

# LEIGHTON BUZZARD AC

FROM AN UNUSUAL BEGINNING, LEIGHTON BUZZARD AC IS NOW FIRMLY ESTABLISHED, SAM DEAR REPORTS

## How it began

In 1978, three local runners who commuted into London daily and belonged to London clubs – Tony Barnes for Crawley AC and John Arnold and Ray Morland for Ealing & Southall AC – discussed the possibility of setting up an athletics club in Leighton Buzzard. A public meeting was arranged and a notice put into the local paper.

In the beginning it wasn't unknown for the club to turn up at races with the entire team in one car. Despite this, Leighton Buzzard AC competed well against larger clubs in big events such as the Round Norfolk Relay, the Grand Union Canal Relay and the Southern 12 Stage Road Relays.

Nearly 40 years later, having struggled with membership numbers in the early 2000s and despite having no track of their own, the club is thriving and boasts a healthy junior membership as well as a diverse and friendly group of seniors.

## Who's who

Current club president Gail Duckworth coxes for England and GB masters and has achieved British records in her time with the club, while former member Nikki Sykes won the SEAA Cross Country Championships at under-15 level. Mike Shevyn gained international honours with England at middle distance and cross country. Richard Inchley has been secretary of the South of England Cross Country Association and is currently chairman of the Bedfordshire Athletics Association and treasurer of the English Cross Country Association and Chiltern Cross Country League, as well as being the county cross-country men's team manager for the past 25 years.

## Recent successes

As a club, Leighton Buzzard AC has always been seen to be punching above its weight. As the smallest club in the division, the club

The club has grown considerably since its humble start in 1978



finished third in the senior men's category and sixth overall in division one of the Chiltern Cross Country League in 2015-6, the best finish in its history.

Despite having no superstars, there are frequent individual and team wins on the local race scene, where the club competes admirably against the heavyweights from Bedford & County, Luton and Marshall Milton Keynes.

## Where they train

LBAC holds sessions on Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays for seniors mostly on the streets and paths of Leighton Buzzard and the surrounding area. These include speed sessions, beginners' sessions and a social run on the Wednesday, all starting at Tiddenfoot Leisure Centre in the town. The juniors train on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Without a track of their own, the club occasionally hires ones out to improve on track and field disciplines.

## Coaches

The coaches concentrate on the juniors and none more so than Nick Clay. Everybody who has progressed through Leighton Buzzard AC has done so under Clay's guidance. The other coaches working with Nick are mostly made up of parents of the junior members. It's a system that works well.

## Club races

The club is hosting the 35th Leighton 10 this year on September 18. The race is a scenic and undulating route just outside Leighton Buzzard on the Bedfordshire-Buckinghamshire border and includes the notorious Shenley Hill. Having hosted a Chiltern Cross Country League fixture for many years, this led, with the help of Inchley, to the club organising the Milton Keynes fixture in the British Athletics Cross Challenge for the last two years.

## Leagues

Juniors and seniors participate in the Chiltern Cross Country League, one of the largest leagues in the country, and the East Anglian League for track and field during the summer months. The young members focus on the multi-disciplinary approach, doing plenty of QuadKids and Sportshall competitions.

## CLUB STATS

**Number of members:** Approximately 95 seniors and 100 juniors, but growing all the time.

**Club colours:** Purple and gold

**Website:** [leightonbuzzardac.co.uk](http://leightonbuzzardac.co.uk)

**Facebook:** Leighton Buzzard AC

**Twitter:** @LeightonRunning

**Instagram:** @LeightonRunning