



## **ALBATROSS DIVING CLUB ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

**Rivermead Leisure Centre Tuesday 20 January 2026 6:40-8:00pm**

### **In Attendance:**

Ben Colton, David Saunders, Emma West, Malcolm Green, Stephen Clamp, Anjali Colton, Mark Basham, Fay Knight, Lukasz Baniewicz, Martin Seward, Selale Sogut, Louise Darrah, Mark Westall, Malcolm Jones, Andy Norris, Pawel Rumas, Sarah Griffin, Jane Von Benecke, Hernan Mosqueda-Jolly, Anne Green Jessel, Richard Jessel

### **No Recorded Apologies**

#### **1. Welcome**

The meeting was opened by Emma West who welcomed those attending and introduced Ben Colton as Chair and Malcolm Green as Lead Coach.

#### **2. Chairperson's Report**

Ben presented the Chair report to the meeting.

For those that don't know me, my name is Ben Colton and I am Chair at Albatross Diving Club. I am also a parent of children in the Advanced and Skills competition squads and in the Learn to Dive programme.

I'd like to use this opportunity to provide a brief recap on the achievements we have made this year before my committee colleagues provide greater detail on the diving programme and club finances.

Our key goal at Albatross is to provide the conditions for every diver to be the best that they can be, both in and out of the pool. Our ambition is to provide this experience for all divers, whether they are diving at national level or whether it is their first diving session.

We mentioned at the last AGM that the Learn to Dive programme had grown dramatically since we had moved to the Rivermead Leisure Centre from around 40 divers to almost 200 divers.

A key goal this last year has been to provide a club structure that supports this enlarged Learn to Dive programme, that allows each diver to have a roadmap for progression. We have therefore revamped the programme, overseen by Coach Charlie, which now consists of different development groups so divers can progress through once they have demonstrated the correct skillset and aptitude, if they so wish.

The club now conducts grading every 2 months, which allows the divers to see how well they are progressing on the skills that they have been working on. It also allows a wider group of coaches to oversee the progress of each diver. This has seen the club develop our own Albatross Grading system which we are due to launch over the coming weeks which takes the best bits out of the Swim England programme, but which we feel is better tailored for the development of our divers.

We have also made a big effort to provide opportunities for Learn-to-Dive to experience competitions in a fun and enjoyable setting where they can show family and friends the skills they have been working on. Last year Albatross hosted an Inter-Club Gala against other clubs in the Region and a Club Christmas Gala where Learn-to-Divers could experience competitive diving for the first time. We have also opened 'dry training' sessions for the more advanced Learn to Dive groups where they use dry boards, trampolines and other equipment to improve their core strength, flexibility and diving skills outside of the pool. I believe we are one of the most forward-thinking clubs in the South of England that offer such opportunities to divers so early in their development. Even next Sunday we are sending 22 divers, accompanied by 4 coaches to a Gala in Guilford. These are all examples of how we are pushing the boundaries to offer as many positive experiences as possible for all our divers.

This same approach has been implemented for our adult divers who attend on Thursday nights. The main principle is for adult divers of mixed abilities to have fun, socialise and individually challenge themselves. However, just like Learn-to-Dive, the club has strived to support adult divers who would like to compete at Master Events. An example is JD who competed at the GBDF Winter Masters and won Gold. We were also thrilled to see so many adult divers compete at our Christmas Gala events. If there is anyone here tonight who would like to give it ago, please feel free to chat to me or anybody on the committee and we can sign you up for a taster!

It has also been a successful year for the competitive Skills and Advanced Diving squads. I will not go into too much detail as Malcolm will provide more information. But to summarise the Club managed a Team tour to Dubai Open Championships, which was the first club trip outside of Europe. This meant 13 divers got to mix and socialise with athletes from around the world and experience a completely new culture. They also performed exceptionally within the pool winning 22 medals.

The teams also performed extremely well at Regional Level with 11 divers representing the Club at National level for both squads.

Most pleasing was to see multiple divers progress through the Learn-to-Dive programme, through to pre-skills, perform well at regional competitions so that they could then progress into the Skills and Advanced competition squads. This shows our development pipeline is strong.

It would also be remiss of me to not mention our coaches. Having interacted with many clubs throughout the past year, it is apparent that we are blessed with the number of skilled coaches that wish to dedicate their time to the club. We have a diverse group of coaches that bring their

different experiences and skillsets to the mix. Many are ex-divers, most of whom have previously represented the club, but we also have parents involved who offer their own unique perspective.

I can confirm that the passion and enthusiasm shown by the coaches on poolside with divers is just the tip of the iceberg. All coaches go above and beyond outside of training hours to plan and improve training sessions, go on training courses and travel on weekends to competitions and training camps. In the last 12 months Albatross has run two training camps at Rivermead with nationally respected coaches and Olympic athletes to learn better training techniques; we have paid for coaches to attend rigging courses; gain their Level 1 and Level 2 coaching qualifications and we have also had a coach judge at the National Talent Games, where they can see firsthand how national selectors are judging the best talent in the country.

Beyond the coaches we have an excellent cadre of volunteers. My fellow committee members, the kit team, judges, team managers, fundraisers and support staff at gala events. The club could not perform at its best without these volunteers and if anybody wants to become more involved, please chat to me afterwards.

Lastly, you will hear from Emma shortly a summary of the club's financials. It is with great pride to report that the club is in a strong financial position, but this should not be taken for granted. In a recent poll taken by a charity Cash4Clubs, it is estimated that over 40% of grassroots organisations are having to cancel services because of a lack of funding. 22% fear they will be financially unsustainable within the next year due to facility, energy and insurance costs as well as difficulties finding volunteers. Albatross is a non-for-profit club where all money is funnelled back into supporting the divers grow and progress with their confidence and skillset. Given the challenging economic environment we are operating in, Club members should be reassured that we have a firm financial foundation that will allow us to continue supporting divers in our region to excel in and out of the pool.

### **3. Lead Coach Report**

Malcolm Green, Albatross Head Coach, then presented his report to the meeting.

We moved into Rivermead in July 2024. The club has grown to over 200 members. Our Learn to Dive programme has flourished. We have more divers at Skills level and more divers at Age group level. We have more Level 1 & Level 2 coaches than ever before, and we have others who step in when needed for cover. We have run coach CPD courses for ourselves and for the region to bring in current coaching skills in both dry and wet for all coaches to understand coaching expectations on skill techniques as well as expanding our own dry sessions. Our grade system has been re-written to suit our club moving forward and in line with Swim England guidelines, this will support our growing base of divers to grow our competitive squads and offer more options for the Learn to Dive programme. This has now come into effect and all divers from Learn to Dive right through to our skills squad will now have ongoing gradings. Our adult diving session is now more open, offering competitive options where needed. Our judges' have expanded to include 2 more J2's at National

level and we sent 3 L2 National Judges to Talent Games in November. Our National Judges were also selected to judge at all the National events for Skills, Age Group, Elite and Senior Championships. Over the last year we have also supported the qualification of additional Level 1 Coaches, Level 2 Coaches, and qualified Lifeguards, this all helps to enable club sessions to run smoothly and to benefit all the divers. Having additional coaches and judges also helps to aid our existing coaches at competitions and training, more volunteers for this are always welcome. Last year we were able to bring back our Interclub novice competition after an 8 year break. This was always a firm fixture on the diving calendar and was attended by 9 other diving clubs from around the south of England. Again, this will run on June 14<sup>th</sup> this year. This is one of our primary fundraisers for our club along with the Xmas gala.

The club has been represented at many regional events during the year as well as qualifying to compete at National Skills, National Age Groups and National Masters. Opportunities for our Learn to Dive programme to compete have also been offered at Regional and club level. Perhaps the highlight for our squad divers was a trip to Dubai to compete against divers from other countries including Russia, New Zealand, and Mexico.

The busy competition season leading up to the summer starts this week with 22 of our divers competing at the Surrey Skills novice event in Guildford and a further 9 of our divers at the Gavin Brown Nove in Southampton. Qualification for National Skills starts in March with the London Skills at the Olympic London Aquatic Centre and with the Age Group Divers looking to reach their recommended scores at the Armada Cup in Plymouth next month.

#### **4. Treasurer's Report**

Emma then presented the Treasurer's report.

Welcome. We present the accounts for the year ended 31 March 2025, a period that started at the close of our contract with Abbey School and included our move to our new home base at Rivermead Leisure Centre when we started paying for our coaches.

The accounts for the year have been independently reviewed by Steve Breach and were attached to the invitation email. You will have seen that at the close of the last financial year we were holding cash balances of just over £34,000, having increased over the previous year due to a significant rise in the number of members. We left the Abbey with 100 junior divers and closed the financial year with 192 and an additional 11 adult divers. We currently have a slight drop to 183 juniors diving with us but a greater proportion of these are diving more than one session a week than previously as we have incorporated an expanded offer.

Reserves held by the club are used to fund expenditure outside of the daily operation of the club. We are fortunate to continue to enjoy a strong relationship with third parties with whom we have hire arrangements and, whilst pool hire has increased again alongside energy and cost of living

risers, so too have our membership numbers with the growth allowing us to manage our bottom line. Since our move to Rivermead we have incurred fewer travelling costs but have started to pay for our coaches, a figure which last year matched our pool hire costs but as we have expanded our session offer now exceeds it. This structural change is one that we have welcomed, and our fee structure supports our increased cost base, and we have not proposed an increase in the current rates being mindful of wishing to retain our diver numbers in this changing financial climate.

Whilst we are still small when compared to most clubs competing at our national level, we are investing in our coaching team to ensure their continued development in a period of change in our sport. We, other clubs, and regional representatives, are working with our governing body, Swim England, to encourage greater engagement and retention in the sport at both recreational and competitive levels. We recognise that some coaches in other clubs may be employed by the operator which can afford some greater security but we are a strong team of coaches and committee who are working continuously to examine our offer with more opportunities, encourage growth, invest in our team and ensure financial stability.

We annually invoice our divers with their insurance charge based on their level of training and competition. Divers on our lesson programme and competing at levels below regionally led national competition qualifiers will, this year, be invoiced £18, and those competing at regional level and higher £45. These costs have risen since last year but are just on charges of those already levied and paid for by the club and will be recovered through the online Team Unify App at the end of March.

We record our thanks to Steve for his support in reviewing the accounts with no charge and his willingness to conduct the role of Independent Reviewer for the year ahead.

## **5. Adoption of Changes to the Club's Fee Structure**

Each year it is the responsibility of the Committee to review the financial sustainability of the Club considering committed expenditure and forthcoming operating costs. In addition to the investment in and maintenance of the clubs' assets, costs are largely fixed in accordance with the timetable of sessions offered to members. Fees exclude annual Swim England Membership and Insurance at a rate pursuant to competitive level of the diver apart from new starters to the club who pay their insurance charge as a joining fee to cover their first period of Swim England membership before the annual renewal. In line with most sports organisations Albatross moved to a direct debit system during 2025 to aid financial control.

As with most sports clubs the structure is pyramidal where the more sessions you dive (the higher the capability of diver), the cheaper the per session rate becomes to avoid penalising the competitive progression of our athletes. There was no fee change proposed for the calendar year 2026.

## **Adoption of 2026 Constitution**

There have been no changes to the Club Constitution as it is compliant with Swim England requirements. The current Constitution had been circulated to all members with the AGM Agenda for comment, no comments had been received. The AGM were invited to ask questions, but none were forthcoming, so the room was asked to adopt the Constitution as presented. Voting was unanimous and the 2026 Albatross Diving Club Constitution adopted.

## **6. Resignation of Officers**

Ben as Chair, David as Secretary and Emma as Treasurer stood down from their positions. In advance of the meeting nominations had been sought for the 3 Executive Committee positions of Chair, Secretary and Treasurer. There were only 3 nominees:

Chair – Ben Colton

Secretary – Jane Von Benecke

Treasurer – Emma West

There were then nominees for the non-executive positions of Welfare Officer and Governance and Administration Officer

Welfare Officer – Fay Knight

Governance and Administration Officer – David Saunders

The position of Lead Coach is in the gift of the Coaches Meeting and was advised to the meeting as Malcolm Green.

## **7. Election of Officers**

In addition to the above Executive positions the AGM attendees were invited in advance or at the meeting to declare if they wish to join the Committee or assist the Club in any role with the Committee structure having been circulated with the AGM papers. Copies of role descriptions were available to the meeting.

The following positions were voted upon and recorded as elected:

Chair – Ben Colton - Proposed by Louise Darrah, Seconded by Malcolm Jones

Secretary – Jane Von Benecke - Proposed by Anjali Colton, Seconded by Louise Darrah

Treasurer – Emma West - Proposed by Anjali Colton, Seconded by Martin Seward

Welfare Offer – Fay Knight - Proposed by Selale Sogut, Seconded by Lukas Baniewicz

Governance and Administration Officer – David Saunders - Proposed by Andy Norris, Seconded by Emma West

There are 2 remaining committee roles of fundraising and event management.

David Saunders oversees all data and certification collection for the club which includes the administration of DBS certification. He is the lead advisor on Team Unify.

SwimMark accreditation is currently being nationally overhauled by Swim England. Emma and Ben will ensure the club meets the standards required for the current interim arrangements this summer.

Club reports for the website and social media have been produced by Emma but Ben will be embracing this role.

Jane is the lead contact for club kit aided by Catherine Sewell

Mark Westall and Mark Basham offered help with fundraising and grant applications.

The club are happy to support parents and older divers (over 14 years) who have an interest in training to be a coach or judge and gain an assistant coach/judge qualification. The club is required to take a judge to each competition and by separating this from coaching gives the divers competing and the coach coaching a better competitive experience.

## **8. Any Other Business**

Increased parent engagement was welcomed by parents attending with grading review data and feedback agreed to be provided by coaches. Additionally, any good dive videos taken in training and achievement points were requested from coaches. It was recognised that face to face meetings is difficult to achieve with sessions running back-to-back but if any parent wishes to speak directly with the coach this can be arranged.

Putting the AGM on Teams/Zoom was suggested for next year to encourage additional attendees.

Adult progression input was requested to mirror the gradings in place for juniors.

Volunteer t shirts are need for club representatives at events.

No further business was raised.