



Chairmans Report

2021-22 Season

Executive Summary

Our 75th year was representative of the highs and lows the Club has been through over its history; a season of two halves, immensely challenging on and off the field up until Xmas and then greatly satisfying after, to remind us why we do what we do!

Rugby

- Our Ladies had a 75% win rate to top their league and get promoted. Girls Youth teams were active at U13, U15 and U18 and the section is growing
- The Academy went unbeaten and won their OBB League after a brilliant season
- Our Senior Mens section started the season with more players than in 2019-20. Circumstances forced the 2&3XV to be combined. More positively we did relaunch the Stragglers Veterans team which appeals to many older 3s players
- Touch Rugby saw an influx of players, encouragingly seeing more youth age players, which we hope will provide an option to keep players in the game
- Boys Youth had a strong showing in Bucks Cup competitions and U13s saw significant growth in numbers. The Mini Section made a good return post pandemic and also so growth in player numbers across all Age Groups
- The Club has developed its End to End Rugby Strategy focused on attracting new players and retaining players from U6 to Veterans, addressing the challenges of reducing participation in the mens game and maximising opportunities in the Ladies/Girls, Touch Union and abbreviated forms of the game

Commercial, Financial and Fundraising

- A number of significant functions helped income generation adding to buoyant bar, catering and event hire income
- Sponsorship totalling over £55K has been raised to fund Development Projects for next season, including GT Wealth our first Club Kit Sponsor.
- Disciplined financial management ensured the Club reported a profit for the 2020/21 season and estimated profit for 2021/2
- The Club has plans to invest £81K in rugby and facility development in the 2022-3 season

Facilities

- The club will continue to maintain and invest in our Clubhouse to ensure fitness for purpose whilst development plans proceed
- A significant investment is planned in two grounds projects: a further bore-hole for irrigation and mobile lights to increase capacity for pitch use whilst protecting over used pitches

Management

- The Executive has operated at half capacity this season and it has only been possible to keep the Club running due to a handful of highly committed individuals covering multiple roles.
- Despite this many of the same individuals have also made the time to develop future plans. I applaud and thank those individuals on behalf of all of the membership. We have also seen some great participation from our Clubhouse Development Steering Group.

Volunteers and Membership

- A massive thank you to all of you who volunteer your time – whether in roles (coaches, AGOs, management) or helping with specific tasks
- We need urgent help with some crucial roles that remain unfilled including Safeguarding without which the Junior Club can't operate. The level of membership subscriptions will have to increase if we have to pay people to do voluntary roles

Key Events

- Wow, two great events were held to celebrate our 75th year, the Summer Ball and Players Re-union. They showcased all that is great about Marlow Rugby Club and raised funds to invest in our plans for the next 75 years. Sincere gratitude to the organisers
- Our first Mini Festival in 3 years was a triumph of organisation, enjoyable for those that attended and a major commercial success. Major thanks to the U11s and all involved

Strategy and Development

- As with all grass roots Sports Clubs we face some major challenges in the future. The club is in a strong position to face them and exploit the many advantages and opportunities we have. Our capacity and rate of development is key to keeping ahead.

Mens Senior Rugby

DoR: Simon Hammond

Pre season was promising with good numbers and a number of new or returning players. We started the season with 3 Senior Mens teams, our 2nd and 3XV having been promoted in the 2019-20 season, meaning we had teams at Level 7, 8 and 9. It soon became clear that the challenge was too great and both 2XV and 3XV were struggling results wise. There was a real danger of losing both teams so we combined the 2s and 3s and relaunched the Vets team

We were quick to act as we turned out to be one of eight clubs who lost a side in the BBO leagues this season. A contributing factor to our decision to come out of the league (and perhaps my hardest decision over the past three seasons) was due to the fact that over half of the sides had their first team playing in a league above our own - this is evident in the strength and depth and we just couldn't compete on an equal footing from purely a safety point of view.

The Vets played a few fixtures and we were able to encourage a number of players back as well as expanding our rugby offering to an older audience. The Penguins Friday night fixture certainly put Marlow on the touring map.

Looking forward, we are now entering a challenging phase for rugby as a whole. For the 2022/23 season, we will be represented by two teams in L7 and L9 - leagues which we can be competitive within.

The Clubs that develop their offering well, in my opinion, will start to move ahead of the ones that can't. Examples of this will be investment in technologies to develop players such as video analysis and feedback from coaches with the evidence. As an early adopter, we can use this as a recruitment lever and as a differentiator to other local clubs.

Our continuing partnership with BNU continues to grow, allowing us to tap into another source of player recruitment - we must continue to foster the relationship.

Finally, I wish to thank a number of people who made it happen this season, from the strong coaching team of Rory Greenslade-Jones and Sly Silvester, our talented team physios Charlie Cook and Cate MacKenzie, the great captaincy of Hugo Jafari and Lewis Edwards and the continued inspiring input from Jockey, Rod Faul and Paul Tremelling.

Women's Rugby

DoR Kez Newman

A very successful season for the Ladies Team with new players coming in, current players showing improvement and a continued drive to learn and get better. We ended with a 75% win ratio including all home games and for the first time in over 6 seasons being able to fulfil all fixtures with at least 15 players, this culminated with a league win and promotion to NC2. This season saw a coaching team of Ali Buckle, Mick Jenkins and Louis and Henry Kunzig with a sprinkling of guest coaches. Going forward we have Neil Brooks returning as skills and analysis coach and Ezzy Goddard is currently running our pre pre season fitness training.

Highlight of the year: Last game against Aylesbury at home. Sun was shining, the biggest squad we'd put out to date and lots of supporters on the side lines with the broly bar open getting to enjoy it. A win secured top spot in the league.

Lowligh: The struggle to get a full team out around injury battles and covid infections. So many players stood up and committed even when they weren't 100% to make that happen and a massive thank you must go out to every player who pulled a shirt on this season.

Next season we are going up a league which means a higher standard, more games and a requirement for a bigger squad to cope with this. Recruitment through our social media channels is active and ongoing. We are putting in place some plans with face to face interactions to get the teams and the clubs name out there eg a stall at Marlow Market and a free women's boot camp. We are also going to need higher levels of fitness and continued improvement in skills. To aid this we are putting in place individual player performance plans, game analysis and specific skills training.

Girls Section

Across the Season we had 6 different girls represent the club in both u18 and u13 for the South Bucks BaaBaas in the Bucks Invitational League. Most of these playing their first ever game of contact rugby. All girls have showed an improvement in skill across the season and will looking to be to continue that on and progress their learning on a Wednesday night. The most challenging part of the section is the low numbers and the mixed age groups make contact training quite difficult though we often have joint training sessions in our Cluster group to help with this.

For next season the age grade bandings will be changed and there will be 4 age grades instead of 3. The current players will continue with Wednesday night training and playing with the cluster group. Recruitment is ongoing in this area with work to be done through the local schools where the club will look to assist with coaching in the school. My main target for next season is the new U12 Age Grade. I am looking to target current grade 6 students with touch sessions and introduction to rugby sessions over the next few months and the training for this will take place on a Sunday morning. If there is anyone interested in coaching or assisting with the running of the girls section please let me know.

I'd like to thank Mick Jenkins for assistance with coaching and Claire Clarke for assistance with admin.

Marlow Academy

DoR Rod Duguid

The step up from Youth to Academy Rugby in any season is a significant challenge. With GCSEs and A Levels and the physical challenges of the gateway to adult rugby, the players have both mental and physical mountains to climb. However, on the back of the COVID years where sport has been disrupted and, rugby especially, limited by the amount of contact possible, this year's successes have been truly remarkable and goes some way to prove that Marlow continues to be a club to be reckoned with and has seen the exceptional teamwork, camaraderie and success shine through in this phenomenal squad. At the business end of our End to End Rugby programme, we have given Marlow RUFC a great foundation to build on our vision as a club.

The early COVID year took its toll on many U16 players moving up to Academy. Only 18 players moved up from U16, and with limited contact and new schools with new opportunities only 13 of those initial players made it to the first matches. However, the stalwart support and leadership of the seasoned 20 strong U18s took them under their wing and integrated them quickly into the squad and, without doubt, brought out the best of them. The younger players became renowned, quickly, for their spirit, teamwork, determination and, indeed their skill sets. Victories came our way quickly with Marlow building serious credibility and reputation. Initially we convincingly beat our 10yrs touring friends from Manchester (Kersal RFC), having not beaten them in the last 3 encounters, so the season was showing great potential. Great wins against quality opposition like: Reading Abbey, Reading RAMS, Reading, A&C, Beaconsfield, Banbury, and Oxford Quins. Only in friendlies against the top opposition did the score not go our way, despite great tries and battles to the end. Indeed, the majority of those narrow losses in friendly ties, we won when it counted. In fact, throughout the entire season, Marlow Academy remained unbeaten in the Three Counties OBB League; only drawing to Henley away, but winning convincingly to all other contenders. Beating a strong Buckingham Team in the semi-final (21-10), before beating our noisy neighbours, Aylesbury, at Riverwoods, in the League Final (19-13). What a finish to the season!!

Unsurprisingly, individual players were recognised themselves and earned their colours for Bucks County U18s (Harry Ashton, Harry Price, Leo Simpson, Sam Tuckerman, Kit Selman), U18 SW Divisionals (Jack Downing, Charlie Moss - despite both only being U17) Wasps Academy U17s and U18s (Harry Price, Henry Hazlem, Charlie Moss) and England Lambs (Henry Kunzig). Very recently too Alex Holloway, Olly Spence and Jack Downing played U17 Bucks County, currently unbeaten in their first 2 matches. Such is our reputation, that when County were short of players through injury or COVID, they came to us first. Quite an accolade and proves the depth of squad that we have built. A massive well done to our Academy Head Coach, Al Lewis for bringing out the best in the players and developing the squad. Also, thank you to the team of volunteers that have helped coach, manage and inspire the players throughout this year. And to the phenomenal support from the 'Marlow Massive' that have cheered us on to Three Counties victory for every home game!!

Looking ahead to next year we have the challenge as lower numbers in the current U16 pull through to Academy age and are developing plans with Henley who we will continue to partner with next season

Touch Union

DoR Robert Clayton

Attendance

- The average number of players throughout the winter season has continued to be above 35 on Wednesdays– with two concurrent games in play. Numbers have picked up to 60+ through April and May as we move towards the summer league.
- Since Covid we have only seen the return of three pitches in use during the winter on three Wednesdays.
- Friday night Touch started this season and there is little or no pattern to the numbers, from as few as six to as many as 30 in the winter. As we have moved into summer numbers are stabilising at around 30.
- Boxing Day Touch was again well attended.

Membership/Players

- We have had a significant influx of new players this season, mainly from the Youth groups in particular the U14s once hitting the age of play, this was down to significant encouragement from the coaches of that age group. Rod has also helped with some of the academy lads joining in.
- In order to continue to grow touch active engagement is needed with parents of Youth starting at U14s but also alongside parents of minis.
- Two constraints on growing Touch are lack of lighting on other pitches and an unwillingness of others to volunteer (I personally wash over 100 bids a week during the summer) and to step up and referee.

Competitions/Other Clubs

- We played two friendlies with Maidehead in December with two mixed ability teams recording a one draw and one win. We played the return leg in April, where Maidenhead sent one team and played against three mixed ability teams, they won all three.

Summer League

- At time of writing summer league kicks off tonight, with ten teams registered rather than the usual eight.
- We have 59 players who have signed and paid for the league – a much higher uptake of the early bird rate this year.
- We have teams from the Borlase PE department and Cultivate fitness joining this year.

In closing I would particularly like to thank Craig Harrison, Scott Masters, Neil Brooks, Simon Hunt, Rod Duguid, Leighton Jones and our fantastic groundsman Roland for all their help and assistance over the past year.

Age Grade Rugby (Youth)

DoR: Leighton Jones

We enjoyed a marvellous season after the debacle of the last couple of seasons being interrupted due to the Covid crisis. A slow start steady amount of momentum was built up over August and September to the first fixtures. All age groups worked well together.

We welcomed the U13's into the Youth section and they have excelled at all things rugby. Initial numbers of 24 per session slowly expanded to 43 by January. The strength and depth has enabled the age group to remain unbeaten until the end of February. In doing so they played some of the best go forward rugby that we have seen from them.

For the U14s they boys headed gallantly into the Bucks Cup and made it into the semi finals before finally conceding to Buckingham in February. The season ended with a triumphant tour to Huntingdon, where the boys practised new skills in XRugby7s, made great memories and bonded as a team (as did the attending parents).

The U15's had an overall very successful season on pitch with a strong fixture list. Good run in Bucks cup losing a very close final. They had a fantastic tour to Lisbon playing in a great tournament and behaviour of boys was an absolute credit to the club. They trained Thursday evenings throughout the season having had a long pre-season build up from July. They succeeded in ensuring that they regularly had good numbers (half squad) training each Thursday.

Great support from parents and first class commitment throughout the whole season from coaches and AGO.

The U16's due to limited numbers in that year group successfully merged with Henley and as such managed to keep a good standard of rugby up at both clubs.

I would like to thank all of the players, coaches and volunteers for their contribution to a successful youth season at Marlow RUFC.

Age Grade Rugby (Mini)

DoR: Guy Ayland

For young players in the mini's section (U6-U12) losing 2 seasons due to the pandemic is a huge amount of time lost for building core skills that they will use for the rest of their rugby careers. So last season all our volunteer coaches had a huge mountain to climb and I pleased to say each and every age group did a fantastic job.

At this age the fundamental ingredient to growth and development is the young players having fun with ball in hand not training drills. All the age groups embraced this ethos with nearly all age groups attending more fixtures and festivals than ever before. The club covers the entry fees for 2 away festivals a season but all age groups came up with addition ways to fund additional rugby festivals for the players. Well done to everyone taking those initiatives and giving the players the all important competitive game time they missed for 2 seasons.

From the U9's upwards the mini's age groups are allowed to embraces the magical experiences of rugby tours. Again all age groups volunteers put a huge amount of time in organising the tours with great success all round. The U12 organised a 2 day weekend tour to the Midland and Oxford with 14 touring players and entered 2 festivals. A lot of rugby for the players which they all embraced and thoroughly enjoyed. The U11's went further afield to Cardiff, again for 2 days with 25 players. The tour included two training sessions and matches against Bedwas RFC & Caerphilly RFC. Both of whom were very tough competition but the player learnt a huge amount and played with amazing passion. Sadly due to low numbers in the U10's they didn't tour but they still managed a home tour with, games, entertainment, food and awards with shows great spirit in the age group. Finally the U9's ventured down to Chichester for a 2 day rugby festival with 14 players and returned having had a fantastic time and medals around their necks.

The key take away from the season is the fact that across all age groups we've had growth in the number of players and we need to continue to build on that in 22/23. The atmosphere at the club on Sunday mornings is electric and it's a joy to see grass roots rugby thrive. All of this is only possible though due to all our age group volunteers, both on the pitch as coaches but also off the pitch. Investing their time supporting the age groups, whether it's weekly admin, raising funds, first aid or organising tours. To all of you a huge, huge, thank you.

Clubhouse and Grounds Operations

Clubhouse Operations

Our bar and catering services are an important part of our offering to Members as well as being a key sources of income. A number of issues conspired to make the first half of the season particularly difficult with changing management, volunteer shortages (Sundays), staff shortages in the catering industry, pressure on costs, IT and till system issues all compounding. I'd like to thank Rob Olney and Michelle Brown for getting us through that period and providing the platform for the second half of the season.

The role of Club House manager had previously been a part time role which makes it very difficult to find the right candidate. We decided that it had become essential to have a full time Clubhouse Manager, and there was a sufficient pipeline of bookings to make that commitment and John "Jocky" Jayes has taken on that role since February supported by Georgia Milborrow who is looking after bookings and events and has provided continuity since the summer. I'm pleased to say that the Calendar has been filling up and we are seeing more bookings including some sizeable events over the offseason that the team have managed.

The Club introduced a new EPOS system in the season which will help us better manage stock and improve control. It will also enable membership benefits and discounts planned for next season

Events

Another casualty of the post pandemic world was our social events calendar. A lack of volunteers to help put that together and run events meant it just didn't happen. A further positive development since Xmas has been the formation of a Social Committee with Steve Dunning at the helm. We look forward to a vibrant calendar in the new season that is so critical to the social life of the club as well as a source of income.

The Club did run some very successful Club and 3rd Party events. Notably the Mini Festival returned with a vengeance as one of the best by a number of measures of success with revenue of over £30K.

Our 75th celebrations were both superbly organised, huge fund and again commercial successes.

- **The 75th Anniversary Summer Ball was held on 7th May** – a massive thank you to Sarah Peacey and George Buckland, Andy and Angus, the organising Committee and Jocky and Team for making it such a memorable occasion
- **75th Anniversary Reunion Dinner** – on the 21st May players from many generations gathered to catch up and rewrite their achievements; some travelling from abroad. David Sumpter pulled off another triumph; many thanks to him and the other organisers.

Grounds

- As a Club we invest heavily in the upkeep of our pitches. The increase in use they now get is a positive reflection of the growth of rugby, but also presents a challenge. Overuse, combined with environmental conditions has taken its toll, in particular on the 1XV pitch. For that reason we have decided to invest on mobile lights and a new borehole to enable greater rotation of use of pitches and ability to water all pitches. I'd like to thank our groundsman Roland for the pride he takes in keeping the grounds in spite of these challenges

Strategy and Development

As many will know from work experience, strategising and planning is time consuming and requires particular skills. When your volunteer management are already overstretched it can seem an unwanted distraction. But plan we must or we will never have clarity on what we are trying to achieve or develop at the rate we need to. I'm pleased to say that as well as keeping the lights on our management team has maintained momentum on strategic plans.

The groundwork is being laid and the Club is in a strong position to invest in its future with a window of the next 3 to 5 years to position itself to address the challenges facing the amateur game and exploit our inherent strengths to assure the Clubs survival for the next 75 years.

We must adapt and quickly. Planning is across 3 key areas:

- Rugby – the Rugby Committee will present plans for rugby that extend a player journey from U6 to Veterans, male and female, 15 a side contact and other variants and includes critical enabler such as coaching and facilities
- Commercial – the Club is fortunate that through its location there many opportunities to add income streams by being an attractive venue for hire. Currently much of that opportunity is untapped
- Facilities – underpinning both of the above is plans for social and rugby facilities, in short term but also strategic projects to sustain the next 75 years of Marlow Rugby

Risks

- Declining participation in Mens 15 a side, contact game
- Reduced ability/desire of amateur players to commit to league schedule
- Reducing voluntary workforce

Opportunities

- Commercial income streams to sustain and develop Club – 7 day a week Leisure facility
- Sharing of facilities with other Community organisations
- Invest and differentiate our offering from other local clubs
- Growth in participation Ladies Rugby
- Growth in participation in Touch Rugby
- Growth in abbreviated variants of the game

Commercial Financial & Funding

Commercial

We had great success in income generation initiatives during the last season including Euros Football and Lions Rugby from June/July, Pub in the Park Parking, Facilities rentals such as hosting the Chinese 7s team as well as our 75th fundraising events

Looking ahead to next season we have also been able to secure £70K of the £81K required for our investment programme (see slide 13). This included £60K of Sponsorship including a New Sponsor Dense Air Limited. A significant development was the signing of GT Wealth as our first Club Kit Sponsor who will finance team strips for all representative teams across the Club plus personal issue kit.

Our next focus is to develop our Commercial Strategy, including what opportunities we can realise by developing our facilities to make Riverwoods a 7 day a week leisure facility. Our estimates indicate the Club could generate up to £200K per annum additional income to fund Rugby. Examples of opportunities include extending function hire into the season by adding a members bar and separate enlarged function room (s) and increasing their seating capacity, increasing wedding and corporate bookings, having a fully equipped gym for enhanced membership, operating a mid week café and children's, play area and business meeting space. We know there is unmet demand for all these services and we have the ideal riverside location and proximity to Globe Park

Financial Performance

Tim Platt will report on our Financial Position. Our balance sheet is strong with significant reserves to fund development plans

It has been necessary to apply significant financial discipline in the last year given the uncertainties around income streams. It is important that the Club is able to balance its books in year and generate a small profit, in order to preserve reserves for our future development plans, and to be able to demonstrate serviceability of loan funding should we decide to borrow money for future development. This discipline hasn't been applied in the past and that is what has held investment back as funds that should have been used for development have plugged holes in operational budgets.

The Clubs Operational Budget covers the base costs of running the Club – Rugby and Member services, maintaining grounds and running the Clubhouse (costs circa £170K per annum). The aim is to make a profit after these costs on income from Membership, Venue Hire and Hospitality and Rentals.

Development Funding

Anything Developmental is funded from our ring-fenced Development Funds which come primarily from Sponsorship, Fundraising and Grants, the Swans Supporters Group and 200 Club. Our investment programme for the year is managed through the Exec, with selection of candidate projects that further the objectives of the Club, It is managed on a One Club basis with representation from all sections. There are two funds:

- Rugby Development – for investments that the Rugby Committee identify in their Rugby Development Plans
- Facilities and Operations – minor developments for the Clubhouse and Grounds including systems and IT

A third fund supports the Strategic Development of Facilities – the Clubhouse and Grounds. Our aim is to try and raise funds in year for these Development projects to allow our reserves to be preserved for Strategic Development

Funding Sources 2022-23 Season

Rugby Development Fund - Target £35K

Funded by:

- Swans Supporters Group
- 200 Club
- Rugby Sponsorship
 - Shirt Sponsors - GT Wealth, The Ship and Luigi's Pizza, Peter Fountain
 - Maidenhead and Marlow Tyres
 - Individual Player Sponsors
- £10K remains to be sourced from Sponsors, Grants and Fundraising in year

Facilities and Operations Fund – Target £46K

Fully Funded by Club Sponsorship

- Whistl
- Dense Air Limited,
- Robert Walters
- Publicis
- Marlow Stoves

Leadership & Management

Our Club is at a critical juncture. Some of the threats we face will be existential if not responded to. The Club enjoys significant inherent advantages compared to many peer clubs, some of whom are making much more rapid progress in their development plans than Marlow. We have to up our game and rate of progress and need members to help that journey

We have created a new structure to allow more people to get involved in management and speed up our rate of development, but many positions remain unfilled and the Club is still managed by a core of perhaps six people who are completely overstretched, in some cases covering 3 or 4 roles. Of the six

Over the last 12 months we have seen some great servants of the Club relinquish their roles. I would like to say a big personal thank you to all of them for their service including:

- Gwyn Stone, President (a presentation will be made at the AGM)
- Nigel Brown, Commercial Director
- Simon Hammond, Director of Senior Rugby
- Andrew Webb, Marketing and Communications Director
- Rob Olney, Operations Director
- Michelle Brown, Operations Director

I thank all of the remaining members of the Executive, of Subcommittees and other management roles for their immense contribution in what has been a highly challenging year for getting us through the period to Xmas, to then reap some of the successes up to April

As I step down from the Chair Role, I'm greatly encouraged to see some of the candidates who will join the management team which I know have the ambition, vision and energy to move us forward. This Club can deliver on its vision with the right leadership and right involvement from our membership.

Management Vacancies

Vacant Golden or Critical Roles

- Safeguarding
- Fixtures Secretary
- RugbySafe Lead
- Accounts Assistant

Management Committees where volunteers required

- Fundraising
- Strategy and Development
- Commercial
- Social and Community

Investment Programme

Fund	Investment	Objectives	Cost (2022-23)
Rugby Development	Veo Camera System	Support Player Development planning and performance analysis. Improved player development and retention	£35K
	Summer Recruitment Campaigns	New players into Senior Mens and Girls Rugby	
	Player Personal Kit (stash)	Improve player proposition/Incentivise commitment to player development plans, create sense of identity/belonging/recognition	
	Coach Development – training courses	Improve baseline quality/standard of coaching, increase capacity and capability of coaching pool and provide Coach pathway	
	Schools Development plan - coaching	Recruitment of players from Schools to Club – male and female youth	
	Age Grade Projects		
	Gym Refurbishment	Improve proposition to players	
	Enhanced Coaching (Academy and Senior Rugby)	Support Academy and Senior Rugby Development Plans	
Facilities and Operations	EPOS System	Improve reporting, membership benefits	£46K
	Grounds – fencing, car park remedial	Maintain fit for purpose	
	Clubhouse Minor improvements/maintenance (showers, doors)	Maintain fit for purpose	
	Portable Floodlights, Borehole and irrigation	Protect grass pitches, enable increased usage/capacity to support more activity	