



WHITEFIELD BOWLING CLUB

A COMMUNITY INTEREST COMPANY

This document gives an overview of the last few years and the transition from a Company Limited (Co Ltd) to a Community Interest Company (CIC). It looks at what we have achieved and the intended direction.

Brief history of how we got here

The Company Limited (shareholders/directors) had owned the land and buildings of WBC since 1891. We had a management committee since the mid 1960s that ran the day-to-day activities and delivery. The Co Ltd had to have detailed annual reports and serviced companies house and shareholders. The management committee serviced the membership and had to satisfy annual accounts for members.

The club building was always kept to legislative requirements; it was clean and well maintained but it was/is suffering from lack of significant investment and has severe structural issues and problems with the roof. It is expensive to run in terms of energy consumption, not accessible for all of the community and the toilet facilities are severely inadequate. The Co Ltd or Management Committee did not have the funds or the ability to bring in money for rectification.

There were several hostile bids received for sale of the land. Despite consistent rumour that the land could not be sold, the fact (after legal consultation) was the land could be sold and built on. Running in tandem with this was a determined campaign by new members to remove the long-term stable member facing management committee. It was very clear that the number of members, opening hours and the general level of activity was declining (as it was and is across all sectors) and this would be a major drawback in achieving objectives.

The Co Ltd directors met and agreed on a way forward: -

- Move the Co Ltd from owned shareholders to a CIC. This would ensure the land and buildings would be in community ownership and safe for ever.
- Move away from a private company to a CIC would allow us to seek grants from public bodies and “charity” funders (with some success).
- We would apply a robust business plan, policies and procedures, community engagement with tight reporting regimes. More members via opening hours that would demonstrate an income that would support loans and borrowing that would allow us to seek either public or private funding.
- We would regenerate interest by demonstrating plans for new buildings, we would set strict opening hours, so all knew we were open and ready for business.
- We would ensure we had best possible supply prices to attract new custom/members.
- We would usher in digital services for day-to-day operations, sales, stock and most importantly for complete transparency with.
- We would share all documents, policies, reports and news across all the communities, partners, members and regulators.



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Unfortunately, there were casualties within this plan, the biggest being the dedicated management committee that delivered a fantastic service for many years. It also dictated that a limited number of Directors for the new CIC would take this forward as it had to be total hands on, instant communication and ability to totally support direction and strategy.

What we have achieved

Our first objective was to get more members and increase cashflow which would allow us to pay for the high costs of services we needed to bring in. We established clear and strict opening hours so our members knew the lights were on and they could come in and meet friends. We increased membership by 110% in the first 12 months. We increased revenue by 160% during the same period.

We introduced digital software that enabled us to take card payments, see instantly (both remote and on site) takings, profit and costs. We established CCTV coverage of all transactions and external monitoring. We established new bank accounts that took annual charges down by circa £30 a month. We established broadband connections and installed new TV and entertainment services.

We researched the prices we were being charged from long term partners for the wet goods (being the main income source) and found consistent and significant overcharging. We immediately sought new suppliers and brought down the purchase price of a bitter (to us) from £1.34 to 90p. We continue to keep prices as low as possible to ensure we are not only competitive but give members excellent value.

We engaged the services of Blackstone's Solicitors to handle the Co Ltd to CIC change. We established new articles of association that totally encompass our direction, history and a fair and honest membership input that included our original position, to return to a management committee once we have the operations and controls in situ.

We engaged a business consultant to work with us to establish a business plan that would not only demonstrate to lenders that we had a vision and control but that we were being realistic about our ability to repay and manage. Critical to the plan was the continued drive to get as much income in as possible and have robust and transparent policies and control mechanisms.

We engaged a firm of architects to look at the site and prepare drawings and plans of what we could achieve and realistically deliver. We set out two plans, one for each funding scenario. The first was to build a new two storey unit with separate function room that would serve as a community facility in the day (creche, kitchen, training centre). This would give us access to Government and other funding streams. The second was to build two apartments on the first floor that would be leased/sold to fund the new build.



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We engaged structural engineers to report on condition of the building, risk, movement, and action needs and valuers to report on the land and buildings worth presently and projected.

We are a member of Bury communities action group and feed into community strategy and services. We are a part of Bury Voluntary Faith Alliance programme of engagement services. We support several charities and services via grant (from us to them) to circa £5500 from commencement of the CIC.

We cleared land at the rear and erected buildings to ensure we have a base when we start any demolition, rebuilding and alterations.

We have invested over £9000 in new machinery for the grounds, significant work on the green, new boards and equipment. We have an encompassing management committee for the green, teams and bowling events that we intend to extend and improve in 2023.

We have submitted grants across several areas and several organisations ranging from total rebuilds, modernisation, environmental projects, community support and projects with schools and academies. We have received over £5000 in grants that have been directed to support and relevant funding criteria.

We have a strong and reliable panel of directors and trustees who are committed and informed. We have a strong and reliable panel of bar service providers. We have our continued and loyal volunteers across all platforms that remain the life blood, body, and soul of WBC. We have our members and friends who are the reason we are still here.

Direction and Strategy

The long-term objective is clear and as it was from day one, to ensure the club, its land and facilities remain open and accessible and to be at the centre of our community, providing a meeting place for friends to gather, enjoy our facilities, in an atmosphere free from threat or intimidation, a safe refuge.

The work to date has been hard, time consuming, frustrating, infuriating and with casualties, but on the whole rewarding in terms of what has been achieved. We recognise that several members do want to be part of the delivery and have input into direction of the club and need to further establish platforms for greater accessibility.

Changes in both political and financial climates through the results of the pandemic and cost of living crisis are forcing many institutions to take a back seat and await upturn and outcome. The Governments levelling up fund that we prepared a 40-page submission for with numerous reports and feasibility studies, planning applications (£800) we were told “had a very good chance” of achieving, was dropped from a ceiling of £1million (new build) to £250,000 (we are still in at stage 3). The private sector is not currently looking for “new



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business” and we still have the register of CIC to confirm we are able to use the land for lease/rental for individuals. For us, that means the funding opportunities to meet our primary objective (new build) must be shelved for the immediate future and to review our timelines.

We propose the following for discussion, consultation via an extraordinary member’s meeting in March 2023:

1. Return the day-to-day management of the club and premises to a democratically elected Management Committee of 8/10 members as per the articles of association. An elected chairman, finance officer with delegated roles and responsibilities to be discussed (all to be supported by CIC Directors).
2. A review of the number of CIC Directors’ and tasks.
3. A review of the roles of trustees, numbers and authority.
4. CIC Directors will continue to deal with Community Interest Regulator, year-end CIC overall accounts, companies house.
5. The established green/captains committee to be extended to 6/8 members (with scope for co-opted members) with regular meetings and responsibilities.