

Downs Sailing Club Development Plan – 2020 to 2023

It is recognised that for the club to continue to thrive it will need to adapt and evolve to meet the changing needs of its existing and potential new members, so that they can continue to enjoy their club and the sailing opportunities it provides. To achieve this, the club has put in place a Development Plan that evaluates the current situation, considered improvement opportunities and provides a structured pathway to where it needs to be in the future to meet its aspirations.

The Development Plan cycle runs for a three year period between 2021 to 2023 and was initiated during the last year of the current Commodore (2021) and includes the preceding two year tenure of the future Commodore (2022 and 2023).

The objective of the Development Plan is to help determine which aspects of the club need to be developed, to recognise where the club is at this current point in time and to identify what processes need to be put in place to allow us to get to where we want to be.

The Plan is intended to capture the needs and aspirations of the club and its members in a relatively informal and low-key format. It is acknowledged that this is not a comprehensive review of the club, its membership or its governance, but instead a high-level document to help focus and make best use of the time available from its volunteer committees and members.

In line with the RYA Club Development Model, the following core elements have been identified:

- Members and Participants
- Volunteers
- Resources
- Governance
- Activities
- Facilities

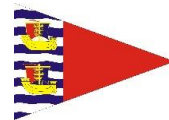
In preparing the Development Plan, each of these have been carefully examined and individual development projects identified. Based on the needs of the club and its members, these development projects have been prioritised. The following sections summarise the key issues, objectives and identified actions for each core element and where required, set out future aims and actions needed to implement the plan. This has been structured broadly in line with the RYA Club Development Cycle.

Members and Participants

Situation Analysis

Whilst membership numbers remain reasonably healthy and consistent, there is a notable change in the ratio between the total membership and the number of members that participate in sailing activities. There is a growing gap between the more traditional member, i.e. that is very racing focussed and attends regularly, and members that sail/race when it suits them and their lifestyle. It is recognised that many members have more than one pastime now.

The club has a good diversity in terms of age range and have a healthy number of female sailors regularly competing in club racing. It offers a structured plan from Learn to Sail to open meeting



winning level training and coaching. However, it has been identified that very few members travel to open meetings now.

Whilst our membership is reasonably diverse in age and gender, to increase the level of participation, there needs to be a strong focus on less experienced sailors of all ages and gender. Downs Sailing Club has always had a full training syllabus and the following is to be maintained and enhanced where required.

- Learn to Sail
- Friday Coached Sailing
- Ready to Race
- Coached Rookie Series
- Rookie Open Meeting with supported coaching
- Kent Schools Sailing Association (KSSA) Training

To facilitate these development activities, the club's Development Group, chaired by the Vice Commodore oversees new initiatives and activities.

Future Aims

The principle aims of the club in this Development Plan cycle are to:

- retain existing membership, reduce 'churn' and to increase the level of participation
- increase diversity and the range of on-water activities available to the membership

Actions

- The Development Group have the full support of the Executive Committee to continue to drive forward the membership initiatives such as the 'Lets Get Racing' programme, which has been hugely successful in encouraging more members to take part in club racing.
- Groups within the local community, such as the local Scouts to be identified and approached.
- Continue to provide recreational sailing opportunities, such as the Sandwich Bay Cruise, Trip to the Goodwins and Friday Night informal sailing sessions.
- Continue to employ club coaches so that more one-to-one coaching can take place.
- Target non-sailing parents and encourage them to take part in sailing.
- Use more diverse imagery across our website to show that we offer more than just racing.
- Adapt membership packages so that taster sessions are more accessible and require less administration.
- Encourage more women on the water activities
- Continue to host at least two open meeting per year with the aim of familiarising new members with the format of such events, with the objective being to encourage members to attend open meetings at other clubs and class events.
- Continue to maintain strong links with the Kent Schools Sailing Association (KSSA). This provides excellent training and comradery for the younger sailors at the club and is a good pathway to competitive sailing, which has been proven by many of the clubs young sailors that have progressed to high level competitive sailing.
- A long-term aim of the club is to explore the feasibility of hosting the National Schools Sailing Association Regatta in 2026.



Volunteers

Situation Analysis

With the exception of the club coaches, all roles within the club are carried out on a voluntary basis. In order to provide experience and increase the confidence of members that are new to particular volunteer roles, the club's Training Committee helps to identify members who require particular experience. For example helming safety boats, mark laying or race officer duties, and has put in place a mentoring system to facilitate this.

Future Aims

The club has always been run on a volunteer basis and this is part of what makes the club so successful, as it engenders an 'everyone mucks in' attitude that underpins the friendly atmosphere that has always prevailed. It is not envisaged that this will change in the future.

It has also been recognised that a significant amount of training is undertaken by the club's volunteer members. In acknowledging this point, one of the future aims of the club is to invest in the training of out trainers.

Actions

- Increased awareness of the need for members to carry out their duties
- Improve communications to the wider network of members, especially those not taking an active part in club racing.
- Sell the benefits of doing duties, i.e. developing power boat skills, better understanding of race officer duties and race management.
- Ongoing roll out of PB2 and Safety Boat courses
- Encourage mentoring sessions for safety boat, course laying and race management

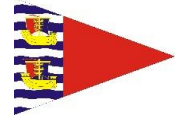
Resources

Situation Analysis

Income from membership, combined with the hire of the clubhouse for events and Bridge clubs, as well as revenue generated from hosting open meetings, allows the club to maintain a reasonably healthy and sustainable balance sheet. However, it is important to be mindful of the impacts associated with the possibility of reducing membership numbers in the future.

Current income streams allow for a good investment in club boats and safety equipment and the recent changes to the membership packages has increased revenue from boat hire. The recent review undertaken by the Development Group has successfully facilitated a structured programme of maintenance and replacement for club boats.

One of these income streams is renting the clubhouse out during weekdays to local Bridge clubs. Not only does this strengthen the club's community engagement but the income contributes significantly to training and maintenance costs.



One of the tasks in this Development Plan cycle has been to continue to review the club boat hire structure, moving towards a 'pay and play' system. Early feedback since the introduction of the scheme has shown that this has both simplified the boat hire process and has significantly increased boat hire revenue. This has reinforced the view of the club that a significant proportion of the newer generation of members are content to hire, rather than own their own boats. This has allowed these members to gain a better understanding of the type of boat they are best suited to, before transitioning to boat ownership. The positive outcome being that there is less drop-out due to members purchasing unsuitable boats and not enjoying their sailing.

The provision of a good range of well-maintained boats has allowed greater participation and take-up of on-water activity. In addition, the income generated is sufficient to allow longer term investments in the clubs hire fleet to be considered.

Another invaluable resource that the club has is its paid coaches. These are a legacy from the RYA initiative that part funded this role some years ago. The restructuring of membership fees and emphasis on encouraging new and less active members to participate in on-water activities and club racing has brought the role of the club coaches into sharp focus over the last two years. Their input has been invaluable in helping less confident members to transition to competent and competitive sailors.

Future Aims

It is the club's intention to continue to fund club coaches.

Governance

Situation Analysis

The current club governance was reviewed in detail in 2010 as part of 'An Inspired Facility' application. The club's governance is not considered to be in need of review within this Development Plan cycle.

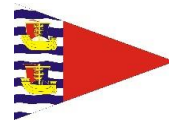
Activities

Situation Analysis

In addition to the racing calendar, the club currently provides a range of on and off water activities to help engage members that are not actively participating in club racing. These include:

- Dinghy cruises
- Treasure hunt / games day
- Powerboat training
- Powerboat cruise
- Sailing cruise to the Goodwin Sands

The club is also focussed on encouraging visitors and sharing the great sailing opportunities that are available at this location. These include:



- Hosting the Topper Regional Training Group
- Hosting the Streaker Southern Championships
- Hosting a Topper / Phantom Open
- Hosting the Man of Kent Regatta
- Facilitating the KSSA Girls Day
- Hosting the KSSA Coastal Annual Regatta

The club has always engendered close links with the local community and being in close proximity to the Walmer RNLI station has allowed the club to contribute in a number of ways. These include:

- Taking part in the annual RNLI Training Exercise
- Allowing the RNLI to use club facilities for training / social events
- Contributing to the RNLI Open Day
- Providing free taster sailing sessions for RNLI crew
- Fundraising activities

Downs Sailing Club is also an active participant in the Deal and Walmer Carnival and the annual town regatta.

Future Aims

The club aims to offer a 'Try Sailing Day' to local Scout Groups and will also strive to continue to grow the ladies participation in club racing.

Actions

In addition to promoting the above listed events, it is a priority action of the club to raise the profile in club calendar of the annual Ladies' race to reflect increase in participation.

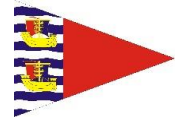
Facilities

Situation Analysis

Over the last decade there has been a significant investment in the clubhouse and whilst the building as it stands provides high quality accommodation for the club, areas of improvement have been identified. The immediate area of focus is the female changing area, which is not large enough for the increase in the number of female members actively involved in sailing activities.

Future Aims

The short-term objective (1 to 2 years) is to remodel the existing area, utilising more of the 'dead space' in the entrance hall. There is also an opportunity to carry out improvements to the bridge which in turn could make more space available for female changing.



Actions

During the winter of 2022-23 plans are to be drawn up and cost estimates derived that will inform the club's decision making in this matter.

Summary

The Development Plan has highlighted a number of areas where the club needs to focus the efforts of its volunteer membership, and these will be coordinated by the respective committees and groups that are well established. All of the actions that have been identified can be readily undertaken or managed by the current membership and no significant changes in the aspirations and objectives of the club have been identified.

The focus for this Development Plan cycle is therefore to continue to progress the good work undertaken through the dedication of generations of previous committees that have allowed the club to be in the position it is now.