

NATIONAL RIFLE ASSOCIATION

Bisley General Meeting

Minutes of the Bisley General Meeting

held in the Umbrella Tent, Bisley
on Wednesday 19th July 2017 from 9.00pm

Present:

Chairman:	Mr JGM Webster
Chief Executive	Mr A Mercer
Vice Chairman General Council	Dr JD Warburton
Treasurer	Mr D Lowe
Members:	186 Members and others

BISLEY GENERAL MEETING

Notice of the Bisley General Meeting

The notice of the Meeting was taken as read.

ITEM 1 - SPEECHES

The Speech of the Chairman is attached hereto and initialled by the Chairman.

ITEM 2 - OPEN FORUM

ITEM - 3 – QUALIFYING SCORE HM THE QUEENS PRIZE, STAGE I

The Bronze Medal went to Miss EJ Nuttall of ATSC with a score of 105.20v.

The last score qualifying for Stage II is 102.10v, finishing 32.1 at 600 yards.

Chairman

Proceedings

Chairman

Ladies and Gentlemen, it is 9pm and I think we should get started.

Before I begin, I think we should take a moments' silence to remember all those who are no longer able to be with us at this meeting. We all know that Simon Fraser passed away earlier this year and there was a celebration here for his friends and family last Sunday. Other notable 'Message 10's' since last year are Philip Rowell, who saw active service in the Second World War, and most recently from overseas Paul Bawden from Canada, who did a lot for the Royal Canadian Army Cadets, and Reg Rowlands from Australia, without whom competitions in that country will be a little less colourful going forward. Let us take a moment to remember these folks and others who can no longer be with us here tonight.

Thank you.

I am joined here on the rostrum by John Warburton, the Vice-Chairman of General Council, Derek Lowe, our Treasurer and Andrew Mercer, our Chief Executive.

I would particularly like to welcome all our Vice-Presidents who have either been here, are here or are coming here. I would particularly like to welcome those from overseas: Philippe Ginestet from France, Norris Gomez from Trinidad, Stan Frost from Canada, and Cliff Mallett from Jersey. I would also like to take this opportunity to send our best wishes to Jim Thompson of Canada who is currently quite ill in hospital.

Moving on to the competitions:

We started with the Service Rifle events, which were supported by overseas teams from Canada and Oman and over 200 competitors took part.

The winners of Her Majesty the Queen's Medals were: for the Royal Navy/Royal Marines, Warrant Officer John Newell, Staff of Flag Officer Sea Training; for the Army Reserve, Corporal Darren Alexander, 253 Medical Regiment; for the Army, Corporal Ashok Thapa, 1 Royal Gurkha Rifles; for the Royal Air Force, Corporal Michael Keightley, 63 Squadron RAF Regiment. The main prize giver was Mr Mark Lancaster MP who is the Minister for Defence, Veterans, Reserves and Personnel. The Army Reserve prizes were presented by Maj Gen J Crackett CB TD VR and Director Reserves.

The Methuen Trophy Inter Corp Team Shoot was won by the Royal Ghurkha Rifles. The cup was presented by Mr Mark Lancaster, aforementioned MP and Minister for Defence and Veterans.

Civilian Service Rifle, which runs alongside the Service Rifle events, opened the Imperial 2017 with their first shot taking place on 28th June. 2017 saw 366 competitors shoot over 5 days, up on last year's numbers.

The class winners were for Iron Sight, Sean Clarke with a score of 919, for Practical Optic, Olivier Larrue from France with a score of 1126 and for Service Optic, Bill Ellis with a score of 1148.

The CSR Meeting culminates in the NRA Methuen Cup Match. The Practical Class was won by the London Practical Shooting Club A Team, with The Highpower Rifle Association (last year's winners) runners-up and the Practical Shotgun Pennine Shooting Sports Association taking third.

The Lee Enfield Rifle Association 'A' team retained the Mons Trophy for the Historic Enfield Class.

The winners of our fifth NRA Military Adaptive Championship this year was, in the Serving class, Captain Craig Mudie with a score of 382.36v, and in the Veteran class, Geoff Newport with a score of 367.22v.

A successful Inter Services Cadet Rifle Meeting was held over the period with a total of 89 teams competing including the Royal Canadian Army Cadet National Rifle Team. The winning team in the Team Grand Aggregate – for the 2nd year in succession - was E Coy 2nd (NI) Bn ACF with a score of 914.41v whilst Staff Sgt C Kennedy of G Coy 2nd (NI) Bn ACF won the Bossom - the individual prize - with a score of 237.15v. It was my pleasure to present the prizes to the cadets.

At the Schools' Meeting there were 31 school including those from Canada, with 470 cadets taking part. 27 of those schools participated in the Ashburton Shield which was retained by Wellington College with a score of 772 and 53v beating Elizabeth College into second place by a handsome 23 points and 15vs.

The Historic Arms Meeting was run by David Camp as Match Director and aided by volunteers to whom we owe our thanks. The event saw a slight decrease in the number of competitors this, down to 89 from 103 with 455 matches shot. Cadets from 211 ATC (Newbury) acted as markers and performed to their usual high standard.

Turning to Match Rifle, the Hopton was won by Rob Lygoe, beating Nick Tremlett by two points with a score of 999 with 129 V bulls. Rob Lygoe also won the Albert which is the last shoot in the Hopton, with a score of 222.32 v bulls.

The Elcho was retained by England with 1750.209v beating Scotland's 1727.181v, with Wales on 1700.136v in third, and Ireland 1693.172v in fourth. Top score was achieved by Scotland's Captain Mike Baillie-Hamilton with a score 224.25v.

The Imperial Gallery Rifle meeting had over 100 competitors, an increase on last year's number, with more competitions shot. Our thanks go to those who helped organise this very enjoyable and relaxed event.

Overall Target and Match Rifle has shown 1016 entries, 146 of those are from overseas. The Grand Aggregate has had 765 entries, down marginally from 783 the preceding year and we have seen teams and individuals from Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Guernsey, Guyana, Jersey, Kenya, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Pakistan, South Africa and Trinidad & Tobago.

196 Under 21s are competing in the Grand Aggregate and a further 57 Under 25s are also doing that. I should mention tonight, as some of you may not know, that one of those Under 21's, Daisy Armstrong, age 14, won the tie shoot for the Alexandra earlier this evening. *(Round of applause)*

There were 54 entered into the F-Class competitions that run over the weekend, and 37 cadets have entered the Cadet Imperial, disappointingly down on last year due to issues servicing the cadet rifles.

The oldest competitor was Jo Wright at 94, and I had the privilege of presenting him with a medal commemorating his 60th Imperial Meeting. And the youngest is Miss Sarah Rorison of Sedbergh School at 13, who is competing in her first Imperial Meeting.

We wish all the best on Friday to Lindsay Peden with his Kolapore team, and to the British teams travelling to Canada next month: Chris Weeden and his TR team to the Canadian Full-bore Rifle Championships; David Lloyd and his F-Open team and Russell Simmonds and his F-TR team that will be competing in the F-Class World Championships there.

Now to my thank you's to those who have worked very hard over the last 4 weeks of competitions.

To the Operational Shooting Training Team who produced military range teams and the MoD and Landmarc teams at Pirbright.

Our thanks also to the Bisley 'V' Club for organising "The Arthur Clarke" long range match for the cadets. It was most disappointing that the match was unable to go ahead this year due to the extreme heat.

To Col Robert Bruce and CCRS in their support of the cadets with both ISCRM and Schools.

To our Chief Range Officers, John Miller and Tony Clayton on Stickledown and Peter Turner and Lisa Railton on Century.

To our Chief of Staff, Mike Turner, Chief Butts Officers, Colin Scoles on Century and Shane Cake on Stickledown, and all the RCOs and Butt supervisors who have kept things going for us. Our sincere thanks also goes to all the markers who have done a sterling job in all the butts.

To the staff who have prepared the Camp and Ranges. I do hope you continue to see an improvement in the facilities here at Bisley.

To Ted Molyneux and his team of volunteers who have opened the Museum.

I would also like to thank the front counter team for ensuring everyone had their squadding cards on time, the Stats team who have produced all the results, the Range Office and Armoury staff who have ensured the ranges run smoothly, as well as all those working diligently behind the scenes to ensure a successful Imperial Meeting for all.

Now to the first of two announcements of recently held elections. First the results of the Under 25 GB Rifle Team Captain to New Zealand in 2019. I am happy to announce that Henry Awin is elected as Captain after securing 30 of the 53 votes cast. Congratulations to him and good luck to his team. We also give our commiserations to the other very worthy candidates.

(round of applause)

I would now like to call upon Andrew Chown to give us the results of the General Council elections. Our thanks go to Andy and to Paul Upham for giving up their time to act as scrutineers for this election.

Andrew Chown:

Mr Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen. The results of the recent vote to elect five members of Council. The total number of voting papers received was 2,013 of which there were 14 spoiled papers. The total number of votes cast was 8,897.

The results in ascending order were as follows:

Tim Stewart	583
Barry Morgan	754
Peter Hobson	1027
Nick Brasier	1236
David Crispin	1246
Silke Lohmann	1291
John Bloomfield	1364
David Calvert	1396

The duly elected people to continue as members of General Council are David Calvert, John Bloomfield, Silke Lohmann, David Crispin and Nick Brasier.

(round of applause)

Chairman:

Thank you very much.

So before I open the meeting to questions and comments from the floor, I should first address some concerns that have been put to me and other trustees.

These involve the belief held by some that the current Trustees want to drive clubs out of the clubhouses on camp, and concerns about the level of fees being spent on professional advisers.

First, there is no wish to drive clubs out of clubhouses on camp. As outlined in our last annual report, there are 800 Clubs and Associations affiliated to the NRA. Of those, 29 rent a clubhouse on camp. We want every club to be successful. But we also should expect that those clubs who are tenants of clubhouses on camp behave like proper tenants. That is all we ask.

We ask and expect the same of the tenants of other properties, so not to do so would be unfair. To talk only about clubs is not helpful. All tenants, whether a club or not, should pay a rent consistent with the "going rate" for that type of property. The "going rate" is normally established by tender offers for properties on camp. That ensures fairness between tenants, and between the tenants as a group and the general members of the Association who are not party to any tenancy.

An artificially low rent for one tenant is not fair to the other tenants who do pay the going rate or to general members who may pay higher membership fees to compensate.

Second, the thrust of the complaint is that the NRA is wasting members' funds on unnecessary litigation on the renewal of tenancies.

The NRA always prefers to agree new terms and conditions whenever possible and we have been largely successful in doing so. The problem facing the NRA is that some individuals and clubs adopt positions that are wrong in law, or seek preferential treatment.

It is unfortunate that there have been three recent cases where we have not been able to reach agreement at an early stage, which of course if we had, would have resulted in only modest fees being incurred. It is interesting to note that these all involve tenants with a right to renew; of the 29 clubs that rent premises on camp, only 7 have such a right. Consider the fairness of that for a moment.

So far there have been 3 cases, out of 42 tenancies that have been agreed since 2013, where the failure to reach agreement has resulted in higher than normal professional fees being incurred. In these cases, the Trustees considered the tenants' position to be plainly wrong. The Trustees took professional advice as is encouraged by the Charity Commission, and relied on that advice when dealing with the tenants concerned. That advice established that the tenant's position was wrong. In these cases when a dispute has been litigated or taken to arbitration, the Trustees position has been upheld, validating the advice that we have received.

The fact remains that it takes 2 to agree on a settlement, but in the rare cases where we have been unable to agree terms, the position adopted by the Trustees has been proved right by independent adjudication.

I don't see why the NRA should be criticised for being proved to be right. I think the NRA membership expects the Trustees to get these decisions right and it seems bordering on the absurd that we should be criticised - and have complaints lodged against us - for making correct decisions. It is not our fault that from time to time we have to deal with people who put forward arguments and adopt positions that are subsequently proven to have no merit.

But even if the NRA had not been proved right, the Trustees have a duty to act in the best interests of all the members of the Association and that may at times involve taking legal proceedings to resolve disputes. The Trustees do not take such action lightly or without taking proper professional advice.

Notwithstanding this, members will be aware that a strategic review for the years 2018 to 2020 is due this autumn. We will discuss the format for this with General Council – the body elected by the members to advise the Trustees – to which body we will recommend that the interests of tenants, potential tenants and non-tenants are discussed in a round table format.

On individual tenancies, we are always ready to meet with a tenant to discuss terms, including in the presence of a mediator if there is lack of agreement. I am grateful for the helpful suggestions on this particular topic made at the AGM last month.

I now throw the meeting open to the floor. Please come forward to the microphone, state your name and please make your point quickly – and for sure in under 2 minutes.

(round of applause)

John Carmichael – Life Member

I don't know if I can take two minutes, because I think that's an extremely short time to say anything at all.

My name, for those who may not know, is John Carmichael. I am a Life Member of the NRA and have been shooting here at Bisley for the past 56 years – longer than most of you.

I ask you to imagine a Bisley without the multi-member clubs. Imagine they are now all gone.

The buildings are still there but they now are leased to government sponsored organisations such as the police or commercial business such as, say, G4S or a few private individuals, those who have little or no intention of being a shooting club or promoting the skill of marksmanship.

So, guess what, no more chairing the Queens prize winner from club to club to celebrate. No more verandas filled with people socialising, discussing the day's shoots over a pint, having their meals. No more inter-club shoots. All that will be left is just one large club – a club called the NRA.

Why you may ask am I saying this? Because this is exactly what is happening right before your eyes.

There is a hidden commercial plan and one of the requirements of a commercial plan is to have buildings to operate from.

We have already seen the bullying of the Surrey Club, the commercialisation of the British Pistol Club and Old Bisley Gun Club. The loss of the Muzzle Loaders hut, still empty – you have to ask why? The loss of Bullet Lodge Club now leased for £12,000 per year to an occasional shotgun shooter, who spends most of his time elsewhere. The loss of the English XX. building for club use. The likely loss of the Artists Rifle Club, followed by the North London Rifle Club both well known to being presently bullied by the landlord, fighting hard to keep their clubs.

It is only a matter of time before the other 16 or so clubs such as the LMRA, the Army, BSG, the Commonwealth, the Surrey, the OSM and Inns of Court etc. face the same fate. No longer the clubs we love but a playground for high paying commercial clients.

Canada House is soon to be targeted with the certainty of creating a very nasty international incident when this is tried on.

So why is this happening?

First, the demand of extraordinarily high increases in rentals of between 400% and 800%, such as from just over £3,000 to £14,700 and from £2,500 to £22,000 in a single leap. Similar increase demands have left some just to give up or give in, not having the funds to fight it.

Who has actually valued these clubs and why has any proper valuation not been revealed to the NRA membership and discussed first by General Council?

Second, and far worse, are the threatened changes to the terms of these proposed new leases. Please listen carefully. Here are a couple of examples.

1. In the event of the Landlord being desirous of carrying out any work of construction or development on the Property or upon any part of the Estate shall serve upon the Tenant not less than twelve months' notice and upon the expiration of such notice this Lease shall cease and the Property shall thereupon vest in the Landlord. For the avoidance of doubt no compensation shall be payable to the Tenant.
2. In the event that the Tenant being an individual dies, the representatives of the Tenant shall offer to the Landlord to surrender this Lease and if this is rejected will assign this Lease to a person previously approved by the Landlord.

This smacks of what I would call, in my opinion, a rather corrupt practice and it breaks the past 100 years of clubs covenants.

When many of the leases for the clubs began, there was a gentleman's agreement between the clubs and the NRA that such a right would never be invoked other than in an extreme emergency. Sadly the clubs never thought that the time would come when we have no gentlemen in charge of the NRA. The clubs trusted their landlord, a trust which had now been badly broken, without good reason, and are being taken advantage of by the landlord in a most unpleasant way. Would you have entered into a 21 year lease, invested your hard earned money into maintaining and improving this building, knowing full well that in 21 years, or possibly one year, the landlord could step in and take the building back with no compensation? If this had been the case 21 years ago, the Bisley club life would never be what it is today.

Our founders and successive chairmen have always honoured this legacy until now.

Please note that not one penny has been spent by the NRA on any club improvements to date.

You need to be aware that your NRA is using tens of thousands of your membership money to fight and bully the clubs. A charity using your money against you.

These are people you elected – is this how you wish to see your money being spent? This cannot fulfil the charitable aims of the NRA? I see nothing here that that could even come close to being charitable.

They refuse to disclose how much they have spent so far on legal support for their attack.

As a Charity all such spending is supposed to be transparent and not deliberately hidden.

The Trustees should be reminded that under the Charities Act it states that: spending charity funds on the wrong purpose is a very serious matter and in some cases trustees may have to reimburse the charity personally.

I hope you will all remember that.

Our Bisley clubs are not commercial businesses. They rely solely on those who come to Bisley and they are not open to the general public. All of our Bisley clubs are supported and run by volunteers, who not only give of their time but reach into their own pockets to support their clubs. Unlike the new NRA club which is totally funded from central NRA funds using fully paid staff and which is a club actively competing against our clubs.

Even if our clubs did manage to raise the funds to cover the new rental, each would do so knowing full well that in possibly 12 months' time the landlord with his present destructive agenda, could most likely remove them and take over the building any way, with no compensation. To me that smacks of planned theft, I'm sorry to say, or self-interest and perhaps some much more serious questions might need to be asked.

So what do the clubs actually do to provide a benefit to British shooting?

They provide a home base for many shooters across the UK and from all over the world. A place to store equipment, clean rifles, even find a reasonably priced place to stay and have their meals. They are places of education for the newcomer to the sport. They provide valuable training in a friendly atmosphere, free of charge, supplying expertise and equipment and add a vibrant social aspect to the camp.

But perhaps the most important aspect is the clubs provide the foundation for present and all future Palma, GB, National, Under 19, Under 25, County and Commonwealth Games participants. They provide the year round inter-club competitions where members learn the essential skills. The clubs encourage the advancement of these skills and are able to recognise talent and bring it forward for the benefit of our Nation.

The NRA with its shooting club can never ever achieve this. Talent cannot be spotted and developed in one large “commercial” club that is essentially no more than “pay and play”, giving no consideration to the future of UK & GB teams. The UK will no longer be a force to be reckoned with and overseas visiting teams and individuals will have no reason to come to Bisley. If the NRA is permitted to continue to destroy the clubs, then the talent will die. There is presently still a reasonable wealth of talent but it will take only a few years for this talent to pass and there will be no replacements.

What a legacy to leave for future generations!

Chairman:

John, message 9. There are others who may wish to speak.

(let him finish)

John Carmichael

The NRA does believe in the requirement for a club but only their club. It has been admitted that around half a million pounds is to be spent achieving this and from other reliable sources it has been stated that the real cost will be nearer a million pounds. – This is member’s money! Where is the Bisley commercial plan, why has it not been presented to General Council, discussed and agreed before being implemented, why is it hidden?

We know the who, the what, the where and the how but the question remains why? Why would anyone seek to destroy competitive shooting in the UK? There is over 150 years of shooting history inside the very walls of all these clubs. Where thousands of shooters have passed through, adding their names to the trophies, record boards and walls. The new tenants may keep these as fancy decoration but this history will more likely go to the tip.

I, among many others can see no good and honourable reason with a turnover last year of £5.7 million, one cannot see any justification for what is taking place other than financial greed. There is an agenda of commercialisation with no care for the charitable aims of the Association and no checks and balances or oversight seem to be permitted.

An agenda of money making, personal kudos and I'm sorry to say perhaps personal gain, visibly driven by one out of control Servant of the NRA that the Chairman and Trustees seem utterly incapable of or perhaps unwilling to reign in. One thing is for certain, the clubs are in the way of their agenda.

I ask you to stand with me and let the NRA and the people you elected know, that this greedy, bullying behaviour must stop and it must stop now.

Stand up and save your clubs and the history of Bisley and save Bisley for the future generations of competitive shooters, our future worldwide team winners and our present place as the world's top country in our unique sport. Otherwise it will be gone forever.

Please stop sleep walking and wake up everyone!

(Applause)

Chairman:

Thank you John.

Let me remind everybody here that this is but a small number of the 8,500 members of the NRA.

Let me also remind you that the Trustees owe a duty of care to every member of the Association. Let me further remind you that there are members of Bisley-based clubs, and there are members of the NRA who are not members of Bisley-based clubs. So everybody has a horse in this particular race.

All the Trustees seek to do is to have those clubs, who are tenants, pay the going rate. I do not believe it is fair to the 5 clubs that have signed their leases in the last 3 or 4 years, that they should pay up to five times the rent of a club that stands alongside them and has exactly the same opportunity to get members through their door and make their club a success.

Deitra Kimpton:

How about doing it on a graduated scale to be fair to the clubs?

Chairman:

We have offered graduated scales.

Deitra Kimpton:

No you haven't!

(Let him finish!)

Chairman:

Yes we have. Let me address some points which John made. First of all, there is no hidden commercial plan as described. Next, let's take the Artists Rifle Club. The Artists Rifle Club's final offer for settlement was £10,000 of rent per annum. It has 9 bedrooms – what do you think 9 caravans in rent cost? It is more than £10,000. And yet...

(Multiple interruptions)

Vice-Chairman:

Can I say something?

Ladies and Gentlemen, when John Carmichael was speaking, the audience asked he be allowed to continue and listened to. I think it is only fair that you award the same courtesy to our Chairman who tries to answer questions.

(hear hear – round of applause)

Chairman:

Let us return to the Artists Rifle Club. Please log on to their website and read the first three paragraphs of the history of that particular club. It says that the Clubhouse was secured in 2003 for the sole purpose of wanting to preserve and promote the Regiment's former history and heritage. Note: It has nothing to do with promotion of marksmanship. I will repeat that – it has nothing to do with the promotion of shooting.

It is about being a refuge for a very good and very honourable regiment – nothing wrong with that - but it is nothing to do with shooting. So please, please don't attack the NRA for not supporting shooting in this case.

We are not trying to destroy clubs. We simply want those clubs who have tenancies here to pay comparable levels of rent. There was a fair rents scheme actually proposed by Dr Robin Pizer, my predecessor.

Robin Pizer:

In 1988.

Chairman:

Exactly!

Robin Pizer:

And then it was scrapped.

Chairman:

Because we now have a Real Estate Policy that was formulated in 2005. The particular elements that John Carmichael takes so much exception to have been part of that real estate policy and a new lease since that date. This is nothing new, ladies and gentlemen. All your Trustees are doing is seeking fairness between all tenants. That is all we want.

Let us take Bullet Lodge, which was also mentioned. Bullet Lodge was in such a state of disrepair that under new guidelines, we felt that we had to take that building back and refurbish it. After refurbishment, that building was offered to the existing tenant at a discount to the guide price at which it was eventually put on the market. That price was £8,000 per annum.

The incumbent tenant was offered a significant discount on that price. They did not want to take it. So we put it out to tender. We had 14 expressions of interest on that building and got 11 bids in excess of the guide price. Do you really think that was rapacious? I think that's just sensible husbandry of the stock of real estate that we have on this camp.

We are not trying to drive out clubs. But I do not believe you should have two clubs sitting side by side competing for the same custom from the membership, and one has a significant cost advantage over the other. It's just that simple.

Canada House has been mentioned. We have been talking to the DCRA. Both Andrew and I have spent time talking with both Jim Thompson and Stan Frost and they have been reassured that they will be able to keep their building.

But they don't have a right to renew. The only people who make a fuss are those people who have a right to renew. And as I said, there are 7 such clubs. Four of those are due to renew after 2023 whilst there are 3 that are current. Of those three, one has already agreed heads of terms because they, quite sensibly, wanted to sit down and negotiate. One is the Artists Rifle Club which has been all over the national press misrepresenting the facts, and the other is the North London.

We simply want those clubs to just pay their fair dues.

If there are 200 members of the Mars & Minerva Club, and they have to pay £10,000 a year, a rent that they have refused, that is a £1 per member, per week. That is not swingeing, rapacious, hidden commerciality. It is absolutely ridiculous for you to assert otherwise.

(round of applause)

Robert Harbord:

My name is Robert Harbord. I shot on the ranges here first in 1964.

The reason I'm here is just to listen to what the Chairman and the Board have to say. And I just say I think it's a pity that he's used one word which is not correct. He's referring to reports in the press about the Artists Rifle Club and their point of view being a misrepresentation. That is not correct!

(It is correct!)

It is not correct. The reports that have been in the press of the way they've been treated is a misrepresentation is not correct. They've not been treated fairly and take a rent of £3,150 a year and ask for £14,170 a year is staggering. That was a 466% increase that they demanded.

Subsequently they thought they ought to they use an oriental practice of reducing it very slightly to £10,000 which was made in the offices of Sir Julian Brasier, a member of Parliament who was the Minister for Reserves. That was flatly refused and quite rightly so! That was still a sensational increase of 388%. Now, if we are going to adopt oriental practices to run the most magnificent association, created by Lord Elcho and a whole host of volunteers, with cordial agreement at every level. And we now have a situation where there is an 'us' and a 'them' situation which just seems to me to be very unheathly.

That's all I've got to say, thank you very much.

(round of applause)

Chairman:

Can I reply to the 'us' and 'them'? There are 108 buildings under tenancy on Bisley camp, 42 of those have been agreed in the last 4 years. Of those only two have been litigious or controversial. That is your 'us' and 'them'.

(round of applause)

Simon Dixon, President of the North London Rifle Club:

Against all the odds, we survived the retribution following Hungerford and Dunblane, we survived the political interference when Bisley was deprived of being the obvious shooting choice for the 2012 London Olympics.

So it is perhaps hard to believe that it is our very own governing body seemingly unaware of the implications of their chosen approach to club house leases that is driving a stake through the very heart of our amateur sport that we love so much and that so many of us have devoted countless hours and dedicated so much effort in attempting to keep it, and our club houses, alive.

There used to be a time when Bisley was peopled by the gentlemen whose word was their bond. Now we see the NRA reneging on a gentleman's agreement over the Artists Rifle Club, where it is alleged that the Trustees were deceived over the rent negotiations for the Surrey Rifle Association.

And now my own club is being bullied and threatened over our lease.

Perhaps it is a case of unintended consequences. But what the current Trustees are doing will tear the very heart out of the whole ethos and culture of Bisley clubs.

Who do they think will in the future provide all of the volunteers who dedicate so much time and effort to bring on the GB and Palma shots of the future? Who will provide the inter-club competitions where young shooters are taught team shooting and wind coaching? All this currently given freely by members of the clubs on club row and on the common.

The approach on rents being pursued by the NRA Trustees, is based crudely on the size of the building. Where this falls apart is that it takes little account of the different restrictions in leases, or the way the club houses can be used, or the huge disparity in the cost of repairs and maintenance.

Neither does it take into account that some club houses are owned by the NRA, and are left on normal lease terms. In others, such as the North London which was built and has been maintained by its members since 1904, and the NRA has never invested one penny piece in it. This is where the NRA's current approach is so iniquitous.

I would be interested to know how the NRA Trustees can reconcile their misguided approach to fairness in relation to the Pavilion which has been refurbished and modernised, I understand, to provide a bar, a café, restaurant, plus rifle storage and accommodation. All funded with charity money and available to members of the NRA, which will be in competition with the Bisley-based clubs.

I would like to remind the Trustees that this may well be deemed anti-competitive behaviour in contravention of the 1998 Competition Act. And further, it would be interesting to see how long it takes for the NRA to recoup in shooting sport income, excluding CNC income, the commercial rent that has been foregone and the investment made.

And no doubt, like much other information to which members are entitled, I doubt that separate accounts will be available on the Pavilion for members to see.

John, I do wonder how you will feel in a very few years' time, when you look back on your time as Chairman of the NRA and realise that you presided over the misguided philosophy of so-called fairness that will, I very much fear, result in the demise of

many of the Bisley-based clubs and all the enjoyment that has been derived from them by so many generations. I hope you will feel appropriately admonished.

(round of applause)

Chairman:

Simon, I must tell you and everybody here - and the members of General Council who are here will back me up on this. This has been a subject that has been discussed with General Council in depth at every General Council meeting this year, at every General Council meeting last year, and I think at least two of the meetings in the year before.

Your General Council which is your elected body, which advises the group of Trustees, supports fairness between clubs. It's that simple. So if you have a problem with that, it's your problem, not my problem.

Because I am not running this particular organisation for anything other than the benefit of all its members. And all of its members deserve to get treated fairly. If you have everybody who is conflicted – and in this case you are either a member of a Bisley-based club, or you are a member of the NRA, who is not a member of a Bisley-based club - the best way to manage that conflict between those two groups is to treat everybody fairly. And when everybody is conflicted and have differing views of what fairness is, you treat everybody equally. It's that simple.

(round of applause)

Robert Atwood:

Good evening, my name is Robert Atwood. I'm a Life Member and I've been a life member for just under 20 years.

I've been hearing about all these tales of woe, but just alluding to the Chairman's comments, let's talk about fairness and let's talk about good corporate governance, and let's talk about facts.

I think that what needs to happen is the Trustees need to conduct a proper fiscal audit. And I mean a proper one where they go in and look at all the costs, what's been going on, who's involved and what's going to be happening.

There are a lot of questions here and I think we need answers, and the sooner we get them the better. That way we can heal. Stop spending all this money, because it's going to go nowhere and find out what's going on.

Thank you.

(round of applause)

Antonia Stuart:

My name is Antonia Stuart, I've been a member of the NRA since September, so I'm relatively new.

My concern as a charity spending over £1 million without, I can't even say it, the proper will of all the people.

There are several clubs that are no longer with us – the British Pistol Club, the Muzzle Loaders, the Surrey Rifle Club. (*we're still here*)

As a new member I'm deeply disturbed by it.

£1.3 million being spent on legal fees for the NRA to help themselves, I'm not exactly pleased with what's happening here. And what I would like to say is this; I concur with John and what you have said about the Artists Rifle Club, I hereby would like to put it to a vote on whether Mr Mercer and Mr Webster should resign

Chairman:

There is no vote at this meeting.

£1.3 million is a figure that I do not recognise. The audited accounts for 2016 show expenditure on professional services of, I think, £153,000.

That is up from figures on the prior two years of around £90,000 each year. Where your figure of £1.3 million comes from, I have no idea.

Colin McEachran:

My name is Colin McEachran, I come from Scotland. I've been coming to Bisley for over 50 years. I've been privileged to be made a Vice President of the NRA and one of the great charms of Bisley is Club Row and the multi-member club houses.

And I separate out the multi-member club houses for the club houses which are individually owned. Now these buildings, these club houses, were built by their members, many of them more than 100 years ago. The NRA have had no help, no part in that at all. And they are now, because of their age, very expensive to maintain.

So I'm appalled to discover when I come down to Bisley that there is this dispute between the NRA and the multi-member club houses. And that certainly that over £100k of NRA members' money has been spent on legal fees, surveyors' fees, court costs.

Up until 2013, it was recognised by the NRA that these multi-member club houses contributed enormously to the charitable aims of the NRA. And you will remember what the charitable aims are – it is to promote marksmanship. And these club houses, these multi-member club houses, provide armoury facilities, they provide food and drink and accommodation. They provide competitions as has been explained by previous speakers.

Now, the policy up to 2013 emphasised two things. And the first thing was affordability. And the second was comparability. Now I think we all agree there should be fairness between the clubs. But where is the emphasis on affordability of what the clubs can afford? And what worries me as a member of General Council, is that I have never seen the policy, the rental policy, and I'm certain that the policy has not been seen and discussed by the general members of the NRA.

And it seems to me that the estate policy for multi-member club houses should be put out by the NRA on their website so people can see it and see whether they agree with it.

(round of applause)

Chairman:

Colin, the real estate policy is on the website.

Colin McEachran:

Oh! And does it mention the word affordability?

Chief Executive

Yes

Colin McEachran:

Well, that's also good to hear – perhaps the Trustees will pay some attention to that!

Now the NRA Trustees have a wide discretion as to what rents they set for the multi-member club houses. That's been discussed over the last few years. At the AGM in June this year, it was proposed that the NRA sit down with the clubs that they were in dispute with to reach a mediated settlement.

Now a mediated settlement means that a mediator is there between the two parties encouraging them to reach a consensus view which deals with the dispute. But it also means that each party has to agree that there is something to be said for the other side's point of view to be able to reach a mediated settlement. That is what worries me about the NRA's position, they just assume they're right!

(hear, hear)

Chairman:

May I answer that point as you are going along?

You will recall that the initial offer to the Artists Rifle Clubhouse was £14,700. That offer was lowered to £10,000. That was done on the basis of a degree of understanding of the investment that particular individual tenant had put into the building.

(Robert Harbord - over half a million pounds)

As it happens, his own surveyor says that figure is £62,000.

(Robert Harbord – you are quite right. That is for improvements only. The overall refurbishment and complete repair is over half a million pounds.)

Chairman:

All I am doing is quoting the number that his own surveyor quoted.

I understand there are other bills that he probably took on. That is for his benefit.

(Robert Harbord – it is for the benefit of the NRA)

Colin McEachran:

It should perhaps be remembered that the NRA's surveyor initially proposed a £3,000 rent.

Chairman:

The NRA's surveyor proposed no such thing. Look at that particular email from Tim Oliffe-Lee and you will notice several things:

- 1) it is headed without prejudice and subject to contract.
- 2) it is dated July 2012 which is a full seven months after the lease was meant to come to an end.

- 3) it is addressed to someone called PJ and not the tenant. If it were so important to him, why didn't the tenant himself engage with the surveyor who was doing this?
- 4) it is not an offer. It says this is the lowest figure that he can recommend to the Trustees. The Trustees, as every Trustee will know, are bound by the Charities Act. They must get the best rent that can be reasonably obtained. I'm sorry, the £3,000 or so was not the best rent that can be reasonably obtained, and
- 5) to boot, the man in charge of that particular club house did not accept the offer!

What else are the Trustees meant to do?

Colin McEachran:

What you are meant to do John is to remember that we are here for a sport. We're not here taking legal points about the fact that the letter is headed 'Without Prejudice'.

Chairman:

Colin, we have renewed five club house leases in the last 3 years. They have all been done on a rack rent. To do anything else makes mugs out of those people.

Antonia Stuart: *but other clubhouses have gone*

Chairman:

The Surrey is still here, the Muzzle Loaders are still a very successful club, it just doesn't have a club house.

We have already been through the reasons why the Exhibition Hut is empty. As it happens as an empty building it has been used successfully as a film set.

(Multiple interjections)

Chairman:

Everyone must remember the only time that we spend money on litigation is when a tenant has a right to renew. There are seven clubs out of the 29 club tenants that have a right to renew. Why that situation exists I do not know. But it does. And that in and of itself is not fair.

If you have clubs that are paying significantly more than other clubs next door, I just don't think that is fair. I suppose we could lower everybody's rent but there is a market for these club houses whether you like it or not which sets these rents fairly between the tenant and the rest of the membership. To be honest I really don't care

what the level of rent is; all I want the level to be is at a market level because markets are where prices clear. That is a transaction between a willing buyer and a willing seller at the record date.

(More heckling)

I love these meetings because they are rambunctious. The thing that I get out of these meetings is that I know that everybody cares, and that is really important. We have different ways of showing it. But you should know that I care too, and must care for every member's interest.

Colin McEachran:

Now what I was mentioning that the proposal made at the AGM that there should be a mediated settlement and as I understand it, the Chairman accepted that proposal at the AGM, but nothing has happened. Now, he mentioned in his address to us that he is quite keen to have a mediated settlement, but that can't really take place until September.

Now what worries me, is that the legal and the surveying costs clock is ticking away. Hundreds of thousands of pounds are still being clocked up. So what I would propose to the Trustees today, is that they put all litigation about multi-member club houses on hold and enter into mediated settlement talks with the club houses involved. I would ask those who agree to raise their hands.

(hear, hear)

Chairman:

If you are raising your hands, remind yourselves that when a club has a right to renew, they tend to push the boundaries as far as they can. Why is that fair to those 22 other clubs, that don't have a right to renew, that don't litigate, that sit down and talk to the Chief Executive, and negotiate a fair and honest settlement with him?

That is the difference here.

John Carmichael:

I'm going to correct the Chairman on something he said because he misled you, in this room, on something he said a few moments ago.

I'm going to read something from an email that was sent to him by Julian Brasier, one of the politicians that he met with.

"Thank you for coming to see me Monday. We are grateful to you bringing the time, but we are no closer to a solution. We were surprised that you and David Evans had not seen either of the two affidavits from former officers of the NRA setting out the background of assurances against which Moss Mustafa and his co-investors made their investment in the building".

Mr Mercer chose to tell the meeting the reports suggested that improvements in the building amounted to only £61,000. I heard that figure banded about a moment ago. But were astonished to subsequently discover that he had concealed from us the very much larger sum in refurbishments which were detailed in the same report, together some £400,000. Although there is a technical distinction of two terms, this concealment was at the very least misleading.

Chief Executive:

The report that Sir Julian referred to was commissioned by the tenant, it clearly states that the value of the improvements identified by the surveyor at the Artists at £61,200. That is what the figure says.

He alludes that there may well be other figures, there may well be other amounts that have yet to be justified or validated.

John Carmichael:

They were in the papers that you were sent. You had them before that time.

Chief Executive:

Of course.

John Carmichael:

You had all the papers, and those figures are mentioned. And you misled the MPs in what you said. And John, you just did it again!

Chairman:

No I did not; that is what it says.

John Carmichael:

Yes – I have seen the papers.

Chairman:

Have you seen the tenant's report by the valuation agent that was commissioned by the tenant?

John Carmichael:

Yes – and I can read you a piece from that if you wish. Let me read you a piece from that. This is Ramsdale's report.

Chief Executive:

That is the wrong report.

John Carmichael:

This is the report that I have. So what is the report that you are alluding to??

Chairman:

It is a report commissioned by the tenant.

John Carmichael:

This is the report commissioned by the tenant.

Chief Executive:

That is the second report commissioned by the tenant. What's the date of that report?

John Carmichael:

Is the tenant suddenly saying that, oh it's not £400,000, it is £61,000?!

Chairman:

John, this is getting us nowhere – please sit down.

John Carmichael:

There are some seriously devious things going on here!

Nigel Wells:

Sorry for jumping in. I'm Nigel Wells, UK Police Target Rifle Club.

A quick history lesson Mr Chairman. For those that may not understand the significance of the words I'm going to say in about 15 seconds – you can educate them later – but it does refer to the whole of the camp.

“When you drive through the gates, Queen Victoria is still alive”

Peter Wilson:

My name is Peter Wilson. I'm the former Secretary for the GB F-Class Rifle Association, former National, European and World Champion. I'm a member of the Artists Rifles Club. I'm a solicitor who assisted Moss in the very first re-negotiation of his lease.

The point I would like to make is that if we were to enable to clearly and easily understand matters is that on or about the renewal of the Artists Rifle Clubhouse, you had a rent of c.£3,000. You had a rent renewal requirement within the lease, and the reappraisal terms within the lease, as is normal throughout any commercial lease, is that they are meant to take into account issues such as inflation, changes within the market within reason. You would not normally expect to be proffered an option of renewal which is 4 times what was originally paid, or what was originally on the lease.

So, once you are going into a phase whereby rental increases are hitting the four times magnitude, there is something highly unusual. I mean, seriously unusual, because that would not ever be encountered even in the City of London.

So, here we have a policy which is being adopted and pushed forward which is clearly out of kilter with the majority of any expectation by any club, and fundamentally by any other precedent of leasehold property ownership as to what you would normally expect. And the question I would like to ask is why is that the case?

Why do you feel it necessary to push rents which are 4 times which hitherto were lawfully agreed?

Chief Executive:

Percentages are misleading. When you look at the Artists Rifle, it has 9 bedrooms, over 4,000 sq ft of space, sits on one of the prime positions on Bisley Camp, and the NRA owns the building.

(they don't)

It does. With the greatest respect, that was a point of contention between the NRA and the tenant, Moss Mustafa. We agreed to settle our dispute through arbitration. We went to arbitration, we both put our case to the arbitrator, and the arbitrator clearly asserted that the NRA is correct in stating that the building belongs to the NRA.

So, the NRA is now entitled to charge a rack rent instead of just a ground rent for the ground and the buildings. Those are the terms that have been agreed by Moss Mustafa. They were agreed on the 10th February this year. The only matter that now sits outstanding between us and Moss is the level of rent.

We offered, as the Chairman has said, to try and settle the matter, a revised rent, not the £14,700 which continues to be quoted, but £10,000. That was rejected and the tenant insisted that he wanted the rent on the terms of the lease that had been agreed, decided by our respective surveyors. That is the process that we are going through.

So the two surveyors were put to work. They were given three weeks according to the agreement between ourselves and Moss, to agree the rent and if at the end of the three week period either party was at liberty to put the matter to expert RICS appointed arbitration. Three months later there was still no agreement between the two surveyors, so we've put the matter to arbitration.

What I struggle to understand is that we are following a process that Moss has agreed to. Moss agreed that process on the 10th February. So to try and create this process of revisiting all the past communication, all the past correspondence, I find something of a mystery. Because we agreed terms on 10th February. That was evidenced by consent order that went to court.

The Chairman wrote to Sir Julian Brasier. Sir Julian Brasier wrote back to the Chairman thanking him for his support and saying how pleased he was that the matter had been settled. That is the honest truth and there is correspondence to back that up; although an inconvenient truth, that is the truth of the matter.

So we are now at the situation where we are putting the matter to the expert arbitrator. The surveyors are trying to agree the facts that they agree on and then ultimately it will go to arbitration. We are still open to negotiation and suggestion, but the problem is that we are following the process that Moss wanted us to follow.

Peter Wilson:

Can I interject here and just explain to the members because they are going to be confused here? It looks like Moss is totally shooting himself in the foot!

What actually happened is that there was a case law whereby a precedent was created so that the type of lease which Moss had, whereby it was initially of the view that Moss was renting the ground and the ground only, because the building itself had been procured by the members of the Artists Rifles and built as such, and had been on there, with the acknowledgement that the ground and the ground rent was belonging to the NRA. This case law overturned matters and determined that over the effluxion of time the building itself would then become the property of the NRA, which you couldn't overturn. That was the case.

So you have a situation where you do have a change and you have a change in case law to that effect. You then have the situation whereby under the original lease, where Moss has a right to renew, you then have to assess a fair rent. Now again, and I don't think anyone's answered my question, I said that you have a rent, it's c.£3,000, and you have a rent that was initially agreed to be increased to about £3,300. We are talking small amounts of money. And you then have a situation whereby the NRA come in and they say that they consider the appropriate rent to be £14,750, and even if it's subsequently reduced to £10,000, you are talking a 300% increase.

I don't think there is anywhere in our country whereby you have 300% increases being applied. The most expensive areas of real estate, say Sandbanks in Bournemouth and the City of London, you don't get increases of that magnitude.

Chief Executive:

But with the greatest respect, you will not find anywhere else in the country where you can rent a 4,600 sq ft clubhouse with 9 bedrooms on a prime piece of Bisley real estate for £3,000 pa.

(hear, hear)

Peter Wilson:

The point about Bisley being a prime piece of real estate has to be restricted in terms of its assessment. The house has to be ran as a shooting club house. It isn't a property that the Kashoggi's can come in and partner.

Chief Executive:

You are absolutely right! As are all the club houses at Bisley. And the fundamental point is that all club houses have restricted covenants in terms of who can be the tenant, what those buildings can be used for and that's what drives down the rent compared to what you would reasonably get away from Bisley. And the Trustees accept that.

But the reality is that when you look at club houses, whether people like it or not, there is a market for club houses at Bisley. That market was evidenced by the tender process for Bullet Lodge because three Bisley-based clubs tendered bids.

Peter Wilson:

Could I respond a little bit within this? The situation as it appears is that if you have a gate around the club house criteria to some extent, and have a club that's made up of small numbers of members, you could then comply with the requirements to actually take a lease out, and then as you potentially accurately say, you've got a very sizeable property in a very wealthy area of Surrey that is potentially cheap.

But, you're here as Trustees and that means a position of trust. And it doesn't take much – it isn't a leap of faith – to say that when people are navigating around in that fashion, it's fundamentally wrong.

Chief Executive:

The reality is that when you look at the club market, there are very successful clubs that have recently renewed that are flourishing at Bisley. That is fact. If you look at the Surrey Rifle Association's last filed accounts, anybody who reads those accounts, freely available on the Charity Commission's website, that evidence, anyone who understands a set of accounts will actually agree with my assertion that is a successful, vibrant club that is doing well.

Point one, point two – the Old Sergeant's Mess have recently renewed, a very successful club.

Peter Wilson:

Can I just interrupt on the Old Sergeant's Mess? Isn't that someone's domestic property where they live? In other words they are somewhat held to ransom in so far as if they didn't renew, they would lose everything – they would lose where they live and everything.

Chief Executive:

Absolutely not! The reality is that they came to us, they wanted to invest in the club house, they wanted to put a mezzanine floor extension to it, and they wanted the security of a new lease. On the signing of that lease, they made that investment.

Peter Wilson

Could I interrupt once again? Sorry to interrupt, but just to get things straight. These negotiations which you rely on as a justification and precedent to enable you to validate what you are now seeking to do, they actually occurred after the negotiations were commenced with the Artists Rifles and after the significant figures that you demanded from them were put to them.

It's all well and good to say that we now have authority, or some authority by way of prior cases or prior examples, to justify what was done with the Artists Rifles, but at the time that didn't exist. So at the time there must be some justification and validation as to why you were looking to move from £3,100 to £14,700 and then that figure subsequently being reduced to £10,000.

In other words, I'm going back to my original question – you are looking for increases that are c.3 times the amount of money that is actually asked for, whereas in each and every normal case an increase is a percentage of the original sum.

Chief Executive:

The percentages, as I said before, are meaningless. When you are charging buttons, three times buttons is still buttons! It is a substantial club house with a lot of bedrooms on a prime position. £3,000 in anybody's money is simply not enough.

With the greatest respect, what we are trying to do is apply rents fairly.

Peter Wilson:

Income from a club house is cyclical throughout the year. It's not a constant, it's based on highs such as the Imperial now, and lows over winter when no-one is shooting. It isn't per annum, pro-rata as appears to have been forward by you.

The lower rents that were demanded, and not just demanded of the Artists Rifles, but seemingly across the board with the London & Middlesex and some of the other clubs, those lower rents were probably indicative of what was sustainable by those clubs and acknowledged to be such by your predecessors.

Now what you have here is a sudden leap or a transitional phase whereby what your predecessors hitherto look for and what you are now looking for is dramatically different. It's in the region of a three to four times multiple. And again, I'm asking why?

Chairman:

Peter, I think we need to draw this to a close, but one of the things that I think Andrew said quite clearly is you are comparing apples and oranges and not apples to apples. Ground rents versus ground and building rents.

And two, I have to say that there are other comparable buildings that we have had before all the more recent transactions. But I am sure that when it gets to arbitration an expert is going to arbitrate as to what that rent is. Now you and everybody else in the room should know, that one of the Trustees is a retired member of the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors. Andrew has done nothing without Richard Bailie's guidance about what these rents are worth.

All we is seeking to do is one, implement a fair policy between all the club houses and two, uphold the 2005 real estate policy. It's that simple.

Peter Wilson:

I'll let someone else speak, but if we are in a situation where our heritage is being lost in order to secure our future, where is mandate for that?

(hear, hear)

Chairman:

I'll tell you where the mandate is from. It's from a series of discussions with General Council who support this policy.

("you should open up the minutes for everybody")

They're on the website, so please do your homework.

Silke Lohmann:

It looks like my turn. Silke Lohmann, soon to be on General Council by the sound of it, so to all of you who voted for me, thank you very much.

(round of applause)

Trustees, whether you like it or not, the NRA is still a charity. Your CEO seems to run it like a company with a property portfolio. However, you do seem to hide behind charity law whenever it suits you, but ignore basic charity law like conflict of interest and conflict of loyalty where your members are concerned.

You've spent a high proportion of your, or should I say our, the charity's money on legal fees, fighting your members, the beneficiaries of the charity.

Money that should have undoubtedly been spent on improving Bisley ranges, getting more regional ranges and supporting the sport in general by giving bigger grants to touring teams and encouraging young shooters to take up the sport.

The CEO runs the business as if his responsibility were to stakeholders and he had no responsibility to customers. He doesn't seem to understand that at Bisley he is in a different position. His stakeholders and his customers are one and the same people, so the very people he is supposed to representing are the people against whom he is fighting, and using their money to do so.

The question arises whether the CEO's job description needs to be changed to ensure that he runs the NRA as a business and as a charity in equal measure, or perhaps it is just a question of the Trustees to manage the CEO properly.

The CEO is a servant working on behalf of the members and the Trustees are put in place to ensure that is the case. Should the current CEO not have the required skill set, perhaps it is time for the Trustees to look for a new CEO.

Now I would like to say I made that proposal at the AGM to have a round table discussion with all the leaseholders. I'm very pleased to hear that you've now agreed to have this meeting in September with an independent mediator, because in your emails you didn't qualify that.

Chairman:

I said, we have always agreed to have a meeting, a round table meeting.

Silke Lohmann:

But not with an independent mediator.

Chairman:

I have said also that the need for a mediator is to avoid excessive litigation. The only time we have excessive litigation is with those clubs that have a right to renew. We are prepared to sit down with the North London and mediate but you continue to misunderstand and misquote what I say. One can only have a mediator when there is something to mediate.

Silke Lohmann:

No, that is not true. This is the first time you've said you'll agree in September that there will be an independent mediator. In your emails, you do not.

Chairman:

I have not said that an independent mediator should be at the round table discussion as there is nothing to mediate. The purpose of an independent mediator is to avoid excessive fees. An independent mediator should be engaged by us in the one on one conversations with those clubs that have a right to renew where we need to understand each other's point of view.

The 2018-2020 strategic plan will involve, once it has been blessed as a process by General Council, the members body upon which you now sit, a meeting of all tenants as well as non-tenants and prospective tenants so that we can hash out a policy.

John Howell who is in the back of the room rightly asked through John Warburton the General Council to ensure that as a group of Trustees and General Council, we need a club house strategy included in the 2018-2020 plan and the Trustees sign up to that in spades. Have I finally made myself clear?

Unknown:

Have you had any recent dialogue with the Charity Commission?

Chairman:

Not dialogue. I've sent them emails, because of the reputation of the charity being obviously threatened by various MPs and also by various correspondence in the national newspapers. I have sent not one, but two notices to the Charity Commission to say that there is a threat to the reputation of the charity, and that William Shawcross has received a letter from six MPs. I have told them that we are an open book and they can come here any time they want and tell us what we are doing wrong and/or tell us what we should be doing differently.

That is an ongoing process. (*To Chief Executive*) Has there been any recent correspondence?

Chief Executive:

I've had recent correspondence actually asking for clarification on one or two policies and they've asked the Trustees to review those in August.

Chairman:

So there we are. We are having ongoing communication with the Charity Commission. And by the way we have new auditors about to start and they act on behalf of all the members.

Silke Lohmann:

So John, you are confirming that the meeting in September with all the leaseholders and you guys, will also involve an independent mediator?

Chairman:

I am *NOT* confirming that. I keep telling you this.

Silke Lohmann:

But that's what I asked for – I didn't ask for anything else.

Chairman:

No it is not what you asked for. What you asked for was a meeting where we would seek to minimise excessive fees. Excessive fees on tenancy renewals only occur on those few clubs that have a right to renew. There is no point in having a mediator come to a round table of all of us when the mediator has nothing to mediate about.

Silke Lohmann:

I think we all agree that we all want to know what every club house is basically paying. We are very interested in fairness.

Chairman:

Then find out by asking them

Silke Lohmann:

Why don't you give it to us?

Chairman:

I can't under the Data Protection Act.

Silke Lohmann:

OK so why don't you ask your tenants whether they are happy to.

Chairman:

I have no problem with you or anybody else going around to each club house and saying what do you pay for rent. Please do. If you have to, go to the Land Registry and you can find it out for yourselves. But remember that each lease is different and terms and therefore rents may vary accordingly.

I can't give it to you, I'm sorry and I'm not going to authorise Andrew to do it either.

Gary Alexander:

Has the NRA ever spent any money on any litigation or any arbitration where they've not won their case and therefore the responsibility is on the club? Have the NRA lost any of the arbitration or any of the legal cases?

Chief Executive:

Not in my time.

Chairman:

Not since I've been Chairman.

Gary Alexander:

So every penny that we've spent has been proved by the courts or the arbitrators that we have spent in the defence of every member in this room and every member of the NRA.

(hear hear – round of applause)

Ross McQuillan:

My name is Ross McQuillan, I've been a member of the Association for 19 years now. I am a member of a number of other clubs, some with Bisley club houses, some Bisley based without club houses, some regional.

I've been attending meetings like this here in previous years and forums including I think what was the first forum of Bisley clubs assembled at the Artists a number of years ago.

I've heard a lot of emotional statements that have led to personal attacks on friends of mine who I believe are giving up their time with the best interests of the sport and of this place.

I care about this place as much as people who have very different views and those views have been stated tonight.

What I haven't heard from any of those forums is any suggestion of a better way to calculate club rent other than something like what was there before, plus a few percent. To pick up on the example of one previous speaker, I've been working in commercial property in the City of London for 15 years. I find that as a position to be deeply flawed. It can't be simply accepted that what was correct in the past, is correct moving forward.

So accepting that we need to re-examine what is a correct rent to pay going forward, I simply invite anyone to come up with a better way than what has been proposed. I've heard a lot of complaints, but I haven't actually heard a better suggestion.

I will say this – I love this place, I hope, I think, as much or nearly as much as those who've spoken before. I consider it a home from home and have done for the 27 years I've been coming here. But as with other sports, we face challenges from a multitude of directions. If our only guiding ethos is things must stay the same in every way, including financially, then we are doomed to failure.

(hear, hear – round of applause)

If our only principle is that we must preserve everything in aspic, then we are inviting oblivion.

(round of applause)

Unknown:

I'm just going to say rather like Ross, we are all here because we love this sport, which is not popular in the wider world, and we want to do what we can to maintain it. I've been coming here a long time, 45 odd years, and I've never seen such a mood of anger from within the club, from within the NRA, within the whole place. And I think that anger is terribly unhealthy.

I'm not saying whether anybody is right or wrong, I just think we should all look at how we've got ourselves in this situation, everybody, and think about how we can step back from that and how we can actually go forward as a sport and progress into the future.

(hear, hear – round of applause)

Deitra Kimpton:

Deitra Kimpton, Artists Rifle Club. Ross, you are quite right. You said you wanted to look for another suggestion. And this suggestion was made to the Chairman, he said at one time to my husband that he would take it under consideration. Why was not a graduated approach taken with the club houses?

I don't think anybody in here disagrees that something needed to be done to sort out the rentals here. They were a bit antiquated. Some of the subs at some of the club houses are a bit antiquated and we've all relied on that. But, if the NRA wishes to preserve life – we don't want to keep it in stone – as Ross says, yes we've got to move forward and so the rents have got to be moving forward. But why was not a graduated approach to this taken to go from £3,000 to get to the goal of £10,000 and offer it to the clubs in a staged approach over several years where the clubs could then manage it, the clubs could then adjust their subs to their members and they could make a go of it and be able to survive?

Round of applause

Chief Executive:

Two answers to that. The President of the North London will confirm that a stepped rent offer has been made and where is the starting point?

Simon Dixon:

I think; wasn't it £14,000.

Chief Executive:

That is wrong; think again.

Simon Dixon:

Anyway the North London membership discarded it because it was seen to be unaffordable.

Nick Hinchliffe:

The North London membership weren't asked about it!!

Simon Dixon:

I'm sorry but they were.

Chief Executive:

And the second point is that in the specific case of the Artists, the Artists lease expired in 2011. The new rent will be dated to the 1st August 2014.

So in terms of stepping, there has actually been a considerable advantage accrued by the tenant by not having the new rent starting until 2½ years after the old lease finished.

Deitra Kimpton:

So, is that six years then that the Artists will have at the old rent then? Is that what you are confirming?

Chief Executive:

No. 1st August 2014.

Richard Vary:

Ross asked whether anyone had made a constructive suggestion as to how we deal with rents. I made a suggestion to the Chairman in a letter around Christmas time where I suggested that rather than spending our money on lawyers and courts doing all these things through the formal procedures, we first establish a Bisleys Rents Tribunal staffed by independent people in exactly the same way that we have a Disciplinary Tribunal for dealing with disciplinary offences.

If there is a disagreement between the tenants and the NRA, then the Rents Tribunal can determine what the rent is. If the Rents Tribunal has access to all of the rents paid by all of the clubs, which the NRA knows, then setting a rent for a particular club house is no different to setting your elevation for 800 yards when you already know your elevation for 900 and 600. And we can all do that to a fair degree of accuracy. It's not hard, it would save an awful lot of money if we stopped spending on lawyers, and I can tell you that – I am one of them. Let's stop spending money.

(round of applause)

Chief Executive:

The rent and the terms of the lease are already validated by an independent body before the leases are signed. That is what the Charity Trustees are obliged to do. They are obliged to seek the independent advice from a surveyor who produces a charity act report. And all of the leases, both the terms and the rent are independently assessed and they are checked against all the other rents being paid on the estate.

Chairman:

The problem that I had with your particular proposal, Richard, is that as I've said before, if we have a lot of people in the room who are members of the NRA they are all conflicted. They are either members of a club, or they're not members of a club. So they have a horse in the race.

They either want a large rent or they want a low rent. And therefore, you have to go to someone independent. We already go outside the membership to comply with Section 117 of the Charities Act. We conform to that, and have done so every time it's required.

Richard Vary:

My suggestion is we try it first. I'm not saying don't go outside if it doesn't work, but try it first.

Chief Executive:

A lease is considered, in Charity Law, as a disposal of a property. It is a property disposed of by a charity. The charity Trustees are obliged to seek independent advice to the terms of that disposal. It's not something that they might want to do, or they may choose to do – they are obliged to do it.

Mike Gregory:

Mike Gregory, Royal Air Force Target Rifle Club and North London Rifle Club.

We want to make a strategy for the future that will benefit shooting and all the members of the National Rifle Association. While it might be perfectly legal for the NRA to take over ownership of all the properties, and have a means of taking them back at relatively short notice if 12 months is indeed the case generally, but I ask as a vision for the future, what do we want our clubs to do? Do we want our clubs to develop their facilities, improve insulation, reduce heating costs, improve the comfort of members and the facilities that they can offer, not only to their own members, but to the 1000's of other NRA members who are not club members, but come to Bisley to shoot?

What incentive is there to invest in such facilities, if the NRA owns the property and can take it back just like that?

Chairman:

The Trustees are not making this up. We are fiduciaries and have to obey the law. English property law says that the club houses belong to the NRA. I can't change that. Sometimes I wish I could – wouldn't it be so much easier?

It is a fact that I cannot change. So what we have to do is to live within that. I am a fiduciary. I have a duty of trust to every single member of this association and I must make sure that when I make decisions, as do all of the rest of the Trustees, and also General Council when they are advising the Trustees, that we must be fair to every single member of this organisation.

I don't see why some club houses should get a better deal than others. It's just that simple. And so we have to set these rents at levels which yes, are affordable, but are also fair to all members of the Association, and between the clubs themselves.

Tim Webster:

I would like to put this whole thing into perspective. My name is Tim Webster, Central Bankers Rifle Club – and no relation.

Just take pause and look around you. We are in a brand new facility. Now we all know the NRA's not perfect but the fact is by one means or another, the improvements around the camp, the improvements in shooting generally throughout the country, have been fantastic.

You have an organisation here of volunteers and paid staff who at last are professional. They're turning in a surplus for your organisation, and they are then reinvesting that. If you want to take Bisley Camp for a start – I as a cyclist no longer fall into potholes because the roads have been improved. You have electronic targets which will become available widely shortly. You have a fantastic investment in the general infrastructure. The place is humming, it's going further and part of this whole arrangement is bringing the tenancy arrangements groaning into the current century!

I know it's tough, but just get with the programme. So, just be appreciative of the organisation and the people who run it, both volunteers and professionals, who are doing a great job to make this NRA a fantastic institution.

Thank you.

(hear hear – round of applause)

Chairman:

Thank you everybody. Look it's 10.45pm and we have already lost a number of cocktailers from the back.

I obviously have one more announcement to make before we close.

In the first stage of Her Majesty's The Queen's Prize 2017, which was shot today, there were 799 entries in the competition. The NRA bronze medal and an NRA bronze badge was won - with a score of 105.20v - by Emma Nuttall of ATSC.

(cheers & round of applause)

I'm told that she was pretty excited!

(laughter)

Well done, Emma.

And the final score to qualify for the second stage, to be shot on Friday afternoon, is 102.10v finishing with a 32.1v at 600 yards.

I bet that last count took a long time!

Thank you everybody and I wish you a fun evening.

(round of applause)

The meeting closed at 10.45pm