

Chair's Report to AGM 2021/2022

I don't think it would be any exaggeration to say that 2021/2022 has been another incredibly challenging season. A year which began, still reeling from the effects of the Covid pandemic, unsure as to whether restrictions would be completely lifted. A year where, largely as a consequence of being forced to find alternative activities during Covid, and/or a shifting of families' financial priorities, we have seen many more swimmers depart than arrive. A year during which, frankly, it has seemed that the Club's survival was seriously in doubt. But, whilst we are not even close to being out of the woods or away from the wolf who continuously tries to knock at the door, it seems, thanks to the dogged determination of the Committee, loyalty of staff, and generosity and patience of our members and some of the wider community, we are slowly on the up. Thank you to each and every one of you for anything and everything you have done and continue to do to help with this.

Fundraising

As swimming began to tiptoe its way out of the significant restrictions of Covid, in the Autumn of 2021, it became very apparent to us that we were staring into a period of significant financial shortfall and uncertainty, in spite of the fees increase implemented on 01 September 2021. Despite further rejigging of squads and the pool timetable, the continuation of restrictions on pool time and numbers, impacts of Covid-contact isolation, the consequential physical and mental health effects of the Pandemic, and price increases all continued to negatively impact our finances. We realised then that in order to have any chance of continuing the club, significant fundraising was required.

The people of Alton & District swimming Club have shown that they are not prepared to go down without a fight! There have been some marvellous fundraising campaigns benefitting the club this year, without which, we would not still be here.

By far the largest income was approximately £11,000 raised through the Crowdfunding campaign – a huge thank you to Gemma Singleton for coordinating this for us and to every single person who donated money or lots or shared the campaign in any way. The money raised included some Sport England Match Funding, proceeds from the 'Swim the Channel' sponsored swim, organised by the French-Lynch family, and a generous donation of £500 from Winkworth Plc estate agents, to name but a few. This money, as with all the money raised for the club, has been, and continues to be used to help the club's survival and availability to provide swimming lessons and competitive swimming opportunities to Alton and the wider community.

The circular walk from Selbourne, via the Jacksons' for tea and delicious homemade cake, was a great success. Thanks to Ian and Lucie for organising that and for overseeing the inception of the fantastic ADSC Zoom Quiz! Thanks too to Ian's friend and professional question editor, Alan Connor, for so generously donating his time to the cause. Congratulations to the Jordans for taking home the trophy, concocted by Ian, at no extra expense and in the spirit of austerity, from obsolete and broken ADSC trophies!

Probably the stand-out moment for me was learning that swimmer, Finlay T, had decided he was so passionate about keeping the Club going that he was going to get sponsored to swim. He clocked up three miles every day for five days, split between 6 o'clock in the morning and his normal evening training sessions. Huge thanks to him and to Mum and Dad for co-ordinating and being poolside every time to count lengths. Finlay raised an incredible £2,500 – a fantastic effort that has undoubtedly helped the Club and saw him rewarded with the Winkworth Cup at the end-of-season awards in July.

Facilities

Meetings in March with East Hampshire District Council, Everyone Active and Churchers College, proved fruitful in highlighting our financial plight and I am grateful to both EA and Churchers for temporarily waiving some of the facility hire cost increases from March until October. Pool availability was highlighted with Everyone Active, particularly in terms of the access to facilities for our Academy swimmers. EHDC's targets for Everyone Active's swimming schools are demanding – this is where they make their money in the pool too – and so we will always be fighting against them for this share of the market. That said, there may be an opportunity to develop a feeder relationship from the top stages of their scheme into our Academy, something that we are looking to progress. The relationship between Everyone Active and the Club is definitely improved – both have a better understanding of each other's operations and needs and this seems to be promoting a greater degree of co-operation.

Unfortunately, using the Taro at Petersfield has become impossible because the times offered were far too late for the age of swimmers we were aiming at. There is no doubting that this has hurt us financially as swimmers either joined the Everyone Active scheme there or left swimming altogether rather than travel to Bordon or Alton for our lessons. Keen to be able to continue to offer swimming lessons in Petersfield, in March we were delighted to secure a small amount of time at the pool at Bedales School and we welcomed back Lynn to the teaching team.

One of the best ways for swimming clubs to generate funds is to host licenced swimming meets open to other clubs. The small size of the pool deck and seating area at Alton don't help us with having large numbers of swimmers and spectators. Without spectators, we are a much less attractive proposition as an open-meet venue. What counteracts that for people is that the pool is equipped with the automatic timing equipment (AOE) that allows times to be measured without human error, displayed on the board poolside and, increases the level of licence we can get to Level 3. This, in turn increases the level of eligibility of swimmers' times for regional and higher competitions.

Having taken on the role of Competition Secretary, James excitedly sat down with me to plan the Club Championships for the summer, with thoughts of using the timing system for the first time. Software and licence upgrades complete, James headed to the pool to meet George, Operations Manager at Alton, to have a go at plugging things in. Unfortunately, they discovered that the fixings from the timing pads had been incorrectly positioned during installation and were also corroded as the wrong material had been used (there have been significant corrosion issues in the pool area since the building opened as a result of airflow issues which have promoted a corrosive atmosphere). There are still a good many snagging problems, which Everyone Active are attempting to work through and this is another one, however, James is working closely with George to try to get the system up and running before the end of the 2022/2023 season. In the meantime, we are planning to host some small invitational meets, licenced at Level 4, aimed at the younger swimmers.

Foot-fall

There will always be a natural turnover of swimmers in a club, however, in the 2021/2022 season this was much larger than average, with the majority being leavers. Of the people who volunteered a reason for leaving, a significant number were related to the effects of the

Covid-19 pandemic. Reasons such as finding alternative activities during restrictions and loving those more so not returning; enjoying the lack of time-constraints from other activities compared to swimming; financial impacts of the pandemic on bill-payers; and parents unable to facilitate the swim-taxi service, are examples. In addition, we had a large number of older teens leave to concentrate on GCSEs and A-Levels or head to further education. SwimFit is still offered for those who don't want to compete any more or need to reduce hours for a while. Swimming two sessions a week, we believe, is a good option for exam students or those rehabilitating from injury for whom the intensity of the normal performance schedule is too much but who still want to maintain some fitness. Sadly, this not always considered as an option and is something we should have worked on more. The tiered fee structure of the Club means that, for every Performance swimmer leaving the club, four Academy swimmers need to come in to balance the books. This is a tall order.

I recognise that our general membership recruitment was lacking in structure during this time and that there could, and should, have been a more concerted publicity campaign around this too. Publicity of the Club was through a closed Facebook page and the occasional Instagram or Twitter post (neither of which any of the Committee had administrator access for), and via articles in the newspaper. I'm happy to say that we are now a much slicker outfit in both departments, thanks in no small part to Frances for shaking-up and reorganising the trials and membership side of things, and Tracey F becoming our social media lead and spreading all ADSC news far and wide.

Thanks too to Ian for resurrecting the Club newsletter, which has been very well received and is not only informative but a lot of fun – don't forget to show it to your swimmers! Please bombard him with updates on what your swimmers have been up to, whether swimming-related or not, terrible jokes, and don't forget to enter the pasta competition!

On the Teaching and Coaching front, staffing levels meant Luke personally had to work a lot of cover to ensure the club continue to function as normally as possible. Kira took on the Academy Co-ordinator role, Lynn returned to teaching in Petersfield and we welcomed Tegan to the Club, as a trainee coach. My sincere thanks to all coaching and teaching staff who have worked and continue to work for our Club. Without you we can't run sessions and there would be no Club.

We also hope we have got to the bottom of the long struggle to source the money promised to us by Alton Beer Festival for providing volunteers for their events. The money is specifically for staff training and evidence of payment for courses has to be provided to release the funds from them – somewhat tricky when they won't respond to messages. Hopefully this is resolved so between this and the small bursary we get for our SwimMark accreditation, we can continue to help fund training courses to ensure teacher and coach development.

Competitions

Despite only just being properly back at swimming, a number of swimmers represented the Club at the 2021 Winter Regionals, with Joe M taking a bronze for the 50m fly.

Three rounds of Arena League team competition saw Alton compete for the top of the Division 2 West table. Pipped into second place behind Southampton in the final round, the final table saw us joint second on league points with Wycombe District C but relegated to third on total gala points and therefore missing out on promotion. Still an outstanding achievement by everyone who took part, considering how little swimming there had been when it started.

Hampshire County Championships took place early in 2022 and was another very successful meet for the Club. There were a couple of unfortunate disqualifications (the blocks at the new Winchester pool have sensors to detect movement so wriggling feet are counted as movement before the start), nonetheless it was a brilliant showing for our club. Many swimmers made finals and the junior section, in particular, bagged several podium places with some returning as County Champions in their events. By my reckoning the medal tally was 6 gold, 15 silver and 12 bronze!

Summer Regionals saw several of our swimmers making the journey to the K2 at Crawley at the beginning of May. A month that also saw trips to Sheffield for British Championships for Joe who was joined in July by James P. Absolutely fantastic that our little Club can be represented on the national stage – congratulations to both!

We finished off the season with our in-house Club Championships, which were very well attended and enjoyed by swimmers and parents alike – so nice to have spectators poolside again. My sincere thanks to everyone who gave of their time to make the sessions work, whatever role they took, and particularly to James and Laura for their incredibly hard work in organising and co-ordinating the whole thing. I think everyone would agree that no-one would have known they were flying solo for the first time!

Thanks to all the Coaches for making it possible for our swimmers to go to these events and compete.

None of these events would be able to run, for any club/area, at any level, without the support of officials, team managers and meet managers – thank you if you are one of these for our club. The cynic in me thinks this is the best way to avoid paying to sit in uncomfortable seats to watch your swimmer and their team and it certainly makes the day go more quickly! It has been a particularly successful year for our officials, many of whom have joined me in achieving the next level of qualification, including José, Chris and Carole, Becky S, and James. Congratulations all!

Awards Night

It has been so nice to be able to start socialising in person this year and we celebrated that by holding our end-of-term awards evening at Alton Rugby Club in July. It was fantastic evening, with families making the most of the warm weather outside and food and drink provided by the rugby club, The latest round of The Great Alton Bake-Off was judged and the presentation of certificates and awards to swimmers, staff and volunteers alike. Congratulations to anyone who received official recognition there! We now hope to reinstate this as an annual event for the Club.

Committee

The 2021 AGM saw the installation of Gerald as Secretary. The Committee has done its best to meet, via Zoom, once a month and can often also be found dealing with issues via the Committee WhatsApp group! During the year there has been a reshuffling of a couple of positions on the Committee, with Frances taking on Membership and Fee recovery when Kate and Nick respectively decided they needed to step down from these roles. In turn, Becky I stepped into the role of Performance Rep, which had been vacated by Frances. Thanks to all for the support they have given to the club and continue to offer.

Sadly, by the end of this year's AGM five other committee members will have hung up their hats. The sudden resignation in February, of Steve, our Treasurer, was a big shock. A time of financial crisis is not the time to lose a treasurer, however, I am truly indebted to José for

absorbing Steve's role into his own Assistant Treasurer role and helping Luke and me to be clearer about the true picture. Despite my pleading, José's other commitments mean he is not able to continue with both roles on a permanent basis. Steve's sudden departure also highlighted how important having an assistant is to that role. Frustratingly, we have not been able to persuade anyone to take on Steve's role as yet, and we are desperate to do so. I would urge anyone who has a working knowledge of Excel and a basic understanding of balancing books to consider whether this is something they could help us with.

Alison Reynolds has been our Swim Mark co-ordinator ever since I started with the Club. SwimMark is Swim England's quality standard for clubs which recognises high standards of governance, sustainability and effectiveness. Our performance against specified criteria is assessed annually and Alison has been overseeing the Club's submissions every year – no small undertaking involving an awful lot of nagging, something I'm sure she won't miss at all! Although she's stepping down this year, mindful of the forthcoming full audit in February 2023, Alison has been kind enough to offer to be a sounding board to her successor, something which the Club is very grateful for. Enjoy your 'retirement' Alison!

Most of you will know that Lisa Tolliday used to be Club Chair. She book-ended that job with, amongst other things, the Pool Bookings role – something crucial to the running of a swimming club! She has also been the main risk assessor. Like Alison, Lisa was on the committee when I arrived and has invested a great deal of time and energy into the Club, not least the terrifying prospect of understanding applying all the quickly evolving Covid guidance when she was Chair. Thank you, Lisa, for your seemingly unwaivering enthusiasm for the Club and patience with everything that's come your way, you've absolutely earned the right to step away now!

Helen Jackson has been involved with the Club for over 10 years, at least six of which have seen her being responsible for the provision and curation of the Club's trophies and medals. This is harder and much more time-consuming than it sounds, and particularly stressful when things are sprung at short-notice! Thanks Helen, you have been so supportive of the Club (and sometimes a miracle-worker) – you deserve a medal!!

Fiona Clement joined the Club at a similar time to me, although I didn't really get to know her until she became joint Development Rep with Lucie. The following year she co-opted me into the gap left when Lucie had to step away and we have worked together ever since. Almost immediately we found ourselves having to deal with the return to pool from Lockdown activity. Fiona distributed and collated all the forms for this, having to send back at least half to people who'd missed out information or not signed in all the right places! It was incredibly labour and time intensive – I know because I had the joy of doing it the next time round! For the past two years Fiona has been the Club's Vice Chair and, whilst, if not on the Committee, you may not have heard much from her in the role, she has been invaluable to me as a sounding board for the ever-changing challenges of being the Chair, and I am incredibly grateful for her tremendous support there. During that time, Fiona has taken on the mantle of co-ordinating the Club's small band of Team Managers to try to ensure we provide the right level of support at swimming meets. I'm delighted to say that, whilst she is stepping away from the main Committee as Vice Chair, Fiona will still be involved with the wider Committee Support Group, continuing in the Team Manager Co-ordination role.

I apologise that this report has turned into more of a novelette! We continue to operate in turbulent times and, as such, there is a lot to share. My hope is that this season will continue to see the necessary Club growth to ease some of the uncertainty that I know has been felt by everyone. All that remains for me to say is thank you for continuing to support

the Club. Everything the Committee does is to ensure the Club is here for you and we look forward to continuing that work in the coming year.