**Chairman’s Report 2021**

Good morning all - I would like to present my chairman’s report for the year, or 15 months. This is my 6th report since I was appointed Chairman and I have to say it has been the most difficult year.

We at least we started the year in the water in September 2020 with almost with the same time slots as pre COVID. A lot of other clubs were not so fortunate. Don Briggs put in place robust risk assessments and plans to keep our swimmers, coaches and volunteers safe. Don was in position rain or shine and when the winter chill kicked in – he was still there in shorts and a Hartlepool shirt. Tees Active eventually allowed him in to the door way if the weather was really bad.

I can only imagine how difficult it was for the swimmers to get back in to the pool after such a long layoff. The prospect of training without the prospect of competition was a difficult situation to navigate for swimmers and coaches.

Some swimmers decided not to return. The prospect of no immediate competition and with exams on the horizon meant a realignment of priorities for some. Swim England recognised the issue and introduced some level x racing which was an inhouse event which did provide so focus.

Just as Christmas approached COVID numbers began to climb again and the inevitable happened - a second lockdown!

This time it lasted until the 12 April. With the prospect of a few more months with reduced numbers, and weekly rotas – our finances began to suffer. Paying full pool hire fees but with reduced numbers began to take its toll. Leanne Milburn set up a fundraising page which generated almost £2,000. On top of that the club were awarded almost £5,000 from Sport England. This helped to plug the gap from funds lost by not hosting our own galas.

Don was again back in his usual spot at the front together with a chair and table this time. Ticking swimmers in and ensuring social distance was maintained – together with the endless amounts of paperwork!

Swim England announced a summer Festival of Swimming. A competition to be held in each region and ours was in Sunderland. This was an opportunity to compete again but from my point of view it was an indication of how events will run in the current climate. Measuring the cubic space of air per person, ensuring ventilation is adequate, no spectators, one-way systems, masks and sanitation points. Risk assessments need to be completed and return to swimming competition forms became the standard – all things we needed to consider when hosting our next event.

As we entered the summer break we received some great news from Tees Active. Restrictions are being relaxed – we can finally stop the weekly rotas’ and increase the lane numbers. The coaches over the break restructured their squads as we returned to some normalcy at the end of August. This coincided with the N&D competition planning meeting all which resulted in us hosting our annual Autumn Meet which in was a huge success. We again continue to strengthen our reputation to host successful meets.

We also had a first for the club by hosting a long distance meet for the first time. This was for one day but the interest was so strong we could have done 2 days easily. With swimmers coming from Wales and Scotland to attend shows there is a need for this type of meet – it is just a shame there is not much profit in the meet.

However, although not in the same context as previous more profitable meets but from the point of view of bring the club together after COVID with so many new volunteers on poolside and working behind the scenes they were very much a success.

This is the spirit we need to embrace to move the club forward. Nearly all committee members do not have children swimming in the club. We are relying on their goodwill to continue the club operating. What we need is new blood, new ideas, new energy and new volunteers to push the club forward.

Although a common theme in previous AGM’s – we really do need to build on this momentum.

From a swimming perspective I will let Guy comment on their success. But it was fabulous to note that a week after our club championship in which a number of young swimmers took in their first race with lane ropes, timing boards and whistles – a week later we had a swimmer competing with the country’s top swimmers in the Winter Nationals in Sheffield, who 10 years earlier started in the same way.

As we move into the festive period, we have our New Year meet on the horizon which is full. We hope to have spectators present but as COVID cases rise, I am fearful of more restrictions to indoor group gatherings. But we watch this space – if the worst happens we certainly have the experience to take it in our stride.

Finally – I need to thank a few people. Don Briggs has done a fabulous job getting us COVID ready and we would not have had swimmers in the water so quickly without him. He worked tirelessly with Tees Active to ensure it everything went smoothly and set the bench mark of other clubs using the facility.

Lynn continues to work during her retirement and again successfully oversaw the club retain its Swim 21 accreditation.

Leanne Milburn has done a fabulous job of fund raising – not just this year but over the last 5. She will be a loss to the committee and I thank her for her service.

Guy continues to show the same enthusiasm for swimming that he always has. Preparing swimmers to training after a long period out of the water and without competitions has tested his all his coaching experience. And he had to do it twice.

To Dawn Reed, who has brought all her work experience to the committee and the club is the beneficiary to that.

To all the coaches and teachers who spend their Saturday mornings on poolside; and many of them early evenings.

Most importantly I want to thank Rachel, Jude and Josie. With laptops around the house, a garage full of allsorts of equipment (and the left over wine from galas – good job I am a beer drinker!) I do sometimes sacrifice family time or moments for the swimming club when I have no right. So I thank them for their patience and understanding.

All of these people have many skills and many of them very different. That is makes us work so well – but one thing we all have in common is that we are volunteers. We don’t get paid for what we do – we give our time freely to the club. Balancing busy working and family life. Most people are thankful for what we do – and this year more people than ever have stopped me or Rachel and stated their thanks for we what we as a committee achieve.

Many thanks

Mark