

2. The Venue

The Leisure Centre seemed on the face of it to be an ideal meeting place. It is conveniently located on the edge of town, handy for road runs in winter and the river bank in summer. It has showers, lockers, ample car parking, a bar upstairs for post run re-hydration, and function rooms for larger social events. It was also a good place from which to run the River Bank Challenge.

To start with the only possible disadvantage was the fact that we had to congregate in the corridor outside the changing rooms for the pre-run chat and any announcements, but having to meet in this limited space seemed a small price to pay for all the other good things the Centre had going for it.

But it wasn't ours. As time went on many of the reception and catering staff began treating us in an off-hand way as though they were doing us a favour by tolerating our presence. Whether this was intentional on their part or imaginary on ours is hard to say, but in any case, a less than sociable atmosphere was engendered. And what are the Striders without a sociable atmosphere?

So, in 1995, after ten years at the Leisure Centre, we started casting around for alternatives. One or two of our members were going to the new Aerobia gym on Mariner Street at the time, and happened to mention that we were looking for a new base. Aerobia saw this as a good marketing opportunity, and immediately offered us free use of changing and shower facilities, annual sponsorship, and other financial assistance (no figures mentioned!), and the Striders to be mentioned in all their advertising.

It seemed like a good deal, so we started meeting there for a trial period, at the end of which we would vote to stay or go. Unfortunately, it soon became apparent that the meeting area was very restricted, and the town centre location made it less than ideal for starting training runs. At the same time, we were sceptical about how much cash would be forthcoming when the crunch came, and we were also worried about what would happen if the business folded and we were left high and dry having burnt our bridges back to the Leisure Centre. In addition, we could not run the River Bank race from there. So, with some regret we voted to go back to the Centre.

Our decision to pull out must have created some considerable animosity on Aerobia's part. Unfortunately, I didn't realise that was the case when I went back there some

time later to see if they would sponsor us for an advert we were running in the Times. The owner, a Mr Plant, growled at me “You’ve got a f***ing nerve”, which with hindsight I suppose I had. So that was the end of the Aerobia story.

I’m glad to say our return to the Leisure Centre was short-lived. 1996 saw the construction of the new Westfield Banks Sports Complex, a joint venture between Goole RUFC and Goole Tennis Club. At the time Steve Durose worked for the same firm as Jeff Binnington, the RUFC Chairman, and he broached the possibility of the Striders getting in on the act even though we had no capital to put into their pot.

Steve and I went to meet Jeff at the old Murham Ave rugby club, and somehow managed to persuade him that it was a good idea for the Striders to meet at Westfield on a Wednesday night, which was the one night of the week when there were no rugby orientated activities. We would make an annual contribution to Westfield Banks for the use of the showers, and also, we promised to put as much money behind the Rugby Club bar as we possibly could, which is no hardship at all. In addition, we would use the Complex for the River Bank Challenge and any other social events that came up.

We started meeting at the Rugby Club in August 1996, and my own view is that it’s the best thing that the Club could have done. Occasionally we have to play second fiddle if there’s a one-off rugby fixture on a Wednesday (for some reason the ladies seem to object to having to share changing facilities with 15 hairy-arsed rugby players), but most of the time, to all intents and purposes, it is our very own clubhouse, ideal for the River Bank Challenge and the Ackworth handicap, not to mention one-off parties and discos. Try asking anybody from Ackworth Road Runners, who visit us every year, if they are envious of our facilities, and they will say a resounding Yes every time.