

pickleballEngland (pbE)

Minutes of AGM held at 18.00 on 18 February 2024 by ZOOM

Present: 51 identified below (region/country and pbE roles shown in brackets):

Karen Mitchell (SES – Founding Director pbE) in the Chair; Frank Arico (SES – Founding Director pbE); Sam Basford (Regional Director WM), James Chaudry (SES) (Co-opted Director), Richard Thoms (Regional Director SW), Val Vladea (Regional Director NE), Guy Herzmark (NE) (Secretary), Jackie Arico (SES), Steve Beale (SES), Jimmy Barton (SES), Heidi Boswell (WM), Simon Briggs (SEN), Sue Brown (SW), John Brownlie (WM), Paul Butcher (SW), Michael de Groot (WM), Janine Denison (SW), Trudie Ellis (SEN), Ewan Fagan (WM), Peter Gibbs (SEN), Jack Gratton (SES), Freddie Gratton (SES), Salli Griffith (SES), Paul Hacking (EM), Roger Harrison (EM), John Henderson (NE), Andy Horrell (SW), Kathy Horrell (SW), David Hughes (SES), Lisa King (SEN), Mark Mars (SE), Ron Miller (EM), Christine Neyndorff (SEN), David O’Brien (SES), Patrick Osborn (SEN), David Petchey (NW), Steve Pisano (SES), Mike Plume (SEN), Martin Scarfe (EM), Peter Simmons (SEN), Karen Smith (SW), Martin Smith (SES), Andre Strachan (SES), Jane Strachan (NW), David Stoten (SEN), Pam Stoten (SEN), Sue Sutton (WM), Sandra Swarbrick (SEN), Mandy Tulip (NE), Loren Varndell (SES), Rob Williams (SES).

1 Minutes of last AGM on 27 November 2022

The meeting approved the minutes without objection.

2 Chair’s Report (more detail is in the slide presentation which is on the pbE website; thanks to Chris Frylink for help preparing the charts)

Karen advised that the results being presented are the culmination of the efforts of the Regional Directors, County Representatives, Club Leaders, and everyone involved in pickleball. Momentum is building and the tipping point is near. “Can you feel it?”

2a Membership, clubs, courses

Last year pickleball grew even faster than before. There are now more than 6,000 members of pbE, up 67% on the previous year. We expect numbers to reach 10,000 by the end of the year. The number of pickleball players is estimated at 15,000, potentially more. All regions have increased pbE membership, with the gap between the south east and the rest of the country getting smaller. The proportion of men and women members is roughly in balance. The average age of members has reduced since 2019, though the vast majority are over 50 years old. There are 212 new clubs since the last AGM and 449 places to play on the pbE club locator. Our thanks to Loren Varndell who is now updating the club locator. The first purpose built pickleball centre has opened (in Telford) and is already profitable. The number attending pbE leaders’ courses has more than doubled and there are three times as many coaches qualifying through the IPTPA programme.

2b Application to Sport England to be recognised as national governing body for pickleball

In 2022 our pre-application to Sport England was approved and in April 2023 our full application was submitted. We have had two meetings with the LTA. In the second meeting the LTA made a proposal to take over pickleball. Your PbE Board were unwilling to accept the diminished role that was being offered. Before, we had reported back the Board’s decision the LTA submitted an application to run pickleball. Your

Board does not believe that the LTA would be good for pickleball as they want to include it in their 'Tennis Opened Up' programme and just see it as an entry and exit strategy for tennis players and not as an independent sport for all ages and all abilities. Sport England have delayed consideration of our application and we have heard only that pickleball (not necessarily our application) will be considered at their March meeting.

Members discussed the issue. There was disappointment at the LTA proposal to take over. The LTA had offered a Board position to pbE or for pbE to be a subcommittee of the LTA. However, a similar deal has not worked well for padel. The LTA also argued that they had better contacts in schools, leisure centres and tennis clubs but pbE is rapidly expanding into these areas. There was disquiet about the lack of transparency in Sport England decisions. It was suggested that political pressure from MPs, especially ministers, shadow ministers or members of the relevant oversight committee could be effective. Karen indicated that this was already on the agenda and that the Board were also considering reaching out to members to ask them to contact MPs. We are also strengthening our safeguarding procedures. Stuart Traylor is our safeguarding officer and we already have DBS clearance capability. We intend to roll out DBS clearance across the Board and the County Representatives and to beef up the safeguarding elements in our training courses, in liaison with other relevant organisations. Jimmy Barton offered to assist Stuart in his role.

2c Financial reports

Draft accounts for the year ending December 2023 and the previous four years were presented. Turnover appears to have increased very sharply reflecting success of our events. It does include events using pbE registration and payment system which may not be run by pbE. Members' funds are £25,000, mostly in the form of fixed assets such as roll-out Pickleball courts and court dividers. The accounts are now managed on Xero. Frank Arico is stepping down from the Board and so we will need a new finance lead.

2d New Directors

New Regional Directors are needed in the West Midlands, East Midlands and the two South East regions. In addition a new National Director is required. These positions were advertised and members notified by email. Three positions were uncontested. The applicants were David Hughes SE(S), Pep Giuliano (EM) and Michael de Groot (WM). Two positions were contested and so an election is needed. The voting arrangements have already been notified to members, with a closure date of 23 March 2024 as set out in our Articles of Association. The candidates are Sue Sutton and Martin Smith for the position of National Director and Christine Neyndorff and Trevor Hammond for the SE(N) Regional Directorship. More details including candidate's statements are on the website and in the slide presentation. There will be another mailing in March for new members and those for whom the first mailing failed.

2e Thanks

Karen thanked all those who help pbE at every level. She paid special tribute to Frank Arico and Sam Basford who have been with pbE more or less from the start, and also highlighted the contributions of David Bungard, Sue and Jeremy Richardson and Alan Coley, who are all stepping down. She saluted the efforts of the County Representatives. There are still some gaps to be filled. Frank, on behalf of the Board added thanks to Guy for taking the minutes of the PbE Board meetings and the AGM.

2f London Ambassadors

Especially now that David Bungard has stepped down there is a clear need to strengthen pbE's offer in Greater London. London would benefit from its own pickleball ambassadors as getting there from outside is not straightforward. Your Board is looking for a group of players to be available to help develop pickleball in London. Perhaps Steve Pisano who has already started sessions in Lambeth (thanks!) could be one.

2g Other developments

There are far more events than before, both run by pbE and by others. We have partnered with Dinking Planner to help consolidate the events calendar. Registration for pbE events is growing rapidly. Our pickleball leagues continue to grow in each region and these help to raise money for pbE. Thanks to all who help run them. Pickleball equipment is now available much more widely than it was. There are new media sources such as EBTKD, Pickleball Addiction and Pickleball 52. We have developed the pbE talent pathway from beginner to international level. The first European Team competition is taking place in Southampton in November. We already had our pbE leaders courses as an entry qualification and Rob Williams and Sam Basford have developed the pbE Level 1 coaching curriculum for the next step up. This builds on the IPTPA course (with consent) and will replace it during 2024. Free conversion courses will be offered to those with other qualifications who wish to be recognised by pbE.

2h Grassroots events

There are numerous grassroots events, including developments for schools with Go Well in the North East and All Stars in Crew and in individual schools such as Severn Vale in Gloucestershire where David Tyler has been working with their head of PE to introduce pickleball across the year groups. The UK Pickleball Shop has created a paddle made from recycled plastic. They and pbE are jointly funding 400 of these paddles for schools wanting to play pickleball. Michael de Groot has put 660 people through pickleball taster sessions. Some 56 GLL Better Centres will offer pickleball taster events at the end of February and we hope others will use our 'leap into pickleball' poster to encourage uptake. We have started inclusive taster sessions eg for people with hearing difficulties. David Pechey has grown pickleball in U3A where there are now some 780 groups and perhaps 2750 players.

2i Partnerships

We have added Skechers as a title sponsor for the English Open and the English Nationals in 2024. Our many other partnerships continue. We have developed a sponsorship pack to help raise further funds. But this does require hard work both in obtaining sponsorship and in delivering the promised benefits to sponsors.

2j Challenges in 2023

We wanted to improve our financial arrangements by implementing Xero and this has been achieved with the help of Frank Arico and Norton's. Another objective was to recruit staff to cover the increasing workload. This was delayed due to the standoff with Sport England. It would not be prudent to hire staff in such an uncertain situation. Also delayed and for the same reason was the aim was to implement a proper system to manage membership data, to enable relevant access for Regional Directors and reports for analysis.

2k Please help

We need more volunteers to enable pbE to deliver its goals. In particular we are looking for a financial lead, more County Representatives and Ambassadors and Social Media and Webmaster expertise. We need a Club Leader to set up and run a Club Leaders Panel to discuss common issues and develop best practice templates. We also want to find people who will help sponsorship and partnership management and to recruit an events administrator. The new Board will be in place by the end of March and we will discuss the best way forward.

2l Goals for 2024

We have ambitious goals for 2024. These include:

- obtaining national governing body status
- implementing more robust safeguarding measures
- rolling out our new coaching programme and developing the next level up
- developing a referee qualification
- hiring appropriate staff to deliver day to day services
- confirming the National and Regional Directors and reallocating responsibilities across the Board
- improving the County Representative structure and identifying where additional regional volunteers are needed
- drawing up an organisational and financial plan
- supporting clubs and rolling out taster sessions in schools and other grassroots venues
- selecting an England team for the European Team Championship and (we hope) winning it.

2m Matters raised by members

(i) Incentives to join pbE Michael de Groot asked what incentives could be given to encourage players to join pbE. Perhaps a downloadable resource? Or a car sticker? Karen indicated that the Board would discuss this at its next meeting.

(ii) Training coaches and referees Patrick Osborn asked whether pbE plans for coaching and refereeing courses would be influenced by existing arrangements in USA. Rob Williams confirmed that the new pbE courses build on and improve the American ones. Sam Basford added that the pbE Level 1 course was approved by IPTPA and would replace it. Discussions had taken place about refereeing training and we are looking for someone keen on refereeing to take this on.

(iii) Padel vs pickleball Patrick Osborn asked whether padel and pickleball were in competition / collaboration. Karen's view was that there was little competition as the sports have little overlap. A padel court costs £60,000 to build but you can play pickleball with chalked lines on any hard flat surface.

2n Conclusion

Karen thanked everyone for attending and urged members to vote in the election of new pbE directors. The meeting applauded her for all her work in support of pickleball. Karen thanked members and added that it was getting harder and she was starting to think about an eventual exit strategy. The meeting ended at 19.30.

This note of the pbE AGM was prepared by Guy Herzmark, 23 February 2024