

MERTON SPORTS & SOCIAL CLUB

BULLETIN

December 2020

http://www.mssc.org.uk/

Merton Sports and Social Club for VI People

(Charity No. 283843)

The Guardian Centre

67 Clarendon Road

Colliers Wood

London

SW19 2DX

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**MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIRMAN**

To say it has been a difficult year is a massive understatement. Who could have predicted this time last year the turmoil and turbulence which would unfold in 2020, bringing club activities to an untimely halt? Ironically, we had been particularly busy in the first two-and-a-half months of 2020, recruiting dozens of new pilots and running tandem training workshops. We had new tandems in the fleet and more on order, and we were looking ahead at an exceptionally active period for the club, with an extended programme of rides, to accommodate all the new cyclists and their varying needs and abilities. Sadly, everything changed in March when the first national lockdown descended upon us.

I would like to take this opportunity to remind you all that MSSC, unlike many other charities, does not have paid staff. Instead it is member led and relies on the goodwill and dedication of a small committee of hard working individuals and a number of other generous volunteers. Most have full or part time jobs, all have busy family lives and often have other voluntary commitments. I am immeasurably grateful to all of them and incredibly proud of what they achieve on behalf of MSSC.

The usual schedule of club activities may have had to be put on hold throughout the Covid crisis, but MSSC Committee members and the tandem management team have not sat on their laurels. On the contrary, we have continued to meet, albeit virtually, and have tried our best to find ways in which we can remain productive, even during this period of relative inertia. Therefore we have spent time, for example, undertaking vital administrative tasks, updating policies and  records, reviewing and improving the club’s insurance, managing grant applications and fundraising initiatives, ordering new tandems and renovating older ones, repairing and selling bikes surplus to requirements, improving our storage facilities and fixing the leaky roof.

We have also endeavoured to keep in touch with you all, increasing the quarterly newsletter to a monthly bulletin and regularly putting on a quiz via the Zoom platform. We appreciate there can be no substitute for getting together in person for a social or a pleasant stroll, for a game of bowls or tennis, or for an invigorating swim or cycle ride, so let’s hope it won’t be too long before these are once again regular activities and the MSSC calendar is soon overflowing with events and important dates for your diary.

Until then, on behalf of the MSSC Committee, may I wish you the happiest festive season possible under the circumstances and a safe, peaceful, harmonious New Year.

Richard James

MSSC Chairman.

**ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTIONS**

Naturally, the MSSC Committee deeply regrets that club activities have had to be so drastically curtailed this year, but the club has still incurred expenses, in terms of rent, insurance cover and maintenance costs, so your subscriptions proved as invaluable as ever in 2020, and will be much needed to sustain the club in 2021.

Membership fees for next year are now due, but in light of the lack of club activities in 2020, the committee has decided that the annual subscription should not be increased and will remain just £15.

With the ongoing uncertainty created by Covid-19, it is impossible to say when MSSC will resume its normal range of activities. Nevertheless, the club will still have outgoings, so we really hope that members will continue to support the club and pay the membership fee for 2021, thereby ensuring the survival of MSSC into the future.

There are three different ways you can pay your 2021 membership fee of £15. They are set out below with instructions:

1: Virgin Money Giving which accepts cards and PayPal:

This is a new option and, If you are a tax payer and happy to pay this way, the club benefits by automatically receiving an additional amount through gift aid. I found it very straight forward but if you find this method too difficult, please use one of the alternative methods.

To benefit the club, please pay via VMG if you can, by following the instructions below:-

You can either follow the donate link from MSSC's website and then the 'Make a Donation Link' or use the following link to go straight to MSSC's VMG donation page. Please note that the page automatically ticks the box for ‘Please add 68p to cover the cost of the charity using this not-for-profit service to provide a safe and simple way to give online’.

This is for Virgin and you can untick if you do not wish to contribute.

<https://uk.virginmoneygiving.com/donation-web/charity?charityId=1019685&stop_mobi=yes>

Please enter Subs21 into the message field and your name in the Name field when you are making the donation. If you are paying by card, there are a number of fields to complete. If you do not want to set up an account with Virgin, make sure you untick that box. There is also a section regarding gift aid.

2: Bank Transfer to Lloyds bank:

Account Name: Merton Sports and Social Club for Visually Impaired People

Sort Code: 30 90 89

Account Number: 50720960

Please use your initial and surname plus Subs21 as the payment reference. Once you have made your payment, please let us know to watch out for it by Emailing Finance@MSSC.ORG.UK.

3: By cheque:

Please make your cheque payable to Merton Sports and Social Club for Visually Impaired People and write your name on the back, then post it to me at the following address:

Mrs S. Meade

25 Dafforne Road,

London SW17 8TY.

If you have any queries regarding payment or would like help with the VMG method, please do not hesitate to get in touch by email.

Susie Meade

MSSC Secretary

Email: secretary@mssc.org.uk

**RELOCATION UPDATE**

As mentioned in November’s bulletin, the Guardian Centre site is due to be redeveloped in the near future, necessitating a temporary relocation in 2021 to the Wilson Hospital, Cranmer Road, Mitcham, although the date of the move has yet to be finalised.

While happily we have been assured that we will have space on the temporary site to store MSSC’s equipment, a task group has been set up to research and explore alternative locations for our tandems, further south or west of Mitcham, to allow easier and quicker access to pleasant cycling routes.

The task group is also investigating possible future venues for MSSC socials. The criteria are easy access, good transport links and, of course, a bar! We have a list of possibilities which include scout group facilities, sport and social clubs and well-appointed pubs. If you have any suggestions, do get in touch.

MSSC Committee

Email. committee@mssc.org.uk

**MSSC ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

As reported in the last bulletin, MSSC’s AGM, which was scheduled to take place on 24th March this year, had to be postponed due to the national lockdown. However, the committee consulted with the Charity Commission regarding alternative ways to hold the AGM and discussed the various options, bearing in mind the access needs of our members.

We did consider holding the AGM via the Zoom platform, but this was ruled out, going on our experience of technical hitches at Zoom committee meetings and the regular MSSC virtual quiz, even with relatively small numbers of participants. We also felt that several members would be deterred by the technology required. After much deliberation, it was decided that the most inclusive way of conducting the AGM would be by email.

If you have not received the papers for 2019, along with the Safeguarding Policy and Code of Conduct, please get in touch and we will see that you receive them. The committee will respond to any comments or questions arising, and they will be recorded in the Minutes.

The election of officers will be postponed until the AGM we plan to hold in a live space next spring or summer. We are looking to book a venue, possibly in May or June, by which time we hope it will be **safe for us all to meet in person. In the meantime, if you have any** questions or comments, please contact me on the email address below.

Susie Meade

MSSC Secretary

**Email: secretary@mssc.org.uk**

**TANDEM SECTION UPDATE AND LOAN SCHEME**

It has not always been easy, keeping abreast of the ever-changing government guidelines. Nevertheless, health and safety and minimising risk to our members and activity leaders have remained the committee’s primary considerations when discussing how club activities might be run in a Covid compliant way.  Therefore, even when the advice was that the social distancing rule could be waived if a disabled person needed support from another individual in order to exercise, the committee felt that, with the rate of infection on the rise and the majority of leaders being over sixty, it would pose too much of a risk to pair sighted and VI members up for tandem rides and guided walks.

It was decided, however, once the lockdown was lifted, to trial some limited cycle rides for tandem riding couples from the same household or support bubble, restricting each ride to a total of six participants, in accordance with the official guidelines. We duly identified those members who met the criteria and asked if they would be interested in taking part.   We included some newly trained pilot couples, who could take it in turns to ride the front and then the back of the tandem, thereby improving their confidence and piloting skills, in preparation for the eventual resumption of the club’s usual schedule of rides.

The rides had to be restricted to a maximum of  three tandem pairs.    One of those pairs had to be an experienced ride leader plus their partner, and someone with bike maintenance know-how also had to be included, in case of mechanical issues.  Having identified suitable tandem riding couples, there seemed to be no need to advertise the limited rides more widely.  We managed to run a few rides before the second lockdown, then were able to put on a couple of rides in December before the tougher restrictions were imposed.

Since the beginning of the first lockdown, the club has been approached by two people, enquiring about borrowing one of the club’s tandems. We have loaned tandems temporarily in the past, but they have not always been returned in good condition, and restoring them for club use has proved costly and time consuming.

Notwithstanding the issue of insurance, it has taken a huge amount of effort and expense to renovate and maintain our bikes, to ensure they are fit for use on club rides, so we were reluctant to open the flood gates and offer to loan out our tandems. We have, however, signposted people to Charlotte’s Tandems, a charity primarily set up to loan out tandems, free of charge, to vision impaired people.

The longer the pandemic goes on, however, we are inclined to be a little more flexible and have reconsidered our approach

We have no idea when the regular schedule of rides will once again be viable, so we thought it only fair to look at offering some kind of tandem loan scheme to our members. We were fortunate this year to have three second-hand tandems donated to the club, so rather than selling three of our less versatile bikes to create space for the newer ones, we have decided to keep them and make them available, with conditions attached, for paid up members to borrow on a temporary basis. Please get in touch if you are interested in finding out more about the scheme.

MSSC tandem section

Email: tandemmanagement@mssc.org.uk

**MSSC TWITTER AND FACEBOOK**

MSSC’s latest venture into social media is our very own Twitter account. Please follow us. Our Twitter handle is, @MertonMssc.

You can still keep in touch with fellow MSSC members via the Facebook group, but please take care to demonstrate courtesy and to treat others with respect and dignity at all times. It is a forum for members to exchange thoughts and items of interest, not to express criticism of the club. The committee is always open to feedback from members, but would ask that you make contact by email, rather than posting contentious comments on Facebook.

You can easily join, even if you are not currently on Facebook, all you need to do is log on to the platform, click on groups, search for MSSC, and then request to join the group once you have found it. It really is very straightforward.

MSSC Committee

Email: committee@mssc.org.uk.

**KEEPING FIT AT HOME**

The Metro Blind Sport website continues to be a great resource for anyone attempting to keep fit at home. You will find a selection of accessible, audio exercise and fitness sessions at  https://www.metroblindsport.org/

Also on the website, you will find links to activities run by partner organisations, such as British Blind Sport, Sense and RSBC. See links below:

BBS New”Active at Home” Virtual Programme:

<https://blindsport.uk/BBSActive>

Free Sense Active online sessions – Same time each week:

<https://blindsport.uk/SenseOnline>

VI Yoga YouTube video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DUUiTEsex48>

**ACCESSIBLE ARTS AND CULTURE**

Even during these uncertain times, VocalEyes continues to bring arts and culture to life through audio description, from theatre stages, museums, galleries and heritage sites. There are lots of offerings and events online.

VocalEyes produces a weekly bulletin called The Interval, which lists upcoming accessible arts and culture events. To receive The Interval, email enquiries@VocalEyes.co.uk or to find out what’s on, visit their website at www.vocaleyes.co.uk.

**VIP SINGERS CHRISTMAS VIDEO**

There is a singing group for vision impaired people, based at St Thomas’s Hospital. They have produced a festive video, which you can see on the following link:-

<https://youtu.be/UoGV_fftHCo>

The group would in normal circumstances hold its singing sessions at St Thomas’s Hospital but, due to the Covid crisis, the sessions currently take place on Zoom and WhatsApp.

If you are vision impaired and interested in joining the group, please phone Ariz, (St Thomas’s ECLO) on 07770 381 758 or visit the website: [www.southlondonvision.org](http://www.southlondonvision.org).

Season’s Greetings!

End of bulletin (edited by Terry James, MSSC Links Officer)