

## Pythouse Club Annual General Meeting

Held at the Clubhouse

At 9.30am on Saturday 26th July 2025

**Present:** General Committee members:

Josh Berry (JB) – Chairman and Proprietor

Tony Stredwick (TS) – Deputy Chairman

James (Carter) (JC) – Chairman Tennic Committee

Rita Howcroft (RH) – Championships Organiser

Hugh Macnair – Committee member and acting Secretary

Apologies had been received from:

Lesley Small – Treasurer

Christine McKillop – Membership Secretary

Emma White – Safeguarding

Bede Grossmith – Secretary

The meeting was attended by the following members of the club:

Morag Macnair

Nick Wright

Patrick Craig-McFeely

Julian Berry

Ros Shallcross

Lindsay Brooke

Susanna Munro

Caroline Bond

Hamish de Bretton-Gordon

Julia de Bretton-Gordon

Venetia Wright

Polly Sealy

Dale Strachan

Neil Howcroft

Lorraine Connell

1. **Welcome.** TS welcomed those attending and explained the apologies.

2. **Minutes of 2024 AGM.** These had been circulated and were agreed without further comment.
3. **Membership report.** TS gave the report from CM. The Club had lost members over the last 2 years and was down 10% on the previous year. However, revenue had remained static reflecting the increase in fees. Current membership was 270 Adults and 70 juniors and young adults. It was important to understand the fall in figures, but the Club Spark database was difficult to interrogate. The Club clearly needed some initiatives to recruit new members, and this would be discussed by the committee. Nick Wright enquired whether leaving members had been given any form of questionnaire to find out their reasons for leaving. TS said that many people reported their reasons when resigning, but agreed a more deliberate approach might be helpful.
4. **Accounts.** TS read out the Treasurer's report:
  - Review of 2024-25 Accounts
    - The accounts to Feb 2025 show an increase in income over expenditure of &17.8k. This is slightly better than forecast at last year's AGM.
    - After splitting the cash surplus 50/50 with the Estate, closing reserves were at 28.02.2025 were £47.2k.
    - Membership revenue was down 3% on 2023-24 (£1.2k). Given the fees increase in 2023-24 this is disappointing as it indicates that membership numbers were down overall.
    - Rental income double, solely due to increased rental for yoga classes.
    - Utility costs have been kept in check by switching supplier and using an 'off-peak' tariff. This will continue to be monitored.
    - There have been saving on Marketing /PR as PR spend ceased towards the end of 2023-24. Further savings are expected in 2025-26 as regular marketing costs also ceased in March 2025.
    - There has been an increase in the cost of grounds maintenance as the Estate now undertakes to mowing and hedge cutting costs have increased.
    - An increase in IT/Website costs is due to a late invoice for hosting, covering 2 years.
    - The Floodlight project saw costs in the region of £3k in 2024-25, with a further £1k spent so far in 2025-26 (this is in line with the estimate of £5k given by TS at last years AGM).
  - Looking Forward 2025-26
    - As of the end of June 2025. Membership is now on par with last year's annual revenue, which again given the fees increase continues to be of concern. A lot of work has gone into sorting out the membership database to determine the exact number of members and the demographic of our membership. More needs to be done to determine where we are losing members and understanding the reasons why.
    - Suffice to say that membership revenue is still our main income stream from which to generate funds for boosting the reserves required for ongoing maintenance and any future projects.

- The reserves brought forward from 2024-25 have been significantly depleted following the payment for resurfacing courts 1 and 2 and there will be increased cost for maintaining the new surface and we have signed a three-year contract for three visits per annum.
  - Initiatives to get more income from the bar social events would help cover some of the ongoing running cost and maintain reserves.
  - Income from the club tournament is up on last year which is positive. However if a Club Spark system of payment entry for next year is being considered then the increased costs of using this payment system may need to be factored into the entry fee for next year's competition.
  - Revenue from coaching is still just about break even when we factor in finance fees associated with the coaching booking system. If we can expedite the new coaching contract, that would eliminate much of the Strike finance fees, bringing in more revenue and relieve the admin burden.
  - In addition to rental income from consistent yoga bookings the hire of the clubhouse to 'Exeat' for the recent clothing sample sale was welcomed.
  - At this stage, I'm not aware of any extraordinary cost on the horizon that have not been factored into the forecast for the end of this financial year.
  - If this stays true then I anticipate closing reserve at the end of 2025-26 to be in the region of £42k.
- Discussion.
    - It was asked whether the Clubhouse was still available for hire. TS explained that as the costs of marketing the Club had been in excess of any rental income, the Committee had decided to cease actively marketing clubhouse as a venue. It remained available if members' usage allowed, but use by members had a higher priority. Approaches to use the club by members of the public came generally by email to [info@pythouseclub.co.uk](mailto:info@pythouseclub.co.uk), which was monitored by HM who forwarded emails to the appropriate committee member, or by phone message, which was monitored by TS.
    - TS explained that Lesley Small, for personal reasons, would be standing down as the Club Treasurer. He said she had done a great job, and put out a plea for any willing and qualified volunteer to take her place.

5. Safeguarding. TS read out EW's report:

- I am pleased to report that there have been no safeguarding issues raised during the past 12 months. We continue to be committed to ensuring that Pythouse is a safe and inclusive environment for all our club members, but in particular for children and anyone who is vulnerable for whatever reason.
- Last Autumn we successfully renewed as a registered venue, which requires compliance with the LTA's safeguarding requirements concerning safeguarding policies, safeguarding awareness, safeguarding culture, appropriate checks in place regarding staff, coaches and volunteers, and risk assessment in relation to activities at the club.
- The main safeguarding risk that we have is in relation to children's activities. These are handled by experienced, accredited coaches who have received training in safeguarding.

- As many of you will be aware, we are hosting an LTA junior tournament on Sunday. I would reassure members that the safeguarding side of this is handled by the LTA direct.
- We are planning to hold a junior match or two in the coming months, and appropriate risk assessments will be made in respect of these in advance.
- I am always happy to receive input or feedback from club members

6. Tennis Committee report. JC gave the following report:

- 'I would like to thank all members of the tennis committee for the tremendous support that they have provided over the past year. Running the club is a team effort and relies heavily on volunteers who donate their time generously.
- Social Tennis. This continues to be the backbone of the club and I am hugely grateful to Hugh and Morag Macnair for the fantastic work that they do supported by Helen Kirkland with the Tuesday session. I am also grateful to all those members who host Saturday Social Tennis and provide a consistently high standard of refreshment.
- Club Championships. Rita Howcroft has again done an exceptional job with the club championships and seems to bring an increased amount of energy each year. The club championships form such a valuable part of the club and the standard of competition has seriously improved since they were started. Next year we will be looking to run them with direct entry into the LTA system to reduce the administrative burden for Rita.
- Tournaments. Teresa Taylor-Woolf did an amazing job of organising the Early Summer Tournament which was due to run on Saturday 7 June but was postponed due to rain until Saturday 12 July. Teresa will also be running the Late Summer Tournament on Saturday 6 September. The tournaments provide members with an excellent social opportunity and to make new connections within the club.
- Play Your Way to Wimbledon. For the first time we were able to run qualifying events at the club. Lorna Wood and Claudia Aaron won the regional final and will play at Wimbledon in the national final which takes place in August.
- League Teams.
  - a. Sarum League. The A team have won Division 2 with the only loss in a very tight match against a strong Salisbury A team. The B team have finished second in Division 3 and are also likely to be promoted. The new O60 Mixed Team have won that division. Lorraine Connell and Lesley Small have done an excellent job of managing the B team and O60 team respectively.
  - b. Shaftesbury League. Tony Stredwick, Martin Smith and Teresa Taylor-Wolff respectively have done a magnificent job of looking after the A, B and C teams in this league with the A team 6 points ahead of Marnhull A and favourites to win Division 1 with one match to play.
  - c. Dorset League Men's O60. Stephen Lansley has continued to do an great job of running this team.
  - d. Dorset League Ladies' Team. Polly Sealy has taken over as captain of this team in Division 5 of the Dorset League and has done a fantastic job.
  - e. Winter Teams. We will be running two Mixed teams in the Sarum League; Ladies', Men's O45, Men's O60 and two Mixed teams in the Dorset League and a Mixed team in the Shaftesbury League.

- Coaching. Dimitri Antoniou continues to do an excellent job of leading the coaching team with strategic support from Ian Jerrard. The coaching team also includes Ben Joy and Tom Allen. The club is lucky to have three quality coaches and there is strong participation in junior coaching on Saturday mornings with groups running at 9 and 10. We are offering summer holiday camps over three weeks this year with the first camp fully subscribed.
- LTA Junior Competition. We are hosting an Under 18 Grade 5 tournament at the club tomorrow to provide an opportunity for some of our juniors to get competition experience.
- Membership. I would also like to thank our Membership Secretary Christine McKillop for her contribution to the Tennis Committee. Membership Secretary is a very busy job when renewals come around and Christine worked really hard at renewal time with the ClubSpark system to ensure that memberships were renewed with support from Helen Kirkland whilst she has been away over the summer.'

7. Croquet project. Julian Berry (father of the Chairman) was introduced, and he explained his proposal to develop croquet as an activity for the Club.

- A survey of Club members had indicated support by 80%, with others not against croquet but rather more interested in other priorities.
- He envisaged 2 lawns, positioned between the current tennis courts, and had identified equipment to support the project. This included a Hector Brilliant mower, capable of a 5mm cut, a white line marker and a roller already on the Pythouse Club premises. The Club would need to construct a small hut to hold the equipment, but with volunteers, he believed this could offer a usable facility by spring 2026.
- A 3 phase programme was suggested:
  1. Build shed and procure equipment.
  2. Flatten the lawn areas by rolling
  3. Enhance the grass surface by weeding, reseeding and feeding.
- The likely cost would be around £6000, of which 50% would be borne by Pythouse Estate, and 50% by the Club, of which half would be set against the excess income divided between the Club and Pythouse Estate. Therefore the Club's Reserve would need to pay for only 25% of the costs. It was hoped that this development could lead to increased membership for the Club, and it was envisaged that the Club would have to offer a special Croquet only membership.
- It was suggested that the equipment for the croquet lawns could also be used to develop some (possibly 3) grass tennis courts beyond the croquet lawns. It was felt that planning permission would not be needed, with nets for tennis courts being only temporary seasonal structures.

8. Floodlight project.

- TS said that he preferred the term 'Court lighting' to 'Floodlights'. He gave a short update on the project:
  - The ecological surveys were in progress and would be complete in September. Initial indications are that the site has an extensive and varied bat populations.
  - A survey had been conducted of the club membership. Of 135 members asked, 50% had replied, with 65% in favour and 30% opposed.
- Extensive discussion then took place. Morag Macnair and Julian de Bretton-Gordon expressed strong concern about the project. Their scripts are attached. Concerns centred

around conservation issues, covering primarily the impact on bats and the Dark Sky Reserve. TS pointed out that the project was not intended to disregard these issues, but to fit in around them.

- It was asked whether consultation had taken place with other clubs to gauge the practical effect on membership numbers of the installation of court lighting. Anecdotal evidence of those attending suggested a mixed attitude among other clubs.

- TS closed the discussion by pointing out that the Committee had still to decide whether to continue with the project and this would happen in September/October when the results of the ecology surveys was known. Up until this, the Committee have been only exploring the art of the possible, and that only limited investment had been undertaken.

9. Treasurer position. TS emphasised the importance of finding a suitable candidate for the important Treasurer position, and asked members to spread the word among friends and fellow members who might help.

10. AOB. There being no further business the meeting finished at 10.47 am.

### **Morag Macnair comments on Proposed floodlights at Pythouse Club**

As an active member of this club, I want our charming rural tennis club to be successful, but not to the detriment of the environment, the dark skies status of the Cranborne Chase National Landscape, and alienating our neighbours.

Sitting as it does in the middle of the countryside, in a dark skies reserve, and bearing in mind that the original planning permission for this clubhouse states very clearly that no external lights were to be allowed, it seems inconceivable that the idea of floodlights at Pythouse Tennis Club has been mooted.

To quote the original grant of planning permission “No lighting will be erected on the site, outside the residential curtilage hereby approved. REASON: To protect bat habitat from being illuminated by lighting associated with the proposed community facilities.”

This area of West Tisbury parish in which are privileged to live is the Cranborne Chase National Landscape which became the 14<sup>th</sup> Dark Skies Reserve across the globe in October 2019 and joins an exclusive club of International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Protected Areas to gain international recognition for its dark skies.

I know that many neighbours are preparing to object to this ill-conceived potential planning application: the Murrays of Pythouse have hired a planning consultant, and the de Bretton-Gordons - who will be the most impacted - are preparing to object in the strongest terms. I will certainly object as a private individual and, for those who know, if required, I will stand down from West Tisbury Parish Council in order to object to any planning application for floodlights. The Cranborne Chase National Landscape will, no doubt, object to any planning application involving floodlights.

In this small community of West Tisbury, I find it disturbing that some members of the Committees of our lovely little tennis club are willing to go against the wishes of their neighbours.

Furthermore, and perhaps more importantly, putting in a planning application involves a considerable sum of money for professional fees, ecology surveys and so on. I understand that the proposed plan is to fundraise via the members for the considerable cost of (a) putting in a planning application and (b) the further cost of installing floodlights. Any planning application for floodlights in this dark corner of Wiltshire will be vigorously opposed by neighbours, many residents of West Tisbury, and national bodies. The outcome is by no means certain.

It is important that members of Pythouse Tennis Club are aware of the costs involved when the outcome is questionable. I ask that this important point is made clear to the membership.

## Julia de Bretton-Gordon Notes for Pythouse Tennis Club AGM 2025

I would like to thank the committee for giving me the opportunity to speak this morning.

The USP of this club must be its glorious rural, ancient parkland setting. It sits in a National Landscape and an International dark sky reserve. One of only 22 on the whole of the planet. The site is also of significant ecological importance - containing species of national importance and is set within a Special Area of Conservation.

I am speaking today as a Chartered Planning and Development surveyor, so familiar with the planning system. I am also speaking from personal experience of developing this site in connection with the landowner.

For those NOT aware the current planning consent which covers the whole site was conditional on the basis that "no lighting will be erected outside the residential curtilage"

REASON : To protect bat habitat being illuminated by lighting associated with the proposed community facilities.

Getting a planning authority to go completely against their own decision I think will be an expensive and tall order.

As an estimate of likely fees the club will incur, based on my professional experience:

Pre application £2k

4 stage Ecology report as requested by the council 3-4k

Lighting design £3k

Planning Consultant to prepare and submit a - design and access statement, and planning application - £4-5k

I would say as an absolute minimum the club are looking at fees of £10-£15,000 with,

lighting scheme of 9x 6.9m high floodlights. (roughly 2.5 x higher than the netting around the court - with a lighting level of 500 lux which I understand from Tony is to LTA competition standard.

The council ecologist has already warned that the proposal 'has potential to result in a significant adverse impact' on the Special Area of Conservation and 'must demonstrate no net loss of functional habitat for bio diversity'

FYI we have a confirmed maternity, hibernation and day time roost in our house and garage. The hedge line immediately adjacent to cts 3 and 4 was a major commuting and foraging route for bats from Pyt house with over 13 15 species. That's almost every type of bat species in the UK.

I understand the justification for this proposal is to continue the junior coaching programme having built up ahead of steam over the summer holidays.

However many of the children I know, who are members, attend private schools, which include tennis as part of their school curriculum, and many of them boarders, so are either catered for during term time or would be unable to attend evening coaching sessions. Hence the reason why they only attend holiday coaching.

I understand that younger children from the local primary schools are already have early evening lessons, straight after school and hence before dusk the majority of the year. The longest day of the year occurs during the Christmas break and hence day time lessons could continue to cover this period.

The demographics of the club includes many retired members who have the luxury of being able to play during the day.

With flexible working hours and working from home – this also gives members the flexibility to play during the day.

As neighbours of the club, we are here 360 days of the year 24 hours a day and able to see and hear when the courts are being used. When it is wet, windy and cold, the courts remain empty. I'm not sure why the committee think members will turn out in the dark, just because there are lights on a cold, wet, rainy, windy night.

The recent survey regarding floodlighting in my opinion was biased.

- It did not inform participants of the likely professional costs to push forward this application.
- It did not make them aware of the planning issues and likely risk
- There was no mention of the cost of installing the floodlights. I would estimate £40K.
- There was no mention of additional ongoing costs for their upkeep.
- Nor was mention of the cost to individuals wishing to hire floodlights courts.
- Most importantly there were no alternative proposals offered. Many members may feel that other than other initiatives to promote the club may be a better use of funds.

It seems to me that this urban lighting scheme is being pushed through for the benefit of just a few keen members and any money spent would be disproportionate and detrimental to other members.

As Tony knows the Nadder Centre who have two floodlit courts. They generally only have one booking a week during the winter, so shows little demand.. They would be delighted to work with the club during the winter offering to clean the courts, repaint the lines and replace the nets. So it would be a shame not to take advantage of this generous offer right on the doorstep.

It seems strange that the club have chosen to ignore the advice of the Managing Agent for the Pythouse estate, who formally a committee member of the club, has cautioned against this scheme.

FYI the Murray's, the owners of Pyt house, have engaged their own planning consultant. Their solicitor will also be looking at the section 106, the legal agreement which binds the operation of the tennis club with current Planning consent. We in turn have employed our own ecologist to undertake survey work to counter any lighting proposal and the Murray's have been recommended to do the same.

Finally ... have a email from James Carter stating 'we would not want to proceed with floodlights unless we are able to satisfy you in terms of design and impact of the lighting system'

Is the club therefore going to go back on their word, against the advice of the estate landagent and submit an application for a lighting scheme, which goes directly against the **very** condition which was imposed to protect this very special part of the landscape.

