

**Chief Executive's Report to the Bowls England AGM
Saturday 24th February 2018**

I am pleased to present this Annual Report on behalf of the Board of Bowls England.

2017 marked the 10th Anniversary since the formation of Bowls England, and provided an ideal opportunity for us to look back on our achievements over that period and to consider how we can best meet the needs of our members in the future.

The highlight of our celebrations was the Anniversary Dinner held at The Royal Pump Rooms in August during the National Championships. Whilst, sadly, some of those who played a key role in the formation of Bowls England and supported our work in the early years were unable to attend for a variety of reasons, it was a wonderful occasion and we were delighted to see our County Associations so well represented.

However, we must remember that we are custodians of the sport for future generations and at all levels it is vital that we do not stand still. It was therefore apt that just hours before the Anniversary Dinner we outlined our plans to County Associations for a new-look Bowls England governance structure. The new arrangements, which were approved by County Associations at the Special General Meeting in November, will come into effect following the Annual General Meeting at which the revised Articles of Association will be presented for approval.

The main changes will see revised Director Portfolios, the creation of an Audit & Review Committee elected by the four geographic regions and the ability for the Board to appoint Working Parties to undertake specific tasks and, in doing so, bring in relevant personnel with the required skills. The current Committees will cease to exist, and the Chairman of the Board personally wrote to all those Committee Members thanking them for the time they have given and the work that they have undertaken. I am sure, however, that many of them will be asked to put their experience to good use on Working Parties in the future.

Perhaps, most importantly, the new structure will be underpinned by the Regional Meetings. These were introduced in Spring 2017 on a trial basis and proved to be a great success. Many more County Association representatives, including some who had not previously had the opportunity to attend a Bowls England event, had the chance to have their say on matters of both local and national importance. This wider involvement among the membership is vital to the future of County Associations and Bowls England. Indeed, it was the success of the Regional Meetings and the positive feedback that fuelled the need for change in the governance structure.

During a time of transformation, the Board itself will have seen significant change over the last 12 months. Howard Pryse, who was awarded Life Membership of Bowls England in recognition of his work over many years, retired as Director of Finance in September and Stephen Hemsley (Lancashire) was appointed as his replacement. The Annual General Meeting in February 2018 will also mark the 'retirement' of two long-standing Directors with Jeff Applegate and Norma Hazzledine, both having indicated that they would not be standing for re-election as Directors.

I must thank Howard, Jeff and Norma for all the support, guidance and hard work that they have given, freely, to Bowls England in their respective roles. I am sure you will all agree that we would have been much poorer without them and all three will be a hard act to follow.

This means that at the Annual General Meeting the election of two new Directors will be announced whose roles will be Director of Coaching and Director of Development. These two new portfolios

have been created to reflect the importance that Bowls England and our membership place on these two areas of work that are vital to the sport's long-term future.

Our new-look Board will be meeting in March to begin work on our new Strategic Plan, which will underpin the organisation for the next four years. However, it is clear that a number of significant items are already emerging.

Bowls England's agreement with Warwick District Council for office accommodation within Riverside House has been extended until 28th February 2020. Work to assess potential sites within the local area is continuing and the establishment of new offices, whilst making the best use of our Members funds, has been highlighted by the Board as one of its top priorities.

At the Counties Meeting in November there was widespread support for the introduction of a National Membership Register. Having agreed the principle, work is now underway to look at how such a scheme could be realistically implemented. As indicated at the Counties Meeting, there will need to be a pilot phase and I would like to thank all those County Associations that have already volunteered to assist. Any scheme will, of course, need to take into account the latest data protection requirements that will be introduced in May this year in the form of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

Another key area of work, which is reflected by the creation of the Director of Coaching post, will be the transition of Coach Bowls to Bowls England and the English Indoor Bowling Association Ltd (EIBA). The two National Governing Bodies will take ownership of Coach Bowls on 1st April 2019, and it is vital that there is a smooth handover. Bowls England is already offering limited administrative support to Coach Bowls as part of the process, and this commitment is expected to increase over the coming months. Significant financial and human resources will be required from both parties to ensure that Coach Bowls continues to grow in the future whilst meeting the needs of our sport.

In addition to Coach Bowls, we continue to work closely with the EIBA in a number of areas including safeguarding and facilities, and in the future it is evident that both organisations could potentially benefit from the sharing of resources and skills, particularly within our respective staff teams.

The development of the sport, particularly the provision of more opportunities for younger players, is something that we all fully subscribe to and again I am sure this will be a key focus of our Strategic Plan.

Bowls England was delighted to be invited to work with the Youth Sport Trust towards inclusion of the sport of bowls on the School Games programme. Initial work is now underway and it is envisaged that School Games organisers will have the opportunity to include bowls within their programme of activities from September 2018. Responsibility for this work will lie with the new Director of Development.

In support of the development of the sport, Bowls England remains committed to the work of the Bowls Development Alliance (BDA) to increase participation in the sport. We have been pleased to assist in the early stages of the BDA's Club Development Programme which aims to provide 'hands on' assistance to help clubs prosper. Whilst the programme is still in its infancy, we expect this work to be of great benefit to our clubs over the next few years and would encourage any interested party to contact the BDA Team.

Looking back at 2017, an early highlight was the annual Bowls England Week at Potters Resort in Norfolk. We invested additional resources into supporting the event, including a number of

workshops and fun activities, so that individuals really felt they were getting more value for their money. In addition, the week provided an excellent opportunity to meet with members and advise them on many of their queries about Bowls England and the sport of bowls. At the time of writing, the 2018 Week is 'fully booked' with nearly 500 bowlers due to attend, which therefore demonstrates that our efforts have been rewarded.

The National Championships in August were once again widely regarded as a success. I must take this opportunity to thank all those who contributed to the event with particular reference to the staff team, volunteers (including markers and umpires) and Warwick District Council without whose efforts the 30 days would just not be possible.

The Championships saw the introduction of three new events to an already busy schedule – Men's Junior Pairs, Men's Senior Fours and Women's Senior Fours. All three were well supported and, for the winners of the two Senior events, there was the added bonus that they will now represent England in the British Isles Championships this coming season. I am aware that the Senior events in other British Isles countries are proving to be very popular, and I am sure that with the correct promotion amongst our clubs, participation in England will follow a similar trend.

Regrettably, this coming year we will be without the services of the Royal Naval Association Club, which we understand is likely to close its doors for the final time at the end of March 2018. The RNA has been a big supporter of Bowls England and the National Championships since our move to Royal Leamington Spa, and I would like to publicly thank the Club. The closure means that in 2018 we will be unable to host Corporate Lunches, however in their stead we will be organising two evening functions at The Pump Rooms – on Wednesday 8th August and Wednesday 22nd August – to which County Association representatives and other special guests who previously attended a Corporate Lunch will be invited. Separate arrangements have been confirmed with the Friends of English Bowling.

On the playing front, I am delighted to report that England has enjoyed notable success at international level over the last 12 months. Jamie-Lea Winch and Rebecca Wigfield struck gold in the Ladies Pairs at the European Championships in Jersey, Taylor Monk and David Bolt were finalists in the Hong Kong Classic Pairs whilst Donna Knight took bronze at the Women's Champion of Champions held in Australia. Closer to home, and once again our international teams led the way in the British Isles with the Senior Men, Senior Women and Junior Women claiming their respective titles.

This year, Australia's Gold Coast will host the Commonwealth Games from Wednesday 4th to Sunday 15th April. We were delighted to welcome the Gold Coast Baton Relay team to the National Championships in August, and it proved to be a memorable day for all those present. I wish our team, under the leadership of Performance Director John Bell, good bowling and hope that they will be able to repeat their fine performances in Delhi 2010 and Glasgow 2014.

The closing ceremony in Australia will, of course, be extra special as it will mean that the countdown to Birmingham 2022 is on, when Victoria Park in Royal Leamington Spa will host the Lawn Bowls events. Whilst the involvement of Bowls England as an organisation in the 2022 Games is at this stage unknown, we expect that the likely infrastructure improvements will ensure a long-term legacy for players and spectators who utilise the facilities year round.

Later in 2018, Victoria Park will host the Men's Senior International Series and the Women's Junior International Series, together with the respective Championships. The Senior Women and Junior Men will travel to Belfast, Northern Ireland. This is a great opportunity to see our sport played at the

highest level and I know that the players selected would be appreciative of your support during these events.

As with many sports, volunteers continue to provide the backbone of bowls at all levels, and I must thank each and every one of you for your efforts – whether that be as a green keeper, administrative officer, umpire, coach or any other role. In recognition of the sport's reliance on volunteers, Bowls England has been delighted to make funding available to clubs and individual members in support of their attendance on recognised courses including safeguarding, greens maintenance and coaching. We will endeavour to increase this provision over the coming years, subject to available resource.

Clubs and County Associations remain the mainstay of the sport, and one of our key roles as your National Governing Body is to offer guidance and advice to our Members. In doing so, the past year has proved to be particularly challenging. We have dealt with a large increase in disciplinary cases that have regrettably reached national level, and offered advice in this area to many other clubs to assist them in reaching a decision on such matters. In light of some of the issues raised, we will be reviewing the disciplinary regulations in the coming months.

Our Civil Liability Insurance service continues to provide a significant benefit for all our affiliated members. Bowls England is only able to obtain such advantageous rates due to the economies of scale to be achieved from such a large take up. In return Sutton Winson continues to provide significant cost savings which, for many clubs, far outweighs the cost of affiliation. I take this opportunity to encourage all of our Members to ensure that their insurance needs are met ahead of the 2018 season.

Whilst Bowls England recorded another surplus in 2017, it must be remembered that a large percentage of this can be attributed to the savings achieved by the relocation to Royal Leamington Spa and particularly the financial benefits currently enjoyed by our agreement for office accommodation within Riverside House. I remind you that we also continue to receive regular income from our former office in Worthing. The ongoing financial support from the Friends of English Bowling, Sutton Winson Insurance and all of our commercial sponsors is greatly appreciated, and greatly helps us to maintain the positive financial position that has enabled the Board to recommend no increase in the Affiliation Fee for 2019.

The Men's and Women's Annual Dinners in 2017 were held respectively at the Doubletree by Hilton Hotel in Coventry and the St Johns Hotel in Solihull. The two venues, at present, best meet our requirements for these events and have, therefore, been booked for the next two years to ensure their availability.

Finally, in preparing this Annual Report, the Chair of Bowls England wished me to formally record his sincere thanks to all who continue to contribute to Bowls England and our sport as a whole – whether it is at club, county, national or international level. In doing so, it would be remiss not to highlight the work of County Administrators who provide a vital link between Bowls England and our clubs. Mention must also go to those County Authorised Representatives who will be standing down at the AGM in February 2018. All are volunteers and fulfil their duties to the best of their ability.

The Chair also wished me to thank his fellow Directors, all of whom continue to give their time and expertise freely to serve you all, the Staff Members who demonstrate their commitment to Bowls England throughout the year and our Presidential Team, which is in many ways the public face of Bowls England and who travel thousands of miles to attend Celebration Matches and International Events in addition to their support of the National Championships.

As Chief Executive, I must also highlight that the staff team continues to show great aptitude and commitment to provide a service to our members. Their dedication and support is second to none, and I know that this will be acknowledged by you all. I am personally very proud of the efforts of everyone involved in supporting Bowls England over the past 12 months and look forward to building on this success on behalf of our members in 2018.