

Bringing together flat green bowls as England Bowls.

For decades bowlers have talked about merging the indoor and outdoor organisations. With financial support of Sport England and a specialist consultancy firm we have completed a detailed outline of a merger. Following strong support from a survey of both indoor and outdoor bowlers, and positive indications from the legal and organisational analysis, now is the time to take a decisive step.

Imagine a future where flat green bowls speaks with one, uplifting voice. For too long we've been separated - indoors and outdoors, summer and winter - while the world around us has changed and competition for people's leisure time has become fiercer. By merging EIBA and Bowls England to form England Bowls, we'll build on our existing collaborations to create a single, stronger official governing body which represents everybody who loves our sport.

Together, we'll have a unified vision and a coordinated strategy to grow participation, secure investment, and showcase bowls as the accessible, year-round sport it truly is. Clubs and counties will benefit from a simpler structure, modern governance, and streamlined services - less administration, more support, and more time to focus on playing and promoting the game.

With one organisation, we'll build regional delivery hubs to support affiliated clubs, one competitions and events calendar, and a consistent player pathway from grassroots to international level. And by combining resources, we'll open new funding and commercial opportunities, whilst reinvesting savings directly into the sport's development, facilities, and workforce.

England Bowls isn't just a merger - it's a movement to reignite our sport's place in public life, celebrate its inclusiveness, unlock its potential and secure its future for generations to come.

The purpose of England Bowls

A National Governing Body (NGB) is an organisation that acts as the custodian of its sport and governs activity within that sport. Sometimes NGBs get are criticized as it's not always easy to please everyone, but they are an essential part of a sport's fabric, bring its many varied parts together as one and have the sports best interests at heart.

Most sports have different formats or codes under the jurisdiction of one NGB. Take British Cycling, for example, it governs all varieties of cycling – road, BMX, track cycling, mountain-biking...and so on.

Should the merger happen, England Bowls will be the official NGB for flat green outdoor and indoor bowls. Its role as an NGB will be broad and encompasses: -

- Promoting flat green bowls and lobbying on its behalf to ensure its voice is heard.
- Investing in flat green bowls whether it be through the generation of commercial revenues or through the channelling of government funding.
- Providing practical support to affiliated flat green bowls clubs and grassroots players.
- Developing and delivering new ways to play the game to grow participation.
- Administering and staging international and national flat green bowls competition and events.
- Providing the structures to educate and develop coaches, umpires and volunteers.
- Managing international teams including flat green bowls' involvement within Team England, England's Commonwealth Games Team.

- Managing talent development pathways to help players fulfil their potential.
- Interfacing with Sport England, UK Sport, World Bowls and other partner organisations.
- Regulating the environment in which the sport is played including discipline and safeguarding.

An NGB has a critical role for a sport. Forming England Bowls will allow all these activities to be delivered more successfully, more efficiently, and more effectively all year round.

The benefits of creating England Bowls

Whilst positive progress has been made by both organisations in recent years, EIBA and Bowls England firmly believe that combining forces to create England Bowls will pave the way to a brighter future. After all, if we stand still, we go backwards and there is more choice than ever for people looking to play sport or be active.

The benefits can be summarised into four broad areas.

One, uplifting voice for flat green bowls

For a generation, our sport has drifted away from the mainstream public consciousness. At a time when competition for people's attention, time and budgets has never been fiercer, to reach and engage new audiences we must unite and more powerfully champion the value of flat green bowls.

England Bowls will -

- Develop one unified strategy for flat green bowls that everyone can get behind.
- Have one set of communication channels to provide information to existing bowlers and promote our sport to new audiences.
- Be better placed to secure more coverage of flat green bowls in the media.
- Advocate and lobby for bowls more strongly to national and local government policy and decision-makers.

A governing body for everybody in our sport

Indoor/outdoor, elite/grassroots, county/national, young/old. Whilst we are united by a passion for our sport of bowls, too often we focus on difference and assume progress is a zero-sum game – a trade-off, if you like. It's imperative we embrace our diversity, ensure everybody is represented and recognise that progress can benefit all our sport.

England Bowls will -

- Adopt a modern governance structure that reflects a merger of equals and gives all stakeholders the opportunity to influence future decisions.
- Develop one, joined-up competitions and events calendar
- Be transparent and strategic about where it spends money, balancing all parts of our sport from grassroots to international.
- Develop a network of Regional Delivery Hubs to support the development of the sport, creating a more consistent approach across the country.

A simpler, more effective structure and service

Over many years the convoluted nature of our sport's governance has created duplications and frustrations. At a time when volunteer capacity is stretched and bowlers expect more, it is critical that we make it as easy as possible to administer our sport and spend more of our time grasping the opportunities ahead of us.

England Bowls will -

- Integrate and improve its range of club services.
- Create one membership database of clubs so that we can provide tailored support, reduce untargeted communications and ease club administration.
- Rationalise its approach to affiliation, safeguarding and discipline to create clarity and efficiency when people need their NGB
- Standardise and align rules, policies and procedures to make enjoying and administering bowls simpler.
- Create a national resource centre of templates and best practice so County Associations and Clubs can access time-saving content.
- Have an all-year around player-centric Performance Pathway and Talent Development programme.
- Organise resource to better respond to the ever-increasing legal, governance and administrative requirements.

More investment into growing flat green bowls

Flat green bowls generates very low levels of public and commercial funding given the scale of its participant base. With our sport's ability to get everybody active and our core demographic of over 65s growing, we have a strong case for greater investment. Owing to its increased reach and resonance, one governing body is a more compelling proposition for greater investment into our sport.

England Bowls will -

- Strengthen and simplify our sport's relationship with funders in positioning bowls' role in creating a more active society
- Combine EIBA and Bowls England's commercial assets delivering more value for existing and potential sponsors.
- Be able to access better data and insights that help clubs grow participation and unlock new B2C revenue opportunities.
- Create efficiency savings from reduced duplication that can be reinvested back into growing our sport and supporting its workforce.
- Be one point of contact for key partner organisations for example World Bowls and Sport England to maximise opportunities.

The Roadmap to Creating England Bowls

While there is much more that unites us than divides us, merging two organisations isn't simple. EIBA and Bowls England have different governance models, affiliation systems and ways of operating. Creating England Bowls requires careful planning, consultation with stakeholders and a willingness to compromise.

Leading this project is a Joint Board Working Group made up of representatives from the EIBA and Bowls England Boards. Their discussions are informed by the work of a Joint Executive Group made up of the EIBA and Bowls England Chief Executives and specialist consultants, Campbell Tickell who have been funded by Sport England. The Joint Board Working Group's recommendations go to the respective EIBA and Bowls England Boards and the final proposals will be put to the members of EIBA and Bowls England at an AGM or SGM. It is anticipated this will be early in 2027.

Both EIBA and Bowls England's Boards have independently approved the initial outline of how a merger might look. Between now and these decisions next year, we will be: -

- Identifying what must be in place structurally, legally and operationally on day 1 of England Bowls and undertaking work on these areas. For those matters that would not be in place on day 1, an implementation plan would be developed for them to be phased in over the following months.

- Setting up a 'Designate Board' responsible for considering the affairs of England Bowls before Day 1. This Board will be made up of existing EIBA and Bowls England Board members and they would become the Board on Day 1 of England Bowls. This would ensure a smooth transition to the new NGB.
- Undertaking due diligence on the EIBA and Bowls England businesses, financial planning and ensuring essential financial systems and processes are in place.
- Developing a governance and compliance framework including new Articles of Association, standardised Rules and Regulations and aligning key policies.
- Exploring the range of operational activities of both organisations, and planning how these would be best delivered as one organisation and one staff team. Creating clarity of roles and responsibilities between NGB, Regional Delivery Hubs, County Associations and Clubs so we can all work together effectively.
- Communicating progress to everybody who is invested in the future of bowls and meeting with key stakeholders to listen to their feedback and enable them to influence our work.

We will keep our bowls community informed on developments through this website and our digital and social communications.

Get in touch

If you have any thoughts or questions about the merger, please email ourfuture@bowlsengland.com or info@eiba.co.uk , using the subject line "England Bowls merger".

FAQs

General

How is this project being funded?

EIBA and Bowls England put a case to Sport England explaining the benefits of one governing body for flat green bowls and they have funded the project, including the engagement of a specialist company, Campbell Tickell. Sport England is the most important stakeholder for our sport, and their support of our ambition should not be overlooked.

Is there a plan B?

No, this is a binary decision. Our communications will lay out the plans to encourage everybody to recognise that the benefits of merging far outweigh the effort of changing.

What if the merger does not happen?

Simply EIBA and Bowls England would exist as we currently do, and we will continue to collaborate. That said, we would perpetuate the inefficiencies of being separate organisations and miss out on all the opportunity outlined above. As a sport, it is likely that we would continue to lose out to other sports and activities which are growing faster than bowls.

Research and consultation

Have you done any research?

Yes, over 3,000 bowlers, administrators and officials responded to a survey about the merger last year. Over 75% of people felt positive about the prospects of a merger with 15% unsure and almost 80% felt some confidence that a unified NGB would help our sport be more appealing to the public.

We learned that what matters most to people is that the new NGB delivers: -

- Stronger advocacy for bowls as a sport.
- Greater opportunities for the sport to secure more public and commercial funding.
- A joined up all year-round competitions and events programme.
- Efficiency savings by reducing duplicated activity.

Concerns expressed were: -

- the merging of the two organisation's cultures.
- losing heritage.
- making changes to competitions.

How will you engage members?

We will ensure there is regular communication over the coming months explaining plans. This will be through Bowls England's newsletters – The Jack and Club Together – and EIBA's Beyond The Rink.

Bowls England will be discussing with County Associations at the monthly on-line meetings and at the annual County Conference in October.

EIBA will be communicating directly with its Clubs and Counties and hosting webinars in October and November.

We have also assembled a Stakeholder Forum made up of representatives from across our sport, including County Association administrators and indoor Bowls Clubs managers and administrators, who will meet regularly to provide feedback on proposals and help shape plans.

Operating Model

What will be different on day 1 of England Bowls?

We are in the middle of identifying exactly what this looks like but the governance, financial and business arrangements must be in place for England Bowls. We will have a new brand identity and joined up communications, we will align as many systems, processes and policies as practicable and there will be a plan in place for the integration of all business functions.

What will this mean for indoor and outdoor County Associations?

Indoor and outdoor County Associations will be members of England Bowls. The new NGB will work closely with County Associations to administer the sport and support County Associations in their endeavours. In due course, there may be the opportunity for indoor and outdoor County Associations to come together to enjoy the benefits outlined in this project, but at a county level.

What will this mean for indoor and outdoor bowls clubs?

Indoor and outdoor clubs will be members of England Bowls. They will affiliate to the new governing body and benefit from the services Bowls England provides.

What will change for bowlers?

For many bowlers, much will remain the same. Thousands of people across the country will continue to enjoy the same local and national competitions, including the National Championships. The rules of the sport will be the same. But, in time, bowlers are more

likely to see their sport grow and benefit from their clubs being well supported and thriving.

What exactly will the Regional Delivery Hubs do?

We are currently consulting with County Associations and Clubs about their role, but we believe these regional centres can add firepower to the NGBs activities particularly in areas such as coaching, talent pathway, regional competitions, development, safeguarding and club services.

What does this mean for partner organisations like World Bowls, Bowls Development Alliance, Coach Bowls, and EBUA?

Coach Bowls is jointly owned by EIBA and Bowls England and therefore this area of work will form part of England Bowls.

Other partners who currently have a relationship with either EIBA or Bowls England, or both of us, will partner with England Bowls and we will continue to work collaboratively in pursuit of our shared interests.

Legal and Governance

How will the two organisations be merged?

Following much discussion about the options available to us, it has been identified that the easiest and most cost-effective way to create a new, single organisation is for the EIBA to transfer its business, known as a Transfer of Engagements, through Bowls England to form England Bowls.

Is this a Bowls England take-over?

Absolutely not. The method of merger is purely the wiring that knits our two organisations together. Culturally the organization will be one, with a passion and responsibility to nurture flat green bowls irrespective of whether it's played on an outdoor or indoor green.

How will the new Board be set up?

We will set up a Designate Board made of members of EIBA and Bowls England's Boards. The board will be consistent with the requirements of Sport England's Code of Governance and include a Chair, Senior Independent Director and both member-elected and independent directors. There will a selection process based on the skills required of the new board and this Shadow Board will become the England Bowls board on Day 1 of the new NGB.

How will the voting work at the AGM?

One of the differences between EIBA and Bowls England is the nature of its membership and governance. England Bowls' members will be both County Associations and Clubs and both constituent parts will be represented in the new governance model. We need to get into more detail, but the principles here is to create the most equitable and democratic voting system across the country.

Finances

What are the expected financial benefits?

Detailed work is currently ongoing on the modelling process and covers all aspects including the anticipated financial benefits of the merger, the treatment of existing assets and liabilities, the transitional costs and their funding and the affiliation fee structure.