Swindon & District Football League

ACCREDITED
PART OF ENGLAND FOOTBALL

LEAGUE SECRETARY ADDRESS 14 June 2023

INTRODUCTION

On behalf of the Swindon and District Football League I am pleased to present my League's Secretary Annual Report for Season 2022/2023. The past twelve months have been marked by significant activity both on and off the pitch and in many ways will be seen as a pivotal year for the League.

Last June at this meeting we discussed the challenges facing local Football and highlighted areas that were perceived as being particularly crucial. I am happy to report that significant progress has been achieved in many of these areas and anticipate that further improvements will be made in the months ahead.

The League has witnessed an eventful year with much excitement and the usual array of issues and challenges. It has been difficult but equally rewarding, but in the end, we achieved a lot. The biggest challenge has been the abject weather, but you are a resilient group and with adopting a flexible approach we managed to complete the seasons fixtures. Thanks must go to Pete Mildenhall our fixture secretary, for his dogged approach to the challenges that came his way, every week of the season.

FOOTBALL

Clubs in Wiltshire now have more choice with the introduction of a Division 2 South in the Hellenic, and a Division One in the Wiltshire Senior League, and we saw some migration to those Leagues, leaving us with fewer teams than the previous season. This meant that we had to lose a complete Division, but I think you will agree the Premier Division has been the most competitive, for years, with the title being decided on the last day of the season. Hearty congratulations go to the Shield and Dagger for a League and Cup double. It was also a battle in Division 1, with Coleview Purples finally overcoming Cricklade Reserves challenge to win the title, and this was their first season in the League.

Fortunately, we didn't lose any teams during the season, but there is no doubt that some Clubs are struggling to survive financially, others struggling to field Teams and others struggling to retain their Volunteers. With this in mind the Management Committee reversed their decision to increase fees and fines for 2023 -2024, and we hope that we all start to see a fall in the cost of living increases we have seen this past year.

The adverse weather conditions were the worst for many years, with frozen, then flooded, pitches. That we came through despite the inevitable fixtures backlog, and that complaints about fixtures rescheduling were kept to a minimum, says a great deal about you, and your commitment. I can only applaud all concerned for their efforts.

This was the last season that player registration forms will be used, Next season the Central Registration of Players through WGS will come into force. Clubs must ensure 100% compliance with Registration Rules by ensuring that their Players are correctly registered within the permitted Timescales and Regulations.

REFEREES

Once again, our local Referee pool provided an outstanding service with Official Referees being appointed to all but one of our fixtures last Season – a remarkable statistic and one that is undoubtedly the envy of all other local Leagues. I must commend the efforts of Mark Paris-Haines the League RAO, and his Buddy

mentor Jeremy Moyes. Referee development remains a key focus and an integral part of our League. Alongside recruitment there has been a concerted effort to improve the standard of refereeing through coaching and performance reviewing of Referees

ADMINISTRATION

There were monthly Management Committee Meetings and numerous Sub-Committee Meetings held throughout the year – either on zoom or teams, attended by your elected Officers.

I would like to thank the 2 retired Officers, Ian Rosewell, and Chris Ricketts, that left part way through the season, for their contributions and efforts. Their roles were shared out to the rest of the Committee.

I am happy to welcome 2 new Officers, Keith White – League Safeguarding, and Ollie Sweeney – Discipline, but more about them later.

I am very aware that some Clubs have little or no knowledge of the administrative activities of the League, and I encourage more of you to get involved, and to experience the pressure to get the League business done. I feel it is important to make sure that the next generation of League Officials see what is involved thereby ensuring that the burden of running the League doesn't fall on the same small number of people, who are giving their skills and experience and time on a voluntary basis.

I consulted with all of you, by using League Bulletins, and in mid-season I sought your views / recommendations on any additions / alterations to the League's Rules that you deemed appropriate. With none forthcoming from you, the Management Committee acted upon the feedback we had been getting around the rules on the registration process, fees and fines increases, and the need for a pre-match squad photo, and these were the only changes put forward by us, to the FA rules committee.

FINANCE

Sponsorship is vital, and a matter of concern that our efforts to secure sponsorship and funding for the League have dried up. Finding new Sponsors in the present economic climate is proving difficult. So, if you know of any-body that wants to help us out, please give them my contact details?

Increased revenue from Registration Fees has helped our position. The League is in a stable condition, as Peter Cejer will explain in his financial report, which regrettably may be his "swan song" as he looks to retire his position from the Committee. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Peter for everything he has done for the League since 2010, if indeed he does manage to escape!

PUBLICITY

There is great interest in what happens in the Swindon & District Football League. Many people attend our games, and it would be great if we could get match reports and photographs uploaded to our League website. This used to done, by a third party, but when charges started to be introduced, the Committee decided that without sponsors the money was needed elsewhere.

The League's Hall of Fame acknowledges and celebrates the huge contributions made to our League since 1891 by so many people. We need you to tell us about your heroes since the establishment of the League.

The revamp of the website, by Peter Cejer, will offer greater scope to promote ourselves and will significantly benefit you by providing more up-to-date information, but we need volunteers to make that happen?

The virtual handbook has been replaced, with integrated pages in the revamp, saving the League the expense of the handbooks being produced.

INITIATIVES

We are continually evolving by our own demands for improvement and by our association with the County FA, and as a consequence it is imperative that we review and amend our procedures on an ongoing basis.

- **Club County FA Affiliation** – mandatory changes around child welfare. All adult teams will need to ensure all of the new requirements are completed in your club portal, otherwise your affiliation will be rejected by the FA. This affects all of you, regardless if you have under 18's or not at the time of FA affiliation. To help you, the League are pleased to announce that we now have our own League Safeguarding Officer- Keith White. You will be hearing from Keith a little bit later.

  Club insurance can only be purchased on line through Whole Game at the time of Affiliation. Blufin Player Insurance has been replaced by Marsh Sports.

- **Pyramid** - As the District League continues to improve our links with others, we can confirm there will be four feeder Leagues to the Wiltshire Senior Premier League from the start of next season.

  Hellenic League Division 2.

  Swindon & District League Premier Division.

  Trowbridge & District League Division 1.

  Wiltshire Senior League Division 1.

- **England Accredited League** - The Swindon & District Management Committee are '**PROUD**' to announce that we are now an '**FA England Accredited Football League**". The 'FA England Football Accreditation' replaced the 'FA Charter Standard Accreditation' in 2021. The Accreditation will be playing a big part in making our football environment safe, fun and inclusive by raising standards, raising awareness and taking action, making the Accreditation worthwhile to be part of.

  The FA England Football programme exists to positively improve people's football experience through the Accreditation. The FA England Football Programme is open to all grassroots Clubs, and aims to raise standards in the grassroots game through supporting the **development** of its member Clubs. Having achieved the Accreditation, demonstrates that the League offers well-run and sustainable football. **We are proud** to prioritise qualified coaching and safeguarding, as well as the values of the 'FA's Respect Programme' as part of our game.

THE WAY AHEAD

As a League we recognise we are in times of change and we are planning carefully to manage those changes. As clubs you will be expected to do more for yourselves through your Club portals on line. We are your first point of contact, but if you have any concerns, these are useful numbers for the COUNTY FOOTBALL SERVICES TEAM

Shane Comb
Football Services Manager
01793 486047 Option 3 / 07956 212301 / Shane.Comb@WiltshireFA.com

Maria Lai
Designated Safeguarding Officer
01793 486047 Option 3 / 07340 272564 / Maria.Lai@WiltshireFA.com

CONCLUSION

I would like to thank my fellow officers on the Management Committee, for their considerable efforts on behalf of the League, Especially Martyn Rosewell, the Chairman, whose wealth of experience, common sense, and football “know-how” has kept us all on the same path. It is a privilege to work with you all and indeed I enjoyed your company, on Cup Final day in the sunshine.

I wish to thank you and your Club volunteers for your ongoing and vital contributions. There is no doubt that you are the heartbeat of our local Football and we could not function without you.

The League wishes to record its thanks to Central Swindon North Parish Council for making their pitches available during the Season, and we partner with them to improve the playing surfaces of the pitches at Sevenfields, and Southbrook. We now look forward to the unveiling of the Moredon Hub, with its new 3G and grass pitches becoming available later this year.

As we prepare to close another chapter in our 133rd Year History I welcome the challenges of 2023/24 and look forward with enthusiasm, as we strive to make the Swindon District Football League the best and fun place to play your matches in Wiltshire.

Sincerely yours in Football

John Luckhurst