



STOWMARKET STRIDERS RUNNING CLUB

Thank you, Mr Chairman, for the opportunity to speak about the achievements and future plans for Stowmarket Striders Running Club. I am Rachel Oakley, Club Chairman, and this is my third year in post.

Like all local organisations, Striders were no stranger to the impacts and effects of the Covid Pandemic. Our training programmes, events and races were all initially non-existent and then continually disrupted whilst restrictions lasted – although we fully understood the need for the restrictions and complied with them. Our governing body England Athletics provided guidelines to steer us through this difficult period. The club is also affiliated to British Triathlon.

Whilst free of restrictions since July of last year, we were impacted again during the rise of the Omicron variant last winter; the implementation of plan b measures meant that our Christmas Party had to be cancelled. This year, thus far, we have managed to keep up a full training programme and races are back on.

Stowmarket Striders was formed in 1986 and last year marked our 35th anniversary, although, due to covid guidelines we were ultimately not able to celebrate the achievement socially. We still have at least one founder member in the club.

The Club organises three flagship road races during the year, one of which, the Stowmarket Half-Marathon (or the Robert Tomlinson Half-Marathon) is hosted by a Buxhall business, Tomlinson Groundcare. The race takes in just over 13 miles of beautiful countryside starting and finishing in Buxhall. We are grateful to Mrs Tomlinson for allowing us the continued use of their business premises as a convenient base for the race, the arrangement having been started by the late Robert Tomlinson who is sadly missed. One of the Race Directors, Les Basham, lives in Buxhall and is a member of your Parish Council.

We have a five mile race from Haughley Park in June as part of the Friday Five series of five mile races in Suffolk. We also have the Scenic Seven race, a 7 mile race around the nearby countryside each Remembrance Sunday; this is probably our most popular road race in recent years as it fills up very quickly.

In the winter-time, the Club hosts a leg of the Suffolk Cross Country League, again at Haughley Park and a leg of the East Anglian Cross Country League from Chilton Fields in Stowmarket.

Our membership is open to juniors from the ages of 8 – 17 and seniors from age 18 and we have members through all age groups including over 70s. In fact we have at least two prolific and very successful racers in the over 70 age range. We are in the process of completing annual membership renewals and we have around 210 seniors and 40 juniors. This is down on pre pandemic levels but we are steadily growing again and have been welcoming at least one or two newcomers each week.

We have a strong, hardworking committee of 15, although we are looking for someone to take on the roles of publicity officer and social secretary. We have a 20 + team of coaches and coaching assistants who deliver our varied training programme, although not all are active at any one time. Most of our active coaches are currently delivering at least one session per week. Tuesday evenings are our mixed ability sessions and on a Thursday evening a very popular interval endurance session is held. During the winter months cross country training takes place at Haughley Park on Sunday mornings in addition. Some members also enjoy non-coached social runs on a Thursday evening.

Past officers and committees have built up a financially healthy club. In addition, Striders are very proud of their charity work. During the summer months, our members host trail runs/ walks, which start and finish from a local village pub, those attending paying £2.00 each. We regularly have an average of 70 + people taking part and non members are welcome. We have achieved a win-win situation of combining healthy exercise, socialising and supporting local pubs whilst raising money for local charities. We usually support three charities per year in this way and last year the three charities were presented with a cheque for £850.00 each. In addition, from our half marathon we made a donation of £900.00 to MSUK, the charity supported by the late Robert Tomlinson and on Remembrance Sunday the Club regularly raises £500.00 for the RBL Poppy Appeal from the refreshment stall at the Scenic Seven.

Looking forward, the club is recruiting and enrolling the next generation of coaches into the EA training programme. We were awarded funding from MSDC post-covid development grants administered via Suffolk Community Action in order to develop our future training needs. Some of this funding has also gone toward's the club's development of its triathlon training as we have three qualified triathlon coaches. Recently we have piloted some coached swimming sessions which received good feedback and in the near future some bike training for triathletes will be added to our programme.

A new endeavour is to re-introduce training for beginners to running via the couch to 5km programme. We now have an experienced coach in delivering these programmes, which can be attended by non-members for a nominal cost. This means someone new to running can get the support of our coaching team as well as peer support from fellow runners. We expected about 20 – 25 to sign up but ultimately we have 40 participants.

Lastly, the Club is involved, along with other sports clubs, in discussions with Mid-Suffolk Council on a proposed project to improve sports, leisure and wellbeing facilities on the new High School site and Chilton Fields area. A range of improvements is under discussion which include the potential for a new training track with add-on field athletics provisions. If successful, this will provide enhanced training facilities and enable the Club to develop field athletics, expanding the reach of our training offers.

So looking forward the Club is confident that we are meeting the needs of all runners and we have a friendly and vibrant membership base. We have bounced back from the pandemic and our members are coming back stronger than ever with many breaking club records and achieving great success with personal bests. Thank you for letting me share this with you today and if you would like to know more please visit our website www.stowmarketstriders.org.uk. I wish the Council and residents every success for the year ahead.