

Commodores Report to members AGM August 2020

You may think it strange that we have called the AGM for August this year. Unfortunately, our rules require us to do this. However with all the uncertainty that we find ourselves in at the end of July with future rules on social distancing, I do not want to put any of you at risk, so I ask you **not** to attend. We will not therefor have a quorum and can postpone the meeting until it is deemed appropriate to meet and when rules regarding social gatherings have been sufficiently relaxed. The Club will continue to be managed by existing committee members.

If someone had told me, at the 43rd AGM, that I would have to close the Club and postpone our 44th AGM because of a Bat in China, I would have sent for the men in white coats. We will all have had broadly similar experiences. We will look back on the events of this year as the greatest period of change that most of us will have encountered in our lives.

So how has the Club changed? In March we started to revise our operating procedures to prepare for the arrival of the Virus only to be hit with a closure notice. Furlough of staff, and small business grant proved a lifeline during the darkest hours. Business interruption insurance proved less helpful.

With the fast pace of change I decided we needed a small group of core people to make quick decisions. With agreement of Management Committee, I established a Crisis Team of myself, the Rear Commodore, Treasurer and Club Admin Manager. We communicated by virtual meetings on Whats App whenever decisions were needed. We have called on other Committee Members to help as we felt able to use their skills.

My initial fears, that we would not re-open this year, proved unfounded. Events of July looked like the light at the end of the tunnel. However the light turned out to be the head torch of a civil servant coming the other way with a wheelbarrow full of rules, regulations, "ifs and buts". Our bar was in pieces because the planned cellar refurbishment had been interrupted by lockdown.

There followed a herculean two weeks when Ema our Admin Manager and our Bar Supervisor Ewan, with the Crisis Team, several Committee members, and Rowers, digested the rules and prepared a huge risk assessment, designed an operating system allowing us to accommodate outside service for our members. They erected the Marquee, finalised a food concession, filled the cellar, rebuilt the bar and trained the staff. We opened outside to our members on 17th July. A huge "thank you" to those involved.

Is it very different? Oh Yes!

The pandemic hasn't gone away, it's still out there. Our core principles are to have a safe environment for our members & staff and confound the virus by social distancing, washing and sanitising. We have an enviably low infection rate in Newport, we aim to keep it that way, with your cooperation & understanding.

It may seem strange to have to sit all evening at one table, and not leap up when a friend appears. For the time being that is what must happen. There will come a time when we hopefully have a vaccine and all this will just be a memory. At the moment, we are all on probation. If we mis-behave we could go back to prison!

We had a further relaxation of restrictions on the 3rd August, allowing us to trade indoors. For the time being, we cannot envisage any change to our current procedures. Unless social distancing rules are radically altered, we will continue to offer seating outside the Club and in the marquee.

We have a new food offering for this year. Panaroma Asian Takeaway. Ordering is online via their website panaromaonline.com or via the downloaded app "Foodhub". Collection is at the BBQ shelter at the Club. Alternatively, you can eat outside the Club if a table is available. I have heard good reports from diners. I am halfway through the menu and can no longer blame lockdown for my expanding waste-line.

However, many challenges still remain. To operate safely, we currently need 5 staff at all times. This is going to increase our summer costs. Social distancing will impact on the numbers of persons we can accommodate on site at any one time and our ability to organise on water activities. We are hoping to run a short program of eight races up to August Bank Holiday. Doug Williams will email those interested once things are arranged. Please also take time to read the attached reports from Sailing and Boating Committee, Treasurer and Membership Secretary. They contain things I would have highlighted in more normal years.

We have so far been unable to recruit sufficient staff to open 7 days a week. We will review in September what we need to do to conserve our dwindling reserves through the winter. We must prepare for further disruption and a poor trading environment for at least a further year.

Let me finish on a positive note.

We are doing all we can to preserve our Club for the post Covid era. So far, I have every reason to believe we will succeed. It may not seem like normal now, but every change is there for a reason and gradually we will get back the club we know and love.

I could not have got through the past four months without the help & co-operation of the staff and Committee Members. They have seen this Club through the most unimaginable set of circumstances and we all owe them a big debt of gratitude.

Also, I am indebted to my dear friend Roger Howell, the Club Secretary, who's untimely death in June has deeply affected all who knew him. Roger was a larger than life character, who's council, analytical mind and especially his ability to punctuate my rambling reports, I will greatly miss. Our thoughts continue to be with his family.

Stay safe.

Tony Williams

Commodore

6 August 2020