



ECCLES RUGBY FOOTBALL CLUB

Founded 1897

Ground and Clubhouse: Gorton Street, Peel Green, Eccles, Manchester, M30 7LY
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Minutes of Eccles RFC Annual General Meeting – 27th July 2020

Apologies for absence: Simon Holland, Steve Tunstall, Danny Nicholls, Dave Nicholls, Dan Appleby, Leeann Aspinall

Technical introduction – Mark Greenhalgh

Mark gave an overview of how the meeting would operate over Zoom and how the technology works for those unfamiliar with it. Questions and comments were invited using the 'chat' feature, which would be monitored by Mark.

Welcome from the Club President – Mark Dutton

Mark opened the meeting proper by welcoming everyone to the meeting, under these exceptional circumstances, before handing over to Paul Thorpe to chair the meeting.

Minutes from previous AGM – Mark Greenhalgh

Mark explained that the minutes of the previous AGM have been published to the club website, alongside all the reports, as people were advised in advance. He said that he had received no questions in advance of the meeting so, unless there were any questions to be raised now, he would like to propose them as the official record. No questions were raised. Mark Dutton seconded Mark Greenhalgh's proposal, the minutes were accepted.

Treasurer's report – Mike Bateman

Income has exceeded expenditure for the year, which is positive, particularly as the season was curtailed early, preventing us from hosting end of year activities which are usually profitable. Bar sales and margin have improved slightly, but the biggest difference compared to the previous year was in membership fees collected, thanks to the new system put in place by Heather Thorpe and Mark Baines. International ticket income was down due to reduced fixture list ahead of the World Cup, and England only having two home games in this year's Six Nations.

The club is on a sound financial footing. We have developed our own reserves, as required by the astro replacement project. We have also received an interest-free loan from the RFU to assist with our capital projects. And recently we have received two grants from Salford Council and Sport England to help us through the pandemic. We have tightened our belts as much as possible during these quiet months, including furloughing our only employee. Our unavoidable costs are around £2k per month, so we are comfortable for a while yet.

President: Mark Dutton	07802 345380	Fixtures Secretary: Don Edmondson	07821 683516
Chairman: Paul Thorpe	07766 512552	Sponsorship Secretary: Andy Brunt	07743 825459
Hon. Secretary: Mark Greenhalgh	07525 434790	Communications Officer: Chris Gaffey	07971 817375
Hon. Treasurer: Mike Bateman	07843 756160	Safeguarding Officer: Heather Thorpe	07762 081105
		M&J Section Chair: Paul Fleming	07889 601558
Director of Rugby: Sam Simpson	07935 403171	D of E Award Chair: Mark Baines	07850 082122



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Further detail is available in the Treasurer's Report published on the club website.

Mark Dutton added that since activity has resumed, the astro hire has been more popular than ever, and looks to be a good source of income moving forward.



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Hon. Secretary's report – Mark Greenhalgh

Mark's report highlighted some of the key events that have taken place this season, which may not feature in other sections' reports, including:

- Successful beer & gin festival
- Working with Try Talking as club mental health partner
- New club website
- Working more closely with mini and junior section, both coaches and managers, and parents
- Salford Sports Club of the Year
- A number of events watching the World Cup
- Club Magazine Rugby Club of the Year Nominee
- Online match day programmes, giving better exposure to our sponsors
- Oddballs charity fundraiser
- 10th Christopher Tickle Cup event over the Christmas period, raising money for the Nicholls Spinal Injury Foundation
- "Kill Your Speed" signs added to Gorton Street
- Participation in Adult Men's Competitions Review

Further detail is available on the above in the Secretary's Report published on the club website.

On 16th March all rugby activity was suspended, and on 20th March the RFU cancelled the rest of the season. This resulted in the Men's 1XV being relegated to what would be Lancashire/Cheshire Division 1. However, we were also informed that the majority of the eight teams that had participated in that league during the 19/20 season had applied to join the ADM (Lancashire) Leagues for 20/21, meaning that division faced an uncertain future. Following discussion amongst areas of the club it was unanimously agreed that we too should apply to join the ADM Leagues, to ensure an appropriate standard of rugby was available once activity can resume.

In May it became apparent that lockdown would prevent us from holding an AGM as usual. The committee discussed how we would address this and came up with a proposal that the current committee would remain in post for another season as is, without the need for individual re-election and without an AGM in the near future (as we were unclear at that stage when/how it may be possible). This proposal was circulated to the members by email and was majority approved. Therefore, the below officers were confirmed for the next season:

Position	Nomination
President	Mark Dutton
Chairman	Paul Thorpe
Secretary	Mark Greenhalgh
Asst. Secretary	Heather Thorpe
Treasurer	Mike Bateman
Senior Fixture Sec.	Don Edmondson



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Communications & Sponsorship Officer	Chris Gaffey
D of E Award Chair	Mark Baines
Mini & Juniors Chair	Paul Fleming
Social Chair	Dave Nicholls
Ground & Pavilion Chair	Andy Brunt

The Senior Captains were omitted from this process. They will be appointed once we know more about what next season will look like.

Earlier this month we were informed by the RFU that we could reopen the club in a social capacity. After much discussion we have decided not to do this, primarily as we don't want to ask our staff and volunteers to put themselves at risk just so that a small number of people can meet at the club (as would be anticipated). We will continue to review the situation as it progresses.

A question was asked on how the committee were operating without senior captains appointed. The answer was that the committee has not been operating as such recently; they have only been responding to pandemic events and arranging this meeting. Moving forward, representatives from both the men's and women's section will be involved in any conversations.

A question was asked about the process that was gone through to decide moving to the ADM Leagues was the correct decision. The answer was that the process began with a discussion at committee level. It was decided that wider conversation was required with players and with Sam Simpson as Director of Rugby. After completing those conversations, all three groups were in agreement that the ADM Leagues were the correct decision.

A question was asked over whether the process of deciding what league the men's 1XV should play in and the process for the reappointment of the committee were done with the appropriate level of visibility. Mark answered that he was satisfied the way things had been done was in line with club rules and standard practices. The opportunity for club members to voice any concerns had been made available, and made as simple as possible, but no objections had been received.

Communications & Sponsorship Officer's report – Chris Gaffey

Social media continues to be the cheapest and most effective way of engaging with our members and the wider community. Across all our platforms we have over 4000 followers, which is not bad considering we only have 300 members!

The new club website has been launched this year and has been a great success. Along with the improvements to membership payments, as mentioned earlier, it is also easy to use and presents us in a professional light.

The new online match programme initiative has been a big success. Producing the printed version requires a lot of effort for not much reward, and often encounters issues. Whereas the online version has minimal production costs and provides better exposure for our sponsors. Moving forward we are just going to produce the online version.

Our kit supply contract with O'Neills has come to an end, for now. We are currently in the process of reviewing supplier, including O'Neills, to try and secure the best deal for the club moving forward.



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A large number of new sponsors have been attracted to the club this year. Unfortunately, the total amount raised from sponsorship is down on last year, for a number of reasons, but primarily that we had a number of high value deals last year that we haven't repeated this year. However, with new contacts established hopefully the door is open to more deal in the future.

Thanks were extended to many people who have assisted Chris over the past season.

Further details are available in the Communication Officer's Report on the club website.

A question was asked on who was conducting the kit supplier review and what the timescales are. The answer was that Chris, Sam Simpson, Andrew Maddocks and Heather Thorpe were currently identifying potential suppliers and contacting them for prices. Mark Greenhalgh added the process is not trying to replace O'Neills, more to ensure we are getting a good deal with them based on market prices.

A further question was asked on whether we intended to warn people that we may not be with O'Neills moving forward. The answer was that we would tell people as soon as possible if that decision was reached, but as we intend to remain with O'Neills if possible, we have not given any such notice at the moment.

Rugby Reports

Men – James Wright

The men's section started the season brightly. Both the 1XV and 2XV were performing well in the league and a 'Casual & Vets' team were formed to play social rugby, often on a Friday night. Unfortunately, as the season went on the strain of playing at a higher level every week took its toll on our squad and results did not go our way throughout November to January. In February and March performances and results started to turn around, but unfortunately the pandemic cut the season short before we could escape the relegation zone.

Regarding the questions earlier, I would like to reinforce that the decision to move leagues was not taken lightly but everyone involved in the conversation came to the same conclusion: moving to the ADM Leagues is the correct decision. I look forward to playing a decent standard of rugby when we can return.

As part of our "rugby for all ethos", I am pleased to see the Walking Rugby being so successful on Monday nights and hope that will resume as soon as possible. We also intend to start some Touch Rugby as soon as possible too.

Thanks were extended to many people who have assisted James over the past season.

Further details are available in the Men's Rugby Report on the club website.

Women & Girls – Shelley Maddocks

As you know, last season was very difficult for us with so many players drawn away to the bright lights of the Women's Premiership. This season we have been rebuilding, relying massively on the younger players coming through from the Girls section. We have been joined by new coaches in the form of Andy Stimson and Matt Parkinson who have made invaluable contributions.

Before the season was curtailed, we had completed all 13 of our scheduled fixtures, winning five of them, and standing fifth in the league, which was in line with our hopes for the season.



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Next season we aim to keep rebuilding. We have gaps in the Girls section that we need to fill to ensure the future of the section so that's a priority. And we have plans for recruiting for the adult section too.

Further details are available in the Women's Rugby Report on the club website.

Colts – Chris Gaffey

This has been a difficult season for the Colts with many players disappearing, meaning it was difficult to raise a full squad most weeks. Regardless, they have fought hard, winning three of 12 games before it was curtailed. Those that have stuck around have showed great resilience which bodes well for the future. Four Senior Colts made their adult rugby debut. Tallis Keeler was selected to represent Lancashire U17s.

Next season we will only be fielding an U17s Junior Colts side, so we will need to find safe opportunities for any U18s wanting to continue playing.

Further details are available in the Colts Rugby Report on the club website.

Mini & Juniors – Paul Fleming

Most of the age groups are doing well, due to the support of the various coaches and parents. Thanks to all those who have stepped up, on a permanent or temporary basis. Further thanks to those who have supported the section overall.

Further details are available in the Mini & Juniors Rugby Report on the club website.

Walking rugby – Alan Bent

We are now in our second year of Walking Rugby at Eccles. This year has been more difficult than last, primarily due to the astro being out of action for a period. While it was unavailable we played on grass which some people were uncomfortable with, especially in bad weather, and this resulted in us losing players. But since the astro has reopened numbers have recovered, up until our activity was curtailed by the pandemic.

We are hoping to return to action soon, taking advice from Sale Sharks on what is safe and possible. When that happens, we are hoping to work with Chris on promoting the Walking Rugby a bit more, as we'd certainly like to welcome more players in the future.

Duke of Edinburgh – Mark Baines

Like all sections, it has been a difficult year for the DoE. This is the first year that we haven't given out a single award as the pandemic cut off the chance to (re)do the current group's expedition assessment, which will obviously have to wait until it's safe to try again. Whereas the other group completed all their commitments but failed to submit their paperwork, despite our encouragement. These are lessons we will have to learn and take forward to next year.

We are also conscious that the numbers signing up for the scheme each year are declining. We don't know why this is, but it's something we'll be thinking about and discussing during our enforced disruption, and will pick up again as soon as possible.

Chairman's comments – Paul Thorpe

Thanks to everyone for joining today under these unusual circumstances. Good to see some new faces alongside the usual suspects. One thing I'd like to emphasise in these times is resilience. We've heard from a couple of teams/sections tonight that have had some tough times, but they've kept going and come out the other end. That's an important message for all of us right now.



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Election of officers

The election of officers was done under special arrangements this year due to the pandemic situation. Please see the Secretary's Report for full details.

Any other business

- *Will the Committee explain why they resigned our (men's) 1XV from the RFU without consultation with members?* – We have not resigned from the RFU. The league that the men's 1XV choose to play in has nothing to do with our standing with the RFU, access to funding or support, insurance or anything else. The process we went through to reach the decision was explained earlier; we didn't feel that consultation with the entire membership was necessary.
- *Why aren't we electing officers tonight (at the AGM)?* – We went through a special vote in May to elect officers for the next season, therefore there's no reason to elect anyone tonight. In hindsight, there was perhaps little benefit from that special vote, but we did what we thought was right at the time. The results of that vote are now binding.
- *Am I right in thinking that because there are four U12s girls coming off the minis production line, we will start an U13s Girls team next season?* – Yes. It's not the only reason we'd like to form an U13s Girls team but it is a happy accident.
- *We are thinking of getting the U7s together soon for some informal training. Is there any guidance available that you could point us to to support that?* Links to RFU resources were shared electronically. Beyond that, we as a committee are currently discussing "return to activity" plans and will distribute them in the next couple of weeks.
- *Did anybody else express any interest in becoming a committee member?* – They did not. But if anyone wants to join the committee or volunteer their time at any point they're very welcome to come and speak to us about it.
- *I think this Zoom AGM has worked really well as it's easier to hear what's going on than it is normally.* – This is something we will bear in mind for the future.

Closing comments from Chairman – Paul Thorpe

A final thank you to everyone who has volunteered their time and effort throughout the year, and thanks to all of you for turning up this evening. If you have any feedback about how the meeting was conducted, or about anything you've heard, please let us know.

With no further business to discuss, the meeting was closed at 22:02.