

Helsby Running Club – AGM – 28 June 2020

ESSAR Four Villages Half Marathon 2020

Summary

The 37th ESSAR Four Villages Half Marathon took place on Sunday 19th January 2020 at 10.30am. 2022 runners registered for the race, which was marginally higher than previous year, with 1717 starting the race and 1711 finishing this was a record year. Pre-race and on the day organisation went smoothly with no major issues. Feedback from runners and supporters and everyone involved following the race was overwhelmingly positive again.

Pre-race organisation

The race team worked closely with CWAC and Blue Arrow to plan the road closures, ensuring the safety of runners, reducing the chance of race cancellation due to bad weather and minimising disruption to local residents and businesses. Local businesses were given plenty of advance notice through face to face visits and a letter drop to all residents on the route was done on 7/8 December informing them of the road closure, as well as publicity in local publications.

We continued to use Nifty Events for online entries and for race timing and fulfilment. We stayed open for entries until race day and saw a last-minute flurry of entries, I think due to the favourable weather forecast. The price remained at £25 (£23UKA).

We won 1st place in the Half Marathons North category of the Challenge Awards presented by Runners World and powered by Let's Do This for the 2018/19 season. We were awarded £1000 in prize money and promotion in Runners World.

This year we worked hard to go green with a number of new initiatives to reduce the environmental impact of the race. These included recyclable paper cups at water stations, paper goody bags, no disposable water bottles at the finish, recycling stations at the start and finish areas and litter bins at each mile marker to collect the increasing number of gel packs runners consume these days! We received a grant from a local CWAC councillor to fund the cost of the paper cups and received positive feedback from runners on our new initiatives. Plus this year we organised a mile by mile clear up and litter check of the course after the race, this kept residents' complaints down.

Our main challenge continues to be parking. This year we didn't have confirmation that we could use the Honeywell site until the last minute and had reduced car parking at the High School. We worked closely with the Rotary team to plan and communicate parking options. We used a parking marshal team to try and reduce irresponsible parking in residential areas, which we had received complaints about last year and this worked well. We also trialled using a car parking area at Essar and provided a bus service to this new area. We will look to develop this further for 2021. For the first time we had a portaloos at the High School and at the Essar carpark there was toilet and indoor eating facilities open, which was a bonus!

We had a good response to our request for volunteers and marshals and the race was well supported by club members, friends of the club and local community groups.

We ran a design a T-shirt competition again with three local schools taking place this year. This year's winner was Zoe from Horn's Mill School. The t-shirts were available to pre-order and the winner was invited to start the race.

On the day

The race went ahead and overall feedback from runners, supporters and residents was really positive. We had a police presence on the day again thanks to Richard Hankins and team and there were less incidents with motorists disregarding the road closures this year. Traffic management was provided by Blue Arrow and on the whole it worked well, with just a few tweaks needed for 2021.

The start area worked well and there were no major issues. The finish area, which is always tricky as there is a high volume of people in a small space, worked smoothly with no back up of runners over the finish line. The freebie this year was a reusable water bottle which we pre-filled with water. There was a small incident with a temporary misplacement of the last box of medals but this was soon rectified and we posted out medals to those who missed out. We received positive feedback on how we dealt with the situation.

There were refreshment options at the school and back at the start area, along with free massages available for runners.

Race Results

Full results for the race can be found at: <https://helsbyrunningclub.niftyentries.com/Results/Four-Villages-Half-Marathon-2020>



Finances

The race accounts have been circulated separately, but I am delighted to say that we have given around £12000 to local groups involved in the race and the two local hospices which we support.

Sponsors, Suppliers and partners

A big thank you to ESSAR and Asics, who continued as our race sponsors. We worked with a whole range of organisations; Nifty Events (race entries & timing), Helsby Sports and Social Club (start area

hosts), Hornsmill School (finish area hosts), Helsby High School (car parking), Rotary (car parking and refreshments), Spark Medical (First aid cover), Blue Arrow (traffic management), Helsby High School (car parking), WI (runner's refreshments), Marie Curie Fund Raising Group (baggage), Helsby Tennis Club (marshals) and numerous local scout and guide and youth groups (marshals, water stations and baggage).

Thank yous

Thank you to everyone who volunteered and helped with pre-race preparations and on the day at the start, finish and on the course. We are only able to put on this race with the support of club members, so your support is very much appreciated. The 4VHM, along with the Sandstone Trail and Wobbler, provide considerable funds to the club, enabling us to keep membership fees down. We will continue to ask all members to volunteer at least once throughout the year to ensure that everyone contributes, so we are able to continue to put on these races and therefore keep membership fees down.

Finally, a massive thank you to the race team. It really is a team effort. Without everyone's hard work we wouldn't have the successful and much loved race that Helsby Running club and the local community can be proud of.

Thinking ahead to 2021

We're very much hoping that the 4VHM will take place on Sunday 17 January 2021 and from our new clubhouse. We'll be taking guidance from UK Athletics and other authorities in the coming months on whether this is possible. We will also be keeping a close eye on whether large mass participation running events such as the London Marathon and Great North Run go ahead in the autumn and any changes they put in place.

One option is to simplify the race to minimise the money we need to spend in advance. This will enable us to go ahead with plans to put the race on but if we have to change plans at a late stage due to ongoing restrictions, we're not put in a difficult financial position. There are considerable costs to putting on a safe and enjoyable race and some of these need to be committed well in advance.

The proposed idea is to put on a 'Back to Basics' race with minimal bling (no medals, no goody bag) but still with a great course and lots of community spirit. Any savings made would be donated to the two local hospices and the community groups we support, who like many are currently facing challenging times. We will still look at ways of giving all runners a token of recognition for completing the race.

We are also considering reducing the number of entries to keep costs down and put less pressure on the local community in terms of parking. Hopefully we will be hosting the race from our new club house, which will be located not far from our existing site and means a slightly different start location for the race. The entry price will reflect any changes we have to make, making sure we are still great value and able to support our charity and community partners.

If you have any feedback on these proposals then please let me know. And we will hopefully be back to 'normal' for 2022.

Laura Baynham-Hughes, Race Director 4VHM