

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT TO MEMBERS 2024 / 2025

I began my term as Chairman in August 2024 with two key objectives:

Firstly to conduct a thorough Member Survey to ensure that we were meeting our members needs and expectations and secondly to address the slow but steady decline in active member numbers seen since we emerged from COVID lockdown in the second half of 2021.

In summary the Member Survey - conducted in the autumn of 2024 - broadly endorsed our range of activities with particular mention of the quality and variety of our after lunch speakers, the walking group and our discussion group.

Frequency of meetings and activities was also felt to be 'about right'. In addition Aldwickbury Park Golf Club's atmosphere and facilities were praised and Member communications were felt to be helpful, clear and 'about right'.

Outings and events were generally liked but it was felt that local events eg Wheathampstead and St Albans historical guided tours and London tours with lunch afterwards were preferred. Also events that could not be done individually were preferred eg Observatory visit and Introduction to Croquet, with the obligatory meal afterwards of course!

Finally Members were generally happy to see less formality at our meetings and lunches and slightly more involvement of spouses / partners at our outings and events.

We have sought to implement these results with the loosening of our dress code and rather less formality in the structure of our meetings and lunches.

We have continued to enjoy some notable speakers at our monthly lunches with highlights including another 'tour de force' from Martin Holmes, this time on Mussolini, Peter Gill's flamboyant and fun look at Noel Coward and Mike Barbakoff opening our eyes further to the activities of Bletchley Park during WW2.

Members have also enjoyed outings such as the London Legal Tour, Richard 111 and Bosworth Field and the National Stud and Newmarket races whilst our minds and bodies have been challenged at the Rothamsted Museum and on the Croquet lawns of St Albans.

Our annual 'special lunches' at Christmas and the Summer BBQ have also been enjoyed once again. In addition special mention goes hand in hand with our thanks to Charles Yuill and Graham George for rescuing our Spring lunch and organising, at very short notice, a very enjoyable lunch at The Cricketers in Redbourn.

Moving on to our finances these remain in good health despite holding our annual membership fee at £25, providing guests brought by members with a free lunch and subsidising (modestly) our special lunches. We also, with the agreement of the Golf club, delayed the increase in our lunch cost until April rather than the January anniversary. This has resulted in a modestly reduced year end cash surplus which, however, should give us the headroom to support some activities in the coming year should the committee choose to do so.

I must thank Stephen Mills, in particular, for providing the committee with timely, accurate financial information and for seamlessly integrating new systems into our accounting methodology after Allan's long stint at the helm of our finances.

I would also like to thank Ed Sobczak and Martin Prechner who have completed another year as the independent examiners of our finances ensuring that everything is as it should be. My thanks also go to Colin Johnston for taking over the important role of Membership Secretary from Graham Lee on the latter's move to Surrey. Graham remains a member of the club and I hope we will see him back from time to time in the new year.

So how should I SumUp (!) my year as Chairman?

Firstly I believe we now have a clearer view of members' needs and wants from the club which will guide the Probus committee's work as we go forward. Secondly it has been a pleasure to work with my colleagues on the committee and the many other members who organise walks, take part in discussions or regularly attend lunches along with trying to fit in as many holidays as we are able to in the year.

My one disappointment has been that our overall numbers have continued to slowly reduce.

Given our purpose and age profile we will always be likely to lose a few of our friends during the year. This year has been no exception with long standing active members such as Peter Webster

and Jim Waller passing on. Whilst welcoming new members this year such as Peter Long and Robin Buller we must continue our efforts to bring in more new blood and I will wholeheartedly support our new Chairman for 2025 / 2026 in this endeavour.
It has been a privilege and a pleasure to serve as Chairman this past year and I will continue to support the club and committee as we go forward.

Theo de Pencier.