring mobility access.

Nick Godley advised he was not speaking as Chairman of the Parish Council but as a Village resident. He spoke on these issues, in particular the need for mobility access. He considered it was possible to achieve this into the Club without the need for the Hub proposal. He confirmed that contact should be made with BDC to find a way forward to achieve greater accessibility.

Mike Kemp asked how the post office was able to get access by car to the Club Shop. The Chairman advised that this was with permission from the owners of the house next door, who allowed her to park behind the shop on a Tuesday and Friday afternoon. This was not a public access route and could not be considered to provide long term disability access.

The Treasurer asked for a vote on Amendment 4 seeking to address all regulatory issues and explore mobility access further. This motion was carried unanimously.

Amendment 3 - the option for the Club to enter into negotiations with the Parish Council within the next 3 months to ensure it is effectively concluded by August 2022. Changes are required to the lease to take

account of the Shop and catering options for the Club. The current lease is for 7 years, it would be intended to seek an extension to the least, perhaps to 10 years.

Nick Godley confirmed a new lease could not be agreed with the Club until the issue with the Hub proposals are dealt with.

The intention would be to report back to Members on the lease and other issues at the proposed extraordinary meeting of the Club planned for January 2022.

The Treasurer asked for a vote on Amendment 3 regarding the lease, this was carried unanimously.

Amendment 2 - the Club to withdraw its provisional agreement to allow the Hub to have access to the Club cellar.

Mair Godley proposed that the Club withdraw its support to providing this space, this was seconded by Marijke Curtis.

Penny James suggested that the Club needed to keep its full access space and that the Hub proposal could not run as it is now.

It was confirmed that the Club intended to look to provide more catering and the back cellar would be required for storage

David Holliday suggested it was very much a them and us situation between the Club and the Hub, he asked if there had been any discussion between the two organisations on any of the issues. The Treasurer confirmed that both sides had met previously for discussions.

Bill Norman considered that if there was support for Amendment 1 then Amendment 2 would automatically fall.

The Treasurer asked for a vote on Amendment 2 to withdraw the offer of using the cellar space. There were votes against and votes to abstain, but the Amendment was carried by a significant majority.

Amendment 1 -to defer the decision on the Hub proposal for 6 months. David Holliday proposed that this amendment should be agreed.

Penny James made the point that this was a Club AGM and not a public meeting for the Hub Group. As such the Hub could consider further options to find an alternative plan moving forward.

The Treasurer asked for a vote on Amendment 1, to agree to defer a decision on the Hub proposal for 6 months to allow further discussion - the Amendment was rejected by a significant majority.

The Treasurer handed the meeting back to the Chairman.

Motions 2 – 5, changes to be made to the Club Constitution

As detailed on the attached sheet. The Chairman referred to each individually. The Motions were voted and carried unanimously.

The Chairman thanked all present for their participation in this part of the meeting.

Secretary's Report

The Chairman handed over to the Secretary, who added her thanks to Matt and Kim for all their hard work over this period, and also to those involved in the refurbishment of the Club Shop. She also personally wished to thank Cliff Stevens for his work as Chairman, he had been a support to her in particular during this time.

She advised that obviously there had been no real activity in the Club over this last 16 months, but that it was hoped some clubs and societies would start up again soon. She confirmed that the Club had received a start-up grant from BDC and it was hoped to use some of that to help restart these organisations. She confirmed if there were any ideas from Members who would like to use the Club premises for a specific purpose then please get in touch with a member of the Committee.

She also advised that the Committee were looking for new members to join them, and if anyone was interested in helping take the Club forward then again, please speak to a member of the Committee.

Treasurer's Report

The Treasurer thanked everyone for all that they had done for the Club over the last few years, mentioning in particular Dave Benfield and Jimmy James, following which the Club had been able to build up significant reserves which had helped us cope through the pandemic.

He confirmed the figures for cash in the Bank for the last 3 years as follows :

£32,997	as at 31/3/2021
£38,853	as at 31/3/2020
£33,749	as at 31/3/2019

He believed the Club had dealt with the enforced closures quite well despite the obvious loss of income, not just from the bar but from all the societies that used the Club as a venue. He confirmed that as a Committee the Club intended to spend all the start-up grant on supporting clubs moving forward. He was aware the Ladies Darts team would no longer be using the Club as their home venue.

He wished to record specific thanks to Mick Nash for all his efforts in working with Cliff Stevens to pursue and obtain planning permission for the Club Shop, this had been greatly appreciated.

He advised he had managed to reduce several bills during the pandemic. He was now looking at seeking a better price for the electricity supply. Having the Club Shop based at the Club had proved synergy in obtaining stock for both venues, making things more cost effective. It was also covered now with the Club insurance. He hoped that the Club Shop would remain open for many years.

He thanked those present for their tolerance during this difficult period.

David Holliday asked for clarification on the Audited Club Accounts which would normally be presented at the AGM. He presumed the Members present would not be asked to vote on the report just provided. The Treasurer confirmed this was the case, and he would be working on a completed set of accounts over the coming weeks.

The Chairman wished to express thanks to Rob and Eleanor Lambert for allowing the removal of all the materials and rubbish from the Club refurbishment out through their front driveway, this had been much appreciated, the meeting thanked them in the usual way.

Election of Committee

Derek Martin confirmed he would continue as acting Chairman for the time being. The situation regarding a new chairman for the Club would be addressed in due course. Proposed – Jimmy Dobson, seconded by Gary Hitchings. Unanimously approved by Members present.

The Chairman asked Julia Broad to confirm she would be prepared to continue as Secretary, she was happy to continue. Proposed – Julian Burton, seconded Dave Nightingale. Unanimously approved by Members present.

The Chairman asked Dave Price to confirm he would be prepared to continue as Treasurer. He confirmed he would although would be happy to hand over to anyone who would like to come forward for the position.

Proposed – Jimmy James, seconded Bill Norman. Unanimously approved by Members present.

The Chairman advised that the remaining Members of the Committee were Jon Birks, Paul Bragg, Matt Suckling and Kim Patmore and asked for agreement from the meeting to the existing committee. Proposed – Dave Price, seconded Bill Norman. Unanimously approved by Members present.

Any other business

Bill Norman asked if the change in the quorate numbers from 40 to 30 discussed at the 2019 AGM had been implemented. This would be clarified, and the decision notified to Members in due course.

A question was raised on confusion with the name of the Club. It was confirmed it had not been operating as the Wethersfield Men's Club for several years and was now referred to as the Wethersfield Club in all correspondence.

The comment referring to the perception of the Club as a rear alley Men's Club in the Hub Leaflet had been of major concern to the Club. The Treasurer confirmed that the Hub Group had publicly apologised for the comments made in this regard.

Mair Godley suggested the start up grant could be used to fund a new promotion of the Club to all, encouraging everyone to visit, ladies in particular. She also suggested that the entrance to the Club could be improved on to create a more welcoming environment.

The Treasurer confirmed that the start up fund of £7.5k could be put to such a promotion and improvement.

The Chairman advised of the new opening hours for the Club starting on Monday, to run through to the end of September.

Penny James suggested the Club could look to open during the day in some way, especially if lunches could be provided. The Treasurer confirmed this was a possibility being looked into, and it was hoped there would be food theme nights set up moving forward.

Matt Suckling wished to thank the Executive Committee, the full Committee, and all Members for their support during this difficult period for the Club and looked forward to welcoming everyone back over the coming weeks.

The Chairman confirmed that all Members in attendance would be entitled to a complimentary drink in the Club this evening.

It was confirmed all should leave the Hall as soon as possible so that the premises could be fogged to sanitise all chairs and surfaces ahead of the WCA Saturday social the following day.

The Chairman thanked all for attending and closed the meeting at 9.30 pm.