

PLETTENBERG BAY COUNTRY CLUB

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT 2021

I have the great pleasure of presenting a review of the state of Plettenberg Bay Country Club for the financial year ended 30th June 2021. Fortunately or unfortunately, this will be my last Chairman's Report – after 8 years on the committee, I am retiring.

In my report to members last year, I stated that 2020 had been an exceptional year in a number of respects – we were dealing with Covid-19 crisis for the first time, and whilst the club had obviously suffered with the course closure, lockdowns, etc., we were in a reasonably strong position financially. During the financial year 2020, we only endured 3 months of lockdown, and we were hopeful that this nightmare would end reasonably quickly.

Unfortunately, as we get to the end of 2021, it is very clear that our lives and the world has changed forever. This pandemic will not go away. As a club, we have had to adapt to the way we operate and the way we conduct our financial affairs.

Nevertheless, we can consider ourselves extremely blessed and fortunate to be members of a club which is reasonably financially sound, which generally provides excellent facilities, which is situated in a town of outstanding natural beauty and which should survive the ravages and uncertainties of this dreadful pandemic.

LIFE UNDER LOCKDOWN – REFLECTIONS OF THE YEAR

We have now been in lockdown since the end of March 2020 – the levels and corresponding restrictions of these lockdowns has varied depending on the severity of the various waves of infections that have been prevalent throughout the country.

When thinking about the Chairman's presentation to members for 2021, I have been trying to put together words or phrases which may encapsulate or describe the club and its activities during this year.

The words that come to mind are "CAMARADERIE", "CHALLENGING" and "DISRUPTIVE".

Despite the lack of social activities and interactions due to the Covid protocols, there is still a great camaraderie and spirit amongst the members. We have a pretty diverse membership, however, despite the difficulties of life these days, generally, we all get on, enjoy our club and its facilities and make the most of things.

With regard to "challenging", some of the reasons will be detailed as I progress through this report.

Unfortunately, there have been some events which have been very "disruptive" to which the committee have had to focus their minds and time – this has been to the detriment of plans and progress that we had envisaged. Fortunately, these events are now behind us and we can move on.

During this year, through newsletters from the Chairman and Club Golf Captain, we have again endeavoured to keep members abreast of developments at the club and these were much appreciated by our local Plett members, our out of town members spread throughout the country and by our overseas based "Swallow" members.

As you are aware, these newsletters focused primarily on

- Operations and maintenance of the golf course

- Operations of the other sports facilities
- The club staff
- The club finances
- The welfare of the caddies

and I will focus on some of these issues in my presentation.

Again, this year has presented us with us with challenges - for myself, for John Lloyd our Treasurer and especially for our Club Manager, Greg Phillips, with managing the Covid protocols, staff and Covid, opening and closing of bar sales, etc., and, on behalf of the members, I would again like to pay tribute to and thank them for their time and efforts during this difficult period.

FINANCES

Our Treasurer, Mr. John Lloyd, has provided full details of the Club finances for the year ending 30 June 2021, however, there are a couple of points which I feel need to be reiterated.

We were fortunate that, despite the difficulties of last year, our finances were reasonably sound to start the new financial year 2021. Your committee, and especially the Finance Committee, have to perform a very delicate balancing act between :-

- 1) Being able to continue to provide excellent facilities for the club and its members, and
- 2) Being able to generate sufficient income to cover our expenses, carefully controlling our expenditure and hopefully allowing our reserves to accumulate;
- 3) Have sufficient cash flow and reserves to replace aging machinery.

As the Treasurer has mentioned, and as members will easily appreciate, having limited visitors over the season (travel restrictions, beach closures, etc), missing the Swallows, etc. has provided a number of challenges which had to be addressed head-on.

Thankfully for all of us, through very prudent management of the club's finances over the past couple of years, we had built up reserves in excess of R4.0 million which hopefully will carry us through until June 2022.

STAFF

Our headcount as per 30 June 2021 was 42 staff (reduction of 4) who are divided as follows :-

- 9 Catering and Cleaning
- 4 Bar
- 5 Golf Car / Caddie Master / Course Marshal
- 20 Golf course
- 4 Admin

We mentioned last year that the committee had agreed that, wherever possible, we would not implement a programme of redundancies or retrenchments for our staff. Members will be aware that a number of clubs around the country have reduced their staff and staff costs considerably. We have continued to pay our staff in full and we have been assisted with the government TERS payments to reduce these staff costs. All staff received a 66% bonus in December and a 34% bonus in June.

During the year, we have recorded 3 Covid-19 cases amongst the staff of which one unfortunately deceased. Numerous efforts have been made to have all staff vaccinated, however, there is a hesitancy amongst certain groups of staff. Most of the "front-line" staff have been vaccinated.

After 4 rounds of negotiations with the union of club staff, guided by the NUM representative from George, we managed to reach a reasonable settlement for the salary increases, bonuses and long service awards. As a matter of interest, the starting increase requested was 30%, however, the union members were reasonable during these negotiations and we reached a settlement which was fair to both sides.

In view of the Covid protocols and the threat of infections, Greg has split our staff into teams and shifts so that if one member is infected we do not have to close down that particular facility or section of the club, although we would have to operate with a skeleton staff during isolation period.

MEMBERSHIP

The Covid pandemic has caused, and will continue to cause, financial hardship across a broad spectrum of the population. Obviously, when choices have to be made regarding personal and family finances, the club membership has become one of the focal points as a possible non-essential. We have witnessed this at Plett Country Club. The effects of the pandemic have, unfortunately, come on top of a general decrease in club memberships being experienced around the country.

Additionally, as far as our club is concerned, the uncertainty of travel restrictions has resulted in a number of our "Swallow" members not renewing their membership or converting it to "Social" membership pending clarification of travel protocols later in 2021 and in 2022.

We started the year with 1,149 members (down 90 members from the year before), however, by the end of June 2021 this had increased marginally to 1,151 (golf 952, bowls 26, tennis 105 and social 100). It is interesting to note that during the year, we lost 154 members due to resignations or defaults, however, in the same period we gained 90 new members.

Over the past 5 years, our membership has declined by 16% which is significant in terms of membership subscriptions and potential spend at the club. The number of new residents moving to Plettenberg Bay is significant which can be seen with the boom in building and the lack of school spaces.

The smaller sections of our club (namely tennis, bowls and bridge) are very active and, whilst membership is declining, they are an important part of "the country club" experience. Of particular concern is the bowls section which has now reduced to 26 members.

As Chairman, I would like to thank the committee and members of these sections for the works that they have done on their own to ensure the continued success and viability of these sections.

TENNIS

The tennis section has had a busy year and we have had a positive increase in membership and court usage. All 4 courts have all been resurfaced which has greatly improved player safety and playing conditions and partial fencing replacement is in progress.

Interprovincial matches have been played this year along with league and a number of local tournaments in the region. The club championships took place in September and they had a fantastic junior entry which made for competitive and good matches.

The Plett tennis section is one of the most active tennis clubs in the Eden District and they have a strong social as well as competitive membership. Coaching through the Plett Tennis Academy is very active almost 7 days a week.

The development programme was interrupted with Covid restrictions but has restarted from October.

Some good news coming as a result of Covid is the relocation of younger people from the cities which has boosted our club membership and every month we have new members.

BOWLS

Unfortunately, the Bowls section has been severely impacted as a result of the Covid pandemic. Membership of the Bowls section has continued to decrease, and since the commencement of lockdowns, attendances have also dramatically decreased.

Most of the competitive bowlers have joined the town club and we are now left with about a dozen social bowlers. Obviously the costs of maintaining two bowling greens for a handful of bowlers is not justified.

A series of informal meetings with the "town" club on a possible merger of the 2 clubs in our town have been held during the year, however, for a number of logistical and financial reasons, a merger would be very difficult to achieve.

The committee have agreed to keep this section operating until the end of the 1st quarter 2022, however, they would be interested to hear from potential interested parties for possible alternative usage.

BRIDGE

Prior to the lockdown, the Bridge section was thriving and was a very active element within the club. The Plett bridge section is still very active and uses the "Bridge Base Online" (BBO) system from the comfort of their own homes. The South African Bridge Federation has decided that no clubs should return to playing bridge face to face until next year.

Pairs competitions are held every Wednesday afternoon and a 5-week teams' competition is held every Monday afternoon. The Monday fees are allocated to the charity of choice for the year.

Last year they ran a very successful charity day. This was also held online and we donated about R45,000 to Kurland Kids last year. They will run another charity day this year for PAWS.

Various players have played in SAWBA (South African Women's Bridge Association) and Congress.

Plettenberg Bay A won the 2020 league competition. Unfortunately, it may be a while before our club lounges are again filled with bridge players.

GOLF

Golf is the largest section of the country club and in most cases subsidises the activities and finances of the other sections, notably bowls and tennis.

During the year, a number of long overdue improvements have been carried out on the golf course. A number of our tee boxes were in poor condition and thus our Club Golf Captain, Nico Westraat, the Greenkeeper, Dave Porrill, and our General Manager, Greg Phillips, set up a task team to tackle this project. The Greens Committee were fortunate enough to co-op Tyrone Yates to assist them.

This project was planned to start towards the end of the summer which would coincide with the growing season. Unfortunately, due to delays caused by the Bitou Council and the SA Senior Tour for the dates of the SA Senior Open, we had to postpone this project until after the tournament had finished. The result was that we missed the growing season and the refurbishment of the tee boxes is going to take longer than expected. A very cold winter and excessive rains have exacerbated this problem. Nevertheless, as we move towards the summer, the new upgraded tee boxes are looking

very good. Unfortunately as a result of this delay, there has been understandable concern and complaints by certain members. We apologise for this.

Our members and visitors have really appreciated the improvements that continue to be carried out on the course and the excellent condition of the course and surrounds. The noteworthy efforts of Dave Porrill and his staff and Nico Westraat and the Greens Committee have been conveyed to all concerned.

In April 2021, we again hosted the South African Senior Open which was sponsored by the Bitou Municipality and was very well supported by the Senior golfing professionals in South Africa. The 2021 SA Senior Open Championship was won by James Kingston. Unfortunately, due to the Covid protocols, no spectators were allowed which obviously took some shine off this prestigious event.

Normally, a year-to-year comparison of the number of rounds played is an excellent barometer of the health of the club and the condition and popularity of the course. Due to the Covid induced closure for 3 months in 2020, these comparisons are difficult. Members will recall that when the golf course was reopened in June 2020, the demand for tee times was exceptional, however, with the restrictions placed on clubs for the Covid protocols, there were some problems accommodating the demand.

In terms of total rounds for 2021, we recorded 36,279 rounds which was below 2019 (40,901) but up on 2020 (34,059). Member's rounds are fairly static (+/- 65% of the total) over the past 3 years. The biggest drop in terms of number of rounds and income earned, is the visitor rounds during the period January to March. The bulk of this decrease can be attributed to the lack of Swallows who normally make Plett their "winter" home. Unless South Africa can come off the UK and Europe "red list of Covid countries", it will be very difficult for the Swallows to return.

Prior to lockdown, Cliff Barnard, our Pro has continued to run our Golf Development Programme on a Friday afternoon and gave tuition to around 18 youngsters from the previously disadvantaged communities. Unfortunately, lockdown has still disrupted this programme and tuition is only aimed at those participating in the Southern Cape Golf Union (SCGU) monthly order of merit tournaments. Nevertheless, we have had some success from Plett with Ms Ernestaycha Minnaar and Kyle McCallum having both won age-group events and Kyle was been selected to represent the Southern Cape U15 golfing team. For this programme, the club provides transport, equipment, clothing and free use of the facilities. The club and all developing golfers are also very grateful to all the members who continually donate equipment, clothing, shoes and accessories.

PRO-SHOP

Cliff Barnard and his team from Gimme Golf have now been operating the pro-shop for 2 years and, despite the disruptions of the lockdowns, etc, they are very pleased with the operations of the shop.

The Directors of Gimme Golf are extremely grateful for the support and business they have received from the Plett members and visitors. They certainly provide a very friendly and professional service and are very competitive with their offerings and prices.

DRIVING RANGE

As a result of the Covid pandemic and the effect on the club finances, the committee has decided to postpone the advancement of this project.

PLETT CADDY ASSOCIATION

Last year, I reported extensively on the formation and the prospects of the Plett Caddy Association which was formed to provide an independent and professional caddy service to members, guests

and visitors. It is worth reminding members that the caddies who offer their services to members and visitors are independent contractors and are not employees of the club.

Whilst some progress has been made with the PCA, the usage of caddies has been affected by Covid protocols, etc. This limited use of caddies obviously affects the PCA income and their ability to provide additional benefits for their members.

AMENDMENTS TO THE CONSTITUTION

Members will recall that at the last AGM in October 2020, there were some issues raised with regard to proxy voting to elect committee members. Legal opinions obtained by the committee confirmed that the Club's constitution, in its current form, does not allow for proxy voting when electing its committee members. It is specific that in the event that voting is required, committee members are to be elected by ballot i.e. by members present at the AGM.

In addition, there is a problem with regard to notice periods in that the deadline for committee nominations is shorter than the notice period for the AGM resulting in it being impossible to advise members of the candidates in time for proxy forms to be completed. This highlighted the situation that many of the Club members are prejudiced in that they may not be able to cast their vote for the Club's committee if they cannot be present at an AGM.

The constitution in its present form has hardly changed since it was written some 40 years ago when electronic communications were not in existence. Innovations such as Zoom, Teams, etc. allow us to broaden our approach to accommodate all members, whether live or virtual. This is especially important during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The proposed changes to the Club's constitution have been circulated to members and a vote is required at the AGM to adopt these changes. We would like to thank Adv R D Levine SC and Mr Tim Randon for their invaluable input.

SPONSORS

We are extremely fortunate to have members and companies who sponsor so many of the activities we all enjoy. Whilst the list is too long to mention them all, I would like to mention the following :-

- Seeff properties Plettenberg Bay
- Plett Build It
- Gimme Golf
- Van Loveren Wines
- Helen Melon Properties
- Duncan Brown of Beacon Isle Kwikspar and Tops

I would earnestly request members to also patronise and support these fine establishments who do so much for the club and the community.

APPRECIATION OF THE COMMITTEE AND MEMBERS

The old saying of "the club is only as good as its management and committee" is very true for Plettenberg Bay Country Club. The committee is elected by the members in October each year and a lot of members are unaware of the time and effort that is put in by various members of the committee.

Without going into detail, I would like to thank all the committee and in particular the following :-

- Firstly, our Club Manager, Greg Phillips and his staff who have been mentioned frequently in this report. I would also like to give a special thanks to his wife Darell who carries out a lot of work for the club which often goes unnoticed.
- Cliff Barnard and the Pro-shop team – for their efficient and super friendly service
- Nico Westraat and his Greens Committee who have achieved an incredible amount this year with the layout and condition of the course. These improvements have been appreciated by all who play golf.
- Charlie Ford and the Ladies Golf Committee who continue to run and very active and successful Ladies Golf Section.
- John Lloyd, our Treasurer, who spends many hours on a monthly basis ensuring that the club's finances remain healthy.
- Carrie McLean chairperson of the tennis section and Roger Wright chairman of the bowls section, for their time and efforts running and managing their sections of the club.
- I would also like to thank the other members of the committee for their time, efforts and contributions – a lot of work goes on behind the scenes.
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We, the members of Plettenberg Bay Country Club, are extremely blessed to have an amazing facility within 5 minutes' drive of our residences.

In conclusion, it is worth reminding ourselves of the objects of the club as defined in the Constitution - "to promote and foster recreational and social activities amongst its members and permit non-members to visit the premises leased to it by the Bitou Municipality."

Despite the many challenges and difficulties faced with the Covid-19 pandemic, I am of the opinion that we have largely achieved these objectives.

As always, there are things to be done and improvements to be made, however, I believe that the Club is in very good shape to handle and deal with the challenges ahead.