

New petanque league ready to bowl along

Petanque has grown in the Lothians and beyond to the extent that a league of ten clubs is due to be launched next Spring.

One of the driving forces behind a sport also known as French boule is Sandy Howden who has likewise helped establish the latest club in Dalkeith.

Sandy and his wife, Margaret, are chair/secretary of a group responsible for ensuring the success of a twin town arrangement involving Dalkeith and Jarnac, South-West France.

The idea of strengthening relations through pétanque seemed an obvious one and is on track but the initial challenge has been to create a piste in Dalkeith.

Sandy was motivated to go around the area photographing pétanque facilities including Dunbar, Haddington, Leith Links (unused), Portobello (unused), Inverleith, Penicuik and Roslin.



The Dalkeith petanque piste opened in August. Driving force Sandy Howden is on the left of the group in the grey jacket. The results were printed in an eight page brochure on why Dalkeith should have a petanque piste and it has proved central to much successful political lobbying at local level.

Considerable funds were unlocked from councillors' environmental funds not only for Dalkeith but firstly from nearby Newtongrange.

Soon after the piste in Newtongrange opened membership reached over 100 and nine players are representing Scotland.

Two years later members of the Midlothian Indoor bowling Club in Dalkeith asked Sandy to replicate the Newtongrange venture and in August this year a grand opening took place.

After three months there are now 43 members playing three times each week.

Sandy said: "The Mental Health group in Kings Park use this facility every day. We have a 16-year-old potential star who is autistic with ADHD and an 80 per cent blind veteran playing.

"We raised money for a wheelchair accessible bench so we can

now accommodate players in wheelchairs and the whole piste is community funded.

“We are having friendly winter meetings between clubs till the proper league starts comprising Selkirk, Walkerburn, Dunbar, Haddington, Dalkeith, Newtongrange, Roslin, Penicuik and Inverleith Edinburgh and possibly Musselburgh if ready.”

As for the link with Jarnac?

“We have written to the Mayor’s office in Jarnac where there is a huge petanque piste to see if we can come over in May to play a tournament. When they were here earlier this year they were delighted at our intention to visit.”