



Queens Park CHESS CLUB

Minutes: 2024 Annual General Meeting

Date: 28 May 2024, 7-8:30pm

Venue: The Bungo, 17-21 Nithsdale Road, Glasgow

Present: Alistair Ahmed, Marianne Burns, Joao Carrapico, Andy Chisholm, Jack Crawford, Paul Cumming, Greg Forrest, Jack Gallagher, Tommy Lally, David Logue, Rhys McCrosson, Caitlin McCulloch, Ryan McGill, John McKenna, Jordan McNaught, Derek Rankine, Iain Shields, Malcolm Theodoreson & Craig Thomson.

1 Introduction & Previous Minutes

Caitlin chaired the meeting, which started at 7pm. She thanked everyone for taking the time to attend and help shape the club's development. There were no matters arising from the 2023 AGM minutes.

2 President's Report

Caitlin said that at the 2023 AGM, member demand for an increase in organised activity was made clear, and the Committee had responded by arranging an extra Championship round, an additional league team, three blitz tournaments, and a rapid event.

She thanked the Committee for all their hard work over a long but rewarding season, and paid gratitude to members for their enthusiasm in getting involved, and assistance with tasks like driving players to away games, and helping to set up and tidy away chess sets during club nights.

Caitlin reported that her main goal had been to prepare the club for the longer term, and that she felt this aim had been achieved with the establishment of a constitution, annual elections, new standards and working processes. She said it felt like the right time to step down as President, and hand over to others to build on these foundations. She added that she felt the club was at the limit of what it can offer activity-wise, and that doing more of one thing, would likely mean doing less of something else, given the finite time available in a busy calendar.

3 Secretary's Report

Derek shared information on participation levels over the season and experience in competitions. He clarified that the club grew from 46 to 54 members, and operated with a waiting list for most of the season. He said this compared favourably to other clubs in the west of Scotland, which all have fewer than 40 active players. He noted Queens Park has the biggest Club Championship in Scotland in terms of participants. He shared that Chess Scotland confirmed the club has become the most active in the country, ahead of Castlehill in Dundee, which also has a junior section.

The club had taken part in more competitions than ever, and enjoyed significant successes, including just missing out on promotion to Division 1 of the Glasgow Chess League, and reaching the semi finals of the Spens Cup. He added that teams in Divisions 3 and 4 of the Glasgow league, Division 2 of the Dumbarton League, and Division 3 of the Scottish National League, had performed well despite generally having less experienced and lower rated players than long-established competitor clubs.

15 members played their first competitive, classical over the board game, and 13 achieved a national rating. Prizes had been awarded for the six round Club Championship rounds, three blitz nights, a full-day allegro, and a simultaneous match. He added that dozens of Queens Park members took part in national rapid and classical tournaments too, and some won individual prizes in those.

Derek said it had been a very positive season from his perspective. He thanked everyone who volunteered in any capacity over the season, and club players of all abilities who helped contribute to success on and off the board.

4 Treasurer's Report

Paul reported that the club was in good financial health. He said that when he was elected Treasurer at the start of the season in August 2023, the bank balance was £432, and that the closing balance in May 2024 had grown to £1030: an increase of £598.

The main source of funds was membership fees of £2200, from 54 paying members. The fee structure of £50 standard / £25 concessions had worked well in generating excess funds, complemented by a lower £40 standard / £20 concession rate available to some players who joined after the season was underway, when the club could no longer offer spaces in regional league teams, which were full.

The club had received £400 in donations, from a generous member who asked not to be named. He said this same member had also donated £250 prize money, which did not come from club funds, to the allegro tournament. He added that a second member, who also wished to remain anonymous, had kindly donated two Staunton chess sets during the season.

Paul stated that the two main outgoings were rent to the Bungo, which cost £850 – eight monthly payments of £100, plus a lower £50 in December when the club took a midwinter break – and equipment. The club had invested £695 in equipment, mainly on two additional Staunton sets, a number of standard tournament sets to replace older ones, and extra clocks. He added that £360 had also been paid in league registration and Chess Scotland club membership fees, plus £69 on trophies, £16 on the website, and £12 on sundries for shared catering with Phones in a Spens Cup match. Paul thanked the donors, Committee, and all members for their support over the season.

5 Questions to the Committee

Caitlin invited questions on the back of the three reports. There were exchanges on:

- What the club pays in **league fees**:
 - Paul said the £360 outgoing payment he referred to in his remarks mainly comprised registration fees for league teams, the most notable being £100 to take part in the Scottish National Chess League. Caitlin said she understood this entry fee would be rising to £150 per team next season, to cover higher venue hire fees.
- What the club intends to do with its **£1k reserves**:
 - Paul said that the chess materials were not insured, as insurance presented poor value for money, and it would be difficult to make claims given venue storage arrangements. He said the plan was to maintain most of the reserves to protect the club against a risk of needing to replace damaged, stolen or lost equipment in future. Caitlin added that should the club move venue next season, reserves could help avoid an increase in member fees, as other Glasgow clubs like Bearsden pay significantly more per annum in rent than Queens Park, and charge higher fees to members.
- The level of **membership fees** next season:
 - Paul and Rhys said the intention was to keep the membership fees at £50 / £25, to present strong value for money while enabling the club to meet its current costs without requiring additional fundraising through donations and sponsors. Jordan said a 'no league' membership discount may not be required next season, depending on how many members expressed an interest in playing in league teams, and how many teams the club decides to operate with.
- The likely **membership numbers** next season:
 - Caitlin and Paul said the Committee agreed to increase the membership cap from 54 to 60 next season, and to have early membership renewal opportunity for existing members in the summer. Rhys said he expected around 40 current members to renew, which would open up space for 20 new members. Paul, Derek and Rhys said these new members could come from the club mailing list, which included those on last season's waiting list and others who were keen to join, and that a marketing push through social media could be utilised for any remaining places.
- Should the club invest in **arbiter courses** and/or **an electronic board**:
 - Paul said he felt the club shouldn't pay for one of its members to gain an arbiter license, at least in full, as the primary beneficiary would be an individual, not the club, but a partial contribution could be considered by the Committee. Caitlin said the club had previously indicated an interest to the Chess Scotland Rules Director Alistair Maxwell in arbiter training, and could look out for future arbiter course opportunities. Rhys said an electronic board would be a welcome investment in the longer term.

- How many people **attended the club each week**:
 - Derek said he did a simple head count most nights, and that the club had been full to capacity with 51 members and visitors on the opening night. He said that in the first half of the season, typical weekly numbers were 30-45, falling to 20-35 in recent months. He said the drop-off happened because some members became less active or left the club as the season progressed, and didn't get replaced after the waiting list closed following the draw for round three of the Club Championship in late January.

6 Election of Committee for 2024/25

Caitlin said she was pleased to have received nominations for the vacant President and Secretary roles, and thanked the remaining Committee Members for putting themselves forward for reappointment in their current roles.

She confirmed that this resulted in one nominee for each role:

- President – **Iain Shields**
- Secretary – **Andy Chisholm**
- Treasurer – **Paul Cumming**
- Competitions Manager – **Jordan McNaught**
- Communications Manager – **Rhys McCrosson**

The nominations were approved and the new Committee was formally elected for the 2024/25 season. Caitlin congratulated Iain and Andy on their appointment.

7 Points from Members

7.1 New Time Control for the Club Championship: 60+10

Caitlin said that four requests had been put forward by members ahead of the AGM, the first being her suggestion that the time control for the Club Championship be extended from 60+5 to 60+10.

Caitlin said making this change would align with the Glasgow and Dumbarton Leagues, which were changing from 75+0 to 60+10 for the 2024/25 season. She said a ten second increment would allow more meaningful chess towards the end of games, without negatively impacting the time required to complete games, as more than 100 moves were needed to go beyond two and half hours, at 60+10.

AGM participants readily approved of the suggestion and **the change in time control was agreed.**

7.2 Number of Rounds for the Club Championship

Caitlin said she was aware of different views on the length of the Club Championship, and invited Jordan to introduce what she anticipated would be an extended discussion on the topic.

Jordan said the Club Championship had expanded from five rounds to six at the previous AGM, but he felt that an even number of rounds proved to be problematic, as some members faced the prospect of playing four games with black and just two with white, or vice versa. He said that **changing back to an odd number of rounds** – five or seven – would resolve this problem and ensure that any member would only have one extra game with black pieces.

In response to questions, Jordan said he reviewed whether this had happened, and found that six or eight players had played four games with one colour, although no members had raised the imbalance as a problem.

Some members said a return to a five round tournament would be logical, as the club has experience of this in the past, it is more accessible to new members, and it is the standard format for weekend Congresses.

Other members expressed a strong preference for seven rounds. They felt five rounds was too short and likely to result in ties for first place, while not allowing those who lose a single game, a second chance to compete for the top prize.

Concerns were shared over the ability of the club to fit seven rounds into an already busy calendar. Caitlin noted that each Championship round affected three club nights, and that the club may have more league fixtures to deal with next season depending on league sizes, while it would still be expected to offer all existing activities including blitz nights, casual nights and simuls.

Jordan said this could be dealt with by shortening windows to two club nights. This was generally welcomed, although Derek noted Alistair had requested the club extend, rather than shorten, windows to help players with availability challenges to agree fixtures. Some pointed out that giving members the option of playing on a designated date, an alternative club night, on a Thursday Chess Group, or in another chess club, within two weeks, should be enough.

Derek and Iain said the new Committee may wish to canvass the membership on this. Derek said he interacted with a number of members over the season who were not present at the AGM, including some new to classical chess, who reported tournament fatigue in feeling the Club Championship was challenging to complete at six rounds.

Craig suggested a show of hands during the meeting. This indicated **a clear majority of AGM participants in favour of seven rounds**. The voting breakdown was:

- Five rounds – 4
- Six rounds – 1
- Seven rounds – 14

Iain said the new **Committee would give further consideration** to this before making a final decision.

The discussion featured exchanges on **several linked topics**:

- Jordan said the Committee were open to offering **one or two half point byes** to help those members who had holiday plans, busy work periods, and/or who simply wanted to play only five or six rounds. Many welcomed this, including Derek, but Derek noted an expectation of good organisation on the part of all members in contacting a Committee member in advance of draws to take byes. He said in his experience, some members were much less organised than others, leading to defaults despite good communications from the club.
- Craig said the Club Championship should be **moved out of the club calendar altogether**, such as to another weeknight at the Bungo, or at the weekend. He said this would solve the problem of an overcrowded calendar, with no impact on home league games, blitz nights and other activities. Some doubted the practicality of this. David said that those who joined the club as they are free to play chess on Tuesdays, are likely to have problems.
- Andy proposed that some members who couldn't make the Bungo on the designated date, but sought a peaceful public playing place, **could play their games in other chess clubs**. Derek said this was already the case, and was communicated on the website, in emails and WhatsApps, but he accepted awareness needs to be raised further.
- Derek said that **a new ruleset**, which Jordan was working on, could help amplify this and resolve outstanding issues of clarity around where and when games can be played. Caitlin and Derek added that those who wish to play in other chess clubs, should first seek permission from the Secretary of that club, or from Marianne in the case of the Thursday Group.
- Jordan said that to reduce defaults, **poor communication** should be punished more severely in the Club Championship, with members who do not contact their opponents, or a Committee member, be removed from the tournament if they no-show for a game, without a second chance.
- Rhys said he would like to see **a grading prize** introduced in the Club Championship, to give lower rated players the opportunity to compete for an award.
- There were mixed views on **casual chess provision**. Some members felt it was important for the club to have casual-only nights, to maintain the club's "friendly, welcoming USP", to offer opportunities to learn from others, fun variants, and to provide a more sociable atmosphere for people to get to know each other. Rhys said one casual night a month would be ideal.
- Others felt those wishing to play casual chess should be directed to the **Thursday Chess Group**, with the club focusing its attention on those players who wish to play serious, competitive games. Marianne and Caitlin noted that the Thursday Group was already promoted to Queens Park members regularly, in person and digitally, including through a dedicated page on the website. Craig said this link could be formalised further.
- Caitlin said the club had been founded with an ethos of **welcoming casual visitors for free** on any club night, which had been agreed as a key principle in the constitution, and something she and others strongly felt should not be eliminated.

- Greg, Derek and Ryan said that **maintaining a pipeline** from the Thursday Group to Queens Park, was a successful method of recruiting loyal new members who wished to make the transition into competition. Derek said some Thursday Group players who had visited the club this season had reported it was too serious, and disliked being ‘shooshed’ and discouraged from talking at all during visits. Derek said this had been less of an issue in the past, when the club had more casual nights and a higher tolerance for quiet background conversation.
- Jordan said the main problem was **a single shared space**, and that a venue with two playing hall, could have both a noisy, casual area, and a silent, serious section. Because the Bungo basement needed to be kept quiet for serious games, he suggested that those who wish to play casually, could play upstairs in The Bungo, as noise from a busy pub quiz would be less distracting to those who like to chat during games. Some agreed this could be a good solution.
- Craig said the Committee could consider looking for **a new venue** with two private playing areas in the longer term, adding that he had a preference for better lighting, although he acknowledged that the Bungo met many of the club’s needs at present.
- Jack said the club could give some thought to an **onboarding process** for new members, to make them feel more comfortable with rules and etiquette before introducing them into serious competition.
- Jordan said he would like to see the club double up its league matches, and play multiple home games on a single night, to free up nights in the calendar for other activity. He noted that in the past, this had been seen as a bad thing, as the Committee had been worried about hosting too many league games at once, but now it could solve problems. Caitlin said this was difficult to achieve in practice, as league coordinators wished to spread league games out across the season to help clubs manage their fixtures and player pools, and that league bodies and other clubs tended not to be keen to change fixtures.

7.3 Reducing the Length of the Season

Caitlin said she thought Queens Park could usefully align with other Chess Clubs in greater Glasgow, almost all of which have their season running from the start of September to the end of April. She said Queens Park runs until the end of May, and that as some members had commented that it felt like a long season, the club may wish to wrap up at the end of April in future.

Caitlin said the previous discussion appeared to indicate the membership preferred to keep as much space in the calendar as possible. A conversation on the topic backed this up, with some members pointing to the healthy numbers for May activities, with 22 players competing in the allegro, 23 in the simultaneous match, and 23 boards being drawn for the final round of the Club Championship.

AGM participants **agreed to keep the season length as it is**, running from the start of September to the end of May.

7.4 A Sponsored Tournament, and Chess Tables in Queens Park

Craig reported that he had an enthusiastic chess contact with a history of sponsoring organised activity, and who recently purchased a company that produces high-end decorative chess sets. Craig said this contact may have an interest in providing funds to Queens Park to run a special tournament that could feature an element of human vs engine play.

Craig noted this idea had been raised to the Committee at the start of the season, and required a lot of planning time. He said the ball was in the Committee's court to let him know if they would like him to follow up with the contact. Paul said now the club had experience in running a one-day tournament, the Committee may wish to pick this up in the new season. Craig said he would love to see Langside Halls host this tournament. While noting that it was vacant, unheated and in need of internal refurbishment, it had a proud history of hosting major chess tournaments in Glasgow.

Craig added that he would like to see the club push ahead with an aspiration to establish a set of permanent outdoor chess tables in Queens Park. He said he would be willing to volunteer some of his time and expertise around planning and architecture to support development.

Derek provided some context, noting the idea had initially come from club founder Julien Papillon, with Derek and former club President Graeme McKinnon taking some steps towards planning, before putting the idea on hold as their attention turned to running the club when its membership had expanded rapidly in the early weeks of season 2022/23. Derek reported that designs had been drawn up, quotes taken from a supplier, links made with Glasgow City Council and Friends of Queens Park, potential funders noted, and project development advice sourced from a successful Dutch initiative.

Caitlin added some recent context around public chess table investment in England, and the club developing a relationship with the local MP Allison Thewlis and Cllr Alex Belic, who visited the Bungo this season, where the idea was raised again. She added that some concerns over maintenance and vandalism had been expressed. Derek said a project manager would be needed to take this forward, as it involved a good deal of planning, partnership activity and fundraising. Paul said Graeme planned to return to the club in season 2024/25 and may be willing to pick this up.

Caitlin noted that that **no action points** were agreed on the above, but that the new Committee may wish to follow up with Craig on either or both suggestions in the new season.

8 Any Other Business

Caitlin invited members to raise any other points or suggestions, which had not been covered so far.

Craig noted that he looked forward to hosting an expanded chess event in **Bungo in the Lanes**, and that he was grateful to the club for supporting and promoting it.

Iain noted that 22 players took part in the Spring blitz and allegro, and he felt the club could comfortably host upward of 30 players. He suggested Queens Park follow Phones' example, and offer **non-members the opportunity to participate in club rapid and blitz tournaments** for a small fee of £5 or £10. He said this would raise some extra income while enabling members the opportunity to test themselves against less familiar opponents, and to gain elo from outside the club in the case of rapid tournaments (the blitz is unrated).

Iain said that non-members would be eligible to win a trophy, but not any prize money. This idea was warmly received, although an extra administrative burden of asking non-members to complete registration forms was noted. Two members said they would prefer one or more tournaments to be limited to Queens Park only, to ensure a Queens Park player would win at least one trophy, and to make those playing their first rapid or blitz tournament feel more comfortable playing those they are familiar with. **The Committee agreed** to consider implementing the idea for at least some tournaments in the new season.

Alistair said the club could also offer non-members the opportunity to take part in **simultaneous matches**, noting that a contact of his was particularly keen to face IM Andrew Greet, but unable to take part. Some welcomed this as a guarantee of filling places, while others felt this was less useful for the club, as simultaneous matches tended to be oversubscribed, rather than undersubscribed like some of the blitz nights. Paul argued that if most events were open to non-members, the purpose of paying a club membership fee would be open to question.

Paul said IM Greet had indicated enthusiasm in making the simultaneous match an annual activity, and **this was welcomed**.

9 Close

There was no further business. Paul paid tribute to Derek and Caitlin for their contributions as Secretary and President. Caitlin concluded the meeting at 8:20pm.