

WHITSTABLE YACHT CLUB

Club Development Plan:
2023, 2024 and beyond



Whitstable Yacht Club Development Plan

This development plan aims to benefit our club by:

- Providing a clear direction for our club's development.
- Identifying goals and help to focus our actions within each of our strands of activity.
- Helping us to attract new members.
- Improving our chances of securing external funding.
- Keeping local, regional and national partners informed of our aims, particularly the RYA.
- Demonstrating how our club can meet criteria in funding applications.

The aim of the plan is to set realistic targets for our club within each strand of activity, and in achievable time frames.

Cover picture credit: Tom Banbury



Where we've come from...

Whitstable Yacht Club was founded in 1902, making it one of the oldest sailing clubs in the UK. In 1906 the name Whitstable Yacht Club was established and the current clubhouse on Sea Wall was leased. Over time, the Club has purchased the buildings it uses, and it now owns the clubhouse itself, as well as three adjacent residential properties. The club continues to lease the beach area (which is used for members' boat parking) from the Whitstable Oyster Fishery Company.

In the early days the boats sailed were a mixture of traditional cutters, yawls and lugs together with a few purpose-built racing craft called raters, with class racing starting in 1925. Team racing was popular, and boats would sail to the other clubs on Saturday morning, race in the afternoon and sail back on the Sunday. Over time, small dinghies started to gain popularity and a new boat, the 18ft National, was introduced. It proved very suitable for sailing off Whitstable and the Club is credited with being the founder of the class.

Post WWII the first dinghy classes at Whitstable were the National 12 and a 14ft Whitstable One Design. Class racing was popular and handicap racing was actively discouraged. By the 1970s established classes in the club were the National 12, Firefly, Merlin Rocket, Cadet, Enterprise, Fireball, Laser and Mirror. Catamaran racing started in the 1970s and there was a large fleet of small cruising yachts moored in the bay.

In the 1980s the Club was one of the few established yacht clubs in the country to encourage windsurfing, and the first national championships were held here in 1986. In the 1990s it was again one of the first to adopt the new high performance asymmetric skiff type dinghies. The club has continued to be a respected host for national championships and major sailing events.

Over the past 25 years the club has developed and sustained a successful RYA accredited training centre that continues to bring large numbers of new people into the sport.

Consultation with members

- A working group drawn from the membership was set up to write this plan.
- Contributions from the membership were sought through an online survey that was sent out in early 2022
- 220 members responded, representing 39% of individual members .
- Subsequently detailed qualitative focus groups were held with a representative cross-section of members in November 2022
- 23 people participated in three groups, categorised loosely as:
 - Active Sailors
 - Non-sailors (other water sports and social members)

In addition, the working group spoke to key members of the club about their experience and ideas for the future of the club

Summaries of current state and strengths & weaknesses were written for each of the following areas:

1. On the Water Activities
2. Training & Young People
3. Marketing & Communications
4. Bar & Social
5. Participation and Community
6. Property and Assets
7. Administration and Finance

The plan has been structured around these divisions of activity.

Feedback from members – focus groups

The key themes to emerge out of the members' focus groups discussions were:

Perception, diversity & inclusion of existing, new & potential members

- Intimidating place to enter
- “Not for me” / elitist
- Non-diverse membership
- No disabled access

Facilities & condition of the club

- Changing rooms & loos very old & tired
- Appearance & comfort of seating areas
- Derelict boats on the beach

Integration of less experienced & younger members

- It's hard to make the leap from newly trained to racing & participating in club events
- Club races can be very competitive and intimidating
- New / younger sailors unlikely to have their own boats – more equipment needs to be for hire

Communications

- Website looks old fashioned and is hard to navigate
- Members are happy to volunteer or do tasks but are often not asked or can't find out about opportunities
- Social media could be used more effectively

Where we want to be

We have used the findings from our research to set key objectives for the club.

The remainder of the plan sets out how we arrived at these objectives and the actions we propose to achieve them.

Area	Key Objectives
On the Water Activities	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Grow participation among less experienced participants2. Increase the diversity of water users (more kayak, SUP, windsurf activity, etc.)3. Improve participation in organised dinghy sailing & get more members racing and cruising regularly
Training & Young People	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Strengthen the pathways from newly qualified sailor to regular racer and cruiser2. Build and sustain our fleet of training dinghies3. Involve cadet members' families/parents so they are engaged & become activate participants at the club4. Improve and modernise the utilities in the training centre
Marketing & Communications	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Ensure we have a confident public facing image that promotes the club appropriately2. Ensure members can easily access the information they need, are informed about events and encouraged to participate
Bar & Social	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Ensure new members are made welcome and introduced to the club through improved inductions2. Maximise the contribution that bar activity makes to club finances
Membership and Community	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Be a more participative member of the local community2. Maximise our volunteers so that the workload is eased for all, and members feel part of the club community
Property & Assets	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Ensure the purpose and use of our assets is clear, and that they deliver the maximum for the club
Administration and Finance	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Achieve financial sustainability for the club, with in-year revenues covering costs & allowing us to grow the surplus against unexpected events / investments (refurbishments, equipment replacements, club boats etc)2. Ensure current high standards are maintained when key team members move on

On the Water Activity

Strengths

Sailing

- Location is excellent for launching and tides
- Good reach from London and train connections bringing members from beyond Whitstable
- High levels of expertise, training & skills on the water
- Good safety cover for formal races
- Strong participation in competitive programme of dinghy events & races
- Wide range of activities & classes (193 boats on the beach)
- Accreditation with appropriate bodies (e.g. RYA)
- >700 races per year, enjoyed by 159 individuals in 2022
- Host National Championships regularly
- Free sailing (c. 25 days per year)
- Some highly experienced / top-class sailors
- Winter “sharing best practice” sessions

Non-Sailing

- Increasing participation (19 kayaks in racks, 1 SUP)
- Informal kayak, SUP, windsurfing & cruising

Weaknesses

Sailing

- Strong focus on dinghy sailing may leave other categories feeling excluded
- General decline in fleet racing with a notable exception being the Laser fleet
- Little formal recognition of the cruiser (keelboat) fleet
- Programme relies heavily on a small number of people
- Name could be seen as exclusive / misleading (“yacht” club)

Training & Improving

- Hard for inexperienced / young sailors to build experience sufficiently to join main club races

Non-sailing

- Poor storage areas for non-sailing (SUP, Kayak etc)
- Minimal accreditation for non-dinghy sailing activities
- Little formal or club-organised events for non-sailing activities

On the Water Activity

Objective	Actioned	Planned
What we want to achieve		
Grow participation among less experienced participants	Increase support for new sailors starting to race - create structured pathways from “newly trained” to “active participant”	✓2024
	Schedule more inshore / short lap races	✓2023
	Offer advice / assistance on buying and selling of boats and equipment	2024
Improve participation in organised dinghy sailing & get more people racing and cruising	Develop innovative approaches involving less experienced members such as relay and team events	Sprint racing experiments 2024
	Instigate buddy system for new racers - Occasional Experienced/novice double-hander events	2024
Build and strengthen cruiser class	Set up audit of cruiser class members and investigate their wants and needs	2024
Increase the diversity of supported activity amongst water users (more kayak, SUP, windsurf activity)	Have kayak/SUP representative on sailing committee; in addition to current windsurfing rep	Review 2024
	Publish times in club programme for non-sailing water users to take part in group activities (eg safety boat with kayak/SUP safari, or kayak-accompanied open water swim)	✓2024
	Investigate the inclusion of kayak, SUP & Windsurfing lessons into the training school curriculum	Windsurfing Proposal 2024

Training & Young People

Strengths

- High levels of participation & involvement
- Excellent & over-subscribed RYA training programme
- Increasing participation from new & younger sailors
- Strong feed through from young trainees to dinghy instructors
- Cadets bring in other new members, eg parents, siblings
- Many new members join for training
- Cadets are encouraged to help with training & cadet sessions
- Excellent role models in the team – Ruth and the team set a great example and inspire other young people

Weaknesses

- Training boat replacement strategy needs to be funded
- Limited facilities in the training area with no toilets or other plumbing and poor climate control
- Difficult to integrate cadet families into wider club activities
- Parents often don't get involved in the sailing
- Stronger routes needed for progression from initial training to club racing
- Most accomplished cadet sailors become instructors rather than club racers (a strength and a weakness)
- Limited club equipment to use if you don't have your own

Training and Young People

Objective What we want to achieve	Action How it will be achieved	Actioned	Planned
Continue to grow our sailing training & include a wider range of activities	Expand breadth of activity by build stronger working relationship with Oyster Coast Watersports.	√2023	
Integrate cadets into club organised dinghy racing	Strengthen structured pathways from “newly trained” to “active participant”.	√2024	
Involve & welcome cadet members’ families/parents so they are engaged & become activate participants at the club	Organise special events during Whitstable Week and other regattas where cadet parents are catered for and invited to take part		√2024
Improve and upgrade Training Centre environment	Install plumbing, toilet, and heating into the teaching space. Upgrade insulation.		When resources allow
Support progression and development of volunteer skill sets	Instigate funding system and bursaries for training in key on-the-water roles.	√2023	

Marketing & Communications

Strengths

- Comprehensive website, collates events, racing schedule & results etc
- Some social media presence across many platforms, used both formally by the club and informally amongst member groups to promote events & participation
- Defined social media policy governs club usage
- There is a webcam at the club, initially for security purposes, also widely used by members to review conditions

Weaknesses

- Website needs redesign and refresh to bring it up to date with better sign-posting and stronger narrative
- Limited engagement with local social media groups
- Perception that internal club communications are inconsistent or unclear
- Public facing image feels exclusive and unwelcoming with unfriendly signage / poor welcoming into the club
- Club brand and internal signage is dated, with inconsistent use and application due to lack of clear guidelines

Marketing and Comms

Objective What we want to achieve	Action How it will be achieved	Actioned	Planned
Strengthen and update our online presence	Design new website with dedicated training space and recruitment/membership application section	✓2024	
	Rebrand the club marketing materials and identity and consider renaming the club to broaden its appeal		✓2024
	Investigate possibility of online club 'weather station' – supporting sailors and encouraging website traffic/SEO (building on popularity of webcam amongst members)		✓2024
	Develop social media strategy and objectives	✓2023	
Make the club more attractive and welcoming for passers by and walk in enquiries	Improve public facing communications around the club property		✓2024

Bar and Social

Strengths

Bar

- Location in town centre, near harbour and on the sea front
- Bar opening hours – daily & extended in Summer (very rare for a sailing club)
- Bar profits support the club finances (c.£20-25k p.a.)
- Professional steward and casual paid bar staff

Land-based activities

- Wide range of clubs and activities beyond sailing / water sports.
- Large number of social events
- C. 25% total membership are adult social members (Sept 22)
- Music club has attracted new members and boosts bar takings on rehearsal and showcase nights

Weaknesses

Bar

- Bar layout reduces social space inside
- Generous member discounts reduce profitability
- Bar staff are the “front of house” of the club and don’t always have the capacity to welcome non-members or new members

Bar and Social

Objective What we want to achieve	Action How it will be achieved	Actioned	Planned
Grow social and non-water activities & make sure everyone is welcome & encouraged to participate	Convene a social committee from existing activists		√2024
	Create wider range of social events including formal Dinners, NYE, Whitstable week events, suppers, talks and clubs managed by individuals through social committee.	√2023	

Membership and Community

Strengths

Membership

- Strong membership numbers
- 2022 a strong year, with 1 in 5 being new members
- 40% individual Junior members in 2022 (20% in 2016)
- High levels of membership satisfaction - in our survey 85% of respondents gave the club a rating of 7 or above on a 10-point scale

Volunteers & participation

- Strong roster of volunteers with good skills and experience

Community

- Located in the town centre and on the beach and ideally placed to be at the centre of the community
- Strong work to build relationships with local schools

Weaknesses

Membership

- Small proportion of members are regular users
- Water users who don't sail do not feel so well catered for
- Growing membership numbers do not own boats / equipment
- Increasing youth membership but hard to engage parents

Volunteers & participation

- Hard to track and make the most of volunteer experience & availability, especially formal qualifications / DBS checks etc
- We do not have a formal volunteer manager role, nor participate in RYA volunteer awards

Community

- The club does not participate in community events in the town, eg Wreath Laying on Armistice day, float in the Carnival etc.

Membership and Community

Objective What we want to achieve	Action How it will be achieved	Actioned	Planned
Become a more welcoming, inclusive members' club	Design & deliver more effective club inductions for new members, covering all aspect of the club and its facilities	√2023	
	Update the "Welcome" signage – members, bar staff, signage etc (still members only, but warmer)		√2024
Be a more participative member of the local community	Create a stronger presence at community events through creation of community liaison role and use of 'community calendar' that keeps us abreast of local events we should be involved in.	√2023	
Recruit and manage volunteers more effectively	Create volunteer coordinator role to manage and facilitate volunteering across the club		Review 2024

Our Property and Assets

The club's buildings are all in a prime seafront facing location with direct access to the beach and sea.

Club properties generate a total annual income of approx. £50K pa.

Considerable expense in maintenance and upgrading of property assets has been made in the recent years.

Portfolio Summary:

- All buildings are 150 – 200 years old in a seafront location all suffering with perennial maintenance
- No. 1 Sea Wall – Let out as 3 Bed roomed residential property over 3 floors.
- No. 2 Sea Wall – Let out as 2 bed roomed residential property over 3 floors.
- No 3-4 Sea Wall - Main WYC Clubhouse and bar.

- Stroud Shed - Windsurfing equipment storage
- Courtyard Coffee hut “Keiths” let out.
- Bin Storage area
- Boat storage area
- 1 x bunk room, let out for overnight accommodation.
- 5 x Offices on upper floors main clubhouse.
- No. 4 Sea Wall – Let out as a 1 Bed residential flat over 2 floors.
- Rigden's Shed - Large shed providing – Boat storage, workshop, equipment storage and sailing school facilities over 2 floors.

Property and Assets

Strengths

- Property has an asset value of £3.2 m.
- Excellent location of assets (likely to grow in value)
- Rental income is essential to club solvency
- Bank loan / mortgage secured with with property as collateral.
- Seafront location attracts members to balcony sunset sessions.
- Direct access to beach and sea.

Weaknesses

- Beach storage areas are leased from Whitstable Oyster Fishery Co. Subject to 15 year renewable lease negotiations. Threat of reduced beach area and increases in annual lease payment.
- Costly upkeep and maintenance of club property portfolio with long term financial implications. Often leads to emergency repairs with subsequent uncertain financial implications.
- Significant upgrades are required to male and female changing and toilet facilities also to facilitate safeguarding of minors and gender segregation.
- Upgrade of the external deck area required
- All development opportunities require substantial fund raising

Property and Assets

Objective What we want to achieve	Action How it will be achieved	Actioned	Planned
Ensure the purpose and use of our property assets is clear, and delivers for the club	Set up a working party to review management of club assets and maximise yield so that other capital projects can be funded. Review the use of the Stroud Shed	Reviewed @ GC annually	✓2024
Respond to member feedback on changing rooms and toilet facilities	Refurbishment of changing rooms with an emphasis on affordable solutions and a clever use of space and resources rather than large capital investment.		When resources allow
Accommodate children and non-binary members more effectively within the constraints of the current building and in line with RYA guidance	Redesign facilities to accommodate safeguarding of minors and gender segregation in line with RYA guidance.		Review options within available resources
Maximise disabled access within the constraints of the current building	Investigate possible modifications to building access that support people with mobility issues.		When resources allow
Respond to member feedback on the deck area	Refurbish deck area and renew canopy.		✓2024

Administration and Finance

Strengths

- Good systems – use of Sage working effectively
- Volunteer dedicated Club Manager with excellent experience
- Future opportunity to split into Co-ordinator and Accounts roles
- Member & Sailing Secretaries are paid roles (currently done by one person also with excellent skills & experience)
- Bar Supervisor, training and bosun roles are also professional / paid
- Legal & regulatory HR requirements contracted to Peninsula until 2024
- Rolling payroll contract with Dendy Neville
- Strong committee structure with experienced & skilled membership and commitment to regular meetings & decision-taking

Weaknesses

- Treasurer position remains vacant
- Relatively low contribution from assets - “Just getting by”
- Risk of loss of knowledge, and need to recruit and pay a new Club Manager when incumbent steps down
- Job descriptions for club roles need finalising
- Club constitution and rules require updating
- Paper based membership & renewal system requires updating
- Annual subs renewal falls in October when people may not enjoy the club until the Spring
- No monthly payment opportunity
- Two committees not currently convened regularly (Bar & House)

Administration and Finance

Objective What we want to achieve	Action How it will be achieved	Actioned	Planned
Ensure current high standards are maintained when key individuals resign/retire	Review succession planning & handover process, and documented processes		✓2024
Bring governance and rules inline with current practice	Review and update rules and committee structures so they align with current practice within the club		✓2024
Reduce admin burden, & outsourcing accounts / bookkeeping	Streamline membership renewal with online payments	✓2023+	
Achieve financial sustainability for the club, with in-year revenues covering costs & allowing us to grow the surplus against unexpected events / investments (refurbishments, equipment replacements, club boats etc)	Consider further commercial opportunities: sponsorship, club rental	✓2023+	
	Create a strategy for increasing our financial reserve		✓and reduce debt
	Review subscription levels / structure & bar contributions	✓	

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2023, 2024 and beyond

