

Stratford upon Avon Bridge Club – 5-year strategy 2021-26

Rider: As a result of the current coronavirus pandemic, there has been no face-to-face bridge at the club premises since March 2020. A large range of on-line bridge has been available. It is anticipated that face-to-face bridge may restart in the latter part of 2021 (following the widespread vaccination programme) and this strategy document relates to the resumption of normal activities within the club.

Introduction

The mission of Stratford upon Avon Bridge Club is to be a successful bridge club by running enjoyable bridge and social events for players with a wide range of abilities, by developing their bridge playing skills and by fostering a thriving bridge community.

It is the responsibility of the management committee, led by the chairman, to ensure that the club has a viable strategy to ensure the ongoing accomplishment of the club's mission.

Strengths and Weaknesses

By and large, the club is in an excellent state with sound finances, superb playing facilities and, largely due to the success of its teaching programme, a healthy membership. Since members want very different things, the strategy must seek to address minority interests but within the best interests of the club as a whole.

The club has a large number of experienced members, but relatively few talented players (as assessed by the National Grading System). We need to ensure that we meet the needs of those who want to develop their skills further and those who simply enjoy playing at their current level.

As with the majority of bridge clubs, the age profile of members is weighted towards the higher end, reflecting the fact that pensioners have the time to enjoy the benefits of playing bridge. We must ensure that we continue to seek new members.

Bridge Playing

Prior to the closure of the club due to the pandemic, the club ran duplicate sessions on 3 afternoons; Tuesday being the transition session, and 4 evenings. Supervised play sessions ran on Monday morning, Monday evening and Wednesday afternoons. During the closure the club is running 2 online sessions a week. Consideration will be given to the future provision of both face-to-face and online bridge.

Some newer, less experienced members have been reluctant to play in certain sessions deemed to be intimidating. Bridge is competitive and disagreements may get overheated. Tournament Directors are best placed to mitigate intimidation at the table.

Competitions are an important feature of any games club and currently most of the club competitions are won by the more talented players. However, more handicapped competitions would encourage wider participation. We will continue to encourage attendance at national and county events.

We will address solutions to sessions that have declining numbers. Apart from our online partnering service, we should consider replicating the successful Thursday evening group email system.

Teaching

Until the pandemic, the club has successfully run beginners' and intermediate courses and the timing of these will be considered to encourage prospective players who may be able to play only in the evenings and at weekends. We will also consider the need for more advanced training sessions.

Social Events

This aspect of club life has been hampered by lack of a management committee lead which has now been rectified. As well as bridge social events for members, we will consider non-bridge events, which could include partners, friends and family.

Membership

Over the next five years, the club will endeavour to maintain the membership at its current level of c400. It is anticipated that approximately 25 members will leave each year (although following the pandemic, there may be a more significant loss in 2021). Replacements will be sought from students completing their beginners' courses and a steady trickle of people moving into the area.

The club relies on its members to assist with the running of the club. We will encourage more members to volunteer.

Technology

The club already makes excellent use of IT to support its bridge playing and membership communication activities. Advances in hardware and software functionality will be kept under review and implemented as appropriate to maintain the club at the forefront in the use of technology.

Property

The club has no plans to move from Holtom Street. Recently the Management Team has instigated improvements to the office and storage areas and enlarged and refreshed the reception area by removing the bar.

Once members can return to the premises, the strengths and weaknesses of the current site will be reviewed. Future improvements could include the second phase of the extension to the foyer/lobby areas which have already gained planning permission.

Finance

The club's financial position remains sound and it has sufficient reserves to fund currently planned capital expenditure.

The club will seek to introduce cashless payment for all types of income. This will be achieved by the introduction of contactless payments and continued use of BACs for subscriptions, tuition fees, social events and table monies.

Legal Matters

The club is currently a "company limited by guarantee and not having a share capital".

In principle, it is preferable to run the club on a volunteer-basis only and not to pay members for their services. However, for many years, the club has paid certain of its members, in particular tournament directors and teachers whose roles require a significant long-term commitment of time and effort. This practice will continue, but where possible the club will avoid paying members for other services to the club.