



Devizes Canoe Club, Wiltshire



Location

Devizes, Wiltshire



Founded

The Club was founded circa 2009 and registered as a charity in 2014



Legal structure

Charitable Incorporated Organisation (1156402)



Description of activity

“the promotion of community participation in healthy recreation in particular by the provision of facilities for the sport of canoeing and kayaking.”
Trustees report, 2016



Key assets

Club building (an asset transfer from the council), a canoe storage shed and two portacabins for changing facilities (both purchased). Access to land between the buildings and the canal needed a legal search and agreement.



Staff and volunteers

No paid staff –members volunteer and run the organisation. The Club has eight trustees and about 150 members. One member is the welfare officer and is involved in child protection and another is a coaching officer.

Overview

The Devizes Canoe Club is about 10 years old and is affiliated to the national governing body, British Canoeing (formerly the British Canoe Union). The Club has always had a central focus on kayaks and sprint racing on flat water. It is seen as one of the growing and aspirational clubs in the country and members take part in the prestigious Devizes–Westminster race each spring.

Devizes, situated in the dispersed county of Wiltshire, provides an important location for flat water canoeing. The Club’s facilities, however, were always fairly elementary at the Wharf site, where there was an indoor lock-up space for storing canoes but no other indoor space. It lacked basic facilities such as changing rooms or adequate showers. This was problematic for all members, but it also restricted how far the club could be accessible to younger people due to safeguarding concerns.

The decision was taken to register the Club as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (this was achieved in 2014). They spent some time investigating possible premises along the canal. Eventually, the depot (used by the county council) was felt to be suitable. The council moved out and then the asset transfer process began. It was recognised that the depot would need to be upgraded alongside other site improvements. The transfer from Wiltshire County Council was agreed in 2013 by the Devizes Area Board, and final planning approval for improvements was given in August 2014.



The main assets now consist of the (improved) depot building; a semi-open storage shed for canoes (which cost about £30,000); two portacabins to provide changing facilities (bought new for £50,000); and a “put in” with steps down to the canal (this cost about £15,000). It needed agreement with the Canal and River Trust, from whom the Club has a lease for use of that part of the club site. All age groups can now benefit from the Club. The new facilities mean: exercising equipment has been installed which expands the usage of the Club (e.g. to indoor winter training); improved access for younger people to meet safeguarding needs; and better storage for club and members’ boats.

Financial health

The Club is in a healthy financial position. There is a membership system and no paid staff. This relies on high levels of volunteer engagement by members in the management and organising of the Club. While this makes the Club dependent on skilled people with time to undertake the work, it does mean there are no on-going staff costs to cover through fundraising.

The annual income of the Club, at around £30,000, appears sustainable with a mixed pattern of income (including grants and fees). Major expenses for new equipment or building repairs will require periodic special funding. However, the Club appears well connected to the local authority, national umbrella organisations, and members who may contribute time, skills (and possibly money for periodic expenses).

Three key factors that have affected its development and financial health:

1. Local authority support

There were good links with the local authority on regulatory issues and with others to fund parts of the work. The project provided good opportunities for the Area Board, which was helpful in providing grants. *“We forged very good links with the local authority and the Devizes Area Board ... in the setting up and getting something going they were very supportive.”* These were crucial in navigating complex planning regulations and public meetings as well as gaining ownership of the asset. The acquisition required planning application for a change of use relating to the (now unused) council depot. This was undertaken by means of a 125-year lease and access would revert to the council if it was no longer used for canoeing. Funders included Sports England, British Canoeing, Viridor (land fill funds), the Devizes Area Board and Wiltshire County Foundation.

2. Membership organisation with high skills

Highly skilled and professional people are involved at board and member level within the Club. The sport attracts people from across a range of professions and skills (including financial planning and accountancy, legal expertise and solicitors’ skills, management skills, carpenters, plasterers, builders, plumbers and heat and lighting engineers). Club members have often supplied their skills, expertise or time pro-bono, meaning work sometimes only requires the purchase of materials. In a few cases members have donated money, while local firms in this small market town have also been supportive.

3. Longevity and linkage

There has been strong continuity with a stable committee for many years, some members have continued in their service for over eight or nine years. Arguably, there is also a strong camaraderie that, in part, may be built up by members’ common engagement in a demanding sport. Linkage to national bodies has also been important for advice and funding: the Club has about 150 members – and some social members – and just under half (63) are also members of British Canoeing.

Future direction

There are no particular plans for the acquisition of further assets. The site does not permit this, and significant time and energy was expended by a volunteer group in this acquisition. Hence, the Club is now in a better position to deliver its core mission.

Outreach, for example to local schools or youth clubs, has been considered and trialled in some cases. However, those services are overstretched and do not usually have the staff or transport resources to adequately engage or supervise young people are to pay the Club’s modest fees for coaching.

A challenge for the Club is that as it grows, so do members’ expectations for greater professionalism. “Members” can begin to identify as “customers” with possible burnout among core volunteers.



Financial information

The following table is drawn from the Devizes Canoe Club Accounts' balance sheet of 31st March 2018 which accompanies the Club's Trustee Report.

Income	£30,849.67
Expenditure	£36,433.78
Difference between income and expenditure	- £5,584.11
Surplus/deficit on ordinary activities before taxation	- £5,584.11
Annual income from grant or subsidy	£12,880
Fixed assets	£15,309.50 Includes equipment (£4,357)
Current assets (Debtors; cash at bank and in hand)	Includes: Stocks: £800.00 Cash: £814.39 In bank: £15,900.11 + equipment: £4,356.76 (with creditors at £2,205.00 subtracted)
Total	£19,666.26
Net assets	£15,900.11

Source: Devizes Canoe Club Financial Accounts 2018, Charity Commission

Note: these figures are drawn from accounts made up to 31st March 2018. These show a surplus last year and a deficit in this year on expenditure over income: this is due to expenditure on premises where the club paid out grant money received. There are, however, about two years' running costs in reserve and over £7,000 in general reserves.