



WIMBLEDON COMMON, the expansive greenspace in south-west London, is a fantastic resource for the capital's residents. And since last autumn the Common has been home to a group of enthusiastic runners who have enjoyed its varied facilities.

Caroline Dunleavy has been running for 6 years although initially she had reservations - am I fit enough to do this? Will I look silly? She took her courage in her hands, pulled on her trainers, headed out the front door and has never looked back.

A high point for her was the Royal Parks Half Marathon in 2012 - fantastic course, great atmosphere. She took part with two friends and they finished within a few minutes of each other and simply had a fantastic time. Around this period Caroline was sending her third child off to school and her thoughts turned to making the most of her new freedom.

Her own early experiences as a runner plus the enjoyment she'd had since, inspired her to take the Run England Leadership in Running Fitness course. Caroline thrived on the course and at that point decided to start her own group for women. She targeted mums like herself with school-age children, retirees and people who worked from home. The response was positive.

Caroline felt there was a demand from women who were absolute beginners and had all the reservations that brings. She set-up a 12 week programme specifically aimed at those new to running. Her approach was supportive, letting people progress at a pace they were comfort-

able with. She started with two small groups who met mid-mornings for a 60 minute weekly session that included warm-up, drills, technique practice, stretches and 20 minutes walk/jog.

Caroline was pleased how the early weeks went: "As anticipated the groups were mixed ability despite all being beginners and some made faster progress than others. However we soon created a friendly and supportive environment where members encouraged each other and swapped highs and lows post-session at the Windmill Cafe.

Over the months we became more adventurous - we explored the trails on the common; we 'practised' the Wimbledon parkrun course so that members could tackle the timed 5k event with confidence and some of the group entered local races. We had a good turnout at the Santa Run Battersea Park 6K in December and the Run Richmond Park 5K/10K in April.

Things have moved along briskly since the autumn launch and the 2014 summer term programme had expanded to beginners' groups on Monday and Thursday and also on Tuesday evenings, and improvers' groups on Monday, Tuesday and Thursday.

Following this promising start Caroline is looking ahead with confidence. A big percentage of her first crop of runners has continued so the improver contingent is increasing. Growing numbers, a presence at local events and a developing sense of identity means the future is bright for Common Runners.

Check out session dates and times at www.commonrunners.co.uk