



## **NTS Steering Group Report October 2020**

Over the 2019/20 seasons the NTS steering group has been chaired by Kevin Lochhead and has comprised Stuart Baillie, Oliver Jessop, Kim Johnston, Chris Heron, Kris Waz, Emma Kane, Alan Murray and Carole Cooney.

Summary of the winter 2019 and summer 2020 season:

### Pricing Structure 2020

At the beginning of the 2019 season, after due diligence, the old “budget plan” was replaced with a number of fairer “bulk purchase” options with various discounts. The decision to change to “bulk discount packages” allowed us to benefit members better in that all sets purchased are valid for 12 months. In addition, should all sets be used then “top-up” packages are available at the same price.

The challenge for the NTS is primarily one of budgeting as with only a six month “season” there is no reliable income over the winter “off season”. After our first full year with the new pricing the accounts confirmed that the financials had followed our budgetary predictions moving us from a £13k loss to a break-even situation. Prior to the beginning of the 2020 season we had set the pricing structure to try and achieve a small profit whilst remaining within acceptable market prices. Unfortunately, the 2020 season failed to start on 1st April due to the COVID-19 pandemic and, with only 3 months of the season and severely limited water time, a budgetary loss of over £20k is predicted.

### Booking system

For the 2019 season the management of the budget and diary was challenging due to the limitations of the booking software that we were using. Over the winter months we were able to research and introduce a new booking software “Mind and Body” (MB) which, with a user-friendly app, also allows much more “back end” control of the measurable data. In the future we hope to use the information from MB to help deliver more on the water hours and better value for participants. In addition this data can also be used to help deliver the required information to sportScotland on how we are performing and meeting targets.

### Opening hours and operation of NTS during 2020

All on water activity was shut down in March and the return to the water during the pandemic was, as we know, slow. All our energy was, as part of our governing body work, focused on working with our operations manager, Kris Waz, to interpret and action government guidelines into new Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), implementing the frequent changes in order to continue to meet sportScotland and Government requirements.

We have only been allowed to operate one boat for much reduced hours with limited staff and, for the first two months, only to members. Despite only half a season being on offer we have seen a good uptake of membership and utilisation of the water hours such that we were able, once guidelines allowed, to introduce two part time drivers (Andrew Haslam and Craig Dickman) who,

with Kris, have done a great job keeping up with the new SOPs whilst offering excellent on the water experiences.

In addition we are indebted to Campbell Cavana for volunteering to open the NTS on a number of Mondays allowing us a glimpse of a 7 day operation.

### Marketing

The marketing strategy, worked on over the winter, was as a result of the pandemic, reduced to our social media presence. In conjunction with our governing body activity we have however been working on creating a clearer distinction between the governing body (WWS) and Townloch/the National Training Site (NTS). Part of this work stream has resulted in the development of new logos and separate social media. Moving forward we anticipate greater website separation and appropriate branding throughout.

### Maintenance & Equipment

We are once again indebted to Matt Mills for his hard work in keeping the centre and our water crafts in good condition. The upholstery in both boats was looking particularly tatty at the end of the 2019 season and to buy us time we have had the interiors of both recovered. We are grateful to the council for agreeing to have the paintwork redone on the exterior of the building, as it was looking particularly tired, risking the underlying woodwork.

### Communication

The WhatsApp group set up in 2019 has proved very useful during the pandemic to explain to members how their experience at NTS would be changing with the guideline updates. The new booking app should allow us to provide more targeted communication in the future.

### Risks to NTS:

There are a number of risks to the business as we move through 2020 and into 2021. These are:

1. Lease of the NTS centre from the council - currently the council are looking to renegotiate the lease for NTS as part of a money saving initiative. We have taken legal advice from our lawyers and have funding approved from sportScotland to see these negotiations through. We do however have to be prepared for an increase in rent and possible restrictions on the use of the site and loch.
2. Additional on weather activities - much time has been spent investigating the possibility of introducing SUP's, Kayaks, open water swimming to the Loch as potential additional revenue streams. All of these however will only be possible as part of a lease negotiation.
3. Ringoes - changes in boating insurance policies are making it increasingly difficult to find an insurer willing to take the risk of covering commercial ringoing. We had to stop Ringo rides due to these changes but hope to reintroduce them next year.
4. Boats - we currently have two Malibu Response ski and wake boats. These boats are both over 10years old with 1,000's hours on the clocks, and are in a state of continual maintenance by Matt Mills. It's impossible to over emphasis how grateful we are to Matt for all the hours and expertise he brings to keeping the boats going. The day one or other of the boats becomes unrepairable is ever closer. New boats have been talked about for a number of years, the reality however is that whilst NTS makes a loss, or only minor profit, we can't consider such an investment. We need a strategy to plan for increasing income / fund raising / donations at NTS in order to protect us from the ever increasing risk of terminal boat failure. If members have

ideas or would like to help in the creation of strategies over the coming winter then please consider joining the NTS management committee.

5. Staffing - Historically the NTS has been a seasonal business, operating from 1st April until 30th September. This changed about three years ago with the trial introduction of a full time manager. The pandemic has forced us to make the difficult decision of ending the full time manager position and returning to being a seasonal business with a volunteer rota of drivers in the winter when weather permits. With the directors of the board / steering group volunteering to take on many of the winter managerial responsibilities along side the new Chief Operating Officer the operations side of the business can be maintained whilst significantly reducing our financial expenditure.
6. Communication - the directors of the governing body and NTS steering group have volunteered their own time in order to keep the NTS running. It's critical however that the actions taken in managing the NTS are in keeping with what the membership wants. As with all committees there needs to be regular updates and open communication with the membership, otherwise the members may be unaware of the challenges faced and the actions taken. Better communication is required, which we hope will be achieved by the introduction of the NTS management committee. This committee will seek to integrate members representing the different factions at NTS with the running of the centre.

#### The future:

1. 2020/21 season - There is no predicting the future and unfortunately the pandemic is likely to be present well into 2021. Hopefully the changing nature of the virus, and guidelines to suit, will allow a more predictable season. Our savings will allow us to manage the anticipated loss, but we need to look to redressing the balance.
2. Structure - In line with the results of the governing body consultation over the new Article of Association we are proposing removing the steering group and replacing it with an NTS management committee. This committee will be tasked with the effective and efficient running of the NTS (see the Terms of Reference (ToR)) and will comprise: 2 board directors, COO, up to 4 members of NTS (2 ski and 2 wake representatives)
3. Income raising activities - we would still like to see additional on and off water activities if possible. If we are limited to wake and ski, which looks likely, there will need to be plans created for maximising the water hours.