

# **BATTERSEA IRONSIDES RUGBY FOOTBALL CLUB MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE (MC) REPORT 2021/2022 SEASON**

## **Introduction**

This year's Report and AGM reflect a shorter than usual period of less than 8 months. This follows from changes to the Club's Constitution that now determine the financial and other affairs of the club including the AGM should be completed before the summer break.

Despite the shorter period the Club Management Committee along with the Senior Men, Women and Junior Committees have all worked incredibly hard to ensure the Club continues to run as effectively as ever whilst always looking after the interests of all our members and endeavoring to improve and progress in every part of the Club. As always, we are very grateful to all our committee members who have worked so hard this season.

An additional challenge has of course been the impact of Covid 19 which caused significant issues over the last 2 seasons as with all rugby clubs. But a particular problem we faced was the closure of the clubhouse and complications with regard to its reopening referred to in more detail below.

This therefore has been a season of consolidation post COVID and we have been delighted at the response of our players and wonderful parents who have returned in increased numbers across all sections in recognition of our reputation as a well-run, incredibly friendly welcoming and inclusive community club built on the ethos of teamwork, commitment and fun. This in turn has led to much on field success shared below.

## **Clubhouse**

Continuing closure of the clubhouse was a huge frustration for us all and we are very grateful for the patience of our members during this period. Management of the clubhouse including its ongoing maintenance has always been the responsibility of the Sports Club (Battersea Ironsides Sports Operations Ltd) and not the Rugby Club. The building fabric was ageing even prior to the pandemic and a long period of shut down only accelerated this deterioration. As Covid restrictions eased it was found the costs to ensure the building was wind and watertight as well as fully compliant with health and safety requirements were substantially beyond the resources of BISOL. In addition, BISOL advised that they no longer wished to operate the bar and kitchen which had made significant losses in previous years. In view that the Rugby Club is the main Clubhouse user we agreed to fund much of the repair and maintenance work as well as entirely refitting the kitchen which was no longer fit for purpose. The MC managed the project work which was complex and extensive and subject to delays almost entirely due to external contractors and Utilities. We were delighted therefore to re-open the Club house in January

which is now entirely managed by the Rugby Club including the kitchen and bar under a separate operating company (Battersea Ironsides Rugby Football Club Operations Ltd).

## **Rugby Success**

### **Senior men:**

Our men truly embraced our guiding philosophies of this season:

- The most welcoming team in the league
- The most positive team in the league
- The hard-working team in the league

Coming back from the hiatus caused by COVID, we were delighted to be able to continue to put out five men's senior teams on a regular basis, plus a Vet's team, often featuring some faces familiar to those who have watched the 1XV over the last five years and a u23 side. We also had a multitude of new players, either brand new this season or who have been training with us over COVID, joining with returning players to form new combinations and play some thrilling rugby.

The men's 1XV were competing for the first time this season in London 1 South, the highest league we have ever reached. After a positive start, we had a few mixed results after Christmas which meant we finished a creditable 9th, well solidified in the league and ready to start challenging for higher positions next season.

Our reserve teams all had fantastic seasons in challenging circumstances with other clubs often pulling out of games at the last minute due to being unable to field a team. All our teams, from the 2XV to the 5XV finished in the top 4 of their respective leagues, with the 3XV winning the Surrey Championship 1 during the regular season and the 5XV and the Vet's winning the post-season play-off final for Surrey Combination 2 and Vet's league 2 respectively. Our 2XV and Vets also won their Surrey Cup competition: the President's Tankard

### **Women:**

Our Women have had a fantastic season reaching new heights of achievement yet again. Now with a squad of 70 players the 1st XV won their National Championship League unbeaten and with only 38 points scored against them. They have now won their league in two successive seasons and are officially promoted to Women's Championship 2 which is only 2 leagues below the Premiership League.

Our 2nd XV achieved their best result finishing 3rd in their National Championship League. This is an excellent result bearing in mind most other clubs put out a single 1st XV only.

Our Women's squad fought off other competing clubs to be the first ever club to be sponsored by the Women's Rugby Agency.

The Women have been instrumental in the ongoing development of our Girls section coaching and supporting them on a weekly basis. In addition, the U18 Girls have been encouraged to join the Women's Thursday training to further develop their skills and breakdown the barrier between Junior and Senior Rugby.

## **OTHER**

The Club is truly proud of its adherence to the underlying ethos of Rugby -Teamwork, Respect, Enjoyment, Sportsmanship and Discipline. In their awards this year Surrey RFU have commended the disciplinary record our Senior Men and Women and Youth. They noted that of the 8 adult teams, an U21 team and full complement of Youth teams, not a single red card or complaint was received this season -an outstanding achievement by a Club of our size. Congratulations also to Paddy Flynn who was given the More Than a Game award by Surrey RFU at the same event.

Finally, we were delighted to hear the Tony Schulz was elected as a Vice President of Surrey Rugby at their last AGM in recognition of many years of service to our Club.

## **GIRLS**

We are delighted that with the support of the Women's section and in particular lead coaches Fiona Sutherland and Amy Chestnutt the Girls section has a strong and committed core of players now numbering over 20. We understand a further number have shown interest in joining next season. Matches against other Clubs this year have included Chobham and Wimbledon. The Girls have also attended festivals including at Wasps and Chobham.

The Girls ran 2 very successful Inner Warrior camps at the Club this season. These were taster sessions for prospective new young players. In the recent February camp 53 girls attended and had a great day of fun and games. England International Rugby stars Bryony Cleall and Emily Scarratt each attended and gave their support and encouragement.

## **JUNIORS**

Also, a period of consolidation in Youth post Covid and again increasing numbers over the season currently with over 400 registered players across all age groups. A key challenge next season will be to build on this- see our volunteer vacancies where we are looking for school and outreach volunteer to help player recruitment of both boys and girls.

We also continue to focus on player welfare and development: Jason's Athletic Development sessions (open to players from U13 upwards) are continuing to deliver real benefits in terms of players' strength, conditioning and athletic ability, and alongside that we have successfully re-established Physio support for home matches and set up a dedicated Youth clinic on

Wednesday evenings ( available for U15, U16 and Colts age groups next season). And of course, the rollout of ReturntoPlay means we now have state-of-the-art processes in place for when injuries do happen – and access to specialist Sports Doctors for all playing members.

All age groups showed great progress in terms of their standard of rugby and gave an excellent account of themselves in the Surrey Cup Competitions. The U12s and U13s were particularly strong: competing at A, B and C team levels in the Surrey Waterfall Cup competition – and both winning the overall competition to be crowned Surrey Champions!

Congratulations are also due to all those players who have taken part in the Surrey / Quins Development set-up and in particular to five boys in our U16 group (Bertie Moore, Jamie Millar, Seb Palmer-Worrell, Tom Slattery and Patrick Dumbili) who have successfully graduated to the Quins Player Development Group. Special mention also goes to Zach Carr and his international call up to play for England U18's this season.

## **MINIS**

Just getting all the boys and girls back to a post Covid normality on a Sunday with the Clubhouse open has been great for everyone especially our young players. The number of players has continued to increase to such a level that waiting lists are now operated in some age groups. This has become inevitable simply on health and safety grounds so that we can ensure there is adequate adult help as well as space to ensure the safety of all our young players at all times. For example our youngest age group the u5/6 has 175 players currently but this is matched by 50 coaches. Another age group the u9s which is the first age group to experience contact Rugby now has 135 players and 35 players. Other mini age group have similar player and volunteer numbers.

So it is incredibly reassuring to see our mini player base continue to be so strong in numbers. It is also very reassuring that we can rely on so many of our parents to step forward as volunteers to coach, referee and act as first aiders and in most cases are prepared to attend the appropriate RFU Training Courses.

Our Head Coaches all work incredibly hard over the season and it is great to hear them all report on what a fabulous season they have had with such positivity demonstrated and fun and teamwork amongst both players and coaches. Age groups attending Festivals repeatedly report success on the pitch as well as ensuring all players as far as practical have the opportunity to share the wonderful Festival experience.

Once again Ironsides minis joined together and attended the Minehead Festival with other clubs from the UK and Ireland. Over 600 players and parents had a fantastic time and acquitted themselves incredibly well -not just in playing ability but also playing with spirit and fairness which is so embedded in the Ironsides ethos.

The end of the season was marked by a wonderful Minis Funday -attended by hundreds of parents and young players in bright May sunshine. Brian Moore British Lions and England legend as well as the Mayor of Wandsworth both kindly agreed to attend and present numerous awards and gifts to minis players and volunteers as well as the Youth Girls. A wonderful day for the minis volunteers and supporting parents to come together and celebrate another excellent season.

## **Financial Strength**

The Rugby Club continues to be in good financial health, with performance now being reported in the books of Battersea Ironsides Rugby Football Club (BIRFC) Ltd and BIRFC Operations Ltd. The latter being the operating company set up to run the club house, post the decision by the Rugby Club to both fund the re-opening of the bar and take on the responsibility of running it.

### **BIRFC Ltd**

Both income and running costs, have returned to pre COVID-19 levels, with the Rugby Club generating a £24k surplus for the year. This reflects both a recovery in membership numbers and a “close to normal” return to training, playing games and entering festivals and tournaments with all their associated costs in coaching, player welfare, buying kit, hiring pitches, etc.

The strength of the balance sheet, built up over the last 10 years, has enabled the Club to invest £85k in the re-furbishment of the Club House and fund the working capital requirement to set up and run the bar. This investment was capitalised in the year as a £90k loan to BIRFC Operations Ltd, increasing the total loanbook to £179k. The remaining balance being the sum of monies lent to the Sports Club, against which a £5k re-payment was made in the year.

strength of the balance sheet, built up over the last 10 years, has enabled the Club to invest £85k in the re-furbishment of the Club House and fund the working capital requirement to set up and run the bar. This investment was capitalised in the year as a £90k loan to BIRFC Operations Ltd, increasing the total loanbook to £179k. The remaining balance being the sum of monies lent to the Sports Club, against which a £5k re-payment was made in the year.

### **BIRFC Operations Ltd**

The initial start-up performance of Club House Operations has been pleasing, with the first 5 months generating sales: £50k and a profit: £8k. This performance very much reflects the hard work & efforts of Wendy and her team, not only to make the Club House a very welcoming place for our members and guests but also their close attention to cost control & waste reduction.

After a deliberately cautious re-start at the end of last season, including determining how best to cater for food, the intent is to run a full programme of events for the 2022/23 season and start re-paying the BIRFC Ltd loan, which was set up with a 5-year term.

## **Infrastructure**

It is worth mentioning again that the Openview is shared between cricket, football and junior sport with rugby making up the 4th part of Battersea Ironsides Sports Club. The grounds are managed jointly with representatives from the 4 sports on the committees of Battersea Ironsides Sports Club and its operating entity Battersea Ironsides Sports Operations Ltd. This brings some complications largely due to the very limited space we have available and competing demands and priorities of the various sports .

We remain very committed to developing Openview to its full potential by providing a redeveloped or new build multi-sport clubhouse which the whole sports club can be proud of, and grounds which all 3 sports can share in an equitable way. In order to do so we need to change the way the Sports Club is currently run which will also involve changing the Sports Club constitution and simplification of its overly complex legal structure. Since our last AGM we have obtained legal advice and reached out to the other sports to progress discussions on constitutional change. At present it is the Rugby club that has the drive and ambition to make these changes happen and we are working hard to convince the other sports that we are stronger working together.

The major success to date since the last AGM is completion of all repair and upgrading works to the Clubhouse and passing of its control solely to Rugby subject to final completion of legalities. Our thanks to Chris Dixon of BISOL for his total support for this very significant change and the whole of the MC -and especially Dave Watson and Zoe Goodwin for their incredible hard work and persistence in the face of numerous obstacles.

The Springfield Site is under development and we remain very committed to ensuring a rugby pitch forms part of the sport provision on this site as originally planned. Following our previous AGM we have now engaged with property specialists Savilles to report in detail on planning and other aspects including future courses of action. We have also added property experts from within the club to assist our Springfield team and we continue to work collaboratively with Spencer Sports Club and Broomwood FC as we believe there is strength in our community approach and shared resources. A recent joint meeting of the group has confirmed that decisions will need to be made soon especially with regard to the submission of a planning application on behalf of this group. We will of course confirm the latest position at the AGM.

The former Scout Hut on Garatt Green is a rugby club asset due for refurbishment although Covid 19 put potential plans on hold and further delays have arisen due to the Council's concerns about its structural stability as well as some uncertainty about liability for any structural repairs. Further decisions on the next step will depend on factors including infrastructure investment priorities. Since the last AGM this now has the additional complication of somewhat unexpected sizeable expenditure on recent repairs and upgrading of the clubhouse.

## **Volunteers**

We are incredibly lucky to have so many wonderful volunteers in our Club. The fact we are such a successful and highly regarded Club is a reflection of the incredible work our volunteers put into the Club as having so many supportive parents.

We currently have

794 mini players

373 youth players

26 girls

404 senior men and women

Over 200 young people on the waiting list

These are astonishing numbers and to manage a Club this size is a huge and complex task.

If you think you can help please let someone know -your age group head coach or manager or any committee member. We have attached some specific vacancies but there are many areas where more help is needed. You might have specific skills and experiences or just energy and passion. Either way you will be welcomed into a fun and worthwhile community. Please do not wait to be asked!

## **Environmental Issues**

Ironsides Rugby Club is, if you think about, a very large family. Like any organisation, we have a responsibility to our Members and our Community to consider the environmental impact of what we do, what waste we produce, how we use energy, etc.. The Committee is of the opinion that Ironsides Rugby Club should set an example to our youngest Members and reflect the concerns of our Youth & Senior Players by thinking of ways to minimise any negative impact on the environment of our activities.

Accordingly, Simon Wardley has been appointed as Club Sustainability Officer to ascertain interest across the Membership in this area, to liaise with local organisations who we can work with and to put forward suggestions for immediate & longer term improvements in this area. With thanks to Hannah Mansour for the introduction, an initial meeting has been held with Senior Officers of World Rugby to discuss our plans and to consider opportunities to work together on issues Sustainable issues of Sustainability. This means that any ideas that you feed back to the Club could reach the attention of World Rugby and perhaps make wider changes than beyond SW17. We have also been contacted by a 100% Vegan Rugby Club about the possibility of co-hosting a Tournament or other event to highlight awareness.

## **Management Committee Summary**

Some of the additional issues and events covered since the previous AGM

- A major change to our First Aid provision was signing up with the Return2play medical sport specialist which provides a high quality professional Injury Management System across the whole Club with particular emphasis on Head Injury and Concussion issues. The benefits include unlimited access to specialist sport doctors, anytime online appointments and Club training and resources
- Senior men and women are completing a 5 Year Rugby Club Vision with the overall ambition to be “the biggest and best amateur Rugby Club”
- In April we finally had our Gallagher Premiership Award night. As you may recall in a nationwide competition we were shortlisted as one of the 6 best clubs in the country, but awards were deferred due to COVID. A fabulous evening was enjoyed at the club along with players from Harlequins RFC.
- Our first major social event in the newly opened clubhouse took place in March with a Club quiz night with food. This was a sell out as always and a hugely successful evening.

**BIRFC Ltd Management Committee June 2022**