

## **AGM Address 2018 by Steve Hopkins**

Somebody once said “May you live in interesting times” well this year has certainly been interesting! Those of you who attended the extraordinary general meeting we held in February will be aware of some of the issues we faced at that time but I will quickly summarise them for the benefit of those who were unable to attend.

When Steve Loomes resigned as Bar Manager in November last year we recruited a couple - Dean and Lucy Scott who had been recommended by our stock taker.

This did not turn out well as Lucy quickly decided the job was not for her went back to her parents. Dean, unable to persuade her to stay, tendered his resignation in December but offered to stay to cover the Christmas period. It was at this point, only two days before Christmas that the Treasurer reported that a sum of £800 was missing from one of the gaming machines. A review of our recently installed CCTV footage showed the money had been removed by Dean one night after the Club was closed. Confronted with this evidence Dean admitted this and was immediately dismissed and escorted from the premises, having first agreed to repay the missing money which he did. This left us left us with no one to run the bar on Christmas eve and despite the efforts of committee members we had, for the first time in living memory, to close the bar early on Christmas eve. However on Christmas day we re-opened thanks to the stalwart efforts of Lis McArthur and Brian Ross who volunteered their services at short notice. We were also fortunate to persuade Ron Sharpe to take on the role of Temporary Bar Manager until we could find a permanent replacement.

Unfortunately our staffing problems did not end there. The kitchen offerings of our chef, Dani Ruso, were not proving popular with the members which resulted in declining food revenues and reduced gross margins. In short the kitchen was haemorrhaging money. The Committee decided to cut our losses and close the kitchen temporarily and dismiss our chef, taking the opportunity to deep clean and redecorate the kitchen. It was at this point that we held the EGM to explain the situation to the members and scotch some of the more extreme rumours circulating at the time. At that meeting we announced that we were exploring the possibility of franchising the kitchen operation and that we were in advanced discussions with someone who appeared keen to undertake this role. At the last moment these arrangements fell through. So we continued to advertise and eventually found an outside catering company who were looking for a larger kitchen and felt that they could operate our business in tandem with their own. Although on the face of it this appeared to offer an ideal solution, and following a very successful Mother’s Day lunch, they decided that they were unable to cope with multiple short order cooking required here on a Friday and Saturday Night. Despite exhaustive advertising, trawling agencies and following individual leads we could not find other options for the franchising route.

At this point we were fortunate to recruit Kenny Gould and Katie Martin to be the new Bar Manager and Assistant manager. This released Ron Sharpe from his temporary role behind the bar and enabled us to recruit him to be chef in the newly refurbished kitchen. At last it seemed as if our staffing problems had stabilised. However the members who had drifted away whilst the kitchen was closed or because they did not like the offerings of the previous chef did not immediately return and hence food revenues continued to fall below the level necessary to break even. The Committee all agreed that a food offering was essential for the members and the long term success of the Club but some of the food sessions were being woefully under supported by members. Drops in revenue from other sources and increases in many of our outgoings, about which you will hear later, obliged the Committee to review once again the organisation of the kitchen, reducing opening times in order to reduce labour costs.

Unfortunately this meant saying goodbye to Ron as he was unable accept less hours. But after a short period of closure and some sterling stand-in work by Kenny we were fortunate to find Alan Surrey a chef with some forty years’ experience who was looking to lower his hours. We welcome Alan as he settles into the kitchen and look forward to him providing the basis for rebuilding our food trade. If you haven't already, do come and give his food a try.

I mentioned briefly the recruitment of Kenny and Katie who successfully completed their probation in September and I would like to pay tribute to the energy and enthusiasm they have brought to their roles which has added measurably to the improved atmosphere in the Club. This is borne out by the 8.4% increase in bar revenue shown in the accounts and the reduction in stock discrepancies which have plagued us for so long.. We look forward to them being with us for many years to come, bringing the certainty and stability which I know the members want. This brings me to my next point. This year has also been a volatile one for the committee. I cannot remember a year which has seen so many changes of committee members. We started the year with three officers and ten committee members with an additional member co-opted at our first committee meeting. Of those a total of two officers and seven committee members left at various times and for various personal reasons. You have already heard of Peter Booker's decision to retire as Chairman after eleven years. His steady hand on the tiller will be sorely missed.

The other officer to resign was our treasurer Dave Woods. Dave served for 11 years in this onerous position and apart from his treasury duties under took many roles and responsibilities. Suffice it to say that without Dave's efforts during the turmoil over staffing the club would have found it difficult to continue. We are very fortunate that Becky Williams has agreed to take on the role of treasurer subject to your approval tonight – I commend her to you. Others who have left for various personal reasons include Evan Hill and his wife Rosalyn who had done sterling work looking after entertainments; Lara Dean who ran the Membership administration; Kate Hornsby who organised our 1<sup>st</sup> Gin festival; Kev Brace who worked on building maintenance; and Andrew Potter who took over the Bar & Finance sub-committee. On your behalf, I would like to thank them all for their hard work and contribution to the club.

However without the contribution of those members who came forward to offer their services as replacements we would not have had a quorum to continue. So I am especially grateful to Chris Williams, Geoff Driscoll, Jackie Carter, Mat Williams, Cheryl Dare and Becky Williams who have slotted into their roles so effectively and enabled us to keep the wheels turning. For despite all the set backs and upheaval your committee has still provided a year of successful and varied events. I have already mentioned the Gin Festival held over the weekend of 20<sup>th</sup> - 22<sup>nd</sup> October. This proved such a success we agreed to hold it annually. Following a children's firework display in November we held another of our ever popular Wine Tasting evenings with a wide variety of wines and accompanying cheeses for members to try – a sell-out occasion enjoyed by all.

Later in November we held another Invitation Quiz when teams from local clubs and pubs joined us for an evening of general knowledge questions interspersed with buffet refreshments – another opportunity to showcase our club. The Christmas season kicked off with the village light-up. It seems that the village sets out to surpass each previous year with bigger, brighter and more inventive displays of illumination! Other Yuletide treats included the Children's Party, the ever popular Boxing Day Whisky Draw, and the New Year's Eve Party. In February we had a welcome party for Kenny and Katie and a Mother's Day Lunch in March. In May our new Entertainments Chairman Mat Williams organised a novel event - the Fawltly Towers Comedy Dining experience which together with Ron Sharpe's cooking produced an evening of enjoyment and hilarity! With the new committee's approval we will be repeating this format in the New Year. June saw the family fun day and the beer festival both blessed with good weather and good support.

During August Katie and Kenny held the first of their very successful cocktail nights; I am told another is due in December. Also in August a visit to Chelmsford Races took place – tickets courtesy of Greene King. On the 8<sup>th</sup> September the village fete took place on the club field special thanks to Mat Williams who took over responsibility for this just a few weeks before the event in this he was ably assisted by Ross Leavers. Just recently we have had the annual car rally organised By Rick Hayward and Geoff Driscoll won overall by the car entered by Ken Wheatley. Lastly the Gin and Lager Festival held over the weekend of 19<sup>th</sup> -21<sup>st</sup> October to the delight of many!

Those of you, who only use the club socially, may be surprised at the range of our sporting activities. As well as our associated football, cricket and bowls teams, the club is represented in local leagues by three darts

teams, two snooker teams, two pool teams, a table tennis team and a cribbage team. All the various sports clubs would welcome new members and if any of you, or your offspring, is interested in joining please look on our website or contact Kenny. In this regard I am happy to report that Elsenham youth football sides are hiring our pitch for five aside training which could lead to transfers to Birchanger senior sides as a natural progression. Our Wednesday dart team did especially well this year evidenced by the additions to the silverware in our trophy cabinet. Lastly our cricket team are looking for a new sponsor for 2019 season if anyone is interested please contact Ross Leavers.

We have also added two new income streams from hiring the pavilion for baby yoga classes and an area of the field not used by club teams for dog training. These activities should bring us an income of over £3000 in a full year. The number of life members of the club has always been difficult to verify but following the introduction of the General Data Protection Regulations this year we took the opportunity to cleanse our data base. This resulted in a reduction in the total of life members. As always there is a number of members who transfer from full to life membership. This together with non- renewals resulted in our revenues from membership subscriptions being slightly down at the end of the financial year. However I am delighted to report that since that time our numbers have increased and we now have a healthy membership of 616 full members and 265 life members.

This brings me to the last part of my report which is consideration of the accounts. I would like to apologise for the late posting of the accounts due to the first draft only being received from the accountants only on Monday 15<sup>th</sup> October despite the necessary papers being passed to the accountants in August. This has given the Committee very little time to appraise the accounts and get answers to the queries that we had. It is therefore doubly unfortunate that our accountants Connor Waring have been unable to send a representative to this meeting tonight. The final draft of the accounts that you see before you were only received last Friday after a lot of work by the Bar and Finance Sub- Committee led by Neil Hornsby and Becky Williams. This has prevented the Committee as a whole having time to consider the accounts and approve them.

We are therefore unable at this time to sign off these accounts or to recommend their adoption by this AGM. It is the committee's recommendation that work continue on these draft accounts and that once they are complete a further EGM be held to endorse the final figures. As a result we will be deferring the election of the accountants until that EGM.

We take feedback from the members very seriously and always try to deal with people's concerns and criticisms as best we can but in order to get a wide range of opinions from the membership we will be issuing a survey at the end of this week seeking your opinions about all aspects of the club and how it may be improved. Do please take a few moments of your time to complete the survey as its outcomes will be used to shape the future. Survey forms will be available at the bar from Friday or if we have your email address you will sent one electronically. Once you have completed the form please hand it in at the bar, post it to us, or submit via email so that we receive it by the end of November.

So for the future I feel the club is now positioned to move back into profit in 2018/19 and with the benefit of stable staffing can look forward to a bright and successful future.

Finally thank you for your forbearance in listening so patiently to this somewhat lengthy report. It only remains for me to thank, on your behalf, all those who have worked so hard under trying circumstances this year. The officers and committee members both past and present, including any I have not named tonight; our staff led by Kenny and Katie on the bar and Alan in the Kitchen and lastly but by no means least yourselves for supporting the Club with your membership, your attendance and your finance. Truly you are what make the club. Thank you.