

ALMSCLIFFE TENNIS AND BOWLING CLUB



Almscliffe Tennis and Bowling Club (**ATBC**) was founded in 1913. We have about 100 adult and 40 junior tennis members, serving 3 villages outside Harrogate. We are tucked away behind the Village Hall in a beautiful rural setting with red kites flying overhead. We have a super, modern pavilion-clubhouse, and with 2 tarmac courts and a full-size Crown Green, we cater for a full cross-section of our community from toddlers to grandparents.

Over the last seven years an enthusiastic Tennis Committee, supported by a growing and keen membership transformed ATBC from a little used facility into a thriving welcoming Club.

Our Project

Originally starting out simply as a replacement 3rd court, it has developed into the construction of a synthetic grass court/multi-use games area (MUGA) with automated gate access, the resurfacing and re-fencing of our 2 existing courts and the installation of floodlights on all 3. A total upgrade of all tennis facilities!

Why did we begin?

Whilst our tennis membership was growing, the lease on our somewhat dilapidated 3rd court was running out. Renewing was not an option as we needed to seek funding to renovate and no-one would lend to us as the landlord insisted on an annual break-clause in the lease. Building a new court on our own land seemed to be the solution but how could we fund it?

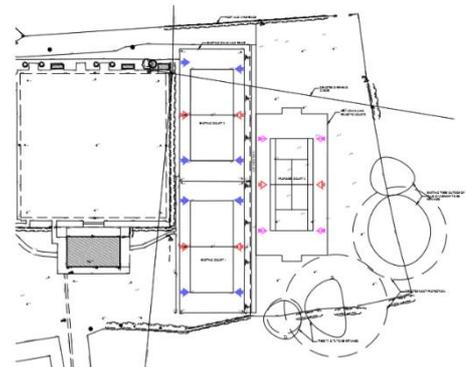
This initial question posed to our Yorkshire Tennis and the local LTA representatives has led us on an eventful journey!

Timing!

In 2017, the Club was at a crossroad. We could make do and mend with 2 courts and revert to being a sleepy village club with a limited future and reducing income or we could seize the moment, look longer term and provide for the sporting needs of our membership and the rural community by becoming a year-round facility, offering competitive and social tennis, coaching for all ages and a MUGA for additional sports.

It seemed that the fates were aligned as the LTA launched their Transforming British Tennis Together initiative and our aims appeared to map well onto the plans to transform tennis participation in the Harrogate area. The LTA were inviting applications for matched grant and loan funding for up to 50% of capital project costs. Yorkshire Tennis were also encouraging our plans. The enticement was there, a few hurdles remained!

First things first: Organisation, commitment and planning!



A very competent, committed and tenacious member of the Tennis Committee with excellent business and financial skills, volunteered to spearhead the project. We formed a close-knit core team throughout, spurring each other on when one of us was down (and there were some down times).

We quickly established a Project Steering Group with representatives from across the club bringing together project management, civil engineering and financial skills, and a fundraising committee to generate ideas and help organise events. Many members of the club were on hand to step in and help at different times along the journey.

Good planning proved to be critical. From the outset, we were clear about what we wanted to achieve, and we refined the project scope and planned according to and measured tenders against our goals. Having taken on an extremely large capital project for a small club, we were determined to make sure that it helped ATBC move to where we want to be in 10 years 'time.

Our challenges

Initially, with only £15,000 in the Club sinking fund, the major challenge appeared to be the enormous fundraising target. However, as time progressed, the challenges came thick and fast, frequently from unanticipated directions!

- **Funding the development.** We estimated the development would cost £218,000; raising the funding shortfall of £61,000 to a tight 10-month deadline was daunting
- **A tortuous planning application process** including the sudden imposition of a blanket Tree Preservation Order on the Club grounds and planning officers raising new objections throughout the process
- **Developing a detailed Business Plan**, completing a complex LTA application form and 5-year cash flow forecast to a tight deadline
- **Keeping everyday tennis activities going** alongside the project
- **Overcoming setbacks** – convincing the Club Committee and members that taking an interest free loan was viable, planning objections, the location of an electricity pylon, 5th wettest winter on record
- **Time-consuming work** akin, periodically, to a full-time job, on occasions with overtime!

Meeting the challenges:

- **Multi-faceted fund-raising**
 - **from the LTA** through their Transforming British Tennis Together programme
 - **from Yorkshire Tennis**
 - **through the backing of and a generous donation** from a longstanding benefactor, Mark Hillery, who was brought up in the village
 - **the fundraising committee enthusiastically organised** and promoted over 15 innovative fundraisers – eg ceilidhs, gin tasting, wreath-making, pop-up cafes
 - **with Juniors engaged in fundraising too**
 - **a local donation campaign** to members, the community and schools
 - **we trawled through possible grant funders**, eventually making 23 applications, tailoring each to explain how we met each fund's criteria
- **Consultation**
 - **with other clubs** who had undertaken recent developments
 - **we asked anyone and everyone** about funding sources
 - **with the LTA** regarding authorised Sports & Play Construction Associated contractors and gladly accepted help from their recommended Planning Consultant to deal with objections raised in the planning process

What we learned:

- **Having a clear vision and rock-solid financial case is critical** in order to communicate effectively with Club Committee, members, the community and grant funders
- **Patience** - our project has taken three years from conception to delivery
- **A dedicated project leader** with drive, determination and attention to detail ensures progress
- **Strong working bonds** between the leadership team help surmount challenges
- **An enthusiastic, committed team of 'experts'** is necessary to work on all aspects of the project. We drew together a Project Committee with legal, accounting, civil engineering, business, project and fundraising skills, all willing to contribute time and expertise to the different phases of the project
- **Good communication is fundamental;** building strong relationships with funders, advisers, members, influencers and the community and using every available channel to promote the cause
- **The importance of demonstrating the Club is helping itself** through fundraising and donations and is not just relying on others
- **Flexibility** – we re-adjusted our original site design in the face of objections and re-phased and re-scheduled the construction phase to accommodate extremely wet weather and finally the Covid-19 lockdown!

Smiles at last even in lockdown!

At the end of April 2020, with challenges overcome, we find ourselves in the enviable position of having our courts resurfaced and re-fenced (our contractors were determined to keep working whilst maintaining strict social distancing protocols) while the Club is closed due to lockdown!

We hope that, should the sunshine continue, they may be able to move seamlessly to the construction of the new court.



Future Plans



On the strength of our new facilities, we have already put in place a coaching agreement with Kinetic Tennis who will run a full adult and junior coaching programme year-round.

We have established a close relationship with the local primary school whose sporting facilities are very limited. The headteacher is intending to use the MUGA, suitably marked for netball and junior 5-side football.

We are looking forward to expanding our membership to those who wish to play tennis throughout the year as well as occasional players who, thanks to programmable access, will be able to hire the new court by the hour. Most of all, we are looking forward to getting back on court ourselves!

Thanks!

The Club is extremely grateful for the help we received from the LTA, Yorkshire Tennis, and the support of Mark Hillery, Sport England, Garfield Weston Foundation, Bramhall Foundation, Foyle Foundation, Weeton Village Fund, Holbeck Trust, the Woodland Trust, Open Country, Leeds Masonic Lodge, Waitrose and all those in the community who have supported our appeal, generously donating time, prizes, cakes and cash! We look forward to celebrating a grand opening in due course. The end is in sight!

We would be happy to share our experience with other clubs. Please contact us: atbcmembers@gmail.com

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