

NATIONAL RIFLE ASSOCIATION

Annual General Meeting

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting
held in the NRA Pavilion, Bisley on Friday 17th June 2016 at 18.00

Present:

Chairman	Mr JGM Webster
Vice Chairman	Mr DG Evans
Treasurer	Mr D Lowe
Chief Executive	Mr A Mercer
Members	56 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. Five further Vice Presidents were proposed.

The Resolution was approved.

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

The Resolution was approved.

SPEECHES AND OPEN FORUM

Attached as Annex.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John John Lehto". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Chairman

Annual General Meeting – 17th June 2016

Proceedings

Chairman:

Ladies & Gentlemen, it's six o' clock.

If I can have your attention please, we should start the Annual General Meeting. Thank you very much.

We have an agenda in front of us. Before I get to the election of our President, I would like to say that I have received a nice letter from our Patron in the past few days. On all of our behalf, I wrote to Her Majesty wishing her a very happy 90th birthday and she has written back the following message, which I'd like to read out:

'I very much appreciated the kind words you have said on behalf of the members of the National Rifle Association on the occasion of my 90th birthday. As your Patron I was grateful for your thoughtfulness in writing as you did, and in return send you all my warm good wishes. Elizabeth R'.

Item number one is the election of our President. I 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)*

Any other nominations *(none)*. Thank you very much.

Second, the election of our Vice Presidents. I'd like to divide this if I may into two blocks. First, that the existing Vice Presidents, as listed on the rear of this notice, be elected en-bloc. I'd like to propose that on behalf of the Council.

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

Anybody against? *(None)*

Then I would like, on behalf of the Council, to propose five new Vice Presidents of our Association. Before we vote, I'd like to tell you a little bit about each of these people.

The first is John Fitzgerald from Australia. John was the Chairman of the National Rifle Association of Australia for 8 years, stepping down in 2015 due to a bout of ill health. He remains a director of the NRAA. He has been instrumental in building relationships between ourselves and the NRA of Australia, not least around the TR World Championships that were held in Brisbane in 2011. As the long serving Chairman of the New South Wales Rifle Association, he has been very instrumental in sustaining full-bore shooting in that particular state, when the future of the Mallabar ranges was threatened.

The second person is Dennis Flaherty of the United States of America. Dennis has represented the USA in the last six Palma matches (the TR long range world team championship), captaining the US team in both 2011 and 2015. He has been a notable supporter of TR style shooting in the US, taking teams out of the North American continent outside of the Palma match year (unusual for the TR community there), captaining US teams to South Africa in 2009 and again in 2013, when he promoted the America Match on that occasion, the first time that it was fired outside the North America continent. He has also been a significant figure in ICFRA (the International Confederation of Full-Bore Rifle Associations). Over this period he played a major part in ensuring that the TR World Championships at Camp Perry in 2015 were a success.

The third person that I would like to commend to you is Simon Fraser. Simon has been the long-serving secretary of the TA Rifle Association and the Council for Cadet Rifle Shooting. During this period he has been responsible inter alia for the successful running of cadet shooting which remains a significant feeder for our sport and our Association. Most notable has been his contribution to the success of the Athelings, which is the British Cadet TR rifle team, and the GB Under 19 Rifle Team. The introduction of the GB Under 19 annual tour to South Africa and the biennial visit to Bisley of the South African Under 19 team was very much his brainchild and has been a huge success in broadening the experience of those particular youngsters, inculcating them in the ways of our sport and building relationships with SABU.

The fourth person I would like to commend to you is Phil Harrison. After being a successful GB team member in the 1970s and 80s, which included winning His Excellency the Governor General of Canada's Prize on two occasions, Phil has been a significant influence in ICFRA since its inception, playing a very major role in drawing up the rules under which its competitions are run, as well as serving as its Secretary General from 2011 until very recently. He was a long serving member, and then Chairman of the English Target Shooting Federation, as well as the England full-bore manager of the rifle team to two Commonwealth Games. From there he went on to play a major role in the Commonwealth Shooting Federation as Chairman of its full-bore rifle committee ensuring, amongst other things, the continuation of full-bore shooting at those games. For our Association, this is a hugely important contribution as it maintains our seat at the top table of international sport.

And the fifth (who is actually here) is Peter Hobson. Peter has quietly made a number of really significant contributions to both our sport and our Association. As well as being a member of General Council, he was an NRA Trustee from 2010 to 2015, during what proved to be an immensely challenging period for the Association. Perhaps less well known is that he is one of the founding fathers of F-Class, which barely existed 15 years ago and now makes up a vibrant and growing part of the full-bore shooting community, both here and overseas.

Does anybody have any objection to us voting on these candidates en bloc? (*None raised*).

So Council would like to propose those five people as Vice Presidents of our Association en bloc.

All those in favour? (*Unanimous show of hands*)

All those against? (*None*)

Thank you very much. Peter, congratulations and thank you very much. (*Round of applause*)

Item 3, the election of Auditors. Saffrey Champness are our auditors. They have indicated that they are willing to stand and I, on behalf of the Council, would like to propose that they are appointed to be our Auditors for 2016. However, I believe good governance demands that the Association put the role of its auditor out to tender for 2017 and beyond as Saffrey Champness have been our auditors for some years now.

So I am indicating to you that for the year 2016, Saffrey Champness will be our auditors, assuming that you approve their nomination, but that we would at the end of that process be putting out the role to tender for the 2017 year.

All those in favour of Saffrey Champness being our auditors for 2016? (*Unanimous show of hands*)

Anybody against? (*None*)

Thank you very much.

Item 4.

As in prior years I then Derek and then Andrew are going to speak, and then we will get to the open forum.

The main headline is that we are able to report another healthy surplus for 2015 and continued growth in our membership. I hope you will by now have had the opportunity to read our annual report which was published in March outlining our financial position. Once again, I am going to leave Derek Lowe to review our financials after I have finished my speech.

There are a number of other positive achievements since we met at this meeting last year that I would like to share with you.

Our membership continues to grow. At the end of May this year, we now have 8,143 members with more joining at a current rate of 90 per month – yes, that is 450 already so far this year. Necessary changes to our membership billing put a lot of pressure on our Membership department during the latter part of last year and I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate and thank Georgina Thatcher and her team on accomplishing all this so effectively. Our database is better, our membership offering for both individuals and clubs is better with improved membership benefits, and the on-boarding of new members is better. This has in turn put pressure on our Training team and their facilities, who have responded magnificently to the challenge.

Range use both by members and corporate users continues to grow. Revenue from civilian (i.e. not including corporate) range hire is up 5% year on year. This has put pressure on certain disciplines, particularly those that involve shooting at 300 yards or less, as range availability at these distances becomes increasingly scarce, particularly on Short Siberia. Managing our fixed range resources efficiently is critical, as is the need to balance the needs of our members versus our corporate users, whose range use demonstrates the value of Bisley to the community and generates significant income for the benefit of the entire Association. I would like to compliment Rick Wells on his management of this Herculean task. To help you appreciate what is involved, the range office has received 17,000 bids for range bookings over the past 9 months. That is over 60 per day, and represents civilian bookings only, i.e. it excludes our corporate users.

On the ranges themselves, there have been some notable events. The fact that for the first time both the NRA's representative teams that travelled abroad during 2015 were captained

by Ladies serves as another reminder 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.

If that wasn't notable enough, the GB TR rifle team captained by Jane Messer swept to victory at the World Long Range Championships at Camp Perry, USA in August, breaking the previous match record by a colossal 79 points with some brilliant coached shooting.

Whilst on the subject of TR, it is perhaps worth noting that the much vaunted "Death of TR" that crops up in conversations around this place from time to time seems overblown. The introduction of GGG as the ammunition for our 'issued ammo' competitions proved to be a resounding success, delivering at least equivalent accuracy to its predecessor at a price 20p per round less. Our congratulations should be extended to those who put this contract together because this has given a considerable boost to the TR community. Given that we sell at least 500,000 rounds of match grade TR ammo every year, the success of this new contract has put over £100,000 back into TR shooting community in the past 12 months. And so it continues; for the first 5 months of this year, TR match ammo sales through our Range Office are 3½ times those for the equivalent period last year. This is indicative of a major increase in TR activity, which may well explain in part the pressure on marker resources that we have experienced during the same period despite expenditure on markers and marking increasing. So please can we put to bed the myth that the NRA somehow doesn't like TR? Since January 1st 2015, almost 500 new members who shoot TR have joined the NRA. The simple fact is that due to the hard work of the professional staff that we have and the enthusiasm of the volunteers that we rely on, we have seen an increase across all disciplines and this can only be good for the future of competitive target shooting. TR is growing and the other types of shooting are growing too.

We continue to make improvements to our ranges here at Bisley both behind and in front of the mantlet. The introduction of electronic targets has proved an interesting learning curve and we will continue to develop our electronic target offering as the best way to increase capacity and fulfil expectations. We are also slowly catching up on road, ground and building maintenance. The membership survey that we conducted threw up some astounding figures. Out of some 28,500 full-bore shooters across the country (that is full NRA members and those designated as regular full-bore shooters by NRA affiliated clubs), some 18,000 claim to use Bisley as their 'home' range. This is particularly because of the facilities at longer ranges. So I make no apologies therefore for focusing a lot of our efforts on improving both infrastructure and capacity here at Bisley. Andrew Mercer will talk more about our plans for the Pavilion in a moment. But with figures like these, it doesn't take long to figure out why Bisley is the National Shooting Centre, and why it is so important to our future.

Notwithstanding this continued focus however, 2015 marked the beginning of our regional ranges initiative, led by Nic Couldrey. Nic made a presentation to the Trustees earlier in the year outlining the spread of membership across the country as well as an inventory of the ranges where they shoot. This ground work has identified all the ranges across the country, the clubs that use them, the scale of those clubs and where their members are located. This will inform the conversations that we are having with the Defence Infrastructure Organisation at the MoD (DIO) and Landmarc about access, pricing and availability. And we are exploring options to invest in ranges away from Bisley for the benefit of NRA members and affiliated clubs. Our pilot scheme in this new partnership arrangement is with the Frome and District Rifle & Pistol Club (FDRPC) at their new Shepton Mallet Target Sports Centre where the NRA has made available on long term loan £18,000 of range equipment. This new range is scheduled to open late July 2016. The Frome Club will make available four weekend days of range hire each year for NRA sponsored / organised training events, competitions etc.; and offer preferential range hire rates for NRA members.

Our policy with regards to young shooters is also taking root as more and more are taking advantage of the financial assistance we are offering. This is crucial to the future of our sport. As part of this, we have developed a cadet imperial to be shot alongside the TR competitions on Century range. My thanks go to Peter Turner and others who have put this together. We see this as a logical extension of the policy that we have as an Association to promote shooting amongst the young. Cadets join cadet units largely because they want to learn how to shoot, which is why we found such a receptive audience from the MOD when we challenged them – with prodding from Mark Garnier MP and Andrew Mercer – to lift their prohibitive restrictions on the movement of cadet rifles and ammunition.

We have finally reached resolution on the Rule 150 issue. All of the three work streams are now substantially complete, and the findings will be published in due course. In summary, in the first work stream to be completed, legal Counsel has emphatically dismissed allegations that the NRA had behaved illegally and concluded the NRA has done nothing illegal; the second work stream to be completed was the extensive tests conducted by the Birmingham Proof House under the supervision of Dr Derek Allsop, the Birmingham Proof House's appointee to oversee these tests. These have clearly demonstrated that the rifle/ammunition combination used in Rule 150/NRA issued ammo competitions is safe, and has been throughout. The NRA therefore does not have, and never has had, a safety problem with its rifles and ammunition in Rule 150 TR competitions; and third the General Council report addresses a number of issues raised over the years relating to Rule 150. The authors of the report interviewed a number of people and reviewed a large number of documents, both contemporary and historic. It is substantially in its final form and will be published, as will the other two, in early July before the BGM. I would like to thank Alice Gran and David Lacey for all their work on the General Council report, and to John Bloomfield for his work with the Birmingham Proof House supporting their tests. Each of them have put in a colossal amount of work to get to the bottom of what has proved to be a thorny and emotive issue.

But just as one thorny and emotive issue is put to bed, another threatens to dominate proceedings; that is club lease renewals and the setting of rents. I suppose it would not be Bisley without having something to disagree about! However, this issue has generated much heat, and in an attempt to throw more light on the subject, the General Council has discussed this matter in its meeting earlier today and will ruminate on those discussions. It is too early to reach any conclusions yet. We must all remember however that the laws under which we operate are quite restrictive and that each of us has a horse in this race; we are either a member of an affected club (me for sure, as I am a member of several), or we are a member of the NRA but not a member of an affected club who has every right to expect that the Association as landlord gets the correct rent for the properties on its estate. That is why, in this particular discussion, we must carefully listen to what our professional advisers – our Lawyers and Chartered Surveyors - say not only because they are experts, but also because they are independent.

Notwithstanding this, I remain bullish about our Association's future. I believe we are on a good path. Before I handover to Derek to demonstrate that, I would just like to say a big thank you to my fellow Trustees and to Andrew Mercer and his staff for all their energy, enthusiasm and hard work over the past 12 months and for the achievements that have been accomplished.

I will now hand you over to Derek Lowe to take us through the finances.

Treasurer

Thank you.

Ladies and Gentlemen

For the third year in a row, it is my pleasure to report on a healthy financial standing for the NRA over the last year.

In 2015, we generated a surplus of £252k, by comparison with an equivalent of £400k in 2014.

Our revenues showed an increase to £5.48m, up from £5.27m in 2014.

And we reinvested the bulk of our net cash generated: out of £456k generated by our operations in 2015 we invested £384k back into capital expenditures on our facilities.

The cash balance at the end of the year was £466k. That's modestly up from £394k at the end of 2014 and above the £200k minimum set by the Trustees, which the executive team met throughout the year.

I hope that you share the encouragement I feel from the financial performance in 2015, which continues into this year. The budget for 2016 looks to a surplus of just over £200k, having allowed for capital expenditure of around £500k and also while sustaining our cash balance confidently above £200k again. Of course the busiest time of the year is still ahead of us but, based on figures available as far as April, we remain on track to achieve this.

When I took up the post as Treasurer in 2013, I highlighted two areas I felt to be of particular importance and they remain so today.

The first is that the finances should serve the shooting and not the other way around. We also need to remember that no organisation will survive, let alone thrive in serving present and future members, without its finances well in hand. The healthier finances of 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.

We continue to see significant investment in shooting services, both at Bisley and outside, and we are on track to meet a target for capital investment of at least £1m over three years. The NRA's revenue from commercial clients corresponds broadly with the money we invest into a combination of our facilities, added support of shooting away from Bisley and help for young shooters. This demonstrates that the shooting activity of members and the use of Bisley Camp together have been priced to an approximate break-even. Two conclusions follow from this: we members are paying what it costs to deliver our shooting and other use of Bisley Camp; and commercial revenue is what makes our investment programme possible.

As you can see from elsewhere in this building, our infrastructure investment continues apace. The first regular users of this space are the training team, who are instrumental in the addition of new NRA members, who numbered over 700 in 2015.

Our first major external use of the Pavilion was for the arms fair at the Phoenix Meeting, showing how a business-like deployment of high standard resources can work hand-in-hand with shooting events, to the benefit of full-bore shooting.

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 annual accounts, my reports to General Council and to this meeting and an article in the Summer Journals since 2014.

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.

Chief Executive

Thank you Derek.

Ladies and Gentlemen.

I would like to follow on from the Chairman and the Treasurer's presentation by cherry-picking a number of salient points out of the annual report, really just to fill in some gaps which I think are important.

The first point I'd like to make is regarding how increased membership has yielded significant greater demand on the NRA training programmes. In 2015 training activity increased by 44%. This included 628 members who took part in the five new probationary modules. This demand continues to increase. As at today we have 160 active probationary members.

Included in the training is work done to support the 4,200 trained RCOs. The RCOs play a key role in civilian shooting, their competence is carefully assessed to ensure the highest standards of range safety and last year we delivered courses to 448 of them.

On a wider point, both the NRA and full-bore shooting greatly depends on the work of volunteers. They act in a host of roles including RCOs, officers of affiliated clubs etc. Our recent Phoenix meeting was a very good example. It could only be delivered with the skill and enthusiasm of 85 volunteers acting as range officers, match officials and working in the stats team.

Every single one of our 800 or so affiliated clubs depends on these willing volunteers who act as RCOs, club secretaries and other officers. In particular, the process and administration that supports shooting which is often seen as tiresome, is actually a critical component that supports a great deal of civilian target shooting.

In fact, when I look at what are the challenges to shooting we tend to think what restricts shooting is the obvious things like range access and cost, but I think the dealing with administration is right up there as one of the big threats.

Whilst I'm talking about volunteers it would be very wrong of me not to mention the many officials who represent the NRA and I think, in particular, our Trustees deserve special praise. Their unstinting support for the work of the Association means that they are bombarded with emails, subject to vigorously expressed opinions, yet receive no reward, save I hope the satisfaction of their service to the NRA.

We are investing increasing resources to improve the profile of the NRA and full-bore shooting. A couple of small examples of that is the fact that we invite police firearms liaison licensing teams and Home Office staff to Bisley for one to three-day training courses designed to explain the often confusing world of full-bore shooting. All of these courses

include an obligatory time on the range; trigger time we find is absolutely perfect to communicate the magic of shooting.

Moving onto communication, social media is becoming an increasingly important vehicle to communicate with our members, the wider shooting community and indeed, the non-shooting world. The main NRA Facebook page has a weekly reach of up to 65,000, the Bisley NSC Facebook page reaches around 3,000. Current 'likes' on the Facebook page of the NRA total 11,700 and for Bisley NSC 2,500. We also are supporting and feeding more targeted Facebook pages for the Target Shotgun League, the Handgun League, the Civilian Service Rifle League, and the National Clay Shooting Centre. Many of our more mature members view Facebook and social media as the spawn of Satan; it is however a fabulously effective communication tool which we are investing a great deal of time and effort in.

More work which engages the staff and Trustees is the monitoring and influencing of changes in legislation and regulation. This is very demanding. We are involved at both UK and European levels and also engaged with regular discussions with the MoD, Landmarc, DIO, the Home Office, the Police, insurers and underwriters. A small example is that we have recently negotiated new Home Office Approved Club regulations that will shortly allow clubs to grant temporary membership to members of other Home Office Approved clubs and FAC holders. However, there are, as is so often the case, clouds on the horizon. We have just heard that the Home Office has recently proposed that fees for club approvals are to increase from £84 to £1,000. We feel that it's not going to be £84 and it's not going to be £1,000, but where it finally sits is going to be the amalgamation of a substantial amount of work.

Finally, I'd like to give you some details of our plans for the Pavilion. In essence, it will become the welcoming heart for visitors to Bisley and improve the experiences for shooters and my hard-working staff alike. The current Range Office, as so many of you will know, is not fit for purpose. It is often ridiculously busy and as the Chairman has alluded to, has received 17,000 range booking enquiries in the last 9 months. And it also, as an aside, supplies over 1 million rounds of ammunition annually. The new Pavilion will accommodate a new range reception in this very room. This very room will also have a new armoury, and a greatly expanded retail offering, selling a wider range of shooting supplies, a new cafeteria and bespoke training rooms that are already being used.

In summary, the good news is that demand for our ranges and interest in full-bore shooting are both growing. The challenge is to manage this change in an effective manner that respects tradition but allows modernisation of facilities and processes to appeal for future generations of full-bore shooters.

Thank you.

Chairman

Item 5. I now throw the meeting open to questions. Can any members who have a question please come forward to the microphone? Please state your name, state your question, and if you can keep your questions to as short a time as possible, that would be helpful.

Chris Law

North London Rifle Club.

Several questions arise from your statement, for example if the Pavilion is to be completely re-constructed, where will next year's Phoenix trade stalls be held? I just pose that. I was grateful for the Treasurer's presentation. I recall at a previous meeting the honorary NRA

Treasurer made a statement that in his considered opinion it should not be the NRA's position to hold unnecessary monies on behalf of its membership, as indeed it is sporting activity that we ought to provide and I'm heartened to hear from the Treasurer that that seems to be the pattern that's being continued. I just thought at the back of my mind that the current Treasurer upon his appointment did give us notice of a three year holding of office.

Chairman

List your questions Chris, and we can answer them in turn.

Chris Law

Well though it's not strictly the remit of the NRA, is there any potential change in the position of the Old Sergeant's Mess apropos the NSRA on camp?

Chairman

Thank you very much. So Andrew, can you take questions 1 and 3 and Derek, can you take two?

Andrew Mercer

The Phoenix trade stand. We decided that, having had a very close look at the Arms Fair that was held at the Phoenix, we like it, we think they're important for Bisley, we've talked to the trade and have proposed we hold two each year, one to coincide with the Phoenix, one to coincide with the Trafalgar. We are proposing to put them in a marquee on Sit Pet Lawn.

The trade has indicated that they want a very big and expensive tent, I've said they can have whatever tent they like, as long as they pay for it. Last week we sent to one of the traders who is acting as a representative of the trade, three options for tents ranging from pole marquees with coil matting, to expensive slab sided marquees with sprung floors, with indications of the relevant costs. We are waiting a response.

The third question was The Old Sergeants' Mess and the NSRA.

I'm not sure what the Old Sergeant's Mess has to do with the NSRA.

(John Bloomfield – I think he means Hut 103, the Cook House)

The cook house is indeed owned by the NSRA. As far as I can recall there was a detailed planning permission to construct a hotel. If memory serves that planning permission expired in July last year; what else is happening there I know not.

Chairman

I think it is probably worth me adding here that this time last year we had a series of interchanges with the NSRA. We investigated whether the two organisations, because they shared various administration activities, such as finance, membership and competitions, would be better off if we got together. The upshot of that conversation was that it was felt that it wasn't really going to move the needle for either organisation significantly enough given the degree of hassle that it would entail. And so that conversation finished, but then the NSRA asked us to put forward a fairly radical proposal about what we could do.

We put forward that radical proposal, and it's pretty radical, and we have not had a reply. So this situation is not yet finished, but it has not really moved much since the last quarter of last year.

Derek should talk about his role.

Derek Lowe

The Treasurer's term of office is three years. I'm delighted to say I was re-elected this afternoon by General Council for another three years. I'm grateful for that expression of confidence. There is currently no limit to the number of terms that the Treasurer is allowed to serve, but I have indicated I would finish at the end of this second term. So when the accounts for 2018 are published in the Spring of 2019, it is my intention to stand down then.

If you would like me to comment briefly on the cash balance that we carry, as you have obviously looked at that, it's clearly prudent that we keep a certain minimum cash balance in all circumstances and that is why we have a policy to do that. If you ask treasurers of similar sized organisations how much they think the NRA should have, they would probably come up with a higher number than £200k which is our current policy. The reason it is as low as that, as you rightly identified, is that we have a priority to invest and provided we are confident that we can sustain that minimum liquidity or at least at that minimum level, we think it's the better choice to be investing rather than sitting on a cash balance.

Chairman

Assuming that we get a decent return on our investment.

Any more questions?

George Tondryk

I belong to a number of clubs who shoot here at Bisley.

I'd like to ask Mr Mercer a question because he was talking about communicating earlier on. A lot of clubs put all their range bookings through in October of the previous year, then draw up their shooting calendar laying out their competitions. There was no communication about the change on Short Siberia. That's actually thrown one of our clubs into some disarray because you can't shoot 200 yards unless it's the last weekend of the month. Most shoots have now had to be cancelled because we can't have the range space we want.

The same goes for Melville. When we use Melville fully, we use it at two distances. If you are shooting a black powder pistol competition, you now have to step forwards to where there is no cover. I don't know what we are going to do this year because the chances are that it's going to be raining on the day we do that. I'd like to know why there was no consultation with the Club Secretaries about the sudden change. Shouldn't it have been held over until after discussions and then the following year you could have brought these rules in and we would have known where we stood?

Chairman

Thank you.

Andrew Mercer

I think what we've done is in the round the right thing to do. I think how we communicated it was poor. I think we've apologised because I think the notice that we gave wasn't sufficient.

We realise now that the club bookings are actually on a much longer timeline than we had actually properly accommodated and we have caused problems, particularly on Short Siberia. The reason why we made the decision to restrict shooting to 100 yards for 3 out of the 4 weekends is so that we are turning away many fewer bookings. That allows more of our members and affiliated clubs to shoot, because instead of having 18 targets available, we have 27. That is a policy that we are monitoring very carefully and I think it is starting to show dividends. We will review it as we go through this year.

In terms of Melville, the changes were done because we were getting problems with 'pop overs' that were affecting the way we could use the left hand side of Stickle-down. We have reengineered substantially Melville Range and spend a significant amount of money improving the target turners and the control boxes and a whole host of different things, and it looks at long last actually like a very professional range.

There is cover available if you wish to shoot at 25 yards because my staff will put up, if you request it in advance, a gazebo at 25 yards which will keep your powder dry. If you need to shoot at both distances, then you have got a problem in the same day. If you choose to shoot at 25 or 50 then you are fine. If you want to shoot at both distances during the day that is problematic.

George Tondryk

We found that in January when we were amongst the first users with the Eagle Rifle & Pistol Club when we needed to shoot at 50 and 25 yards which meant we couldn't do half and half, so everyone had to shoot at 50 and everybody had to shoot at 25 and unfortunately it was a very windy day, standing up out in the open.

Andrew Mercer

My staff have produced a cunning plan as to how to put a permanent canopy over 25 yards and we are just looking at that. I think it is our aspiration to see if we can possibly fit a permanent canopy over 25 so that you can go forward and you can be sheltered there. The tender soles who shoot between 25 and 50 yards and less than 25 will still have to suffer the vagaries of the weather.

Chairman

Thank you.

Graham Clark

Chairman, thank you very much.

Life Member, Whitgift Rifle Club is my primary club, in our 120th year this year.

I have four questions which according to your sheet gives me eight minutes, but I won't be as long as that!

The first concerns the firing points. Both last autumn and also this year, I've been shooting at 600 yards, either at a club practice, or in the Middlesex league, TR of course, and we have been shooting just as firers and registered keepers on the point. All the equipment and other rifles have been placed behind the ditch. To either side of us on all these occasions, a few targets away, were whole teams of people with their equipment on the firing point. One group actually had a circle of about eight chairs on the firing point where they were having their picnic, even during shooting time, right up to the feet of shooters!

Now, I consider this not only dangerous, but very unprofessional. I went to mention to both parties that the NRA custom was to keep all equipment behind the ditch. Neither moved and the general feeling was 'go away and mind your own business'. I think perhaps we ought to have it clear somewhere on the website, or elsewhere, that all equipment should be behind the ditch. When I did query this about a year ago, I was told it was not possible to control that and of course right at the far end of Century, one couldn't do that. I drove along there today and it is quite clear you can put equipment this side of the ditch. Now Andrew, as king of signage, I just wondered if it might be appropriate to have a small sign occasionally along this side of the ditch saying that all non-shooting rifles and equipment should be that side of the ditch. I'd just like to make that point. Thank you.

On shooting again, the Zero range – could it be made clear, as it has in the past, although I don't think it's sunk in – that the zero range should be literally for zeroing and not for blasting off a whole magazine which is pretty pointless. If that could be made clear when people go and buy their zero targets from the range office. I know this has been mentioned before, but I think it wants repeating.

Thirdly, the media. I believe that we are still the second in terms of all shooting disciplines, the second biggest participatory sport after fishing. But of course, we are not politically correct. When I spoke to Andrew the other day on other related things, he mentioned Facebook, he also mentioned Facebook tonight. I have to say that I know nothing about Facebook, nor anything about social media. I understand the press as we all know it. I just wondered whether it might benefit us employing a top leading publicity agent, a name which comes to mind is Saatchi & Saatchi, I don't mean them specifically, but I'm talking about those type of people, give them the instructions slowly, slowly, to drip feed into the public domain the success we have worldwide in South Africa and Australia and the States. We lead the world in so many aspects of shooting and yet we've got an uphill struggle because we are not politically correct and when we have an Orlando or the terrible tragedy of the MP yesterday, all this puts guns in the public domain, they throw up their arms in horror and of course most of the public don't know one end of a firearm to the other, or a rifle from a pistol.

So I just wonder if someone can be given instructions to drip feed slowly, slowly so at some stage when we have the sports news on, we will see the Queen's Prize winner being chaired back, preceded by a military band; one of the most stimulating events that I know. Because that should be in the public domain. I know we have had the press down here in the past, and I remember one journalist going up to someone on the firing point shooting, saying 'is this how you rid yourself of your aggression'. And that is the sort of crazy thing that people like that can say. So I would ask that we look at this again as best we can.

Chairman

Might I give you Message 9, Graham?

Graham Clark

I wonder, you almost answered my next question about the NSRA, I wonder Chairman if we could know what your radical proposal was. And finally, what is the latest status of the Exhibition Hut please. What are the plans for that? Now it is clearly not going to be the reception of the camp, because we are now in the reception of the camp in the Pavilion.

Thank you very much.

Chairman

Thank you. Andrew: Firing points.

Andrew Mercer

Firing point supervision – we are reworking how our range office staff are deployed. We have more eyes out on the ranges. If you see activity on the firing point that causes you distress, use the radio, tell the range office, ask them to come and offer assistance. We've got more staff actually out and about on the ranges; greater supervision of activities on our ranges is one of our priorities this year.

In terms of the Zero range, there will always be a miscreant or two who abuses what that range should be used for. Again, if you are experiencing that, letting the range office know would be very helpful. There are the occasional people or person who does think it is a short distance range available for their use as long as they want to use it.

In terms of media, we've been investing increasingly large sums in increasing our media presence. I don't think they quite stretch to Saatchi and Saatchi to be fair. Sadly, I have been unable to persuade you to look on Facebook, but if you did, you would see a recent posting of 'NRA TV' which has gone down terribly well. Interestingly enough we did post a small YouTube piece, I think it was the InterCounties or one of the TR competitions last year, which has been viewed 117,000 times. So although traditional media, the Daily Telegraph, the Mail, the Sunday Times, et al are all still important, for a progressive audience actually social media is very important.

Chairman

May I just interject here? I think it is also very important. I get a lot of personal feedback from our friends from overseas, how much they like seeing what's going on during the Imperial meeting on social media.

The fourth issue I should probably take and then I'll give Andrew back the fifth issue about Exhibition Hut. You asked about the NSRA – what was the radical plan. The radical plan was stimulated by a statement at the end of our meeting that the NSRA find the upkeep of that building with its range and everything else just too crippling and that they would get rid of it in a heartbeat.

Charles Kennish

I'm sorry; is this the cook house or Lord Roberts Centre?

Chairman

This is the Lord Roberts Centre. Thank you. Regarding the cookhouse, I think this is all public knowledge. To those of you who can read a set of accounts, I don't think I'm telling tales out of school.

Andrew Mercer

It is now, Chairman (*laughter*)

Chairman

The NSRA has a series of loans from its members. Those are quite hefty; in aggregate they are north of £800k. Some of those loans are secured on the building known as the cookhouse and Site 103. So it's complicated to unscramble that piece from the NSRA. Regarding the Lord Roberts Centre, the leaders of the NSRA tell us that it is an enormously expensive thing for them to run and they struggle to do so. And they asked us for a radical proposal to say what and how could we help. So we provided that, the details of which I probably shouldn't go into. This was not a takeover; this was trying to say the NSRA governs small-bore shooting, and they should continue to do so, while the NRA governs full-bore shooting, they continue to do so, but that we have some possible expertise in property and therefore maybe we could help in that by helping them effectively 'downsize' to a more suitable building. So that's all I can probably say on that.

When I say we haven't heard anything back, I don't think we should take that as an outright rejection. I think it's just a question of how radical is radical and maybe they are giving a lot of thought to what radical really means. So I wouldn't want to prejudice any of their thinking.

Exhibition Hut, Andrew.

Andrew Mercer

Exhibition Hut is being allocated to retail. I'm very keen that we sustain a retail core to the camp which starts at Fulton's, runs past the Pavilion, through including Exhibition Hut and finishing up around where William Evans is. In fairness to a prospective tenant for the Exhibition Hut we will put that out to tender but we need to define what our own retail offering is here. It would be grossly unfair of us to put it out to tender for a new retail emporium before we've decided exactly the size and shape and scale of what we are going to be selling here in our own enlarged emporium which will be in this very room.

So in terms of timing, we are currently doing a grand tour of gun shops and talking to a lot of suppliers to try and define our offering in here. Once we have done that we will be able to let the designers loose for our offering, get our operation up and running before the end of this year, and then in the Spring of next year, badge up the Exhibition Hut and put it out to tender for a retail emporium.

Chairman

Any further questions?

Thomas Harrison

When you say you are going to use this room for various operations, does that mean you are going to destroy the effective size of this hall?

Andrew Mercer

No, there will be no dividing walls. There will be a café at the far end. Where you are sitting will be the divide between where the café finishes and the retail starts, and somewhere roughly where that mirror is will be where the range reception and the armourers will be based. The exact layout we are yet to define. I've stood in here and waved my hands around in front of the designers and they have gone away to make sense of our slightly random thinking. The thought process has been pretty careful, it has been heavily scrutinised and is now in the hands of the designers. But it will be one space. We need to work on the acoustics to make sure that it will work operationally and I'm very keen that we work in efficiencies so it becomes a nice environment more of our shooters can enjoy.

Typically, my best estimate is that regarding the range office around 10-15% of all the people who come visiting the ranges to shoot go into the range office. We are very keen that a much greater percentage actually have the opportunity to come in and enjoy the better facilities. Somewhere where you can park your car, somewhere you can use a clean and decent toilet, somewhere you can get out of the weather if the weather is unkind, somewhere warm where you can get a decent cup of coffee before you interact with our range office staff.

Thomas Harrison

So you won't be able to use this room for a meeting like this next year in other words.

Andrew Mercer

No. But we have the two training rooms on the other side which are being refurbished where we would have been today if we have been slightly further ahead of the refurbishment programme which is well on its way.

Mick Barr

Are the acoustics better in the other room than they are in here?

Chairman

Let's hope so. It helps that we've put a carpet down next door.
Any further questions?

John Howell

I'm with the Artists, and started shooting 40 years ago and a member of BCRC and SCRC.

Chairman, Treasurer, Chief Executive. What you described in your speech was essentially a very good run down of the corporatisation of an institution. We are seeing corporatisation of a number of institutions and sectors in the UK and in the US over the last 40 years. They are associated with higher costs and they are associated with not necessarily better output.

If you are going to go down the corporatisation route of the charity and the shooting association, will you commit to publishing very clear statements as to what the value for money and the output for shooters will be in the planning period you are undertaking, because otherwise we are going to get motherhood and apple pie but the cost of this risks of being born away from the NRA by individual shooters. They're called externalities in the economics world and at the moment it seems that they are already hitting because a charity is getting involved in legal disputes, traditions are disappearing and not being costed, and

great things are being promised but we are not seeing them. I'll take you up on one which has been mentioned already, cost to new shooters. You've vaunted the new entry costs with the achievements of the shooting programme, but we know some clubs can deliver that more cheaply. Where is the value for money and where is this all leading? Another thing that can happen under corporatisation is that professional service providers and professional service management got together in captured institutions and institutions were run for the benefit of the professional managers. (*Hear hear*). This is something which should not be allowed to happen.

If you don't believe that, think about the executive pay. Now, I'm not saying this is happening here, but I'm saying there is a big risk of it happening here. My day job is at Oxford at Wolfson College looking at law and looking at political economy and you have this risk of institutional capture, you have risks of corporatisation. Big time. And if you don't pay attention to them, you will stop running a shooting association, you'll be running a shooting disassociation which will lead to the breakup of the NRA in the long term as that is what happens under corporatisation. Read the history books. My warning is, please will you publish a clear plan with figures you are committing to deliver to.

Round of applause

Chairman

Let me take that if I may. I've been a Trustee since 2012. I was asked to join the Board of Trustees because in the prior three years the Association lost over £1 million. I think it is fair to say, and there are former Trustees in the room who stared into the abyss and had to meet every 7 to 10 days to keep this show on the road, I think it is fair to say that for the Trustees as a group, that was a watershed moment. So I can't make an apology for something of a profit motive because profit ultimately is good for the sustainability of the organisation. There is a backdrop here which is very evident. The first thing we had to do was to fix the hole below the water line.

John Howell

I'm talking about the future, not the past.

Chairman

We all come from somewhere. We don't start with a clean sheet of paper sadly and there are some informative experiences there. I think the strength of what you've said is don't let that be the sole guiding light of what you as a group of Trustees really want to try and achieve for the organisation. We have committed quite strongly to building a sustainable organisation but we recognise that we are in a fairly competitive environment for shooters and must make this an attractive place to come.

Let me give you one instance of the sort of debate that takes place at a Trustees meeting. The Pavilion came back to us earlier than anticipated because we had hoped and thought that we were going to get it in December, rather than in April. We had to decide what to do given that we were entering into busy season. There were broadly speaking two options open to us.

There are 20 rooms here. We could get a bid for 5 nights per week for each of those 20 rooms, at a decent profit per night per room, for 52 weeks of the year and inject something like £300k into the bottom line of this organisation. The cost of doing that is no access for shooters who come to Bisley and need accommodation and would like to have somewhere to stay on camp rather than have to go off camp.

So, despite that fairly attractive option, we put a line through it pretty quickly because we said that it is not for the ultimate benefit of the members, and the pursuit of the objectives that the charity is organised to provide. There are large numbers of shooters who come here on a regular basis from fairly considerable distances. Andrew met someone the other day who did a round trip from Durham, six hours in a car both ways, to shoot here for the day.

John Howell

What has this got to do with stating John what you are going to do in future?

Chairman

I'm just trying to give you an example of a current decision that was grounded in service to shooters and not profit. We have a three-year plan which we publish. We discussed at our Trustees meeting this morning that we felt, given the status of getting the Pavilion back, we need to update the current plan and publish a 2017-2019 plan. So that is clearly on the Trustees agenda to be accomplished before the end of the year with publication either before the end of this year, or certainly in the early part of the first quarter of next year.

John Howell

And will that include an idea of the costs of shooting to average shooters over that period, as enabled by your plan?

Andrew Mercer

What we did on the current three-year plan was that we committed to inflation only increases to core costs to shooters; range hire, membership, caravan rents et al. So regarding the core costs to shooters we undertook to limit any price increases to inflation or below and that's exactly what we have done.

In terms of actually defining the cost to a shooter, it very much depends what you do and how you do it and how frequently you do it. I think what we can do, and what I'd be very keen to do is make ongoing forward commitments as to how we are going to price for the core products that Bisley provides which are essentially range hire, target hire – that is the key product as it were that most of our shooters avail for themselves - competition entries and accommodation, and so the key elements that people expend their hard earned cash on when they come to Bisley. We've made commitments actually that those increases will be linked to RPI and we've done that consistently in 2014/15 and 2016.

John Howell

But you'll be a monopoly supplier.

Chairman

An important philosophical point. We are increasingly a monopoly supplier, and we've had this debate at General Council, as Harald here will attest.

Normally as a monopoly supplier with large and growing demand you regulate that demand by jacking up prices. That's basic economics by and large. We won't do that – we know we can't do that. We had a question earlier on from this poor gentleman with his black powder pistol; he now understands that we have to ration the scarce resource that we've got because we've got too much demand. But we won't regulate that demand by putting up

prices. We have to regulate the demand by some form of rationing system. It isn't perfect, and I promise you, it's jolly difficult. As long as I'm here, I want to make sure this is our philosophy and this is a place for shooters and shooting.

John Howell

And do you envisage having clubs resident on the ranges who will also be able to offer training?

Chairman

Yes.

Martin Osment

Thank you John.

Artists Rifles and for my sins, Chairman of the Association of Bisley Clubs and Tenants.

John, may I place on record that first of all that the ABCAT members are keen to work with the NRA to improve the sport overall and not to be in any way hostile or destructive. But are we ever going to be able to settle matters between the club houses amicably?

Chairman

So for those of you who didn't hear Martin, Martin asked if we could settle the issues between the club houses and the NRA amicably. Let me just characterise (and Martin, please correct me if it is a mischaracterisation) the issue with the clubs and their rents

We as an organisation have 85 buildings, 48 huts and something like 350 caravans that we manage as our real estate property. The huts and caravans are leased on an annual basis and the clubs houses and other the larger buildings are typically leased on longer leases and lets and a large number of those are for 21 years less one day. In the process of renewing some of these, it has come to light to the current Trustees that the law that exists is not particularly helpful in that it states that irrespective of whether the club house was built by the members of that particular club or association, the club house belongs to the NRA. So what used to be a series of ground rents has now become a series of, forgive the vernacular, rack rents.

In other words, they are rentalised for both ground and buildings. This has resulted in our professional advisors saying to us that the amount of money that we need to charge goes up quite considerably. And I make no bones about it, there have been some very large proposed increases to various clubs. But please note that 1) the Trustees are somewhat hamstrung by the rules that prevail, and 2) we have to remember that, whether we like it or not, we all have a horse in this race.

We are either a member of an affected club, and I should say here and now that I am a member of least four, or we are a member of the NRA who is not a member of one of these clubs, but who has every right to expect that the Trustees and the executive get the correct rent for the properties on the estate.

The correct rent clearly now involves the building rather than just the ground. That is the law. What we are trying to do to ameliorate this with a lot of the property that concerns Martin and his friends, is to understand several things: first, whether the valuation

methodology that is being employed by our professional advisors is correct. There are traditional ways of valuing buildings. I am not a chartered surveyor. We have used one of these methodologies for as long as anybody can apparently remember. It has been proposed to us that actually that is wrong and we should use something else. So we have asked our professional advisors to see if there is any merit in that particular suggestion. It has taken a while for us to turn that around and I apologise for that. This is because the person at Strutt & Parker who looks after our account has resigned, and we are trying to get her replacement up to speed. That has proved to have taken longer than we would have liked, so we as a group of Trustees have recently decided to take this upstairs within Strutt and Parker because it is an important issue.

The second thing we have got to think about is how we as an Association can help, if that is the right word, those clubs on camp get more of the benefits that we see in terms of the growing numbers who are coming in through the gates and shooting on camp. So we and the membership department under Mik Maksimovic have undertaken to explore a number of initiatives to see if we can actually focus some of these people to join these clubs.

In both of these cases we are hopeful that there is a solution to untie this knot. It is very difficult for me to stand here and say that we can ask less than correct rents from club houses on camp, because I have to a) get that passed by a professional advisor and I'm not sure that he would be particularly keen on me leveraging the relationship in that way, and b) it's unfair to those people who could say why are they getting a deal because they've got a base on camp, when I'm a rifle club and I use the ranges just as much as they do but I don't have a base on camp.

These are complex issues. We have spent quite a lot of time at today's General Council meeting discussing this in some detail and there have been some very thoughtful contributions. I'm very pleased to say that both sides were able to make their points and those points were made. They will be listened to and I hope there is an outcome here that works for everybody. But it's tricky, it's really tricky and the Charities Act that governs the disposal of property is headed up 'Restrictions on the disposal of property' and, sad to say, 'restrictions' it is.

But I believe that the regulations under which we as a group of Trustees operate come from a good place and broadly speaking, those regulations are put in place to make sure that people like me can't run a charity like ours as a private fiefdom. But that also means that members of ABCAT can't run it as a private fiefdom either. We all recognise that so we have to get a solution to this problem which is obviously creating a lot of heat.

John Howell

Why have you gone to professional advisors? Why don't you trawl through the talent that exists in the NRA membership? When I joined....

Chairman

I can answer that question please. Let's not throw too much heat on this problem when there's been a lot of heat already expended.

The Charities Act 2011, Section 117-123; please read it. 119 in particular. It says that we as a group of Trustees must employ a professional advisor who works exclusively for the charity. In other words, none of us can do that because we are conflicted. So while there are a bunch of brilliant people in the membership, and I can see some of them in this room...

John Howell

Yes, but you can do the first trawl, the legal requirement under that provision of the act is for the execution of the institutional duties. But you are perfectly entitled to take your pre-learning and your case building from anywhere you like.

Chairman

I believe we are. However, we still have to get it passed by our professional advisors and if they turn round and say no, we've got a problem. We've got to be really careful what we wish for.

Martin Osment

John, may I come back.

Firstly, I agree with a great deal of what you say. Much of it is in fact not an issue. Indeed, ABCAT doesn't disagree with the law on the attachment of buildings on land. However, leaving that aside, we are looking at the basis of the rental. Now, whether or not it is moral for the NRA to rentalise a building that they've made absolutely no investment in, and have acquired by virtue of the club members paying for it, is not the issue, because the rent has to properly be determined by a surveyor's opinion and if that is not acceptable to either side, then obviously the matter will be forced to be determined by a court.

However, we have put to you the question of what is the proper basis for an evaluation and it seems incomprehensible that a professional firm of the size and ability of Strutt and Parker cannot on the same day say what the proper basis of rack valuing quasi commercial measured properties is. The RCIS publish the process. It is very clear to lay down. We don't understand why Strutt and Parker are prevaricating.

Andrew Mercer

I think the initial response from Strutt and Parker is that the receipts and expenses basis to calculate rent that has been proposed by you is wholly inappropriate for a not-for-profit club that has, through its own articles and organisation, a restricted membership. We however have asked them to do rather more work than that. We could have given you a very brisk straightforward answer on the day, but we've asked them to go and research it rather more thoroughly than that. They are taking specialist advice actually on this particular subject.

So rather than give you a response on the day, which would have been 'it's not appropriate' we're coming back and making sure it is a thoroughly researched and properly presented response.

Martin Osment

I think that is very encouraging Andrew. Do we have a timeline on when we will know the outcome of that?

Andrew Mercer

It would certainly be before the end of next month.

Martin Osment

Can we depend on that?

Andrew Mercer

I would hope you can.

Martin Osment

Good, because clearly without wishing to bore everyone by delving into law, clearly there's the O'May properties case which says categorically that the court has to be satisfied if there are any significant changes to the terms of the lease on renewal and that doesn't seem to have been taken into account in the NRA's thinking.

And finally of course, there is the Esso and Marden case and perhaps the most significant thing to talk about that, whilst it is a petrol station not a leisure business, the focus in that case was that it was purely a question of the gallonage of petrol sold that determined what was the fair rent. And I have a background in being involved in licensed premises in the past and yes the Esso Marden case was the ultimate guiding light as to what should be a fair rent for clubs, so I would ask you to take that on-board.

Andrew Mercer

To be honest you have me at a considerable disadvantage quoting legal cases. I have to rely on expert lawyers and barristers to do that and I've heard enough from expert lawyers and barristers to last me a lifetime on the particular case that you refer to. We had a very expensive round in arbitration to settle the case in terms of the annexing of the building to the land at the end of the lease, and I am absolutely delighted that ABCAT have now recognised that the arbitration award actually has confirmed that unequivocally. So I think we can now at least move on to the real issue which is actually how the level of rent is assessed and I think the cases that you describe, I think that is for others far cleverer than I to opine.

Chairman

Can I take two things? One is the change of the terms of the lease and then what is the correct rent.

So the variation of the terms is obviously predicated to a certain extent on the different terms on which the NRA now looks at that particular club house property. It would be remiss of us given we now know we own the building, and we can't avoid the fact that we know we own the building, to not have proper repairing covenants and proper terms which may not have existed in the prior lease. That is deemed to be a reasonable change and I think the members around here would expect me, the Board of Trustees and the Chief Executive to be seeking to negotiate changes in the terms of that nature.

The second thing is that we talked about the level of rent and the like. I am not an expert. We have to rely, and we must rely on, our independent chartered surveyor. We can all quote what appears to be case law and all that sort of stuff, but it boils down to what our chartered surveyor thinks is the best rent that can be reasonably obtained because that is what it says. And 'best' applies to the level of rent and reasonable applies to how it is obtained, not the level of the rent.

Martin Osment

You see comparing rent on residential properties on the camp, where there is a substantial demand and no-one disputes that, there is no demand for club houses, because no-one is prepared to put up the money to finance more club houses.

Chairman

There may well be ways of untying that and we need to investigate that. Bullet Lodge in particular had a guide price of £8,000, we had 9 bids on the property, and three of those came from clubs. Two of those bids came from clubs on camp. So please don't think that there isn't actually a demand for club house property on camp, because we have got examples that it's there, and we can't ignore that.

Martin Osment

Forgive me though, John. Those bids were to use Bullet Lodge as additional residential accommodation. They were not to use Bullet Lodge as club houses.

Andrew Mercer

But club houses have accommodation. It was an accommodation for shooting members and their guests. That was the basis of their bids. Some of the club houses that we are currently in negotiation with have identical accommodation.

Martin Osment

Well correct me if I'm wrong, Andrew, but Bullet Lodge has now effectively become a bed and breakfast.

Andrew Mercer

Yes, but with the greatest respect, we had three unconditional bids, all over the asking price, two from existing Bisley based clubs to provide accommodation for their members.

Martin Osment

And was the highest bid accepted?

Andrew Mercer

The best bid was accepted.

Martin Osment

That isn't quite what I asked you.

Andrew Mercer

I know it wasn't.

Chairman

I think it would be unfortunate to say, because when something else goes out to tender in the future, those people who have bid would have a commercial advantage regarding the knowledge of uplift over the guide price that new bidders would not. That's an unfair question to ask.

Martin Osment

Moving on, we are able to have this dialogue and clearly whilst it's nowhere near approaching an end with a satisfactory outcome, at least we are now having a dialogue. Why has it been necessary for the NRA and the clubs to each spend over £50,000 in litigation?

Round of applause

Chairman

We are getting into the weeds, but you asked the question, so I will answer it.

The Artists Rifle Clubhouse lease came to an end in December 2011. It is now June 2016 and we have not settled it. During that period, Andrew made repeated requests to meet with the tenant at the Artists Rifle Clubhouse but could not do so. In fact, the first time they set eyes on each other was in April 2016! You can only ask so many times to have a meeting and if somebody else is sent in lieu, it is difficult to have the sort of conversations that you are now saying we should have had all those years ago, literally all those years ago.

In another instance, we have had a fight about the ownership of a club building where 1) it was clear in law it belonged to the NRA and 2) it was clear in the lease that the prior club trustees had signed that they would surrender the building back to the NRA at the end of that lease. I can't as a NRA Trustee sit there and think that if the other side, whoever they may be, take a view that seems to be so diametrically wrong from the English language on the page, either in English law or in the tenancy agreement, I can't sit there and say 'to hell with it, they can have the building'. I can't do it and I won't.

Martin Osment

No-one is suggesting you do.

Chairman

But it cost that particular club house a considerable amount of money, and it cost us £18,500 for something that was, in my honest opinion, patently ridiculous.

Martin Osment

Well let us cover the practicality. Setting aside the question of who owns the club house for the moment, because that should never have been an argument.

Chairman

Why oh why didn't you know that 5 years ago!

Martin Osment

I wasn't in this position five years ago, and remember my role is to seem to pour oil on troubled waters, not to inflame things, although some of the things that have passed between us are tempered down by me, from what I have received from members who I clearly admit are quite vitriolic.

However, what we are dealing with is it is the clubs that pay for those buildings, you are asking them to accept full repairing and insurance and liabilities, so in other words, they continue to maintain them at no cost to the NRA. (*Hear hear*).

Andrew Mercer

With respect, they were full repairing and insured leases before. They always have been full repair and insuring leases.

Martin Osment

Andrew, that isn't quite my point. My point is looking at it as of now, effectively the NRA have been gifted a building, it cost the NRA nothing, and it's the clubs and their members that have to pay for all the maintenance. There is therefore no capital investment by the NRA on which the NRA can justify asking for a return and the NRA is not bearing any outgoings because any services that are provided by the NRA are fully recharged.

Andrew Mercer

The fact of the matter is that you accept, and I'm astonished to be honest that you can sit there and say that you've always accepted this point, that the club houses actually form part of the landlord's demise, because this has been a subject of contention with ABCAT for a substantial period of time, and we went to arbitration to argue that very point. We invested the thick end of £20,000 of the Association's money arguing that very point. And that was done because of the intransigence and the counter view on that point that was taken.

So I am actually chuffed to bits that finally that key question has been resolved, because we can now move on to the really important question which is what is the sensible, and affordable level and proper level of rent to be charged. But it has taken two years of fabulously expensive litigation arguing the point of who owns the building, who built the building. There never has been any disagreement as to who built the building. The tenants have enjoyed 20, 40, 60, 80 years of ground rent over that period and so they have had a very good return on their original investment. That's how it was explained to me by one of our lawyers.

The reality is that we are now at the crux of the matter, which is the level of rent that is fair, and appropriate and reasonable that allows the clubs to flourish and thrive, and allows actually the buildings to be maintained in a good condition, allows the clubs to be able to

deliver good services to their members, for the benefit of their members and the wider NRA and shooting community.

That is the nub of the contention. It is now simply a question of how we set and calculate the rent. Tidying up the lease terms to reflect the new reality, or reflect the reality that the building is now vested with the landlord, is a matter I think of just detail. And if we can just concentrate on the rent issue, I'm sure a lot of these contentions can be put to bed quite quickly.

Martin Osment

Andrew, the crunch is it has been law since time immemorial.

Andrew Mercer

Quite so.

Martin Osment

That if someone rents ground and the tenant builds a building on it, which is attached to the land, it becomes part of the land. That law is absolutely clear. What was in question at least in the mind of the tenant we are talking about, and if you don't mind I will name Moss of the Artists Rifles, what was in his mind, is his lease has a specific clause that said he owns the building and had special terms for yielding up in the event that the lease came to an end, and he decided to leave the building. And that very simply was offer it to the NRA to purchase from him, or he could take the building away. Strange terms, but nevertheless they are what was in the lease. In fact, as those of us already know, the arbitrator didn't actually answer the question that was posed, but let's not go there! Let's try, as you have suggested Andrew, to move forward and the starting point is let's get this definition from Strutt and Parker and if, as we believe, it will follow what the RICS, Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors publishes as the correct formula, fine.

Andrew Mercer

Cutting across you, if Strutt and Parker opine that it is an inappropriate method to calculate rent on the specific example of Bisley club houses like the Artists Rifle, will you accept that decision?

Martin Osment

They already calculated....

Andrew Mercer

Would you answer the question?

Martin Osment

I'd be happy to. We have obviously got to look at it.

Andrew Mercer

Excellent, that is a perfect answer – thank you.

John Howell

Can I just follow up by asking are the other Trustees aware that the outcome of the approach being adopted at the moment seems to be a highland clearance– whatever you say, the legal arguments, the impact of it is a highland clearance.

Unknown – sorry can you repeat the question as we cannot hear you

Chairman

The question is are the Trustees aware of the outcome of the decisions that have been made. The assertion is that this is something of a 'highland clearance'; in other words we are going to have a lot of shell buildings and they are all going to be empty.

I have two answers to that.

If it is morally inappropriate then I'm sorry, but I cannot break the law, and I will not break the law as your Trustee. If you want someone to break the law, you had better get another Chairman.

It's a lousy outcome, but it is very very difficult for the Trustees to behave any other way, because the process is very constraining. We had a debate earlier on at General Council and we talked about the process and forgot about the outcomes because the outcomes are where the emotions get raised.

You are now raising the outcome that we are going to have a lot of empty buildings. And yet we see more and more people coming shooting, we see more and more people coming through the gates at Bisley, we see more and more members. There are 450 new members this year alone. That's about the current size of some of the clubs in the clubhouses, and three or four times the size of other clubs based on some of the returns those clubs send in regarding the number of people involved in full-bore shooting.

I don't know what the outcome is and you don't either, but if you are asking me, this seems like Project Fear sadly...

John Howell

Sorry, but you're

Chairman

John, you asked the question. This is very difficult stuff. If I take a decision as a Trustee which financially impairs the Association, I'm liable. I think about this all the time.

John Howell

Not if it's in line with your charitable objectives.

Chairman

Actually, my charitable objectives are to create a healthy environment for the National Rifle Association – all its members, current and future. Not just the members of the Artists Rifles Clubhouse and others.

John Howell

I'm talking about the tradition of Bisley. I'm talking about Club Row. I'm not sure if it appears on the balance sheet.

Chairman

One of the lawyers that we have asked about this told us his great, great uncle paid for the building of the North London Rifle Clubhouse. Even he says it's got to be a market rent. OK? That's the legal advice that I get. His great, great uncle paid for the building. Forget the morals. You can't be a little bit pregnant here – it's either legal or it isn't.

John Howell

It's the question you're asking. We had a discussion last time, I'm not going to pursue it again. We should have a discussion in this way.

Peter Hobson

Excuse me, can you put a microphone on so we can hear you – you are having a one-way conversation with the room.

Chairman

Anyway, we have thrashed this to death. I think it is passed 7.30pm, we've gone a little bit longer than expected. Martin, one more question...

Martin Townsend

It's not a question. As a member, and I would like to think that I speak on behalf of a fair number of them, I'd like to thank the staff, the Trustees, and all of the Council for the work that they do. I stood up and said the same thing last year. The improvements that continue are very visible and I'd like to congratulate you for that.

Round of applause

Stephen Thomas

I shall not take more than two minutes! In common with Martin who has stolen some of my thunder, Mr Chairman, I would like to add my own contribution.

My name is Stephen Thomas, Central Bankers, but a shooter at Bisley for 51 years now, this year. I would like to say first of all, that it is music to my ears to hear that our membership is increasing, it is music to my ears to hear that our finances have been restored. I have been a member of the Association through a number of cyclical existential crises and it is a joyous thing to hear that actually the Association is flourishing and as a business person, everything I hear about what is happening, is very positive, and good business practice.

We have heard the thanks given by the Chairman to the Trustees, and to the Chief Executive and the staff. I would like to add my thanks to the Chairman, who I feel is a standout candidate amongst our membership. I think we are extremely fortunate that he is prepared to dedicate so much of his time, which could, believe me, be profitably employed elsewhere.

In terms of corporate, I forget the terminology John, corporatisation and self-interest, I agree with you. It is a cancer in our society, but when I come through these gates, I come into an institution with most of its traditions intact, an institution which is run by Trustees who, so far as I am aware, receive no remuneration and I think that we owe the Chairman, who has up to now not had specific thanks, an enormous vote of thanks for his work for us. Thank you.

Round of applause

Chairman

Thank you very much everybody. Its 7.45pm; I think it's beer 'o' clock, gin and tonic 'o' clock – whatever your tippie is.

Thank you very much, and enjoy your weekend.

Meeting closed at 19.45pm.