

Annual General Meeting 2024 Commodore's Report

It seems like only yesterday that we were attending the last AGM in August 2023 having experienced a wet and windy July and August. Little did we appreciate that the wet weather would continue throughout the winter easing only in early May 2024. Hopefully, the pattern has been broken with an improvement in June and July this year.

Following the departure of many of the Committee, the new team has had to get to grips with understanding the running of the Club and commence implementing the vision set out at the last AGM.

The vision for the future of the Club has been built around a number of key areas of:

- Understanding our risks
- Ensuring a sustainable financial future
- Securing our assets
- Increasing the number of volunteers
- Expanding our on-water and clubhouse activities
- Building relationships with other associations in and around Newport
- Re-engaging and developing the relation with the broader local community
- Promoting a harmonious, happy and hospitable environment within the Club.

We are pleased that some progress has been made throughout these areas in the last 12 months.

Work on understand our risks has started. The aim is to develop/create a risk register through risk assessment and risk mapping. There is no doubt that we are living in an uncertain environment and political world where changes in weather patterns and government may have a significant impact on the Club strategically, operationally and financially, let alone the day-to-day hazard of damage and liability. The Club can transfer much of the risk through insurance and compliance, but awareness is still the most critical component in protecting against an event.

There are no known or reported incidents that may give rise to damaging the Club financially or its reputation nor are there any outstanding health and safety or safeguarding issues.

The year end accounts at the 31st March 2024 shows an annual surplus and a cash position of around £120,000. This position demonstrates that the Club continues in a healthy financial position with reserves to indulge in projects to improve the Club such as creating a covered area outside with protection against wind and rain. Nevertheless, the Club must maintain strict control over expenditure to ensure that it remains well funded at all times with reserves to protect against unforeseen maintenance and repairs

to a weather exposed building. The Club continues to preserve a policy of justification and evidence-based review before making any major expenditure and where appropriate, will seek consultation with the members before committing itself to any substantial investment.

It is general knowledge that the Barony wishes to sell the Parrog car park, the green and adjacent areas and is currently in discussion with the Town Council. Access to, and the use of this land is of major importance to the Club. The Club is in dialogue with and currently supporting the Town Council as the most ideal party who wish to take control of the land and retain it on the current basis as an important space for the community and visitors. However, a number of complex issues need to be overcome before a sale can be completed which in turn may have some financial implication on the Club.

Meanwhile, the Management Committee has, as a precaution, instructed the Club's solicitors to protect its historic right of access.

As already indicated in an earlier paragraph, maintenance of our wonderful clubhouse against the elements is an on-going battle. The very wet winter, north westerly winds and spring tides has highlighted the weakness against the egress of water into the building, especially through the lintels of the sea facing windows and general damp in the Commodore's Lounge walls. The Committee has asked a local builder to assess the replacement of the wooden lintels with concrete on the sea facing windows and to make good the damage caused by the dampness.

A major piece of work over the last twelve months has been the review of the Articles and Rules of the Club as requested by the members at the 2023 AGM. The process has been along the following lines:

- Drafting based on templates provided by the Royal Yacht Association and His Majesty's Government plus rules from another well-established sailing club
- Initial review by local members with a legal background
- Second review by a selected number of members of the Club
- Clarity and compliance checks by the Club's solicitors
- Consultation with the members
- Agreement and implementation at the 2024 AGM

Plenty of time has been given to producing a robust and up to date set of Articles and Rules which, it is hoped, will reflect the aspirations of the Club for the foreseeable future.

An on-going concern is finding volunteers to help the running of the Club, which is managing to operate on a minimum number of its members. A number of the Committee have full time jobs and/or other volunteering commitments elsewhere. Concerns remain in respect of the effective and efficient management of the Club, and the difficulty of attracting new committee members, especially if one wishes to achieve the vision of the Club's future.

The introduction of sail racing earlier in the year, has been well supported with manning of the safety boats, and also the request for volunteers for a working party to help with preparing the club boats was also well received.

A similar approach is planned for next year to expand working parties to assist in the maintenance of the Clubhouse facilities. It is hopeful that members are willing to step forward as it would be a tragedy to have to introduce a press gang!!

During the year effort has been put in to building relationships with other associations in and around Newport including but not limited to:

- Attending the “March through the Town to the Memorial Hall” to celebrate hundred years of the hall
- Laying a wreath at the memorial on Remembrance Sunday on behalf of the Club members
- Introducing St Mary’s Church vicar, Revd Emma Kendall, as Chaplain to the Club.
- Supporting Newport Town Council as a part of their Youth Engagement project
- Attending a Memorial Hall event highlighting opportunities for leisure, spiritual guidance, learning, advice and wellbeing available in Newport
- Attended an evening of presentations on Newport’s local environment. The Club is now investigating how to manage our wastewater into the system more efficiently
- Meeting with the Surf Club to discuss access to The Club’s facilities for young locals
- Connecting with the RNLI over water safety
- Offering the Coast Guard our facilities as an incident centre
- Communicating with other boat clubs in Fishguard and Cardigan to sharing facilities and racing together
- Providing more resources in support of the Regatta Committee
- Providing facilities for the 80th Anniversary of D Day celebrations and remembrance and lighting of a beacon on the beach.

I believe we have only scratched the surface of opportunities around Newport and there is so much more that needs to and can be done with more voluntary involvement in the future.

A key part of our vision is to re-engage and build our relationship with the local community. We are pleased to say that the message is getting out that membership is available to all and the feedback to date has been incredibly positive. Between last September and May this year, one hundred and nine new members joined the Club of which sixty-two are from the local area.

There has been a decline this year of visitors in the town with many rental properties struggling to attract guests, plus businesses seeing a drop in revenue of around ten percent. Severe weather, cost of renting, second home tax, twenty mph speed limits, negative signalling to tourism and a weak Euro are suggested factors for a downturn in

visitor traffic. Therefore, it is important that the Club recognises and encourages the important historic relationship it has in the local community to protect and ensure its future.

Over the last few years there has been a decline in sailing and rowing of which the latter was heavily affected by Covid. The Management Committee is keen to rectify this position and encourage more people back to on-water activities which in turn will maintain the welfare of the Club.

Generous donations of boats and boat parts have been made by members to the sailing section of the Club for which we are hugely grateful. In addition, an opportunity arose to purchase three Toppers with a trailer at a very reasonable price. The club fleet is all but complete bar a day boat which can be used to take members out to sea to gain experience sailing rather than being shouted at from the shore!

This year the sailing programme started early in May, including mid-week sailing when the tides have been right. The weather always presents a challenge but on one day there were eleven boats racing. With a bigger fleet accessible to local members without additional cost to the membership, it is hoped that more sailing can be encouraged and developed.

Up until 2019 the rowing section has been an actively competitive section racing around Wales and further away. Post Covid, the challenge is to regenerate enthusiasm and develop a strategy to put the Club back on the rowing map in Wales. This is a project that is beginning, but there is much to be done and will take time. Sadly, the Dinas Head Challenge was cancelled this year over concerns of support and safety in running the event. That said, a team will be put together very shortly to start planning the event now for next year.

Another busy year of events in the clubhouse with quiz and bingo nights, club suppers and for the first time Sunday lunches. A Halloween party and music evenings have also taken place through the long winter period. Bar numbers have been up and the introduction of the four-pound pint has also encouraged members to stay longer into the evenings.

For this season Bocs Du have taken over the concession to supply food and have been well received with the wider and changing range of choice. Coney Island also returned, with their selection of delicious ice cream treats.

“Open Day” became a two-day event on the 31st May and 1st June including a beer festival in the Commodore’s Lounge, live music and the opportunity to sail and row boats. Around forty new members joined the club, many coming from the local area.

The upstairs bar has again opened to the general public during the summer holidays on a trial and limited basis which will be carefully monitored to see the impact on the Club and its members as a whole.

There have been a number of improvements to the clubhouse, of which the most significant has been the moving of the administration office to the Nevern Room providing a larger and much warmer space for our staff. The security system has been updated and improved to provide a wider range of view which is particularly important for the protection of the staff.

Outside, the seating area has been enlarged with more benches receiving positive feedback from many of the members. Members have frequently expressed an opinion that they would like to sit outside more often but are put off by the weather conditions. An initial planning application has been submitted for an opening and closing roof extension along the south side of the building. Once there is a clearer idea of what will be acceptable to the planners, a consultation with the members will follow.

Twenty twenty-six will be the fiftieth anniversary of the Club. Now is the time to start thinking about how the members would like to celebrate this milestone in the Club's history and provide the Management Committee with thoughts and ideas. Those with a long relationship with the Club may wish to step forward and be a part of a team to organise events.

It has been a busy year to what is the start of the next stage in the development of the Club. Without the enormous support, effort and time given by everyone in the team, half of what has been done would not have been achieved.

As Commodore of the club, I cannot thank enough the Board and all the volunteers who have given their time and commitment to the Club.

However, I reserve my greatest appreciation and thanks to all the staff who make the members feel very welcome particularly during the long winter evenings, and especially our administration and bar managers who have taken on much more of the responsibility in the running of our great Club and making it a harmonious, happy and hospitable place in which to spend our time.

The Commodore