TT Clubs in England – 2021 and Beyond

A Report on the Development of Table Tennis Clubs from the Members Advisory Group

Members Advisory Group

May 2021

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1. Rationale and Aim of the Project

Clubs are key drivers of development with table tennis. They do this by operating at several different levels across our sport:

- Bringing new players into table tennis
- Providing facilities for social and competitive play and for practice and training
- Providing access for coaching
- Supporting local and national competitions
- Producing players who can compete at elite level

This is not to ignore the vital roles that local leagues, counties and regions play in our sport. Indeed, a point that was frequently made during our discussions with clubs was that vibrant and thriving local leagues are essential for clubs to be successful in undertaking their development activities.

Against this background, the aim of this project is to:

- find out what help clubs need in this key role of developing our sport

We did this by engaging with a number of leading clubs and seeking their views.

2. Table Tennis Clubs in England – 2021 and Beyond

The key theme of the engagement sessions was "TT Clubs in England – 2021". In particular, we asked the participating clubs to address the following key questions:

- What are the key challenges for your club over the next 2-5 years? What does "success" look like for your club over the next 5 years?

- What needs to be done to achieve this success? What are the barriers preventing you from achieving this success?

- How do we bring about change?

This provided a consistent framework for all the sessions.

3. How the Engagement Sessions Were Undertaken

(a) How clubs were invited – Individual Invite and Open Invitation

For the first three sessions, clubs were invited based on the knowledge of members of MAG and also based on recommendations of the clubs who participated. A short note was produced which outlined the purpose and scope of the engagement sessions – see Appendix A. Our aim was to have 15 clubs at each of the sessions. Typically, there were five MAG participants – so there would be 20 participants in total in each session.

For the fourth session, we wanted to give as many clubs as possible the opportunity to participate in an engagement session. Accordingly, the initial approach was based on an "open invite". All clubs with more than 50 members who wished to participate in the sessions were asked to contact MAG by email. Despite being heavily promoted via the TTE website and social media, only five clubs responded to the "open invite". Accordingly, the remaining 10 places at the session were filled by individual invitation.

(b) The Participants

Thirty-eight clubs participated in the sessions. These clubs are listed in Box 1. Our original aim had been to engage with 50 clubs, but we felt that there was a sufficient consistency of message across the four sessions as to make a further session unnecessary.

Box 1 – Participating Clubs

• Ackworth Club	• Draycott	• Mossford
• Ackworth Academy	• Ellenborough	• Norwich
• Ashford	• Falmouth	• Nottingham Sycamore
• BATTS	• Graham Spicer	• Ormesby
• Birmingham Academy	• Greenhouse	• Portishead
• Bishop Auckland	• Goodwin	• Portsmouth
• Blackpool	• Halton	• South Croydon
• Bristol Civil Service	• Hampstead	• St Neots
• Chorleywood	• Horsham Spinners	• Swerve
• Cippenham	• Joola Plymouth	• Torbay Academy
• Colebridge	• Kingfisher	• Woodfield
• Corby Smash	• Knighton Park	• Woodford Wells
• Darlington	• Leeds Judean	

All the participants were extremely knowledgeable, not only about clubs and club development but also about table tennis more generally. They were all highly committed individuals. They were devoted to the success of their clubs but happy to share their experiences and keen learn from what was happening at other clubs. All the discussions were positive and forward-looking. Given the challenges of Covid-19 and the impacts of the associated lock-downs, this was highly commendable.

For these reasons we have been keen to do what we can to make this report reflect the insights of all those who participated in the engagement sessions.

(c) How the sessions were run

At the start of each session, each club was asked to outline the issues that really mattered to the development of their club and what success looked like for their club. These issues were captured, and areas of commonality were discussed in more detail in terms of what needed to be done and how change could be achieved. These actions were shared with the group at the end of the session, and also sent out to each session participant after the meeting.

Appendix B provides details of each individual session in terms of who participated and the key issues and actions that were raised.

(d) Feedback Report and Consultation on Draft Report

At the end of the process, a "Feedback Report" was produced which summarised the key issues and actions from the sessions. This was sent to all participants to check that all the issues and actions had been correctly recorded and nothing had been over-looked. Likewise the draft report was circulated to participants for comment – particularly with regard to how the various actions had been prioriritised. The comments and feedback received have been incorporated into the report.

4. Issues and Actions

The key issues that emerged from the sessions fell under the following five headings:

- Maintain and improve facilities & venues

- Develop competitive structures that support club development
- Recruitment & retention of players & volunteers
- Giving clubs a stronger voice
- Coaching
- Re-building after Covid-19

The full list of actions under each of these headings are listed in Box 2. A full commentary and explanation of each action is provided in Appendix C.

Box 2 – List of Issues and Actions

Maintain and Improve Facilities & Venues
1. Develop commercial models for club operations ("franchising" approach)
2. Restore facility grants from Sport England
3. Get 24/7 venues in each major city
4. Build links with other sports for use of facilities (eg Premier League Football Clubs)
5. Develop local partnerships

Develop Competitive Structures That Are More Supportive of Club Development
1. British League to focus more on "real" clubs
2. Extend NCL/NJL model to U-21 and senior age groups
3. Improve incentives for clubs to develop their own players
4. Simplify competitive structures, particularly for juniors
5. More flexible competitions - clubs to be able to organise their own competitions, eg "ladder" competitions

Giving Clubs a Stronger Voice
1. Build on the success of the "Ready to Return" webinars which were highly valued by clubs
2. Pro-actively engage with clubs on issues that directly affect their members
3. Hold on-line meetings with clubs based around new account manager structure
4. Change the voting structure to reflect the current structure of the sport
5. Role/ethos of TTE needs to be clearer – what is expected of clubs, where do they fit in?

Recruitment & Retention of Players and Volunteers
1. Stronger links between mass participation programmes and clubs
2. One ranking list for all TTE members
3. Improve the image of the sport to help with recruitment & retention
4. Keep money in the game to support clubs - rather than spending it outside the sport at Sports Centres or similar venues
5. Broadening the base to increase the height of the pyramid
6. Succession planning for volunteers is essential for all clubs - more guidance required

Coaching
1. More support for coaches – they are the key resource for club development
2. Stronger links between national performance team and clubs

Re-building after Covid-19.
1. Re-activating venues
2. Major push to bring back players to social and competitive table tennis
3. Use as an opportunity to bring about new ways of doing things
4. Local Leagues are very important for all clubs. So a strong local league helps with club development. It will be important in the post-Covid world to rebuild at local level

5. Prioritisation

Given the large number of actions that were identified as a result of the engagement sessions, we felt it was important to prioritise the various actions. All the actions that were identified had merit, but in terms of making recommendations to the Board, we felt it was important to have gone through a priortisation exercise.

As far as possible we have wanted to do this prioritisation in an objective way. Accordingly, we have considered each action in terms of its degree of impact and also in terms of how easy it will be to implement. Ease of implementation was assessed in terms of whether implementation was under the control of TTE, or not under the control of TTE. Those actions which make a big impact and which are easy to implement are likely to have a higher priority than those that have a low impact and are difficult to implement.

The resulting prioritisation matrix is shown in Box 3.

6. Recommendations

MAG recommends that the Board establish a small working group to review the prioritised list of actions to produce an Action Plan for the implementation of the various actions. The working group would consist of a member of MAG, a Board member and a member of TTE staff.

Box 3 – Prioritisation of Actions

	Under TTE Control	Partly Under TTE Control	Not Under TTE Control	
Impact	• Extend NCL/NJL Model to U-21 and Senior Age Groups • Stronger Links Between Mass Participation ("Ping") and Clubs • Develop Commercial Models for Club Operations (franchising)	• Re-activating Venues After Covid-19 • Bring Back Players • Re-build competitions at local level • Improve Image of the Sport to Address Decline	• Restore Facility Grants • Get 24/7 Multi-Table Venues in Major Cities • Develop local partnerships	**High**
	• More Support for Coaches • Stronger Links Between National Performance Team and Clubs • British Leagues to Focus on "Real" Clubs • Greater Interaction with Clubs through Account Management Structure • Broaden the Base	• Build Links with Other Sports to Make Use of Venues • Keep Money in Table Tennis to Support Clubs • Incentivise New Ways of Doing Things		**Medium**
	• Improve Incentives for Clubs to Develop Own Players • Simplify Competitive Structures • More Flexible Competitions for Clubs • Clarify Role/Ethos of TTE • One Ranking List for All Players	• Change TTE Voting Structure to Reflect Current Structure of the Sport		**Low**
	Ease of Implementation			

TABLE TENNIS CLUBS IN ENGLAND - 2021 and Beyond….
A Project from the Members Advisory Group (MAG)

ABOUT THIS PROJECT
The question we are asking is:

- How can table tennis across England thrive and benefit as a result of clubs becoming bigger, better, and stronger?

And this involves all clubs whether their main purpose is leisure, community or elite performance.

ABOUT MAG
MAG is an advisory group set up to advise the TTE board on a number of issues. And as such it aims to get the thoughts and feedback of the members so that their views are part of the advice that MAG gives the Board.

MAG addresses issues that are important to members. It has looked at ranking policy and volunteering already. And now we want to address how to help CLUBS in England develop and thrive.

WE NEED YOU
So the first place to start in this MAG project is to pick the brains of the people who run those clubs.

Do you have thoughts or opinions on the above question and related issues such as:

- What are the dreams and hopes for your own club for the next few years? How are those dreams and hopes to be realised?

- Are clubs just single entities or can they / should they be connected in a common goal across the country or a region?

- Are there changes that could be made to the competitive structure so that it helps rather than hinders the development of clubs?

- Could clubs benefit from taking a more modern, commercially-driven approach? And if so, how can they best do that and what help would TTE need to provide?

- Is the idea of the top players in the UK representing English Clubs in English competitions desirable or possible? And if so, how could that ever happen realistically?

- Do clubs have a strong enough voice in the development of table tennis?

If the first big question about clubs or any of the subsequent questions asked interests you, or if you have any other questions – then we would love to speak to you and for you to be a part of this project.

HOW THE PROJECT WORKS

We are holding a series of online discussions with leading clubs. We hope to engage with up to 50 clubs with each round of discussion involving about 10 clubs.

We will then put together a report and recommendations for the Board that takes in to account the range of views heard.

TTE will then use this project as thought through and analysed piece of work informed by the members - which they can utilise in their policy thoughts on Table Tennis Clubs in England 2021 and Beyond.

Appendix B – Details of Individual Sessions

Details of the four engagement sessions ("Clubs 1 -4") are provided in this Appendix.

Clubs 1 – Participants 29 July 2020

- Archway — Gareth Herbert
- BATTS — Neil Brierley & Graham Frankel
- Bishop Auckland — Matt Porter
- Chorleywood — Roger Close
- Corby Smash — Colin Wilson
- Darlington — David Godbold
- Draycott — Jon Bayliss & Jo Green
- Goodwin — Dave Randerson
- Halton — Karen Tonge
- Joola Plymouth — Kevin Buddell
- Mossford — Tony Cantale & Phil Ashleigh
- St Neots — Mark Mitchell
- MAG Members: Neil Hurford, Kevin Buddell, Jo Green, Phil Ashleigh, Sandy Nash, Steve Pratt.
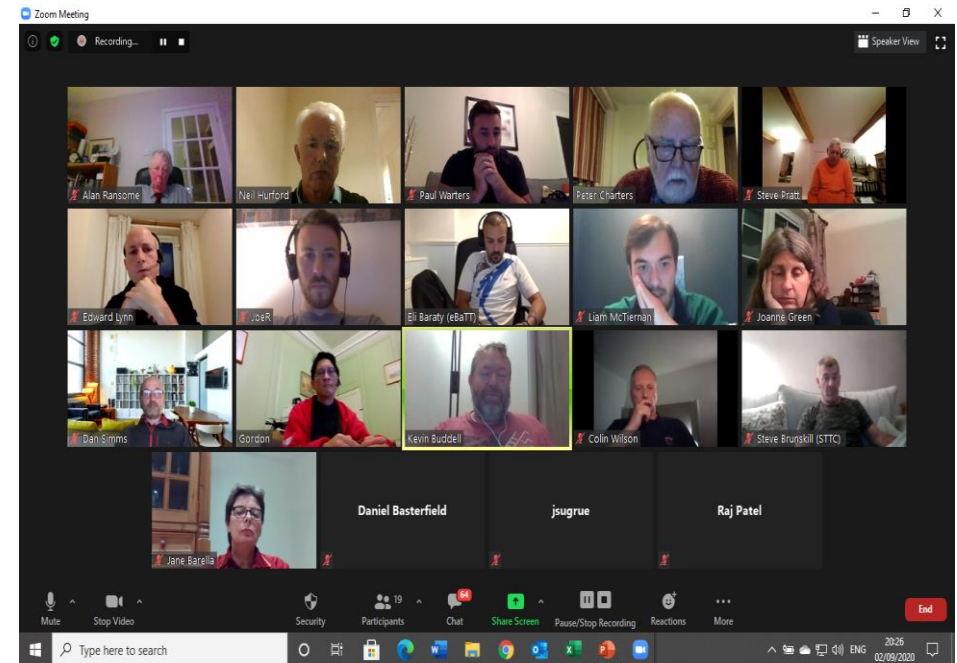
Clubs 1 - Key Challenges

1. **Place / Premises -** Security of tenure, opening hours.

2. **People** –
   i. Coaches. Finances to pay. Valued.
   ii. Members – retention, inclusive player pathway from grass roots to International.

3. **Financial** – self sufficient, affordable for the community.

4. **Competitions & Club Structure** - Teams of own players. Use of club venues to keep funds in TT. Spectators. Genuine 'Premier Club" / Centre for Excellence – funding /competitions within clubs for those deserving. Momentum for schemes should be built over a longer time-frame (e.g. TDCs).

5. **Social** – creating a friendly and social element. Competitions for lower level players.

6. **Community** - recognition and identity.

7. **TTE**
   i. Ethos - needs to be clearer.
   ii. Structure, over-bureaucracy, National Council value? Voting structure – clubs should have a voice.

Clubs 1 – Actions

1. National Clubs League. New clubs culture.

2. A voice for clubs – member voting rights? Clubs to be included in conversations, especially those affecting clubs and their coaches. Possible 'Clubs Professional Body'.

3. Financial considerations – funding and use of clubs for competitions for those deserving.

4. Premier Football Clubs link. Foundation.

5. Build up clubs in communities / funding support for only one club per area. Would encourage spectators and sponsorship.

6. Close connection with Local Leagues is important for clubs and grounds them in their community

7. TTE clear ethos.

Clubs 2 – Participants 2nd September 2020

- Ackworth Club/ MAG   Dan Simms
- Ackworth Academy   Eli Baraty
- Birmingham Academy   Edward Lynn
- Corby Smash   Colin Wilson
- Ellenborough   Gordon Izatt
- Graham Spicer   Jane Barella
- Greenhouse   Daniel Basterfield & Jason Sugrue
- Kingfisher   Peter Charters & Raj Patel
- Ormesby   Alan Ransome
- Portishead   Joe Ratajczak
- Swerve   Paul Warters & Steve Brunskill
- MAG Members: Neil Hurford, Kevin Buddell, Jo Green, Liam McTiernan, Steve Pratt, Dan Simms

Clubs 2 - Key Challenges

1. **Place / Premises** - Security of Tenure. Rent. Suitable facilities (like Europe).

2. **People** –
   i. Coaches. Balance between volunteer and professional coaches – undervalued for the service.
   ii. Attract new and younger members.
   iii. Reduce member dropout rate.

3. **Financial** - Severe downward pressure on prices and costs, adversely impacts investment. Need to become self sufficient via sponsorship and structure.

4. **Competitions & Club Structure** – lack of structure. Pyramid system needed.

5. **Image** –
   i. Non-professional image of the sport impacting membership.
   ii. Lack of role models at the top for kids to develop.

6. **TTE Relationship** - Large complexity in the relationship between Clubs and TTE. Not fit for purpose for the players/ coaches etc, but currently fit for the people that organise events. Voting / lack of political power.

Clubs 2 – Actions

1. Support for creating stronger local clubs as a number 1 priority, not all clubs, prioritise (risk of dilution). Proactive approach from TTE.

2. TTE support to link schools to clubs.

3. It needs to be a huge priority to improve the image of the sport.

4. Connect local clubs to Ping Pong Parlours and Ping! And give out fliers and push recruitment.

5. Competition clear structure, including National Clubs League.

6. Social structure to integrate junior and senior members within a club.

7. Financial ideas to help clubs to be self sustainable. e.g. commercial activities.

8. Use of clubs as competitions venues to so money kept within table tennis.

Clubs 3 – Participants 7 November 2020

- Ashford   Mark Roper
- Cippenham   Graham Trimming
- Falmouth   Jerry Williams
- Graham Spicer Patrick Caunt
- Hampstead TTC Richard Grethe
- Norwich   Stuart Laws
- Torbay Academy Jo Piwowar
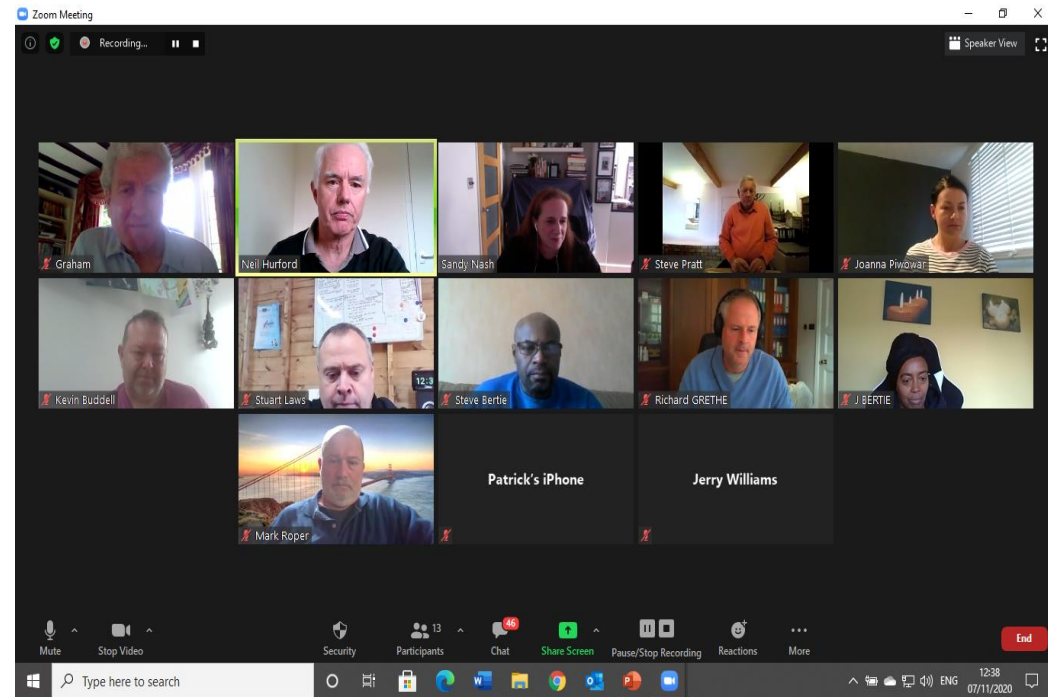
- MAG Members: Neil Hurford, Juliet Bertie, Stephen Bertie, Kevin Buddell, Sandy Nash, Steve Pratt
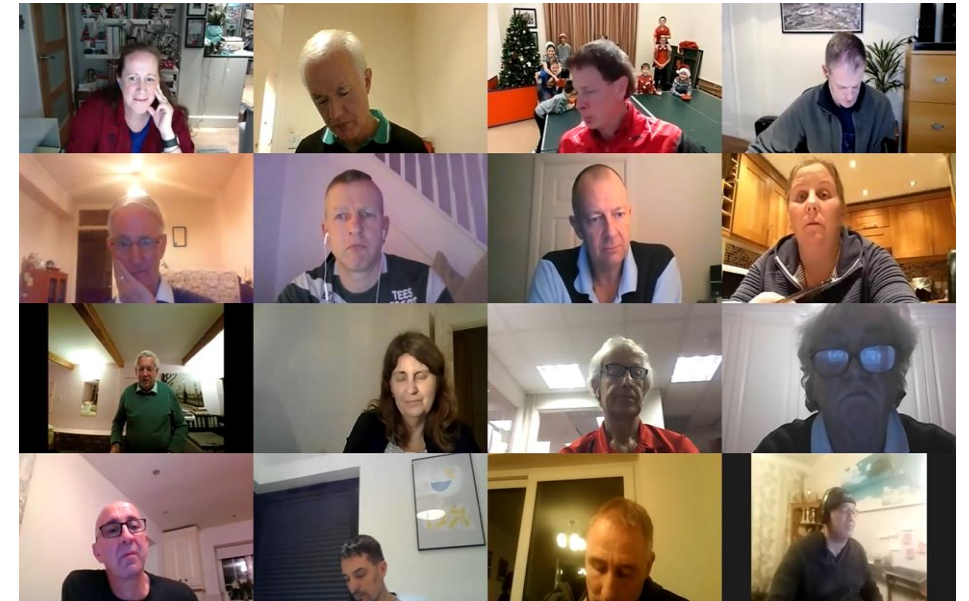
Clubs 3 - Key Challenges

1. **Lockdown / Covid-19** – Rebuilding.

2. **Place** - Premises /Location, Security of Tenure. Availability timing issues, utilise better, expansion or new venue.

3. **People** –
   i. Volunteers with expertise.
   ii. Player demographic – encourage new, younger players.
   iii. Player retention, especially reduce drop out rate from approx 16+ to 35/40.
   iv. Coaches. Being able to support good coaches.

4. **Financial** - Support for performance players at clubs a distance from TTE training venues. Support full player pathway.

5. **Competitions / Social** – getting balance right between community club v junior development. Inclusive atmosphere and competitions available for all levels.

6. **Perception / Image** - More TTE support, especially re TT image and attracting younger demographic.

Clubs 3 – Actions

1. Lockdown opportunity – more flexible structure. Good time to introduce change.

2. National Clubs League. New clubs culture. Pyramid – aim is to widen the base so more local competitions at the lower level to encourage more participation.

3. Consider social players and lower level players in competition and league structure – possible Social Leagues, encourage companies, schools league. More flexible competitions. Build competition to meet needs.

4. Financial - TTE education scheme to help clubs help themselves to become financially sustainable. Basis for TTE funding – suggest regarding rewarding clubs bringing players through.

5. Link any new TTE projects introduced to local clubs, eg. Ping!, Ping Pong Parlours.

6. Improve TT image / perception of table tennis.

7. More activities aimed at 16+.

8. Volunteer investment program via NGB promotion. Apprentice scheme. D of E Scheme.

9. Communication - regular chance for clubs to have a voice. Keep communication channels open. Forum?

Clubs 4 – Participants 15 December 2020

- Bristol Civil Service — Mike Kinlocke
- Colebridge — Kate Hughes
- Horsham Spinners — Rory Scott
- Knighton Park — Mike Smith
- Leeds Judean — Ivan Lewis
- Nottingham Sycamore — Jason Ramage
- Portsmouth — David Wiles
- South Croydon — Robin Faulkner
- TTE/Blackpool TTC — Martin Ireland
- Woodfield — Steve Horton
- Woodford Wells — Zoltan Hosszu

- MAG Members: Neil Hurford, Jo Green, Sandy Nash, Steve Pratt, Dave Randerson

Clubs 4 - Key Challenges

1. **Lockdown / Covid-19** – Rebuilding, getting people back to play (especially adults).

2. **Place / Premises** - Extension or relocation to new venue to enable expansion. Equipment costs and requirements (including more to meet Covid guidelines). Fix leaky roof! Need more sessions available and more participation at existing sessions.

3. **People** –
   i. Volunteers. Need younger and new.
   ii. Coaches. More.
   iii. Members – more, especially for league commitment. All ages, although feel more adults lost as a result of Covid-19, and junior standard needs improving.
   iv. Increase female membership. All ages.
   v. Player retention.

4. **Financial** – Survive. Self sustainable to break even or make a profit.

5. **Competitions Structure** – Needs a cohesive, clear, and regional structured pathway for competitions. Cost prohibitive.

6. **Social** – need to keep new and social players engaged.

7. **Increase base of pyramid.**

Clubs 4 – Actions

1. Help rebuilding post- Covid-19. Local Leagues will be important for this

2. Club development. TTE to work more closely with key clubs looking to grow.

3. Educate clubs to become self-sustaining financially and to be aware of any funding available.

4. Pyramid-base building is key. Plan for social table tennis.

5. Identify potential new club sites / venues.

6. Simplify/rationalise the competitive structure. Re-examine costs of participation – funding for use of venues often insufficient.

7. TTE to enter into venue rental agreement with Sports Hall providers – could be used for regional competitions and schools coaching.

8. Stronger links to universities to deal with the drop-off in participation by players in 18-24 age-group. More competitions at U-21 and U-25 level.

9. More innovative/flexible competitions at club level to ease the transition from social to competitive play – eg ladder competitions, summer leagues for individuals.

C1. Maintain and Improve Facilities & Venues
   1. ***Develop commercial models for club operations ("franchising" approach)***

When clubs were developing plans for having their own premises, they felt it would be easier if they had access to some "standard templates" that set out how they could achieve their goal. Many clubs felt they were having to start from scratch – rather than drawing on the expertise and experience of previous clubs that had acquired their own venues. A development of this would be essentially a "franchise model" in which TTE set out the different routes that clubs could follow to acquire their own facilities.

   2. ***Restore facility grants from Sport England***

The loss of facility grants from Sport England had had a significant detrimental effect on the ability of existing clubs to develop their facilities and for new clubs to create their own venues for the first time. In collaboration with other sports, TTE should be pressing Sport England to restore the facilities grants.

   3. ***Get 24/7 venues in each major city***

This was seen a prestige project that TTE could promote and would ensure that a significant proportion of the population in England was within (say) 15 miles of a multi-table venue that was permanently available for table tennis 24/7. TTE would need to work with local partners to make this happen.

   4. ***Build links with other sports for use of facilities (eg Premier League Football Clubs)***

A number of clubs reported positively on working with other sports to make use of existing sports facilities for table tennis. Links with Premier League Football Clubs had been particularly productive as many such clubs had programmes for engaging with their local community. The nature of table tennis would make it an ideal activity for helping them achieve this goal. This would require TTE to generate pathways with the NGBs of other sports and other organisations such as the Premier League so that local organisations could develop specific locally-based projects.

   5. **Local Partnerships**

Some participants felt that the best way for clubs to thrive is for them to build partnerships in their locality. These clubs would then be clearly identified as the local centre for table tennis. It is unrealistic to imagine that a full network of self-sufficient clubs could be developed entirely through national funding. So this locally-based approach would complement the approach based on seeking grants from Sport England. Clubs would benefit from guidance on how best to build local partnerships.

C2. Develop Competitive Structures That Are More Supportive of Club Development
   1. ***British League to focus more on "real" clubs***

It was felt that the British League was not providing sufficient support to clubs. A number of teams in the British Leagues were essentially "teams of convenience", ie groups of players who created a club purely for the purposes of entering British League. Such clubs did not play any role in the development of table tennis. This "open access" approach to British League does of course maximise the chances for players to participate in high-level competitions. So it was recognised that there was a balance to be struck between the needs of clubs in the development role and providing as much opportunity for players to participate in high level competitions. Because of the importance of this issue, it is already part of a project that will be undertaken by MAG.

2. Extend NCL/NJL model to U-21 and senior age groups

The NCL/NJL competition has proved extremely popular as a vehicle for providing competitive play for cadet and junior players at a level below Junior British League. The competition takes place at weekends, so provides an alternative to the mid-week league matches which players of school age find increasingly difficult to participate in. Extending the NCL/NJL to older age groups might likewise provide opportunities for competitive play for other players for whom mid-week matches are unattractive because of other commitments. This issue is also being addressed as part of the MAG project identified above.

3. Improve incentives for clubs to develop their own players

The existing national club competitions pose few restrictions on who can play for a club in the competition. As a result, players often compete for clubs with which they have no or few connections. This can mean that clubs have no incentives to develop their own players – they can simply rely on using players from other clubs who have invested in developing players.

4. Simplify competitive structures, particularly for juniors

It was noted that there were a plethora of overlapping competitions. This applied particularly for juniors. For example for junior players there were NJL, JBL, County Championships, English League Competitions and various schools competitions. In London and the South East there was also the Jack Petchey competition. There was also an extensive set of tournaments that were open to all junior players. Whilst, players could not play in both NJL and JBL, the other competitions were open to all junior players. Whilst providing a range of opportunities for competitive play is to be applauded, it was felt that the plethora of team and individual events caused confusion. A Competitions Review is underway and this issue has been referred to that Review.

5. More flexible competitions - clubs to be able to organise their own competitions, eg "ladder" competitions

A number of clubs reported that a number of their members who played socially wanted to face the challenges of competitive play. But for various reasons, they didn't want to commit to playing in a local league competition. They felt that more flexible club-based competitions should be available in order to cater to the needs of such players. If their needs were not met then such players might drift away from the sport. We heard about various "ladder" based competitions that clubs were organising for individuals that had proved to be successful. It would be useful if information about how to run such competition was disseminated more widely.

C3. Giving Clubs a Stronger Voice

1. Build on the success of the "Ready to Return" webinars which were highly valued by clubs

The "Ready to Return" webinars were highly valued by clubs – without them any return to play would have been much more difficult. Clubs would welcome on-line webinars continuing after Covid-19 and dealing with other subjects that were important to clubs.

2. Pro-actively engage with clubs on issues that directly affect their members

Clubs would also welcome more informal, consultative sessions with TTE staff in which clubs could raise topics of interest but also hear about future plans of TTE that relate to clubs.

3. Hold on-line meetings with clubs based around the new "account manager" structure

The new "account manager" structure within the TTE Clubs team was well-suited to regular updates and discussions between clubs and TTE. This would be welcomed by clubs.

4. Change the voting structure to reflect the current structure of the sport

Although this was raised by only a small number of clubs, those that did so felt it was very important – though different views were expressed on what changes were desirable.

5. Role/ethos of TTE needs to be clearer – what is expected of clubs, where do they fit in?

Some clubs said they were unsure about the "ethos" of TTE – what were its priorities? Was the priority achieving success for England teams at international level – or was it in developing a broad base of predominantly social players, or perhaps something in between? As a result of this lack of clear ethos or role, some clubs were unsure of what TTE expected of them – indeed they were unsure as to what constituted "success". Organisational success is frequently associated with a high level of focus and specialising in areas where the organisation has particular skills. Others felt that the distinctive characteristic of table tennis was its inherent diversity. It could be played on largely equal terms by people from all age groups and all genders. It could be played at any time of the year – day or night. Compared to many other sports it was cheap to play which meant it was open to people from all backgrounds. Success should be seen in terms of how these different elements mutually reinforced each other.

C4. Recruitment & Retention of Players and Volunteers

1. Stronger links between mass participation programmes and clubs

A frequently expressed view was that clubs were not noticeably benefitting from the mass participation programmes. These were no doubt successful in encouraging people to play socially at Ping outdoor tables or in Ping Pong parlours – but this was not resulting in more players joining clubs as a result of mass participation programmes. It was understood that local leagues were informed about mass participation programmes in their area. This should continue. But to provide opportunities for players to move from mass participation activity into the next level of table tennis, the links had to be made with those local clubs who ran open sessions that such players could attend. This would mainly be local Premier or Associate Clubs. Accordingly, it was strongly recommended that wherever possible mass participation programmes included a step which involved liaison with local Premier and Associate clubs so that they had a chance to work with the mass participation team to ensure that the most was made of the new opportunity. A specific suggestion was made that all Ping tables had a QR code on them which when scanned would provide details of local Premier and Associate clubs.

2. One ranking list for all TTE members

Producing a single ranking list for all TTE members based on both local league and national competitions would be a way of stimulating interest in competitive play.

3. Improve the image of the sport to help with recruitment & retention

For many young players, playing table tennis was very much associated with what they did in their teenage years. As they moved into adulthood, the took up other (sporting or non-sporting) pursuits. Accordingly, they drifted out of the sport as they left the junior ranks. Table Tennis was not seen as a "cool" activity to be pursued by people in their late teens or early twenties. So changing the image of the sport was a vital step for improving the retention of players in the game. In fact, the nature of table tennis with quick bursts of activities was an ideal sport for displaying on social media and YouTube in particular. TTE needed to explore these opportunities further.

4. ***Keep money in the game to support clubs - rather than spending it outside the sport at Sports Centres or similar venues***

Currently a lot of money leaves the sport to pay for the hire of arenas and sports venues. Could a greater proportion of that money be spent within the sport – essentially as a form of re-investment? No doubt certain events do require larger facilities that can be provided by a single club. But maybe certain events could be reconfigured so that they could take place at multiple club venues rather than at a large sports centre or arena.

5. ***Broadening the base to increase the height of the pyramid***

Some clubs expressed the view that broadening the base of the pyramid was the best way to raise the height of the pyramid. If we wished to compete at the highest level internationally, we would only be able to do so by broadening our base. And there were other knock-on benefits of having a broader base than currently. So a key priority for TTE was to establish actions that would broaden the base.

6. ***Succession planning for volunteers is essential for all clubs - more guidance required***

Many clubs had learnt the hard way about the importance of succession planning. They had been operating successfully – but highly dependent on one or two highly motivated individuals. When such individuals had had to stand down – it proved a shock to the system and one from which the club found it difficult to survive. TTE needed to emphasise to clubs the importance of continuous succession planning to secure a robust future for a club. Providing guidance on how to develop suitable succession plans was essential. This issue had already been highlighted in a MAG project on Volunteers and Volunteering.

C5. Coaching

1. ***More support for coaches – they are the key resource for club development***

Many of the individuals who drive forward development of clubs are coaches. And most coaches are now based in particular clubs. Activities that support coaches will have knock-on benefits for clubs.

2. ***Stronger links between national performance team and clubs***

For a number of clubs, developing high level (junior) players who can compete at elite level is a key priority. Such clubs felt it was that there were strong and effective links between clubs and the national performance team. This has been addressed in some detail by a recent report by MAG.

C6. Re-building after Covid-19

1. ***Re-activating venues***

Many clubs emphasised both the importance and the challenges of being able to re-activate venues once restrictions on indoor sport had been lifted. Some clubs were in the ideal position of owning their own venues and would have little difficulties in re-activating their venues. For them, bring back players into social and competitive play would be the major challenge. But most clubs were not in that position. Most rented their venues which were often shared with other activities. During Covid the venues may have been used for other purposes which may continue even after the pandemic was over. The venue owner, eg pubs and clubs may have gone out of business during the pandemic and returning to the venue may simply not be possible. In other cases, the business model of the club may have been severely undermined during the pandemic meaning that the club was no longer

viable or had even been declared insolvent. There was a general venue that this was the major issue facing our sport over the next 12 months (and perhaps longer). It needed to be a high priority for TTE.

2. Major push to bring back players to social and competitive table tennis
For all clubs, they would need to build back their membership lists to return to viable operations. Although it was essentially something to be led by the clubs themselves – support from TTE would be appreciated.

3. Use as an opportunity to bring about new ways of doing things
There was a recognition that even for those clubs that survived the pandemic, it was unlikely to simply be a return to "business as usual". Indeed a number relished the opportunity to bring innovative thinking and approaches to how their clubs met the needs of their membership.

4. Local Leagues are very important for all clubs. So a strong local league helps with club development. It will be important in the post-Covid world to rebuild competitions at local levels
A number of clubs emphasised the importance of a thriving local league competition in order to ensure they were themselves viable. This does not imply that rebuilding local leagues means a return to a pre-pandemic "business as usual". The traditional 10-set format of local league competitions was seen by many as being unhelpful in promoting competitive play amongst younger players. Furthermore, club members in their twenties and thirties found the late finishes "family unfriendly" and difficult to combine with working life. There has been increased interest in shorter format competitions, ie ones that last 2 hours rather than 3 to 3.5 hours. This is a welcome development. A more radical approach is to develop "open singles" and "ladder-based" competitions. These have been used by some clubs with positive feedback from their members.