



HASTINGS ATHLETIC CLUB

(affiliated to the SEAA and Sussex AA)

Statement: 15th January 2020

Dear Club Member,

As many of you will be aware, the past few months has been a very challenging time for Hastings Athletic Club. In this statement the Committee would like to formally address this and provide everyone with an account of what has taken place to provide some clarity, with the intention of moving forward as a club.

- On Thursday 26th September 2019, Terry Skelton emailed his resignation as Chairman with immediate effect to the Club Secretary. He cited his reason: "Although I believe there is not a conflict of interest with me being Chairman and part owning Hy Altitude I think it would be best for the Club and myself to remove myself from the post of Chairman". An informal conversation had taken place that afternoon between Terry Skelton and the Secretary during which she had suggested the idea of declaring the interest in order for the Club to be able to move forward from a historical disagreement surrounding this. At no point was any accusation of any wrong doing by the Chairman made, and the intention was to discuss the idea of providing better protection to the Club and its Committee Officers of any potential accusation of wrong doing. As stated on the 'Club Matters' website: *"It's worth noting that having conflicts of interest does not mean that your committee members have done something wrong. It's often inevitable that conflicts of interest arise; what's important is that they are recognised and handled appropriately, so as not to risk your club's integrity or reputation"*. The Secretary messaged Terry to say that she would not do anything with his email and that there were much better options than this. Terry did not reply.
- The Vice Chairman was informed by the Secretary on Friday 27th September along with the President about Terry's resignation email. The President replied to say that he would be in Ireland until the following Thursday and would contact the Secretary once he had returned, and the Vice Chairman said that he would talk with Terry at the track on the Tuesday evening about it.
- On the morning of Thursday 3rd October Terry Skelton posted about his resignation as Chairman on his Facebook running page. Other posts then followed. At no point at this stage had the Committee made the news of the resignation public knowledge in the hope that a better solution could be found. A telephone conversation between the Secretary and Terry took place that morning, during which she informed Terry that she was due to speak to President that morning to discuss the matter and work out the best course of action and that the Committee were not aware that Club Members had been informed at this stage. Some of the comments posted were of an inflammatory nature and made personal accusations that were abusive and offensive.
- It was agreed by the President and Secretary to discuss the subject at the Committee meeting which had been set (at the previous AGM in November 2018) for the 15th October.

This would allow the Joint User Agreement (JUA) to be discussed which was being sent to Hastings Athletic Club from Ark Academy on Thursday 10th October. (The JUA is the legal contract between HAC and Ark giving the Club security of tenure of the athletics facility for the next 10 years. A great deal of work has gone into the formation of this Agreement over the past 18 months). Ark Alexandra had communicated their need for the Joint User Agreement to be signed ASAP to avoid any further legal expenses.

- An Extraordinary General Meeting (EGM) could not be called as 28 days' notice to all Club Members would have been required (as per our Club Constitution) and the Annual General Meeting itself set for the following month. Any other meeting called would be unconstitutional and would place the Club, volunteers and members in an exposed position. England Athletics and Hastings Voluntary Action were consulted on this, and both agreed that this was the correct procedure, again in keeping with the club's written constitution.
- The Club Constitution was last amended in November 2011. At no point have any of the Committee Officers altered or amended the Club Constitution since this time.
- In the absence of a Chairman or Vice Chairman and with the President suffering ill health, the Committee approached Hastings Voluntary Action (HVA) for guidance as per the Club Constitution. It was then brought to the Committee's attention that Hastings Athletic Club was unincorporated and as such Committee Officers would be held personally liable for any contracts entered into and all members would have personal liability should a claim be made against the Club. Fortunately, the JUA had not been signed by the Secretary or Treasurer who attended a meeting with Ark Alexandra on 22nd October. Pat Weaver, who Chaired the AGM explained this to all members present and proposed that the Committee would go away and look into the best options of incorporation and would report back to all members at an EGM which would be called early in 2020. All present voted in favour of this.
- Matters of a personal nature cannot be discussed at an Annual General Meeting or an Extraordinary General Meeting. The correct procedure as per the Club's Disciplinary and Appeals process (as provided by England Athletics) would need to be followed and this was communicated to all present.
- The Club Policies and Procedures are available on the website. This has been communicated to all Club Members via a post on the Hastings Athletic Club Facebook page and via the newsletter. It has been made clear that this process must be followed and that the Committee cannot, and will not, act on hearsay or rumour.
- No formal complaints were made in writing to the Committee in 2019.
- The current Committee Officers were the only Club members to submit nomination papers to be considered for appointment at the Annual General Meeting on the 13th November 2019. Each post had only one applicant and nobody voted against their election at the AGM.
- All emails which have been sent to the Club Secretary have been shared with the whole Committee. When questioned, the Committee have been able to provide evidence that this was the case and to date only one person has come forward in relation to this and subsequently evidence has been provided.
- Darrin Botting emailed the Committee on Wednesday 18th December to inform them that his session on the following evening (the 19th) would be his last for Hastings Athletic Club. The Committee thanked Darrin via a reply saying that they would let him know the date of the Presentation evening. Individual emails and direct messages were also sent thanking Darrin for everything he has done for the Club. The Committee arranged for a card and some gifts to be at the track for his last evening and the Chairman shook his hand and verbally thanked him.

- Terry Skelton wrote a post on his private Facebook running page informing people that he no longer intended to coach at Hastings Athletic Club on the 5th January 2020. Terry did not communicate this to the Committee in writing or verbally. Had Terry done so, the Committee would have responded and acknowledged his resignation in full.
- Hastings Athletic Club's social media policy requires that people refrain from posting comments about members, coaches and volunteers and do not post inflammatory comments. This policy has been communicated to all members and users and content which violates this will be removed.

The Committee would like to make it clear that Hastings Athletic Club takes the welfare of all of its members and volunteers very seriously. At every Annual General meeting, all Club Members are invited to stand for nomination and / or to attend to vote in the people who they want to run the Club on their behalf. This is an honour that we, the Officers of the Club, take very seriously and we give a lot of time to making sure that we deliver while following the Club Constitution to which we are legally bound. We cannot, and should not, act outside of this and we have enlisted the guidance and assistance of England Athletics to ensure that all of our Policies and Procedures are correct and fair.

Hastings Voluntary Action have also assisted us to ensure that we have followed the Club Constitution and the organisation are providing ongoing support to update it to better reflect where we are in 2020. England Athletics have also provided the Club with a great deal of support and guidance.

Hastings Athletic Club has a rich history spanning half a century and a track record of producing international athletes - no mean feat for a Club that has half of it's demographic taken up by the English Channel! Our athletes are proud to race with the Hastings crest and to represent their town. As we enter this new decade, we have a great opportunity to build on this legacy and to create something very special. Our partnership with Ark Alexandra Academy is very positive and the best it has been to date, and the new Joint User Agreement gives us another decade of security and opportunity. During the past few months the Committee have begun the application process for Track Mark Accreditation which will allow us to continue to host UKA Competitions. We are also working with other local Community Groups to increase track revenue and to encourage more participation in our sport at a local level. Developing the provision for our Junior athletes is also a priority and we will be providing full funding for people to become qualified England Athletics Coaches in 2020. All these things take a lot of planning and time, but as a Committee we are committed to making this happen and getting Hastings AC to the forefront across all disciplines.

The Committee are aware that some Club Members will be leaving us this year, and it is with sadness that we say goodbye to them and wish them all the best in their new endeavours.

We look forward to working with you all to grow and develop Hastings Athletic Club and to show everyone what Hastings Athletic Club athletes can do.

Hastings Athletic Club Committee

Facta Non Verba – Deeds Not Words

References: <https://www.sportenglandclubmatters.com/club-planning/governance/your-committee/conflicts-of-interest/>