



ENGLISH RUGBY COUNTIES ASSOCIATION

Counties in Membership

Berkshire
Buckinghamshire
Cheshire
Cornwall
Devon
Durham
Eastern Counties
Essex
Gloucestershire
Hampshire
Hertfordshire

Lancashire
Middlesex
North Midlands
N.L.D.
Oxfordshire
Somerset
Staffordshire
Surrey
Sussex
Warwickshire

Associate Members

Derbyshire
Lincolnshire
Nottinghamshire

MINUTES of the meeting held at Fiveways Old Edwardians RFC on Sunday 22nd January 2017 at 11:00 a.m.

Counties represented:

David McAteer	Berkshire	Brian East (Secretary)	Middlesex
Anthony Flack	Buckinghamshire	Peter Grace (Chairman)	North Midlands
Gwyn Stone	Buckinghamshire	Steve Guy	North Midlands
Peter Rhodes	Cheshire	Colin Baldwin	Oxfordshire
Richard Simeons	Cornwall	Des Chalmers	Somerset
John Drew	Devon	Rob Forsyth	Staffordshire
Treve Mitchell	Devon	Malcolm Caird	Surrey
Peter Williams	Gloucestershire	Frank Edmonds	Sussex
Peter Baines	Herts & RFU President	Charlie McGinty	Warwickshire
David Herriman	Lancashire		

Apologies were received from:

Jonathan Dance	Berkshire	Norman Robertson	N.C.A.
Alan Mitchell (Treasurer)	Cornwall	Charlie Hemmings	North Midlands
Gordon Roulinson	Derbyshire	Andy Shorney	Somerset
Ivor Smith	Essex	Steve Mead	Somerset
Garry Doherty	Hampshire	Becky Davies	Staffordshire
Adrian Sparks	Herts	John Atkin	Staffordshire
David Hodgson	Lancashire	Roger Edmundson	Sussex

1. **PRELIMINARIES**

- 1.1 The chairman, Peter Grace, welcomed all to the meeting and thanked members for attending. He welcomed Peter Baines, RFU President, to the meeting. Members had a quiet moment of reflection in memory of Nigel Banwell, the President of North Midlands RFU, who passed away recently.
- 1.2 The Secretary reported that he had received apologies from Ron Jones from Dorset & Wiltshire. Invitations had been extended to all the geographic CBs that were not members in order that they might understand how and why ERCA functions.

2. **MINUTES** of meeting held on 18th September 2016

- 2.1 The minutes of the previous meeting were accepted as a true record. Matters arising were taken as agenda items.

3 **RFU Artificial Grass Pitches (AGP) Strategy**

Members discussed their experiences within their CBs for the establishment of AGPs

- 3.1 The Chairman reported that apologies had been received from Ross Baxter from the RFU who was unable to attend. Ross had sent an e-mail report to the chairman which is attached as Appendix A together with other papers included with this set of minutes. He stated that Ross Baxter was positive about the process and that planning always takes longer than expected.
- 3.2 Steve Guy (North Midlands) reported that negotiations with Stourbridge RFC were taking place.
- 3.3 Charlie McGinty (Warwickshire) reported that the process was underway at Old Coventrians but had not yet been finalised.
- 3.4 Anthony Flack (Bucks) reported that he had attended the opening at Aylesbury RFC.
- 3.5 Colin Baldwin (Oxfordshire) said that whilst 6 pilot projects had been approved by RFU Council no report had been received by Council and was concerned about the next tranche was underway without such reports. He reported that the next tranche of money had been approved by Council in the RFU budgets. The timing for approval of the pilots had taken longer than planned.
- 3.6 Peter Rhodes (Cheshire) stated that Chester RFC had not yet approved their offer. It was not clear how many hours the club will have to pay for and there was concern about the lack of control over the use.
- 3.7 Peter Williams (Gloucs) said that there was a need for fresh thinking on the cooperation between local clubs and that effective communication was necessary. He reported that 3 games had been played on the previous day at the Hornets RFC facility.
- 3.8 Gwyn Stone (Bucks) indicated that there was still some concern about injuries sustained on AGPs.
- 3.9 Peter Baines (Herts) said that Saracens had recently relaid their AGP. The previous pitch had been well used but it had been necessary to bring the pitch into line with the latest pitch technology
- 3.10 David Herriman (Lancs) said that there had been a lot of interest in the opening at Preston Grasshoppers RFC with 600 people in attendance and the event had been shown by the BBC on local television.

4. **RFF Awards and other funding**

- 4.1 Peter Grace reported that the RFF Awards Panel had 23 requests under consideration for a maximum of £10,000 each, this sum being “sports-matched” by the applicants. The total sum to be allocated was £77,000. There was also an additional helping hand scheme with a maximum of £1,500 per item to be awarded.
- 4.2 Malcolm Caird (Surrey) said that Surrey were using some of their reserves to run a parallel scheme to the RFF in a series of grants and loans
- 4.3 David McAteer (Berks) said that his CB had had a similar scheme in place for 10 years. Ricard Simeons (Cornwall) reported similarly
- 4.4 The chairman said that he would report back to the RFF about such schemes.

5. **Possible reduction in funding from Sport England**

- 5.1 This topic had been highlighted by the Chairman in his New Year newsletter as follows:
At our meeting on 18 September we discussed the issue of possible Government interference with the RFU constitution under the “threat” of withdrawing Sport England Funding there was certainly concern over such action but others wanted to await developments . Well we have these now in the form of “A Code for Sports Governance “ issued Sport England/UK Sport which may worry most sporting bodies and certainly membership organisations like the RFU. We have a wise and robust Governance partnership between Executive and Volunteer who ERCA must assist to resist any non-productive change and reduction of our democracy. ERCA certainly has a role and responsibility to be involved in the protection of our foundations going forward.
- 5.2 Colin Baldwin (Oxon) reported that a small group had been set up under the aegis of the RFU Council to consider this matter chaired by Jason Leonard and their findings were awaited. The group were all RFU Council members. Of the 72 recommendations from Sport England 60 can be implemented by the RFU but there were 12 that were of concern to Council, particularly the composition of the RFU Management Board. No changes will be made without a Special General Meeting to obtain the approval of the clubs.
- 5.3 The timeline for the conclusion of the Group was reported as April 2017.
- 5.4 Malcolm Caird (Surrey) said that the Sport England recommendations were aimed at the FA and a number of other sports that do not have governing bodies with the same well-managed strengths that the RFU has.
- 5.5 Richard Simeons (Cornwall) said that loans and grants made directly from Sport England to rugby clubs need to be considered and may not be available in the future if the RFU doesn’t comply with the SE recommendations.

6. **Possible National CB Conference 2017**

- 6.1 Peter Williams (Gloucs) stated that the conference may be held in Autumn 2017. The venue remains to be determined.

7. **Payment of Players**

7.1 Malcolm Caird (Surrey) said that he sits on the sub-committee steering group considering this matter; their next meeting was to take place on Wednesday 25th January. There were specific proposals being submitted for consideration at the April 2017 RFU Council meeting.

8. **Treasurer's report**

After the meeting the Treasurer reported by e-mail that the current balance was £3214.27 after payment for this meeting plus the Steering Group meeting.

9. **ERCA and future topics**

9.1 Members commented that these meetings were very useful in informing their CB about matters of common interest. The topic of an ERCA website was briefly discussed. Further topics were requested from members.

9.2 Peter Grace agreed to invite Andy Cosslett to the June meeting. He said that we had invited non-member geographic CBs to attend. The steering group will plan further meetings should the need arise.

9. **Any other Business**

9.1 County Championship – Colin Baldwin said that the regulations for this season have been approved and will be promulgated to the game.

9.2 Peter Baines said that the future of the England Counties XV was being discussed at the CGB. The importance of this side was regarded as a major incentive for players below the elite level.

9.3 Malcolm Caird reported that the Women's County Championship was very successful last season with final at the Stoop and the presentations at half-time at a game at Twickenham.

9.4 David Herriman (Lancs) reported that Lancashire were running a County side at league level 5 and below and were looking for Sunday games in the County Championship window.

9.5 Peter Williams reported that the advanced leadership course had been very successful and will continue.

The meeting closed at 13:05.

The next meeting will on 4th June 2017 together with the AGM

Signed by Peter Grace, Chairman, as a true record of the meeting

_____ Date _____

Appendix A – e-mail from Ross Baxter to Peter Grace

From: Ross Baxter <RossBaxter@RFU.com>

Sent: 19 January 2017 16:55

To: Peter Grace

Subject: RE: ERCA AGPs

Hi Peter

Three of the RFU Rugby Turf Pilot projects opened over the weekend at Aylesbury RFC, Hornets RFC and Preston Grasshoppers RFC with great turn outs and very strong reviews on the player and spectating experience. Usage of them by local clubs is strong and last weekend Hornets hosted 8 matches on the pitch. The RFU has an introductory offer on where any rugby hirer can hire the pitch for £1 in the first month. In all cases the RFU has a FM agreement with the host club for running of the pitch for a fixed term so we can review the effectiveness of this approach. Ian Ritchie, Peter Baines and Eddie Jones opened them. Of the remaining two pilots Billingham RFC is due to commence 13 March and we are targeting 24 April for start of works at Shelford RFC. We are reviewing the key design and operational learnings and incorporating those into the R2 designs moving forward.

22 Rugby Turf projects have completed feasibility and moved to detailed design stage and will aim to submit planning by the first week in February. During the feasibility stage we have lost one project due to ground conditions. The remaining projects have agreed in principle the Heads of Terms on the Lease and Facility Management Agreement and we will now be working with those clubs to execute these agreements whilst planning is under way. We are targeting the delivery of 15 projects this summer for start of season 17/18. The clubs names have not been formally released but CBs have been involved in the identification of the sites and the local delivery teams will commence engagement with the local partnerships of clubs, schools, colleges and universities once formal planning applications are underway.

In respect of Rugby Share the RFU is working with 5 pilot sites at present in areas where there is a lack of Rugby Turf opportunities but there is strong growth in participation and a lack of pitch capacity. The first site to be awarded will be announced in the coming weeks. Brochure is attached and expressions of interest are invited from any interested parties.