



## Stotfold Junior Football Club

**When the Football Association sent out information about the Sport England Clubmark accreditation, Stotfold Junior Football Club requested an information pack and began a process which has changed the club beyond recognition.**

Stotfold Junior Football Club used the Sport England Clubmark accreditation process as the perfect opportunity to update and develop many of its procedures and guidelines and has come on leaps and bounds as a result.

“It can be inevitable in any club to lose a bit of focus,” explains Stotfold’s Chairman, Alan Syme. “We were concentrating on our members’ enjoyment – which of course is essential – but we’d lost sight a little of their development, of the importance of giving them a clear route through to joining the senior squad. Embarking on the Clubmark process gave us all a clear focus. The information pack was very good, it explained why we should go for the accreditation and gave us the way forward.”

The Sport England Clubmark is used by national governing bodies of sport as part of their club accreditation programmes for sports clubs with junior sections in recognition of a quality club. By creating a single, national standard, Clubmark helps give all kinds of sports clubs a structure and direction that will benefit them in many ways.

As part of the Clubmark accreditation process, club coaches had to reach level one coaching status. So many people wanted to get involved that the local FA came to Stotfold to deliver the coaching course directly to 20 of the club’s volunteers. “The technical expertise was never in question,” says Alan. “But there’s been a real step up in the ability of the coaches to communicate with the kids and to make training sessions much more structured.”

The club has developed in every area, but one of the main developments was in the club’s structure and planning. “Stotfold already had a constitution, but we needed to rewrite the rule book,” Alan explains.

“When we first got the pack through it was a little daunting, but the people from the local FA in Bedfordshire were very helpful. They helped us to break it down into components and talk through how the process works. About five or six of us were involved in the process, but for a smaller club that wouldn’t be necessary as the support that’s available makes it easy.”



The club prepared a development plan which is updated every six months. What began as a plan to help achieve Clubmark status has turned into a working document which leads the club on its continued development. As part of that development plan the club developed its codes of conduct, rewriting its existing documents for players, coaches and managers, and bringing in a code for parents for the very first time.

“When we issue the code of conduct to players every year, their parents have to sign up too and agree to abide by the rules. We demand better behaviour on the touchline, and there can be no critical shouting from parents,” explains Alan. “I firmly believe that you can tell when you are playing against a club that has Clubmark status just by the behaviour of the parents!”

Stotfold Junior Football Club has developed in so many ways since embarking on the Clubmark accreditation process back in 2002. “It’s brought the club on so much, and we got there so much quicker than we’d thought – the whole process took just eight months,” says Alan. “We’re unrecognisable from the club we were three years ago, and those changes have come about as a result of the process of going for the Clubmark rather than the accreditation itself.”