

REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST

The previous article reflecting on proposals for development of the clubhouse over the years ended with the SGM in February 1983 at which the members rejected by a very large margin Aberdeen Construction Group's proposal involving the sale of land and relocation of the clubhouse to a lower level of the Club's property. In the press report of the SGM proceedings mentioned in the first article, the Captain at the time, Leslie Robertson, was quoted as saying *"the Deeside members had now made it quite clear that, under no circumstances, would they agree to the land being sold...and that the way was now clear for Council to put before the members plans for improving and developing the present clubhouse"*.

Following a review of the available options Council produced plans for a new-look modernised clubhouse costing approximately £300k but at a SGM in April 1984 this proposal was rejected by 112 votes to 83. It seems opposition to the scheme centred round firstly the imposition of a compulsory levy (£40 for full and 6-day members and £27 for 5-day members) and secondly the bank funding for the project had a 15 year repayment period which meant the prospect of significant annual subscription increases in the coming years. It appears the membership nevertheless accepted that the Club's fee income had to be hiked substantially because the same meeting approved Council's recommendations that the entry fee rise by 33% from £150 to £200; the men's full member annual subscription fee rise by 30% from £125 to £160; and the ladies' full member annual subscription fee rise by 25% from £100 to £125.

As an aside, at the same meeting Council reported that the new 9-hole course measuring 3,345 yards with a testing par of 36 (it became known with justification as the 'Lang Nine') would be open for play on 1 June.

The vote at the April 1984 SGM did not change the fact that the clubhouse was in dire need of modernisation. Less than six months later at a SGM in September 1984 Council put a pretty much identical proposal (including a one off levy) before the members and on that occasion the voting was more than 3 to 1 in favour. Following the meeting Club Captain, Nicol Stephen¹, stated that the vote was *"the most important decision by the club in the 30 years I have been a member"*.

A couple of incidental aspects reported at the September 1984 SGM were firstly the proposed construction of a new double-tiered 18th green which would sit in front of the lounge windows of the extended clubhouse - the existing 18th green becoming a practice putting area and secondly the longer term plan to incorporate the new 9-hole course (the above mentioned Lang Nine) into a revised 18-hole layout involving *"nine holes of the present No. 1 course being converted into a subsidiary circuit starting and finishing relatively close to the clubhouse"*. The first didn't happen whilst the second, after a fashion, did although it took a number of years and the Club's receipt of £185k Lottery Funding for that to become a reality. That is another interesting story which I will come back to in a future article.

Following the September 1984 SGM work began on refurbishing the clubhouse and this was duly completed in October 1985. The press coverage at the time was fulsome reporting that the Club now had a *"clubhouse every bit as prestigious as the course it serves"*. A gala night buffet-dance was held on 16 November 1985 to officially mark the opening of the refurbished clubhouse with principal guest Michael Bonallack, Secretary of the R&A, doing the honours.

Aside from some alterations in the late 1990's to create additional office space and extend the Pro Shop the clubhouse stayed as it was for the next 15 years until with the approaching millennium concerns were once again raised about the clubhouse's shortcomings - concerns accompanied inevitably by the familiar debate whether refurbishment or a new build was the better option. Following an extensive consultation process including a members' meeting in March 2001 the consensus appeared to support a new build. Council followed through on this with a development proposal entitled 'Building for the Future' - another ambitious project with a new clubhouse to the south east of the existing one (still on the high ground) at

¹ Debbie/Elaine, a footnote could be inserted here about the fact that Nicol passed away not that long ago?

an estimated build cost of £1.7m. A SGM was held at the Marcliffe Hotel on 28 June 2001 at which (yes - you've guessed it) the proposal was rejected.

Council took stock and in February 2002 came forward with further proposals for consideration at a SGM convened for 27 March 2002. In short the options were:

- comprehensive refurbishment at an estimated cost of £680k; or
- redevelopment - four schemes were to be considered with estimated costings ranging from £700k to £1.2m.

At the SGM the comprehensive refurbishment option was approved.

A sizeable minority, however, were of the view that this was a poor decision and requisitioned a SGM firstly seeking to rescind the vote and secondly proposing a motion that Council *"should obtain and present to members a minimum of 4 proposals for the construction of a new, smaller clubhouse either on a site south or adjacent to the present building"* within a total cost budget (including furnishings, fittings, professional fees, value added tax etc) of between £1.2m and £1.4m. The SGM was duly held on 26 June 2002 and the motion passed by 252 votes to 73.

On the back of the June 2002 SGM Council produced proposals entitled 'Planning for the Future' comprising six schemes (one refurbishment option and the remaining five new build options) including of course Scheme 5 mentioned in the opening paragraph of the previous article. Which brings me back to where I began in that article.

I will finish with the comment that a remembrance of things past just goes to show that although at the time some Club Captains and their Councils will have felt their 'clubhouse' challenges were novel there is nothing new under the sun.

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