**Preston Grasshoppers RFC Limited**

**Annual General Meeting**

**1st December 2022 at 7:30 PM**

**Wiseman room**

27 members were present

**Apologies**: Hugh Duckworth, Natalie Jones, John LePage, Andy Donovan, Martin Hothersall, Paul Carroll, Dave Smith, Jim Singleton.

**1 Presidents Welcome**

Keith Brierley welcomed members to the meeting and referred to the chairman, Hugh Duckworth, wishing him well in his recovery from an operation.

**2 Apologies for absence**

The president reported that members as identified above had given their apologies for the meeting.

**3 Approval of minutes of 2021 AGM**

The minutes were proposed by Neil Ashton and seconded by les Harrison. Members unanimously agreed.

**4 Matters arising from the 2020 minutes**

There were no matters arising.

**5 Treasurer’s report and presentation of accounts**

Chris Dew opened his report by indicating that he was the 4th treasurer in two years and that there had been two sets of office staff over that period who dealt with the accounts. As a result of all these changes, together with delays by the reporting accountants, it had meant that the AGM had been unavoidably delayed.

Chris presented a summary of the accounts and interpreted the detail for members. The club had incurred a deficit during the covid period and had been grateful for grants and land sales which helped us through that time. There had been a general increase in income after COVID but this was matched by an increasing costs. However the club manage to break even for the year which was an acceptable result considering the issues that have been dealt with.

Chris advised members that during the current year to date the figures were looking good with a surplus at this stage and good growth in most of the income areas. It must be recognised, however, that depreciation will have an affect on the overall final figures. Chris thanked the new staff in the office who have worked hard to introduce new financial controls to enable us to grow the club and invest in rugby and the facilities. The figures are all improving, hospitality is particularly performing better. There are still lots of works to the club infrastructure required to ensure that the facilities are of a good standard.

Chris explained that the club was to receive a retrospective payment from the adjacent quarry in respect of access rights which would be a significant sum, whilst there would also be an annual payment for a number of years to come. This means that, together with the car park income, we have a good buffer for the future. In addition the sale of a small plot of land adjacent to Lingala will mean that a small capital receipt will be received in the near future. Chris did point out that there was an outstanding issue with regards to capital gains tax which required dealing with.

It was proposed by Hadyn Gigg and seconded by Michael Bailey and the members unanimously approved the report.

**6 Appointment of reporting accountant**

Chris Dew advised that it would be normal at this stage for a firm of accountants to be appointed for the current financial year, but due to concerns over delays in preparing the previous accounts it was suggested that this matter be delegated to the management committee. This action was proposed by Hadyn Gigg and seconded by Derek Cray. Members unanimously agreed the proposal.

**7 Rugby report**

Mike Bailey advised members that during the last year the first team had been promoted to the national leagues. Unfortunately both Paul Arnold and Garth Dyer had decided to leave having put in many years of good work for the club. A number of coaches had been interviewed and as a result Joel Unsworth and Dan Orwin had been appointed along with Alex Keay as a consultant but recently it had been decided that Joel Unsworth will leave the club to move on and Alex Keay will take a greater role.

Mike Bailey wished to thank Gareth Dyer for all his hard work and dedication. He also advised that Steve Kerry would become involved with coaching the half backs and the match day set up.

During the close season it had been unfortunate that four players had left to join Fylde rugby club having moved for more money. Mike acknowledged that the club should have tried to sign players earlier.

The priority for this season is to survive in the current league and recruitment was continually a priority.

In general rugby terms it was proving increasingly difficult to get five sides out every week, all this being in common with rugby clubs throughout the country. The ladies team were undefeated in the previous season and promoted but had decided that due to lower player numbers in the current year along with injury and relocation, that they had to withdraw from the league although they were still training and were expected to play friendly games after Christmas with a commitment to return to the leagues next season

Mike Bailey thanked the 1869 club for their tremendous support during the season particularly at away games. He also thanked Craig Steel for his help with the support team, Ian McFarlane is back to help the first team squad, Alan Howarth had done a sterling job with the second team, John Powell supported the squad as always and Harrison Drury were thanked for their sponsorship.

A number of questions were raised by members who were clearly concerned at the performance of the first team during the current season and a discussion took place amongst members to determine how the club could move forward. It was clear that the club aspired to get to the top of the table and to do this, the club would need to provide sufficient finance to support the playing squad. Examples were provided of the way that some other clubs in the country operated and it was acknowledged that we needed to do more to ensure that what we could play at the highest level possible.

**8 Chairman's report**

in the absence of the chairman, John Chesworth provided the chairman's report, the context being that having completed 150 years of rugby the management committee, all of whom were ex-players, wanted to make sure that the club was in the right shape for the next 50 years. He commented that the club was currently in a good place having been promoted last year and being fortunate to have enough funds in place to move forward. He stressed that we needed to be more competitive at this level.

To put more context on this matter, he highlighted that in the previous week, Vale of Lune were only able two select seven players for their second team whilst clubs such as Orrell and Waterloo were no longer at the top level. He expressed the view that there was a need to look at the transition from colts to senior rugby, indicating that much of the problem in this area is with academies and professional clubs. Financially the club is in a good position being debt free and with cash in the bank meaning we have a great position to move forward from. He also identified that during the pandemic a lot of work had been done on the facilities and our clubhouse was now much better than other clubs within the area.

There were many challenges that the club had to deal with, particularly resulting from staff turnover and the decision of the former general manager, Richard Ellis, to step down. It was clear that Richard had not been adequately replaced and that all the work had fallen on the chairman and executive as volunteers. During the year, there has been two chairmen and two treasurers which made running the club quite difficult, whilst we had also seen the final parts of the pandemic followed by the start of a period of national economic uncertainty.

Thank you was required for a number of volunteers who had given significant time and effort to help the club. He particularly identified Les Bray, Derek Cray, Mark Eastham, Andy Goodyear, Bill Kelly, Simon Lochhead, Ian McKenzie, John Powell, Craig Steel and all the volunteers who manned the car park and entrances on matchdays. He also wished to thank the senior staff, Michelle Grindrod, Victoria Yu, Lisa Tiernan and Dave Preston. He highlighted the club's executive committee, Hugh Duckworth, Chris Dew and Graham Cox who were virtually putting in full time jobs for the business and doing a fantastic job for the club.

Looking over the previous year one of the casualties of the pandemic had been the concept of the terrace bar. Issues concerning the appointment of hospitality staff and insufficient kitchen facilities meant that such a scheme was too much of a risk to take forward. The club was just about managing to provide the existing services although he felt we needed to do more to market the 1869 bar to attract local trade.

In financial terms, it was noted that outsourcing of hospitality on Sundays (out of necessity due to staffing issues) had resulted in a loss of good income for the club. This has now been brought back in house, generating good income from the mini-junior section and their supporters. The club had not had sportsman's dinner or Hopfest for a couple of years although these would be returning in 2023, whilst the early season match day lunches were poorly attended. He pointed out that this had been rectified for the remainder of the season. Staff we're working hard to ensure that regular bookings of the facilities took place to increase income whilst the quarry revenue referred to in the Treasurer report was a positive feature.

In terms of governance, there have been a blurring of the lines with the management committee trying to run the club as volunteers, a position that was clearly too onerous and not viable. The point had been reached to consider whether to continue with volunteers or appoint paid staff but unfortunately no volunteers were stepping forward to help. We will look to better delineate volunteer roles into manageable time commitments to try and make it easier for our members to help the club. He said that the Management Committee will be reviewing how the business operations of the club function, and that the new structure should be in place by the next AGM in July 2023.

It was acknowledged that communication between the Management Committee and the membership needs to be improved, and that we propose to hold quarterly meetings with the membership to report on progress and also engage the membership in discussion about potential future projects.

**9 Election of officers**

John Chesworth reminded members that Martin Hothersall had resigned as chairman and treasurer at the end of 2021 and Hugh Duckworth was co-opted to replace him as chairman. Hugh had unfortunately recently had an operation and it was felt that it was too onerous for him to put in the significant number of hours at the club for the time being. As the next AGM was probably only 8 months away, it was considered that we should allow him to recover and appoint an alternative chairman for the rest of the current year.

It was proposed that the officers for the current year should be Keith Brierley (president), Neil Ashton (chairman), Chris Dew (honorary treasurer) and Graham Cox (honorary secretary).

These appointments were proposed by Bob Thompson and seconded by John Dewhurst. Members unanimously voted for the appointments.

**10 Election of committee**

The agenda set out the proposal for the election of committee members for the coming year: Michael Lough, John Chesworth, Michael Bailey, Hugh Duckworth, Natalie Jones.

These appointments were proposed by Hadyn Gigg and seconded by John Potter. Members unanimously approved the appointments.

**11 Appointment of life member**

The Honorary Secretary advised that the management committee had suggested that Hugh Duckworth be appointed a life member in recognition of the significant and amazing amount of work that he had done for the club over many years. He had done a magnificent job of leading the mini junior section of the club for a significant period of time and in each year numbers have been approaching 500 children who play rugby every Sunday morning. Hugh has done all the administration to support that section and in particular for many years he had been the sole organiser of sportsman's dinners which had raised magnificent sums of money for the club. Not to be content with running the mini junior section, Hugh took on board all of the work to improve the club facilities during the period of the pandemic. On top of that, he had then been appointed as chairman of the club, a role in which he spent many, many hours undertaking. It was recognised that his contribution to the club had been immense and that in recognition of this work, the management committee felt that he should be granted the honour of becoming a life member.

All members present unanimously voted in favour of the proposal.

**12 Any other business**

A member suggested that it would be good if there could be a get together of volunteers so that they could be recognised as a group. The chairman accepted this proposal.

The chairman then thanked the members for the privilege of his appointment and advised that he was committed to taking the club forward.

As there were no further questions from members, the president thanked everyone for coming and made a plea that we try to get more members to join in supporting the club.