

Attachment (A)

Chairman's notes

Welcome.....

This is truly an exciting time to be a member of our great club. It is the start of a new era full of opportunities to accelerate growth, continue to improve our vitality, increase the variety of activities, significantly upgrade facilities, and entrench our long-term financial security.....and I am confident of being able to achieve all that, whilst continuing our shared commitment to a culture of volunteerism, friendliness and social connections.

I appreciate that you don't want to listen to me for the next hour or so, especially as everyone would have already read every one of the 35 pages of our Annual Return..but I do want to highlight and expand on a few key items..... and still leave time for questions later.

Firstly, I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to the members of the Management Team (INC) who have tirelessly devoted their time to manage our club for the benefit of all members and the wider Manningham Community. Their dedication has been instrumental in steering our club through some critical decisions and challenges over the last year. And our committee has been 3 or 4 short of a full committee the whole year. A situation we must rectify. Fresh faces, new ideas, and diverse perspectives are essential as we navigate the remarkable bequest left to us and embark on major facility upgrades. So once again, I make a plea for members to consider a role on INC or a sub-committee. We particularly need more women involved in our management group.

I would like to talk about our outstanding membership growth over an extended period, as highlighted in the annual report. Before I do that, I would like to take a moment to recognize two significant contributors: Barry and Julie Wilkins. For nearly two decades, they have been the driving force behind our U3A Lawn Bowls course. That has not only been a great service to the Manningham Community, but a key source of our new members, with strong retention. The Wilkins have decided to retire from running U3A. We all should be very grateful for their dedication over a very long period. Not just with U3A, but many other committee roles, umpiring, selection, and much more. Hence, the recognition they were given in 2011 and 2014, being awarded life memberships. We thank them for their exceptional service to our club. I understand that Barry may want to respond so I will give him that opportunity now, rather than waiting to the end of the meeting.

Now, back onto our growth. The bowls clubs that are currently growing are generally those who have embraced social bowls or barefoot bowls, usually with bistros in good locations, AND those clubs who have upgraded their facilities. We have been fortunate to have achieved good membership growth, due to our dedicated Pennant

players, fantastic volunteers, and membership drives, and all our friendly members, without a large barefoot bowling program (as yet), and with good but not great facilities. That growth is at risk of stalling without major upgrades. At a minimum, replacing the front grass with synthetic and lights, and preferably with a roof. And of course, an additional toilet to service the rear green, with a new surface.

Case studies clearly underscore the impact of covered greens. Clubs that invest in such upgrades experience membership surges of 100%, and increased participation of between 100% to 500%. We are very confident that OUR growth will also accelerate with improved facilities.

The council has included in its 2024/25 draft budget a spend of \$700k on our front green replacement and lighting towers, with our contribution being 50% or \$350k. However, that project is still on hold whilst the council considers our submission to increase the scope and budget to add a roof. The estimated total cost would increase to about \$1.8m, with our contribution being \$900k.

Why is now the opportune moment for this initiative? Consider the following:

1. **Practicality:** Building a third green is an alternative, but constructing a covered green directly in front of our clubhouse is more cost-effective and practical.
2. **Sporting Trends:** Social bowls, with improved facilities, is the prevailing trend. Our move aligns with that evolving landscape.
3. **Bowls Victoria Support:** The need for more covered greens, particularly in the Eastern suburbs has gained backing from Bowls Victoria.
4. **Bequest Legacy:** Our once-in-a-lifetime bequest deserves investment in a once-in-a-lifetime initiative.
5. **Financial Capacity:** Our club can fund the capital costs and still reserve funds for other facility improvements.
6. **Sustainability:** We'll have the ongoing capacity to cover maintenance and whole-life costs.
7. **Cost Efficiency:** Installing the roof before the new surface saves about \$100k in installation expenses and \$200k in drainage/light tower costs.
8. **Consistent Advocacy:** Over the past four years, under three different chairpersons, our management committees have championed the covered green strategy, and kept members informed.
9. **Community Impact:** This initiative will put Donvale on the map for bowls, becoming a flagship sports facility for the Manningham community.
10. **Year-Round Play:** Imagine playing under a dome—day or night, rain or shine—without rain jackets or sunscreen. No more cancellations due to weather!

A question often asked is “what will our membership capacity be once we have two good greens”. The answer isn’t straightforward, as it hinges on membership categories and participation types. I will provide my estimates.

In terms of Pennant and competitive bowlers, I believe we could cater for about 30 to 40 more and grow full memberships from the current 150 to about 190. Remembering that many of those Full Memberships will not play Pennant.

In terms of Non-Affiliated Social membership, I believe we could accommodate an additional 50 and grow from 85 to about 135.

So total membership would then be about 330. Additionally, we expect significant growth in barefoot bowls participation, particularly on Thursday and Friday nights. These players may not necessarily become full members but contribute to our vibrant community and maximise utilisation of our facilities.

Regarding the much-requested extra toilet for the back green, progress has been slow. The council has not approved our submissions, and before proceeding on our own, we needed to wait to be certain what amount we received from the bequest. We expressed our willingness to fund and install the toilet ourselves, but the council is now insisting on doing the project management. Mal Sheild is actively obtaining quotes and assessing the impact of council involvement on costs and timing.

Regarding the rear synthetic, we have two issues we are considering. The unevenness of certain rinks and the poor uniformity, brightness and power usage of the floodlights. Once again, we thank Mal Sheild for working on those issues with the council. I won’t go into the details, unless you want to ask questions later, but the council and our club will be balancing the extra costs in pushing too quickly for replacing the surface before it has worn out.....and replacing the lights without pursuing or waiting for the council to agree to sharing or absorbing the costs.

Regarding new uniforms and logo (or motif), the Management Committee has now agreed in principle to introduce a new uniform and logo. A final design has not been approved, but it should be approved by early July. The plan is to roll out the new uniform in time for this year’s Pennant season, which I agree will be tight. It has been decided that the first two shirts will be supplied free of charge to all members who commit to Pennant for this season. The colour of shorts and pants will not change, and new Jackets and other items of clothing will most likely be deferred for another year.

The sub-committee that has been working on this initiative, has found a very professional, and supportive new supplier, which should enable a reduction in prices of about 30% or more, with improved lead times. The material is the same as used by 98% of bowls clubs.

As I have indicated previously, I think it is a perfect time to refresh and modernise our image. Barry Lester, a well-known Australian bowler with vast experience helping many clubs throughout Australia, recently said in an interview, the successful clubs have conducted reviews of their operations, brand and uniforms to stay fresh and improve their vitality.

There are many other opportunities we will be pursuing and there have been many highlights over the last year, but you have all read about them, so I will leave it there.

In closing, the future of “Club Donvale” shines brightly. Your involvement is crucial. Let’s embark on this exciting journey together!

Now, without further ado, let’s proceed to the agenda and formalities.