

Cambourne junior parkrun

Update for Leisure & Amenities Committee

Cambourne junior parkrun successfully launched on Sunday 25th July. It has taken place every Sunday since, except for the weekend of the Cambourne Town Football Club's Summer Festival.

It is national parkrun policy for new events to have a soft launch, i.e. without any active marketing. This is to allow time for teething problems to be resolved and for volunteers to gain experience, whilst participant numbers are lower. Despite the lack of marketing, the first 7 events had a total of 168 different children complete a total of 379 runs; an average of 54 children each week.

On the first run after the publication of the Crier article, numbers increased to 74 children. Based on local demographics, and experience of other junior parkruns, it is anticipated that numbers in Cambourne will grow to regularly be 100+ children each week.

Of the 168 children that have participated so far, 70 were complete beginners to parkrun. Many of these are likely to go on to be regular participants, with the associated health benefits of regular exercise activity. Each week we also have many parents that choose to accompany their children around the course; anecdotally, for some parents this may be their only exercise of the week.

The event has a very friendly atmosphere. We've noticed that many families choose to stay to the end of the event and clap and cheer all the runners to the finish, rather than just their own. Indeed, it's not unusual for the last finisher to get the loudest applause. This creates a very positive, supportive environment for the participants.

Each week we have around 20 volunteers that help support the event. Overall, we have had 58 unique volunteers help us out so far. We are therefore already building a significant local community of volunteers that support parkrun, including a number of under-18s who may count their parkrun volunteering towards Duke of Edinburgh awards.

Feedback from participants, parents and volunteers has been overwhelmingly positive. We have not received any negative feedback.

There have been a few issues so far, although nothing major.

- On 22nd August, the pavilion defibrillator was missing. It is parkrun policy that parkrun events must be cancelled if there is no working defibrillator available. Thankfully there is another defibrillator at the Sports Centre, but this required us to negotiate with Everyone Active at the last minute to gain access to it. It would be helpful in future if any availability / maintenance issues with the defibrillator could be notified to us. On this occasion, we only found out through word of mouth on the Saturday evening prior to the event.

- On one occasion, we discovered multiple bolts sticking out from the ground in the path of our running route. We believe these are for goal nets to attach to and had been left behind by whoever had used the pitch previously. The bolts were a major hazard, and we used cones to divert our runners. There is a risk that we may not always spot such bolts during our pre-run course check, and a child could trip and hurt themselves.
- Every week our volunteers have to clear away litter from the fields during our pre-run course check. This includes discarded cans, food packaging, dog poop, broken glass and sometimes other unsanitary items.
- We frequently see dog walkers on the field whilst setting up the course. Whilst most dog walkers stay away during the event itself, there have been occasions where a dog walker has ignored the direction of our volunteer marshals, and entered the field during the event, including crossing the path of our runners. It would be helpful if there were more prominent signs to warn the public that dogs are not permitted on the playing fields.
- The construction of the new youth building has severely limited the width of our starting straight to an unsafe width. Our Covid framework also requires us to provide a wide start, to avoid bunching-up. We have therefore had to allow our runners to spread out onto the pitches at the start. All runners are still directed off the pitches as quickly as practical, and the remainder of the route remains entirely off-pitch.

Despite the niggles above, we believe the launch of the event to be very successful. We believe the event will continue to grow and become a very successful and well supported event on Cambourne's weekly calendar.

One future improvement we could make would be to store the parkrun equipment somewhere on-site. This would improve set-up time and reduce the need for Run Directors to drive to the event. If we were to raise funds for a storage locker, would it be possible to find space for it in the sports pavilion?

On behalf of everyone involved, we would like to extend our thanks to the Town Council for continuing to support the event. If any members of the committee would like to come along one Sunday and see the event for yourself, you will be very welcome to do so!

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