**Bowls England news release – Wednesday 18th March 2020**

**BOWLS ENGLAND SETS OUT PLANS FOR 2020 SEASON IN RESPONSE TO CORONAVIRUS OUTBREAK**

Bowls England has announced the cancellation of all its domestic events ahead of the 2020 lawn bowls season in response to the latest Government advice and growing concerns from bowlers about how the Coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak will impact lawn bowls.

The decision, which was reached at an Emergency Meeting of Board members and key staff, held on Tuesday 17th March, covers all National Championships, National Competitions and other domestic events. Discussions are ongoing with the British Isles Bowls Council and British Isles Women’s Bowls Council with regard to British Isles events this year.

Bowls England will be providing support and advice to clubs and county associations over the coming weeks to ensure the future of the sport – including plans for a proposed ‘Festival of Bowls’ later in the season.

Tony Allcock OBE, Bowls England Chief Executive, said: “Every organisation is currently coming to terms with a global situation that is unprecedented, to which Bowls England is sadly not immune. The National Finals are the conclusion of a long process that starts each year in May, therefore it is not possible for the qualification process to be completed in time throughout our 35 county associations.

“However, bowlers are known to be resilient and have proven in the past that they join together and support each other in the time of need. Now, more than ever, is the time for us all to work together to ensure that our clubs and bowling greens are available when it is deemed safe to resume our much-loved sport. So we would urge our members to commit to their clubs, keep an eye out for their fellow members who may feel isolated and be ready to get back on the greens when Government guidance allows.

“Finally, I wish to thank my staff team for their support at this time in managing this ever-changing situation. We have been inundated with enquiries from our clubs and county associations, and we will ensure that each and every enquiry is responded to in the coming days. However, our priority in the next two days will be ensuring that our staff are able to work from home effectively from next Monday”

The Board agreed that one of the most important areas of work for Bowls England over the coming weeks will be club support. Bowls England plans to provide advice and support on subjects including:

a.      Coronavirus Guidance

b.      Minimum amount of Greens Maintenance required so greens are playable when we resume bowling

c.      Funding (including Club Loans and encouraging bowlers to support their clubs financially by continuing to pay their annual subscriptions – so clubs will still be there for them when we resume bowling)

d.      Recruitment

e.      Looking after each other (including encouraging members to keep an eye out for each other, especially fellow bowlers who may live on their own)

f.       Staying Fit (including producing a ‘Bowlers’ Workout’ in order to keep members active during isolation or working from home)

Other key decisions taken by the Board were:

1.                Bowls England office to close with effect from Friday 20th March and all staff (including Coach Bowls employees) to work from home with effect from Monday 23rd March – support for Clubs and County Associations will continue as normal.

2.                Work on the new Bowls England Head Office is put ‘on hold’ until further notice

3.                In support of Clubs at this difficult time, Bowls England will refund the Affiliation Fees paid for 2020 by each playing member. Bowls England will arrange refunds to the county associations, who are mandated to ensure that all monies are then paid to their Member Clubs.

4.                Board to meet regularly via Skype/Conference Call to monitor the ever-changing situation, review the impact on bowls and plan accordingly - regular updates will be issued.