

LTA CLUB OF THE YEAR 2023

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East Bergholt is a village tennis club in the Babergh District of Suffolk. Back in 2020, with just 22 members and three courts, the club's outlook was bleak. Fast forward two years, the facilities have been upgraded, membership continues to grow, and new players of mixed ability are warmly welcomed. Making tennis everyone's game, East Bergholt won LTA Club of the Year 2023 – and here's how their vision became reality.





KEY PROJECTS AND VISION

In 2020, a new and progressive committee was formed, and a new Head Coach appointed, Matthew Watson. The vision was simple: to make tennis accessible to all local people with good quality facilities.

The club soon embarked on its biggest challenge. The 20-year-old lights needed upgrading to state-of-the-art floodlights which would increase playing time for all and be more cost effective. They raised £10k in just 28 days, thanks to an innovative crowdfunding campaign, Sport England grant and funds from Babergh District Council. The new floodlights are energy efficient, environmentally friendly and enable year-round play.

Everyone is welcome at East Bergholt, regardless of ability. The club appeals to a broad audience through provision of LTA programmes such as Cardio Tennis, Tennis Xpress, LTA Youth Start and disability tennis. Two LTA open days in 2022 were fantastically attended, bringing new members in.

Regular member engagement has been key to their growth. The club uses Whatsapp to share news and information with coaching groups and parents. Off-court, social activities include Wimbledon finals get togethers, meals out and pub nights. Quizzes and seasonal activities are also in the pipeline. This is an effective way to encourage new members to take up social tennis or group coaching suited to their level.

East Bergholt strives to be welcoming, safe and inclusive, and has established policies and procedures in terms of safeguarding and wellbeing. The welfare office information is clearly signposted, and the welfare officer is on site at least two times a week.



The rise of the club is truly amazing. We believe in accessible tennis for everyone, with low fees and real community spirit. New members comment on how welcoming and friendly players are. We have ambitious plans and will continue to work with charities, partners and schools and develop our provision of disability tennis.”

Matthew Watson,
Head Coach, East Bergholt TC



SERVING THE COMMUNITY

As a result of new floodlights, growing membership and broad coaching programme, East Bergholt is now an important source of social and physical interaction for local people:

- **The club has nearly 300 members**, coaching six days a week, two social sessions and eight teams in all seasons
- **Annual membership is unbelievably good value:** £20 for kids and £80 for adults
- **The club offers 11.5 hours of group coaching for kids and five hours of adult coaching.** There are fantastic club sessions on Tuesdays and Sundays led by the safeguarding officer that are often full
- **The club delivers tennis in five local primary schools.** Three of these have regular lessons either before school or after school. All schools have taken up the LTA Youth Schools voucher offer
- **Partnering with a local Down's Syndrome charity**, the club offered inclusive summer tennis opportunities and is planning to expand its disability sessions working with UK charity Bright Ideas for Tennis and the LTA
- At their most recent fundraising event, over 60 members attended coaching with Bright Ideas, **raising over £1,000 for the club.**

All this has been achieved operating out of 'three courts and a shed'. The proactive running of the club would not be possible without an army of volunteers, including the dedicated committee.

INCREASING MEMBERSHIP FROM 22 TO 300+



“

The club needed to change, and we are proud of what we have achieved in just a few years. Increasing the membership from 22 to 300+ has opened up tennis to a much bigger audience, whether people are looking for social tennis or competitive leagues. As we grow, we will ensure our facilities can sustain year-round tennis and events, providing a safe, inclusive environment. Being awarded Club of the Year proves that clubs can re-invent themselves and we hope we have inspired others to do the same.”

Paul Cansdale,
Chair and Welfare Officer,
East Bergholt TC

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LTA, The National Tennis Centre
100 Priory Lane, Roehampton
London SW15 5JQ

T: 020 8487 7000
E: info@lta.org.uk
www.lta.org.uk

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