It seems strange to think that a year has passed since I last put pen to paper, figuratively speaking, to summarise the events of the season past and to look forward to what the new season may hold for us. Nevertheless, that is the position in which I find myself as I take stock of the many and varied events, initiatives, challenges and opportunities.

Flushed with the success of last season’s Guinness World Record our intrepid organisers kicked off the new season on our new pitch with an attempt at another record. This was a less strenuous and painful experience for most as we sought the world record for the most number of players playing in a hockey match. While the attempt failed on a technicality it was a successful family event, enjoyed by all, that really seemed to capture the imagination and enthusiasm of so many. Apparently, we’re going to have another crack at it next season.

The GWR attempt was a fantastic way to “christen” our new pitch and, with the identical council pitch alongside, we can boast once again to have one of the best club facilities in the country. The Mayor of Chelmsford, Cllr. Duncan Lumley, was clearly impressed with what he saw when he officially opened both pitches later in the season. The pitch is due its twelve-month inspection about now, which is when the contractors will resolve any issues identified by us, and Spencer Wilcox has been actively seeking feedback. Once that work is complete we shall part with the final five percent payment.

It was the usual mixed bag on the field of play this season. The successes of the M2 and L6 in gaining promotion from East League Division 3SE and Essex League Division 4 respectively were offset by the relegation of the L1 from the EHL after a thirty-year stay having been founder members back in 1988. The M6 also deserve a special mention for narrowly missing out on a promotion spot in East League Division 7SE but finishing above our M5. In a strange quirk of fate a league reorganisation means that it is the M5, and not the M6, who will play alongside the M4 in Division 6SE next season!

Various social events have taken place this season, including the Whisky Tasting and Christmas Party and a hugely successful Beer Festival. Both the men’s dinner and Ladies’ Night were extremely popular, with almost two hundred members in attendance. As well as the important social aspect of these events they also raise vital revenue for the club. Well done to all the organisers and attendees!

There is an opportunity to participate in a forthcoming social event as we host a family tournament linked to the women’s World Cup being held at Lee Valley in July. The event will take place on Sunday, 29th July followed by a trip to a local pub to watch England take on Ireland. See our usual social media outlets for full details.

We also lost two club stalwarts this season who many of you knew well. The club involvement of both Bryan Heelis and Michael Gray has been well chronicled elsewhere so, suffice to say, that their passing is a great loss to all who knew and loved them and they will be missed.

Recently we received the excellent news that England Hockey have awarded us ClubMark status, valid for three years. This award is the official benchmark for all hockey clubs and recognises that we are a well-run club that achieves standards to which others should aspire. It’s a fantastic achievement for all involved with the running of the club but we are indebted to Kath MacDonald, Sally Dalton and others who helped compile all the evidence, implement necessary changes and respond to questions.

The ClubMark accreditation was also the final piece of the jig-saw patiently put together by Spencer Wilcox over the past year or so in his quest to obtain funding from the National Hockey Foundation. While we hadn’t received the cheque at the time of going to press I am delighted to say that we have been formally informed that we have been successful in our application for a grant of £25,000. We shall be investigating what other funding opportunities may be open to us now as ClubMark holders.

The development of our club is a subject that is always at the forefront of management committee meetings. It is a very different club to the one I joined almost forty years ago and we cannot afford to stand still. We must move with the times but also seek to innovate if we wish to maintain our position as one of the leading clubs in the region, if not the country.

While Sally Dalton is relinquishing her Club Development Officer role to focus on junior player recruitment and retention, she leaves us with clear direction on what needs to be done. Without going into details here, our member survey indicates that senior member satisfaction is down on last year but junior member satisfaction is unaffected. We have taken on board feedback about post-match teas and are exploring other options for next season. We also know from the recent development meeting that members want us to be a recreational club with high-performing 1st XIs. This is all vital feedback for us to help shape the future of the club and it is now down to the management committee to identify and implement the necessary changes.

Some significant changes that you will hear more about this evening, and over the coming months, relate to our web site, membership database and General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) policies and controls. While we anticipate that they will help us fulfil all regulatory requirements we also feel they are essential to help us tighten our financial controls and maximise revenue. We are grateful to Peter Carter for taking on this significant responsibility and agreeing to steer us through the important first year of using the new systems as Membership Secretary for both the seniors and juniors.

Finance is an ongoing challenge for us all. We know from member feedback that there is little scope for increasing subscriptions and match fees, yet there is a need to increase revenue to continue to support our club’s development. While we expect the appointment of James Caviel as Sponsorship Officer to aid our search for external funding from local businesses and are focusing efforts on growing our junior membership as previously mentioned, we have also had to increase our coaching budget and to consider player incentive schemes, linked to revenue generation and volunteering, to give our two 1st XIs the support they need to be successful. There is always much debate about the importance of the 1st XIs to the rest of the club but we know from past experience that the success of these flagship teams has a strong influence on the rest of the club, directly and indirectly. Though, to be sustainable, of course this support has to be in conjunction with developing other areas of the club such as junior participation, *Back to Hockey* and alternative hockey activities such as midweek *Rush Hockey*.

Our second significant challenge is the ongoing recruitment and retention of volunteers. There are a number of roles vacant this year, all of which must be filled. The most pressing are the Secretary, Club Development Officer and Bar Secretary roles. If you don’t fancy any of those roles then please consider taking on one of the others! The few people that are working hard to run your club are struggling to manage everything. Something will give soon. If we can’t fill these roles with volunteers then the club will either cease to exist or membership costs will increase as we are forced to pay or incentivise more people to take on roles.

Finally, my personal thanks to the Management Committee members for their hard work, particularly the outgoing Sally Dalton, and to the Chelmer Park ground staff - Martin, Shane and Alan - who, as well as discharging their statutory duties, are always willing to help. We do appreciate your efforts.

David Kitchiner, June 2018