

AGM 2023 - Commodore’s Report

I am delighted once again to welcome everyone to our AGM and to provide this annual report.

As you will hear from our Treasurer, our club continues to operate on a sound financial base. Membership going forward appears to be relatively stable, although does appear to be very slightly down this year with current memberships as I write at 495, including around 50 new members, reduced slightly from the total of 525 at the same time last year. The key shift seems to be in family membership, with some people perhaps tightening their belts and switching to individual memberships, and others, broadly identifiable as new members that joined post COVID, deciding not to renew.

It won’t have escaped anyone’s attention that at the time of this year’s membership renewals we were faced with huge, anticipated rises in our energy costs of around 20%. With increases anticipated also in our other supplier costs and inflation also high, we projected a 10% increase in our cost base when budgeting for this year. A measure of our financial health is that we felt exceptionally able to cushion some of this increase and cover a proportion of this anticipated increase from our reserves, resulting in a membership subscription increase of 7% and no increase in boat fees.

While these pressures are reflected across many other clubs, individuals and families throughout the country, it is more important than ever that we continue to provide the wide range of varied activities in the friendly and welcoming environment that Chew Valley is renowned for, and to which we all contribute.

To this point, you will hear from our Vice Commodore’s report of the tremendous range of cruising, racing, training, youth and Junior activity etc that the sailing committee have organised and help coordinate over the year. Other activities like the popular family fun

day, Lake and Cake and Lunch on the lake operate alongside our full and varied racing calendar and range of open meetings.

You will also read in our Rear Commodores report of the huge amount of work being done to maintain and improve our clubhouse, to help minimise our ongoing costs, and to maintain and improve our premises to ensure they remain suitable for the future. I want to highlight the new Inclusive Changing room in the undercover store as an alternative, more private changing area for use by anyone that may want to use it, while the new dimmable and efficient LEDs in the main club house were widely appreciated by those attending our annual dinner earlier this month.

All this only happens with the support and hard work of not just your committee members, but also a raft of volunteers freely giving up time to help us deliver our program, maintain our club, pontoons and grounds, stock and run the club bar, arrange a constant stock of prizes, keep our RIBs and Committee Boat running, and manage our Dinghy Park. I often wonder if everyone really appreciates that our club is dependant entirely on voluntary work – nothing could take place without it.

I won’t attempt to try to single out any one individual to thank so instead would like to extend on behalf of the membership a huge collective thank you to everyone involved. And also, perhaps a gentle reminder to everyone once again that fulfilling your allocated club duties is a condition of membership and necessary so that we can all enjoy our sailing.

It can’t have escaped the membership that there have been a couple of significant challenges around our on the water operations over the year. Our Rear Commodore’s report highlights the new RIB pontoon recently installed and now in full use, which now has the additional benefit of using the same system as the Southern pontoon.

The second, more unexpected challenge, related to the loss of our Committee Boat, which was written off by a late summer storm following failure of her mooring. As I am sure most are now aware, we have already secured and have (almost) fully operational a replacement boat thanks to the prompt efforts of our new Bosun John Rogers. I am pleased to also report that our insurance claim has been successfully concluded with a settlement of £25,714 now paid to us. We are currently making plans for divers to restore the mooring to working order and are grateful to Bristol Water for their agreement to a second mooring along the northern shore in the lee of Denny Island as a potential safe harbour for the future.

In terms of plans going forward there are two specific areas that I would like to highlight in addition to those detailed in our Rear Commodore’s report.

The first relates to the automation of our entry gates where considerable time and effort has already been spent by way of background research and costing, and in discussion at General Committee and with Bristol Water to move this project forward. Despite all our best attempts Bristol Water recently advised us that they cannot provide any funding in this financial year to automate the entry gate immediately off Walley Court Road. This gate is used by not just us, but by fishermen, rangers and birdwatchers. Your General Committee are agreed that it would not be appropriate for us alone to fund the automation, nor to manage and control entry of this first gate.

While this will be disappointing to many members, it remains possible that we could still progress with automation of the inner gate alone. This has several advantages including improved accessibility, security, and data collection of who is entering our site. We could potentially use the entry system also to give entry to the clubhouse, and by using a combi padlock on the Walley Court Road gate dispense with the need for all members to hold a club key.

However, like all things it comes at a cost, estimated to be around £20-25k, and would not offer the advantages of all gate automation to which we had aspired. We are tabling a separate discussion later in this AGM to understand membership views on the desirability of moving this project forward for the inner gate alone.

The second relates to the trial on the use of electric powered ‘Jaffa’ style boats for training and coaching use. These are increasingly being used by inland clubs and several of us have visited All Aboard Watersports on Bristol Docks to see and use one in action. At the time of writing we are planning to finalise our position at a general Committee meeting to be held just before the AGM and I will provide a further update on this at the meeting.

In closing I would like to thank specifically everyone that serves on the General Committee for all your hard work and ongoing support, I truly appreciate it. Our roles can sometimes feel somewhat thankless, although they are a huge privilege and hugely rewarding. I am sure that the membership would like to take this opportunity and join me in thanking you for your hard work and commitment.

As always, there are a few people whose time on the Committee is now coming to an end, and so I would like to single out our Treasurer Sarah Harding, Duties Secretary Tom Skales, and new Members Rep Jo Muskat for their invaluable contributions of recent years. You will have noted in your packs that there are candidates for all these roles, and I anticipate welcoming all those to the new committee very shortly. Rosie Bowers, our Membership Secretary, was also hoping to stand down this year but has agreed to continue for another year until a replacement can be found. I am pleased however to report that Stuart Robertson has agreed to work alongside her to take some of the load for now, and we are also looking to split some of her ongoing responsibilities out to create a reduced membership role focussed more tightly on the annual renewal process and maintenance of our membership database.

Andrew Jones

Commodore

4/10/23