

From: Hugh Bray <hughbray@kba.org.uk>
Sent: 19 November 2021 10:04
To: hughbray@kba.org.uk
Subject: Chester Croquet Club. Planning Meeting January 14th 2022

Dear Members,

Deep breath, suitable drink to hand, this is a long email.....

It was with great reluctance that your Committee decided not to go ahead with our usual end of season social gathering and presentation of trophies (held in the past few years at Chez Jules) for Covid safety reasons. We hope instead to hold a similar event in the new year before the start of the 2022 season. We also want to reintroduce the "Planning Meeting" which used to be a regular end of year event providing an opportunity for open discussion between members and the committee about a wide variety of topics concerning croquet and the Chester Croquet Club particularly. Whilst this also has to await the New Year, it is important that it happens early enough to enable the Committee to discuss further any matters that arise at the meeting before the AGM at the end of February. Hence the date of January 14th (7.30pm) The venue will be the Westminster Park Community Centre, Five Ashes Road, which is located next to the Belgrave Primary School, and opposite the shops in Westminster Park (that's the housing area, not the park !). Further information on the arrangements will follow.

The Planning Meeting is not the same as the AGM, which is the more formal meeting held under the club's constitution, at which significant decisions related to the running of the club are made by members through voting. However, your committee benefits from hearing the views of club members generally and debating suggestions on a wider stage. Whilst committee members may pick up suggestions and views from individual members whilst on the lawns, the opportunity to discuss these views, ideas and problems (yes. including grumbles !) in an open forum, is helpful and welcome, and will advise the committee's decisions at subsequent meetings as well as those put forward for approval at the AGM. We try to be an inclusive club, where the members feel able to contribute ideas and views to the committee, but we feel that the pandemic has severely curtailed the informal get-togethers which enable that participation, and has also limited open discussions at the AGM. So we hope that many of you will be able to come along to the Planning Meeting and share your views with us.

Experience has shown that some structure is needed even at an "open forum", and I have identified a number of "topics" that might provide a focus for your thoughts (and will certainly help me !) But please do not be constrained by these headings. Feel free to raise other issues or topics which you feel are relevant. Clearly it would be helpful if you could share with us any contribution that you wish to make, before the actual meeting. Doing so by responding to this email will enable other members to consider your suggestions, and this will be particularly useful for those members who will not be able to attend the meeting but would like to contribute to the debate. Hence the early circulation of this email, giving us nearly two months for a sharing of ideas through emails..... and it provides a diversion from Xmas of course .

The Organisation of the Club: Do you have any thoughts or suggestions on the way the club is organised. Would any member like to join the committee, or do you have a particular skill or interest to offer.

Background : The club is run by volunteers. Overall management is in the hands of the Committee with specific Officers (Chair, Secretary, Treasurer) and others who take on particular roles (Membership Secretary, Publicity and Recruitment, Equipment, Catering, Grounds and Maintenance and liaison with the Council, lawn setting out and adjustments, web site and calendar updating, liaison with Croquet Association and the N.W Federation). And of course there are volunteers who do not serve on the committee, such as the Safeguarding Officer, and members of the Social Committee, and those that assist the equipment officer and help with ground maintenance, catering and cleaning activities and help to run events. New committee members are welcome, bringing fresh ideas and skills to the table and enabling long serving members to stand down, but we also depend on volunteers from the wider membership to ensure the day to day running of the club and its events are successful. An AGM is held at the end of February.

Weekly Playing Arrangements: Do you have any comments on the playing arrangements during the week, and suggestions on how they might be varied in 2022.

Background: Traditionally we have structured the week to enable both AC and GC players to "roll up" and be confident of a game on particular days. In addition we have reserved periods for both AC and GC coaching. The organisation of the roll ups varies from year to year, as does the particular days chosen, taking into account the potential for league matches to be played either on weekdays or at the weekend. Thus this year Mondays 10-5 was predominantly for AC, Tuesday 10-1 for GC, Weds 1-5 for AC, and Thurs 10 - 1 for GC. In addition Friday mornings were reserved for this year's new players to practice both AC and GC, and Friday afternoons for those players wishing to play in the GC Handicap and Level Play teams. For part of the season some lawns on Tues evenings were reserved for AC "improvers" sessions. At all other times (when matches or events were not happening) the lawns were available for open play through the on line booking system. This system was started as a result of the need to conform to Covid regulations. Prior to this, outside the reserved sessions shown on the calendar, members were free to play without the need to book (assuming of course there was a lawn free at the time they arrived to play)

Matches Tournaments and Events : Your ideas and suggestions on participation in these activities and any additional events we might explore would be welcome.

Background: The club is a member of the NW Federation of Clubs, which is part of the national body, the Croquet Association. You are all members of the Croquet Association through your membership of CCC. We enter teams to compete in a range of AC and GC leagues run by the Federation throughout the North West and into North Wales. In addition there are a variety of tournaments held at different clubs in the area which individuals can enter. Chester hosts some of these events. There are also national competitions, organised through the Croquet Association in which members can participate. Internally we hold a variety of competitions through the year for our own members. These have been more difficult to organize during the pandemic, but hopefully next season we can roll out the full range, and also include those new competitions which have been introduced this year very successfully. All these activities are crucial to developing the character and quality of the club, and improving the standards of croquet played by members. They are also good fun. In addition we try to host events for the local community and to support charities. All these activities of course take up lawn space, need to be organized, and crucially need participants !

Recruitment: How might we modify our recruitment process and beginner introductions and how might we attract new players, particularly into the AC section .

Background: Each year we hold Taster Sessions early in the season, followed by some form of beginners course(s) for new members. The way this is managed varies year to year depending on the views of the new members of the previous year, those members who ran the courses and the level of recruitment success. This year was particularly successful in terms of numbers of new members, and the standard of play they have achieved in their first year. However, the number of players taking up AC has been repeatedly low year on year, and consequently the number of AC players in the club is falling which does not bode well for the future. Playing AC is a vital part of the club's history and its ongoing role on the regional and national stage, and we have some excellent AC players within the club. But new players are needed if we are to maintain our participation in regional and national events, and improve our standard of play generally.

Club Facilities: Do you think there are any problems with the facilities of the club ? How might they be improved ?

Background: The club has four lawns and a club house. The grounds are rented from the Council, which maintains the lawns and surrounding hedges and fences (with assistance from members of the club), and we hold the pavilion under licence from the Council. This pavilion is shared with the bowlers on the adjoining greens, and under the licence we have a duty to maintain and care for the inside of the pavilion whilst the Council is responsible for the maintenance of its overall fabric and the services provided. We are therefore very dependent on the actions of the Council and these in turn reflect any funding issues that the Council might face. The club provides and maintains all the equipment for play, though members are encouraged to buy their own mallets if they intend to play regularly.

Club Funding: What should the priorities be for the use of the clubs funds, in addition to the day to day running of the club, the support of its players, and the maintenance of its equipment

Background: The club is funded primarily by the membership subscriptions which are set at the AGM each year. The income is used to cover a number of necessary expenses, including the clubs affiliation to the CA and membership of the NW Federation, insurance, rent to the Council, maintenance of equipment, catering items, trophies, running tournaments, publicity, website development, supporting players playing nationally etc. At the moment it does not have to fund the maintenance of the lawns, though occasionally it is willing to contribute as appropriate when work is needed that the Council is unable to fund. Many clubs have to undertake their own grounds maintenance and this would be a major additional expenditure should it prove necessary for us in the future (for example as a result of a change in Council policy). Also, it should be noted that during the period of the pandemic the income from subscriptions dropped significantly and the availability of some financial reserves proved to be very useful.

Social Activities: Once "normality" returns, should we look to resuming social activities, including those of a non croquet nature. Any ideas ? Would anyone like to be part of a separate "social committee" to consider and organize such activities

Background: We are naturally a sociable bunch of folk, and prior to the pandemic we held a variety of social events, not always croquet orientated. (e.g visiting places of interest, quizzes, bridge nights, skittle evenings) These were run by a sub group of the Committee supported by other non committee members of the club. We have also held or supported a number of croquet events within the club involving groups in the local community and/or raising funds for charity.

Any other Topics/Issues: The above ideas may not cover every subject. Suggestions for additional topics welcomed.

Please do give some thought to the above topics, and any other matters you feel should be considered, and I look forward to receiving your thoughtspreferably in the form of an email. But of course whilst play continues there is also an opportunity to discuss and test out ideas with other members face to face.

Many thanks in anticipation

Jayne