

NATIONAL RIFLE ASSOCIATION

Annual General Meeting

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting
held in the NRA Pavilion, Bisley on Friday 13th June 2014 at 18.00

Present:

Chairman	Mr JGM Webster
Treasurer	Mr D Lowe
Chief Executive	Mr A Mercer
Members	72 Registered Members

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

PROCEEDINGS

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

ORDINARY RESOLUTIONS

a. **Election of Officers.**

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

The Resolution was approved.

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

The Resolution was approved.

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

The Resolution was approved.

FINANCIAL STATEMENTS FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31st DECEMBER 2013

The Statement of the Chairman, the Report of the Trustees and the Audited Accounts were received.

SPEECHES AND OPEN FORUM

Attached as Annex.

Chairman

Annual General Meeting – 13th June 2014

Proceedings

Chairman:

Ladies & Gentlemen, I think we should get started.

Welcome to the Annual General Meeting of the NRA, 2014.

Before we start with our agenda today, I would like to ask you if we could all take a collective moment to remember those members of our Association, and other similar Associations around the world, who gave their lives in the First World War, which began, as you all know, 100 years ago.

They are commemorated in a plaque on the front of NRA Headquarters, and number amongst them three winners of the Sovereign's Prize. Their lives were tragically cut short, some in terrible circumstances, so that future generations might enjoy the freedoms that they were defending.

These brave souls would likely have assembled at the AGM in 1914 in much the same way as we are today, unable to realise the tragic events that would engulf their world over the next few years. We also meet today with the 70th Anniversary of D-day fresh in the mind, dignified by the message received from two of our Vice Presidents, Philippe Ginestet and Robert Chombart asking us to be reminded of those souls who died on Normandy soil and are buried there.

Can I ask you all to take a moment to contemplate all of these people's sacrifice and the freedoms that they defended and which we now enjoy?

Thank you very much.

Item one on our Agenda is the Election of the President.

It is proposed by me, on behalf of the Council, that his Royal Highness, the Prince of Wales, is re-elected as the President of our Association. Are there any other nominations for the President of the Association? Could I therefore have a show of hands in favour of this motion?

Anybody against? (No)

Thank you very much.

Item 2 is the election of our Vice Presidents.

We are saddened this year to be reminded that Lilianne Stewart is not amongst them, as she sadly passed away earlier this year. There have been few greater benefactors around the world to our sport of target rifle shooting and she will be much missed.

To commemorate her support of shooting generally and young shooters in particular, the NRA made a contribution to the Young Shooters Fund in her name, rather than send a wreath to her funeral. This was in accordance with her wishes.

So, it is proposed by me, on behalf of the Council, that the existing Vice Presidents that are listed at the rear of the notice that you find in front of you, are re-elected en bloc. Is everybody in favour of that motion?

Thank you. Anybody against? (No). Thank you very much.

Item 3 – the election of our auditors. It is again proposed by me on behalf of the Council, that we re-appoint Saffrey Champness who have been auditing our books for the last couple of years. Normally one rotates one's auditors after a given period, or certainly puts them up for rotation. They have not yet served for three years, so I think this is an appropriate appointment.

Can I have a show of hands to see if that meets with the approval of the meeting?

Is there anyone against? (No)

Thank you very much.

Item 4. We are going to follow the procedures of last year's meeting where I will make a short statement, Derek Lowe will go into more detail about our financial performance as our Treasurer, and Andrew Mercer will round up this part of the agenda with a few thoughts as our Chief Executive.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The main headline is that we are able to report a surplus for the first time since 2009. This is good news, not least because it allows us to start thinking more earnestly about the way forward rather than having to adopt the more immediate hand-to-mouth approach that has been necessary over the past few years. A great deal of credit for this result goes to Andrew Mercer, our Chief Executive, and his hard-working staff, who have delivered this fine result. It should not be lost on any of us that we are now doing more with less – that is often how financial losses are stemmed and organisations are turned back into profit. Please note that our average employed staff numbers have fallen by around 20% since 2010, because we are more efficient and often more effective; consider, for example, the timely production of this year's annual report as but one example of this improved effectiveness. This does not happen by magic but takes a lot of hard work. On behalf of all of us, I would like to thank our staff for their considerable efforts, and I am sure you would like to join me in congratulating them with a show of appreciation.

The healthier state of our finances will now allow us to focus more of our time on the strategic issues that we face as an organisation and as the National Governing Body for the sport of target shooting. The role of any NGB is to set out and guide the backdrop to the environment in which its interests must operate. This brings many different challenges, including balancing the interests of our many different stakeholders across a number of different target shooting disciplines, while ensuring that the sport of target shooting continues to develop and even thrive over the coming years.

With the luxury afforded by better financial control and visibility, we have begun to get our heads, and in some cases our arms, around some of these issues. While the good news is that our ranges here at Bisley are becoming increasingly busy, access to military ranges away from Bisley remains a very real problem, and the changes to the structure of the Armed Forces are not likely to alter this trend in our favour. As troops are recalled from

overseas and the Army relies upon a greater number of Reserves to fulfil its obligations, there will likely be even greater demand for MOD range time than there is now.

This remains a critical issue for us to address but our first order of business is to reassure the MoD of our ability to manage those of our members who use their ranges, not obviously a straight-forward task given the multiplicity of calibres that we all want to shoot. This is further complicated by the increasing propensity for members to wish to do their own home-loading, which further complicates some safety aspects. However, as a sign of their growing confidence in us, the MoD have recently asked us to investigate two incidents involving firearms that happened on MoD ranges, and I believe we should see this as a sign of our increasingly good working relationship together, which is a step in the right direction.

A further aspect is that of the cost of shooting. At the national level, we have been working assiduously on the issue of firearm certificate fees, dealing with the Association of Chief Police Officers and the Home Office via the BSSC. We are very hopeful that this work will bear fruit in managing the rise in fees associated with the registration of the ownership of firearms in the future.

Similarly, we have been involved in a shooting body funded study into the economic impact of shooting in this country. One immediate effect of our involvement is that the number of NRA members that have participated in the most recent study is already more than the entire sample involved in the previous study of 2006. This is important work, in that it will set out the foundations for any debates surrounding the sport of target shooting, some of which could likely be conducted at the national level in a febrile atmosphere post an unfortunate catastrophic event. But it can also be true that other changes, for example a change of government, can instigate these debates. In such circumstances, it will be important for the long term health and continuance of our Association that we have the facts at our disposal; hence the work that we have been undertaking to ensure that this study has our input and is meaningful.

So, I hope that you agree with me that your Council should be looking at these wider issues and be seeking to develop the right environment for the target shooting sports to flourish. We are often guilty – me included - of letting our own individual concerns become front and centre in our own minds. Yes these are important issues, but I believe it would be reckless of those of us who are empowered to guide the organisation over the next few years, were we to forget that we have a duty not only to ourselves, but to all members of the Association, including the generations to come.

Healthy finances are central to this, but so too are our relationships with the Government, the MoD and the licensing authorities. Ultimately, if successful, this will enable us – even force us – to make some choices as to how we should develop our Association.

Our membership continues to grow. However more members will need more range capacity, more firearms and more cartridges. A typical business response to increasing demand in an area of limited capacity is to regulate that demand by increasing prices. Such a response would be contrary to the Council's overall thinking that we need to keep any rises in costs to inflation only (and therefore no rise at all in real terms), in what can be seen as an already expensive sport, in order to ensure that as many who want it can have access to target shooting.

This will require some earnest thought by your Council, and will have a significant effect on the future survival and prosperity of the NRA in the years to come.

That we can now face, or begin to face, these choices intelligently is down to our improved financial position.

I'd now like to hand over to Derek Lowe, our Treasurer, who will talk you through this and some of the detail behind it.

Treasurer:

Thank you Chairman.

Ladies and Gentlemen

It's been a great pleasure to see how the NRA's opportunities and challenges have moved on during my first year as Treasurer.

As the Chairman has said, for the first time since 2009, the NRA has reported an annual surplus. This was £331k in 2013, by comparison with a budget for surplus of £150k. Where I saw 2012 representing transition from the exceptional circumstances of preceding years, I now see 2013 as a first taste of where both the operations and the finances of the NRA can be heading. The budget for 2014 seeks a surplus of £450k, which remains modest by any commercial standard for an operation with revenue of £5.1m in 2013 and which is budgeted for £5.2m this year.

The NRA's financial flexibility has seen a turnaround which corresponds to our return to surplus. Net current assets closed 2013 at £142k, whereas we had started the year with net current liabilities of £247k. This, together with the net cash balance, imposed significant constraints on how we could operate late in 2012 and early in 2013. The improvement during the year demonstrates how healthier finances can free up the time and attention of management and Trustees to concentrate more on our operations and longer term future. We should keep it that way.

As we see our financial position improve, we cannot let that be at the expense of investment in the ranges and camp and there is no intention to do so. The strategic review from last autumn outlined significant expenditure on maintenance and improvement, intending to total £1m over 3 years. Spending on capital projects and development is to be undertaken provided it leaves us confident of at least £200k in forecast cash balances. In 2013, £123k was spent on improvements and maintenance of the ranges. Between January 2013 and March this year, over £400k has been spent on the remainder of Bisley camp, in particular to roads, accommodation, signage, training & visitor facilities and towards establishment of a Wi-Fi network.

Our Association is welcoming a broader spread of shooting interest than ever before. For the first time I can recall, no single discipline represents an overall majority of our membership. This greater diversification brings with it some challenges in the provision of shooting services and coordination of range use. As it brings increasing membership to the NRA, it also offers the opportunity for increased membership and business to Bisley's clubs. Club officials are being encouraged to explore these opportunities by approaching the Membership Department. Members of the Bisley clubs can ask their own officials how they are getting on.

With a wider spread of disciplines and increasing numbers in our membership, members should bear in mind that the NRA is made up of many different constituencies. There need to be equitable balances struck between different interests as we deliver the public benefits of marksmanship both within the association and beyond. In particular, we can only plough

cash surpluses back into the NRA's facilities if we achieve a surplus on both commercial and members' activities – and that is a surplus that is decent with regard to both those members who are on a given shoot and those who are not. Other work over the last year has been the bringing to light, and increasingly into equitable order, of some inconsistencies between similar types of engagement with the NRA. Examples include rents for different clubhouses, prices for different caravan pitches, patterns of payment & collection and differences between the interests of those members who use Bisley frequently and those who largely do not. Opinions on this will vary, and it is understandable when that is in line with a member's exposure to any given situation.

It is greatly to the credit of the Support Services team, under Ray Hutchings, that the communication and understanding of our finances have been available on an accurate and timely basis throughout the last 12 months and more. These are critical contributions to both management and the Trustees and put us in a position to communicate to members, both via your representatives on General Council and directly. Indeed, I hope that our financial progress is not news but rather something that members have been picking up on for several months now, via the publication of my report to General Council in December; most importantly the very prompt publication of our audited results in March; and in a Journal article arriving around now.

The Trustees are very mindful of the patience which is being asked of us all with regard to the type and scheduling of works being done around Bisley and the pricing of various services that we are each asking our collective endeavour – our Association - to provide. A key balance which your Trustees and management seek is between the shooting interests of the present & near future on the one hand and those of the medium & longer term future on the other. An obvious tension in this is between surpluses & investment: one of them raises and saves money, while the other spends it. Sourcing profitable use of the ranges and camp from external clients is a vital component in the NRA's continuing financial health, but it is not a silver bullet for members' financial pressures at Bisley. It also requires a compromise in the availability of range space and other facilities. Success is needed on all these fronts together, and the Trustees are grateful to the whole staff for their effective and hard work in delivering this. Please be supportive of them.

I hope that you share the encouragement I feel from the financial performance in 2013, which continues into this year. I now hand over to Andrew Mercer. Thank you.

Chief Executive:

Thank you Derek, and thank you Chairman.

I have been asked by the Council to reflect on what is my second year with the Association and I really wanted just to give you some thoughts and observations for this, my second AGM.

Firstly, the good news.

The NRA is now a successful and cash generative organisation. Membership is growing, new applications are being received regularly and routinely at the rate of 100 or so per month. Demand for our ranges here at Bisley is growing dramatically this year with some 25% higher than we were last year, and that growth is continuing. And indeed that demand for the ranges is now starting to outstrip supply, certainly at weekends.

We are starting to develop significant commercial revenue sources that use the range infrastructure and that is good news, in my humble opinion, because it deflects costs away from the shooting membership.

There appears to be no lack of demand for shooting although access and affordability are obvious limiting factors. In terms of where we go with our membership, I think the prospects are very good and I think we are going to need to start thinking strategically as to how quickly we grow our membership. When you take a step back and see that there are some 140,000 FACs held nationally, those are many good potential targets for NRA membership, but I think the consequences of a rapid expansion of our membership need thinking very carefully about.

Also under the good news section is the dynamic nature of target shooting. I continue to be both amazed and delighted with the sheer energy and enthusiasm that our members take up their shooting in the many various forms that they enjoy.

Finally, under that good news section, is the fact that the improving financial position has left us in the situation where we can invest hard cash in the facilities around Bisley camp; ranges, roads, service infrastructure, electronic targets are our priorities at the moment.

That's a flavour of the good news, well against good news there is always bad news.

Bad news actually comes in a variety of different guises. I think one that continues to surprise and concern me is the fact that shooting sports appear to lack confidence in who we are and what we do. At times there is almost an imperceptible feeling of being ashamed of the fact that we're shooters, which I just think is bonkers!

We also need to recognise there is a risk, almost inevitability, to the next worldwide shooting calamity. In my short time as Chief Executive there has been two major incidents, more will certainly follow and we need to be mindful and prepared if and when they arrive.

I think when I sit down with our staff and we start talking about range plots and safety arcs and all the technicalities, one thing that really does strike me is how vulnerable we are to the actions of one idiot! When you look at the map of Bisley and where it sits with the vast acreages that we have at our disposal, all of that will come to nothing if someone does something very silly and the implications and the consequences could be potentially calamitous.

The Chairman has already alluded to the issues in terms of access to military ranges. We are starting to invest more time and energy in rebuilding our relationships with the MoD, but they remain concerned about the actions of civilian shooting on the ranges.

There's also, and I'm not sure whether it's good news or bad news, but I've parked it somewhat in the bad news section, the noticeable swing from formal competitive shooting to more leisure shooting. I think that presents us with both opportunities and challenges.

One of the other issues that we do need to address is the fierce resistance to change and healthy cynicism, verging on negativity, amongst a small but vociferous group of our membership.

Finally there are the political issues that we need to be very mindful of. There is a General Election next year. The last two or three years have offered a relatively benign environment for legislative change, that may well not be available to us next year.

So to hopefully enhance the good news, and to address some of the issues in the bad news, we presented a strategic and development plan for three years to the Trustees.

This was approved by the Trustees and the General Council in the Autumn of last year and the key objectives are to concentrate as many resources as we can muster here at Bisley upon the sport of target shooting. We are very keen that all resources at Bisley are focused on driving up range utilisation, and not be disrupted by other activities that may generate some convenient income but have not got shooting in their hearts.

We are determined to improve the shooter and visitor experience here at Bisley. Some of the facilities are still poor, verging on shocking in places, and I think we need to make Bisley much more welcoming to new and prospective shooters.

I think we also need to celebrate shooting sports prowess. At times I think we lose sight of the fact that target shooting is a proper sport. It demands discipline and rigour and I think promoting it as a proper sport is something that will help ease our way when dealing with the Government, Home Office, the media and others.

We also need to recognise that there is no primacy of any one discipline – today not one discipline accounts for more than half of our membership. I think there have been some fascinating debates amongst the participants of the individual disciplines and at times I do get concerned about the negative way that some disciplines view others. At the end of the day, we've got plenty of detractors outside the world of shooting and we don't want to be bickering amongst ourselves.

A lot of our efforts over this and the next few years will be focused on Bisley and it is fair and just to raise some criticisms to that. This is a deliberate policy because we are determined to cement Bisley as the golden goose of the NRA and to use the cash and the influence that that generates to reverse the decline of range availability and encourage target shooting across the rest of the UK.

Finally our three year plan encompasses the firm determination to promote and protect all sensible forms of target shooting sports. We have to be very mindful of our public façade and how we present ourselves to the wider world. Our formal disciplines, and I think we need to be proud of all of them, need to be on the front foot and we need to be very persuasive on how we promote them. But we also need to be mindful of how they are perceived. Anything, for example, that smacks or looks and feels like the simulated combat should be stayed well clear of.

So in summary ladies and gentlemen, I have considerable optimism in the prospects for the NRA here at Bisley, but much less optimism in terms of what is happening with shooting away from Bisley. We need to quickly get Bisley right and get the structures of the NRA in good order so that we can re-channel our resources to support shooting across the wider country.

Thank you.

Chairman:

Thank you Andrew, thank you Derek.

That concludes item 4 on our agenda so we now move to item 5, Open Forum. For any members who have questions, we are happy to take them right away on what has been said. Anybody who has something to ask of us, there is a microphone in the hands of Georgina Thatcher at the back, so please raise your hand. I think it would be helpful if you could identify yourself before you ask the question.

Gillian Kaile:

You said many things, but one of the challenges I think faces the NRA that you haven't addressed is the fact that we are in a mini, mini upturn which is recognised. The Bank of England said next year, it would increase interest rates, it has now this week pulled its decision forward, and may increase from this year, reducing the amount of money the average shooter has in their pocket. Bisley needs millions of pounds to look after its infrastructure, and I haven't heard from you a long term sustainable plan through ups and downs which will allow an investor to see a good return on that asset over a number of years. And I think the short term up turn will only last for a very short time in addition, we only have a very few shooters at the very top end who can afford to pay massive amounts for their shooting. We need to be realistic and I would like to see the NRA put forward a realistic investment long term plan.

Chairman:

Thank you Gillian.

Firstly, thank you for that. I don't think anybody is complacent about the fact that we are operating in a very difficult environment for leisure activities, and it is beholden on all of us to think much longer term. It is a realistic part of where we find ourselves that we have only just come out of a very hand to mouth existence, so we are where we are. The first thing that we felt we would want to do is to try and catch up to the lack of infrastructure and capital expenditure that we have missed over the past two or three years when it's been a difficult time. So, I take your point. The reality is that, yes we are celebrating, but we are not complacent and I would like to think that we have the horsepower now, and the visibility to think intelligently about much longer range scenarios.

I did allude to a couple of things which I think I should refer to. If we were to have say 15 to 20 thousand members, there is a real question as to where they are all going to shoot. It is not unusual in an organisation that you see swings of membership moving away from one category, say target rifle, to other forms of shooting, particularly when other forms of shooting are much cheaper per "bang" or per unit of time on a range.

There's quite a complex dynamic in all of this, and I recognise that we have to get our arms around it. But, we need to carefully plan because I think there are some real issues that will come up and bite us if we go betting the ranch. That's not what you're advocating, and it's certainly not what we're hearing but we need to be extremely careful of the limited resources that we have.

Paul Charlton:

In your address Derek, you mentioned how the information process had improved massively into the management system which had helped turn around the NRA's financial situation. I looked on the website for the most recent reports available to me as a member, and of course, I read last year's minutes of this meeting and the Bisley General Meeting, and also the June Council meeting, June 2013. I know there have been meetings since then, I'm sure the minutes have been approved, it's one of the few ways that we have as members of seeing the inner workings of our Association and I hope that perhaps in this coming year more emphasis can be put on the dissemination of information using your web assets.

Chief Executive:

I actually think that's a good point well made. The website has a few fans, and has some critics. It is due for a major revamp. I think the tidy flow of information is very important and I agree.

Harold Dunton:

How many individual members of the NRA do we have?

Chief Executive:

We've just had a new membership database launched. That has sieved out several hundred duplicates. The running count, I think, will end up this year on around about 7,400. That's direct members. Best guess in terms of number of people shooting full-bore across the country through affiliated clubs, 30,000 is my best guess. We need far more sensible information than that.

Ian Brown:

In your remarks about financial turnaround, you rightly praise and bring attention to the efforts of Andrew and his staff. I did wonder though, firstly whether there might be one omission in that list, and secondly whether that omission was deliberate.

Chairman:

I'm not sure what omission you're referring to.

Ian Brown:

I was thinking about the previous Chairman who followed it all through. *Hear, hear.*

Chairman:

I think the previous Chairman was quite rightly awarded the right acclamation in my report that can be found at the front of our Annual Report. And I'll repeat what I wrote. Robin resigned in December 2013 and he left many of the affairs of the Association in much better shape than he found them. That is in writing, in print, and I would endorse that right here and now, so I have no problem in restating that.

Chris Law:

The NRA will shortly be coming up for another look at ammunition supply for the Imperial Meeting and for decades I have banged a drum that hand-loading should be allowed as it is across so many countries. I believe the NRA makes a rod for its own back in committing itself to issued ammunition only, and hope that this year will not have any of the gaffes of recent ones, so I bid to ask whether you would reconsider the use of hand loads in target rifle shooting.

Chairman:

This is the thorny subject and so the views that I am about to express are personal because they do differ across the Council.

May I just say you are correct that the RUAG contract comes to an end shortly and we are looking at alternative suppliers. We are optimistic that there is the option to have an alternative supplier should we so require it.

The issue of hand-loaded ammunition is one which raises some thorny issues with respect to young shooters coming into the sport of TR. The unfortunate example of the DCRA, that

is the Dominion of Canada Rifle Association, and the problems that they have experienced with having hand loaded ammunition for the few at the top of the sport, and issued ammunition for those who are affectively cadets and/or beginners has meant that they have had little, if any, feed through from what is a very active cadet series of shooting into what is now an ageing target rifle shooting population.

So to be honest, my personal view is significantly coloured by that. But you raise the right question; it's not going to go away. I'm not sure that there is a right answer here, but I think we need to make the determination with as many of the facts to hand as we possibly can.

With respect to what actually happened last year, I think much of that has been gone into. We have made our thoughts and feelings known quite strongly to RUAG, and they took back the ammunition that was unused. We are not anticipating any repeat of that problem given the tests that we have performed on the batches of ammunition that we have received this year. I think I'm right in saying, and Andrew will correct me if I'm wrong, that of this year's ammunition from RUAG we have fired some 28,000 rounds without a hiccup.

So this age old subject is a tough one and I'm not sure that you and I may ever agree on it because there are some imponderables that we just cannot know.

Chris Law:

May I observe, would a company like RUAG be prepared to bid again for example in the light of their recent experiences?

Chairman:

I think the answer to that is yes. But I think the real focus, if I may say so, is that if other suppliers can come in with comparable ammunition at a much cheaper price to the consumer, then we will quite clearly be looking at those people and our aim, and the whole focus of trying to source separate supply, has been along those lines.

Carol Painting:

I would like to support Chris Law and I think that you push hand-loading away for various reasons. The cadets are a red herring because if you cost it properly and charge someone who buys hand loading ammunition like a corkage fee, that can go and subsidise it. As long as you've got good issued ammunition you should let people use what they like. Then they can buy their own and they can keep their converted sighters, they can find an ammo that suits them, but they don't have to hand-load. There are several people who make ammo and they don't all get sold by the NRA. And I don't know other disciplines that operate like this. When I shoot small-bore I can buy what I like and I think this applies to other disciplines, so please look at it again.

Chairman:

I take your point. We are not sold on a particular strategy as yet. I think there is an issue with respect to insurance for those people who hand load for others and we need to take that seriously as well.

There is a unfortunate fact, and it's a demonstrable fact, that most, if not all of the catastrophic failures that we are experiencing at the moment involve hand-loaded ammunition. This is a problem that we really need to get our arms around. We are morphing

as a body of target rifle shooters to a group who want to hand load, and we can obviously understand why, because it's very important to keep the cost of shooting down.

There are some conundrums here that we've got to get our arms around.

Chris Law:

Could I just ask on that business of the insurance, about a decade ago, we had a substantial increase in claims being made against the NRA insurance for hand-loading incidents and I wonder if the Chief Executive could possibly acquaint us with some current feedback on that?

Chief Executive:

I honestly have not got the foggiest idea to be frank! I think the claims history overall is fairly nominal and I don't think there have been many claims actually made on that subject. If they have, I haven't spotted it.

There is actually a wider issue, because the question of hand-loads is giving the military the heebie-jeebies. They do not like hand-loaded ammunition on MoD ranges, period. And we have some very significant concerns at the moment maintaining not only access to military ranges, but access to civilians who want to shoot home-loaded ammunition. That is a big, live real issue.

How we validate the competence of people hand-loading, I know through your good offices we offer courses, but when you think of the sheer volume of ammunition that disappears down ranges across the country that is hand-loaded, that is giving us real cause for concern.

David Crispin:

Carol kind of said what I really wanted to say so I want to back her up in as far as the hand-loads go.

I think it was Andrew Gent who wrote to the Journal a year or two ago with just that suggestion; where shooters enter using hand-loads and providing their own ammunition, they were charged a corkage but I don't know what the numbers are of cadets who were able to versus what was actually charged on corkage, but we could actually basically give all the cadets or youngsters a free entry so all those using hand-loads wouldn't mind paying a 5p or 10p corkage, whatever it turns out to be to give those cadets a free entry, with good quality ammo. That helps everybody I think.

The second point I would like to make is I totally understand the thing about the hand-loads and I think that's just a question of education and then quite rightly on the insurance side is just people understanding what they can and can't do.

The MoD range thing – I hadn't thought of that and hopefully maybe we can come up with some sort of certification programme like we had with the shooters certification card to actually say to the MoD, yes the shooter has been through a certain approved course and they have got their certification card that you would hope they would be safe using hand-loads on a military range.

John Carmichael:

Just a couple of points I would like to make. One is the thing to do with the hand-loading which I don't have a problem with one way or the other. But I would like to point out

something that did get mentioned in some wording from up here (pointing at the stage), was that people, hand-loaders making ammunition for other people, you cannot make ammunition legally for someone else unless you are a registered firearm's dealer and approved by the HSE to make explosive articles. That is illegal and therefore liability of course, there is no liability cover for that, so it's something you have to bear in mind if people are doing it in the background. You won't stop it, it will always occur but you do have to bear that in mind if there is ever an incident.

The other thing is obviously the RUAG contract coming to an end, as a manufacturer of ammunition, I do hope that I will be asked to tender as a possible supplier. Thank you.

Gillian Kaile:

The two previous speakers have covered two of the three points I wanted to make, so I'll only go on with the other one.

The only real trouble I've actually had was with a bit of factory ammunition and because I'm blessed with acute hearing, I noticed the difference and took the bolt out, i.e. some of our factory ammunition has been appalling and I checked the barrel to make sure the bullet wasn't still in there. Fortunately it had dropped out at the far end. If I hadn't had that knowledge, I could've then put another bit of factory ammo in creating a hand-grenade just away from my face. I think that is far, far more dangerous than what some of the hand-loaders are doing considering quality of proofing that most of our guns go through.

We have had some hand-loading which has been excellent and we have also had some factory ammunition which has been appalling.

Chairman:

I think I can agree with both of those statements. The data would suggest however, that the incidents that we are experiencing of catastrophic failure, hand-loading is a major element of that.

Gillian Kaile:

Is that for people who have actually been through the course and applied the rules of hand-loading?

Chairman:

It's a whole variety, but yes.

Any further questions?

David Mumford:

I note the excess of income over expenditure which is excellent, but two things worry me. One is the cancellation of the Hog Rally, and I hope this is not an ongoing thing because I think overall, not just for the NRA, but for the clubs they are suffering from that as well. And the other thing is I understand already three club houses have reverted to the NRA, to us, and of course we are losing the rent from there and I hope that's not going to continue because it will drive the clubs away, one of them I'm a member of, and we will lose rent from that.

So can we be assured that neither of these things are going to continue?

Chief Executive:

The Hog Rally were offered a contract, didn't want to sign it, they didn't want to come here, therefore the event was cancelled, by them.

Other events have been licensed, the National Smallbore Rifle Association have signed an agreement, their event will take place, and the Hayride will take place as well.

I'm determined that people who hire Bisley Camp hire under the terms of a sensible agreement, a documented agreement. It will probably surprise, shock some of you, to realise that previous Hog Rallies, indeed previous Hayrides never had any contractual agreement signed, so at the end of the day, the risk that we take on by hosting such events is ours. We need to make sure that they are properly managed by duly competent organisation.

In terms of the history of the three club houses, the HAC is one I think you are alluding to. That has been empty for two years, so it has been recently let to the Civil Nuclear Constabulary for a decent rent. That has displaced our training team, they needed a home, they're now accommodated in Wimbledon House, formerly the British Pistol Club.

The Exhibition Hut is being converted to a visitor's centre to welcome new visitors, and all visitors to the camp who are not aligned to any particular club. My very simplistic judgement is that probably a third of so, not many more than that, of people who come shooting at Bisley ever step through the doorway of any of the Bisley clubs and I think we need to offer a much more welcoming environment than is currently offered to people who are not aligned to the many fine clubs that are here at Bisley.

Ken Willingale:

I refer to the works that have proceeded, or proposed to have proceeded on Site 4 and SAS. I was one of the people on Site 4. There's been no straw poll on take up that I know of amongst the NRA members, there's been no costs or proposed costs to people wanting to go onto that site, so people can make a judgement about whether they want to participate, and also, is this going to end up whereby we are spending money which might not be recouped by people taking up that offer, and what is the offer to go onto that site, and also the final thing is have you got a contract, have you got a start date, and what is the cost.

Chairman:

Thank you, Ken. I am going to hand over to Andrew who can go into the details, but I think it would be helpful for me to just tell you a little about the thinking that we have discussed. We have shared this with General Council earlier this afternoon.

We have 387 caravan berths on the estate, all of which are subject to an annual license agreement. That is what we have as of now. So, in reviewing the strategic plan, we felt that one of the things that would be good to think about was developing that portfolio of caravan sites and having different caravan offerings for different members.

We felt that would have a series of benefits to the organisation, it would allow us to get away from an annual licensing agreement in certain instances, if that's what people wanted. We thought the creation of some serviced pitches would lead to a better environment for those people who want that. If successful, It would actually put less pressure on the communal facilities such as toilet blocks, which my predecessor will know was a regular bone of

contention at meetings like this. And it would lead to better landscaping. So we felt as a Council that there was an opportunity to see if this view would gain some traction.

There is a difficulty with this and it's that you cannot start to create a bunch of serviced pitches pitch by pitch. You can only really do it site by site. And so, unfortunately for those members who are on the SAS/Site 4, including dare I say, a member of Council, we decided to relocate those people. There will be some optionality for them to relocate back to the new site. But the details of that need to be perfected because the last thing we want to do is go off half-cock and give those people some, as it were, false information.

So I'm now going to pass over to Andrew who will give you a little bit more about what is proposed, but it is still not yet final because there is some uncertainty at the moment over anticipated budgeted costs for these pitches themselves. Andrew over to you.

Chief Executive:

Effectively what we are trying to do, what we will do, is provide 26 serviced pitches; there were 36 caravans on SAS/Site 4. It's taken an inordinate amount of time to relocate all 36, it's taken us far longer and has been much harder than we expected.

We are shortly to start work on site. We will probably hold those works back so we are not bashing and crashing over the meeting, which we think will be unwelcome.

Those 26 pitches will be serviced with mains water, bolt tank gas, drainage, electricity and high capacity broadband. And attractive units they will be. They will be offered up on 20 year leases, not annual licenses with 5 year break clauses, with breaks at 5, 10 and 15.

The budget cost for those developments, each pitch, is somewhere in the region of between £8,000 and £10,000. We are looking to recover that cost, or 65% or so of those costs through a combination of commission on sales of new caravans because those pitches will be restricted to new caravans, and a fee payable for the 20 year lease.

That is our plan. I have two primary fears with this development; one, nobody will take it up and two, we will be overrun with people wanting to take it up. As at this moment in time, I'm pretty confident that a dozen or so will go very quickly. It remains to be seen how successful we are.

I think ultimately, this actually is a major change for camp. It's a major change, instead of trying to persuade people to invest in decent caravans with very poor or little facilities, we are offering people the certainty of 20 years, as it were, to enjoy the facilities that are afforded on their own caravan that will always be theirs.

So it's very much a new venture. We are being fiercely and vigorously criticised about what people think we are doing. Two demonstration units will be arriving on the 4th or 5th July and the full marketing packs will be rolling out then.

The people who have been evicted brutally from SAS and Site 4 will be given first opportunity for the remaining 26 units and after a period, of about a month or so, we will open up to the wider membership.

There is absolutely no guarantee of success of this venture, but I am fairly of the opinion that it is absolutely the right way forward.

My last comment is the fact that it is 26 out of 387 pitches. This is not what we are trying to do across the entire caravan stock. There will always be a mixture of accommodation for a

variety of budgets available, and what we are trying to do is learn the experience of going from pitches with no facilities, to pitches with proper facilities and that will help us develop our long term strategic plans.

So this is very much a trial and a test for us.

Brian Taylor:

Following on from the last question to do with caravans, moving caravans off Site 4 has actually caused a problem for some of us who were not there to start with. Some 8-10 weeks ago I registered with the new chap in charge of caravans, I've forgotten his name, the fact that they had moved a caravan between mine and my neighbouring caravan and there was less than 4 meters between mine and this new caravan, and at the other end was just over 4 meters.

NRA rules stipulate 6 meters. So why is it we have to obey the rules but the NRA doesn't? It still hasn't been moved.

Chief Executive:

It's fair to say that there are a number of caravan relocations which still need our attention. I've had my ear viciously bent this afternoon on one in particular. Chris Dyers, our new Commercial and Operations Manager is on holiday on the moment, but will be returning next week and we will be addressing these issues.

It has been an incredibly difficult problem and we have expended vast amounts of staff and contractor time trying to move and accommodate people. If we were a commercial operator we would have done it much more simply, but we are trying to deal with people with a considerable amount of compassion and that is making things difficult.

We have one caravan in particular where three members of staff have spent the best part of two days trying to please the owner for his relocation. And I think we have perhaps over-exceeded our enthusiasm to help the individual people.

Martin Osment:

May I just ask what the Council's views of the relationship between the NRA and the Bisley tenants?

Chairman:

I'm a Bisley tenant so I must defer to the gentleman on my left because I am conflicted if I answer that question. But I will say this, as the Chairman of the Association, we as a Council are very sensitive to the fact that we owe a duty of care to all the members of the National Rifle Association. And the Bisley Tenants represent a limited number of all of the members. So there is a balance to be struck between, in our real estate policy, which includes pricing, with respect to those people who can enjoy the clubs at Bisley and those people who don't.

Our real estate policy is in the process of being formed. There are three things that we are seeking to do. We are seeking to think about three different types of client or customer, if I can put it that way. A commercial customer, a residential customer and a club house customer, or a club customer. And we think it's important that each of those different groups have, if they were able to, comfort that if they saw someone else's terms and conditions,

they would see that they were based in some form of equity and fairness, but then also in some form of affordability.

So we are looking at things like useable square feet for example, and we are looking at things like the affordability of the rent that we are proposing to the tenants. This is not without its problems. This is a delicate issue. We are trying to deal with it in a way that we see is fair.

I think it is not lost, and should not be lost on any of us, that there are three main drivers as it were of income for our Association. Those are, in no particular order, membership (and we've talked a little bit about membership and how it may or may not grow and what we would do if it suddenly doubled because we'd have a problem of another order); range hire which, broadly speaking, is all about footfall and how many people come and use the ranges; and accommodation. In the last two of those, the club houses are extremely important, and their survival is a very important part of what we want the Association to become, because they drive footfall and they drive income in their own right to the Association as landlords.

So, I could understand if some of the members of the Association of Bisley Club Tenants think that some of the actions that we've taken don't necessarily coincide with the statement that I've just made, but we have to be fair as we think about some of these issues, with respect to those people who are not members of your clubs and/or are not regular users of Bisley. And so therefore, there is a balance to be struck and we are seeking to try and strike that.

I hope that's helpful. Andrew, do you want to add any comments to that?

Chief Executive:

I think I better not!

Ian Brown:

I hear about this serviced caravan site that we thought would be a good idea to offer an enhanced offering for people who wanted it, and I am getting the impression that it hasn't actually been costed accurately or been offered to people at a price, or we haven't got any guaranteed takers. I don't know whether that's right.

But, as somebody who has been involved in the building industry for a while, about 50 years, it rather horrifies me that we're burying what appears to be damn nearly a quarter of a million quid's worth of stuff in possibly contaminated and certainly difficult ground, in a very scattered way, which is then going to need, I would have thought, quite a lot of maintenance.

I wouldn't have thought it would have cost a lot more to build a block like ABC lines, but much more modern and better serviced with en-suite facilities for not a hell of a lot more. I'm old enough to remember when there were no caravans and it was quite a nice place then, although it was mainly Army tents. Caravans made it an absolutely unsightly place and it still is and as people get slightly wealthier I get the impression that people are much more likely to go for a properly serviced place, even if they don't want to own it year round, but they can actually hire it as you do a weekend hut.

I'm lucky enough to live in something that was recently converted from another shed, and it is extremely comfortable and it didn't cost all that much, although it cost plenty. I just worry

that this venture is not fully costed and haven't got guaranteed takers and it is a hell of a way to bury quarter of a million quid.

Chief Executive:

I think the point of principal is that firstly it has been properly designed, we've engaged experienced caravan site designers, we went out to consultation on that design to the others and have actually settled on a plan which I actually think is rather decent.

In terms of the cost, as I said, it is somewhere around the £8,000 to £10,000 so this has been carefully budgeted. We are just about to go out to tender so we will then firm up the costs. You're absolutely right, there is absolutely no certainty in terms of guaranteed uptake, but similarly in a lot of what we do here at Bisley, there is no absolute certainty.

We can take as many soundings as we like. We've done a lot of careful work on this. I'm very confident that there is a market for it. Time will tell and what I would ask is for people to give us chance. We are working very hard to make this successful and I've been surprised at the venom of criticism that we've taken on this project before we've even got going.

Certainly give us a kicking if we get it wrong, and that's evident in a year's time. But I think endeavouring to make Bisley better, to improve Bisley camp, I'm surprised that people aren't keen to throw their weight in to help support us.

In terms of actually replacing ABC lines actually for £250,000, goodness knows what building industry you were working in, because that's way out of my limits of my knowledge of per square footage. We've actually done some work on that, and to be honest you wouldn't buy a block, a decent well serviced block on A, B or C lines actually for much change from £250,000.

Ken Willingale:

I'm the offending caravan that took two days to site. One of the reasons is I was trying to move my caravan to a place where it wouldn't offend other caravaners. Subsequently that didn't work and then it had to be relocated again to then take on the complaints from my neighbours.

But also, it's not a regular caravan site, likewise the one for Brian Taylor. But going back in time, we were given no real notice of what was available, nothing was identified which sites were 28 foot and which were 21 foot. No correspondence came back to help with the decision making. I was dumped in a place that would not be suitable as a first option, and I've ended up somewhere that is still not an option, but is a regular site.

So better planning and an understanding of the available pitches for the available caravans, and the communication backwards to us would have helped the situation no end from my point of view.

Chief Executive:

I think in fairness, there was a great deal of assistance provided, but there are still empty pitches available now which I would be very happy to show you to.

Ken Willingale:

Not 28 foot, I'm sorry, not 28 foot.

Chief Executive:

As I said, I think we need to agree to disagree on that particular point.

Michael Wood:

There are two parts to what I want to say.

The first is that I think the Trustees and the NRA staff should be complimented on a number of things – the turnaround in the accounts I think is great news. I also think that to some extent this evening, and during the General Council meeting this afternoon, we heard a lot of encouraging things, not least the forward looking venture of what the Trustees are trying to do.

So I'm generally very complimentary.

I think the caravan site issue is double edged. I think the strategy as you describe it is a very good one, it's an excellent strategy. But strategies by definition are long term, and I think in the short term the execution in what I've heard has not been very good.

I think communications to the members generally has not been good, I think the communication to the General Council probably hasn't been good, and the communication to the site, the people with caravans on the affected sites, has not been good.

In addition, I think if I'd have been at the owner of a caravan on that site and I had been moved off it in the way that I hear people who have been moved off, I think that's very poor management, I have to say. It may be an annual license fee for the caravan, but people have had these caravans for a long time, some of them, and the resettlement programme, if I can call it that, has been done in a great deal of haste. There should have been much more sensitivity to the moving of the people off that site, onto alternative positions.

(hear hear)

Chief Executive:

I think to be honest to condemn my hard working staff with what has been a very difficult job to say they got it wrong all the way through I think is grossly unfair.

There are a number of vociferous individuals who are very unhappy about moving. Our actions have been condemned by some to napalming a village, which I think gives you some idea of the extent of the sentiment that this has evoked.

We were never going to make people happy moving them from pitches where they've been for 30 or 40 years. The reality is we've done it in the best way we can. Communication can always been improved and I will put my hands up to say we could certainly do it better. But any programme of this nature actually, and I think you use the word resettlement actually very well, it is not going to generate lots of happy people, because we have broken up the community who have been around each other for many years. We are doing that firmly in the view that it is in the best interests of the NRA, but I fully accept it is not going to make 36 original owners happy and content. I think they are justified in their feelings of chagrin.

Gillian Kaile:

As it hasn't been mentioned, I would like for the next meeting for you to show that you are following the charitable aims and also, the Charter. Now we might have ignored the Charter

if it was merely a Victorian issue, but we did go to the job not that long ago of actually updating it and it has not been shown anywhere that it's prescribed items are being followed, and it is the thing under which we are operating. So I think for the next meeting, you need to show that both the Charter is being followed, and our charitable objectives.

Chairman:

I take your point there. I have no difficulty in doing that for the next meeting. This is for a public benefit because it is a charity, we have some original charter issues which we continue to fulfil. I would add that there are 2.5 pages of our Annual Report dedicated to this, so it would help if you could be more precise as to what else you are expecting.

John Carmichael:

There is one thread which runs through much of what is being said this evening, and it's not something just from this evening, it's something that has been occurring for a very long time within the organisation, long before those sat up on the stage were even involved in the positions they are in now. And that is one that comes under the word of communication.

Communication has been extremely poor for years and is still not very good, because it is still in the thread, still going on. If you want to move people's caravans on site, you actually need to talk to them. We did have one person into our hut a few weeks ago who said he wasn't even aware his caravan was going to be moved and all the crockery got smashed inside of it. He wasn't very pleased!

Had he been told about it, he could have perhaps said no, can you leave it until I can move the crockery, or whatever. Communication please, can we have lots and lots of communication. It's very easy to pick up a telephone, email is a waste of time. (*hear hear*)

Use the telephone to speak to people, please.

Applause

Chairman:

If I may say something. One of the things that we are doing, and I alluded to this at the beginning, is we are doing a lot more with less. In 2010 we had nearly 70 full time employees, we now have 55. And, in 2010 we lost a hell of a lot of money, and in 2013 we did not. So there are some tensions that come with the recovery that was required.

And so, this is not unusual. I wouldn't say it was healthy, but we need to remember that those 55 people are doing the work, and a lot more work, than the 70 were doing three or four years ago.

Some balance, if I may say so, is required here because it's very easy for us to throw stones and point fingers and say you could've done better, but we do need to remember that quite a lot has been achieved with a lot less. Let's not lose sight of that either.

Matthew Charlton:

I have two questions if I may, but I'll just start by saying that I was very encouraged by both your statements and the positive developments in the Chief Executive's statement are really good to see.

My first question, you, Andrew, alluded to the possible difficulties which might arise from a change of Government. Could we perhaps approach that as an opportunity to get a good PR message out for shooting? Does the NRA have a strategy for notwithstanding the large preponderance of gentlemen here of my age or older, for getting out the message that this is a sport in which not only women can compete on the same level as men, and on a level playing field, but also in quite a few of our disciplines so could disabled people. And do we have a strategy for attracting those people here, including injured ex-servicemen for instance?

Chairman:

I'll make a couple of comments and then pass it to Andrew.

The first thing with respect to a change of Government that I alluded in my remarks is the shooter body funded study that is being done to enable us to have the facts to hand. This is an economic impact study of shooting and what it means to the nation. So we are trying to build the foundations of the data as it were, so we can use that if we come under threat.

There is nothing on the horizon if there is a change of Government, that we are anticipating, but I do think that there are some real issues that these things can crop up awfully quickly. Obviously, we are very mindful of the fact that things can change quickly, so in the first instance in answer to your question, we are doing quite a lot in terms of trying to build and find out the data and the foundation to what the economic impact of shooting is.

I'm going to leave Andrew to talk on the second question.

Chief Executive:

I think in terms of specific plans and strategies to attract young people, and to attract people with limited mobility, the facilities on camp for the latter category, people with limited mobility, are poor and that's one of the reasons we need money to invest in improving those facilities.

And we have agreed to host, I shouldn't tell you this with Chairman sat next to me, at no cost a disabled shooting festival in September, working with our partners in British Shooting. That is something we are doing free of charge, and not having any range hire fees too. We are throwing a lot of resources at that, as indeed we do at the Adaptive shoot that is part of the Imperial.

Those are in the grand scheme of things, relatively small and almost token contributions. You are absolutely right, we do need a strategy, but we need to get some of the basic core facilities right here. Basic facilities, reasonable quality facilities that we can then get out and promote.

At the moment there is a significant upsurge in demand for our facilities, yet there are still far too many places which are poor and before we start promoting to disabled people, we need disabled toilets, we need good access to the firing points and we need to reassess how we view access to a lot of the ranges.

I think a lot of what we need to do is get the physical aspects right and then we can go promoting and I think this can also be carried forward for the younger and female varieties of shooters that we're very keen to attract here.

Matt Charlton:

Thank you. My second question, Andrew you also mentioned something about needing to avoid anything that looked like simulated combat. Could we please get that message to the people who put together the NRA Journal and discourage them from having to print many photographs that to the untrained eye, look like people who are simulating combat.

Hear, hear and applause.

Chief Executive:

I have to say that I'm very pleased, and it's very interesting when we did the survey of what you, the members, thought of the new style journal. To my surprise and delight, significantly more members prefer the new style journal than prefer the old. A very significant increase in the number of people who liked it.

I think actually that there has been nothing that has been shown on the front cover of any of our journals that I think we should be ashamed of. In fact I am very keen that we go on the front foot and we promote what we do because they are properly done and responsibly. At the end of the day, if it is an NRA discipline, if it looks like an NRA discipline, if it's actually conducted in a proper and sensible way, I think we should be on the front foot and promoting it, not try and pretend that we don't do it.

Chairman:

If I may, I wanted to come back to Gillian and then we will take two more questions, one from Martin Townsend and Martin Osment.

Gillian, can I refer you to the Annual Report. There are two and half pages about our charitable objectives and public benefit. I think we are already doing quite a lot with respect to the question that you asked. We will bear it in mind.

So the two Martins at the back and then I think we should draw to a close.

Martin Townsend:

Good evening. I don't really want to ask a question, I want to pass compliments. I've been coming here for a few years now and I've come down after every winter to find a camp that is in a complete and utter mess, the whole of the ranges, nothing was done.

I've come down this year and to my amazement, the ditches have been dug on Century, some of the roads have been tarmacked, buildings have been painted, the grass is cut properly. The whole infrastructure is beginning to look brighter and I would like pass my compliments to the Trustees and to Council and to the staff.

Applause

Chairman:

Our last question if I may. Thank you Martin.

Martin Osment:

Can I just quickly invite the Council to consider that the following on from Gillian's point of the aims and objectives, would the Council be consider that the aims and objectives of most of the clubs are either charitable or not for profits and that their aims and objectives are coterminous with the aims and objectives of the NRA.

Chairman:

We most certainly do, and if I may, part of the differentiation between commercial club and residential is broadly speaking to reflect those differences.

So that's part of the rationale that we are trying to come up with. There will be clear differences between them. Let me mention one by name – Fultons. I cannot imagine a Bisley camp without Fultons. But they are a commercial tenant. Affordability is an issue with Fultons and the message that we would send if Fultons could no longer afford the rent that we were about to ask them to pay would be a very, very large step to take. So those are the sensitivities. I'm not saying we won't take those steps (anyone here from Fultons shouldn't be worried) but these are some of the considerations that we need to think about.

There are club houses that are open 3 weeks a year. There are club houses that are open 300 days a year. We need to take some of these differences into consideration, and that's where the affordability principal comes in. That's what we are trying to look at. It's a very complex problem but we are sensitive to it.

Ladies and gentlemen, it's half past seven. Thank you for coming, thank you for your attention and for those of you who are, I wish you good shooting over the weekend in this wonderful weather.

Thank you.

Meeting closed at 19.30pm