

Nailsea & District Croquet Club
Minutes of Committee Meeting held on 18 August 2015

Chair: Andrew Wimshurst

Present: Kathy Wallace, Coral Harrison, Mike Tracy, Brigit Clayton

1. Apologies Brian Roynon

2. Minutes of Committee Meeting held on 14 July 2015

These were signed as a true and accurate record of the meeting held on 14 July 2015

3 Matters arising from Minutes of Committee Meeting held on 14 July 2015

Andrew had contacted the CA about Child Protection but they didn't seem to be able to offer any clear guidance on the procedure for appointing a Child Protection Officer. He would try to get information about this from elsewhere.

AW

Andrew reported that a man from NS Council had been to look at the trees bordering St Francis' School and had said that they all had preservation orders on them. He would make another visit to see whether there was any evidence that the particular tree that causes us problems might be unstable. Such evidence would allow him to give us permission to chop it down. This was unlikely.

Andrew reported that the draft lease had been returned to NS Council. Our legal and land representatives were arranging the next steps with the Council. The Committee voted unanimously that David Hunt should replace Joy Wilyman as a trustee. This was due to Joy's advancing years. Kathy had been to visit Joy to tell her about the new lease and Joy had suggested that she be replaced.

Mike Tracy reported that Kathy, Brigit and Chris Jackson had received website training from Mike and would be keeping their respective pages and areas updated. Linda Shaw would do likewise when she had received her training. The chart for allocation of pages had been circulated to all the Committee but had not been returned to him

Mike was thanked for all his effort and time in moving the website forward.

Chris Jackson had indicated that in view of his other club commitments he would not have time to maintain the lawn accessories or to be on the mowing rota.

Chris Jackson had produced a set of Mad Monday results which indicated that the lower handicap players were not losing an undue percentage of their games. Andrew to report back to the player who had raised this issue with him.

AW

4. Treasurer's Report (report attached at end of minutes)

The Committee expressed their thanks to Mike and Liz for the huge effort involved in hosting the barbecue which had made such a handsome profit

Current balance at the bank less un-presented cheques is £14,246.56
The surplus for the year is £4,720.22

5. Property Report

Brian had indicated that he had all the current jobs in hand.

6. Membership report (report attached at end of minutes)

Kathy had met with a new prospective member and given her a taster session. Mary Barnes was now giving her coaching for which she had paid the usual £30 fee. The fee for joining the club after the lessons finished would be reduced to £10 as the main playing season would then be over.

7. Lawn maintenance report (report attached at end of minutes)

Andrew expressed his appreciation of the detailed report. It was decided that

- the LAG should make a decision re spraying.
- the equipment for irrigation proposed in the report should be installed but the costs should be borne in the next financial year
- Coral would create a chart showing the contributions to the running of the Club that each member makes and also the tasks where they have offered to give help. The chart would be used to target requests for more volunteer effort.

CH

Mike indicated that he would like to step down from his hoop-setting role but was anxious that the quality of hoop setting at Nailsea should remain high. It was hoped that John's ideas for reducing the effort required and for enlisting help from younger members would make this possible.

8. Plans to inform members of levelling project

A newsletter would inform members about the new 25 year lease which had made the application for a grant from Sport England feasible. If the application were successful information would then be given about the plans for the autumn of 2016

9. Handicapping update

Andrew was anxious that the plan to give all beginners an AC default handicap of 24 was being implemented for the class of 2015. It was agreed that the Handbook and the Welcome leaflet should contain this information next year. It was also agreed that Kathy would create AC handicap cards for all the beginners and that Andrew would ask Peter to sign them in readiness for the Beginners' Competition on 13 September. We would then ask Linda to distribute the cards and to show the players how to enter the results of their matches.

KW

KW

AW

10. The principle of paid coaching

It was the opinion of the Committee that paid coaching should not take place other than through formal courses organised by the club.

11. Short Croquet teams at Budleigh

The Committee were pleased to accept the offer of Brian McCausland to organise the teams. Kathy would supply him with all the information he needed. This would include the names of those who had priority for a place because they had not played in the Nailsea event or because they had responded positively to the e-mail asking for interest to be registered.

KW

12. (Some) dates for next season

Dates were set provisionally for:
Semi-finals: 19/20/21 August
Finals: 2/3/4 September

The weekend between these two sets of dates would be the August Bank Holiday weekend.

The weekend Tournament dates would be discussed at the next meeting with Peter present and, possibly, knowledge of the Sport England decision.

13. AOB

It was agreed that the Watford fixture had become difficult to find a team for and that lawn time was limited so we should not arrange a match for 2016. Kathy to inform the Watford team

KW

Chris Jackson had asked if he could arrange a friendly GC match between NDCC and 6 members of Dowlish Wake CC. It would take place late September/October. The Committee had no objections to this.

14. Date of next meeting

This was arranged for 10am on Tuesday 22 September

Signed as a true and accurate record

Name.....

Signature..... date.....

Treasurer's report for NDCC committee meeting 18th August 2015

Current balance at the bank less un-presented cheques is £14,246.56

The surplus for the year is £4,720.22

The net income from the WACWC was £287.89 from lunches and £390.00 from the CA for lawn hire and manager's lunches and teas (payment pending), total £677.89

The net income from the barbecue was £244.02

The approach from an insurance broker to provide cover at lower cost did not bear fruit as he could not find any company that would offer us insurance for less than we are already paying. The cost of cover for the year has increased to ££898.40 from £876.00 last year.

Machinery repairs are over budget, mostly due to the fuel leakage problems with the Countax. This has accounted for about £700 of the £1038 spent on machinery repairs and maintenance against a budget of £500. Note that the Toro mower has its own expenditure category and has cost £354 against a budget of £500.

My figures are slightly distorted because there are expense claims for petrol of which I know that have not yet been presented. Last year our petrol cost £443.25 and expense claims this year amount to £82.04. I am nevertheless confident that we will have a significantly better surplus for the year than we budgeted for.

Late news. It has come to light that the fee for the hire of the Masonic Hall for our Christmas meal should have been paid when the booking was made in July, and that this does not appear to have been done. The venue has now been booked for Christmas 2016 and so the fee for this is also due now. If investigations show that the fee for this year was not paid then this year's accounts will contain two year's hire fee, £250 in total, instead of the expected fee for one year.

Membership Report 18 August 2015

I have checked the list of people who signed up for coaching. There were initially 18 people from Open Day and more recently another 2 joined Jim's group. The result is 12 new members and a reasonable chance that the 2 latecomers will join.

I have contacted Jim, Linda and Rob enquiring about those who have not joined. Jim had a couple who came for one lesson and have not been seen since but they live some distance away so are unlikely new members. They had paid for coaching. Another person who had also paid has not been to any coaching but when he received the invitation to the New Members Evening, he said that he would come in the Autumn.

Linda had 2 people who did not come to coaching and there is also another person who is a mystery, Rob and Linda have never heard of him and Jim thinks he was the person who was apparently very keen but has not been seen.

Coral

Lawn Maintenance Report – August 2015

1. Lawns

The Local Dry Patches (LDP) continue to make playing conditions difficult. More Aqueduct spray has not been applied because the Aqueduct spray allows water to penetrate the soil but it does need rain to work. With generally dry weather over the last month there were only three days (24 and 26 July plus 14 August) having significant rainfall.

Duncan Hector visited seven clubs in the South West on 4/5 August including Nailsea. The soil core samples showed thatch depth to be about 18mm. The soil samples also showed that the roots on the dwarf rye grass test patch were much deeper (4 inches plus) than on the main lawns. He commented that dwarf rye grass does appear to be more drought resistant than the traditional fescue cultivars and meadow grass. He confirmed that we had LDP and that he had observed LDP on many of the croquet lawns he visited in July/August. He has been discussing methods of prevention with the Aqueduct manufacturer, Farmura. The full text of his subsequent email is included in Appendix 1.

The thrust of the discussions is that :

- a. Efforts to prevent LDP must start early in the year (March/April).
- b. We need a revised programme of Wetting Agent sprays. (A combination of Revolution and Aqueduct).
- c. To work effectively these products need to be watered in and are best applied just before rain.

The change from a Yucca wetting agent to Aqueduct and Revolution represents a significant cost increase of about £640 per annum. If we continued with contractor spraying from John Swift there would be an increase in spraying labour of £240 minimum for two additional sprays. Fortunately, there are two ways in which this increase can be mitigated within the lawn maintenance budget:

a. By virtue of expanding the number of clubs that he advises in the South West Duncan Hector is able to minimise his travel costs and we do not have to budget for his site visits. (saving of about £530)

b. By purchasing a sprayer and carrying out a large proportion of the spraying ourselves. Both the Iron and Wetting Agents are not licensable products and can be applied by NDCC manpower. The reduction in Iron Spraying labour costs represents a reduction of £360 against our current budget. It also avoids the potential increase of £240 for additional spraying.

Based on the above, there is a small annual saving from the proposed changes to the maintenance programme/regime of £250 (530+360-640). However, as the Wetting Agents require to be watered in (via the new irrigation system – see below) I suspect that the cost of water will offset the saving. To put this in context, 10 mm of rain fell on Friday (13th August). This is approximately the volume recommended for watering in Revolution and corresponds to 33 cubic metres of water, the cost of which is £100 from Bristol Water.

The estimated cost of a small towable sprayer is about £500.

Crucially, the ability to carry out our own spraying of non-licensable products would allow us to time wetting agent spraying to coincide with rain – something that is not possible with a contractor who has to be booked ahead of time. It also affords us the opportunity of:

a. Carrying out additional Iron Spraying to achieve Duncan Hector's target of 5Kg/lawn. Currently John Swift will not spray on more than 2.5Kg/lawn for fear of blocking the spray nozzles and we would have to pay for repeat spraying if we insisted on 5Kg. The recommended limit is 4Kg per application and so to achieve 5Kg needs two sprays a week or two apart. The Iron spraying is particularly expensive because the peripheral areas of the lawns are also sprayed to prevent the spread of moss.

b. Reducing the cost of the four summer fertiliser sprays. The liquid fertiliser and wetting agent are not licensable. However, the PrimoMaxx growth regulator is licensable. At present, each spray costs us £120 in labour. If we were able to find somebody to supervise NDCC sprayers then we could carry out fertiliser sprays ourselves. Preliminary discussions with Greensleeves suggest that they would be prepared to carry out this supervisory role for about £40. (1 hours labour). Storage of the PrimoMaxx is an issue as it needs to be under the control of the Supervisor.

There may also be a need to purchase some protective clothing although John Swift does not use it as he regards PrimoMaxx as fairly harmless. He views Insecticides and Herbicides as a different matter and I would be keen to retain the services of a contractor to carry out any such spraying. At present this means that the October spray against Leather Jackets would continue to be contracted out.

2. Hoop Setting

Hoop setting remains the most arduous and least popular lawn activity. I have been thinking about ways of reducing the workload and have suggested to Mike Tracy that next year we operate two sets of hoop, side by side, 12 inches apart. Moving the hoops every month would essentially then only involve a re-set into the old hoop holes. The latter would continue to be covered over using Mike's excellent screwdriver technique but would enable the hoop to be relocated without recourse to measuring and drilling and probably backfilling. The key to making this a workable solution is to be able to accurately locate the site of the old holes. I believe I have a solution to this but I need to discuss the detail with Mike.

For the Womens World Championship Qualifier Mike and I decided not to move the hoops as they had been moved for the B class tournament the week before. I was able to carry out a re-set on all 24 hoops on the Thursday evening on my own. The real significance of this is that, if hoop moving is accomplished by resetting in old holes (as above), then it can be considered an evening rather than all day activity. This opens up the possibility of younger members of the club who work during the day as potential hoop setters. I explored this possibility with one of them last week and I think he could be persuaded to give up one evening (probably a Thursday) per year to hoop set.

In general a re-set arrangement would only require two people as one only has to cover up the existing hole and reset the hoop in the old hole. A number of younger members work but are all potentially available in the evening. Partnering one of them with one of the present team would make sense and reduce the physical burden on older members of the club.

3. Irrigation

The Lawns Advisory Group (LAG) group looked at various irrigation ideas both to support the possible levelling project and avoid LDP. The simplest and most cost effective scheme involves a 32mm flexible hosepipe and two high capacity sprinklers connected to the mains. The installation was delayed until this coming winter as the cost (around £900) was included in the Inspired Facilities Grant application. Regardless of the grant decision, I think it would be a good idea to press ahead with installation this autumn because of the revised wetting agent programme described under Lawns. (The LAG needs to meet to finalise and agree the detail before installation commences.)

The proposed scheme should be capable of delivering 1.5 to 2.0 cubic metres of water per hour and covering two lawns to a depth of 5mm in about four hours. Thus in two evenings it would be possible to irrigate all four lawns. During the four hour period the sprinklers would need moving twice.

The nominal cost of 5mm coverage is about £50 (Water costs about £3.50 per cubic metre) but it may be possible to negotiate a reduced rate as the water is returned to the ground and does not pass through the sewage system.

Regular irrigation would be two expensive both in terms of cost and manpower. However, occasional use could play a part in avoiding the LDP problems that we currently experience.

4. Manpower

There is potential problem with manpower for 2016 onwards. If we look at various activities that need people to help the situation is as follows:

1. Grass cutting needs a team of 8 people. Two and possibly three are giving up mowing at the end of this season so two or three new volunteers are needed.

2. Hoop setting manpower was discussed above. If the proposed arrangements prove viable then several younger members of the club can contribute and remove much of the burden on Mike Tracy and his existing team.
3. White lining requires a team of four people. Robin Hendry is a welcome addition to the team but I think other new recruits are required.
4. Sarel spiking, rolling and tining. I spike and roll the lawns approximately every two weeks. An assistant would be useful.
5. Leaf collection. Traditionally the grass cutters have taken on the task of leaf clearance in the autumn as grass cutting frequency is reduced to once per week. However, playing conditions benefit from a twice weekly cut and I would prefer to have separate group of people to take on this role.
6. Spraying. Assuming that we do start to do most of our own spraying Geoff Hughes has volunteered to carry it out . I will assist him as necessary. Carrying out the spraying ourselves does not increase the manpower required as somebody has to be present to open up the club, provide the contractor with chemicals, supervise the contractor, take the nets down and put everything back at the end.

I think it would be useful if the committee could consider the best way of recruiting more volunteers.

4. Autumn Programme 2015

The Lawns Advisory Group (LAG) came to the conclusion in the spring that there was little point in top dressing any lawns this year if they were going to be levelled next year. The cost saving of perhaps £1200-£1500 is well worth having. However there are bare patches on the lawns and I have been discussing the best way of reseeding these areas with Duncan Hector. The reseeding/overseeding problem is universal and the Sports Turf Research Institute (STRI) has been carrying out trials to explore new ideas. The most effective method appears to be a modification of the dimple seeding technique. Holes are punched in the ground at a depth of 12 to 15mm using a tining machine, the seed broadcast on the ground and then brushed into the holes (referred to as plant pots) using a piece of upside-down AstroTurf that is dragged across the ground. The holes can be top dressed with sand afterwards to smooth out the surface. In principle I think the lawns can continue to be used but it may be necessary to close them for a short period whilst the seed germinates. Last year Letchworth closed their lawns for 3 weeks to support overseeding and light top dressing.

With Geoff Hughes help I am going to experiment with this technique this Autumn. I need to make up 12 short stubby tines on my lathe to create the holes and purchase an AstroTurf offcut (£40ish). If the experiment is successful then we could have repeat sets of stubby tines made up commercially at low cost. (I expect the trial tines will rapidly wear out as they will be manufactured from mild steel rod without case hardening). If the experiment is successful it provides a cheap method of overseeding our lawns. However, if top dressing proves necessary, then at present this would still have to be contracted out.

In terms of lawn closures, it may well be worth experimenting by not closing three lawns at all but closing one for say three weeks and observing the relative outcomes. I expect the reseeding work to take place in October when there is more rain about. (Essential for germination). In general, I hope to keep all the lawns open as much as possible throughout the Autumn up to Xmas.

John Wallace 15/8/15

Appendix 1 : Text of Email from Duncan Hector re Local Dry Patch

I have had a long discussion with Jonathan Harmer at Farmura about Aquatrols products. He made a number of interesting points. Firstly that bents and fescues are more susceptible to drought than rye grasses. This seems to tally with the fact that the two new lawns at Guildford which contain rye grasses were still green. *(JNW Note – the older Guildford lawns are badly affected by LDP as are the Bristol lawns)* He recommends a programme of two applications of Aqueduct in April with a monthly application of Revolution in April, May, June and July. The idea is to make the surface porous early in the season using Aqueduct and the Revolution will then maintain the water/air balance in the soil. This method has been tested in Holland with excellent results. He stressed that Aquatrols spend millions a year on research and they do what it says on the tin. St Andrews Golf Club has a 3 year contract for Revolution which is used on the fairways and greens on all their courses which came about after advice from the STRI amongst others. He seems very confident that this will work BUT if there is no rain and no irrigation the lawns will obviously still go brown. There is a cost to this of about £280 per lawn per annum. A traditional wetting agent approach would cost around £160 per lawn but I am not sure whether that would work. *(JNW Note It only partially worked this year at NDCC. Although the total brown areas are smaller they are still a significant problem)*