



**AGM 2025**

## **PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS**

**I regret that there was not time to cover the review of 2024 club activities that I would normally have addressed at the AGM due to the need to allow a full discussion of some of the key issues facing the Club. This review is set out below.**

**Mike Bourne**

**President, Coombe Wood LTC**

## **MEMBERSHIP**

Having reached our agreed limit of 350 adult members in the Full and Under 26 categories, our membership numbers have remained stable at their record highs. On top of this, our waiting list has increased even further and now stands at over 130 people. We are only able to let in new Full and Under 26 members when current members leave, although we do still have capacity to take in more Off-peak members.

Junior and cadet membership numbers have also remained firm at around 450 members with limited availability of spaces on the junior term programme.

As announced at last year's AGM, the membership year will start on 1st April rather than 1st May with effect from this year. This aligns with the start of the new tennis season and should allow new members to enter the club tournament.

I would like to thank Ian Stewart, our Membership Secretary, for the fantastic job he has done once again over the last year on membership matters and in developing and running our IT systems.

Last year, Ian announced his intention to handover membership responsibilities to a new Membership Secretary. Armand Shahverdian volunteered to take on the role

and he and Ian have been working together on a handover plan with the aim of Armand formally starting the role after the 2025 AGM, picking up immediate responsibility, supported by the club manager, for the new membership year subscription billing process. Armand has also applied to become Chair of the Club and so will probably need to hand over this position to a successor if elected.

Ian had planned to continue as a general committee member in order to provide continuity and handover the critical IT elements of his role. Regrettably, given the likelihood of a complete change in the makeup of the committee, he has now decided to stand down from the committee completely. He has served on the committee for over 20 years and has been Membership Secretary since 2012. During that period, he has single-handedly moved the club from a paper-based, entirely manual operation to the fully automated, web-based club that we are today. Our membership and court booking systems are best in class having been developed to the club's bespoke needs. Ian has also contributed enormously to the club in many other ways, dealing with numerous facilities matters, such as the car park barrier and lighting, the entrance gate and other electrical matters. He has been instrumental in running the club tournament and finals day arrangements. He will be a huge miss to the committee which has come to rely on him in many ways. We all owe him a huge debt of gratitude for everything he has done for the club.

Ian's departure puts in jeopardy the future of the club's IT system, the scope of which touches many critical aspects of the club, including the Members Management System, Court Booking System and Coaching Management System. Addressing this will need to be high on the new committee's agenda.

## JUNIORS AND COACHING

Ollie, our Head Coach, and his team have had another fantastic year.

First and foremost, Ollie would like to extend his gratitude to all club members for their unwavering support throughout the year. Your enthusiasm, encouragement, and commitment to the club continue to be the foundation of our success. A special mention goes to Harry, Ed, Joe, and Natasha, as well as all of our amazing junior tennis assistants, who have worked tirelessly to provide first-class coaching with their trademark friendly and supportive approach. We are also delighted to welcome

Edwin Brooks back to the team—a familiar face to many, and it's great to have him with us once again. Our coaching programme has reached new heights, with more members participating than ever before. We introduced fresh initiatives, including our Tennis Clinics, which have provided players with new and engaging ways to improve their skills. The dedication of our players has also been reflected in competitive success, with some of our junior teams progressing to the quarter-finals of the winter youth league competition—a fantastic achievement and a testament to their hard work. We also celebrated success with some of our junior players reaching county level, as well as Audrina Neeladoo becoming a finalist of the Lemon Bowl, a prestigious international tournament held at the site of the Italian Open.

The Matthew Cruikshank Cup (played between our adult and junior membership) saw the adult side come out on top in the final round of matches, after a closely fought contest! This now sees the adults take a 2-1 lead in the competition. On the back of this, we are delighted that many of our juniors have now stepped up to join adult competition. The next match between the two sides will be Sunday 14th September.

We were particularly proud to take part again in the Bright Ideas for Tennis, 24 hour marathon a few weeks ago. With Tim Henman joining some of the club's own SEND participants, it really reinforces our commitment to inclusivity and providing opportunities for all.

Looking Ahead, 2025 promises to be just as exciting. A key focus remains on expanding our junior programme, particularly at the youngest levels, to ensure we continue nurturing the next generation of players.

Our adult social tennis sessions remain a great way to meet fellow members and enjoy the game, and we encourage everyone to join us at 2pm on a Saturday — bring a friend, spread the word and enjoy some fun and competitive play!

Ollie is keen to deliver an action-packed calendar, including four to five American-style tournaments throughout the year, complete with a manned bar, BBQ, and a relaxed social atmosphere. Our Junior Qualifying Day (Sunday 8th June) will once again be a highlight, and we are exploring the possibility of introducing a junior social event to further strengthen our community.

As always, our commitment to inclusivity remains at the heart of everything we do. Whether you are picking up a racquet for the first time or striving to reach new heights in your game, we want to support every member in achieving their personal tennis goals.

A huge thank you to each and every one of you. Your continued support, passion, and enthusiasm makes Coombe Wood the wonderful club that it is. Here's to another successful year ahead!

## TOURNAMENT AND TEAMS

Firstly, a big thank you to all the team captains and players. It is an honour to represent the club and to be selected as team captain. It is also a big commitment, and all efforts are very much appreciated.

We now have 19 adult teams. Overall, the teams have had a good summer and winter, with several teams finishing either top or second in their division. For the first time, the Ladies 1st team has been promoted into Division 4 for the summer. The men's teams have had a challenging winter season, however congratulations to the men's 2nd team who are currently placed 2nd in their division with final matches to be played. We introduced a 2nd midweek ladies' team and entered a 3rd mixed team into the Surrey knockout event for the first time. Congratulations to all.

Importantly we have seen some of our juniors make the transition to adult tennis, being welcomed into the ladies and men's teams, notably Ellie Philips, Monica Kingston and Raf Cawthra.

With just a few final winter league and knockout matches to play, we are now looking ahead to the summer season and our Match Secretary, Natasha Sherrard will be arranging captains meeting to finalise team squads over the next couple of weeks.

Several members also continue to compete in competitions outside of the club and following on from last year, players have repeated their individual successes in the Surrey knockout competitions. Natasha herself won the women's doubles in two age groups in the Surrey knock-outs in the summer, partnering with another Coombe Wood member, Amanda Sherrard, in one of these.

The 2024 club tournament was once again a big success, with some great matches taking place in both the adult and junior events on a lovely day for all the family. Congratulations to Audrina Neeladoo who won the ladies singles for the 2nd time, Although there could be no men's singles on finals day due to one of the finalists pulling out injured, congratulations go to Stefan Suvei who was subsequently awarded the title.

In addition to the club championships, the singles box leagues continue to be very popular – many thanks to Jon Rushforth and Mark Fox for running these.

It was announced at last year's AGM that Jan Stewart planned to stand down as Match Secretary, and Natasha Sherrard joined the committee with the aim of taking over the role. This handover was completed in July, with Jan passing over the responsibility to Natasha after overseeing the summer season and club tournament. Although new to the committee, Natasha is ideally qualified for the role from her time spent a captain of the ladies 1st team and her many successes in the club tournament.

Thanks to Ian Stewart for setting up the new booking system for the club teams enabling the captains to book their own courts. The new system has been embraced and has been a great addition.

Thanks also to Louise and Gary Jordan for their work ordering and putting out new tennis balls, as well as to Andy Brownen for sending the used balls to be recycled. Both these tasks have now been passed over to the Club Manager.

Having passed over the Match Secretary role, Jan has now decided to step down from the committee completely and I would like to thank her for the tremendous work she has done over her 20 plus years on the committee, included 13 years as social secretary.

## WELFARE AND SAFEGUARDING

For personal reasons, Kerry Ono stood down from her role as the club's Welfare Officer in November. I would like to thank Kerry for work in the role and for her valuable contribution to committee matters over her time on the committee.

When Kerry took on the role at the start of last year, Greg Sorrell, who has extensive experience in welfare and safeguarding matters, took on the role of Deputy Welfare officer to provide advice to Kerry and deputise for her in case of absence. Greg very kindly agreed to step in and take over the main role of Welfare Officer from Kerry on a temporary basis and was co-opted on to the committee in November. Greg has agreed to stay on while we seek another committee member to take on the role on a longer-term basis, as, without a suitably qualified person in this role, the club will not be compliant with the LTA's venue registration conditions. Finding a replacement Welfare Officer will also be high on the new committee's agenda.

We continue to work closely with the LTA to ensure the club follows guidelines and best practice in the safeguarding of children and adults at risk. Please see our Safeguarding Policy on club website and noticeboard for details of how to report a concern, or you can contact the Welfare Officer directly if you ever need to.

## SOCIAL ACTIVITIES

It was a very active year on the social front with several large events taking place. These included:

- Drinks on the terrace to celebrate the arrival of the new terrace furniture at the start of June.
- Father's Day event with tennis, barbeque and live England football match on a big screen in the clubhouse.
- Junior Qualifying day, a fun family event which is now firmly part of the club's calendar.
- Finals day, the traditional highlight of the year, which was a great success as always.
- Coombe-fest – the end of summer party had an Oktoberfest theme last year with an unforgettable evening hosted by the legendary Eva Von Schnippisch.
- Coombe Christmas Cracker – a well-attended Christmas party with dancing to a live DJ.

We announced at last year's AGM that Nandini Narayanan planned to stand down as social secretary and handover the responsibility to Eniola Sanwo. The handover was completed in July after Nandini managed the Finals Day arrangements as her

last event. I would like to thank Nandini for all of her incredible work during 7 and a half years in the role.

Eniola Sanwo picked up the responsibility before being formally co-opted on to the Committee as social secretary in November. She did a fantastic job leading the arrangements for the highly successful Coombe-Fest and Christmas Cracker events. Unfortunately, however, in light of the potential further significant changes to the committee, Eniola has decided not to stand for re-election, and I would like to thank her for her hard work during her period in the role.

Many thanks are also due to the social sub-committee members, especially Matt and Skye Pickin, Tim Husain and Nicki Tattersall for their great work in helping run the various events during the year, and to Tim again for running the bar activities in the early part of the year before the Club Manager was recruited.

Once the new Committee is in place there will be the need to appoint a replacement Social Secretary from amongst the incoming committee members as soon as possible to work on plans for the 2025 social calendar.

## **BRIDGE CLUB**

The bridge club meets in the club house on the first Tuesday of the month and plays online on all other Tuesday evenings. The club enters two teams in the Surrey Tennis Club Bridge League and plays competitive matches throughout the autumn, winter and early spring months. The bridge club is always looking for new members and if you are interested, contact Ian Stewart.

I would like to thank Jan and Ian for running this so successfully.

## **GROUNDS AND FACILITIES**

The major project undertaken during the year was completion of the long-planned development of the lane. For the first time, we now have a pedestrian footpath and lighting to enable members to walk along the entrance lane safely at all times of day. The passing spaces have also been enlarged and hardstanding put in place for the rubbish bins. These improvements will be beneficial to members for years to come.

Huge thanks are due to Bob Blunden, who led the initial stages of the project through to obtaining planning permission, and Donato Calviello, who took over the project at the start of last year and managed the construction phase through to completion.

Donato managed the construction work with meticulous attention to detail, closely following the specifications set out in the planning permission documentation. He spent countless hours on the project on a voluntary basis, did an exceptional job planning and overseeing the construction, carrying out an extremely thorough process to select a suitable company to carry out the works, meeting with and obtaining quotes from around 20 landscaping contractors. He eventually presented a shortlist of 3 firms to the committee, which approved the selection of the standout firm, Flourish Landscapes.

Donato successfully tackled numerous challenges during the works, resolved issues, and found creative solutions to address concerns raised during the project. Despite these challenges, he was able to complete the work for £40,000, well within the budgeted expenditure for 2024 of £60,000 approved at the last AGM.

In June, some fabulous new outdoor furniture was purchased for the terrace, including a stylish sofa and canopy and new tables and chairs. This has proved to be very popular with members and has allowed the terrace to be used to its full potential. We also gave the exterior of the clubhouse a fresh coat of paint to complete the picture. Thank you to Belinda, Nandini and Chris Lewis for leading this project, and for all their time designing the layout, reviewing alternatives, visiting suppliers and negotiating prices.

Following discussion at last year's AGM, a firm of civil engineers were engaged to scope out the work that would be required to provide a permanent long-term solution to the car park surface. Thank you to Armand who led this review for the committee and Poly Church, a club member and a very experienced commercial architect, for arranging for this review to be carried out.

The initial proposal put forward by the engineers, had an indicative cost of around £135,000. This was considered disproportionate to the value that would be achieved



for club members and the project therefore remains on hold pending a review of alternative, more cost effective solutions.

In addition to these projects, there has been lots of general work on the grounds as usual. Tree lopping took place to cut back all over-hanging branches and several yew trees, which were considered a risk to members because of the poisonous berries, were removed.

Our thanks to Willow Landscape for their work continuing to maintain all grassed areas and plant borders.

Thanks are also due to another of our club members, David King, for his work on court maintenance.

Chris Lewis is now standing down from the committee and I would like to thank her for the tremendous work she has put in to looking after the club grounds for 6 years over 2 spells as Grounds Secretary. Donato joined the committee at the last AGM with a view to taking on a new Facilities Secretary role combining the responsibilities for both grounds and clubhouse matters. As well as leading the lane project, Donato has also provided expert advice on several other facilities issues during the year. He has however decided not to take the Facilities Secretary role and is now standing for Honorary Secretary instead. The new committee will therefore need to appoint a new Facilities Secretary to ensure our grounds and clubhouse continue to be kept in a first class condition.

## CLUB MANAGER

At the start of October we were pleased to welcome Sam King as our first ever Club Manager. Reporting to the Honorary Secretary and supporting the rest of the committee, Sam has been settling in to the role, learning how the club operates and aims to pick up more of the day to day club management tasks over the coming months.

## CLUB CHARITY

Club events are held to raise money for charity from time to time with the funds raised going to various different charities. The committee decided to pick a specific

charity to be the focus each year and has selected Barnfield Riding for the Disabled to be the club charity for 2025/26.

Barnfield Riding for the Disabled is a small charity in Kingston that provides horse-riding therapy sessions for people in our community with physical, mental and emotional disabilities. Their goal is to improve their riders' mobility, confidence and well-being through horse-riding, which offers benefits such as muscle-strengthening, balance improvement, and coordination, as well as emotional and social benefits by providing a sense of accomplishment and connection with others. Their sessions cater to adults and children with a wide range of disabilities and life-limiting conditions, run by trained volunteers and using the charity's horses to help enhance their riders' lives in a supportive and safe environment. For many of the people they support, Barnfield Riding for the Disabled is their 'happy place'.

## GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE REVIEW

I believe it is more important than ever that we push ahead with the plan, announced at previous AGMs, to incorporate the club as a company limited by guarantee. The club has outgrown its current status as an unincorporated association and needs a legal structure to protect committee members and members generally. The work on this project has taken longer than expected, due to the heavy workload placed on Rob and other committee members over the last year. We will update our club rules, which have not changed since 2007, as part of the same project.

It is also proposed to streamline the committee structure by introducing a new smaller board/committee with provisions for shorter periods of tenure to ensure the make-up of the committee changes more frequently and represents the views of current members. Some of these provisions will no doubt provoke debate and a comprehensive consultation process with members will take place, which will inevitably take several months. I hope that the new committee members will give their full support to this project. More details will be provided at the meeting.

## COMMITTEE TRANSITION

There have been a number of significant changes to the committee, most of which were in line with the plans announced at last year's AGM in anticipation of transitioning to the proposed new company.

- **Honorary Secretary:** After Rob Gale stood down from the role at last year's AGM after 7 years in the role, we were without an Honorary Secretary at the start of the year and consequently Heather McAtackney and Rob continued to cover the responsibilities between them. Chrissie Bestley volunteered and was co-opted onto the committee at the beginning of May with a view to eventually taking over the Honorary Secretary role. Rob worked with Chrissie on handover plans, but unfortunately Chrissie decided to withdraw her interest in the role in mid-June.

Richard Senger volunteered for the role and in August started a further lengthy handover process with Rob before being formally co-opted on to the committee in November.

- **Membership:** Armand Shahverdian has been shadowing Ian Stewart with the plan for him to take over as membership secretary following the AGM. As noted earlier, however, Armand is now standing for Chair, so it is possible a new membership secretary will be required.
- **Treasurer:** Zak Hirt has been working with Paul in preparation for taking over as Honorary Treasurer once the new company is in place.
- **Match:** Natasha Sherrard has already taken over the Match Secretary position from Jan Stewart having stepped in to the role with effect from the end of the last summer season.
- **Social:** Eniola Sanwo took over the Social Secretary responsibilities from Nandini in the summer although she has now decided to stand down from the Committee

- Grounds/Facilities: It had been planned that Chris Lewis would hand over the Grounds Secretary responsibilities to Donato as part of an enlarged Facilities Secretary role with support for day to day administration by the Club Manager. As noted earlier, however, Donato is now standing for Honorary Secretary.
- Other: Daniel McQue is also standing down from the committee and I would like to thank him for his contribution over his time on the committee which included 4 years serving as Match Secretary.

On a final note, I am sad to say that Heather McAtackney is today standing down as the Club's Chair. Over Heather's 8 years chairing the committee, the club has developed and grown enormously in terms of its membership numbers, finances, coaching activities and governance. Heather's contribution to the club has been immense, not just in her time as Chair, but in close to 30 years of service on the committee overall. I would like to extend my sincere thanks and gratitude to Heather for everything she has done for the club.