

# Dartmouth Tennis - A briefing for Dartmouth Town Council's Assets Committee

## Introduction

This is a briefing for your December 18th meeting from the Dartmouth Tennis Association, currently made up of the 94 members listed below. We want to explain our weekly tennis groups and why they should continue to have their repeat weekly bookings but we also want to suggest a continued dialogue with you to improve Dartmouth tennis in general.

There is much to celebrate about Dartmouth tennis and much to do. We really do thank the Town Council for its provision and maintenance of the Coronation Park courts. We were upset when the Council Office abruptly changed the bookings of the courts because we depend on these regular weekly groups. We want to keep them going and we are grateful for the reinstatement of their bookings. They fit in well with the Dartmouth tradition of self-help and community organisation and we have formed ourselves into a single community association.

Our national body, the LTA has developed a clear vision that tennis is for everyone, all ages, all backgrounds and all levels of ability and we certainly fit well into that model - though we are so far missing from our ranks a future Wimbledon Champion! We want to work with you, the Council, to ensure that the courts are well used, well maintained and safe, available for local people and visitors, young and old, resident and tourist, and this briefing sets out how we might do that.

## A Successful Partnership

We celebrate the Town Council's commitment to tennis in providing the Coronation Park courts. They are a real asset to the local community, giving us year-long access to a sport which is good for our health and our well-being. Before our recent dispute we had a good partnership with you:

- We have run, for at least the last twenty years, **regular weekly tennis sessions** for local residents under the overall coordination of Yvonne Cottam<sup>1</sup>. She is supported by 14 tennis coordinators who each organise weekly tennis groups and involve a total of about 90 local residents - from beginners upwards - we make use of about 20% of court time but account for 80% of the tennis played on the courts. We play all year round, peer pressure means that we turn up through all seasons and most weathers. We may moan but our health benefits from the regular exercise and competition and your courts are arguably the best used of any outdoor public courts in Devon.
- We have organised the annual **Dartmouth Regatta Tennis Tournament** every August for the last 55 years. It is made up of a Closed Tournament (in 2023 51 local players competed in 11 events) followed by a week-long Open LTA Grade 4 tournament (2023 - 85 players from the South West in 12 events).
- We have developed our **website** [www.dartmouthtennis.club](http://www.dartmouthtennis.club) to support both the Regatta Tennis tournament and to help organise tennis activity in Dartmouth. New players moving into Dartmouth make contact through our website and are fed into our groups as appropriate. We provide links to the tennis ClubSpark website for Coronation Park and to the Town Council website.
- We regularly hold **smaller day competitions** to raise funds for the RNLI and other local charities.
- We have now set ourselves up as an **association**, partly as a response to the dispute with the Council Office. We know it will take time to evolve, but it will form the basis for better organised activity and partnerships.

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<sup>1</sup> This work, together with her many other activities led to her being recognised as a '**Coronation Champion**' – one of only 500 across the Country at the King's Coronation celebration. Her work has also been recognised by the Town Council itself and Dartmouth Rotary Club.

- We introduced the Council to ClubSpark and advocated **the electronic gate system**. This has substantially increased the income to the Town Council and opened up the courts to all. Prior to this, there was an ad hoc arrangement with the cafe on the park and gates were left open much of the time. We have helped the Properties team by maintaining the nets and the associated equipment. We have also helped new players access the courts and use the floodlights when the Council Offices are closed.

But there is much more to do!

### [First - Resolving our dispute](#)

We think the original withdrawal of our group bookings was a mistake. A chance remark from ClubSpark that Dartmouth had a lot of weekly bookings led to the Council Office cancelling them without consultation. The LTA has now explained that ClubSpark's comment wasn't meant as an instruction and it is for the Council to decide how the booking system is set up. Technically the system can make any booking into a recurring weekly one as required. We have discussed the situation with LTA and they agree that there is nothing wrong in what we are doing but we are an outlier in the extent we use organised weekly groups. Although this high extent of organisation is unusual for park tennis courts it is not unusual for Dartmouth. Dartmouth thrives on the local community working together to organise events: the Regatta, the Food Festival, the Music Festival are obvious examples. And this organisation pays off - our group games use just 20% of the available time slots but provide over 80% of the tennis played on the courts - and judging by their booking sheets our outside park courts are fuller and better used than any in Devon.

We are proud of these weekly groups and we are grateful to the Mayor and Councillors for restoring our recurring bookings, and of course we are asking the Assets Committee to support this permanently.

### [Agreeing an Agenda for the Future](#)

There are a number of key areas where the Council should consider its plans in partnership with the LTA. In particular to:

- **Attract younger people and families to the courts and make it a safe environment for them.** There are no groups of young people using the courts. The Youth Club and the schools are obviously key to developing an interest in tennis by young players. We can help a bit, but this is hard to achieve. One of our players has become a Level 2 Coach with the aim of providing young people with support and training. Several others are interested in supporting him. The LTA produces a range of free products and programmes e.g. LTA Youth Schools and Free Park Tennis. The Council needs to have its safeguarding information up on the courts, making explicit the reporting arrangements for concerns. In the future parents would expect the provision of a Clubhouse or a Shelter as described in the Neighbourhood Plan (see below).
- **Attract more visitors to use the courts and make it easy for them to play:** Apart from our website there is no visible signage or marketing of the courts as an easily accessible resource for all. We have already suggested the need for a simple Noticeboard. Extending the Floodlights to all four courts and ensuring that players who book night sessions are provided with the code and directions to access them would improve capacity.
- **Provide a Shelter.** Dartmouth's Neighbourhood Plan proposes: 'A single storey shelter and storage facility should be provided on Coronation Park as funds become available.. It should be located in the SW corner adjacent to the retaining wall in an area near the tennis courts. We would like to work with you on achieving this.
- **Make better use of LTA Initiatives to attract local residents to play tennis:** The Council could integrate better into LTA Activities such as LTA Serves, Team Challenge, LTA Parks Initiative, Free Park Tennis

Activators, and make better use of the ClubSpark. We have a number of players with mobility issues who still get enjoyment from tennis. LTA schemes like Walking Tennis are ideal for them and Wheelchair Tennis is also possible, although the Council would need to make the courts more accessible and make contact with the appropriate local organisations. We would be willing to discuss with the Council how we can help with the integration and promotion of these products and programmes.

### How we might go forward

- **Dialogue is important.** In October we had a joint meeting between ourselves, Cllr. Graham Webb, Cllr. Cathy Campos and Rhys Andrews and we all agreed to continue these meetings. Our suggestion is that they are used to monitor progress in our partnership and to agree to any changes needed.
- We will continue to develop the **Dartmouth Tennis Association** with the help of LTA guidance. We aim to make it open and free to all and welcome all abilities from beginners onwards as members. Our approach is not the traditional stuffy tennis club approach but one based on community involvement and in this we think we are ahead of the curve, not behind it. We will look to maintain the informality of our groups, but also develop better links to the Council, the LTA and Devon Tennis. It will create an umbrella organisation to support the Regatta Tennis Tournament, our groups, and other activities.
- We will **advise the Council Office** of any changes we think might increase footfall, identify any problems that reduce the user experience and, if asked, help you improve your capacity to run the ClubSpark system and market the venue.
- **Events for Young players.** We will work with you to find ways to encourage young people to play tennis. We are in discussions with Cllr. Liz Moseley to organise a Coronation Park youth sports day with tennis as a key element. We already run a family competition as part of the Regatta and we will look to expand this in 2024 and are grateful to the Mayor for the offer of a cup for young players as part of the Tournament. We are happy to consider how we might help the Council on the LTA schemes such as free Park Tennis.
- And of course we will work with the Town Council's **Review of Assets Working Group** to support its work in investigating ways of increasing income, foot fall and experience of the tennis courts.

### *Signed by all 94 members of the Dartmouth Tennis Association*

Alan Rimmell, Alison Bull, Alison Timms, Alistair Forbes, Andrew Davis, Andy Clark, Ann Marie Swart, Anne Taylor, Anne Woodward, Annie Norton, Archie Mesgian, Aroop Mozumder, Beth Scorer, Bill May, Bob Tyrell, Carol Lingard, Caroline Wigley, Caryn Yates, Chris Smith, Christine Scott, Clare Pridmore, Colin Raven, Craig Davidson, David Hackford, David Parker, Deborah Lord, Deborah Penn, Derek Berra, Edward Jephson, Eva Harrison, Frankie Davidson, Georgina Parker, Graham Buckel, Harry Franks, Helen Jacob, Irene Collins, Jayne Turner, Jim Hassan, John Bretherton, John Collins, Jon Preston, Jonathan Shribman, Julie Elliott, Julie Moores, Julie Rogers, Juliet Mason-Jones, Karen Davis, Kate Watson, Katy Barwell, Kaye Cowley, Keith Williams, Ken Johnson, Leo Whittington, Linda Raven, Lindsay Ellwood, Louise Furbank, Mags Wilmshurst, Margaret Bailey, Maria Avis, Marion Foster, Mark Jessep, Martin Clive-Smith, Maureen Preece, Nicholas Smith, Nicole van der Eyden, Pam Braakenburg, Patrick Hinde, Paul Tucker, Peter Avis, Peter Gardner, Peter Verow, Phil Braakenburg, Philippa Franks, Richard Hawke, Richard Johnston, Richard Turner, Robert Brooke, Rosie Clive-Smith, Ross Pridmore, Sally Clarke, Sheila Shribman, Soo Forbes, Spencer Wigley, Stephen Yates, Steve Cairns, Steve Jones, Stuart Duke, Sue Black, Sue Preston, Susan Elias Jones, Susan Manley, Tom Harrison, Tracey Bridgwood, Vivienne Dunne, Yvonne Cottam