

BATTERSEA IRONSIDES RUGBY FOOTBALL CLUB: MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE [MC] REPORT 2020/21 SEASON

Intro

This year's report is one that reflects a club that is getting back on its feet. Like so many up and down the country, we have been hit hard by the lockdown. The cessation in rugby, buildings requiring extensive repair and a community unable to meet up. All of these things on their own would be a challenge, but collectively they have caused numerous late nights and difficulty for the club. It has only been thanks to the dedication of so many rugby volunteers that the club heads towards 2022 in such a strong position.

Rugby Success:

The men's 1st XV gained promotion again, moving the club to its highest position in its history in London Division 1 South. Our reserve men's teams from the 2ndXV to the 5thXV are also playing the highest leagues ever for each respective team.

The women's team were league champions in 2020, before having their promotion playoff cancelled against London Irish Ladies.

Despite the hiatus in junior rugby, limitations on the return to contact rugby and a predicted exodus of families from London, the Junior Section of the Club continues to go from strength to strength. We continue to field strong teams at every age grade, with at least 3 Colts age players playing for Premiership Academies this season. And finally, several players moving from junior rugby with the boys and girls sections to playing for the men's and ladies teams, as well as the normal large cohort of players transferring between the minis and youth section. We now have the largest numbers of ex-junior and Colts players playing for the senior teams than at any other time before.

We have the strongest cohort of coaches that the club has had and are proud to have strengthened that even more this year with the addition of England & Wasps player Bryony Cleall and Jason St Clair (Athletic Development) both of whom have a mandate to support the development of youth and mini players and coaching, as well as support the senior teams.

COVID 19 Impact:

Despite the numerous lock downs severely impacting our "face to face" time, we were pleased with the number of players, families and members who actively participated in our #IronsidesRugbyOnline initiatives; including the athletic development sessions for all ages, the pilates classes, the Quiz Night and the fun and games of the "Ironsides Big Night In", including the open microphone session with Brian Moore and Tyrone Howe, not to mention having the opportunity to have a Guinness delivered to our door step! We remain very grateful for your help & support throughout the pandemic and it was good to see so many players return to training and take part in the adjusted rules games when lock down ended, including the impressive number of mini's who took part in our 1st ever summer programme of after school training at Openview.

In addition to organising the virtual and on-field action, we took the decision to commission a new website and implement Spond across all sections of the Rugby Club. The latter has allowed us to centralise membership management and administration into one place and provide a tool that allows us to communicate key messages, run the International ticket ballots and have confidence we can engage with all of our members on key club matters, including the vote on the new kit design, after the decision to move to a pan-club kit supplier. That is of course, in addition to meeting the need for teams and age groups to organise player availability for training, games and attending festivals.

Finally, regarding the lock down, it would be remiss of us not to acknowledge and recognise the effort and commitment of the large number of our members who reached out to help and support our local community. Special mention goes to the Reverend Jonny Sertin, St. Andrews Church (who has three children, playing at Ironsides in the U11's, U13's & U16's) and his work within the Earlsfield community. As well as our congratulations to Janneke Diemel, Niall Barrett, Anton Truter, Rory Scott and Demelza Jones for their recent nomination for the England Rugby Volunteers of the Year Awards for their work setting up and running the Critical NHS initiative.

Financial Strength

Battersea Ironsides Rugby Club operated at a surplus again this season, enabling us to grow our infrastructure and key projects investment fund further. It is not the committee's intention to continue to operate such a large surplus and we will lay out several projects and opportunities to further strengthen the club in the future, at the November AGM.

The club inclusivity fund has also increased, and we are proud to financially support more players than ever before across the junior and senior sections. Pro-actively supporting players, who cannot afford the cost of membership and kit, will continue to be a core part of our Rugby Club.

It would also be remiss, not to thank Gill and Michael Leech who have run and managed the Junior Club's kit shop every Sunday for nearly 20 years. Their commitment and support to Junior Rugby has been unwavering and we cannot thank them enough for their services and the monies they have raised over the years.

Infrastructure

We are in a sports club arrangement with two other sports that does not always work for us as well as it could. However, sharing a site with football and cricket means that we are curators for the Openview site alongside them. The lockdown exposed several issues with Club House that have required extensive remediation work. Our rugby representatives on the BISC committees managing the site have been key in orchestrating the repair of water supply and heating to the club, mending roofs and re-wiring the electrics on site. Particular thanks goes to Dave Watson and Zoe Goodwin for their persistence in making sure the Sports Club: address these issues, prioritise funding and collect all monies due to it, to fund these works. In addition, our thanks go to longstanding Rugby Club member, Chris Dixon, who has overseen much of this work, as well as club stalwarts Sean Lyons and Mick Walsh who have completed the work.

In addition to investment by the Sports Club, the Rugby Club MC took the decision to invest additional Rugby Club monies to replace the Club House hall ceiling, redecorate the hall and toilets, replace the sanitary ware in the men's and ladies toilets and help support the upgrade of the plumbing, heating and electrical works; including the installation of new radiators and lighting in the hall. These works were supported by an anonymous Ruby Club member's donation, for which we are extremely grateful.

We need volunteers

It is only with a strong group of volunteers that we can continue to flourish and as a committee we would like to thank everyone who gives their time so generously to the club. Enabling over 1,500 rugby players to play the game week in week out is a mammoth task. We ask that anyone who does want to get involved and help the club to develop, please get in touch with your respective section chairs or the committee and discuss ways to help. We need volunteers both with specific skills and experiences (eg. who can help with youth girl's player recruitment, social media, priority projects, etc.), as well as volunteers who are able to give us their time, passion and energy on game and training days (eg. age group 1st Aiders, referees, etc.). Please see below for more roles within our Rugby Club that need your help & support.

Development Opportunities

Finally, we would be remiss, in not laying out the committee's plans for the coming years.

We are fully aware, the club's growth is limited by the capacity of its facilities, and to enable the club to offer more rugby to more children and adults, we must have an infrastructure strategy fit for the future. As such our focus is on three areas: the Springfield Trust Development (opposite the club), the pitches at Garratt Green (including the Scout Hut) and the Sports Club facilities at Openview (grass/ artificial pitches, changing room/shower facilities, storage, Club House, etc.)

The Springfield Trust Development is fast approaching its point of conclusion. It is essential that there is a rugby pitch placed, within the development, as was initially planned. In order to ensure this, we have continued to work with the Spencer Sports Club and Broomwood FC, as part of the Springfield Community Sports Partnership, as well as reaching out to property experts within our membership who advised we commission Saville's to provide options on a future course of action. It is likely that this will involve cost to the Rugby Club, which will be appropriately consulted on with the membership, but the MC believe it is important that additional pitch access is secured as a priority.

The Scout Hut, at Garratt Green, is dilapidated, with the interior needing renovation, and in 2018 we entered into an agreement with the council to refurbish the building. Since then an asbestos survey, delays due to COVID-19 and council concern over the condition of the building have halted our plans. We have now indicated to the council that we would be prepared to consider the alternative option to refurbishing the current building of knocking down and replacing the existing structure. We believe this decision to be dependent upon the cost and agreement with the membership on our investment priorities.

Regarding the Openview site, we have engaged a feasibility study from Sports ClubHouses to recommend options both for the redevelopment of the existing Club House and building a New Club House, in addition to proving an appropriate ground to meet the needs of Rugby, Cricket and Football. The Minis Chair, Dave Watson, has led this effort, including inviting members from the football and cricket clubs to discuss hybrid pitches with the English Cricket Board (ECB), presenting the report's recommendations to the Sports Club Management Committee and being given the opportunity to present at the recent November Sports Club AGM.

As a Rugby Club, we are committed to a multi-sport facility at Openview but are convinced that delivering a step change in the quality of facilities and developing the site to its full potential, can only happen with an accompanying change in the way in which the Sports Club is currently run, including a re-write of its constitution and simplification of a complex legal structure. As with addressing the shortfalls with the previous Rugby Club constitution, we believe this will come at a cost and require us to engage appropriate legal advice but believe it is an investment decision that we should seriously consider to unlock the full potential of Openview for the local community.

Finally, with regard to the current Club House building, we are in the process of negotiating with the Sports Club, for the Rugby Club to take over the running of the bar and provide catering, under a franchise agreement. In support of this, we have decided to invest monies in the fit out of a new industrial kitchen to ensure we have the appropriate facilities to both host visiting teams and support a full Club House diary of social events. In the interim period up to having a kitchen on site, the Senior & Junior Rugby Club sections will continue to organise "pop up" bar and food to meet our needs on a Saturday & Sunday.

We firmly believe our members are our biggest asset and that it is vital to have a fully working, safe & welcoming Club House at Openview both on match & non-match days!

Conclusion

All of the change that we would like to see materialise will not happen overnight and without additional manpower, but there are multiple seeds of growth and we are entering a good position for the next 75 years of rugby at the club. From the whole of the committee, thank you to all who give up their time to make this club what it is.

2, 3 Ironsides!

BIRFC Management Committee, Nov"21

Ironsides Rugby: we are not short on ideas BUT we are currently short of volunteers!

.... with specific skills and experiences in with enthusiasm and passion to be
Social media, to help with player recruitment & membership coms/ engagement	1 st Aid Volunteers for all age groups
Food & Beverage, to be a Director on BIRFC Operations Ltd	Referees for older mini and younger youth age groups
Junior Treasurer, to take over from our current incumbent	Lead and develop a Young Referees Programme ...
Health & Safety, to conduct risk assessments on our facilities	Enter their Age Group match scores onto GMS, to maximise our International ticket allocations (U14+)
Coaching, to coach and develop both our Senior & Older Youth teams	Co-ordinate our referees across the Junior Club
Refereeing, to officiate at Senior & Older Youth games	Set up a secondary schools liaison programme to help recruit boys and girls into the club
Immediate 1st Aid Care Provision, to be on the touch line for Senior & Older Youth Games	