

Chairman's Report for AGM

July 2021

Our last AGM was held in December 2020 when Pat Lewis stepped down after a challenging 3 years as chairman. Pat drove forward the building project and then had to steer us through lockdown and the move to online bridge. Thank you, Pat, for all you achieved for OBC.

It was a privilege to be invited to take on interim chairmanship of the Club in December 2020 and I have enjoyed working closely with our team of trustees and officers, all of whom have put in so much work to keep the Club afloat over the last 12 months and have made me feel so welcome. Thank you all for making my new role so much easier.

We meet regularly using Zoom and it works surprisingly well. Liza Furnival with Martin Illingworth do so much to ensure bridge games and tournaments run smoothly, Susan Fletcher is an extraordinarily efficient organiser of Education- such a crucial arm of the club- Steven Bliss has our finances under tight control, Julie Anderson is in charge of the Premises committee as well as health and safety, Mary Bennet, our conduct guru, ensures behaviour is up to the mark, Richard Sills heads up communications and Matthew Wilkinson our membership secretary is also responsible for data protection. I must also mention our wonderful secretary, Ursula Bowler. Everyone needs an Ursula on hand to organise, guide and ensure that heffalump traps are avoided. Thanks also to Sandra Devaney and Steph Bliss, both directly elected trustees.

In March, the trustees held a strategy meeting led by Lis Long. We discussed how we might better fulfil our charitable purposes by diversifying membership and engaging with the community. We reviewed our finances and we considered what sort of club we wanted to be. We agreed that, above all, the club should be friendly and welcoming - everyone should bear this in mind. We also want to offer activities that cater for all levels and types of players, including those who enjoy social bridge. We will work towards achieving these goals.

The trustees have agreed more specific terms of reference for the committees to tighten up governance and have updated our safeguarding policy to recognise the potential risks of online bridge for children, young people and vulnerable adults. I wanted you to have access to more information about how the club is managed. If you are interested have a look at the updated website. Click on "All about the club" and then go to "Publicly available documents". I hope you might also enjoy dipping into some of the new content such as the history of the club or the short biographies of the trustees. Thanks go to Brian Mills who oversees the website.

Our club relies on so many volunteers. What would we do without those who direct and score, prepare the boards, organise host rotas and competitions, participate in committees, keep the website and club database up to the mark, and assist with the running of the club in so many ways. Thank you all. I am sure that many more of you have a skill to offer. I

would particularly like to draw on the expertise of our newer members, so please do get in touch if you feel able to contribute in any way to the running of the club.

Although the Covid pandemic with consequent lockdowns and social restrictions posed an immense challenge, our club is thriving. Matt Wilkinson tells me that we have 482 paid-up members as of June 2021. I am delighted that numbers have held up so well in these turbulent times. EBU data confirm that OBC is still the largest club in Oxfordshire and one of the most active.

Face-to-face activities ceased, but instead the club introduced opportunities to play bridge online which many of you have taken to with enthusiasm- no driving or parking problems. The bridge committee does so much work to ensure that games run smoothly- thank you. Most online sessions are hosted but we are always looking for more people to take part in the rotas- it is a good way of meeting potential partners. Let me know if you can help. Information about hosting is on the website.

Education is another key activity of OBC and Education has also flourished on-line. Classes and Saturday seminars have both been very successful. My thanks to all those in the education committee and the education team, especially our dedicated teachers and classroom assistants.

I am sure that most of you will want to know when we can return to playing bridge in our beautiful premises. I assure you that the trustees review the situation frequently but the club will only offer face-face bridge when the trustees consider that it is safe to do so and when the risks of viral transmission within the premises have been minimised. In the meanwhile, it is crucial to ensure that you take the opportunity to be immunised when it is offered, both to reduce the risk of transmission to others and for your own protection. The premises are being used for junior bridge, which commenced under Holly Kilpatrick's supervision in May 2021.

It seems likely that some form of on-line provision will be retained. I do hope that those of you who have not tried playing bridge online might consider giving it a go. RealBridge is a particularly sociable interface as you can chat to your partner and opponents.

Finally my congratulations to all those club members and junior members who have succeeded at high levels both nationally and internationally. May you go on to even better things. The rest of us mere mortals will continue to do our best, but I hope everyone will continue to enjoy playing this wonderful game.