

Annual General Meeting 2025 Commodore's Report

Since the last Commodores' report for the AGM, there has been much change in the world. Change, inevitably, brings with it uncertainty and new challenges. Events on the global stage will continue to affect us all, now and in the future. Our club is not immune to the need for change, and we have taken steps to protect and ensure that the spirit of the club remains while modernising its processes and protocols. The objective of the Club will always remain to be a members' club for the enjoyment of the members. It will also continue to play its part in supporting the community of Newport and the surrounding area.

With the changing of the guard in 2023, and a challenging period around the last AGM, it was clear that the main requirement for the last twelve months has been to grow and strengthen the management committee. This is something that is much easier said than done with limited resources and time for those living in and around Newport. Nevertheless, progress has been made in getting fresh faces onto the management committee, bringing experience in areas helpful to the Club.

Firstly, we are indebted to Gareth Davies, a chartered accountant, who offered to take on the role of Treasurer. His knowledge and understanding of modern business practice is already making its mark in managing and developing the financial and administrative activity in the club.

Secondly, we were happy to welcome Ed Will, Steve Penn and Hal Grim onto the committee. All are enthusiastic rowers determined to raise the profile of rowing in the Club, also bring guidance in marketing, health and safety and IT.

Towards the end of last year, events were organised for members to meet the management team and talk about opportunities where individuals may be able to help the club. This produced further support for the Club including a whole committee for the 50th Anniversary! There still remain places to fill, particularly a Vice Commodore and somebody with experience in dealing with HR issues. Hopefully, someone may step forward at the AGM to fill these places.

Having withdrawn the proposal for the new Articles and Rules at the last AGM on the grounds of a technicality, a Special General Meeting was called in February to obtain the acceptance of the new Directors to the Board and agreement to the new Articles and Rules. Regrettably, the proposed Articles and Rules, although obtaining a majority agreement, failed to pass the required higher threshold of 75%. In light of the result, the Committee conducted a detailed 'listening exercise' to understand the concerns of a group of members to ensure a future consensus. Hopefully, these concerns have now been addressed, and a revised document has been presented for consideration with the amended Articles and Rules in suitable time for agreement at the AGM.

The financial statements for the year ended 31st March 2024 have been prepared by our new accountants Dros Do Cyfyngedig T/A Pritchard and Co of Fishguard and show that the Club achieved a profit before tax of £11,149 compared to over £27,726 for the year ending March 2023. Whereas turnover remained broadly in line with last year the cost of sales has increased by

around 6% meaning that our gross profit is reduced. Salary increases due to inflation and the minimum wage, plus the renewal of long-term contracts for utilities, cleaning and waste disposal, saw a significant increase in our administrative expenses. With poor summer weather last year, and health and safety issues restricting the use of the Commodores Lounge resulting in fewer club suppers than were planned, the financial results are lower than the previous but in line with expectations.

Our cash reserves remain healthily around the same as last year at £127,000. This provides us with some security in the current economic environment. Nevertheless, the impact of the increase in National Insurance costs, increase in the minimum wage plus inflation means there is less room to manoeuvre looking forward.

The economic outlook for the UK, and particularly Wales is uncertain with ongoing issues such as low growth, productivity challenges, rising unemployment, and social care pressures, along with expected tax increases will further affect the hospitality sector, already under intense pressure. Further increases in wages, utilities, insurance, health and safety and technology coupled with the general maintenance of the clubhouse will put pressure to either increase our turnover or reduce our costs. The Management Committee feel that the best option for the next twelve months is to focus on increasing income, with more social events especially during the off-season period rather than directly increasing subscriptions. A raft of exciting new ideas is in development and will be discussed and refined in the coming weeks and months.

The move to Xero online accounting package supplied through our accountants is proving to be a substantial benefit and has already improved our bookkeeping and reporting, at the same time saving a substantial amount of time to focus on the ever-increasing regulatory burden. The Club receives support and advice from our legal representatives, who recently provided a worthwhile seminar to understand the upcoming changes in employment law which was duly attended by the Administration Manager and Commodore.

The sale of land around the Parrog, including the car park, is ongoing following the support of the town at a public meeting for the Town Council to purchase the car park, Green and surrounding land. Newport Boat Club has two places on the working group set up to assist the Council in their endeavours to purchase the land. As one would appreciate there are many hoops to go through in understanding who owns the titles to land, the basis on what conditions the Barony may sell the land and the current leases in place. Fortunately, Pembrokeshire County Council agreed to keep the public lavatories open for the time being which was a major concern to the town and the Club. Meanwhile, progress is slow, but we are keeping a close eye on the potential impact upon our members in terms of cost and flexibility of use of the car park and access to the Green for boat and tender parking.

Maintenance of the Clubhouse against the elements remains a continuing concern. Thankfully, Storm Daragh did no damage to the club other than flooding the Commodores Lounge, but the Commodore and Rear Commodore 'swabbed the decks' during the storm. Outside, the Club's boats were moved to the least windy position and tied down. The only near miss was a tree falling across the main road at Cotham Lodge just after the Commodore went to check the Club in the afternoon!

Investigation into what is causing the damp mould in the Commodores Lounge identified that there has been a prolonged period since the exterior walls of the building have been repointed and resealed against the ingress of water. Contractors are organised for the beginning of

September to conduct the work followed by a period to dry out and see whether this effectively reduces the damp before repainting and replacing the sound baffles on the walls.

Another major project will be to install cabling to improve the lighting and replace the slabs along the path leading to the front door.

At the end of last year, a planning pre-application was submitted to see whether Pembrokeshire National Park Authority would entertain a shelter with a shuttered roof alongside the lean-to on the south side of the building to allow members to be outside in less-clement weather. The response has been “acceptable in principle”. The application also put in for an extension of the veranda to the north side. As the installation of the shelter will have an impact on the use of space and visual implication there needs to be a thorough consultation with the members before any decision can be made.

On the water, we have picked up quite a few new rowing members and sailing races have been running since May. A number of our powerboat drivers supporting sailing have upgraded their qualifications with support from the Club’s training fund, as has our Paddling Captain. Contact details and the schedule of events are on the Boating programme available from the bar and on the website.

It has been another busy year of events in the clubhouse. Quiz nights have been particularly popular along with bingo. As in previous years, music evenings and a Halloween party have been an enormous success during the winter months. As previously explained, Club suppers had to be scaled back but we managed to host the Golf Club Seniors prizegiving supper which boosted bar turnover considerably! A club supper was held earlier in the year and tickets sold out within a day. Again, all had a great evening.

The Club said goodbye to Bocs Du at the end of the season last year as they wanted a permanent location in Cardigan. This year the franchise was taken over by “Brwnt” offering ‘mouthwatering street & seafood with a view’! The ever-popular Coney Island has returned with their delicious ice cream and coffees.

“Open Day” was again a successful event, with pleasant weather, lots of visitors, a good band and another thirty new members signing up, which taken together, made it a really enjoyable day. A highlight was Merched y Mor (1 boat, 4 ladies – two of whom are Club members) which is entered for the ‘World’s Toughest Row’ - The Atlantic Challenge 2025 in December. It was a delight to welcome the team to our lawns for their inspiration, modesty and good humour.

The upstairs bar will be open again to the general public during the summer holidays on certain days helping relieve the pressure on the Members’ bar at peak times.

Next year is the 50th Anniversary of the Club and a committee was assembled at Easter to organise the programme. Ahead of these events, the club is hosting a photographic competition running until the end of August this year. Members are encouraged to submit photographs that reflect their creative interpretation of five category titles: Sunsets; On the water; Buildings; Seasons; Abstract. Winning photos will feature in the 50th Anniversary calendar. Full details are on the Club website <https://www.newportboatclub.co.uk/latest-news>

For next year, a range of events are in the pipeline including a dinner dance, crabbing and art competitions, water-based events, a duck race, live bands, and a tea and cake afternoon finishing with fireworks and a disco on the August bank holiday. Any member who can provide help will be appreciated.

It has been quite a challenging year, but one feels a real degree of progress has been made in bringing the Club closer together. Hopefully, with the Articles and Rules agreed at the AGM, we can all set sail as one and have a wonderful celebration of the Club on its 50th Anniversary.

My heartfelt thanks go out to the Management Committee who have worked hard to keep everything ticking along and given freely of their time as volunteers and members of the team. Without their commitment to the Club we would not be in the position we are today. And finally, my greatest appreciation goes to all the staff who have made the members feel welcome throughout the year. We are blessed with a very friendly, helpful and capable team supporting our administration and bar managers who have taken on much of the responsibility of the daily running of the Club.

The Commodore