

Chairman's Report 2022

The last AGM was held in May 2019. In May 2020, two months after the closure enforced by Golden Hill because of the pandemic, we produced committee reports and made them available on the website. So, to summarise from then:

We agreed the terms of a Licence to Occupy with the RAFA Club, though that was only signed formally in January this year. Financially, we paid no rent when Golden Hill was closed, but paid the RAFA Club a small retainer fee from July 2020, when we officially left Golden Hill and moved our equipment out. We paid for the redecoration of this room while the club was closed (though the colour scheme was chosen by RAFA). We reopened in September 2021, and in preparation we purchased new tables, new chairs, new tablecloths and two cupboards. RAFA made numerous improvements, including the lighting. We sent our Duplimate dealing machine away for a service to prolong its life. We purchased two air purifying machines as an anti-Covid measure, which remain on continuously, and completed a formal risk assessment before reopening. Earlier this year, following Government guidance, we had to enforce mask-wearing for a short period. We continue to ensure adequate ventilation and other safety measures.

We sought members' views before reopening, and there was support for all our previous sessions, so we ran all five sessions from September. It was soon clear that table numbers were consistently down and not as good as we hoped, but nevertheless just about viable. Most sessions improved a little in time but not Monday evening, and we were forced to cancel this session in December through shortage of players. Numbers generally continue to remain low but viable, although attendance on Monday afternoon has been strong, even prompting requests for another, similar session. This was launched on Friday afternoons from 1 April though numbers are low so far.

The trend that has become apparent since restarting face-to-face bridge, here and in other clubs both locally and nationally, is that the better and more experienced players are more likely to stay away and to play more of their bridge online, where in particular a revitalised BBO (Bridge Base Online) and the newly developed RealBridge platform have gained a lot of players. Playing online has some obvious advantages, but the newer and less experienced players seem more willing to come out and play face-to-face, for the benefits of the social interaction, which may or may not be about bridge.

So we hope to continue the five weekly sessions we have at present, with new members joining our Thursday Improvers, gaining experience and then progressing to the competitive afternoon sessions and then the evening ones. We have not restarted our leagues or cup events since reopening, but we will review this if numbers grow further.

Our liaison with the RAFA Club continues to work well, with Jane Chapman recently overseeing various day-to-day interactions and joining their committee. They have responded helpfully to our requests, and the only significant downside of our partnership is the complications of membership.

We note with sadness the passing away of a number of our members during the past three years: Alan Williams (a former Chairman), Peter Randell, Suzette Worthington, Cedric Gunson, Shirley Brown, Alan Reid, Ted Cox and Lesley Reed, and I apologise if I have omitted anyone else.

I am grateful to all the committee members for their work during the past three years in such a strange and unprecedented period.

Alan Evans, May 2022