

Bishop's Stortford Hockey Club

Chairman's Report 2020/21

On behalf of the Management Committee, it is my privilege to welcome members to our Annual General Meeting for the 2020/21 season. At the time of writing, it is hoped that we will be able to gather in person at the Herts & Essex Sports Centre on Monday 5 July but we will let you know if that changes and, like last year, we need to revert to a virtual format.

We are all by now well used to having to be flexible in the way in which we are leading our lives and our hockey has been no exception to that. Time has really flown by since the virtual AGM held at the beginning of last September and, unusually, at the start of a season. We started with high hopes and perhaps even some expectation of getting in the major part of the season despite the pandemic. The friendlies in September were played with more than the usual amount of enthusiasm given the lack of activity through the late spring and summer and this carried through to the start of the league season in late September. We were able to start socialising in the bar in October and enjoyed some excellent Saturday evenings... before an announcement at the end of October that November would be in lockdown leading to a very unusual hockeyless November. Of course, that was nothing as, after resuming some enjoyable hockey in December, we ended up locked down for January, February and March which resulted in the annulling of the Leagues for all of our senior teams.

Perhaps a result of the third lockdown was again an unusual amount of enthusiasm for late spring and summer hockey, which is continuing with very strong support from members.

Needless to say, like everyone and every walk of life, the club has faced some unprecedented situations and lots of challenges during the period since September. Given the reduction in hockey, the Committee took the decision to offer to members a refund of half of their subscriptions for the 2020/21 season. We are very grateful to the very large number of members who were able to afford to do so who decided to leave their money with the club. This has enabled the club to prepare with confidence as well as ambition (as to which see below) for the future.

We have sought to maximise our playing offering with the fixture secretaries, club captains and team captains of the senior sides working hard to arrange friendlies with local clubs – a chance to get back to our roots of simply playing the game for the enjoyment of it and allowing other local clubs to do so – and, on the junior side, the extension/deferral of the

second half of the junior coaching to the April to July period with, again, some provision for additional friendlies to give the junior members an opportunity to play some matches.

There has also been a considerable amount of liaison with our venues at Herts & Essex and Hockerill, both in relation to financial impacts and the need to continue to use pitches to a much greater extent outside what would usually be our season.

The fact that the season was aborted should not mean that the success that our teams enjoyed during the play that was allowed should be ignored. Far from it. The Club's senior sides were enjoying possibly their most successful League season of this century before it was annulled. I will leave the details to Richard Temple and Jack Wheaton's reports but as highlights: the Ladies' first team, having been promoted to Premier A, were in second place after a fantastic away win at Harleston Magpies and in one of the two places that would have got into the National League. The other ladies' teams continued to dominate, as we have become used to them doing. The men's sides were also having their strongest season for many years with the first team top of Division 1 and the second team top of Division 4. We also increased our playing numbers with six men's teams and eight ladies teams playing regularly on Saturdays and with strong numbers in squads.

I mentioned our ambition. How does this manifest itself in practical actions? Gregg Pettit was appointed as our new Director of Junior Hockey in September and has been working on a strategy to build on and improve our offering for Juniors. This would include the appointment of a Junior Committee to oversee the Junior Section which, I hope, will give some junior members an opportunity to partake in governance as an additional way of developing through their membership of the Club. Members may have seen that we are advertising for a Coach and Schools Outreach Officer who would spend the bulk of their time in schools, starting with Herts & Essex but also some time in the other local secondary schools and the local primary schools to seek to increase the playing of hockey in our state schools in and around Bishop's Stortford. Leading on from that, we aim to apply to become a "Talent Centre" under the new England Hockey Talent Development Strategy. We feel we are well positioned to fulfil the criteria for that and that it is an important part of the development of the Club to become one of the leading hockey clubs in East Anglia. In relation to the cash that has been retained from subscriptions, as well as helping to pay for the Outreach Coach, we are investing in a new state-of-the-art scoreboard for the Herts & Essex pitch which, as well as telling the score and being hopefully broadcastable on the television in the Club Room, would be capable of linking to a camera to show replays of goals and the like.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of the Management Committee and all of the other volunteers at the Club for the enormous amount of time and effort that they put into the running of the Club. We must remember that if it wasn't for them, none of us would be playing any hockey. Particular thanks to Jack Wheaton and Adam Farley for taking forward the tender process for new playing kit for the Club and to obtain a contract and relationship (with Mr Cricket Hockey) that we expect to prove more user-friendly for our members in obtaining kit quickly and reliably. That process in itself took many months. To Adam Farley (again) for working during the third lockdown to update the website and for patiently and valiantly continuing to work with the software provider on remedying the various glitches with ClubBuzz's "upgraded" site. To Pete Duffy for mastering the financial position of the Club with enormous energy and enthusiasm in his first year as Club Treasurer, helping us weather the financial challenges of Covid and then relentlessly engaging with members to ensure that everybody had paid their fair share in relation to subscriptions, etc. – again an enormous amount of time required. To Amy Duffy who, as well as being very reliable as the Club's Secretary, is managing the process of updating our supporting materials for our ClubMark status and for our Talent Centre readiness. To Jack Wheaton, who has done an excellent job in his first year as Men's Club Captain, even though what would surely have been very positive results have sadly been annulled. To all of the team captains, coaches and managers in all three Sections of the Club for your hard work and last, but by no means least, to all of the umpires, again, without whom we would have had no hockey to play.

That brings me to those who are finishing roles on the Management Committee. Richard Temple has led the Ladies' Section to some spectacular success in his three years as Ladies' Club Captain. Given that he is also the Men's Fixture Secretary, Club League Liaison Officer, often the de facto Umpire Liaison Officer, Girls U14 and Ladies coach, an umpire and has become one of our representative trustees in relation to the pitch at Hockerill, I am not surprised that DT feels that he needs to step back from the Ladies Club Captain role. His efforts are, as always, enormously appreciated and their success speaks for itself. The Club's Ladies' Section has never been in a stronger position.

Rachel Armitage has been our Junior Administrator for two years and has carried out a particularly challenging role with patience and enthusiasm. It is no easy task, but, again, vital to the running of our Junior Section and in turn to the Club given the importance of the Junior Section to the Club. We are very grateful to Rachel for her work.

Paul Round will be standing down from the role as Communications Officer. Until work commitments took Paul away from this role in recent times, we benefitted from e.g. a very informative weekly emailed newsletter and some great coverage in the local press. We are very grateful to Paul for that.

We are sorry to be losing Jilly McCarthy as Umpire Liaison Officer: Jilly started last season and showed some considerable ability to charm the Herts & Beds Umpires Association in relation to pool appointments for BSHC. Again increased work and also family commitments take Jilly away with our best wishes and thanks.

Here's to a full, uninterrupted season in 2021/22, with the bar open and maybe even some social events – if we can remember how to socialise!

As a final word, I would encourage everybody to get involved in the running of the Club. The spectrum of help could be taking up a role as Committee Member such Social Secretary or Communications Officer to assisting in discrete projects such as in pulling together a paper for a Talent Centre submission. We are in the process of adding information about the Committee, the roles of the various Committee Members and the minutes of our meetings onto the website to provide an indication of what is involved in the running of the Club and so that, in any event, members can see what the Committee is focusing on. We have lots of interesting developments coming up in the forthcoming season and all help would be gratefully received. It might even be fun!

Duncan Barber

BSHC Chairman