

Bowls' Big Weekend Case Study

Ormskirk Bowling Club, Lancashire

70 attendees • 22 Joined Club •

9 additional new bowlers joined from taster sessions

Background

Ormskirk Bowling Club was formed in 2013 to campaign for, develop and ultimately play at, new greens in Ormskirk to replace those lost to development. Two greens, one an artificial green, were completed in 2016 on the site of former school tennis courts, adjacent to the town's cricket club. The Club has steadily grown in membership since then, offering both an annual membership as well as winter membership given the artificial green is suitable for year round use. The Club also has a junior section and is keen to attract all ages to the sport. There is a Level 2 Crown Green Coach at the Club.

However, the Covid lockdown affected membership and the Club was keen to attract new members post lockdown. For the 2021 season a half price membership offer was given to all members (£17.50).

Bowls' Big Weekend (BBW)

This national initiative seemed an ideal opportunity to try and develop membership, with national publicity as well as resources to help clubs.

What we Planned, Preparation & Publicity

The Club decided to run a themed event on the evening of Saturday 29 May – BBQ, Beer & Bowls. In addition the Club planned two more traditional taster sessions on the Bank Holiday Monday (31st May), one in the morning and one in the afternoon. The morning session was themed as a 'Family Session'.

The materials available to clubs who registered for the Bowls Big Weekend proved to be very useful and the images were utilised for the Club's website, Facebook, Twitter and Instagram pages. The image for the BBQ, Beer & Bowls night did not actually show anyone bowling, but instead people relaxing and enjoying a drink by a bowling green.

The Club paid £20 to boost the Facebook post advertising the BBQ night and a further £20 to boost the post for the Monday taster sessions. The post was also put on local Facebook Groups for the town to generate interest.



Burgers and sausages were purchased for the BBQ night (using Covid Grant monies the Club had been awarded), and they were provided free for attendees. One of the Club members volunteered to run the BBQ. Music was played through a small speaker purchased for the event.

People could register on the BBW website and a form was also set up on the Club's own website for people to register on, so there was at least a rough idea of how many people would turn up.

A press release was prepared and published on a local news website.

Club members were asked if they would assist at the events and there were 13 volunteers for the BBQ event, including the Club Coach.

How did it go?

BBQ Beer & Bowls Night

32 people turned up for the evening and their contact details were taken on arrival. Most had pre-registered but one or two turned up on spec.

On arrival people were initially taken round a set course on the artificial green, where target wedges, hoops etc were set out. There was a club member on each mark to assist them. They were then shown by volunteers the fundamentals of the sport on the grass green. Following this pairs were drawn and played three games over a set number of ends. The pairs winning the most games played off in a final with a bottle of Prosecco presented to the winners. The BBQ was running throughout and people were invited to go up for food when not playing. Drinks orders were rung through to the cricket club pavilion and carried over to the bowling club greens. To round the evening off everyone played a large game of 'spider' and the winner was presented with a bottle of Prosecco.



Feedback forms were given to attendees to complete before they left.

The weather was fortunately very good and everyone seemed to thoroughly enjoy the evening.

Monday Taster Sessions

Although the morning session had been themed as a family session, only one family actually attended. However, 18 people turned up in total.



For the afternoon session 20 people turned up, which was far more than expected and a call had to be put out for club members to come along and help. Once again, the sessions proved to be very popular. Whilst names, phone numbers and email addresses were collected we neglected to give out feedback forms, partly due to the fact we were swamped with people. One or two people from the Saturday night BBQ event turned up again as they had enjoyed the bowling so much.

Feedback

The forms that were completed after the BBQ event were extremely positive and almost everyone gave it a 4 out of 4 (Fantastic couldn't be better) on the forms. In terms of written comments some are reproduced below:

- *"Friendly atmosphere. Good game of bowling"*
- *"A most enjoyable evening"*
- *"Enjoyed learning how to play & loads of laughs. Thanks for being boss"*

- *“Enjoyed new experience and meeting people”*
- *“Good atmosphere, friendly people, good laugh”*
- *“Very well organised, everyone very friendly”*

People were also asked what they would they be prepared to pay for such an event if we charged in the future and the common consensus seemed to be £5 per head

Follow Up

Following the BBW the Club contacted all those who had attended the BBW events and invited them to a weekly social session on a Thursday evening. Some brought friends along and anyone else who contacted the Club via its website were also asked to attend this session. No pressure was put on to join the club, although many asked about membership. Club members often have an informal roll up at 11 most weekdays and people were also told that they could attend those sessions. A U3A group also ran informal sessions 1-3pm on Mondays and Fridays and these were also given as an option.

Future Outcomes

From those that attended the BBW, 22 have directly joined the Club in the following weeks and there are one or two more who have said that they will join but have not yet got around to doing so.

The event seemed to have raised the profile of the Club and there have been many people contacting the Club subsequently asking if they can come along and have a go. In total since the BBW there have been 9 further new bowlers join the Club, in addition to the 22 from the BBW.

Learning Points

Preparation is the key and although the Club had registered for the BBW it only became aware of all the publicity materials quite late in the day. In the future publicity would start earlier and more would have been done in the local press. Boosting posts on Facebook was useful. Overall, the costs of running the events were more than covered by the memberships gained from people joining.

Volunteers are crucial and the Club would have struggled with less than the 13 volunteers we had for the BBQ event, given the need to help people on the green and organising food and drinks for people. We did not really organise or brief our volunteers prior to the event and next time this will be done earlier with more clear roles assigned. Whilst it just about went alright on the night it was bit cobbled together at the last minute, and a Club Helpers Workshop/Bowls Activator training delivered by the Bowls Development Alliance and Coach Bowls would have been useful.

The follow up beginner/taster sessions are crucial for getting people into bowling and to interest them in joining the Club.

Conclusions

Overall, the Club was extremely pleased with the turnout for the events and the great feedback we got, not to mention the increase in membership that resulted. The events were a great success and that was borne out by the excellent feedback. The Club will definitely take part next year and will plan a little further in advance next time.

Further Support for Clubs

For more information, advice and resources in developing your club and attracting new members you can visit the Bowls Development Alliance website ([Bowls Development Alliance](#)). Please also

look out for the soon to be launched Club Health Checker, which will help direct you to those areas where you can seek to improve your club further, and Education Platform, which will contain further resources to assist you.