

# NATIONAL RIFLE ASSOCIATION

## Annual General Meeting

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting  
held in the NRA Pavilion, Bisley on Friday 16<sup>th</sup> June 2016 at 18.00

### **Present:**

|                 |                       |
|-----------------|-----------------------|
| Chairman        | Mr JGM Webster        |
| Treasurer       | Mr D Lowe             |
| Trustee         | Mr D Lacey            |
| Chief Executive | Mr A Mercer           |
| Secretary       | Mrs GJ Thatcher       |
| Members         | 66 Registered Members |

### **ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

#### **PROCEEDINGS**

Attached hereto and initialled by the Chairman of the meeting as a record of the meeting.

#### **ORDINARY RESOLUTIONS**

##### a. **Election of Officers**

- (1) **Re-election of the President** The Chairman proposed on behalf of The Council that H.R.H. the Prince of Wales KG, KT, GCB, AK, QSD, CD, PC, ADC(P) be re-elected as President.

**The Resolution was approved.**

- (2) **Election of Vice-Presidents** The Chairman proposed on behalf of The Council that the existing Vice-Presidents be elected en bloc.

**The Resolution was approved.**

- b. **Appointment of the Auditors** The Chairman proposed on behalf of the Council the appointment of Hays McIntyre, Chartered Accountants, as Auditors.

**The Resolution was approved.**

## **SPEECHES AND OPEN FORUM**

Attached as Annex.

Chairman

## Annual General Meeting – 16<sup>th</sup> June 2017

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### Proceedings

Chairman:

Can I draw the meeting to order please? Ladies and Gentlemen, welcome and good evening to everybody.

Before we proceed, I think we should remember that this is the first AGM since the untimely passing of Simon Fraser, one of our Vice Presidents. So let us take a moment's silence to remember a very good friend of our Association, and in particular, its young shooters.

*(Silence – after a pause, a phone rings)*

That was probably Simon on the phone!

*(Laughter)*

Thank you very much. So to our agenda.

Item 1: The election of our President. I, on behalf of the Council, would like to propose that His Royal Highness, The Prince of Wales, be re-elected as our President.

All those in favour?

*(Unanimous show of hands)*

Any one against? *(none)*

Thank you very much.

Item 2. I was hoping to be able to propose to you a very good candidate for the office of Deputy President, but sadly after giving it great consideration, he has told us that he cannot afford the time - particularly over the summer months - with other duties that he has to undertake. I only received that news after the papers were circulated, so I do not have a proposal.

I have said to General Council that I believe there are two reasons why I think now is the time for us to consider having a Deputy President given that we have not had one since 2004. First, we have a big birthday coming up. 2019 will be our 150<sup>th</sup> Imperial Meeting. We intend to have a celebration and we intend to invite either our Patron or our President to attend some or all of those proceedings. It would be a great help to have a Deputy President to help us with that process.

Second, and perhaps more importantly, we are entering a period of importance for our public benefit role. Terrorist events, such as Borough Market and others, will likely require us to consolidate our relationship with the Civil Defence Forces. It would be enormously helpful in the view of Council to have somebody of stature to 1) help us navigate through that quite difficult territory, and 2) to give us counsel, and introductions to those people who can advise us, how to act in the nation's best interest with respect to this.

So I say to you, and I have also said this to General Council, that if anybody has any suggestions I'd be very happy for you to get in touch.

Item 3: The election of our Vice Presidents. There are no new Vice President nominations this year. So it is proposed by me on behalf of Council that the existing Vice Presidents that are listed on the rear of this notice, be re-elected en-bloc.

All those in favour (*unanimous show of hands*)

Anybody against?

(*none*)

I would like to remind everyone that the gentleman at the top of the list, Haddon Donald, reached a significant milestone in March this year. He is our longest serving Vice President and reached his 100<sup>th</sup> birthday. He looks substantially fitter than most of us, I have to say, and long may that continue.

Item 4: the election of Auditors. I believe we signalled this time last year that we would put the post of auditor to the NRA out to tender.

This was no criticism of the incumbent, Saffrey Champness. It is good governance to ensure that we regularly put such posts out to tender to get fresh input. We invited Saffrey Champness to re-tender for the audit.

We interviewed several firms by phone after circulating a tender document, and held a 'bake off' between the finalists conducted by myself, Derek Lowe, the Treasurer, and Reg Roberts, who is a FCA together with the relevant executives. As a result we have alighted on a recommendation to you of Hays McIntyre.

Hays McIntyre are a single office firm. They are based in London and have 32 partners and just over 200 staff. They are the leading charity adviser to the 3,000 largest charities in the country, auditing over 600 charities. They audit a large number of sports' national governing bodies, including British Rowing and UK Athletics. They also audit a number of sports foundations and charities, the British Sports Trust for example as well as the Lords Taverners.

They appear to be a first rate firm. I have to say in honesty the quality of all the finalists was very good and it was a difficult decision, but we felt that these were the right people to provide a very strong audit and charity audit service. Also because of their position in the industry, they do produce a benchmarking study which I think will give us some good measures as to how we are performing as a charity, and something that we could use as an ancillary benefit.

So on behalf of the Council, I would like to propose that Hays McIntyre be appointed our auditors for the upcoming year.

All those in favour? (*Almost unanimous show of hands*)

Anybody against? (*One against*)

Graham Clarke: Mr Chairman, may I just add that they happen to be my accountants and I've dealt with them for very many years. Their senior partner, the partner who deals with my work is ex-HMRC and I am delighted to be one of the people who second the motion.

Gwynne Jarvis: One charity I am involved with has actually just stopped using them because they were very slow.

Thank you very much.

Item 5.

We have signalled to you, that we would like the meeting, or the membership, to consider the attached amendment to the Second Schedule and on behalf of the Council I have asked David Lacey to present this particular paper to you. After which obviously we will take some comments from the floor.

David Lacey:

Thank you.

The origin of this proposal comes from the increasing costs to the Association of producing, collating, distributing, and handling election paperwork which is common now to many organisations. The recent General Council election, for example, cost in the region of £18k which would get us several electronic targets, fix ablution blocks and do all kinds of useful things.

There were two options to this. The first was to go completely electronic and do away with paper altogether. We might have got away with that if we were a university, but I think we are still in that hybrid mode for many of us where the computer is fine, but a bit of paper doesn't hurt either.

So the thinking behind this first is that it is a cross over – it doesn't give us all the benefits of going completely paperless, but provides a bridge between all paper and the completely paperless world we will all eventually get to. That is why you will see both references to paper and to electronics.

Just briefly walking through the clauses, it's immensely beneficial if people provide us with email addresses; 92% of our members have provided email addresses. Being able to communicate with members by email is extremely useful. And if you change email addresses, just as if you changed regular address, tell the Association so we can keep the records up to date.

Equally, the Association will publish email addresses to be used for separate things, so the second sentence just clarifies that if the instructions say send your range booking to [range.bookings@nra.org.uk](mailto:range.bookings@nra.org.uk), please send it there. So that's the thinking behind the first provision.

The second provision deals with circulating information. We can put it on the website. For those who haven't provided an email address, and we hope that there will be fewer and fewer of those, it will be posted. And of course it will be available here for inspection.

And the third element to this is that of polls, which is where the real cost comes in. The printing, the collecting, the counting of ballots, all of that process is very expensive.

The proposal here is that we have a website where you will go to vote. Given the IT demands of doing that and the fact that our IT department has lots of other things they could be doing, I suspect that in practice we will use an external provider for that. For those who have email addresses, they will get an email saying please go to the website to vote. For

those who haven't, they will get a postcard through the mail that says voting is open, please vote and you will have six weeks at some point to get to an internet connection to cast your vote.

There will be some young people that the thought of being disconnected from the internet for 30 seconds would be incomprehensible so we hope allowing 6 weeks for that will enable everybody to pass their vote.

It means we will get automatic collated voting – everyone will have a chance to vote and the costs will be reduced significantly. The costs of using an external provider, I think I'm right Andrew, are £1,500 to £2,000, representing a very significant saving.

At some point in the future we may well go all electronic, but for the moment, the combination of both electronic and paper systems to reduce costs, increase efficiency and enable money to be spent on the ranges, rather than on printing papers.

Mr Chairman, thank you.

Chairman: So we will take a few questions. I know that Tony de Launay has some issues with this, so can we just take questions first Tony? Is that alright with you? (*absolutely*)

Peter Hobson: There is a very simple question I want to ask. That is, the results of voting, will that be absolutely confidential until the closing time of the vote?

David Lacey: That is my understanding of how these votes will work. We wouldn't be able to see the votes and would just get the answers from the polling company that would say we've processed these many votes and these are the results.

Peter Hobson: That's fine, thank you, that's answered that question.

Chairman: And so, Tony would you like to make your points now?

Tony de Launay: I can reduce it, I think, to just one comment about what David was just saying. And that is re 1.4.2.; if you do not manage to get to, or wheel yourself to, machinery to get onto the website, you don't get a vote. So what that does is effectively disenfranchise a number of people, or has the potential to. This is not something that can be disregarded because as far as I am aware, every paid up member has the right to vote. I fully support the idea of moving to electronic polling, maybe over a period of a number of years, when people, who I would describe as non technical, have died out of the system - and you can't include me in that because I use the damn machine all the time.

So I think that the way this is worded at the moment is just fundamentally wrong. It should allow people to vote, as it does, electronically. It should allow those who are not able to do so, to have a three, four or five year run-in, to continue using a piece of paper to vote. And it could be re-worded quite simply to say that they should request that. You're sending them something on a bit of paper anyway. That piece of paper can say this is what you do if you do not have access to electronic communication. It seems very simple to me. The sad thing is that if it is not reworded like that, there is the possibility that you will be disenfranchising people and that to me is fundamentally wrong.

Chairman: The point I think you are raising is a good one. The issue is the deceptive simplicity that for the 8% who don't provide us with an email address, we would have to personalise for them the correspondence that we would ultimately be putting out for these type of polls. That is not a trivial exercise. When David mentions £18k worth of expenditure, that does not include the Membership Team's time of putting all of that together. The

simplicity of what this is trying to achieve is to avoid personalised correspondence; we can have a postcard which goes to everyone which says please log onto the internet and take your vote. That is the simplest and most cost effective way of doing this.

Anthony de Launay: But that is exactly what I just said. You may have misunderstood me. When you send out a postcard saying there is going to be a poll, it's going to be done by using the website, you need another sentence that says if you do not have access to electronic communications, get in touch with the office and we will sort you out by sending you a postal vote.

Chairman: That takes time and manpower. You still have to print it, still have to personalise it, still have to send it out.

Anthony de Launay: Well, the printing of it is such a small number.

Chairman: The problem with a lot of issues like this is that it sounds simple when you say it but it often becomes the place where mistakes are made and costs go up. We have to decide whether that is a risk worth taking. Let us remember that 80% of the membership do not vote. That is not a good argument to say that they should not be given the chance to vote, but more to comment on the fact that they don't. We are in danger here of the tail wagging the dog! That is, to a certain extent, the choice.

Anthony de Launay: I don't see it like that at all.

Chairman: That is why we have a debate because people see things differently.

Anthony de Launay: Because what you are doing in the NRA's constitution is saying that one of the privileges of membership is the ability to vote in elections, right? (*correct*) What you are doing here is putting in place an electronic system, good, I like it, but you are disenfranchising those who do not have the ability to use an electronic system.

Chairman: Every member will still have the chance to vote, and time to exercise it. That is not disenfranchisement. People who can't write or get to a post box are currently disenfranchised on that basis! There are some other questions.

Jim Hallam, VP, formerly Chairman of the South London Rifle Club: Tony de Launay has hit exactly on the point which I was going to raise. When the South London Rifle Club offered to its membership electronic communication, part of the deal was to reduce the subscription to the club because we saved a lot of postage and printing. Now you are saying, and I am rounding figures, that we can save all the postage and printing for 90% of the members, so this little rump who are left are going to be very little cost over the whole voting system. So because of security reasons, all you need is an envelope, the envelope has in it the postcard that you refer to, and it also has a reply paid card that says please send me a voting paper.

Chairman: And that takes manpower and organisation.

Peter Hobson: What price is democracy?

Chairman: What we are doing is effectively sustaining democracy. The ability to vote is still there. People can still access it; one can go to a library and access an internet web page. I cannot see how that that is disenfranchising.

Jim Hallam: Mr Chairman, we had people resigning from the South London Rifle Club because they said they were being discriminated against because they didn't have a computer.

Chairman: But they can't go to a library to sign onto a computer? They can't ring up the office and say...

Jim Hallam: Some may not be physically able to do that.

Chairman: Fair enough. But they can't get to a post box either in that case. Any further thoughts?

Alex Cargill-Thompson: Just to add to that, I am a member of various professional bodies, a couple of building societies and the like. They all have what I presume to be a pretty similar problem. They hire third party providers who will email you and where they can't email you they will send something through the post. So yes, this small percentage of people who are not online will cost us some money, but I think that can be outsourced as part of the overall administration. Going down from £18k for an election to £2000 or £5000, to me paying an extra £1000 for getting the democracy right given that bill will come down year on year as more people go online, and we are going to be saving the better part of £15k doing it, arguing about another couple of thousand over an issue like this just feels totally wrong.

Nick Brasier: With the Journal, with a print run, it comes through your door and you know it's arrived. I'm assuming that when we have an electronic Journal we would email people to say it's been published. It doesn't say it here, but I think it's important that people know that a new journal has been published if you have got notices in the journal.

Chairman: We are actually talking about paper elections.

Nick Brasier: Then I support Tony and Alex's views that even with a small number we should be supporting them.

Roger Mason, Somerset and a bit of a dinosaur: You are saving a lot of money by doing all this electronically. Don't be so mean that we are not prepared to continue spending a certain amount for the small minority of people who are unable to do it.

Steve Postins: Just a question. The membership numbers – what is the 8%? How many are we talking about?

Chairman: The current membership is 8,375, so we talking about 600-700 people.

Steve Postins: And 80% across that don't vote?

Chairman: 80% across the 8,375 don't vote.

Steve Postins: OK. So taking 80% out of the 8% if you follow my logic, what number are we talking about might request a vote by paper?

David Lacey: About 130.

Steve Postins: Is that manageable?

John Bloomfield: It's not worth arguing about.

Chairman: No it's not.

John Bloomfield: I think you misunderstood what I'm saying. I'm saying it's not worth arguing about to say no you can't do it.

Chairman: I understand, but we would still have to process 600-700 paper applications to reach the 130 as we do not know them in advance.

Charles Dickenson, Target Rifle Rep: I think any belief that you could, for those who aren't electronic, send out a generalised form is incorrect. My experience is that for all the electronic polling, a personalised email or other communication is necessary to provide both a username and a logon password in order to actually effect a vote. Therefore a personalised communication of some description will be needed to every person. So I think you have to accept that is going to have to happen and under those circumstances it's entirely reasonable you could offer them an alternative means of voting.

Nick Hinchliffe: I support the sentiment of the views expressed and would have thought a transition period as essential and you can review it after two to three years.

Chairman: I think that appears to be the mood of the meeting, but I want to give everybody else an opportunity to talk.

Paul Charlton, Stock Exchange: I agree with Tony in the sentiment that we mustn't disenfranchise. My experience of both historic mail order related things, and being currently employed by an internet marketing company, is that the click-through rates and the response rates, both mail and electronic, are in the order of 1-2%. So the likelihood of people actually responding to "please send us a vote" is likely to be not 20% of the voting population, but an even smaller proportion of that. So I think that it is mean not to offer an interim solution.

Martin Osment, ABCAT: Can I offer a suggestion as to another technology that will assist the dinosaurs of us, and that is automated telephone voting. It is very simple and very inexpensive.

Chairman: It's clear this is not going to pass in its current form. So we wait another year

Thomas Harrison, Whitby: It worries me the security of this. You are saying you can log on in any library to make a vote. How many times are you allowed to vote?

Chairman: The system basically gives you one vote. You will have a passcode when you log on and you vote.

Thomas Harrison: So then you're back to what the others were saying having to send out personalised invitations.

Chairman: No, because it is achieved by your logging onto the website with a code and you know what your code is. Do you bank electronically? (yes) Same sort of system.

Peter Hobson, Vice President: Wouldn't it just be simpler to offer those who wish to vote electronically to register the fact that they wish to, and those that don't carry on? It will eventually dwindle away, and the initial cost savings won't be substantial, but it will ensure that the democracy of the association is preserved.

Chairman: It seems to me that the mood of the meeting is that we need to rethink. If I can just encapsulate it, we are generally in favour of electronic voting where we can do it, we are generally in favour of not disenfranchising any member from a vote however it is to be undertaken, and if we can actually effect a transition period to electronic voting, we will do so. To change the constitution, we need to do that at a meeting of this kind, so we cannot change the Second Schedule until this time next year.

Peter Hobson: It is possible because you have a quorum in here so you can actually propose an amendment and have the amendment pass.

Chairman: I am not sure that's right.

John Bloomfield: I think it is right. The meeting can choose to vote on an amended set of words. My personal advice would be that unless the amended set of words have been thought through carefully, trying to do something on the hoof is not very sensible. You have two options to take this forward. One is that you can re-present it at the Bisley General Meeting, but you would have to declare that an EGM in order to do it, and there is a time limit set out in the Second Schedule to do that. Or it has to come back to the AGM next year, or you can elect to hold an EGM at any point with 28 days' notice given to the membership. So there are three possible ways of dealing with this. It doesn't have to wait until this time next year.

Iain Robertson, RAFTRC: Would the meeting consider Mr Chairman, an alternative motion to pass items 1.1 to 1.3 and 1.5 of the proposal?

Chairman: My sense is, unless anybody is very strongly supportive of that, is that we probably don't want to do this on the hoof and we should re-form a proposal which will come up in the future.

Tony de Launay: As you know, I put a form of words to you although I know it was far too late when I put those to you.

Chairman: Yes, thank you. They have been circulated.

Tony de Launay: I would not want those voted on here because I am not sure they are totally right and I think the whole thing needs to be looked at very carefully to make sure, and it's important, that all the or's and all the and's are in the right places.

Chairman: I agree. Thank you very much.

Item 6.

We have several speeches from myself, Derek and Andrew.

So I am pleased that we are able to report another healthy surplus for 2016, continued growth in our membership, and significant capital investment.

I hope by now you have all had the opportunity to read the Annual Report which was published in March which outlines our financial position. As is now our custom, I am going to leave Derek Lowe, our Treasurer, to review the financial report for you in a moment and then Andrew Mercer will describe the capital investment projects on-going at Bisley Camp and other things.

First, there are a number of other positive items that I would like to share with you.

Our membership continues to grow. As of the end of May this year, we have 8,375 members. We received 850 applications for new membership in 2016 – an average of over 16 a week – and we have experienced similar levels so far in 2017. The number of affiliated clubs increased to 746 in 2016.

Throughout this period, the membership team, led by Georgina Thatcher, have been updating the membership database to ensure our membership information is accurate, and I would like to thank them for their continued great work on this.

This level of membership applications, while essential for the growth of our sport, has obviously put pressure on the system, particularly on our training team, as the number of probationary members keeps growing. At one point we had 174 probationary members seeking training.

Consequently we have invested in new training facilities in the Pavilion, you're actually sitting in part of them now, to cope with this increasing demand. This includes a new armoury, and modern IT and audio facilities. We have also recruited David Camp as the National Training Manager, to manage the training at Bisley and to develop ways for the Association to deliver training away from Bisley, which we think will be helpful.

Range use by both members and corporate users continues to grow. Range use by individuals and clubs is up 11% year on year. This increasing demand has put considerable pressure on the booking system, as I'm sure many of you are aware, and I know that members will be frustrated at times with the inability of the current software to cope with the volume of booking requests received each month – there are often over 1000. We are working on new software to correct this, but in the interim the Range Office will focus on delivering range space for early and repeat bookings to maintain the usual shooting calendar. I know that many have found this irritating, but please bear with us. I know that a lot of bookings are being rejected for lack of capacity, and that is not good.

Coupled with this, we have experienced the usual problems with markers in the early part of the year. Many markers have academic and other commitments, as you know, meaning it is a challenge to maintain a steady supply of markers through the year. Demand for markers rose 21% during the first 5 months of this year compared to the same period last year. This demonstrates the popularity of shooting, but shows that we must look to new solutions, and the answer clearly lies with electronic targets. We are committed to introducing these and Andrew will talk more about this later.

There have been some notable events on the ranges. Last year's Imperial Meeting was the first to include the Cadet Imperial. This proved a popular success and we will hold it again this year. And the winner will be presented with the Simon Fraser Memorial Trophy – an honour for Simon that fortunately we were able to share with him before he passed away. Our major competitions, including the Imperial Meeting, were well-supported, building on recent initiatives. I would particularly like to thank James Harris and his team for the successful delivery of the Target Shotgun, Hand Gun and mini-Rifle leagues at ranges across the UK.

We also continued to organise competitions away from Bisley. In 2016 we held a major competition at Altcar, and earlier this year we held the Birmingham Bisley at Kingsbury for the first time since 2005. I want to record my thanks to all those who helped organise these events and make them a success. It is something we wish to continue.

The GB TR Rifle team captained by Lindsay Peden in Canada/USA in 2016 and the team captained by Nick Tremlett in South Africa earlier this year won all their matches – the most significant of which was the Australia Match in Bloemfontein – as well as enjoying some notable individual successes. Emma Nuttall captained the NRA team to the Channel Islands with a revised schedule that worked well for both sides, and I hope will continue in future years.

Her presence and all of these competitions continue to demonstrate that we are one of the very few sports that can proudly say that men and women, as well as young and old, and able and physically challenged, can compete together in open competition.

Finally, I will touch upon estate issues. Our rental income continues to rise, and now stands at £1.25m in 2016, up from £1.18m the prior year. The CNC now rent the HAC Clubhouse, and we have renewed a grazing licence with the Surrey Wildlife Trust for the deer in the range danger area. Each of those agreements pays more in annual rent than ALL the clubs on Club Row, from the Army down to the British Commonwealth Club. So those who claim that our improving rent income flows from swingeing increases in rent to Bisley-based clubhouses are simply wrong.

Since 2013, we have agreed new leases in relation to 42 of the 108 properties on the Bisley Estate. All but one of those was agreed without controversy. Five of these are traditional Bisley Clubhouses on a 21-year tenancy. Each has been issued on a rack rent basis and these clubs appear to be doing well. The assertion that charging rack rents will kill off the Bisley based clubhouses does not ring true.

There have been many claims made in the past few days about this issue, and sadly many of these involve misrepresentation. I am sure we will discuss this topic in our question and answer session and I look forward to addressing any concerns of members on this matter.

Before I hand over to Derek, I would like to end by thanking my fellow Trustees, some of whom are here in the room, and Andrew Mercer and his staff for all their energy, enthusiasm and hard work over the past 12 months. Much has been achieved and I remain bullish about the Association's very positive future.

Derek, over to you.

Derek Lowe:

Ladies and Gentlemen, I am pleased to report on a healthy financial standing for the NRA over the last year.

In 2016, our revenues increased to £5.73m, up from £5.48m in 2015. We invested just over £700k on capital expenditure, bringing the total for 2014-2016 inclusive to more than £1.8m. This surpasses the strategic target set by the Trustees of at least £1m over those 3 years.

The cash balance at the end of the year was £709k. That was stronger than the £466k at the end of 2015, owing primarily to the earlier receipt of membership subscriptions and reduction in ammunition stock.

To make the NRA ready for unforeseen events, whether contingencies or fresh opportunities, the Trustees set a minimum level for the cash balance of £200k, and the staff team met this throughout the year.

And we generated a surplus of £108k, by comparison with an equivalent of £252k in 2015. The budget for 2017 looks to a surplus of around £230k, alongside capital expenditure of around £650k. Of course, the busiest time of the year is still ahead of us, but the figures to April are just ahead of budget.

I hope you share the encouragement I feel from the financial performance in 2016. Surpluses and cash balances make it possible for us to invest in facilities and services which promote and deliver shooting, whether that of our members or of our clients. Every year, the Trustees face a complex mixture of competing opportunities and interests. We aim to strike a balance between them which serves all our beneficiaries as a charity, and, as our own rules require us to do, without special favour between the interests of different members.

When I took up the post of Treasurer in 2013, I highlighted two areas I felt to be of particular importance and they remain so today. The first is that we should apply our financial resources to serve the shooting of both the present and the future. The challenge early on was to ensure we had financial resources at all, without which no organisation would survive, let alone thrive. The healthier finances of more recent years have freed up the time and attention of management and Trustees, allowing us to concentrate more on our operations and longer term future.

This meeting is held ahead of a weekend that is key to Target Rifle at Bisley. To complement the perspective of visible expenditure around the Camp, the Trustees are pleased to have been able to expand our investment beyond that: both in other disciplines and away from Bisley. What was once a good intention for better times is now something that we are much better fitted to deliver on, whether investing in the Shepton Mallett gallery rifle range in Wiltshire, bidding at auction for the Pentre barracks in the Rhondda valley – twice - or undertaking meaningful engagement with the MoD on ranges around the country.

These investments and initiatives have not come at the expense of impacting affordability to individual shooters. While it is fair that shooters pay what it costs to deliver the services and goods we consume, the NRA continues to preserve the real-terms cost of core goods & services by limiting most price rises to the inflation rate. For Target Rifle shooters in particular, the benefits of introducing GGG ammunition in 2015 continue, with its combination of accuracy and lower pricing. The NRA's revenue from commercial clients remains key to our investment programme and we aim to deliver this with minimal disruption to members' shooting and with spin-off benefits from any investment spending on commercial activity.

The second area is the importance placed by the Trustees on effective communication around our finances: within management for operational effectiveness; among the Trustees for oversight, direction and support; and out to General Council and individual members for transparency and enfranchisement. With this in mind, members can read on the website regular publications such as our accounts, my reports to General Council and to this meeting and an article in the Summer Journals since 2014, including the Journal published last week.

I record the Trustees' thanks to the Support Services team, led by Ray Hutchings, for making the communication and understanding of our finances so effective and timely throughout the year. They make a critical contribution.

I now hand over to Andrew Mercer. Thank you.

Andrew Mercer:

Thank you Derek.

Ladies & Gentlemen, I would first like to draw members' attention to some areas of the NRA's work that is often unnoticed. Although a considerable amount of our efforts are focused on the Bisley range complex we also invest significant resources in promoting shooting away from Bisley.

A good example of this work is challenging recent Home Office proposals for excessive increases in fees for Approved Clubs; this resulted in some 5,000 responses to the Home Office's public consultation and has prompted a re-think of the fee structure.

We are also developing a programme to promote full bore shooting and inform police firearms licensing staff and Home Office personnel about the peculiarities of our sport. Typically these involve a day or three at Bisley, invariably with the opportunity to shoot. The early results of this programme are encouraging – we are finding greater knowledge amongst FEOs yields a more efficient service to FAC holders. Furthermore a closer relationship with the police offers improved lines of communications and better opportunities to resolve disputes and queries. There are times when we have to agree to disagree with the police, but I am convinced our relationship should be that of a "critical friend".

Another essential relationship we invest time and energy to is that with the MoD; we invest considerable efforts improving dialogue and understanding to maximise civilian access to the military ranges. This has yielded some potentially exciting opportunities to invest in range complexes away from Bisley.

We are also now able to fund investments in other ranges; last year as has been alluded to, we saw the opening of the new range in Shepton Mallett by the Frome & District Pistol Club; the NRA part funded the developments and the new range is flourishing. In September last year NRA Trustees approved a six figure bid for a barracks site in the Rhondda valley; sadly

we were beaten at auction but we are investigating other opportunities in Wales with the Welsh Target Shooting Federation.

We are also improving our Social media output and investing greater resources in promotional material for the hungry beast that is Facebook. As at today the number of “likes” on our Facebook pages total 26,200 and last year our weekly reach maxed out at just over 300,000. I have no doubt that the steady stream of positive images celebrating the many forms of target shooting posted to social media are contributing to the growth in NRA membership.

Returning to Bisley we continue to invest heavily in improvements to the range and estates. When wrestling with budgets I always test any proposed improvement with the question “will it make the ranges busier?” As our membership continues to grow we need to concentrate upon maximising range capacity and utilisation. It is fair to say that the ranges have their quiet moments weekdays and in the depths of winter. However come summer weekends we welcome hundreds of shooters every day and the range office is refusing an increasing number of bookings.

Our efforts to minimise the impact of echelon shooting on Century and Stickledown by more prescriptive allocation of targets is helping; however the challenge of recruiting enough quality markers remains. As the Chairman has reported the number of markers provided for the year to May this year is 20% higher than last; alas this has not satisfied every booking and it is common for the range office to be short of markers.

Electronic targets are the obvious solution and I am pleased how the six targets on Butt 19 Century range have performed. Our staff are becoming increasingly skilled at improving the reliability of these targets and the targets are becoming increasingly popular with the shooting community.

We have also successfully installed ten electronic targets for the Olympic pistol squad on Cheylesmore range; these are being extensively used by British Shooting and Army pistol teams.

The next installation will be on Stickledown. Earlier this year we trialled three systems and were pleased with the number of members who took up the opportunity for a test shoot. The Intarso targets were the clear winner of the trials and we have placed an order for 11 targets to be installed in August this year. The system includes electric winches that will raise the target on command from the firing points or even range office. The investment is not insignificant and we will see little change from £100,000 when the infrastructure costs have been fully accounted for. 11 electronic targets means 11 fewer markers to employ and we are excited about the opportunities to bring “stats” to the firing point by linking the targets to electronic scoreboards. This is not new technology, although a revolution in the world of Bisley camp.

Other range improvements include an extensive programme of re-turfing firing points on Century and Stickledown. Despite a scare with frosty weather the turf has taken well and is growing away rather nicely.

We’ve also invested heavily in new target frames and turning, advancing and retrievable targets. In each case improving the reliability of delivery of targets is our key aim; our shooters often travel great distances to shoot at Bisley and are understandably annoyed if the target they have booked suffers mechanical failure.

As the ranges get busier car parking can become chaotic so we built last year two new car parks at 300 yards on Century and between 1 and 200 yards on Short Siberia. We also continue to improve ablution blocks and have just opened two new facilities at Jennys and Caravan Site 1. These are not sexy improvements but are essential as we continue to invest in enhancing the shooting experience. I have at times been lambasted by long standing NRA members for concentrating on such improvements; however I remain convinced that modern facilities are essential for attracting and retaining new generations of shooters.

Another new major project started last year has been the development and improvement of the Zero range and Winans. The major works have been concluded and it is fair to say they have taken longer than I expected but having started the project we decided to make a really big mess and sort out the entire range in one go. Thankfully the works were completed in time for the Phoenix meeting and it was a relief to see shooters busy on the new Winans range. We will return to this project later this year.

We have been on something of a roller coaster ride with the Pavilion over the past year. Much as we love the old building she has not been kindly treated and needs significant TLC to address such matters as leaking roofs, questionable plumbing and incomprehensible wiring. The good news is that our Training team are now fully ensconced in the new facilities and we have moved commercial, accommodation and range staff to the new offices. The bad news is that asbestos has resulted in delays but I hope next week the final stage of addressing this problem will be resolved when specialist contractors start to clear the old ballroom void. I hope you have noticed the improvements our work has yielded; in the new lounge area we have a small display of visuals for the new café, range office and retail armoury.

Finally a couple of points of clarification. First I can confirm that we have decided to commission a limited refurbishment of Exhibition Hut and are awaiting a response from the Conservation Officer. As an aside the Hut has been extensively used as a film set this year and has really been earning her keep. Secondly, and really finally, members will be pleased to learn that our tarmac contractors will be on site on 27<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> of this month – just in time to hide the potholes for the Imperial.

Thank you.

Chairman: Thank you both Derek and Andrew.

That brings us to the open forum. Before I throw it open to the floor, Andrew, I think we have had a couple of questions which have come in through the internet which you should read out and answer.

Andrew Mercer: Thank you Chairman. The first question is has the NRA conducted any sound level tests behind the firing point to satisfy itself that the use of muzzle breaks are not introducing levels of sound that are known to cause damage.

That is a good question and the answer is 'yes we are,. We have started trials and those trials are ongoing and there is further work for us to do.

The second question is regarding support for University Clubs. It is reported that three have been suspended from shooting activity because of compliance issues to Home Office requirements for approved clubs. What can the NRA do actively help and maintain continuity of their approval requirements?

Well the short answer to that is if there is a problem, ring the NRA. Iain Robertson has already dealt with one or two universities who have had problems this year. And I think that dealing with the Home Office and issues regarding Home Office approval is something that is part of the routine work that Iain does.

Chairman: Thank you. Any other questions?

Martin Townsend: Following the recent email that was sent out by Andrew with the newsletter, I believe it would appear that we are doing away with the Umbrella Tent for prizegiving? (Yes) Where is it going to be held?

Chairman: In here.

Martin Townsend: It's not big enough.

Andrew Mercer: This is only half of it.

Chairman: Do you see the doors behind you? That screen goes back to open the room all the way back. So it will be double this size.

Martin Townsend: I hope it works.

Chairman: One reason for doing it this way is so that we can put the prizes/trophies up after the BGM. Jonathan Haward's complaint at last year's BGM that when he brings his friends down here on Final Saturday he cannot show them all the silver prompted the idea that we can set all the silverware up after the BGM and have someone in here on permanent guard. Therefore the silverware can effectively be on display from Thursday lunchtime through to when everyone picks it up on Saturday. To do that in the marquee makes security that much more difficult. So I think this is a reasonable solution; let's see if it works.

Tom Harrison: You made reference a few minutes ago to building at the Exhibition Hut etc. On one occasion they dug up all the flag poles on Military Lawn and put them back like a load of drunken soldiers. Are they going to be pulled back to straighten them up before long, because they used to stand beautifully erect?

Andrew Mercer: Some of them have settled not upright and we will address that before they're used for the Imperial.

Chairman: Any other questions?

Robin Pizer: I am very concerned about the failure of the NRA to acknowledge the significant safety concerns which are described in the report of the 2015 Proof House trials by their technical adviser, Dr Allsopp. I urge you, yet again, to publish this report in full for the benefit of all members. I'm even more concerned that the NRA has for the last 18 months refused to authorise the additional trials that Dr Allsopp requires before any new memorandum is issued concerning .308 Winchester rifles and their ammunition as used in Target Rifle.

As things stand, most target rifles are now being proofed as wildcats with no guarantee that they meet the requirements of Rule 150. I recommended last August that all target rifles be re-checked before the 2017 Imperial Meeting for compliance with Rule 150. Will this happen?

You will be aware from Trustee discussions in August 2013 that some gunsmiths are producing target rifles which do not comply with Rule 150. These are potentially dangerous.

You had personal experience of non-compliant target rifles when you took part in a hand-loading course on 6<sup>th</sup> & 7<sup>th</sup> October 2015. You measured two of your rifles and found they had negative jump of about 25 thou. You were advised by all your friends on the course to get them compliant with Rule 150. Was the gunsmith who produced the rifles John Bloomfield? In July 2016 an ammunition issuing officer noticed that you had three cases in your ammunition box with blown primers. No doubt you are aware that GGG ammunition has crimped primers which require a pressure significantly higher than proof pressure to blow. Not only was your own safety at risk, but also that of others on the firing point. After the third primer blew, why did you not call the attention of the Range Officer as required in the rules? Who examined your rifle, what was wrong, was this the work of John Bloomfield?

Chairman: Let me answer those questions. Firstly, I wonder whether you have the right Webster. I had no such problem with blown primers. I do not recall having any blown primers in my box. So if you are going to make allegations of that, I would prefer that you did that to me personally before you socialise such an obvious calumny in front of this group.

Secondly, when I went on the hand-loading course, I took one rifle, not two rifles. It was measured. It was not cleaned before it was measured. It was measured as being short by the same person who continues to measure rifles with equipment that results in chambers appearing to be short when they are not when measured by others. After that, it was cleaned, I went down to the NRA office and I had it measured. It now has a new green sticker because it passed.

So, I would suggest that if you are going to lodge issues against me in such a public forum, you check your facts.

Finally, I will remind you – not for the first time - that the report of the Proof House will be published when the Proof House, whose report it is, says we can publish it. Have I answered your questions?

Robin Pizer: Yes. I would just add that the Proof House tell me that they are awaiting your agreement to publishing the report and it is your difficulty in this matter that is preventing this publication.

Chairman: Would you tell me exactly who that person is?

Robin Pizer: Roger Hancox.

Chairman: And you spoke to him when?

Robin Pizer: On a number of occasions.

Chairman: When did you last speak to Roger Hancox?

Robin Pizer: About two weeks ago.

Chairman: And he says that he is waiting for us to produce his report?

Robin Pizer: He is saying that you will not get a report until you've agreed the additional experiments and the additional experiments have been done.

Chairman: I have to say this is news to me. John (Bloomfield), is this news to you?

John Bloomfield: It's news to me as well. There is no additional trials either programmed or thought about, and never have been.

Robin Pizer: Well, I have to disagree with you. I'm quite certain that Roger Hancox and Richard Mabbott of the London Proof House are telling me the truth.

John Bloomfield: There are no other trials either programmed or planned. What is ongoing at the moment is determining the dimensions of the chamber to produce a drawing to go with the report when it is published. There are a number of issues that we are in process of addressing at the present time and when those have been finalised with Dr Allsopp and Roger Hancox has given his approval, then the whole lot will be published together. So as usual, and not for the first time, you not only misunderstand what is said to you, you misunderstand most of what the technicalities of this are anyway.

Robin Pizer: I note what you say John, I would just ask are you telling me the truth because...

John Bloomfield: Are you saying that I'm lying to you and this meeting Robin?

Robin Pizer: There are occasions when you have said to me in the past things which have turned out to be untrue when further investigated, so

John Bloomfield: And you are a fine one to talk about that.

Chairman: Sorry, we are going to stop this now. Robin, you have put significant embarrassment across the NRA in the past week. You wrote a letter to the Times which was 1) a breach of the confidentiality agreement that you signed as a Trustee, by taking a confidential minute of this Association and publishing it in a letter to the Times. And 2) you outlined a conclusion of that meeting which was wholly wrong. In fact the conclusion in that minute, as you know very well because you were the Chairman at that time who signed them, was that the Trustees decided that we would have to use 'comparators' on the renewal of a lease, and that is precisely what we are doing.

This organisation, and particularly its Council, is running out of patience with having to deal with you and issues of misrepresentation.

Robin Pizer: I disagree. I feel I have never misrepresented anything that I am aware of. Just take note of what I have said, particularly with regard to Rule 150 with regard to the Proof Houses. Ring them up tomorrow or Monday and find out what is really worrying Roger Hancox.

Chairman: I will. But do you really think that after all the work the NRA and the Birmingham Proof House have done together, Roger Hancox wouldn't pick up the phone to us if he was worried?

(Post Script: It was not possible to answer all of Dr. Pizer's questions at the meeting as no advanced notification of the points he made was given. In addition to the answers that were given at the time, NRA members may wish to know that:

- 1) Dr. Allsopp has described no significant safety concerns in his report of the 2015 Proof House trials.
- 2) the Proof House memorandum specifies minimum dimensions that the proof houses will accept for proof. Neither proof house certifies compliance with Rule 150.
- 3) The Birmingham Proof house have finalised their report and sent a copy to the NRA, the findings of which have been presented to General Council. There are no "additional experiments" to be undertaken.

Does anybody else have any further questions?

Simon Dixon, NLRC. Yes I would to ask the Chief Executive if he could tell me how much as been spent by the NRA from budgets for which he is responsible, on lease associated matters in the years 2013, 14, 15 and 16. And this was a prearranged question through one of the Trustees.

Andrew Mercer: I've got the figures for professional fees, I haven't got those split down in terms of lease. In terms of the professional fees, John do you have those figures there?

Chairman: Here we go. Professional fees for 2012 were £443,494, 2013 they were £273,972, 2014 they were £71,931, 2015 they were £89,714 and in 2016 they were £152,668.

Simon Dixon: Those are the figures which I have and the specific question related to those amounts that relate to the expenditure on leases. And that was specifically put to the Chief Executive by the time required.

Chairman: I'm sorry I don't have that question.

Andrew Mercer: I had a question about professional fees and it came from one of the Trustees and that is the figures we've provided. In terms of the breakdown, I've got a breakdown of the 2016 figure. Effectively, in terms of £152,668 there was in terms of leases somewhere in the region of.....

Simon Dixon: Could I suggest that the figures are supplied to me? The question was put in the due time, specifically on lease matters and that has not been supplied.

Andrew Mercer: It would have been better if you'd have sent it direct to me.

Simon Dixon: Well it came via one of the Trustees as you well know.

Andrew Mercer: It's strange you didn't address it to me.

Simon Dixon: I discussed it with a Trustee and he said shall I put it to the Chief Executive.

Andrew Mercer: The figures that I have is around £103k spent on legal fees. Of that, quickly skimming down, there were 14 different leases that that covered. About £12k of that is general legal expenses, so out of the £103k, about £90k has been spent of the legal fees on leasehold matters, but as I said that relates to about 14 different matters.

Simon Dixon: Thank you.

Brian Taylor, Life Member: As I understand it, some people have done the calculation. It is very laudable based on item five that we are trying to cut costs like elections and things like that of £18k. As I understand it, the NRA bill probably for leases, legal fees or leases, is probably not far short over the last few years of £250k. A number of clubs themselves are having to bear considerable cost in fighting with the NRA over the issue of leases.

Now, bearing in mind the charitable aims of the Association and the clubs involved, we are supposed to be supporting shooting. That is a lot of money that could be put towards shooting, rather than fighting amongst ourselves and bullying by the NRA.

Chairman: I agree that it is a lot of money. But I will say this, and I will say it again. This issue has been discussed extensively by the Council and by the General Council. I repeat;

everybody has a horse in this race. You are either a member of the NRA and not a member of one of these clubs, or you are a member of one of these clubs. So the degree to which the balance is struck in a clubhouse lease renewal with respect to rent is very important in terms of fairness.

Now I have taken a lot of advice from charity lawyers, including the Chairman of the Charity Law Commission, about how we should pitch this particular issue. We live in the middle of Surrey. If you go outside of the gates of this particular camp, rents are extraordinarily high. When you step foot inside the camp they drop very quickly, because every building on camp supports shooting.

We have three broad levels of rent. We have commercial rents, and I have mentioned two in my speech today. A club that we all know is now being rented for possibly four times what it would be rented for were it a rented to a rifle club. And that is the sort of difference between a commercial rent and a rifle club rent, which is the lowest level of rent. In the middle of those two are what we would call residential properties. And that is based on some sort of basic 'per bedroom' type charge.

Clubhouse rents needs to be fair to everybody. Everybody who is not a member of a club that rents a clubhouse has the right to expect that the NRA gets the appropriate rent for that particular clubhouse. Nobody is forcing clubs to be a tenant of a Bisley clubhouse. We want clubs to survive, but we also want tenants to behave like proper tenants. The clubs sign up to a rental agreement which includes dilapidations. If we do not charge an appropriate rent and enforce the dilapidations included in the agreement, we basically create inter-generational unfairness where our successors will have to pick up the tab for our inefficiency to actually make people who signed up willingly to a series of legal obligations, undertake and fulfil those obligations.

Everybody is conflicted on this issue. You are either a member of, say, the North London Rifle Club, or you're not. And I should say here that I am a member of the North London and four different clubs around the camp. But I am also a member of the NRA. I am also a fiduciary as the Chairman of the Trustees to every single member of this organisation. So it's not enough for people to say to me that nobody is complaining. That is not good enough. It has to be right. And the best way that we can get it right is as follows:

We have to recognise that when everybody is conflicted, the best way to sort out that conflict of interest is to treat everybody fairly. In an instance when everybody is conflicted and judgments about what is fair may differ, fairness is best resolved by treating everybody equally. There are some clubhouses that have been on a ground rent since the year dot. There are other clubhouses that are now on rack rents. I don't think it is fair that club A sits next to club B and club A is on a ground rent and club B is on a rack rent and club A has a significant cost advantage over club B in attracting the members of the Association who are increasingly coming into this place and wanting to use such facilities.

That's all. That's all we want to do. We want fairness. We want to put all the clubs on all fours with each other. That creates quite large percentage increases for some of those clubs. I have less qualms about that because if you take a very low number and you multiply it by 500% it's still a relatively low number. But it's the same number as it would be if you had a rack rent previously. That's all. As I said to you, the traditional clubs that have renewed leases since 2013 are now all on rack rents. They don't seem to be 'going to the wall' like everybody seems to suggest they would.

What is painful is when we have tenants who will not engage in that process. And I'm sad to say that in such circumstance the only process left to us is that of the court. Yes it takes two to settle, I agree, but it takes two to litigate. The first time that the tenant of the Artists Rifles

Clubhouse sat down in person with the Chief Executive was April 2016, despite many invitations to do so since the lease that he had on that building expired in December 2011.

If people will not engage, it is not fair to all the members of this organisation who are not members of the Artists Rifles Club, to sit there and hope that this problem will go away. And by the way, they'll get two, three or four years lower rent, or not new rent, because they played the delaying game and kicked the problem into the long grass. It's just not fair. And all I'm trying to do is to make sure that people behave fairly. I have no wish, and I promise you, no wish for anybody to pay more than they should. But I'll be darned if the 8250 or so remaining members of the NRA should subsidise somebody because he's refused to sit down and negotiate something. That would be wrong.

The problem of course is the moral hazard that we face in that we have to spend money to actually get him to come to the table. That's life, I'm sorry. If the NRA wasn't going to spend any money, he wouldn't come to the table. And to be honest if you don't spend that money and people don't come to the table, I think it's morally wrong for me and the rest of the Trustees to say we would be much better off kicking it into the long grass and giving him another ground rent.

Were we to do that, we might spend the £4-6k that it normally costs to renew a lease and what happens? The rest of the NRA membership forego the increase that they should receive. And in the case of the Surrey where we have final figures, over a 21 year lease, that is £115-120k. Not to assert our position because it results in legal costs results in all of you as members of the NRA having a little bit of money skimmed from you each year and between you, you are going to forego £120k over 21 years without really knowing about it. I just think that's plain wrong.

If you want me to do that, I will do that. I don't think people want me to do that. I don't hear people saying I want you to do that. I actually think people say I want to pay and be paid a fair rent, because that is the right thing to do. I've said my piece.

#### *Round of applause*

Brian Taylor: If I can just add one thing to that. Something which I think you are ignoring is the fact that your predecessors had an estates policy where it was clarified that the tenant would invest a lot of money in the Artists and now the rules have suddenly changed and he has lost all that money. And I think that is one of the major things with the Artists alone. The other business about changing from ground rent to rack rents has almost been forced on one or two clubs against their will.

Chairman: So let me address that point in particular, and Martin (Osment) is here and he can challenge and critique what I say, if needs be.

We are getting into the weeds here, but they are important weeds. In 2003, Moss Mustafa took over the lease of the Artists Rifles Club. In correspondence with Jeremy Staples, who was then Chief Executive of the NSC, the two of them agreed that after the lease was assigned, the Artists would be issued a new standard lease. A letter containing that agreement was exchanged between Mr Mustafa and Mr Staples, and both signed it.

I'm sorry to say the issuance of a new standard lease never happened. In 2005, Jeremy Staples was asked what would happen upon a lease renewal. Amongst other things he said that the tenant will be issued a notice at the end of that particular lease, and in it the heads of terms will include a proposed rent at the current rate for properties of a similar type.

I don't know why a new standard lease was never issued. But there is a problem with the

existing lease, which I confess gave me and the Trustees great difficulty. In the lease document there is a clause which is unclear but could be interpreted to say that at the determination of the lease the tenant is allowed to get compensation for the building, or take it away with him.

Each side had very different interpretations of that clause and it took us a while to really understand what that meant. But what really concerned me as Chairman was the thought that I might have to sign off on behalf of the members of this organisation, and a charity, on the possibility that the NRA would pay over a considerable sum of money to an individual who wasn't even a member.

Close personal friends of mine, who are lawyers, said that if I didn't get the meaning of this clause well bottomed out with really good legal advice, I would be a fool because I am personally liable as a Trustee. So I confess that we have spent sums trying to get that bottomed out re the Artists Rifles Clubhouse, but it is a complicated issue.

Paul Charlton: Is the tenant of the Artists now a member of the NRA?

Chairman: Yes he is. He became a member of the NRA in the third quarter of last year.

Simon Dixon: Mr Chairman, can I come back on the point you made about fairness? The North London has been compared in the Journal with the English VIII and questions have been raised about the fairness of the rent paid of £2,711 by the English VIII, as compared with £2,513 which we (NLRC) were paying last year.

What this totally overlooks is the massive difference in the cost of maintaining these buildings. In 2015 the English VIII's maintenance bill was just £1,178 compared to that of the North London at £60,795. If we strip out the staff costs, it's still £22,224 – nineteen times as much from running the club which is why the previous Trustees recognised that by keeping to ground rents they were able to ensure the continuation of the clubs which can only survive as the result of a huge amount of volunteer work contributed by the members.

It was suggested by one of the Trustees that mid-week weddings were a good source of income. The North London is a not-for-profit shooting club providing facilities for members essentially for six months a year. In his response to my letter to the Vice Chairman of the NRA, and whilst he acknowledged that rent is influenced by the cost of upkeep, he suggested that the trustees have to consider what sort of offers might be made for the clubhouse if it were put out to tender from organisations who might well have ideas to make more commercial use of the building.

In my March response to him I went to great lengths to explain why commercialising the club was a non-starter and reflected a lack of misunderstanding by the trustees of the realities of running a club house at Bisley. The committee received many emails of support from members to my letter to the Vice Chairman, with one exception which I will read;

'What a pompous, arrogant and pig-ignorant letter, resign and do it now before you make even more of an ass of yourself than you have already done'. And that was copied to the North London Chairman and to the North London Secretary and came from John Bloomfield.

John Bloomfield: And it was accurate.

Simon Dixon: Disagreed by all the members of the North, bar yourself.

John Bloomfield: Really? You have that in writing, do you?

Simon Dixon: In our 2016 accounts it was estimated that management committee input was valued at over £70k. If the club were to become a commercial operation, then volunteering would no longer feature. If you could assume that a commercial operation was prepared to run a business that operates for only six months a year – that is unless the NRA are proposing to introduce attractions which encourage the general public to visit on a regular basis, then the subscription rate would effectively need to double to £576, effectively killing off membership of the North London, after 137 years of existence.

In such an environment, you can forget all the support that the clubs, and it's not just the North, all of the clubs provide to the NRA in vetting new members, training them up to competency standards, organising matches which with the universities and other shooting clubs, helping schools to bring on their teams, essentially providing future GB shots to represent the country for absolutely no cost to the NRA.

When I put the NRA's lease proposal to our members, I gained overwhelming support for taking the matter to court, and I have a fighting fund of £50k as you probably well know to start the ball rolling. Unless a reasonable and affordable settlement can be negotiated, it is my intention to write to all of the Vice Presidents of overseas shooting organisations that visit Bisley and receive our hospitality to ask them to contribute to our fighting fund.

Our legal advisers suggest that we have a very good chance of the continuation of our ground lease, and if we were to win our case, then of course the NRA would have the costs awarded against them.

My question is does the NRA really appreciate the consequences of their current attitude to lease?

Chairman: I'm going to hand over to Andrew. But let me just say this: as I said earlier on, the five club houses that have renewed leases since 2013 have done so on a rack rent. None of those are in peril. They all run well.

Simon Dixon: Does that include the Surrey?

Chairman: Yes it does include the Surrey. The three most successful clubs on this camp are run on rack rent. There is a myth out there that rack rents will kill off Bisley. The evidence suggests anything but. And nobody is forcing you to stay in that building. I wish the North London well because I am a member, but the North London as a club and the North London as a tenant are very different things. The North London has signed up to a lease which, as you know, includes dilapidation clauses. It is meant to be the premier club on Bisley, and instead it has looked the tattiest club on the camp for some time.

We as a group have to be fair to all those members of the association who are not members of the North London. And we think that if you don't want to pay a respectable rent for that building there are other people who will. And if you don't believe that, then let's put it to the test. It's that simple. Nobody, me least of all, wants you to leave the building, but I cannot have the rest of the members of the National Rifle Association subsidise your occupation of that building. It's just not fair.

David Lacey: Can I just ask for clarification? You mention the club only shoots six months a year? Why is that?

Simon Dixon: It is essentially only open for six months a year. We do open on odd occasion during the winter.

David Lacey: But why not shoot all through the year?

Simon Dixon: Because people don't want to shoot all through the year.

David Lacey: North London members don't want to shoot all through the year?

Simon Dixon: Bisley shooters don't want to shoot all through the year.

Andrew Mercer: Sorry, are you talking about this Bisley? This range complex here at Bisley, people only shoot six months of the year?

Simon Dixon: Target Rifle shooters and Match Rifle and Gallery Rifle shooters, a lot of our members do not shoot during the winter months essentially, as for the Surrey and the London & Middlesex.

David Lacey: But other clubs shoot throughout the year. Andrew, don't the bookings confirm that?

John Bloomfield: Can I add something at this stage Mr Chairman? I have been lambasted by Mr Dixon for replying to what I thought was a pompous, arrogant and conceited letter, because it came across that way. The reason your club is in trouble, Mr Dixon, is because you have failed to run it in a proper manner. You are currently facing, and you have failed so far to tell the rest of the membership this, a dilapidations bill for over £100k. You have in the kitty £50k to spend. Where is the rest of the money coming from to fulfil your obligations to keep the building in good repair – something that you say you've done but clearly have not done and it's there for everybody to see that you have not done it?

You sir, have presided effectively over the club becoming insolvent over the last 21 years. That's the current position you are in. The club has a liability; the liability has not been notified to the members, it has not been put in the accounts, which means the accounts are materially mis-stated. You have presided over that – what are you going to do to get your club, my club too, and I've been a member for 40 years, out of the mess that you have managed to get it into?

Robin Pizer: Mr Chairman, can I just ask Mr Bloomfield. You say £104K, can I please have a breakdown of that. The Club has never been given it. Now I would like a breakdown.

Chairman: Robin, you need to be very careful.

Robin Pizer: There has been no breakdown given.

Chairman: I am a member of the North London. If we serve the dilapidations schedule to the club, it must be done within a specific time period, otherwise it will be completed by the NRA and it will become an obligation of the club to pay the NRA for those works. If then the North London doesn't pay that money, it becomes a rental obligation which if not paid becomes a reason for default.

Robin Pizer: I'm not asking you to serve a charge. I am asking for an explanation of how you have come to that figure.

Chairman: It is professionally arrived at by a third party company called Dilapidations UK who do this for a living. They are professional dilapidation experts.

Christopher Leighton, Chairman North London: Actually, I spoke to the surveyor who did that and produced that figure, and he said that there is no breakdown behind it, because it is merely a budget figure to indicate.

Chairman: Correct.

Christopher Leighton: And it has no substance to it.

Andrew Mercer: I would take issue with that. Dilaps UK have done probably a dozen or so schedules. They also did the schedule of this building here (the Pavilion) and I can tell you without fear of contradiction, that the schedule, the budget figures, are almost invariably less than the true cost of repair of doing the work. Because they do a visual inspection, you find the real nasties when you strip away roofs, and you start digging into the work. You invariably find more work than they can identify from a visual, non-intrusive inspection.

So I think to assume that the figures that we've quoted actually are grossly exceeding the reality is a very dangerous assumption to make.

Christopher Leighton: I think that assumption that actually they are grossly exaggerated have been borne out by the set of numbers that are coming out of the deal with the biggest single issue which is the roof which is currently being done.

Chairman: Does anybody have any further questions?

Nick Brasier: I don't want to dig into detail, but I think it's worth saying that the larger clubs on Bisley who run open club houses, such as the Surrey and the North London and the London & Middlesex, feel that they are facing an existential crisis driven by very large increases in the rent. I think there is a real danger that they disappear. They play a very large role in helping the NRA to fulfil its charitable objectives of encouraging marksmanship. I would just urge you to think very carefully about whether you think it's important to have the larger, more active clubs here at Bisley. Without the club house, we wouldn't be as we are, we would be as much smaller clubs are. We wouldn't have an identity. And I think the Trustees need to think about what would Bisley be like without them, because I think that is a real risk. And if you don't want that to happen, then how can we work together to make sure that the clubs are more effective? We all actually run these clubs and associations, we are all heavily engaged every day, every week in doing it for no reward. We do the best that we can. We know very well that are in a very hand-to-mouth situation to survive and sometimes we have good years and sometimes we have bad years. And in bad years we've been at real risk of going under. Just the extra pressure of another £10-20K a year expenditure seems like a really big issue to us. We feel that it's not something that we can physically manage to go forward with. I don't have a question, I'd just like to ask the Trustees to look at in that way.

Chairman: I understand it, and I take your point. I think one of the things we are able to do is to consider the restrictive covenants that the club houses are subject to, so that there could be opportunities for each to do more in what could be described as your 'closed' season. I know that Simon seems to have a problem with that, but because the Pavilion is now back in our hands, we are less restricted because the tenant that used to run this place held our feet to the fire on this issue.

So there are certain things that we would consider, but I can promise you that the reason we do what we do, is charity law. I know everybody hates me to bring that up, but there is a process we must follow. A 21 year lease is akin to a real estate disposal and charity law is very restrictive about what we can and cannot do. We employ experts to either set the rent and/or we put it out to tender; that's how the market is created. And a market by definition is a willing buyer and a willing seller at the date of record. That's what creates the market place, and if the current tenants of those clubs don't want to be tenants anymore that's fine.

But please don't ask the rest of the membership to subsidise their occupation if you're not prepared to pay the market rent. It's that simple.

Peter Hobson: Mr Chairman. I was a Trustee during the programme in 2013 when we discussed fair rents, which we all agreed with and it was the right way forward.

I don't want to break any confidentiality that we agreed at that time, but what we did do was we said this is what Surrey is worth, and then negotiate down to where we want to be. And there was unfairness, I agree with you absolutely; that's why we put the policy in, to level the playing field so that favours of the past were levelled out.

What we didn't do was take account of the value of the real estate in terms of shooting to the clubs. We took the value of the real estate in terms of Surrey. When this was built, Surrey wasn't here, it was a county with fields. Now it's the middle of a metropolis and we are trying to put rents up on buildings 120 years old which cost a fortune to look after, that are not fit for purpose today and in fact, as landlords, you would have one hell of a job getting any money back from by the time you've raised them to modern day standards.

You're right that we've agreed fairness. I voted for that, and I was all for it. Where we went wrong, I think, was the flexibility in looking at this as an asset for shooting rather than an asset for income. That's what we got wrong.

Chairman: I take your point. But my answer to that is as follows: every building on the camp is occupied, and actually has covenants in its lease, to ensure that it supports shooting. This means we can't have a large PLC come here and rent the building. That's why we have divided up the buildings between commercial, residential and club houses.

The Vice Chairman of General Council said to us at the last General Council meeting in February, that the Trustees should go away and think quite clearly what our club house strategy should be. And I get that. Nobody, me least of all, wants to see the NRA not renting club houses to clubs. But I have to say that the data from our independent surveyors we employ who do this for a living, or from the independence of the market place that says this club want to rent that building for £x, is much more compelling. And that's the problem; those pieces of data are a lot higher than certain incumbents appears to want to pay.

Peter Hobson: Of course, and I agree with you. The National Trust has the same problem. They pay people to live in their houses. We've got an historic stock here which has limited value on re-sale. Not just because of the covenants, but because they are not winterised. They are just not fit for modern day purpose. The members keep them going because that's what clubs do. All I'm saying is that the fairness is right, but let's look at the value of the asset to shooting rather than value the asset as a building.

Chairman: The value of the asset to shooting is the income that it generates to enable everybody to shoot, and to enable this place to survive. As I've said to you many a time, and I believe we agree on this, when I took over as Chairman and you were on Council, one of the goals was to get the current members to pay for their consumption of this place and their shooting. Anything that we raise outside of that – be it from the CNC, the MoD and others - would be spent on investment. I think we've got there and that's a really good thing. The question is how do we make continue to ensure that everybody pays their fair whack. Some quarters have had a deal. Dare I say it, the North London have had a deal for more than 100 years. What's done is done - and I happen to be a North London member – but others who aren't members feel pretty strongly that enough is enough.

Peter Hobson: There is such a thing, if you want to go back that far, as retrospective legislation. The Bill of Rights 1668 states quite clearly there are no forfeitures without

recourse to law; it also says no retrospective legislation. So when did the law lords say that this was done? If it was done after this was built in 1906, I'm afraid it's legislative information and you're out of it. Nobody's looked at that yet. We may get caught with our trousers down.

Chairman: We have to move this on. Paul, I will take your question and then I think that will be the last. But I do want to remind you all that we did have a club house called the HAC and if that was a club house today, it would be yielding for all of our benefit about a quarter to a fifth of what it's yielding now.

David Crispin: But nobody wanted to take it on. That's why you had to rent it out to someone else.

Chairman: All evidence to the contrary, given the fact that we have rented it out for four or five times what it would be rented if it was a club house.

David Crispin: To a commercial organisation, not a shooting club.

Andrew Mercer: But it does fulfil our charitable objects. If you want to look in terms of defence of the realm, training police staff to actually protect the great British public and provide nuclear defences, what part of defence of the realm doesn't that fit?

David Crispin: I don't dispute that. They have deep tax payer pockets to pay for the building.

Andrew Mercer: I understand that.

Chairman: Paul, one question and then we should adjourn.

Paul Charlton: I feel I should refute my dear friend Peter Hobson. As a former regional accountant to the National Trust, we do not pay people to live in houses. They did occasionally pay farmers compensation because they no longer allow deer hunting on their land, and they compensated them for crop loss. But we're moving from an old style lease to a new style lease, we've grown up with the old style lease, our mindset was that and unfortunately the law has changed. Our leases have come to an end, the new leases have to be under the new law.

Peter Hobson: Good for the National Trust – I stand corrected.

Chairman: Ladies and Gentlemen, it is 19.45pm. I think we should adjourn for the evening.

Martin Osment: John, may I just give three bullet points? Very quickly, the eyesore of Hut 103, is there any update on doing anything with that?

Andrew Mercer: Ask the NSRA who own it.

Chairman: So Martin Osment asked about Hut 103. Hut 103, as I've said before, sadly no longer belongs to us, it belongs to the NSRA. As I said before we have had some negotiations, not terribly fruitful, with the NSRA and we are going to start to progress those more aggressively because frankly it is too much of an eyesore.

Martin Osment: The next thing is one of our members asked me to ask, given the periodic water failures on camp, how often is the water tested for potability?

Chairman: I don't know.

Andrew Mercer: I think twice a year.

Martin Osment: Thank you, and the final thing; in light of the article in the Times on Tuesday, are the Trustees proposing any response?

Chairman: We decided that with respect the article, we would state what the facts are on the website, which Andrew has done. With respect to Robin's letter, we considered that was airing dirty laundry in public and we would not do that. We would not engage in a debate through the Times, we would engage in a debate in this room.

Chairman: Silke, last question.

Silke Lohmann: Given that the NRA is a charity, given that most of us are probably members of one club or another, even if it is just an affiliated club, I personally feel that transparency of the rates that the clubs actually pay would be helpful. I completely agree with you, I think it should be fair for everyone and there shouldn't be one club that pays a lot less than another one. And I think everyone actually agrees with that. People have suggested to you and various other Trustees that we should sit around the table and even if it takes a whole weekend to discuss it, we should get some independent outsiders to sit with us and we should discuss the problem. We should stop spending enormous amounts on legal fees which could be spent to keep up the camp, promote shooting and also put money into regional shooting because I know that is very important for us to get regional ranges.

We seem to have lost common sense and all of you are actually bright enough to realise that maybe we could all take a step back and all have a go, sit around a table and at least give it one last shot if you like.

*(Hear, hear – round of applause)*

Chairman: Thank you. I must say that I completely agree, but it is very difficult sometimes to get people into a room when they don't want to engage.

Silke Lohmann: If I promise to get everyone the round the table, would you be able to do that?

Chairman: I'd be happy to do so.

Thank you everybody, we are adjourned.

Meeting closed at 20.00pm.