

NATIONAL RIFLE ASSOCIATION

FINAL

THE GENERAL COUNCIL

Minutes of a Meeting held at the Pavilion Bisley
on Friday 17th June 2016 from 3.00pm

Present:

Chairman: Mr JGM Webster (Chairman)

Members: Mr HRM Bailie
Mr GV Barnard
Mrs ID Bennett
Mr JPS Bloomfield
Mr CM Brooks
Mr AM Bullen
Dr A Cargill Thompson
Mr PR Coley
Mr M Cotillard
Mr DC Crispin
Mr HF Dunton
Mr DGF Evans
Mr GMLN Gilpin
Mr JS Harris
Mr DR Lamb
Mr GAE Larcombe
Mr D Lowe
Mr TS McDowell
Mr M Magan
Mr JF Miller
Mr R Roberts
Mr P Ryder
Mr AJD Saunders
Mr I Shirra-Gibb
Sqn Ldr P Upham
Dr J Warburton (Vice Chairman)
Mr MP Watkins
Dr AP Wolpe
Mr MJ Wood
Mr D Young

In attendance: Mr A Mercer - Chief Executive
Mrs G Thatcher - Office Manager
Mr D Lacey - Trustee

Apologies for absence: Mr GK Alexander, Mr T Bobbet, Col WGC Bowles, Wg Cdr DP Calvert, Mr M Charlton, Mr ARK Clayton, Maj. Gen IC Dale, Mr S East, Sqn Ldr A Fox, Mr NJ Francis, Maj SB Fraser, Dr N Fyfe, Mr J Harper-Smith, Mr K Hocking, Wg Cdr CJ Hockley, Mr JA Horton, Mr A Hunter, Mr TLW Kidner, Mr JM Kynoch, Mr T Lehman, Mr M Maksimovic, Mr MF Martell, Mr CN McEachran, Mr K Nash, Col. Brig. WJ O'Leary, Mr WCP Richards, Mrs K Robertson, Mr R Sayer, Brig J Smales, Mr D Stimpson, Wing Cdr M Symonds, Mr G Trembath, Mr PDC Turner.

CHAIRMAN'S OPENING REMARKS

The Chairman of General Council welcomed everyone to the meeting.

INDEX G433 to G444

G433 – APOLOGIES

Apologies were received.

G434 – MINUTES OF MEETING OF GENERAL COUNCIL MEETING – 20th FEBRUARY 2016

The Minutes of the General Council meeting of 20th February 2016 were received.

The minutes were accepted as an accurate account of the meeting and duly approved.

G435 – MATTERS ARISING FROM MINUTES OF 20th FEBRUARY 2016

Lease renewals and the setting of rents

The Chairman had circulated a memorandum and supporting correspondence regarding the recent events involving ABCAT and clubhouse rents on camp. The Chairman requested both feedback and support from the General Council members and explained that everyone in the room had a 'horse in this race' as they were either members of clubs on camp, or individual NRA members who shoot at Bisley.

There has been a lot of heat thrown on the subject and the Chairman would now like to throw some light on the subject and proposed running through the major pieces of legislation and governing documents actually required of the NRA, attempting to separate the process from the outcome.

There are four principles/documents that govern what the Association can do and this includes the Charities Act, English Property Law, Trustees Code of Conduct and the NRA real estate policy document.

The Chairman explained that the Charities Act requires the Association to obtain and consider a report from a qualified surveyor acting exclusively for the charity, and the Chairman confirmed the Association does this through Strutt and Parker. Any assertion that it hasn't is wrong. The property must also be advertised appropriately, if required, and this will be stipulated by the chartered surveyor. As a charity, the NRA Trustees must also ensure that the terms of the disposition are the best that can be reasonably obtained. The NRA will follow the advice provided to them by their expert advisors.

English Property Law decrees that at the end of the first lease term, a building reverts to the ownership of the landlord. This is not new law and is well established. The building can therefore be rentalised.

The Trustee Code of Conduct is signed by all Trustees who undertake to adhere to it. The Trustees must administer the organisation, both the NRA as the charity and the NSC as the trading subsidiary, and all its assets, in the interests of current and future members.

The NRA real estate policy which was adopted in December 2010 states that all leases are to be negotiated on an open market basis. The NSC executes real estate negotiations on behalf of the NRA. Andrew Mercer as the Chief Executive of the NSC therefore will negotiate club house leases in consultation with Strutt and Parker, as well as getting advice from Richard Bailie, a Trustee who is a retired member of RICS.

When a lease comes to an end, the tenant will be notified no less than 6 months in advance of the expiry date and a Section 25 notice will be issued bringing the lease to an end. A Section 25 notice is the mechanism by which the landlord terminates a lease and a lease must be terminated whether or not the landlord wishes to issue a new lease to the same tenant.

The Chairman asked if everyone was clear on all these areas as to how the management of the real estate works and whether there were any questions, or whether anyone disagreed.

Steve McDowell stated that he had issues with all the points raised. SMcD does not believe he is conflicted as he is a member of four clubs and is an elected member of this council and has been asked to raise concerns by some members. SMcD was invited to attend the ABCAT meeting last week and would like to represent concerns raised at that meeting to help try and take some heat out of the situation.

SMcD asked what professional advice has been taken by the NRA and can the General Council members see the advice.

DE responded that because the NRA are now in litigation with a tenant, they would be unable to reveal the legal advice received until the litigation has been resolved, and believes this would be the same for the advice received from Strutt and Parker.

David Crispin added that if the NRA have some documentation or legal advice that could be shared to avoid expensive litigation, it should.

Following discussion it was agreed that the Council may be able to share some of the advice from Strutt and Parker with the General Council members on matters that have been closed, but not information on live matters.

AM added that despite making repeated requests to meet with Moss Mustafa of the Artists Rifles Clubhouse to resolve the lease issue, nothing was forthcoming and therefore the only alternative was to go to arbitration. The result of the arbitration award proved without any contention that the NRA's case was valid and true. The arbitration award has still not been accepted by the Artists Rifles Clubhouse. Unfortunately the NRA are unable to share that information as the award remains confidential. However, it is beyond dispute that the buildings are annexed to the land and therefore belong to the NRA and can be rentalised.

DC commented that there is no contention that the NRA owns the buildings and this has been accepted by ABCAT. What is still under dispute is what is considered to be a fair rent.

SMcD asked what is considered to be a commercial rent. The clubhouses are not a commercial business and would not exist without the help and goodwill of the members.

The Chairman responded that the association has to seek the 'correct' rent which is the best that can be reasonably obtained in accordance with the Charities Act. The NRA must obtain and consider a report from a qualified surveyor acting exclusively on behalf of the charity as to what that is. The real fear is that the point can be argued on and on. A qualified surveyor could turn around and say that open market rents can be charged which could increase the rents even further.

If there should be a change to the valuation methodology, then the association would be willing to consider that and have asked Strutt and Parker to review the different options and are awaiting a response from them. Any delay is mainly due to internal personnel changes.

DC requested better transparency and clarity on what is being levied by the association on rents.

JW responded that the experts would be the ones to review and confirm the pricing structure for clubhouses and the association would follow that advice.

David Lamb remarked that there is no understanding of the model being used for setting the rents and an example of how they are levied should be included in the NRA estate policy so that clubhouses can understand the charges better.

JW remarked that previous rents had been set on a ground rent basis, but it had now changed to ground and building rents which has created a large increase in the rents now levied.

Harald Dunton posed the question whether payments could be phased in to be affordable for clubs. JW responded that it has been considered and could be further thought about by the Trustees, but it would have to be fair for everyone.

AM gave some examples of current square meterage payments being paid by clubhouses on camp. The Surrey Rifle Association currently pays £17.72 per sq. m. The new rent proposed for the Artists Rifle Clubhouse is around £35.00 per sq. m (they currently pay £7.70 per sq. m ground rent only) due to the larger accommodation option. Dukka Hut currently pay £26.00 per sq. m as a clubhouse only with no accommodation. Bullet Lodge currently pay £68.00 per sq. m. Spencer Site as a serviced caravan pitch is £38.50 per sq. m.

AM's remarked that Strutt and Parker asked him why the guide price for Bullet Lodge was set so low. The fear is that an expert advisor will suggest the rents increase considerably based on market rents for the area. Fair, reasonable and equitable rates needs to be set for all clubs and must be fair for all members of the Association.

Reg Roberts added that the Trustees should understand the bigger picture which is that since RG subsidy was dropped there is no waiting list for caravans and there is a lower number of club members. People now have a choice and can walk away from investing in the camp through caravan rents and membership. Guidance notes are available for levying rents on camp which means you can double the rent rather than increase it 400-800%.

The Chairman responded that people do have a choice, and people are joining the NRA at a rate of 90 new members per month. The organisation is growing quickly which in turn provides a lot more business to the camp. The Trustees do not have a great deal of latitude with regards to the levying of rents on camp. The rules are written to take personal feelings out of it and have independent experts levy the correct levels.

JB added that clubs should promote their clubs for new members to join, either through the Journal, website, NRA bulletin etc.

Mike Cotillard offered an outsiders view as the newest member to General Council. One of the cost saving methods the Jersey Rifle Association are looking at is creating a fund on behalf of the clubs in Jersey which allows them to put money into a fund for investment into the ranges. A similar thing could be arranged at the NRA for buildings on camp.

ACT added that a lot of the issues are down to perceptions and there are challenges around the view that the NRA can't favour individual groups because the group of members are benefitting as members of a club. Some clubs do more for Bisley than others but that can be difficult to levy but it should be recognised that it isn't a straight forward transaction for clubs.

The Chairman responded that there are clubs who do not have club houses on camp who are more active on the ranges so it wouldn't be fair to grant discounts to clubs on camp.

ACT asked what the right balance is for a club based on camp versus a club that just uses the ranges.

The Chairman remarked that one of the options is to relax the covenants for clubs to be able to invite non-members into their club houses and hold parties and events to help increase income for the club.

DC remarked that Bates Wells and Braithwaite's website states in principal that if one charity is charging another charity they don't have to charge the full amount and can charge a lesser amount.

The Chairman responded that legal advice received has indicated that the Association's articles have to show you are allowed to charge a smaller amount, and the NRA's do not specify that. Also the Trustees Code of Conduct requests that the NRA act in the best interests of all the members of the Association.

Harald Dunton commented on the point JW had made that the majority of the 900 NRA clubs polled used Bisley. HD had undertaken his own poll of his regional clubs and two thirds of them do not use Bisley at all.

John Miller asked whether Strutt and Parker are considering the options of a receipt and expenditure payment method for club rents and if so, will the NRA consider that as an option. The Chairman responded that if Strutt and Parker say that is the appropriate methodology then the NRA will use it.

Charles Brooks remarked that a lot of the issues for rent negotiations have arisen due to the Elitestone case. Morally the buildings belong to the clubs against what the law says. CB wonders if it is worth sitting down with Strutt and Parker and explaining the issues of club houses having paid for the buildings and whether there can be any leniency on it. The Chairman responded that the law is the only thing the NRA can follow, regardless of the moral issues.

Martin Watkins asked whether polling the membership for their vote on a proposed method for club house rents at Bisley would be advisable. The Chairman responded that the membership may not vote the way the Bisley club houses wish! It would also be very difficult and unfair to do it on a club by club basis.

David Lamb asked what the outcome of the discussion with Strutt and Parker was. The Chairman stated that the NRA would chase Strutt and Parker for their decision on the valuation methodology and a number of other questions that have been levied at them. The NRA would then assemble some information for circulation to the General Council members to help them understand the outcome of all the advice.

Martin Watkins added that the members of General Council do not expect the Trustees to break the law. He also added that of the 120 clubs in Wales less than 10% visit Bisley due to the cost. The Chairman responded that the prices have gone up due to the change from ground rent to building rent. The Trustees do not want to see empty buildings on camp and will work towards the best resolution possible.

The Chairman thanked everyone for their input into the discussion.

Attendance Levels

John Warburton had contacted the members of General Council with regards to attendance of these meetings. The main issues raised were the distance to travel to Bisley, the timings of meetings and the difficulty of attending on a Friday afternoon. Options offered were to hold a meeting more centrally for each of travel, hold meetings through SKYPE or move the June and September meetings to a Saturday.

64% of members attended all General Council meetings in 2015. It is believed that is a good turnout. Difficulties of holding a meeting on a Saturday in September and June with the number of competitions and shooting events taking place over weekends could affect attendance.

JWar does not believe there is an issue and therefore it was agreed that no changes would be made at this time.

Regional Working Party

Harald Dunton asked whether anything further had been done about creating a Regional Ranges Working Group.

James Harris responded that the Regional Ranges Working Group had not yet been constituted and that Nic Couldrey as Regional Ranges Manager and James Harris are gathering information as to what needs to be done throughout the UK. Once this has been appraised, a group will be set up to manage it.

G436 – THE COUNCIL

The Chairman gave a verbal report of the Council meetings held on 23rd April and 17th June.

A large amount of work has been undertaken on both the roads and ranges on camp and this work continues.

AM has been in regular attendance at meetings with government and the MoD and there is continuing work ongoing with that.

The trade event was very successful during the Phoenix meeting and regular trade events will be held over the Phoenix and Trafalgar weekends in future.

Marker issues have been raised and the NRA are addressing these as best as possible. The NRA have employed and trained more markers than before due to the increase in demand for ranges. The number of markers at University or undertaking exams impact greatly on the availability from April through to June.

Steve East (through David Crispin) asked what was being done about the marker situation.

AM confirmed that this time of year is always difficult to secure markers and also a large number of good markers will be tempted away by private groups as they pay cash in hand. One way to resolve this is to pay the markers more, but this would have an impact on charges made to the shooters.

The three workstreams of the Rule 150 enquiry are all now substantially complete and these will be considered and published in early July before the BGM. The Chairman extended his thanks to all those who had been involved.

G437 – FINANCE

The Treasurer gave a synopsis of the speech he had prepared for the AGM.

He pleased to report a healthy financial standing. Last year a surplus of £252k was achieved. Revenues are up to £5.5m from £5.3m. The bulk of cash generated was reinvested into the infrastructure at Bisley.

Cash balance at year end was c.£470k. The Trustees set a minimum cash balance of £200k which has been achieved. The budget this year looks to a surplus of just over £200k, which also allows a capital expenditure of £500k.

Communication of the Association's accounts will continue through reports by the Treasurer which are published on the website.

G438 – CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT

The Chief Executive presented his report to the General Council members.

The Pavilion has been an extra addition to the Association this year and expenditure is being undertaken to bring the Pavilion into use.

The Phoenix meeting saw the Arms Fair in the main ballroom, as well as all the accommodation being used through the weekend.

Future trade fairs will be held in a marquee on Sit Pet Lawn twice a year during the Phoenix and the Trafalgar meetings.

Training of members has increased 44% and the training team will be using the Pavilion as their training base from now on.

The Home Office have recently announced a change to club renewal fees from £84 to £1000 as well as RFD renewal charges increasing to £1500. The NRA will be working with the Home Office to help levy a fairer charge for clubs.

The Home Office have also passed new legislation for clubs to allow 'temporary' members of other home office approved clubs and FAC holders. There will be implications for insurance and competency but the NRA will be working through this.

SMcD asked whether any security will be provided for Arms Fairs due to the content of the fairs.

AM remarked that we have careful liaison with the police, and the presence of the CNC and Metropolitan Police are informed of any risks.

Guy Larcombe asked whether the NRA could restrict or remove the sale of knives and non-shooting items at the Arms Fairs. AM will consider that for future events.

David Young asked whether there was a financial plan for the Pavilion now that it has come back into the NRA's possession versus offering it out for lease to a third party.

AM confirmed that there would be good financial return for the NRA with the café, retail offering and larger Range Office being made available.

DY also asked whether it was worth taking advice from Town and Country planning with regards to using the building as a hotel as it could be extended due to its use.

AM remarked that a change of use would not be sought and it was a point well made. The current 19 hotel rooms would be retained for use by shooters.

G439 – SHOOTING COMMITTEE

The minutes of 21st January were presented to the members. There were no matters arising.

A verbal report of the meeting on 5th May was given by JB.

Peter Cottrell will be undertaking further trials on misses and the use of Corex as raised at last year's BGM. JB will provide a brief report will at this year's BGM if possible.

Harald Dunton added that they have used Corex for 7 years and never had an issue with missed shots.

JB responded that they are looking at covering all angles so that a report can be presented at the BGM.

F-Class 'blow-off' shots will be allowed at the first competition of the day when F-Class targets will not go up on Message 1 for one minute when blow-off shots can be taken. Targets will then be raised after a minute break.

The Cadet Imperial will be taking place with 56 entries to date. The MoD will be paying for the competition and the NRA will provide the prizes. If successful, this will become a regular fixture at the Imperial Meeting.

1200 yard bookings have been resolved with all bookings now being made through the Match Rifle Discipline Rep who will in turn feed those into the range office and suggested dates will be provided by the range office for agreement.

The Veterans Team Captain to New Zealand in 2019 is John Webster.

John Miller asked whether Peter Turner was aware of the decision for F-Class 'blow-off' shots as it hadn't been mentioned in the Imperial Planning meeting with the CROs.

JB confirmed PT was not yet aware of the decision as a draft Range Operations order produced by Peter Cottrell which will be sent onto PT and JM.

G440 – MEMBERSHIP COMMITTEE

David Crispin offered an idea with regards to a case to converting all affiliated members to full NRA members and to encourage them by making the annual fee cheaper for all. GL responded that the Membership Committee are formulating plans for this.

AM added that there is work which needs to be done with shooters certification cards and capitation and now the new legislation for 'temporary' members.

G441 – ELECTION TO THE GENERAL COUNCIL

It was recorded that the following Elected Members of General Council under Second Schedule Rule 7(g) have been elected unopposed:

Ordinary Members

M Maksimovic
RM Roberts
Mrs KD Robertson
I Thomson

Regional Members

Mr H Dunton	-	Eastern
G Trembath	-	Northern
Dr JD Warburton	-	Yorkshire & Humberside

Discipline Members

C Dickenson	-	Target Rifle
D Kent	-	F Class
Dr AP Wolpe	-	Muzzle Loading

G442 – VICE CHAIRMAN TO THE GENERAL COUNCIL

Dr John Warburton was re-elected as Vice Chairman to General Council for a further term of three years.

G443 – ELECTIONS TO COUNCIL

Barry Morgan was re co-opted to Council for a further term of three years.

Gary Alexander and Derek Lowe were both re-elected to Council for a further term of three years.

The Chairman announced a vacancy for an elected member of Council following Peter Hobson's departure. Nominations in writing were requested by mid-August to the Secretary General.

The Vice Chairman of Council will be elected by its members in August. David Evans has expressed his willingness to re-stand for a further term.

G444 – OTHER ITEMS FOR CONSIDERATION

Harald Dunton raised the point of how popular 'AirSoft' has now become and how seriously they take it. Certain drills used to be followed in the past. Drills on target are being taken very seriously by AirSoft shooters and wants to ask whether anyone has asked to find out what is going on within the AirSoft world.

AM confirmed that the NRA have looked at the AirSoft community and there is a modicum of target shooting. However most of it is not appropriate to Bisley.

David Crispin remarked that Bullet Lodge was recently put out to tender. However, Old Bisley Gun Club and Wimbledon House have not been offered out to tender and leased to a commercial tenant. Why was it not put out to tender as per the estate policy so it was fair for everyone? It seems to be a contradiction to the stated policy.

AM confirmed that a 'commercial' lease had been conducted and Strutt and Parker will opine on whether this is acceptable. The Chairman added that both buildings were taken on a commercial basis and that if it had been put out to tender the original deal of offering both buildings may not have been achieved, therefore it would not have been in the NRA's commercial interest to do so. Section 119 states that the NRA has to advertise a proposed disposition, if required, following advice from our chartered surveyor.

SMcD stated that the work done at the back of Century was very commendable and asked that more spaces be cut out of the sleepers to provide access for shooters equipment. John Miller added that more access for disabled shooters would be appreciated.

The Chairman wrote with birthday wishes to the Patron on the occasion of her 90th birthday and shared a letter received from Her Majesty expressing her thanks and kind wishes.

The Chairman is proposing five new Vice Presidents at the AGM and informed the General Council members of the candidates – Phil Harrison, Simon Fraser, Peter Hobson, John Fitzgerald (Australia) and Dennis Flaherty (USA). All candidates were accepted by the GC members.

No further questions were raised.

The meeting closed at 17.45pm

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "John John Herbert".

Chairman

DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING

Friday 2nd September 2016 2.00pm

NRA Pavilion