

Tonbridge Sports Association

Annual report 2014/2015

This report is presented 95 years from the formation of the Association in 1920. The inaugural meeting took place on May 19th 1920 with Rev H Allen appointed as the first President.

The purpose of formation was to control a small area of land known locally as the Racecourse, next to Tonbridge Castle and quite close to the main thoroughfare of the town. The Association was soon in action and creating rules. The second meeting on May 25th endorsed the rule that no dogs were allowed on the area owing to the presence of grazing sheep. In September 1920 the first sports letting was agreed for a County Rugby match.

From 1921, when a larger area was taken over, the momentum appears to increase with the mention of Football, Netball and Bowls. By 1922 this increases further with Hockey, Tennis and an Angling Society. There seems to have been a need for further formalisation of the area as in May 1923 preparation was under way for an official opening of the Racecourse Sportsground. Although there was some initial disagreement between the Association and the Council over the staging of events on the day this finally went ahead in June 1923.

It is from this date, when the Tonbridge Sports Association appoints representatives to the Parks Committee of Tonbridge Urban District Council that the working relationship between the Association and the Council commenced. The Association provided the administration of letting and collection of the charges and also the control over use. Upon the formation of the new Authority in 1974 this relationship was accepted and maintained with the widening of the sphere of administration increasing in area to include Hadlow and Hildenborough. And then, in 1987, with the number of sportsgrounds and facilities having been considerably enlarged, the administration needed to revert to Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council with the Sports Association working in partnership with Leisure Services.

This relationship has continued to this day with meetings with Leisure Services every six weeks discussing sports development, defining ideas, plans and actions for the continuance of the enjoyment of sport by clubs in the area. The Tonbridge Sports Association covers 20 different sporting activities and within those sports there are currently 44 clubs with a combined membership of over 6,000. Such is the wealth of facilities that has been created from those early beginnings in 1920.

Our football clubs have numerous teams providing the ability of six year olds to commence playing and continue playing through into adult teams. This year has seen a thirty three week winter season which has, once again, proved not to be enough. However, this is not due to the weather or the condition of the pitches. Contrary to the recent report in the local newspaper the football pitches in Tonbridge are well maintained and continually available. Indeed our clubs continue to report that home matches are always played on better pitches than any away matches. This year we have had away teams playing their home games on our clubs pitches so that fixtures can be completed.

The flooding that occurred at Christmas 2013 was once again the worst flooding problem in over forty five years. Club buildings were badly affected at the Racecourse sportsground which has resulted in the inability of clubs to have adequate flood insurance cover, a problem that appears to have no answer.

However the actual ground problems have not gone away for the Rugby Club and there has been a lasting effect across the mini rugby pitches that need drastic action. A professional survey has now been commissioned as a first step. The enthusiasm and organisation of the Rugby club has ensured that the junior sections continue to thrive. The assistance of Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council, to all the clubs affected, has been recorded, and continues to show the approach that the Sports Association Clubs have seen for the last 90 plus years.

When flooding is discussed it is important not to forget our Sailing Club whose premises would be greatly affected by proposed changes to the flood management by the Environmental Agency. This shows that it is important to always consider the bigger picture, something that the Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council and the Sports Association seek to achieve through the regular meetings.

As mentioned the facilities, and the arrangements by which they are used, are constantly under review. In this last year we have discussed a new lease for the Sailing Club, new changing facilities at Woodland Walk sportsground and we are currently discussing a new Community Use Agreement for the Athletics track at Tonbridge School. The Tonbridge Athletic Club already has a new trackside pavilion and is moving forward to try and upgrade the track lighting. Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council has signified their willingness to contribute to the track refurbishment in 2019.

Our member clubs are run by volunteers and it shows their dedication that so many clubs are successful in their activities. We continually see, in newspaper reports, the competition successes of the Judo Club, The Rugby Club and the Athletics Club. Small mention is made of the successes by the Badminton Club, the Bowls Clubs, the Canoe Club and recently the Baseball Club. It is important to appreciate that all our member clubs play an important role in the community in that the social as well as sporting activities all happen to bring both adults and children together in a sporting environment. This is grassroots sport at its best which serves to produce the elite.

The fees that are paid, by those playing their sport, are kept as low as possible by Clubs as part of the process of encouraging more people to take up sport. There have been a number of reports recently suggesting that sporting activity is on the decline. This has been seen in swimming and in cricket and it remains the fact that our clubs continue to be the main supplier of the sporting environment for children and others willing to take part. However it is increasingly difficult for the finances of clubs to cover all that is needed to maintain the level required and expected.

When you take an overview of the area covered by the Tonbridge Sports Association and you take the elements of the continued input by the Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council, the facilities that have been created in the last 95 years and the dedication by the volunteers who run our member clubs, one cannot be left with anything but enthusiasm for promoting sporting activity.

April 2015