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Dear Members and Club Followers

Development Plan and the New Season

Thank you to everyone who participated in the AGM, where the plans for 2024 were set out. It also enabled me to update members on our 2023-2027 Development Plan.

We are, and have always been, a community club and recognize the essential need to respect the cultural differences of our membership. Over the years EDI has been good for us, delivering more players, coaches and other volunteers to support better performance and high-level community togetherness. We promote cricket for all, from grass roots to the first class game, for all ages and abilities. Some 90% of our male players develop from our juniors.

I am delighted that the AGM approved important Management Committee appointments – Jon Gritten, our Head of Junior Cricket, and Helen Quinlan, who will chair a newly formed Women's & Girl's Forum to focus on the special needs of female cricketers, the club's fastest growing sector.

Our investment program on improved facilities has been, and continues to be, significant. We will continue to seek members' and other financial support, mindful that grant funding is becoming more difficult to secure.

When The ECB published its EDI requirements, we had already implemented a strong safeguarding environment, with whistle blowing, codes of conduct, social media internal audit from a young/vulnerable person perspective, a bursary scheme and the appointment of external advisors. We expect our recent additional EDI related measures – a 'Junior Herons Council' to give our juniors a bigger say in the way the club is run, an Alumni group to promote the interests of former members and their partners, a sharper focus on Communication, PR capability and volunteer training – will help us maintain 'best practice' EDI standards.

A five-year plan period is a long time, and we are aware that there is no room for complacency. Specifically, we intend to focus on continuous improvement of our systems and reporting processes and, through our Green Heron Forum, recognise that environmental demands are likely to result in alternative products, cricket balls and pitches for example. The traditional cricket match has changed considerably in recent years and it will continue to do so.

Having recently completed the building of a school library in Nairobi, and the Yorkshire 3 Peaks fund raising challenge, we now turn our attention to the new season. We are always looking for new volunteers from across our membership. Some tasks take little time, an enquiry does not involve any obligation.

Please drop me a line if you wish to discuss anything. My door is always open.

Kind regards, Martin Pluck – Club Chair.

3rd April 2024

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Development Plan – 2023-2027

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Our vision is 'to remain a top recreational cricket club'. This will be achieved by nurturing – through our communities of families and partnership – the development of recreational cricket to the highest of standards and to provide all members with the opportunity to enjoy the game and fulfil their potential'.

1 Introduction

- 1.1 The 20-year journey overview shown in Appendix A highlights the 50% increase in playing membership during the period, substantial changes in membership categories, a stable and highly inclusive membership, geographical inclusivity, and the initiatives, which the club (“The Herons”) is taking to address an uncertain future for recreational cricket.
- 1.2 The last five years have certainly been full of opportunities, accomplishments and challenges. The demanding agenda set in the 2018 Development Plan was successfully delivered, which provided ample opportunities for all members in the club. For instance, the new nets installed in 2019 have been a great success. In addition, the establishment of a modern volunteer structure has resulted in an increase in the number of competent volunteers across the club. This initiative also included a thorough revision of our Safeguarding Policy to confirm that it was in line with ‘best practice’. Considerable progress was also made to put in place an appropriate EDI (Equality, Diversity and Inclusivity) protocol in time for the 2023 summer season. These new requirements have delayed progress on development of our communications strategy, but this is expected to be remedied following the recent appointment of a new Communications Officer and supporting volunteer.
- 1.3 The continuing successful provision of cricket by the club was significantly disrupted not long after the previous Development Plan, when Covid presented a significant challenge. However, the club responded in an efficient and effective manner to the challenge. The club should be congratulated on its achievement of playing the maximum cricket permitted under difficult circumstances. Training videos and competitions were arranged during this time. The club would like to express thanks to Essex County for their considerable support with webinars, training and community projects which members enjoyed and found highly educational.
- 1.4 With Covid mostly over and most of the previous agenda delivered, we now look forward to the next five years. A structured consultative process has proven to be the most effective and influential way in shaping policy over the past 20 years. Following the same approach for the current Development Plan, a survey questionnaire was distributed to all members and the resulting responses were supplemented by a number of structured interviews.
- 1.5 For any successful club, a secure financial condition is one of the key priorities. We are lucky to have a broad membership base, which is not only the cause but also effect of our being a successful and financially stable club. We are well placed but while it is comforting to know that the club has a high standard of financial stewardship, both the immediate and medium term present financial uncertainties on a scale not experienced for some time. This is a particular challenge that many clubs will have to face in the foreseeable future.
- 1.6 The Club is delighted to have secured a new sponsor, Bradley & Co, Human Resources and Business Management Consultants. The new sponsor replaced Keaton’s Estate Agents, who were excellent sponsors; we are most grateful for their support over the years.

1.7 Finally, our thanks to the volunteers who supported the preparation of this report, from member surveys and interviews. Overall, the response from the members was overwhelmingly positive. However, there were of course criticisms and suggestions. Below we provide the detail including a summary of the responses to the survey and interviews and our response to significant issues raised.

2 Recommendations to Management Committee

- 2.1 To address concerns over potential funding curtailment with an effective communications strategy and move towards a PR capability to make the club activities and outcomes more visible to members, community leaders and the local community generally. Related issues include identifying and publicising community activities such as school, Borough and open day 'show case' events (cricket week, for example) and drawing attention to the availability of club facilities for hire to members.
- 2.2 To continually review the club's management structure to ensure that it remains effective and efficient. This is nothing new, but the need is seen to be particularly relevant as the immediate future for many leading recreational cricket clubs is less predictable than usual. Succession planning is a continuous process, ideally encouraging club volunteers with managerial talent to take on future leadership roles, wherever possible safeguarding against organisations that become brittle because of over dependence on too few executives. The need to continue finding quality volunteers is essential to the Herons' ongoing success. A point made by Paul Middlemiss, who provided the external review (see Appendix B).
- 2.3 To understand and define what it is to be an effective and focused community club. This has become an important aspect in today's competitive world, and we want to explore more systematically the members' perception of it, with a view to articulating the findings in the club's Constitution. When addressing this issue we will consider the implications of the **Independent Commission for Equity in Cricket**, a 317-page report published in June 2023.
- 2.4 To continue our efforts to raise funds through grant proposals as well as securing additional contributions from members, for example with the use of appeals, to fund specific capital projects, while keeping our approach to providing help to members with particular financial hardship.
- 2.5 To continually reinforce the notion that The Herons is not a service provider but a members' club that places considerable reliance on its quality volunteers.
- 2.6 To continue the development of policies to make the club a leader in providing opportunities for girls and women to play cricket not only at the highest level but socially as well.
- 2.7 To develop plans to improve the administration of the Nutter Lane ground and the pavilion.
- 2.8 To introduce a 'continuous improvement programme' that would seek to upgrade processes, which are likely to change over time with the introduction of metrics and data analysis. Specific areas to review would be better information on player retention/churn that our current web systems do not permit.
- 2.9 Recognising the importance of player development, to ensure that the club's protocol on coaching is continually reviewed to reflect latest best practice.

3 The Changing Nature of Recreational Cricket and The Herons Response

- 3.1 All sport in the UK must make its case for government funding and participation levels have been in decline despite ECB initiatives to improve participation of younger players. The Freddie Flintoff 'Field of Dreams' series drew attention to areas of English society where cricket is neither represented nor understood..
- 3.2 Funding could also be affected by the continuous attack on the ECB for its failure to address the implementation of EDI (Equality, Diversity and Inclusivity) legislation published in 2000. Accusations that cricket is institutionally racist will do little to improve 'sponsor appeal'. Moreover, cricket should not take it for granted that funding will continue to be available from the public purse. As we enter the next five-year plan period with severe countrywide economic concerns and uncertainty, a cut in funding, perhaps with a rerouting of funding for physical activity through local authorities, is not out of the question.
- 3.3 The somewhat fluid position that arises at the time of publication of this report permits only potential scenario identification at this stage. How recent developments play out can be no more than speculative.
- Player developmental pathways were heavily criticised in the **Independent Commission for Equity in Cricket**, a 317-page report published in June 2023. This report stated that "costs associated with participation in the talent pathway are one of the more significant barriers to equity in cricket" and that "private schools dominate the talent pathway." We believe we address the concerns raised by this report, which we are studying in detail together with the MCC Foundation aims on cricket training hubs. Meanwhile, funding from sponsors through a series of academies, perhaps run by the Counties, might be a solution to measure player developmental progress but it would necessitate a programme of quality match competitions to assess standards, a potentially expensive strategy.
 - More clubs in the future may be funded by team sponsorship. Many senior recreational clubs are already funded in this way, recruiting players from other clubs and overseas players subject to required limitations. This would be against our club's community and volunteer ethos.

The Herons response

- 3.4 The Herons main income sources include members' subscriptions, club bar, grants and sponsorships. The common theme and essential support required to optimise income under these headings is the improvement of The Herons communications and PR capability. The Herons have an excellent leading sponsor and a number of advertisers and community supporters. It could re-brand them collectively as 'Community Partners' and do far more to explain how important they are to the club. For example, The Herons should provide active links to its Playgroup, junior footballers, Corner House, Slow Coaches opponents and The Wanstead Fringe. We have a wonderful story to tell but we are sometimes too busy to tell it.

3.5 So, is there a genuine message to get across with so much uncertainty? Should we wait and see how events unfold, or should The Herons take steps now to invest in time and perhaps additional volunteer recruitment to develop a modern HR/communications platform? Do we have a convincing story to tell? The recommendation is 'yes' for the following reasons:

- There are huge concerns facing county clubs, including the potential loss of ECB income, Government/Lottery funding, which is designed to help people play sport. Community cricket clubs with proven expertise to attract and retain aspiring cricket players should be better placed to receive the funding required to meet facility improvements and funding generally but this must not be taken for granted.
- During the twenty-year journey the club has consistently performed well in league and cup competitions, having won major County, Domestic and National competitions. Almost 90% of the successful men's sides include players who develop from the juniors. We also provide cricket for players of all standards with six men's sides and many players move successfully to other clubs when they near adulthood; we are a net exporter of players we have attracted to cricket and subsequently developed their skills. A similar pattern is emerging with the development of our two women's teams and girls' teams, which is the fastest growing sector of the club. We have runs on the board.
- Feedback in the Development Plan Survey support these trends, these are the views of others:

Wanstead is such a lovely club for our family, there are so many activities, getting involved is both a pleasure and rewarding experience (member's comment)

"The club's fun initiatives and online cricket coaching during Covid were remarkable" (member's comment)

"Our children joined the Young Herons when they were thirteen and this gave them credits for their Duke of Edinburgh Awards". (member's comment)

"Knowing Wanstead & Snaresbrook CC as a member of another local cricket club in the area, my personal view would be that they are an organisation, which other local clubs aspire to in many ways, and rightly so. What I believe distinguishes them from other clubs is their ability to provide cricket for all at the same time as achieving success at the highest levels of the club game" (independent external review Appendix B)

- If, and as a safeguard, local authorities have an increasing say in grant delivery, The Herons should guard against adverse 'postcode' bias. Our members reside in all parts of the borough and adjacent boroughs. As a result, we probably have more Newham resident members than the Newham Cricket Club and we have large membership populations in Waltham Forest and Docklands. So, we must 'know' our MPs and Councillors and other influencers, including our important local residents. A series of local partnerships with other clubs might be helpful. These are all valid reasons to promote The Herons.

Detailed Report

4 Terms of Reference and Survey Process

- 4.1 The Development Planning Group (“DPG”) has prepared this Development Plan for the club (“The Herons”). A feature of the club’s ethos for over 20 years, the report provides details of the main findings, including recommendations for the Management Committee to consider. The process involves consultations with members and the external environment, which includes potential members, sponsors, grant providers, and the wider cricket community. While development issues are considered at each Management Committee quarterly meeting, a more thorough study, including seeking members’ opinions, is conducted every five years by the DPG. The findings and recommendations, reflect views expressed by the general membership of the club, including volunteers and individual Management Committee members. The DPG then provides advice and recommendations about the key aspects the club should consider in the following five years and how they might be implemented.
- 4.2 The survey was conducted along the following lines:
- Survey questionnaires were sent to all members of the club. In addition, focused feedback was obtained from interviewing a random sample of members from different membership groups – parents of younger members, players aged U15 to U19, team coaches and managers, adult team captains, The Slow Coaches, members of the Management Committee, social members and the playgroup, ground facility providers and the football section. When evaluating responses, interviewers were required to emphasise the confidential nature of their work. When reporting to the DPG they were requested not to reveal the identity of the interviewees and to look for recurring themes rather than place excessive emphasis on a single perspective.
 - In total some 50 members were interviewed across all levels of membership: juniors (older boys and girls), juniors’ parents, adult men and women players as well as social members. We also obtained an external review of the club.
 - The findings included both “strategic” – potential long-term developmental issues – as well as “operational” issues. Major issues were subject to focused recommendations, other important issues were discussed with relevant volunteers, and are identified in the report with the club’s comment.
- 4.3 The Management Committee would like to express its thanks to the members of the DPG, whose names are listed in Appendix C.

5 2018 Development Plan Revisited: A pleasing outcome against the backdrop of Covid

5.1 Recommendations and outcomes

- **Recommendation:** to approve the preparation of a PR style report on The Herons for current and potential members, sponsors, grant providers and the wider cricket community.

Outcome: Covid considerably delayed the preparation of this report. Our communications were excellent with the publication of coaching videos and quizzes which supported our community effort. By the time we had got through Covid there were other challenges, which have required us to undertake more research. This topic has been carried forward to the current plan.

- **Recommendation:** to review the effectiveness of the club's management structure and how to deal with the retirement of key personnel.

Outcome: completed with establishment of the Sports Committee and successful recruitment of new key personnel. The rapidly changing nature of cricket and the need to consider the appointment of younger members and achieve gender inclusivity have now led to a recommendation to undertake this revision more frequently and also to modernise job titles. With regard to key personnel since 2018 the following new appointments have been made: Treasurer, Safeguarding Officer, Bar Chairman and Head of Junior Cricket.

- **Recommendation:** to consider a more structured volunteer recruitment and development program, including the appointment of a volunteer Co Ordinator to identify, communicate and monitor vacancies. An integral feature of this is to continually emphasise that the Herons is a members' club and not a service provider.

Outcome: completed – policies, training and admin procedures in place. Appointment of Data Protection Manager close to finalisation.

- **Recommendation:** to identify an assistant to understudy the Welfare Officer.

Outcome: completed.

- **Recommendation:** to include a representative from the women's section on the social committee.

Outcome: progress could have been better, but a priority has been the establishment of the second women's team and emerging development pathway. There are two or three adult women players who are now working closely on match reporting and are keen to act as a link to the social committee.

- **Recommendation:** to prepare a communications strategy.

Outcome: not completed, same comment as the first bullet point above.

- **Recommendation:** to consider a better explanation of junior player development (Friday coaching groups and coaching plans, greater access to adult matches).

Outcome: we have made some progress with a catch-up of volunteers taking coaching courses that were discontinued because of Covid.

- **Recommendation:** to consider the introduction of a women's membership category similar to the men's occasional player.

Outcome: completed.

- **Recommendation:** to research the potential for securing additional contributions from members (for example, with the use of appeals) to fund specific capital projects and to renew our approach to aiding members with hardship.

Outcome: members have been very generous as witnessed by the Nets Appeal. With regard to aiding members with hardship, Martin and Jon run the scheme with much sensitivity. There was a lack of enthusiasm for differential subscriptions.

- **Recommendation:** to continually seek sponsors and recognise that they can often provide a valuable source of advice.

Outcome: completed – handled very well.

- **Recommendation:** to monitor the efficiency of the clothing supplier – attendance required on registration evening.

Outcome: completed – they attended the first year but then Covid became an issue.

- **Recommendation:** to establish a project to refurbish the Overton Drive nets.

Outcome: excellent initiative, well managed and all outcomes met. The Herons at its best.

6 Important initiatives introduced since last plan

- 6.1 Thinking is well advanced on how The Herons should address concerns, that do not relate to us but cricket generally, and described as an existential threat from two sources: an institutional racism challenge and uncertainty over the level of support for recreational cricket. The first concern has already been addressed with the introduction of the new EDI protocol.
- 6.2 In addition to progress in addressing the recommendations of the last plan, there has been a period of consolidation in relation to catching up with attendance at ECB approved coaching courses. We would like to place on record our thanks for the help we have received here from our Safeguarding Officer, who has been so busy with DBS approvals and the significantly greater workload caused by the much tougher regulatory environment. We have still more to do with a return to the preparation of coaching plans, but efforts to date are moving us in the right direction. It is not unusual to observe young players being taught slog and scoop shots, the summer camps are well attended and highly popular and we have restored the efficient pathway for young boys and girls from 'beginners' to the introduction of hard ball skills.
- 6.3 Support from our Young Herons with coaching is impressive. It has been well received by managers and senior coaches and has been effective. The Management Committee has approved in principle a Young Herons Council with its own constitution and seat on the Management Committee. More involvement by juniors in social events is envisaged. Valuable volunteer contributions are not restricted to cricket but to media and statistical work. One of our Young Herons earned a Duke of Edinburgh volunteer accreditation by performing valuable data research for the preparation of this report.
- 6.4 Lack of available funding has restricted continuation of the highly successful Project Heron. The extension of the Overton Drive club house has been put on hold, but existing funds have been spent on roof insulation and refurbishment of the Gents toilets and showers. The 'in house' management of this project was impressive by any measure and 'hands on' support from across the club's membership was excellent. There is a current project to replace one of the buildings which has been the subject of irreparable flood damage.
- 6.5 A Herons Green Forum was established, and this emphasises the importance of environmentally preferable practices. Some important changes have been initiated around the bar management and a number of larger initiatives are under review. The water supply to Overton Drive is a particular priority.
- 6.6 We are also looking at the availability of grant funding to refurbish our Nutter Lane pavilion. The installation of a quality artificial pitch at Nutter Lane is a game changer because it provides an additional facility, an all-weather pitch for junior matches and coaching.

7 2023-2027 strategic observations and recommendations

- 7.1 Sustainability, as always, is the number one priority, although a reference level to set and measure targets is particularly difficult under current circumstances. The need for flexibility and fast response has never been so important.
- 7.2 The member survey indicated overwhelming support for the club and for the volunteers who work so hard to run it. Inevitably, a number of comments were made. Many were constructive and some were critical. The key strategic observations and recommendations to the Management Committee are identified below. Comments of a more operational or tactical nature are addressed in Section 8.
- 7.3 It is apparent from the Membership statistics (see Appendix A) that the club has grown considerably over the last 20 years. While changes to the management organisation have taken place, the uncertain financial climate in the short and medium term requires a more thorough and continuous review of the management organisation and decision-making process. The remit will be for more improved focus on player development and division of responsibilities, strategic decision-making and delivery. Improving the quality and timely availability of information metrics under a 'continuous improvement program' are important facets of this recommendation. The recommendation is to commence this process in summer of 2023 with the intention to have an updated structure in place as soon as possible. This review would consider suggestions made by members in relation to player development, referred to below in 8.3.
- 7.4 With our continuously strong volunteer base, which has helped make us one of the most successful and dynamic clubs in the region, we must continually enforce our message that The Herons is a members' club and not a service provider. Club subscriptions and match fees are to support club activities and are not a payment for a service.
- 7.5 The 20-year membership history (see Appendix A) indicates substantial change over the period. Our men's and boys' intake increased over a number of years before reaching a steady state around 2020. There were no women's or girls' teams 25 years ago. Progress in improving the development of girls' cricket was successfully achieved last year, and the introduction of a second women's adult side in summer 2023 is welcomed. This is a potential game changer for the club, and we want to continue our efforts to get more girls and women involved in playing and managing the game.
- 7.6 One of the aspects the club was not able to fully implement from the last Plan's recommendation was a cohesive communications strategy. Club communications comprise a number of facets, all of which are likely to have a significant impact on how the club informs and involves its members and the wider community. It also has implications for attracting sponsors to the club. Part of the communication strategy has already been implemented in the 2023 season, in terms of match reports etc, but we need to integrate all of the elements. A related issue is the need to identify the broad range of club supporters and partners that are required

to comply with the anti-discrimination code published by the ECB in response to the EDI (Equality, Diversity and Inclusivity) requirements. In this regard, we are fortunate to have appointed experienced advisors and at the commencement of the 2023 summer season we published an EDI protocol which included a 'Communications Policy Including Online Safety'.

- 7.7 The Nutter Lane ground has capacity for a large junior section of some 140 4- to 12-year-olds, for use by our 3rd XI and 4th XI adult teams and the Women's first team when they are not playing at Overton Drive as well as by the Women's second team and for coaching of juniors using the new artificial pitch. It is also used by our football team, Snaresbrook FC and by another junior football club, which also runs Martial Arts courses. Given its importance and the club's investment in the ground, the pavilion needs considerable investment to bring facilities up to acceptable standards. One of the key recommendations, based also on a number of responses from the survey questionnaires, is to undertake capital investment in its pavilion. To that effect, the DPG recommends that a joint football and cricket community partnership ("The Snaresbrook Community Partnership") with a Management Forum should be established. The chair of this forum should report regularly to the club's Sports Committee to ensure regular reporting to, and support from, the club.
- 7.8 Recreational cricket is becoming more expensive. Financial security will be an essential requirement to achieve sustainability. We consider the four sources of funding – bar and social, member contributions, grants and sponsorships, including marketing opportunities. Our core values (inclusive, community and an integrated club) are authentic and have become an important feature of club ethos during the last twenty years. Set against the backdrop of our success, the contribution we expect to make as a member of our County's vibrant multicultural East London region as well as our community programmes in general mean that we should consider whether there is scope to actively market The Herons brand to attract more sponsors.
- 7.9 Members' voluntary contributions – there appears to be an opportunity to invite members to make additional or higher financial contributions. This facility is already available by selecting to make an additional subscription. Following on from the strategy adopted after the last report, the club will continue to ask for contributions for specific projects when the need arises. Other areas where we could consider additional membership funding include bursaries for members with modest means and/or for sponsorship of young members to attend Community projects. This is an important issue for a leading recreational club and one we would like to think we handle it in a discreet and compassionate manner.
- 7.10 A small number of parents of juniors questioned a lack of available private coaching, particularly from experienced senior club members. Many coaches and team managers also requested more specialist coaching support including master class summer and winter workshops run by 1st XI or 2nd XI adult players to enhance player development. Following Covid there was a discontinuation of some coaching initiatives, but the club is catching up with more qualified coaches

to enable us to regain best practice coaching support. Most expressed satisfaction with the level of membership and match fees which the club can confirm are benchmarked with other clubs.

- 7.11 The idea of differential subscription rates depending on affordability received a mixed response. The majority of respondents supported the idea of special appeals for specific projects.
- 7.12 The women's first team requested a focused coach. A suitable appointment has been made.
- 7.13 There has been considerable debate on the meaning of a 'community club'. We propose to carry out a comprehensive review of what it means to be a community club. The outcome should be reflected in the club's constitution.

8 2023-2027 survey findings and responses

- 8.1 Roughly 50 members responded to the questionnaire. The responses were overwhelmingly positive, though a number of members raised some concerns as well as made suggestions to improve the operational aspects of the club. We are grateful to those who responded to the survey. In addition, Paul Middlemiss of Upminster Cricket Club provided the external review of the Wanstead Cricket Club (see Appendix B).
- 8.2 A common positive response from junior members was that they are “really happy at Wanstead Cricket Club, it is a really nice club, and all my teammates are kind and helpful”. All members found the club environment to be friendly and safe. Friday evenings are especially an enjoyable experience for the members, with the new nets and improved coaching focus deemed to be positive developments. Parents are especially appreciative of all the volunteers and their important contribution to these coaching sessions.
- 8.3 However, some parents commented that their children’s cricket development would be improved if the club looked to more experienced coaches, perhaps qualified coaches with senior recreational or first-class experience. Some requested more specialist coaching support including master class summer and winter workshops run by 1st XI or 2nd XI adult players to enhance player development. Another, and perhaps related complaint, is that getting the club to provide private coaching is difficult, with the result that many parents look to coaches outside of the club to provide private coaching. The club appreciates the comment and will carefully review the current coaching protocol which members have requested. Positive developments in this area have already taken place with the engagement of two specialist coaches, a 1st XI and a 2nd XI player, for Mondays, Thursdays and Fridays. In addition, the scope for, and timing of, coaching sessions is now being reviewed and extended following the installation of the new all-weather Nutter Lane pitch in early summer 2023. The club website contains a good deal of help information on player development and consideration is being given to a further review of player development including publication of more detailed coaching plans. These are strategic objectives in the current development plan.
- 8.4 Members are very complimentary of the club facilities. However, a few members raised issues about the availability of facilities. Whilst this is particularly in relation to pitches for matches, it also applies to winter training facilities. Suggestions to address these issues include making better use of Nutter Lane, which is now possible with the new pitch, changing the way pitches are booked and recorded, and making centralised arrangements for winter nets rather than leaving each coach to sort these out for their own team. This suggestion will be taken on board by the management group. It should be noted that improvement in the administration of Nutter Lane is already a recommendation of this development report. Part of the problem is also the lack of information about the availability of pitches. Our aim is to address all of these aspects before the next season.

- 8.5 Team selection is considered to be fair and there were equal opportunities for all, both boys and girls, though some members are concerned about parents managing cricket teams. The concern is that at times coaches' children are given privileges such as top order batting in games or batting first in the nets every week. This is well received and while in an ideal world perhaps this could be addressed in an effective way, in a community club like ours there is a need for volunteer commitment, which is a key aspect of the success of this club (this is acknowledged by the external reviewer as well – see Appendix B). There are no proposals to change the current model as it works well because all members have access to the Head of Junior cricket who has the responsibility to ensure that all players are treated fairly and that all coaches are both properly trained AND appropriately supervised. More support from senior players has been successfully implemented and well received.
- 8.6 Respondents enjoy the coaching but would welcome some more guidance as to how to approach the role, especially when starting out – e.g. a centrally-led development programme to follow through the summer. Recognised and regulatory coaching courses were suspended during the Covid restrictions and there has since been a commendable effort to catch up and continue our coach development programme. The club appreciates this suggestion and this is part of the restructuring of the club management structure, especially the junior section, which is listed as one of the key priorities of the current development plan.
- 8.7 One major concern raised by some 1st XI women players was that most events and matches are centred around the men's Saturday games. It was stated that 'it's rare that anyone takes much interest in the women's section as games are played on Sundays'. The suggestion is that the club should advertise the women's games on the club website in more detail to make it more appealing for people to come and watch and hold events/BBQ on a Sunday afternoon during the games "so the women can get some more focus". This point is well taken. Over the last year a large amount of effort has been put in developing women's cricket with introduction of a 2nd XI, which was promoted and is fully supported by the 1st XI team, and a significant increase in girls playing cricket as well. There has also been good progress in publicising women's cricket with the introduction of match reporting by our communications team. The club is mindful of the need to embrace all members, and this is important in relation to both girls' and women's cricket. It is the fastest growing membership sector, and the focus will be on strengthening the player developmental pathway, which now has a much firmer foundation. Hospitality of our women's teams is particularly good and members at all levels should do more than just watch matches but look to 'meet the team' at post-match teas.
- 8.8 There were highly positive comments on the club's 2022 Kenya tour, which was regarded as an excellent community initiative.
- 8.9 Most respondents are very happy with the food on offer on Friday, and for Slow Coaches players on Tuesday.

- 8.10 The new bar area has been highlighted as a welcome improvement. Related to that, some commented that all aspects of the communications from the club can be improved, particularly for new members. For example, not everyone is aware that the club can be hired for social events. This is very useful information. The club plans to communicate more effectively to its members as there is a communications team in place now. The club also plans to promote itself more within the local community, including local schools.
- 8.11 A few members suggested having events that could include in-house coaching get-togethers, end of season ball/dinner (note: there is one for older age groups), bingo, darts nights, tournaments and trips away. We need to do more to recruit volunteers to the social committee.
- 8.12 Comments based on the external review by Paul Middlemiss (see Appendix B for full report)
- The club has an enviable record on and off the pitch at all levels of the game, and over the past 20 years has represented stability and consistency as well as achieving success in terms of trophies and performances.
 - What I believe distinguishes Wanstead and Snaresbrook from other clubs is their ability to provide cricket for all at the same time as achieving success at the highest levels of the club game. This is something that a number of clubs find difficult to achieve.
 - Wanstead lead the way in women's and girls' cricket in the region, and this is one area where they have been very helpful and supportive of our own club who have been trying to build playing numbers in this area in recent times.
 - In youth cricket generally, Wanstead have produced more young players who have gone on to play representative and county cricket than anyone else, but at the same time the club runs a junior programme that is open to 100s of young people.

Comments from club leavers

- 8.13 While some turnover is expected in terms of club membership, we nevertheless wanted to understand why members leave. For that purpose, some recent "leavers" were also interviewed in order to understand the reasons why some players leave. Often the concern is that competition for first team places at The Herons is too intense but also, and sometimes most importantly, another important reason is that the leavers school mates play at a different club, which provides better social interaction. It is also sometimes related to the fact that some members, especially those playing at Wanstead from childhood, want to experience another club, with the hope of getting exposure at the top level of the game.
- 8.14 These discussions confirmed what we know: there is dressing room pressure on players in the Essex junior set-up. Our players know that they are better players than some who say, 'why don't you play in your first team'? These responses are not in any way intended to be negative. The Herons has a progressive player

recruitment and development programme, young players are promoted through the adult teams from the age of thirteen and often exposed to the first team.. Other clubs often seek to recruit for their first teams from The Herons second or third teams which is a high compliment. Our experience in the last three years is that retention levels of 15- and 16-year-olds have improved. We provide 90% of our first team from the juniors and we are by any measure a large exporter of players to other clubs.

Appendix A

20-year journey and last five years' focus – overview

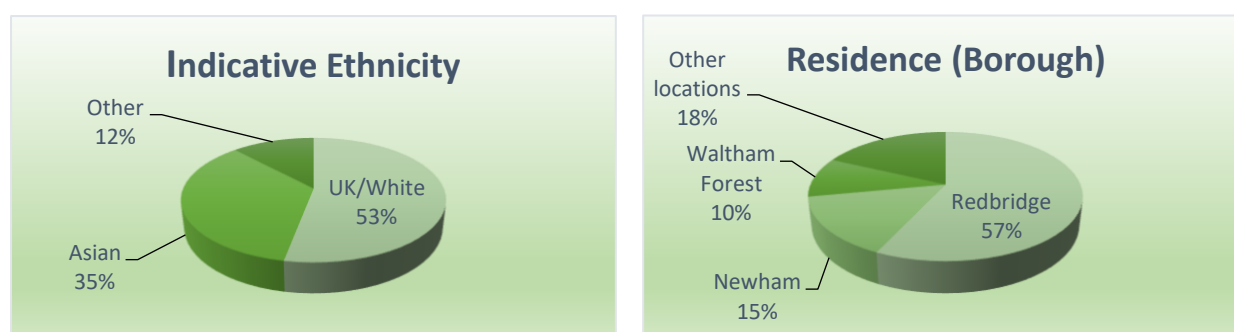
Development Plan 20-year history, last five years' focus and current initiatives

MEMBERSHIP TRENDS¹

	2002	2007	2012	2017	2022
Men Playing Members	63	105	134	180	165
Women Playing Members	–	13	16	40	23
Junior Playing Member	278	326	336	359	336
Total playing members	341	444	486	579	524
<i>50% increase in playing members – 9 % decrease 2017 to 2022</i>					

¹ Since availability of data

Indicative analysis of all 2022 members, including parents:



Key Developments – 20 Year Period

- 54% playing membership increase – introduction of u/5 to u/8 age groups, 116 5 to 8-year-old juniors in 2022 (none in 2002), 46 women and secondary school girls in 2022 (300% increase). No ability test for juniors.
- 9% decrease in playing members 2017 to 2022 – pre covid levels have not yet recovered.
- Addition of two more adult men teams, from four to six, and consequently the acquisition of additional grounds (Nutter Lane and increased usage of London Playing Fields, Fairlop)
- 26 u/17 boys in 2022 reflects increased retention level.
- Outstanding on-field performances – male Essex top three in each of last 17 years, major county and national cup awards, 85% of adults develop from juniors, high success rate to County academy, net exporter of players to other clubs. Women's team a leading Essex side.
- Continued support for local district, borough and school cricket over 20 years plus.

- Regulatory requirements (ClubMark and Safeguarding/EDI) have increased significantly.
- Geographical and ethnicity statistics reflect relatively high and stable diversity levels. Successful development to 'inclusive recreational cricket club'.
- Volunteer-led club, highly transparent and communicative with its members.

Last Five Year's Focus

- The changing nature of recreational cricket and the Herons response is described in more detail below and in the main report.
- Continued on-field successes – parents of juniors indicate high satisfaction with the standards of junior development including coaching.
- Girls' cricket is the fastest growth area, and an integrated player development programme is being developed including a new women's adult league side in 2023.
- Successful Management of Covid risk – outstanding Project Heron initiative delivered new nets and Pavilion refurbishment.
- Establishment of modern HR/volunteer capability – some important personnel changes.
- Safeguarding policy revision and EDI Protocol published with training program.

Current Initiatives

- Thinking is well advanced on how the Herons should address concerns about what has been described as an existential threat to cricket. This threat emanates through an institutional racism challenge and the uncertain outlook for professional cricket. Funding may become more difficult to secure and the administration process may be affected.
- The club is well placed to secure funding, but we need a louder voice and better local contacts as part of a newly established PR/communications strategy to promote our well-established programs and emphasise our considerable diversity including high numbers of members resident across all Redbridge wards, Newham and Waltham Forest.

Appendix B

Independent External Review

The club would like to express its thanks to the experienced and widely respected Paul Middlemiss, who has provided the following independent perspective. Paul, a member of Upminster CC, has considerable experience in recreational cricket, serving on a number of Essex County CC committees and the Metropolitan Essex District County Board.

Knowing Wanstead and Snaresbrook CC as a member of another local club and as an administrator involved with junior cricket in the area, my personal view would be that they are an organisation which other local cricket clubs aspire to in many ways, and rightly so.

The club has an enviable record on and off the pitch at all levels of the game, and over the past 20 years has represented stability and consistency as well as achieving success in terms of trophies and performances. In many ways Wanstead have dominated senior/open age cricket in Essex for much of the last two decades, and they have done this by producing a huge pool of home-grown talent. It is for this reason that the club is highly respected by other clubs and those involved in the game.

As a lower eleven cricketer myself, I know that whenever we play a Wanstead side they will be well drilled, competitive and that their line-up will include several high quality youngsters.

As my own club has grown considerably in many ways over the last two decades, Wanstead have often been a club we have looked to for guidance and advice, either on a formal basis (which their committee members have always been happy to offer) or simply by us trying to look at what Wanstead do on a number of fronts. This has been reciprocated in recent times, where our two clubs were able to swap and discuss ideas on various matters during the Covid pandemic.

What I believe distinguishes Wanstead and Snaresbrook from other clubs is their ability to provide cricket for all at the same time as achieving success at the highest levels of the club game. This is something that a number of clubs find difficult to achieve. Wanstead lead the way in women's and girls' cricket in the region, and this is one area where they have been very helpful and supportive of our own club who have been trying to build playing numbers in this area in recent times.

In youth cricket generally, Wanstead have produced more young players who have gone on to play representative and county cricket than anyone else, but at the same time the club runs a junior programme that is open to 100's of young people regardless of ability.

Wanstead enjoy many things which help to keep the club in a very strong position (two private grounds to play on as well as the demographics of the local community for instance), but I believe the one thing that helps to keep the club at the very top of the local game is its volunteers. All local sports clubs are suffering in modern times from a lack of capable and willing volunteers, but this never seems to be the case at Wanstead. On any visit to the club, or attendance at a meeting or event, I will see volunteers from

Wanstead who I know have been involved with the club for a number of years, and I will also be introduced to new people who have become more recently involved. These volunteers are all from all backgrounds and from all parts of the club. I believe it is this which distinguishes Wanstead from other clubs in the area and has helped them to build a club where cricket is available to a huge volume of people from all parts of the community, regardless of ability.

Having been involved with cricket on a number of levels for a long time, I have seen a number of clubs try new ideas or start something new, and then after a while certain member or volunteer will move on and certain aspects of the club struggle to cope with the departure of these volunteers. Wanstead however have found a way of both retaining good volunteers and finding new ones. As someone looking in from the outside I would say that this will also represent the club's biggest challenge over the coming years. Wanstead have built a club which is the envy of many others and provides cricket to many. Adult cricket, junior cricket, women's cricket, cricket weeks, social cricket, social events.....the list is endless. However, this has been built on the back of the work of a huge number of volunteers and so Wanstead must continue to find the right people to keep moving all aspects of the club forward. This is not an easy task, and so the club's committee will have to continue to work hard to engage with its membership and keep finding people to take on key roles and keep taking things forward. If the club can do this then I expect it to continue to flourish and retain its position as the premier club in Essex and East London for many years to come.

Appendix C

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A big 'thank you' also to Paul Middlemiss who has provided an independent perspective. Paul, a member of Upminster CC, has considerable experience in recreational cricket, serving on a number of Essex County CC committees, and the Metropolitan Essex District County Board.