

# NL&F County Development Officer Report 2022



2022 has, thankfully, seen somewhat of a return to normality after two challenging years for Clubs. With most Leagues returning to full play, Clubs have been more engaged in looking at ways of developing themselves, both operationally and from a membership and playing perspective.

As previously, this report will follow in the lines of our County Development Plan, highlighting successes and areas where further development is required. The report is not exhaustive, but contains details of some of the key actions, and activities, across the County throughout 2022.

## **'Centres of Excellence'**

The concept of our 'Centres of Excellence' is based on a project that I helped to establish in 2012 – the Philip Wright Crown Green Bowling Academy in Colne (East Lancs). With this in mind, our aim is to replicate this model across NL&F, with a minimum of two likeminded 'Centres' within each Region. Following on from successes in 2021, for 2022 I have supported the formation of the next two of these Academies – the Fairhaven Bowls Academy (Fairhaven Lake, Lytham) and the Anchorsholme Academy (Anchorsholme, Cleveleys).

## **Fairhaven Bowls Academy**

In January, I was put in contact with a gentleman called Bill Hannigan who was keen to promote crown green bowls across the Lytham area of the Fylde. With a military background, Bill is both structured and organised, and has an amazing desire to succeed in his quest. What makes Bill even more inspiring, is that he suffers from Parkinson's disease but, as you'd expect, he doesn't let this stand in his way.

Following our initial discussions, I met Bill and some of his volunteers at East End BC, at the start of the season, to run a coaching day with them and to support them with their vision. Lots of people came along and I arranged the loan of a large volume of equipment for the season, to enable them to hold regular sessions. From this first event, Bill has gained the backing of Fylde Borough Council and, in particular, their Sports Development Officer (Ian Brookes). We have both met with Ian on several occasions and he has proved invaluable to the Fairhaven Academy in supporting them

with funding, a bowling green, and links to numerous like-minded groups across the area.

The Fairhaven Academy has run sessions every weekend since April and continues to develop at pace. The Academy currently has one Level One Coach, with three more currently part-way through their qualification. The governance of the organisation has been done correctly and all of their volunteers are both Safeguarding and DBS certified (Sue Sinclair, NL&F Safeguarding Officer is one of their volunteers).

In their first year, with support from myself and Ian Brookes, the Fairhaven Academy has also worked with several other community groups to promote the sport. These include One Fylde (adults with learning disabilities), the Fylde Rugby Foundation (supporting summer schools) and numerous local schools (to support teachers with 'after school' sessions). As a result of this, Bill and his team were nominated for a Fylde Sports Award for their contribution to active communities.

The work with Fairhaven Academy is on-going, both from a coaching and development side. The group has started to gain significant traction within the local area and are keen to expand on this as we go into 2023.



### **Anchorsholme Academy**

On the back of the work with the Fairhaven Academy, I was contacted mid-summer by a small group of relatively new bowlers from the opposite end of the Fylde coast. Following several conversations with Rowland Fox, I was invited to come and meet some of the Committee at Anchorsholme BC to explain how I could support them in replicating what they had seen at Fairhaven. Almost immediately it became evident that what the volunteers lacked in bowling experience, they more than made up for in drive, enthusiasm, and determination. The Club has a relatively small membership but is right on the edge of a very busy park, located right on the seafront – an ideal location to encourage passers-by to come and try the sport.

Within a couple of weeks of our first meeting, three of their members were booked on Level One coaching courses, and an additional six had attended a Safeguarding course. The Club was very keen to do things 'the right way' and have followed every piece of guidance that I have been able to offer. To highlight to them the opportunity that they had, I arranged for some equipment to be loaned to the Club to enable them to 'try' a couple of Open Days towards the end of the season. Following their second of these days (two, two-hour sessions on consecutive Sunday afternoons), I received an excited call from Rowland informing me that they had gained six new members!!!

The Academy continues to develop and will do even more once fully launched in 2023. Open days are now being held every Sunday at the Club, incorporating both outdoor and indoor, short-mat bowling, depending upon the weather.



### **Burnley Bowls Partnership**

Following the formation of the Burnley Bowls Partnership's 'Try Bowls' sessions in 2021, they have continued to develop and go from strength to strength in 2022. Mavis Hancock, and her team, expanded this year to enable them to run both their weekly sessions at Ightenhill Park, Burnley and, operate a weekly 'road-show' style event across the town. This was done in four-week blocks at four different local Clubs, with the aim of specifically targeting Clubs with lower membership. Initial success was mixed, but it is something that the team will replicate again next year.

In addition to this, the Partnership has supported both schools and Girl Guide groups throughout the summer, as a way of encouraging younger bowlers to try the sport. This has been very well received, with in excess of 500 young people having a try.

Towards the end of the year, the Partnership started working with Burnley Football Club in the Community by way of promoting healthy lifestyles and social inclusion. This is an ongoing project but has also been supported for the winter months by the provision of indoor bowling mats at the Leisure Box (BFCiTC's Sport Centre facility). The Partnership now has the use of four short mats for them to continue their work



over the winter, along with weekly crown green activities on one of the winter bowling greens at Queens Park.

I've continued to offer help and support throughout, and it has been great to see the continued progression of the Burnley Bowls Partnership as a 'Centre of Excellence'.



### **Todmorden Bowls Academy**

Peter Carrigan has seen the Todmorden Bowls Academy develop along very similar lines to the Burnley Bowls Partnership in 2022. From a similar starting point in 2021, Peter continues to promote and work tirelessly to introduce new players to the sport. One of his main aims for this year was to develop the governance of the Todmorden Bowls Academy from both an operational (coaching, Safeguarding, etc...) aspect and also by building stronger links with the local Council.

As the only four-green, crown green bowling venue in England (as far as we are aware), I've continued to support Peter wherever possible. This year, Peter has started his Level One coaching qualification and the Club has started to promote themselves to the wider bowling community. As a result of this, the Club hosted both the Lancashire Ladies Merit competition and the Super League Grand Final event. Both events were great successes, and the Club were great hosts.

For the 2022 season, the Academy entered new teams into several local leagues, including the 'Peak Bowlers' – an all-ladies team that was made up entirely of new bowlers!!!

This year, Todmorden Bowls Academy has piloted project with both people with disabilities and refugee groups. Both of these have been a success and are something that they are looking to expand on for 2023.

On what seems to be becoming a theme, for the winter months, the Academy has managed to obtain three short mat carpets and are promoting that as a way of keeping their members active throughout the winter months.



### **Philip Wright Crown Green Bowling Academy**

The Philip Wright Crown Green Bowling Academy is now very well established within both the bowling and local communities of East Lancashire. This year, the Academy has piloted a new community project, with support from Active Lancashire – FAB (Fun at Bowls) Community Group.

The aim of the FAB Community Group is two-sided. Firstly, the primary aim of the group is to offer opportunities for people with disabilities to participate in our sport. Secondly, the group offers members of the community the opportunity to support these bowlers, as volunteers, and engage with them both on and off the green (social interaction over a cup of coffee). The group has run weekly sessions (two-hours on a Thursday afternoon) since early August and has developed an average attendance of over 30 people each week.

With the support of Active Lancashire, Sport England, local councillors and local bowling Clubs, The Academy has now built up a significant cache of equipment to support people with disabilities. These include specialist wheelchairs, bowling arms, walking frames, bowls lifters, lighter bowls, etc... As we move into 2023, more documentation of the group will be done to enable it to be used as a template document for other Clubs to follow.





Next Steps – As we progress into 2023, our NL&F Regional Management Committees are proposing 'Centres of Excellence' for review. The aim would be to support the set-up of between 2 and 4 of these each year, over the next 4 years, so as to ensure that they receive enough support in establishing themselves. The success of this structure will become evident over the coming years, but the initial signs are excellent and gives a strong focal point for people starting to play our sport.

## **Coaching**

One of the key focuses of the County Development Plan is to develop a team of qualified coaches that can support our Clubs, at grassroots, throughout the County. At the end of 2022, we now have almost 30 qualified Coach Bowls Level One coaches, 14 currently going through their qualification, 8 awaiting courses to commence, and 2 qualified Coach Bowls Level Two coaches (only 6 currently across crown green as a sport). In conjunction with Coach Bowls' new website ([www.coachbowls.org](http://www.coachbowls.org)), I will be supporting all new coaches throughout 2023 and enabling them to support both their Clubs and local areas.

On a personal basis, I was extremely proud to be awarded the Coach Bowls 'Grassroots Coach of the Year 2022' at the Bowls England Finals in Leamington Spa in September. This is not only the first time that a crown green coach has won the award, but the first time that one has even been nominated!!! What made the award even more special was that my son, Thomas, was also awarded the Coach Bowls 'Young Coach of the Year 2022' at the same event. Thomas is one of three under-20 year old Level One coaches that we have within North Lancs & Fylde – something that we are progressing as a way of attracting younger bowlers to the sport, and breaking the stereotypes of bowls only being an 'old person's sport'.



## **Governance, Safeguarding and Going Forwards**

During 2022, an area that I wanted to develop was both Club and County understanding of governance and how it affects them. It's true to say that without the correct governance in place, not only does a Club not operate to it's full potential, but it finds it harder to gain external support, especially financially. This development started with County operations by reviewing, and re-writing, our County Bye-Laws, followed by an in-depth review of all roles within the County. 'Job Descriptions' have now been written and implemented for all roles which, going forward, will ensure that the roles are fulfilled as needed, and that honoraria can be paid, and reviewed, in a responsible manner.

Throughout the year, I have liaised with Sue Sinclair (NL&F Safeguarding Officer) to offer support wherever possible. Sue did a tremendous job during the early months of 2022 to ensure that all regions of NL&F received the opportunity of localised safeguarding courses and DBS completions.

Another area of governance (and just good practice in general) that I facilitated, was the introduction of First Aid courses for Clubs and individuals. Our first course ran in December at Anchorsholme and was attended by 16 people. The courses are run by an external provider (to enable correct certification) and can only be a good way of upskilling Club members to deal with situations should they arise.

Finally, as a County, we have encouraged bowlers (and their Clubs) to seek both local and County-wide recognition for the sport. For too long, crown green bowls has never been considered for any of the County's sporting awards through the major 'players' in the sporting environment (such as Active Lancashire). I am very pleased to report that this year things have changed!!! In November I attended the Active Lancashire 'Lancashire Sports Awards' where awards were to be presented for both Regional and County-wide recognition.



On the evening, crown green bowls was represented in 5 of the 12 categories with the following successes:

- Sue Sinclair – Fylde Volunteer of the Year
- David Clamp – Pendle Volunteer of the Year
- Harry Glyn – Lifetime Achievement Award for South Ribble
- Steve Clamp – Pendle Sports Coach of the Year
- Philip Wright Crown Green Bowling Academy – Pendle and Lancashire's 'Contribution to Active Communities' Award

This is something that I would encourage every County to do. The more that the sport is recognised alongside 'mainstream' sports, the quicker that the stigma of being an 'old persons' sport can be broken.



## **Junior Development**

In 2022, we have continued to work on both developing, and expanding, junior bowling across the County. The formation of two new Academies has helped this and will continue to do so in the future. Within the County, we also have our first 'all junior' league team (as far as I'm aware), playing at the Gardner's Arms, Blackpool in a Saturday evening league. A huge congratulations must go out to Darren James (and his family) for driving and supporting this team.

As with 2021, we have entered a junior team into a winter league at Fox Lane, Leyland and the team continues to do very well. This year, additional players have been brought into the squad to be able to give them additional experience. Juniors have also started to play in other winter leagues, on additional evenings, and this is an area that we are keen to develop even further during 2023.

As a County, we were unable to raise enough players to be able to commit to the full BCGBA Junior County Championship in 2022, but successfully fielded two teams in the inaugural Junior County Cup (played over two dates as a round robin event) and a team in the BCGBA Ladies Junior Team Competition.



Another area that we have progressed with junior development is through the Federation system. For several years we have entered both junior and youth teams in their events, but we are also now seeing juniors being introduced into their National League teams. This has evidenced a great opportunity for continued development, and it is one that we will continue to support.

## **'Bowls Buddies'**

In October 2022, as some of you are aware, I designed and launched a new bowls product (with a friend – Ian Gill) with an aim of attracting school children to the sport – 'Bowls Buddies'.

The bowls have been in design for around 18 months, following a frustration of there not being the right products available to deliver structured sessions within a school environment. Existing 'rubber' bowls products have serious limitations with regards to bias-consistency and, more importantly, the ability to 'stop' on a hard surface (due to almost zero friction, the bowls continue to roll until they hit another surface). These limitations are preventative for introducing schools to bowls, especially given reduced school resources and the inability to be able to take children to a bowling green. Our thinking, and aims, were that if the product was right, schools could use their school halls/play areas to play 'bowls-orientated' games and give children their first experience of it (breaking previously mentioned stereotypes).

On the back of this, 'Bowls Buddies' was born. The newly designed, biased bowls are made from a polyurethane material with small ridges across the running surface to increase friction, whilst not impacting the bias/running of the bowl. Following these developments, we have found that the bowls will 'stop' about 50% quicker, enabling the school environment to be used for 'bowling'. Please feel free to have a look at the website ([www.bowlsbuddies.com](http://www.bowlsbuddies.com)) and/or contact me to have a look at the bowls and targets.

Currently, the products are still in their early stages of implementation but, following conversations with all bowls-codes governing bodies, indications are very promising. As mentioned, our aim with 'Bowls Buddies' is to try and get bowls played in schools, and to be included within the Spar School Games. With both Ian's and my own background in bowls development, we have already made pledges, to all of the governing bodies, to support them financially from all promoted sales of the products. The more money that all codes of bowls can invest in development, the more chance there is of reaching our goals.



## Summary

In summary, 2022 has been another challenging year for the sport, but one in which there has been a significant intake of new bowlers. We're at a point where Clubs need to look at where they are and plan how they can move forwards to take advantage of this. At County level, for 2023 we are re-launching our website with several new features focussing around communication. One of the major operational breakdowns that we have as a sport, is how we communicate information to bowlers – an issue that exists from BCGBA, right through to grassroots Club Secretaries. Our new website will directly link to social media so that all 'news feed' items will automatically sink across all channels AND, following a bowler 'sign-up' drive, will also email the content directly to every registered bowler within the County. I firmly believe that, at present, bowlers don't feel that they get 'value' from their County and Governing Body purely because they don't hear about everything that is being done within those realms.

A lot of good work is done by countless people at National, County, League and Club level...but they need the support to be able to move their ideas forward. 2023 has the potential to be able to offer that support across all aspects of development and it's time that, as a sport, we develop!!!

Kind Regards,

Steve