

Trent Windsurfing Club, A Plan for Growth

1 Introduction

Trent Windsurfing Club is seeking to improve both what it has to offer the existing membership and its appeal to the wider public. The club needs to recruit new members and retain existing ones in order to become financially secure. This documents seeks to lay out the plans for the 2012 season and beyond, with the intention that these changes will create the conditions in which the club will flourish.

2 Club History

The club was formed in the 1980's based in Long Eaton, Derbyshire. The club has access to a landscaped former gravel pit with some limited storage and changing/toilet facilities in metal shipping containers. The membership has been around the 50-60 mark for a number of years, though in its heyday there were in excess of 250 members which came about due to the temporary closure of Nottinghamshire County Sailing Club.

In 2007 an influx of new members on to the committee has seen a change to the ambition for the club. Since that time the club has introduced a number of new initiatives;-

1. A new website as the public face of the club,
2. A beginner level equipment lease scheme,
3. Training days with nationally recognised professional windsurfers,
4. Equipment demo days in conjunction with our local windsurfing shop,
5. A concerted effort to promote the club within the windsurfing community,
6. Organised and sponsored trips to UK and foreign windsurfing venues,
7. Commencing in 2011 an intermediate board lease scheme,
8. Commencing in 2011 regular weekly club nights.

3. Current Situation

3.1 Lease

Our current lease is up for renewal and we are waiting for the landlords response to our request to open negotiations. We have a number of projects that will require the landlords agreement and we will seek to create some leeway within the lease to allow us to make changes without recourse each time to asking permission.

Some of what we have planned might have to be adapted in the light of the result of these negotiations, however we expect to be paying considerably more in rent in the future since we wish to gain access, in addition, to another lake in the same locality and controlled by the same landlord, which will give us much better sailing conditions in Southerly and South Westerly winds. Our current lake is best in a South Westerly to North Westerly direction.

With this in mind we did some projections based on the current membership levels and we found that without significant recruitment we would likely be reducing the capital assets at too rapid a rate.

3.2 Factors Affecting Membership Numbers

As a club we recognise that our water(s) are not ideal for a competent or experienced windsurfer, though for beginners and intermediates they offer very safe sailing. In order for the club to retain members as they progress we have to offer more than just water access.

When we looked more closely at membership statistics (these have only been kept, in useful form, for the last 4 years) we found that whilst we were managing to recruit at a reasonable rate, we were losing members in equal numbers such that as at March 2011 50% of the membership had joined in the previous 4 years.

The failure to keep long term members is one of our biggest concerns and is informing our planning decisions. However it is revealing that recruitment in a time of national decline in numbers for the sport is holding up well and recruitment in 2011 has been the highest of recent years at 13 and a significant proportion of those being experienced windsurfers.

The club has traditionally done little or no formal advertising either locally or nationally. We currently rely on the club website to show interested parties what and who we are. We recognise the importance of continually updating and adding interesting new material and we think that this has been the primary driving force in bringing new members to the club. We also have a good placement in relevant Google searches. We have good contacts with the national windsurfing press and have had a number of press releases and reports published over the last three years. This has helped in recruitment of experienced windsurfers.

3.3 Factors Affecting Recruitment

The equipment lease scheme as it stands will only bring in 3-5 new members per year. The intermediate board lease scheme is an attempt to aid retention of these in the second year of membership by staging the outlay necessary on equipment. We lease the intermediate equipment as a board only, the member has to purchase their own rig.

The club has never been able to offer any training and we do know that we lose a number of potential new members because of this. Whilst we will never be able to become an RYA Training Centre we would like to be able offer some basic beginner level training. We do have two RYA Level 1 instructors within the committee who are keen to offer help.

3.4 Membership Fees

Membership fees have traditionally been low and have not increased for many years. The current renewal rate of £55 is felt to be very competitive but the committee are very wary of imposing a big increase as it is felt that the effects on member retention will be detrimental.

The committee feel that the membership will accept a modest increase in fees in exchange for the flexibility of having two lakes, however more significant increases will have to be backed by a bigger offer by way of events and activities.

The committee have decided that whilst the capital assets could be reserved in order to insulate the membership from an increase in fees brought about by an increase in rent, the better plan is to use the assets more creatively to bring about change which will lead to increased membership levels and a more secure future.

4. The Future

4.1 Activities

Club trips, training and social occasions are important and we want to have a full calendar in place in time for the AGM in February 2012 and membership renewals. As last year we will be offering incentives to attend the AGM so that we can get the views of the membership and hopefully, recruit new blood to the committee.

4.2 Recruitment

The activities of the club and the publicity surrounding them, along with the hire scheme are successfully driving recruitment. The influx of new members this year is without precedent in recent years. The changes put in place in 2007 and the hard work of the committee is paying off. We are mindful however that we might still lose numbers overall at March 2012 renewal time, but the plans we want to make should eventually have an impact on retention. Our aim is to grow the club such that fixed costs are covered by membership fees, which requires a membership of approximately 100. The key to this is activity and the publicity derived from it. We have to make welcome and integrate new members rapidly so that they will feel comfortable joining in with club activities, something that has been lacking in the past.

4.3 Equipment Leasing

The equipment lease scheme has been successful in bringing new members to the club with very little by way of local advertising. We would like to expand this coupled with a local advertising campaign in order to ensure we generate enough new interest.

We will be considering applying to the RYA for funding to help purchase the necessary equipment. We will probably stage the increase over two years and will include the intermediate board lease scheme in our plans. We have recognised that we currently have insufficient storage in the off season and will have to adapt one of our cabins for board racking.

4.4 Publicity and Promotion

We have agreed to appoint a Publicity Officer whose role it will be to co-ordinate the advertising and promotion of all club activities to the general public and within the windsurfing press.

4.5 Training

We know we turn away new members because we do not offer any form of initial basic training. We want this to change for 2012 and we have agreed to create a new committee position of Training Officer whose aim will be to develop a club training programme.

We have a member appointed to this role in an acting capacity until the change to the constitution can be ratified at the AGM. We have two RYA level 1 qualified instructors and the club has agreed to subsidise the cost of training two more.

4.6 Record Keeping

Historically the club has only ever kept basic records about both its' membership and finances. Both of these are being addressed for 2012. In order to ensure proper budgetary control the club will be moving from paper based accounts to a computer accounts package commencing January 2012. This will allow us to rapidly track income and expenditure against allocated budgets.

4.7 Membership

Membership records are currently computer based, however we feel we could further improve our data collection and gather additional information from both renewing members and new member. Consequently the forms will change for 2012 to gather information such as ;-

1. How did you hear of the club
2. What made you decide to join
3. Age, competence and experience information
4. RYA, UKWA or relevant other membership.

5. Willing to volunteer and relevant skills.

6. Activity requests.

We will also be circulating a questionnaire at the AGM with a broader list of questions relating to the activity of the club.

4.8 Committee Recruitment

The club also needs to recruit new and active members to the committee. With a considerable number of long serving committee members retiring over the last few years, and more having signalled their desire to do so at the end of the current year, the future growth program will falter without new recruits. To this end we will be circulating a request to all members to ascertain if any would be prepared to stand for election as either an officer post or ordinary member. We will be suggesting that they might like to attend some meetings prior to the AGM to see how the club operates and perhaps air their views.

4.9 Longer Term Plans

Longer term, once we have a new lease in place we want to be able to improve club facilities in order to be able to offer;-

1. Equipment storage. We have turned away some potential new members because of lack of same.
2. A new shelter and paved seating area along with secure outdoor furniture storage.
3. SUPS, canoes possibly, to supplement the tandem board for use in light winds on club nights.
4. Rescue boat storage. Currently the small RIB needs to be inflated for use so is not readily available.

5. Summary

An action plan

<i>Item</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Action Date</i>
1.	One club organised event each month of the season.	Continuing
2.	Regular training sessions for club members catering for varying ability levels.	Commencing April 2012
3.	Refurbish the changing room cabin to provide board storage space and updated changing room.	Summer 2012
4.	Refurbish the toilet block.	Summer 2012
5.	Arrange for volunteers to undergo RYA Level 1 Instructor training.	Spring 2012
6.	Club Open Day to be coupled with the traditional club campover, BBQ and demo day.	July/August 2012
7.	Club Membership records to be revamped to gather useful information.	February 2012
8.	Club accounts to be computerised and budgets allocated.	January 2012
9.	Regular beginner level training events for newly joined members.	May 2012
10.	Taster sessions/beginner courses to be organised based on demand from new enquiries.	Spring/Summer 2012
11.	Expand the equipment lease scheme to 6 beginner boards and 4 intermediate boards.	May 2012
12.	Embark on a comprehensive campaign of local advertising to promote the training facilities and open day.	May 2012