



**David Tucker**  
**Bowls England Chair**  
**Speech to the Counties Conference, 26<sup>th</sup> November 2021**

Since my appointment as Chair this is the first opportunity I have had to speak with you all face to face.

Many of you know me and my bowls background but for those that don't here is a brief synopsis:

- A player for 56 years and I am proud to say that throughout I have stayed a member of Topsham Bowling Club where I am still very active, having just completed my 48<sup>th</sup> year as Secretary and continuing to look after the green.
- I have been fortunate to have played at a high level with many competition successes, playing over 100 Middleton Cup games. After retiring from the Middleton Cup, I became manager for Devon and our success has been second to none. Of course as Bowls England Chair I didn't say that!
- Over the years I have gained so much enjoyment out of the sport that I wanted to put something back. Throughout my career I have been involved with bowls administration at Club, County and National level.
- Bowls has been a big part of my life

Over the years I have witnessed many changes

- An increase in the number of ladies playing
- More unified clubs
- Improved facilities
- Modernisation of dress codes
- Increase in the competitive side of the sport

Sadly the one downside has been the deterioration of green standards particularly those maintained by Local Authorities.

In my C.V. for the position of Chair and my subsequent acceptance speech I used the phrase "we are in a changing world and if bowls is to survive we have to embrace change at all levels."

My initial aim as Chair was to make sure that Bowls England was fit for purpose and to ensure that our sport thrives.

Who would have predicted that three weeks after being appointed I would be faced with the pandemic and a period without a Chief Executive? What an initiation. Despite that, and the staff having to work from home, I am proud of what was achieved. The opportunity arose for me to meet up with other National Governing Body Chairs and share with them how difficult the pandemic has been for the whole sports sector. We have done well compared to many indoor sports and testimony to the ambition we all had to see the sport get back on its feet. Throughout we were grateful for your appreciation for the help and advice we made readily available for Counties and Clubs. Thank you all for that positive feedback.



Lockdown impressed on me that if we were to successfully come out of it and re-establish ourselves there would have to be change and that we must all forget the well-expressed phrase "but we have always done it this way".

Over the past year the role of the Chair and Board has changed as we have become more transparent, professional and demonstrating good leadership. The Board is responsible for leading Bowls England and deciding strategy and direction so that the day-to-day operations can be left in the capable hands of Jon and his team.

Let me dismiss here and now the comments from some that the Chief Executive makes unilateral decisions. This is not true. Jon and I have an excellent working relationship and during his time with us he has achieved a lot. That success has brought criticism, mainly I suspect from those who find change difficult, of both Jon and myself. The one which causes me much concern is that most of our new staff are not bowlers.

This is true but deliberate. What we needed was staff who have the right qualities and experience to help lead us into the future. Let me assure you that the staff team still has some very experienced bowlers together with a Board where there is a vast depth of knowledge and experience of the sport. You don't need to be a footballer to be a good referee.

Following those comments let me briefly mention the achievements during the past year;

- We had National Championships and Competitions, albeit on a reduced scale and the 18 days at Leamington with the new layout was well received. Of course, other Home Nations had no championships at all, so this is a feather in the caps of our staff. Well done. Of course, there can always be improvement and following consultations which included the players the formats for next year will be changed. We do listen.
- Bowls Big Weekend which was a tremendous success.
- Our 5-year strategic plan following consultation with Counties was launched.

I will conclude by saying that as you are all aware Bowls England is under new leadership at both Board and staff levels and we are clearly on a new course. Unfortunately, that new start coincided with the pandemic.

This produced many challenges and I am proud of the way we have all supported the sport to mitigate the impact of the pandemic. When I say all, I mean the board, staff, counties and clubs.

Thank you all.

Let's go forward together to build a brighter future for our sport and maximise the benefits of next year's Commonwealth Games.

Remember if we cannot always agree the best solution is that we agree to disagree.

I hope you are all enjoying the conference and finding it helpful. This afternoon was excellent, very proactive and positive and I can confirm that, having listened, the Board



has agreed to reinstate an optional badge presentation at the championships and introduce an open draw for the National Finals.

Please enjoy the rest of the evening.

Thank you.