**Rickmansworth parkrun**

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**1. What is parkrun?**

parkrun is a collection of free 5km runs that take place at 9am, every Saturday, all year round, at more than 500 locations worldwide. They are timed runs – not races – and are completely free for anyone to enter. Beginners, children, parents with buggies, club runners and Olympic athletes have been taking part in these events since 2004. Presently, there are more than 1.1 million people registered with parkrun.

Running 5 kilometres on a regular basis is an excellent way to get fit, and this in turn encourages people to make healthier lifestyle choices.

The primary objective of parkrun is to promote health and wellbeing by providing a free weekly event that is open to people of all ages and abilities. All parkrun events are 5 kilometres because this distance is achievable for beginners who are new to running, and is long enough to encourage more serious runners to take part.

**2. Breaking down barriers to running**

Each event is coordinated entirely by local volunteers and the ethos is simple – to break down all barriers to running in a simple, effective format that inspires people to regularly take part and make healthier lifestyle choices as a result.

parkrun’s mission statement is to “bring a parkrun to every community that wants one”, and my role as a volunteer parkrun ambassador is to work with local volunteer teams and local authorities, landowners and “friends of” groups to establish new events that can be of most benefit to local communities.

A parkrun in the Aquadrome would provide new runners with a weekly target, namely to come along and run, and to try to beat their best time. The knock-on effects will be meeting other like-minded people to run with during the week, eating healthier and making healthier lifestyle choices. Many runners will gain the confidence to enter formal races, run longer distances, and join local running and triathlon clubs.

parkrun events are free and are open to people of all standards and ages, whether as volunteers or as runners. All runners receive encouragement and enjoy being part of a run open to all standards. Equally, our volunteer teams come from a huge variety of backgrounds and we urge everybody to get involved in organising.

Because parkrun is accessible to all people, and is coordinated entirely by local volunteers, anybody can be involved in some capacity, as a runner, volunteer, or both. Each parkrun event develops a community of like-minded people over time, and is a group that anyone can join. It can give people a sense of belonging, a new group of friends, and something to look forward to each week.  By always being at the same time, a strong sense of community develops, with individuals attending their weekly social parkrun regardless of weather. It is very effective at getting people into the “habit” of regular exercise.

Being a free event is perhaps our most distinctive feature, making parkruns more attractive to those on lower incomes than paid events. More than anything else, this helps to create a sense of community around our events - essential if they are to thrive long term with a healthy base of loyal volunteers. The major benefits of being free to the runner are:

* We are able to attract people who have never run before, and who may have been dissuaded by an entry fee.
* We attract runners on a regular basis.
* We do not have to administer the collection of entry fees.
* We provide competition to paid events and help to keep entry fees at a reasonable level.
* Our events are funded through local sponsorship, and are coordinated by local people for local people.

**3. Inclusivity**

parkrun is committed to ensuring events are free of unfair discrimination of any sort:

**Gender:** parkrun events have become very popular with groups of local women and mothers. The proportion of female participants at parkrun events is considerably higher than many other running events (47.5% of all parkrunners are female, and 36.5% of all runs were by women - as of July 2012). Many local and national women's running groups use our events and we ensure that our events are properly signposted from these groups.

**Ethnicity:** parkrun events already attract a wide range of participants that reflect the ethnicity of their local areas. Increasing participation by diverse ethnic groups also requires locating parkrun events in places easily accessible with the backing of local councils, combined with marketing the events to local community groups and organisations.

**Disability:** parkruns are already used by a number of disabled athletes, including runners with artificial limbs, vision impaired runners (with or without a guide runner), and runners with learning disabilities (with or without guide runners as required). The Aquadrome course will be suitable for wheelchair users unlike the parkrun in South Oxhey which is entirely off-road.

**Mental health:** According to Mind, 1 in 4 people will experience a mental health problem in any year. Exercise has been shown to be helpful to people suffering from many mental illnesses, and our free, zero commitment events offer an ideal opportunity to get a weekly dose. We also hope that many with mental illness will also benefit from being part of a supportive community of volunteers. We do however urge all runners and volunteers to maintain a healthy life balance, and to seek professional assistance if needed.

**Age:** parkruns are open to all ages and standards. Runs are age graded so that young and old can compare their performance against adults in their prime. Older athletes can focus on maintaining or beating their age graded best rather than a time PB set when they were younger. We also welcome younger runners while recognising the need to protect their welfare. We have specific guidance on this for all volunteer event teams.

**4. parkrun Ambassadors**

The parkrun ambassador is Michelle Ashwell. Her remit is to submit proposals for new events, and work with landowners and local authorities to secure the permission and funding for the event; design the course; certify the course as 5km; complete the initial risk assessment (this is a working document that the event team will update every three months, or sooner if necessary).

Once the proposal is accepted, I fully equip the event team to coordinate their event. This includes formal training days; several mentoring mornings at other parkrun events; coordinating a test event; assisting at the launch event; and providing ongoing training and support once the event launches.

Each parkrun is coordinated by a team of volunteers. The event is led by an Event Director (ED), along with a minimum of 3 run directors (RDs). The ED and the RDs take it in turns to coordinate the event each Saturday, on a rota basis.

There has been significant interest from prospective volunteers regarding a potential parkrun in The Aquadrome, so I am confident we will quickly build a volunteer team if this proposal is approved. Many of those who have expressed interest are park runners who live locally but must travel to South Oxhey, Watford, St Albans and further afield to take part in parkruns.

**5. Cost**

The cost of a parkrun is £3,000. This is a one-off cost for the life of the event. It includes:

* a parkrun laptop with bespoke parkrun unique timekeeping and registration software installed, that is rotated between the run directors from week to week. This is used to process results, update the event website/social media, respond to queries from volunteers and runners during the week
* 2 electronic stopwatches
* 2 electronic barcode scanners to register runners as they cross the finish line.
* 20 marshals’ vests
* First-aid kit
* Cones/arrows/km markers to mark the course/finishing funnel
* Creation of the event website
* Training of the core volunteer team
* IT support for processing results/updating event information
* Ongoing support/equipment upgrades and replacement kit from parkrun HQ (balance of funds)

Funding is available from Herts Sports Partnership and Hertfordshire Public Health for the creation of new parkruns.

**6. What happens on a Saturday morning?**

Each Saturday morning the run director on the day arrives around 8am to inspect the course, place the arrow markers and any “caution runner” signs if appropriate. Volunteers are asked to arrive at 8:40. The RD briefs the volunteers, allocates the roles (timers, scanners, finishing tokens, course marshals). At 8:55, the RD conducts a pre-run brief for all first-timers. This includes a course description and an explanation of how runners register their timing barcode when they finish).

At 9am, the RD conducts a pre-run brief to all participants. This includes:

* reminder to give way to park users;
* thanks to all volunteers;
* info on how to volunteer in future;
* reminder that runners under the age of 11 must be accompanied by an adult or responsible guardian
* invite to local café after the run
* any other health and safety info where necessary.

In The Aquadrome, it is envisaged this will take place on the lawn next to the Café, where the run could finish. After the brief, marshals will walk to the key sections of the course, the scanning volunteers will remain at the finish with any clothes, gear etc that is left, and runners will then walk up to the start line with the timekeepers, who will start the run and then return to the finish.

At the end of the run, runners have their times recorded. The last runner normally finishes about 9:45am. The results are processed on a parkrun laptop in the café, and this is normally completed by 10:30am. Runners receive their results shortly after, by text and by email, and the results are published on the parkrun website. Volunteers also receive a text and email thanking them for their help.

parkrun UK stipulates that new events must be grown organically, for a number of reasons. Firstly, as each run is coordinated by volunteers, we do not want new volunteers to be swamped by hundreds of runners from day one. If the numbers increase gradually, it is much more likely that volunteers will be comfortable carrying out their duties and encouraged to help out regularly.

Secondly, it is important for us to ensure that regular park users are introduced gradually to the weekly run. A substantial number of participants in parkrun events find out about their local event when they see the event taking place.

Finally, parkrun’s mission statement is to remove all barriers to taking part in a running event, whether it’s as a runner or volunteer. By growing gradually, the core event team has the chance to meet new participants, introduce them to other runners, and make them feel welcome. This in turn is the most effective model for ensuring that new runners “give back” by volunteering a couple of times per year – ensuring that the event remains sustainable.

**7. Parking**

Many parkrun events do not have car parking at all. However, all parkrun events place a strong emphasis on encouraging participants to travel to venues by sustainable modes, particularly walking, cycling, local bus services and trains/underground for events in Greater London. Given the proximity of The Aquadrome to Rickmansworth Metropolitan Line and local bus routes, this will help us promote this model. When participants do need to travel by car, we actively encourage them to car share. The Aquadrome has ample parking available for all user groups.

In parkrun literature, e-correspondence and during each Saturday’s pre-run safety brief, runners are reminded that they must give way to other park users. Impact on regular park users can to a large extent be minimalised by the design of the course, which is why the proposed routes are being suggested.

The landowners who grant permission to parkrun to use the course each Saturday at 9am, fully reserve the right to cancel the event if there are other events in the park, maintenance being undertaken, etc. In addition, the weekly run director is required to walk the course before the run each Saturday, and will cancel the event if there are any health and safety risks to runners, e.g. ice/fallen trees, etc.

A full risk assessment has been undertaken by me, and will be publicly available on the parkrun website. As per parkrun procedures, the risk assessment is a working document, which will be updated by the Event Director and the parkrun ambassador on a regular basis.

**8. Communication**

Each parkrun event has its own webpage that is incorporated into the parkrun UK website. An example is here: http://www.parkrun.org.uk/southoxhey. The websites provide information on the course/how to get there, news, upcoming cancellations, run reports, results, and the upcoming volunteer roster.

In addition, most events operate an official Facebook page and Twitter account.

Runners can ‘opt-in’ to receive the weekly parkrun UK newsletter. Runners can also ‘opt-in’ to receive information about volunteering opportunities at their local parkrun event.

**9. Volunteering opportunities**

Each parkrun event provides numerous volunteering opportunities for local people. Most volunteers come from the running group, and we ask each runner to volunteer a couple of times per year to ensure the event remains sustainable. However, there are an increasing number of university students, Duke of Edinburgh Award participants and school pupils who use parkrun events as regular volunteering opportunities.

On any given Saturday, the number of “essential” volunteers is 7 – 2 timers, 2 registers, 2 ‘key point’ marshals, one person to hand out finishing tokens. However, there are many other tasks that can be done to ensure the event flow smoothly and the workload is shared. These can include pace runners; tail runners (they collect the arrow markers); finishing area coordinators; results processors; extra marshals; photographers; people to set the signs out before the run.

Volunteers receive an automatic email and text message after each event to thank them for their help, and their names appear next to the results on the event webpage. An example of a volunteer roster can be found here: http://www.parkrun.org.uk/southoxhey/futureroster/

**10. Sponsorship**

parkrun is sponsored by Adidas, Sweatshop, PruHealth and London Marathon Company, all of whom actively engage participants by providing free or discounted running equipment, entry to paid races and advice on both exercise and healthy lifestyle choices.

Every runner receives a free, technical Adidas running shirt when they complete 50, 100, 250 and (soon) 500 parkruns – with an additional shirt awarded to juniors after their 10th run. These are bespoke parkrun shirts, with the number of runs and parkrun logo printed on them. The attraction of these shirts is that they can only be earned by turning up each week and running, and they provide a wonderful incentive for people to take part regularly.

Sweatshop provides every event team in the UK with a voucher every month, all year round, to award to one of its “most improved” participants. The voucher is for a pair of running shoes, to be chosen by the winner, and professionally fitted by a footwear professional in a Sweatshop store. For many beginner runners who are not aware of the benefits of proper footwear when running, this can provide a gateway to regular participation and progression to paid races and running club membership.

**11. Expected numbers of runners**

The parkrun ethos is to have lots of parkrun events, with fewer runners at each event. We would expect an average number of 100 runners each week. It is also worth noting that parkruns are not formally advertised, only through word of mouth, with the mantra being that “organic growth is best for everyone”: runners, volunteers, and park users.

**12. Useful webpages providing statistics on each parkrun**

Each parkrun event’s website – which sits under the parkrun UK website – automatically calculates a broad range of statistics each week. Examples of webpages that demonstrate this information are:

http://wiki.parkrun.info/index.php/South\_Oxhey\_parkrun and http://www.parkrun.org.uk/southoxhey/

On the results page, the far right column indicates how many parkruns a runner has done worldwide. This column can be sorted by clicking on the little arrows next to the column header, which orders runners from lowest to highest. On any given week, the number of “1s” indicates how many people have run their first ever parkrun. This is a tangible statistic to show the increase in sports participation.

**13. Proposed Aquadrome course**

Given the large size of the Aquadrome there are numerous options for a 5k course, which takes into account other park users while making it simple for volunteers to coordinate the event each week. Either multiple laps of one lake, figure of eight loop around each lake or a combination of other routes. We would consider all feedback and comments and design the most appropriate route.

Prepared by Michelle Ashwell, volunteer parkrun coordinator