

We held our first *virtual* AGM on 11<sup>th</sup> March 2021. This was the last for Malcolm Dunbar in his role as Chairman, stepping down after five incredible years in the post. He was warmly thanked as he passed the baton swiftly onto Les Green. After the usual formalities our President, Claire Coutinho MP, provided an array of amusing insights and anecdotes into the workings of the Treasury. The Q&A session allowed many other topics to be discussed – from potholes to planning! The meeting ended with glasses being raised to thank Malcolm for all his sterling efforts.

In taking over the Chairman role, I am extremely aware of the need to protect the core of great events which people enjoy so much. However, I am also keen to try out new events. During 2021, I hope you enjoyed some of these “firsts” as there are more to come in 2022! In addition I am aiming to put a little more “business” back into ESBC and, perhaps most important of all, attract younger members – something that the new Corporate Membership scheme is already addressing.

On Earth Day 2021 (22<sup>nd</sup> April), the club got ‘down to earth’ by enjoying its first ever Gin Tasting. Over 30 people attended this virtual event and we were rewarded with the chance to sample the delights of one of the UK’s smallest, but most successful, Gin companies – Sky Wave. From their distillery in Oxford, Rachel Hicks used all her BBC TV experience to provide a superb introduction to the magic of their tipples – and our resident drinks experts, Malcolm and Lindsey, won the quiz and prize! Well no surprise there then.

The Cabinet Update on 20<sup>th</sup> May 2021, from Kwasi Kwarteng, Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, was our third virtual event in three months. In a packed one hour session, he spoke freely and openly about the handling of the pandemic, the challenges facing the country and his personal expectations for the rest of 2021. Fortunately for him, we will not be revisiting his predictions!

As Covid-19 cases started to rise steeply again during the summer of 2021 we became extremely concerned as to when we might return to in-person events. Fortunately, the Cabinet Update proved to be our last gathering in a virtual format. As summer moved to a close, we held five great events in close order.

The annual Golf Day took place on 9<sup>th</sup> September at Westerham Golf Club. The course was beautifully presented but for many of the 27 players, in the words of Peter Alliss, it was *“a great walk ruined by the Golf!”*

The Ladies' Lunch on 7<sup>th</sup> October at Tandridge Golf Club was another new addition to the ESBC calendar. My wife, Sue, hosted the lunch and the guest speaker was Lucy Choi, niece of Jimmy Choo, a successful businesswoman in her own right. The feedback from the 52 ladies who attended was such that we will repeat the event in 2022!

Five days later at Tandridge Golf Club, Geoffrey Sanderson hosted another of his sensational Desert Island Disc events when the person in the chair was Sir Richard Stilgoe. It was a night to remember: Geoffrey had certainly done his homework and asked poignant and searching questions; and the music chosen by Sir Richard covered an incredibly wide spectrum.

One of the initiatives I have been most proud of during 2021 is the launch of a Corporate Membership. This provides local small businesses, mostly run by dynamic young entrepreneurs, with the opportunity to meet four times per year for breakfast with a senior MP or business leader. Claire has been a great supporter and attended the first gathering on 1<sup>st</sup> November when the speaker was Minister for Skills and Apprenticeship, Alex Burghart. With eight members already signed and a target of 20 by the end of 2022, we are well underway with this new membership scheme.

The last event of the year was the Christmas Lunch held, as every year, at Tandridge Golf Club. Anne Marie Harrison ensured everything went to plan and it was a fun day all round – in fact dancing to the Tailored Tenors went on past 5pm! The chosen charity was Red Trousers Day and founder, Paul Finch, gave an excellent presentation on why it was formed and the great work they do in supporting research at The Royal Marsden. Before Gift Aid, over £4,800 was raised on the day, an amazing result both for ESBC and the charity.

Finally, I would like to thank all of you for supporting East Surrey Business Club during my first year as Chairman. It's been unusual, with the mix of virtual and in-person events, but one that has been extremely enjoyable.

**Les Green – Chairman East Surrey Business Club, March 2022**