



## Eastern Regional Rowing Council

### Annual General Meeting 24<sup>th</sup> November 2020

#### Chairman's Report

This report reviews the year past and reports on the work done by the National Governing Body and the Region over the year in these challenging times.

#### **Remembrance**

Before we move on to these matters we must remember those who have been lost to the sport regionally and nationally in the last year. I ask that the Meeting observes a silence to reflect on the lives and contribution of all those gone ahead and in particular:

David Berry – Bedford Modern School and GB Junior Rowing  
John Buchan – Peterborough City RC, Divisional Rep and ARA  
Bob Howard – Star Club, City of Cambridge RC and Sudbury RC  
Andy Johnson – Cantabridgian RC, Eastern Region, ARA and BR  
Sally Lawrence – Lea RC, Eastern Region and BR

Each of these, and many others, made a unique contribution to the enjoyment of rowing in their own setting and leave many happy memories. I would like to pay a personal tribute to the lives of Andy and Sally whose support I deeply miss. These were people whose personalities, as much as their work, leave their mark on the world.

#### **National Picture**

In common with all other organisations British Rowing (BR), the National Governing Body for the sport has had to respond to the enormous challenges presented by the advent of the novel coronavirus. At the same time as finding new ways of working, as we all have, BR has had to repurpose its staff in order to provide support to the domestic sport in an unprecedented way.

Staff and volunteers have come together to develop safe frameworks for the sport, to respond to the ever changing national and local pictures, to understand the (often late and ambiguous) guidance from various authorities, to provide timely advice and answer the many queries arising from Clubs. The Region, and the sport as a whole recognises the contribution of Nick Hubble, Chair of Sport Committee as a key volunteer helping to draw together the efforts of others in these especially challenging times.

Dialogue with and advocacy to Cabinet Office, Department of Culture Media and Sport, Sport England and other bodies has translated into the advice and guidance that we are working with. The return to rowing in May would not have been possible without this work and the gradual transition towards a greater level of activity that we saw over the summer was made possible only through the development of the frameworks we are now familiar with. This is not always 'easy' and we all share frustrations with the continuing restrictions on the activity we enjoy.

However, the National Governing Body has a serious responsibility to develop advice that is aligned with public policy. It is for Government to decide what that policy is, and it is for BR to implement that. The interpretation of policy must be, and is, guided by discussion with officials and the resultant advice conveyed to wider rowing community.

At that point the responsibility transfers to clubs for implementation in each local setting and we are all grateful for the huge efforts made by volunteers within clubs to develop protocols, procedures and facilities that have enabled rowing to recommence until the most recent lockdown.

It can be galling to see other water users seemingly freely afloat. It can be hard to retain a sense of fairness and proportion in the face of conflicting pressures and the understandable desire to get rowing but we must, I believe, retain the sense of doing the right thing even when, especially when, others may not be.

As I write this report new measures, tiering are being proposed by Government. It is not yet clear what this will mean region by region or how the measures will apply to sporting activities and to individual settings. British Rowing will issue advice as soon as it is able to and the Region will cascade that out in as timely a fashion as possible. In the meantime we will have to remain pragmatic and patient.

It is understandable that the number of individuals renewing their membership of British Rowing has declined sharply over recent months. There is a persistent sense that membership is purely a passport to competition which, of course, is not taking place. However, I strongly urge clubs to talk to their members, to make the point that rowing would not be possible at all without the central advice and guidance developed by the NGB, that the support given to clubs by BR. All those who are hoping to enjoy their rowing over the winter (we hope!) should consider renewing at least a basic support membership to recognise the benefit they receive from having so active an NGB.

### **The Region's work**

At the beginning of the year the Region was enthusiastically planning to expand its ability to deliver events – we had scheduled a major Trials for our JIRR team at Peterborough and the next in our series of Head of the East at St.Neots for the same day and were on course to deliver both as grand successes. Unfortunately the weather did for them both, it being fatally wet at both venues. In retrospect this is bitter-sweet as the country was on the cusp of the pandemic and although it was our last opportunity for racing this was also the weekend immediately before the Cheltenham meeting with the associated increase in virus transmission. Perhaps we were lucky.

Since lockdown the Region has made every effort to support clubs through the crisis. We have attempted to be as communicative as possible and give clubs the tools they need to find their way through the mazes. I apologise, personally, for the multiple emails, links and attachments that I have sent out over the months and hope that you have felt free to deal with them as you see fit. Equally, I do hope that they have been timely and useful at least as a belt and braces approach to receiving guidance. Clubs are reminded to maintain current email addresses on ClubHub as this is the definitive data we use to get in touch with you.

The Region made just as great a contribution through the series of Open Forums we ran under the Sharing Good Practice banner. This initiative, lead by Tracy Muir and Lou Rivett, enabled clubs to share challenges and practical solutions they were proposing to implement. We are very grateful to Tracy and Lou for this work and it is something we are looking to build on. If there are subject areas that clubs would be interested in please do write to the Region.



## **Regional Representation**

It is with regret that we had to accept the resignation of Lou Rivett from the role of Regional Representative owing to the impact of Covid. We are grateful for the contribution Lou made during her time in post, especially as above and look forward to welcoming her back when times are better.

At the same time we were notified that unexpectedly (and in disagreement with advice received last year), my own term as Regional Representative must now come to an end owing to the term limits determined by the Articles of British Rowing. It is possible for me to continue as Chair of the Region, and I am willing to do this, but the Region needs to elect two Representatives to act as voting Members of BR at AGMs.

We are very lucky to have had two people come forward, Stella Isaac and Seb Walker and I shall be asking them to introduce themselves in due course. We very much hope to be able to exploit their energy and ideas to strengthen the links between clubs, the Region and BR.

## **British Rowing Awards 2020**

The Region is proud of its volunteers and its competitors. The cancellation of the BR Awards ceremony this Spring prevented us celebrating the achievements of so many, though I understand that an alternative form of presentation is presently being planned.

In the meantime I would like to draw your attention to the list of nominees in the various categories here: <https://www.britishrowing.org/2020/03/british-rowing-awards-2020-shortlist/>

Eastern Region has nominees in Club of the Year, Club Crew of the Year, University Crew of the Year, Volunteer of the Year, Lifetime Achievement Award and two in Coach of the Year.

The British Rowing Medal of Merit is awarded for exceptional contributions to club and regional rowing. British Rowing had decided to recognise Sally Lawrence this year and was able to let her know shortly before she passed away.

## **Regional Constitution**

Finally, we are proposing an amendment to our Regional Constitution to reflect the virtual arrangements we may choose to make in future. For the avoidance of doubt, Companies Act permits us to hold the current meeting virtually prior to approving this clause.

Andrew Blit  
November 2020