

Mid Sussex Triathlon Club - Policy and Practice for Open Water Swimming

1. Introduction

In furthering the aims of the Club, open water swimming (OWS) will be encouraged and facilities put in place to enable members to participate. This is one of the most popular and participative activities put on by the Club and requires a significant amount of organisation and administration. Open water swimming is not without risk and all efforts will be made to ensure participation is enjoyable and safe.

The only venue made available through the Club is Ardingly Reservoir. This is a managed Activity Centre offering various water-based activities. All arrangements will be made in conjunction with the Activity Centre Manager, who offers this facility to the Club on a commercial basis. The reservoir itself is owned by South East Water who are an important stakeholder in the arrangements. Every effort will be made to maintain good relationships with all concerned.

For Ardingly Reservoir an Officer of the Club, who is a member of the committee, will be assigned to oversee all the arrangements. The Officer (coordinator), with assistance from an OWS Sub Committee, will be responsible for all policy, processes and liaisons necessary to allow enjoyable and safe OWS.

These duties include overseeing:

- Preparation and update of this Document
- Chair the Sub Committee
- To organise and co-ordinate the Club's open water swimming sessions at Ardingly Reservoir, including a rota for safety personnel (Dutyman)
- To liaise with the manager of Ardingly Activity Centre to co-ordinate procedures and practise and foster good relations between the Club and Centre
- Develop and maintain updated Risk Assessments, Emergency Action Plan and ensure the safety procedures are fit for purpose and well practised
- Develop and maintain systems for record keeping and the financial arrangements relevant to OWS

- Develop and maintain systems to facilitate Trial and Guest Taster sessions
- To provide a report for each committee meeting
- Prepare an end of year report for consideration at the club AGM

2. Policy and Practice

This policy and practice document will be drawn up and presented to the committee for agreement and adoption. This will drive how OWS is run and will be reviewed each year by the Sub Committee. In addition all of the information relevant to Open Water Swimming will be detailed and held together on the Club website, with suitable links and guidance as required.

3. Risk Assessment and Emergency Action Plan

These documents will be drawn up by the OWSSC and agreed by the Chair and Head Coach. These, along with other relevant documentation will be held on the Club website, and will be reviewed annually. The Risk Assessment will drive the safety arrangements put in place.

4. Open water Swimming Sub Committee

Due to the risks involved, the complex arrangements which need to be put in place and decisions made, a group will be formed, led by the lead club Officer. The group will consist of key members involved in the arrangements, particularly the Dutyman system, and meet on a regular basis.

5. Swim Safety

Current arrangements with the Activity Centre manager allow swimming during the summer months May to September on a Tuesday evening 6.00pm – 7:30pm and May to October on a Saturday morning 8.15am – 9.45am. Before the season starts the Centre Manager will arrange for water testing and inform the club when the water has been declared safe. These tests will be conducted throughout the relevant months and if the water standards drop to unacceptable levels the club will be notified and sessions will cease.

A safety team will be in place for every swim session, consisting of a Spotter (from MSTC), Kayak personnel (from MSTC) and a launch (from

AAC). The responsibilities of this team are laid out in documentation on the website and those participating are required to brief themselves before their duty, including viewing the video.

The Spotter, among other things, will be responsible for signing swimmers in and out of the water, and liaison with centre staff. A swim course will be clearly marked out by buoys and pointed out to swimmers. The kayakers are, among other things, responsible for keeping other water users away from the swim area, particularly boats and watching out for swimmers in difficulty. They are crucial in a rescue situation. Guidance (for competitions) suggests there should be a ratio of one safety craft per 20 swimmers; swimmers should be reachable within one minute and be no more than 50m from the safety craft. We will aim to match these requirements during training sessions. As such the patrol pattern must take place within the swim area and kayakers separate out to gain maximum coverage.

Members participation in the Safety rota is driven by the Dutyman system. Every member who signs up for OWS is required to carry out a Spotter and a Kayak duty. A rota is drawn up using a web-based duty system which with the help of key members of the sub committee, informs members of their duty. Any exceptions to this duty can only be agreed by the sub committee, who oversee these arrangements. If members who sign up for and participate in OWS deliberately avoid their duty, consideration will be given by the sub committee to removing their right to swim in the reservoir.

Nobody will swim in the reservoir without reading and signing the indemnity waiver, and without the requisite safety arrangements being in place.

Nobody will be allowed to swim in the session unless they have pre-booked and paid.

A practise drill simulating a rescue from the reservoir will be run annually towards the beginning of the season. This will involve Activity Centre staff and their launch which is crucial to a successful rescue.

6. Taster sessions

Any non-members who wish to swim will be required to pre-book their session and sign the indemnity waiver form before being allowed in the water. These swims are on a limited basis to comply with Club insurance. Non-members will be limited to one swim either as a Trial taster or Guest taster.

Trial Taster

Where an individual wishes to have a trial swim before joining the club. There is no charge for this. Swimmers will need to contact openwaterswim@midsussextriclub.com beforehand to agree their attendance. At the reservoir, the taster swimmer will need to make themselves known to the Spotter and will need to agree and sign the the Indemnity waiver form (blank copies are kept with the Spotter) before being allowed in the reservoir. The committee reserves the right to restrict access to these sessions if it compromises safety. An experienced open water swimmer will be assigned to meet, greet, brief and swim with the swimmer for at least the first lap. The taster swimmer will be required to wear a Tow Float which will be provided. The committee reserves the right to restrict access to these sessions if it compromises safety

Guest Taster

Where a member wishes to bring a guest to swim with them. The MSTC member will be responsible for booking the swimmer in online and paying the £4 fee. At the reservoir, the member and guest will need to make themselves known to the Spotter and the guest will need to agree and sign the the Indemnity waiver form (blank copies are kept with the Spotter) before being allowed in the reservoir. The guest will also be required to wear a tow float. The member will be responsible for ensuring the guest is a competent swimmer and swim with them to ensure they remain safe for at least for the first lap.

7. Training

Any specific OWS training or events will be arranged and overseen by the Club Head Coach, with its own Risk Assessment.

8. Ardingly Activity Centre

Regular liaison will take place between the Officer and the Centre Manager to ensure good communication and relations, and to deal with any issues which arise. They will also meet in between seasons to discuss

any improvements to arrangements and the financial agreements for the following year. Records will be kept of all swim numbers to ensure accurate remuneration to the Centre. It is a requirement that the centre is paid for a minimum of 12 swimmers on a Tuesday evening session. As such the coordinator will run a system to forecast swim numbers on a Tuesday, and make a decision at least 24hours beforehand as to whether it will go ahead or be cancelled. A fund will be allocated to the coordinator of £100 which can be used to supplement the session where it falls short but should only be used where the deficit is 1 or 2 swimmers. It is not there to supplement a session where there are very few swimmers.