

4 May 2011

To: The RYA Community Awards Panel

I fully endorse the nomination of Mark Burkitt to receive an RYA Community Award for an Outstanding Contribution to sailing and to Ulley Sailing Club in particular.

At the time of the damage to the dam wall of Ulley Reservoir in the floods of June 2007 and the consequent doubts about the future of our sailing water, there was a serious danger that Ulley Sailing Club would not survive. I think it is no exaggeration to say that, without Mark, Ulley Sailing Club would not have emerged from the difficult years that followed as the dynamic and forward-looking Club that it is today.

Initially, in his then role as Vice Commodore, Mark played a major part in the temporary relocation of the Club to share the facilities of South Yorkshire Sailing Club. Inevitably, this arrangement did not suit all our members and Mark again played a major part in initially arranging access to our clubhouse at Ulley to allow social gatherings and then a return to sailing (albeit on a reduced area of water) while the rest of Ulley Country Park remained closed to the public.

Subsequently, as Commodore, Mark has been a true inspiration to the management committee; he is dynamic, hard working, always positive in his outlook and seems to bring new proposals to every committee meeting for projects or changes to improve the management, operation or facilities of the Club. As a consequence, the Club has better, more forward-looking management and, without any assistance from our landlords, the premises are now better and more secure than before the floods. A major achievement in this respect was the replacement of the decrepit fencing around the boat park with metal palisade fencing. Mark sourced this fencing through his work at no cost, but many of the committee doubted our ability to erect it. Mark would not countenance this negative attitude and drove the project through to a successful conclusion, thanks to a great team effort by the membership.

Mark's dynamism and commitment resulted in a continuing trickle of new members despite the disruptions to our activities - new members were even joining when we again lost access to the water during repairs to the dam wall! However, perhaps Mark's greatest contribution and legacy for the

future of the Club arose from several enquiries from non-members who wanted to give presents of "Sailing Experiences". These queries came to me as General Secretary and I was very doubtful that we could provide a worthwhile "Experience". However, Mark had recently completed his RYA instructor training and seized on the idea as a way to apply this training. He developed a half-day session of basic training, with at least two hours out on the water and the near certainty of the trainees sailing on their own by the end of the session. Mark is insistent that the price for these sessions must be kept low (currently only £10 per adult, £5 per junior) to ensure that they are available to as many people as possible, and this sum is deducted from the membership fees when the trainees decide to join the Club.

At the Gala Re-Opening of the Club and the Country Park at the end of August 2010, the "Sailing Experiences" were extremely popular and they have proved to be a highly successful way of obtaining new, active members who had not sailed before. To date, these sessions have all been run by Mark and he has maintained the new members' interest throughout the winter months by providing "whiteboard training" on Wednesday evenings (with some assistance from other instructors). Some of the new members even sailed through all the cold weather!

These "Sailing Experiences" have revolutionised recruitment to the Club and have been a major factor in 20 new memberships over the last twelve months. To my knowledge, this is a higher recruitment rate than in any of the previous twenty years. At our recent Open Days on 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> May, people ranging from 5 to 55 years old booked another twenty "Sailing Experiences" and there is a waiting list for eighteen more, so we can expect a further influx of new faces at the Club!

Mark has a full-time job and a young family, but the amount of time that he still manages to spend at the Club or working on its behalf is incredible – and would not be possible without the full support of his wife, Linda. His total commitment and "can-do" attitude during a very difficult time for the club has inspired us all. He is fully deserving of this or any other award in recognition of his outstanding services to Ulley Sailing Club.

Yours sincerely

Steve Butler  
General Secretary, Ulley Sailing Club