

Bearcat Running Club

History and Key Information [September 2023]

1. Introduction

This document provides essential information about The Bearcat Running Club, describing our core principles, explaining how we organise ourselves, identifying our key aims and objectives and referring to underlying policies. The Appendix section provides further detail where noted.

2. Where we have come from and who we are

2.1 Origins of the club

The club was founded in 2012 by Caitlin Limmer to provide a running club with a particular emphasis on inclusivity. Caitlin aimed to be the London Marathon of running clubs i.e. to provide an environment that was suitable for all abilities.

A key feature of the club is its association with the Turks Head pub. This was based on a relationship that Caitlin and her husband had with Fullers. Fullers were keen to support health in our community and continue to provide valuable support to the club's operation and sustainability.

The name of the club was inspired by its connection to the Turks Head pub and its long running hosting of the Bearcat Comedy Club. As the running club usually runs from the Turks Head pub on a Sunday morning, it was decided to link the club more closely to that base by connecting the names (and it's a cool name!).

Another link with the Turks Head is the club's support for the 'Turks Head 10' annual running event. This was relaunched by Caitlin who redesigned it from its original format, a 10 mile relaxed, informal pub run, to an all-inclusive 10KM race intended as a celebration for all runners. The Bearcat Running Club helps provide the marshals for the event while the Turks Head Pub host the famous after-run party.

From the club's beginning, the aim was to provide an environment that is warm, supportive, encouraging and educational. To allow the runner / walker to achieve the goal they have within an environment that is hugely welcoming, supportive, nurturing with a great emphasis on inclusivity and community.

A measure of the success in achieving Caitlin's aims for the club was in a comment made by Paul Sinton Hewitt, founder of Parkrun, when he said, "If Parkrun was a running club, it would be The Bearcat Running Club".

It is important to note, other running clubs are absolutely respected by us and we have strong links and relationships with our two closest running clubs, Ranelagh Harriers and Stragglers Running Club.

2.2 Bearcat Running Club renewed

The club had great success throughout the period from its opening on September 19th 2012 to March 2020 when, like most of the world, it was hit by the impact of the COVID pandemic. Emerging cautiously from the pandemic period it took a long while to build back the numbers coming out on our Sunday morning runs.

A lot of thinking went into how changes might be made to the club to give it a more formal structure that, while preserving the club's core principles, would better ensure its permanence. Following significant consultation, the renewed club was launched in May 2023 as an Unincorporated Association.

In this structure the club has a committee made up of four officer posts (Chair, Secretary, Treasurer and Membership Secretary) and has established a constitution (available on the club's website).

Another important change was to move from operating on a 'pay as you go' basis to an annual subscription model in conjunction with a membership database. In accordance with our commitment to inclusivity, we strive to set the membership subscription rate at an affordable level (*see the Bearcat web site for subscription details*).

Reflecting the original aims of the club, the Committee determined the following wording to describe the club in its new membership application form:

"We are a running club with membership open to those of all abilities from 18 years of age. As a club we prioritise fun, enjoyment, improving fitness and health and making a positive contribution to the community. We do not compete to be the fastest club but we strive to be the friendliest and provide a great community that encompasses a walking group, those beginning on their running journey, and all running abilities up to those who are London Marathon good for age standard."

3. Where, when and how we meet

3.1 General details

We meet every Sunday morning in readiness for club announcements at 8.30am with training sessions to start immediately after.

Our usual meeting place on Sunday morning is the Turks Head pub. However, generally once per month and at particular times of the year (often in July/August and November) we meet in local parks, e.g. Bushy Park, Richmond Park and Orleans Gardens. Our schedule of meeting places is published on the club website and each week the meeting place for the forthcoming weekend is confirmed in a news email (also put on the club Facebook page).

Our training sessions are usually 50-60 minutes in duration organised across 9 different ability groups (see appendix 1), each with a leader (see 3.3 below).

3.2 What a Bearcat Sunday looks like

We have at least two from our team of leaders on 'opening up' duty by no later than 8.15am. They oversee the signing in of all attendees that day, ensuring all are allocated to one of the nine differing ability groups.

They also make sure that anyone attending the club for the first time is particularly welcomed and that an interim disclaimer form is completed by anyone attending on a 'try out' basis.

We encourage arrivals by 8.25 (5-10 minutes earlier if attending for the first time) so that club announcements can be made at 8.30am. This includes notification of key forthcoming events and confirmation of the group leaders for the day. We aim for everyone to break into their groups and head off by 8.35am.

Depending on the nature of the activity and the ability level of the group, the session length will normally be of 50 minutes to 60 minutes in duration, followed by warm down stretches.

Afterwards, if running out of our base at The Turks Head Pub that week, there is the option to stay for a while to socialise in the pub with free tea and coffee facilities kindly provided by the Turks Head management. If not at The Turks Head, we aim to run from an area that provides a café for us to socialise afterwards, typically Richmond and Bushy parks.

3.3 About our Leaders

All our leaders have significant experience with The Bearcat Running Club and understand and embrace the ethos of the club. Each brings their individual personality and running experience to the role which, as with the committee positions, are undertaken on a voluntary basis.

The *core leaders* of our team are those who have undergone the LIRF (Leaders in Running Fitness) Course with England Athletics. They are insured with England Athletics. We maintain a contingent of at least 15 LIRF leaders.

To supplement the LIRF leaders, we welcome the involvement of *support leaders* who have the same understanding and commitment to the ethos of the club and are significantly experienced in running with the group for which they take the leader role. The activities they lead are covered by the club's own insurance policy.

Each week, the leaders are given the route and key directions for the session they will lead but they have discretion to apply reasonable adjustments to these, responding to conditions and circumstances during the session.

Leaders start sessions with the following:

- Introductions - particularly making sure that anyone new to the group (e.g. those moving to a faster paced group or completely new to the club) is made welcome
- Explanation of the route and other key features of the session (e.g. explanation if the session will involve hill work or speed intervals)
- Explanation of any significant health and safety factors to look out for on the route
- A reminder for front runners in the group to check from time to time if 'looping back' is required if the distance between them and back markers in the group is getting too big.

During the session leaders incorporate a warmup (running groups), continue to give route directions and promote a group dynamic that is encouraging, motivating and supportive.

Continuously monitoring health and safety, leaders encourage joint vigilance, e.g. the calling out of hazards (approaching bikes / other runners being the most common). They carry basic first aid items and also a mobile phone in case of emergencies. At the end of the session they oversee warm down and stretching.

We welcome interest from any of our regularly attending club members about being on our support leader list and from time to time encourage existing support leaders to undertake the LIRF training. The club will encourage LIRF leader training and may be able to make a part contribution towards the costs of training (this will be discussed with an individual or group of individuals at the time that the training is proposed, it will depend on club finances and the forecast for club funds for the balance of the year). Anyone interested in becoming a support leader or undertaking the LIRF training to become a core leader, please email office@bearcatrunningclub.co.uk .

3.4 The Physical Training

We forward plan a programme to provide varied training through the year.

The aim is to develop experience of different forms of training that will help develop running fitness in different ways, e.g. by improving cardiovascular performance or endurance.

Over any 6 week period we typically include sessions that incorporate speed work (intervals and caterpillars), hills and extra distance. We also incorporate some sessions that are aimed at being more social.

We ensure that no runner is left behind by implementing a looping system within a group, this ensures that nobody is made to feel they are holding up a group or that the front runners are not demotivated/lose mileage.

3.5 Couch to 5km ("C25k")

Based on take up, popularity and adequate funds in future years we hope each year to run at least one six week 'Couch to 5KM' programme, looking to encourage more people to take up running and join the Bearcat community.

The programme is offered on a free basis to newcomers to the club but, on completion, we hope that the experience of running with the Bearcats will have the majority wanting to continue their running journey as members of the club.

Each programme is overseen by one or two leaders with other leaders supporting through the weeks to inspire and support the participants. The programme involves an organised session every Sunday when the club meets plus guidance on 'homework' to be undertaken through the week.

Advice and support is facilitated through a WhatsApp group administered by the overseeing leaders, with participants often using this to arrange meet ups between the Sunday sessions to do their 'homework' together.

We aim for 'graduation' at the end of the programme to involve all members of the group, along with many other Bearcats, coming together to take part in one of the Saturday morning Parkrun events in the local area.

3.6 Motivation

One of the key aims of the club is to help all members push their running boundaries, whether that's to achieve a faster time or complete a longer distance. This ambition extends to all ability groups. We are equally excited to celebrate those completing their first 5km and 10km events as those reaching their first Marathon finish line.

Many club members take part in a wide range of running events throughout the year from weekly parkruns to longer events covering all distances up to marathon distance (and even the occasional 'ultra'). We encourage all who are happy to do so to share their experience, whether that is in organised post Sunday run 'talk' sessions or just by being open to being approached by individuals in the club seeking advice.

Sunday mornings with the Bearcats serve as a great place for plans to be hatched, whether that's for joint Parkrun 'tourism' or for Bearcats to 'mob' a longer distance event. For many events we nominate a 'captain' to particularly promote as much Bearcat participation as possible. The events are further promoted in our weekly newsletters and in Sunday pre-run 'club announcements'.

Certain events are particularly earmarked by the club as motivational opportunities to push the boundaries of our normal running 'comfort zones', whether that's to go a bit further in distance or a bit faster. Every year this includes the Cabbage Patch 10, a ten mile event organised by the Stragglers. For the Cabbage Patch 10 we actually close the club as we generally have 50 or more club members running in the event, with many staying on for post run celebrations. Similarly, the club is closed on the day of the Turks Head 10 as, with the

club's close association with the event (mentioned in 2.1), most club members are either running in it or helping with the marshalling.

We are also looking to re-introduce an old club tradition by having at least one event per year where a 'Bearcat coach' is arranged so that a large contingent of Bearcats can travel to the event together. In the past such coach trips have been arranged for the Great South Run in Portsmouth (2015), Brighton Marathon and 10KM events (2017 and 2018) and the Grand Union Canal Half Marathon (2018).

In the re-launch of this tradition in the 2023-24 membership year, the club will subsidise the cost of hiring a coach to take up to 50 to participate in the Brighton Half Marathon on 25 February 2024.

4. Beyond the running

4.1 Mental Health

As with physical health, the promotion of good mental health is a fundamental objective of the club.

Two club members are nominated as Mental Health Champions. In conjunction with the Chair they lead on the development and implementation of the club's strategy of supporting mental health. The club's approach to mental health is explained further in the Mental Health document (on the club's website) and includes occasional post run talk sessions.

4.2 The Social Side and the Community Dimension

Fun and enjoyment are key ingredients of the Bearcat Running Club experience.

Building up from our standard training sessions (which we aim to be good fun in any case) we have social sessions where more emphasis is put on club members from our different ability groups getting to know one another better.

As explained previously, we usually have the option of an after run tea/coffee chat and often have themed post run talks. Sometimes our Sunday morning are further enhanced with things such as 'Pie Sunday' and 'Bring and Share Breakfast'.

The annual 'Bearcat Bus' mentioned in 3.6 is another way in which we look to develop the social dimension of the club in conjunction with our running ambitions. Another cross-over between the motivational side and the social side is through the participation of Bearcat Running Club teams in events such as the Greenbelt Relay and the River Relay (both organised by the Stragglers). The Bearcat teams in these events are truly representative of all the ability groups in the club. Our event captains having an amazing track record of not just succeeding in the hugely complex task of co-ordinating our teams' participation but also in ensuring the club's ambition for fun, enjoyment and celebrating *every* team member's effort shines above all else.

Taking the fun a bit further away from the running, we organise a minimum of two large social evening events each year in spring and autumn with the Turks Head management always providing fantastic support to make these a success. We also promote opportunities for club members to try things together like Stand up Paddleboarding (SUP) or meeting up for a meal (often at Tai Chi!) or getting involved with the running of Clothes Exchange and Tabletop Sales events.

To show our thanks and support to Parkrun, we also aim that twice per year our club members cover all the volunteer roles at a local Saturday morning Parkrun event – for example at Crane Park or Old Deer Park.

5. Underlying policies

Although the Bearcat Running Club is not affiliated to England Athletics, the Club Committee sees guidance issued by England Athletics as an important point of reference in deciding on policies and operational arrangements in the running of the club. This includes using England Athletics' 'Club Standards' as a benchmark.

As well as referring to governance arrangements (constitution and committee), Club Standards sets out expectations that we are working towards in relation to: Grievance and Disciplinary Policy; General Data Protection Regulation; Inclusion and Diversity; Safeguarding; and Health and Safety.

The Club Constitution is already accessible on our website and others will be following soon.

Appendix 1: Our nine groups [September 2023]

Group	Typical distance covered in a Bearcat training session	Pace information (including indicative time for completing 5KM Parkrun)
Walk	3-4 miles	3-3.5mph
Run/Walk	3.5 - 4.5 miles	Running pace might be 11-12 mins per mile with regular walking interludes. Parkrun time c. 38 minutes
Novice 3	4.5 - 5 miles	11-12 mins per mile. Parkrun time c. 32-36 minutes
Novice 2	5 – 5.5 miles	10m15s -10m45s per mile. Parkrun time c. 29-31 mins
Novice 1	6 miles	9m45s -10m15s per mile. Parkrun time c. 27-28 mins
Inters 4	6 – 6.5 miles	9m30s -10m per mile. Parkrun time c. 26-27 mins
Inters 3	7 miles	8m45s – 9m30s per mile. Parkrun time c. 24-25 mins
Inters 2	7 miles	8m00s -8m45s per mile. Parkrun time c. 22-23 mins
Inters 1	7 miles	7m00s - 8m00s per mile. Parkrun time c. 19-21 mins