

NATIONAL RIFLE ASSOCIATION

Annual General Meeting

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting
held in the NRA Pavilion, Bisley on Saturday 25th May 2019 at 18.00

Present:

Chairman	Mr JGM Webster
Treasurer	Mr A Reynolds
Trustee	Mr D Lacey
Chief Executive	Mr A Mercer
Members	55 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 Chairman also proposed on behalf of Council that Tony Clayton and Dietmar Honersch of Germany be elected Vice Presidents.

Both Resolutions was approved.

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

The Resolution was approved.

SPEECHES AND OPEN FORUM

Attached as Annex.

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

Chairman

Annual General Meeting – 25th May 2019

Proceedings

Chairman:

Ladies and Gentlemen, welcome to the 2019 AGM.

Before we get to our agenda, I should mention that some of our members have passed away since we last met. Several were Vice Presidents; Haddon Donald of New Zealand, Richard van Lingen of South Africa and Jim Thompson of Canada. Also Ken Nash of the National Smallbore Rifle Association passed away recently; Ken was a long-standing Vice President of the NRA as well as his role with the NSRA.

So, if I may crave your indulgence, I'd like just to take a few moments of silence to remember them, and to remember all of those who cannot be here with us today.

Thank you very much.

Item one is the election of the President.

It is my very great pleasure to propose on behalf of the Council of the NRA, that His Royal Highness, The Prince of Wales be re-elected as our President.

All those in favour?

(Unanimous show of hands)

Any one against? *(none)*

Thank you very much.

Item two. There is no candidate for the Deputy President, so we'll move passed that and go straight to item three.

I'd like to take this in two sections, if I may.

One is that the existing Vice Presidents that are listed on the rear of the notice that you have are re-elected en-bloc.

I'd like to propose that on behalf of the Council.

All those in favour?

(Unanimous show of hands)

Anybody against? *(none)*

Thank you very much.

On behalf of Council I would like to propose two further candidates as Vice Presidents of our Association.

The first is Tony Clayton. To many of you, Tony needs no introduction. For those of you who don't know, Tony Clayton has, for the last 25 years, been the Chief Range Officer of the Imperial Target Rifle Meeting, either on Century and/or Stickledown. This is his last year.

Also he has variously been a member of the General Council of the NRA and heavily involved in cadet shooting, including being a commandant of an Athelings tour.

So I would like to propose on behalf of Council that he be elected a Vice President.

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

Anybody against?

(*none*)

Thank you.

The second candidate that the Council would like to put forward is Deitmar Honersch of Germany.

Dietmar has been involved in Gallery Rifle shooting with the BDMP for several decades and is widely credited with instigating competitive gallery rifle shooting in Germany. He has been the Gallery Rifle discipline rep for the BDMP for many years. He was also the manager of the popular Liettmar range which has regularly welcomed NRA pistol shooters to its facility.

He is a regular visitor to Bisley. He is an active competitor at the Phoenix and the Trafalgar Meetings and he is also the German Team Manager for the Gallery Rifle International that is about to take place.

This would be, I think, a first for our Association that a member of the BDMP become a Vice President, and I can think of no finer representative.

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

Anybody against?

(*none*)

Thank you very much. Our congratulations go to both Tony and Dietmar.

Item 4, the election of our Auditors. As you know, Haysmacintyre is the auditors of the NRA.

I propose on behalf of the Council that they be re-elected as our Auditors. They have expressed a willingness to stand.

All those in favour of re-electing Haysmacintyre as our auditors. (*unanimous show of hands*)

Anybody against?

(*none*)

Thank you very much.

Item 5. The Second Schedule amendment. I am going to ask David Lacey, a member of the Council to introduce this particular subject.

David Lacey:

Good afternoon. You will recall this has been raised at previous meetings with the desire to move away from a paper-based electoral system, to using a computerised, online system for various votes that we hold.

This is for two reasons. First there is a very significant cost to the Association with a postal ballot system. You will have all received voting papers for the current General Council meeting, there is the cost of printing all of that paper, posting it out to everybody and then of course the return postage to those who choose to vote in the election.

There is also an issue of increasing people's interest in these elections, with many of our younger members far more accustomed to doing everything online, and the thought of doing something by paper is seen as rather archaic.

I suspect every person in this room can tell me exactly where their local post box is for posting a letter, but I expect many of our younger members would have no idea what a post box looks like, let alone where to find it!

The wording that you have before you is a variation of the wording that was proposed at the previous meeting, taking into account the number of comments that were made at that meeting. That said, no drafting is perfect, if it was we wouldn't need judges and lawyers would be out of business, but the wording, I believe does take into account comments made at the previous meeting and I believe will assist the Association, both in terms of controlling costs, which means that money can then be spent on the ranges, which is personally where I'd rather it was spent, and also helping to get as many people as possible engaged in the voting process.

And I commend the wording to you and if there are any questions, Mr Chairman, is this an appropriate time to take questions on the wording?

Chairman:

Yes it is.

Unknown (from the floor):

Mr Chairman. On the agenda it says clearly Electronic Voting as per the amendment to the Second Schedule. But this is quite clearly an amendment to the rules of the Association that all communication to the membership is done by electronic means. Is that not right?

David Lacey:

Yes, that's right.

Unknown:

So therefore the agenda is either deceptive or inaccurate of release.

David Lacey:

I think the point is that I was focusing on the particular cost of elections where we send out paper. The member has quite properly pointed out that clause 16 actually allows us to use electronic means for a range of communications, not simply sending out voting papers. And that is absolutely correct.

Unknown:

Am I right – is the agenda wrong?

Paul Charlton:

The agenda item talks about voting.

Unknown:

The agenda is quite clear - electronic voting – per the attached amendment to the Second Schedule. And quite clearly, the amendment is not just that. It is everything, all communication will be done by electronic means, not just the voting.

David Lacey:

The point is true. The gentleman is absolutely right. This wording allows the Association to communicate by email with people, because that is what members want in many cases, and has significant cost benefit.

I have focused on the voting because we have just had electoral material sent out and the cost of that exercise was £9,000 which makes it particularly on topic right now. But the gentleman is quite correct in what he says it covers other things not just voting.

Gillian Kaile:

Does this rule out the very nice magazine that we get in some ways when it suggests “all”? Also has consideration been given to the birth rate decline in the age group from 16-26, and therefore your key point that the effect of the demographics for the UK is not likely to result in a younger group but an older group as years go on because the birth rate has dropped significantly in that group?

Chairman:

Are there any other questions?

Unknown:

Mr Chairman, my point is does this meeting wish to progress with this item on the agenda?

Chairman:

That’s what I am just about to ask.

Are there any other questions first?

Phil Northam:

Just a point on the wording. The word “may” is used significantly rather than ‘shall’. Why?

May to me is a very optional word, it’s a selective word that says you can do one or the other, whereas shall is a definitive word that says this is what you will do. This is written in a form that is non-demandable and non-definitive.

David Lacey:

Yes. So the use of the ‘may’ is to suggest an option – you may do this or you may not – shall is a prescriptive word – you shall do it. So for example, in 16b, Websites - the Association may establish and maintain a website. That is an option for the Association to do, it does not compel the Association to maintain a website.

So you are quite correct that if this wording was passed, and the NRA decided for some reason that it no longer wanted to maintain a website, it would have the option of not doing that.

Phil Northam:

OK.

Paul Charlton:

Sub-clause D at the end of it says if the Journal is published the Secretary General shall notify members promptly when each issue becomes available on the website. Does that mean that you published it on the website or that he communicates via email to each member?

David Lacey:

If it's only in electronic form, then there is an email to all members to say the Journal has been published, would you like to go and look at it on the website.

Paul Charlton:

But if it is in printed form, does that just mean you put it on the website that it's been printed?

David Lacey:

Or the electronic copy would be posted as it is now. I think if we had a printed form, I'm not sure why we wouldn't also put it on line.

Andrew Mercer:

We do.

David Lacey:

Since the full version is online anyway.

Nigel Wells:

Focusing on the Journal, I want to get hold of it and keep it in the hands and carry it around or leave it on the settee. I don't want it electronically.

Andrew Mercer:

And that is effectively our current plan. Trying to revise the Second Schedule is not an easy or straightforward exercise. So what we are just trying to do is build in flexibility for the future. As at this moment in time, we are committed to printed copies of the Journal, so that's what we do now and that's what we're planning to do.

If in the future that changes, this rule change will allow the Association to consider moving to electronic copies.

Nigel Wells:

That's why I'm saying we print the Journal, end of story. It doesn't go electronic. I've tried reading the papers online and I've failed miserably. I just can't get my head round it and I hate it. I've tried it on the iPad and I've tried it on the computer. If I get an NRA journal online the computer will be going out the window!

Iain Robertson:

I would like to raise essentially that point slightly differently. I understand that this facilitates an all-electronic journal. There are two points that arise from that, one of which has been answered, that there is currently no intention to take up that option.

The other one which concerns me slightly more, is presumably if the Journal were to go all-electronic, the notification scheme would have to follow the pattern for other notification schemes incorporated in this amendment, which is that those who have chosen not to communicate electronically, would have to be provided by some physical means with notification or access.

David Lacey:

Yes, they would get a notification that it was available online. So you would get a letter in the post that says the journal is available for you to read online. We are hoping very much that as more and more organisations, both charitable and non-charitable, move to electronic communication, that we can do the same thing, and enjoy the same benefits.

Equally, if the vote in the room is that you want to keep the existing paper-based system and that the cost to the Association is worth it, then that is a decision for the members.

Charles Dickenson:

Just for clarification, Rule 16, how much of that already exists, and how much of it is actually being amended as a result of the intention of going electronic?

David Lacey:

I don't believe there is any reference in the current Second Schedule to electronic communication, given that at the time it was written, I doubt there were even computers!

Charles Dickenson:

So this is a completely new section, covering all aspects.

Andrew Mercer:

It is.

David Lacey:

Basically everything to do with electronic communication has been brought into the one place, rather than trying to stitch it through the whole Second Schedule.

Charles Dickenson:

That just helps to clarify the question, the fact that the Second Schedule on the agenda, just refers to electronic voting, it doesn't actually refer to the whole of Rule 16, which is the comment made originally.

Neville Stebbings:

There was a point made before about the use of the word 'may' and I accept to some extent, the reason that was given. But I think it is still far too woolly.

Personally, I am a great fan of electronic communication, but I think as far as polling and voting is concerned, it should be reinforced in some way and it should say that voting will be done electronically, unless there are grounds not to, which gives the NRA the option then under certain circumstances to withdraw from that.

But it is my belief that voting should be electronic because that then makes it far, far easier for people around the country to take part and participate in the running of the organisation into which they pay their membership fee.

As you can see from the number of people here tonight, out of a membership of just short of 10,000, not many have made it.

I would also say that in terms of the Journal, I think the journal should be available electronically, but I accept the point that not a lot of people like reading electronic communications. I'm the same, and therefore I would probably opt to have it in print.

You could consider offering people a slightly reduced membership if they opt to take electronically and not to have it in print.

In relation to the electronic voting, you should also give members, if we go down the route of electronic voting, the option to opt out of electronic voting as well. I know that will create some issues in terms of management, but they are not insurmountable. But there are some people who don't like using computers, can't use computers, don't have a computer and you can't disenfranchise them by going to a system which isn't available for everybody.

Nevertheless, it is my firm belief that electronic voting is the way forward and that's the way that it should be done, except for those people who opt out.

David Lacey:

And that point was indeed made last year and has been taken into account in 16e.

Neville Stebbings:

I don't think this is worded correctly now. I think it gives too many options for the NRA not to do it, and I'd like to see the wording amended.

Chairman:

The last sentence, 16e, says the Association must send to each member who has not provided an address for electronic communication upon request by that member, a voting paper in accordance with Rule 9(e)iii, which is by post.

Neville Stebbings:

All I'm saying is that I think people should, as far as possible, be allowed to vote electronically, that is the way forward, but there needs to be more options.

Chairman:

I think that is provided for, because that was the essential debate that we had, not last year, but two years ago in this room. And we actually had that debate and said we have to keep paper means, otherwise we disenfranchise people.

Neville Stebbings:

I'm really pleased to hear that, but I just think the wording allows too much latitude on the part of the NRA.

Chairman:

I'm sorry, but precisely what latitude? It says the Association MUST send to those people a voting paper by post if they don't want to get it electronically.

Neville Stebbings:

It means they don't have to do electronic voting and you can just send people voting papers.

Chairman:

But that was the point.

Neville Stebbings:

We want to have electronic voting apart from those few people who don't want to do it. What we don't do is give you carte blanche not to do it. That's the whole point.

Chairman:

The last time that we were in this room talking about this, that very point was made; we wanted to go to electronic voting and by doing so we were going to disenfranchise those people who don't.

Neville Stebbings:

So you just offer those people who don't want to do it, the option to opt out.

Chairman:

And that is what it says.

Neville Stebbings:

I'm not happy with the word may. It gives too much....

Chairman:

It says 'must'. The Association must send to each person.....

Neville Stebbings:

It must send a paper form out to those people who ask for it.

Chairman:

Who have not provided an email address.

Neville Stebbings:

Right, OK. Well, let me ask this in a different way then.

Are you going to go to electronic voting.

Chairman:

I really hope so.

Neville Stebbings:

Good.

Can I also make one final point of view in relation to the printed version of the Journal? If you've got four people living in the same house who are all members of the NRA, why do you send them four copies of the Journal. It must be expensive!

Andrew Mercer:

What would be very helpful is if four members in the same household are receiving four copies, it would be really good if one of them could contact the Membership Department and alert them to that fact, with a little note to say out of the four of us, this is the only one who wants it, and we will be very pleased to address that.

Martin Osment:

Can I put forward what I hope are constructive suggestions. If, para 5 of the agenda becomes electronic communication, rather than electronic voting, then to turn over the page to clause 16a, change to email any electoral communication and then down at point b - Journal, the Association may publish the Journal in both printed and electronic form.

I would suggest that with those minor changes it ought to be much more acceptable.

Chairman:

We can't change the amendment without coming back to this meeting. So we have to take this amendment as it is.

Steve Wallis:

This is a significant step forward, so to do so would do so would be the right direction.

John Bloomfield:

Can I just try and clarify things a little, Mr Chairman?

First of all, as I understand it, the intention is we are going to go to electronic voting if this amendment is passed. Is that correct?

Chairman:

That is correct.

John Bloomfield:

The second thing is, it removes the anomaly from two years ago where those who did not register for electronic voting, i.e. we haven't got an email for them, would have been disenfranchised under that system. This proposal removes that.

Chairman:

That is correct.

John Bloomfield:

The third thing is, at the moment we cannot use electronic voting at all. So, is it not better to say, yes we are going to use electronic voting, that is the intention, that is what this enables us to do, and the rest of the dispute over 'may' and 'shall' is little more than nit-picking.

Chairman:

Thank you. I think that is the general direction in which we are heading.

Phil Northam:

Just a couple of points.

The Journal to many people is a collector's item. So I understand those that want physical copies. I get two, no problem with that. One for the club and one for me. The one for the club I send round, leave it in the caravan, leave it in the armoury. It reaches other people.

Whilst I'm quite happy with electronic voting, I believe that any notice of a vote must be a deliberate act. It must be sent to be received. We've had some communications of late which were published and assumed to have been received and read. And that doesn't work in the same way.

So in my opinion if you are going to send out something calling for a vote, that should be an email, it should be a letter, and it should be on the web, and on the Facebook page, and it should be the Journal if necessary. It should be deliberately sent out.

Andrew Mercer:

The thing is, if you are saying that every time there is a vote, we need to write to every person that we are going to be balloting telling them that there is a ballot and to expect an email, and we are supposed to do that by letter, it rather defeats the object.

Phil Northam:

No, email should be the primary means to do that now. People should be able to elect.

Derek Lowe:

Paragraph e proposes exactly that.

Iain Robertson:

I'm aware that we have done a great deal of work on electronic communications over the last couple of years or so. Do we have an idea of what the success rate of sending emails to the membership is? This metric can be measured.

Andrew Mercer:

The short answer is it depends. It depends as to what the message is and who you send it to.

Iain Robertson:

I mean in the technical sense, the email gets there and doesn't bounce.

Andrew Mercer:

I think we are well into the 90's. I think 90%. We use the email addresses that members provide us, They are pretty robust and pretty reliable.

David Mumford:

I'm sorry, I have horrid feeling you are going to ask us to vote in a minute. The Second Schedule item 5 on the agenda quite clearly says Electronic Voting. And as pointed out, the supporting document at the back uses the word Communication which is a hell of a difference. It takes everything in. Are we talking about voting, or are we talking about everything?

Chairman:

We are talking about communication for this amendment to the Second Schedule. If the current labelling bothers anyone, we will delay it by another 12 months and spend another £18,000. Does it bother anyone?

Andrew Mercer:

Please note that the actual paper came with the agenda. So if you think that the agenda is in some respects misleading, you just needed to turn over the page and see what it actually said on the amendment to see what was actually being proposed.

Paul Charlton:

I don't recall receiving the papers.

Andrew Mercer:

It was published.

Unknown:

Where was it published?

Andrew Mercer:

On the website. We don't send out a copy of the AGM by post to all members.

Unknown:

You don't even do it by email – why not?

Andrew Mercer:

We don't do it by email because GDPR has wreaked havoc on our ability to communicate by email and, more importantly, you have the problem you are not reaching everybody.

So we post it to the website, we post it on the noticeboard. We follow the Second Schedule in terms of how we communicate the notice for the Annual General Meeting.

Chairman:

If you pass this amendment, we will be able to send it by email.

Gillian Kaile:

I think you have just picked the nub of the thing.

You will need permission to ask the members to open their email where on the whole they allow post.

What we've done with another body is to send an important email to our members that have allowed that, but we've monitored it; how many of our members opened it, because most people at least open their post; and then we monitored how long they actually stayed on that email. And that was only allowed to go out to the small proportion of our members allowed.

So a) you have to have the email to notify the voting, just to send it out to say there is a vote, b) they have to open it, which unfortunately with the mass of emails most of us get, is a relatively small proportion, and then c) it has to be opened long enough when they see it for them to actually take any notice of them.

And unless you have tried those three, this will probably, and got the results back which you can easily by computer monitoring when presenting under your steering committee, there is no note to say what your proposed success rate for this is. And I can speak as somebody who's done it, and unfortunately, it is not just demographic, but is not over the board of people as successful as you might hope.

So many people have gone to email, the first thing somebody does is to put them in the junk box. When you actually get a message through the door, it tends to be opened. So it's a weigh-up. How much more do we want to pay to have more democracy? Because at the moment the email system for voting is not coming out very well.

Chairman:

Let me just understand what you have said.

At the moment, we send everybody a letter. So now we are going to send them an email unless they choose to have a letter.

Gillian Kaile:

Saying that there is going to be a voting process, perhaps on the web. But the communication is poor.

Chairman:

That is my point. If they consider it to be poor, they could still get the letter.

Gillian Kaile:

They have to actually understand it and opt that is a very tiny percentage of people who know how to do that.

Chairman:

If they want to get an email instead of a letter, they elect to do that. If they don't elect to do that, they still get a letter.

If they then choose to ignore the email that they've elected to get, that is their fault. I think none of us would be prepared to forego the substantial savings available for people not to be disenfranchised in such a way,

Richard Stebbings:

I was pretty much going to say what you just said. This doesn't take away post, it just gives me the choice to have it electronically instead. It's a 600 mile round trip for me to come here for a meeting.

Neville Stebbings:

Just one comment on the failed communications. I know what you are talking about, but you may well find that those people who open their envelope and it will be a high proportion, fail to do anything about it because they are not interested. So while I accept what you say, I'm not convinced necessarily that the impact on the returns would be as great as you think.

In my experience with marketing communications, if you get a 5% return on a marketing communication, you are doing extremely well. Whether we would expect to get a higher return on the email for other purposes, perhaps you could tell us what the response is to the written communication is. Have you got any idea what percentage return you get from members?

Andrew Mercer:

We've sent out 9200 ballot papers. I would expect to get in somewhere between 1,500 and 2,000.

Gillian Kaile:

That is way above any email percentage. That's massive.

Neville Stebbings:

Remember we're not talking about marketing communications, we're talking about voting communications.

Iain Robertson:

Just as an exemplar on that, some years ago the Association ran an electronic survey on the reasons for people attending or not attending the Imperial Meeting. I was intimately involved in making that happen. The response rate was of the order of 25%.

Steve Wallis:

I had a conversation with Andrew yesterday, because until somebody pointed out to me that there was an AGM today, I had missed that fact and suggested to him that it might have been helpful to email people. GDPR was used as an excuse not to.

Can I ask then, why I can get spammed by the Phoenix Meeting emails which I get on a regular basis, and I haven't opted into, but you can't email me to say the AGM is on today.

Chairman:

I know that we could email you to say the AGM is on, it just has not been standard practice. This would certainly enable it.

John Bloomfield:

I think the other fact, Mr Chairman, is that as the Second Schedule stands at the moment, it requires the notice of the AGM to be published in the Journal. It was published in the Winter Journal.

Chairman:

So I don't know why you are getting the spam from the Phoenix Meeting.

Steve Wallis:

I didn't opt into it but I get it.

Chairman:

If there are no further questions the proposal is we adopt this amendment to our Second Schedule.

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

Anyone against (*none*)

The proposal is carried.

Thank you very much.

Item 6.

We will follow our normal procedure.

I am pleased that we are able to report continued growth in the number of people involved in shooting activities, both at Bisley and across the country, as well as continued capital investment in facilities for shooting.

Our Annual Report was published before Easter and outlines our financial position. Our new treasurer, Andrew Reynolds - welcome, Andrew, to your first AGM as our Treasurer - will follow me to review this, and then Andrew will present the Chief Executive's report.

But before we do that, there are a number of items that I am pleased to share with you. Our membership continues to grow; it rose from 8,505 to 9,209 in calendar 2018, which is an increase of 704. 1,027 people applied for membership in 2018 and we have received, according to Georgina as of yesterday, 452 applications for new membership so far this year, which is an average of around 100 a month.

This level of membership applications is the result of a lot of hard work from many people, and is of course essential to the growth of shooting activities in the country. It has obviously put pressure on the system, both on our membership team and our training team as the number of probationary members grows in step. 1,145 members completed a probationary course in 2018; which is more than 5 times what it was 5 years ago. In addition, the membership team have issued 12,926 Shooter Certification cards since taking on this

task. 11,546 of those cards have been issued to non-NRA members who are members of NRA affiliated clubs. So together with the 9,200 or so full NRA members, it means there are well over 20,000 shooters around the country actively involved in fullbore shooting at Bisley and MoD Ranges, in addition to those of course who shoot on ranges where no Shooter Certification card is required.

So I would like to pay particular tribute to the Membership Team, led by Georgina Thatcher, and the Training Team, led by David Camp, for successfully managing that growth.

Range use at Bisley by members and by corporate users also continues to grow. Range use by individuals and clubs is up 17% this year alone. And this is where the rubber meets the road so to speak, but this increasing demand means that we must continue to look to new solutions to increase capacity on the ranges.

One answer clearly lies with electronic targets; and these are proving to be very popular for range bookings. We continue to expand our use of these and introduced a further butt on Century Range last year, but more will have to be done. The current echelon shooting arrangement on Century Range means that many targets go unused in order to provide the necessary safe separation of shooters. So, in 2020, on busy days shooting on Century Range will take place at a single distance, or with everybody falling back at the same time, so that all targets can be used. These new procedures will greatly increase the range capacity and mean that more people than ever can enjoy the facilities at Bisley.

Cost and management of our ranges will become increasingly important as we seek to maximise the capacity that we have for the benefit of everybody. This is a big part of our decision that the National Shooting Centre Ltd, the NRA's trading subsidiary, should take over the sporting clays facilities on Cottesloe Heath and Long Siberia following the end of the licence of the current operator. It is undeniable that sporting clays can be a lucrative business and that income will help the NRA pursue its charitable objectives. But the operational flexibility of having this land under the control and management of the NSC will help ensure that the use of our ranges is maximised, again contributing to our charitable objectives.

We are committed to continuing our existing investment and maintenance programmes throughout the current 3-year plan. And all the while we will aim to keep prices for membership, training and shooting flat in real terms wherever possible, and continue to provide subsidies to encourage younger shooters.

Not everything is positive however – it hardly ever is. The social and political backdrop for shooting remains very challenging; mass shootings such as in Christchurch, New Zealand earlier in the year add to already negative perceptions. We have yet to hear whether shooting, and particularly full-bore shooting, will be part of the Commonwealth Games in Birmingham in 2022. The Offensive Weapons Bill that gained Royal Assent earlier this month introduces new prohibitions on self-unloading rifles. The NRA has been closely involved throughout on these two issues, and were successful in removing the prohibition on .50 cal shooting. But whilst seeking to protect the breadth of shooting activities available in this country, we must sometimes choose to come across as sensible and pragmatic, rather than strident and entrenched.

It is therefore all the more disappointing that much of what I and the other Trustees have had to deal with has been generated, not by the regulators or other third parties, but by our own members. The most obvious of these is Rents, where those who think we have been unfair have complained to the Charity Commission. The Charity Commission have yet to conclude their investigation, but they did write to me on the 7th February on this particular issue and said:

“We have previously advised that the support of non-charitable shooting clubs is not in itself charitable. NRA tenants and affiliated clubs are not themselves established for charitable purposes so we expect tenants to be charged at full rent. It does not fall within the purposes of NRA to support and subsidise its tenants.”

I hope, once and for all, that this puts this particular issue to bed.

Before I hand over to our new Treasurer, I would like to end by thanking my fellow Trustees, some of whom are here in the room, and Andrew Mercer and his staff for all their energy, enthusiasm and hard work over the past 12 months. I would particularly like to mention the contributions of three Trustees who retired in 2018; Richard Baillie, who made a very significant contribution to addressing real estate policy issues, Mik Maksimovic, whose brainchild, the F Class European Championships, now attracts almost 300 competitors each September, and Derek Lowe, who took on the Treasurer role in 2013 when it was something of a poisoned chalice. The results since speak for themselves.

Andrew; over to you, sir.

Andrew Reynolds, Treasurer:

Thank you.

Good evening.

As the incoming Treasurer, I would also like to express my thanks and gratitude to Derek for his tireless efforts in this role over the last 6 years. He has helped to steer the NRA from the turbulence of restructuring to the relative calm the charity currently enjoys.

Maintaining continuity of knowledge and expertise is important in the management body and I am glad to see that Derek is seeking an ongoing role within General Council.

In the year to December 2018, the NRA has performed steadily, with total consolidated income rising 4% year on year to £6.2 million, producing net income excluding gains and losses on investments of £79,000. This has resulted in the group's net assets increasing to £8.5 million.

The year-end cash balance of £700,000 is comfortably above the minimum target balance of £250,000 set in the 2018-2020 Strategic & Development Review. The slight negative net current asset position reflects, to a large extent, the receipt of advance membership and rent payments, totaling £1.1 million, which at the year-end are treated as deferred liabilities.

Net cash from operating activities of £581,000 was broadly the same as the previous year despite the £50,000 year on year decline in net income. This reflects a £60,000 reduction in net working capital and of course an ongoing sizeable depreciation charge of £0.5 million, a non-cash expense.

Combined, this enabled the NRA to fund capital expenditure during the year of £488,000 and pay maintenance costs of £390,000, in line with the strategic targets of £500,000 and £400,000 respectively.

Looking ahead, organic growth in the 2019 budget is largely centered on the full opening of the Pavilion facility, the timing of which will drive the updated full year forecast which we will have around the mid-year.

As Treasurer, an overarching theme for me over the coming years will be to continue to support decisions which will build the charity's reserve base sufficient to both weather unforeseen problems and allow us to be in a position to capitalize on new opportunities. This however, must be done in conjunction with the ongoing need to simultaneously fund investment in the NRA's initiatives around the country, as well as maintaining and developing the facilities and services at the ranges which enable the NRA to fulfill its charitable objective of promoting marksmanship in the United Kingdom.

These aims will only be achieved with a collective recognition that the NRA operates for its public charitable purposes.

The Trustees therefore, in line with the Charity Commission's public benefit guidance, continue to consider it both fair and necessary that shooters are not subsidized for what it costs to deliver the goods and services that we consume.

My second thematic aim for my tenure will be on governance. The NRA has become a mature and stable institution and this gives the managing body the opportunity to focus on continually improving financial control.

As the NRA grows, so too should its processes which ensure that management information and oversight reflect good practice. This will be a key project on my part.

Finally, as I commend these accounts to the general meeting and hand over to the Secretary General, I would invite you all to show your appreciation to the Finance team who make an invaluable contribution to the sound financial management of the Association.

Thank you and thanks to them.

(round of applause)

Andrew Mercer – Chief Executive:

Ladies and Gentlemen

I am grateful to both the Chairman and Treasurer for their reports of our activities and some achievements in 2018.

The year proved a mixed bag for the shooting community. Our efforts challenging the iniquitous prohibitions contained in the Offensive Weapons Bill yielded both modest success and absolute failure.

We succeeded in marshalling a good number of the shooting community behind the cause of saving .50" calibres; well-reasoned and carefully targeted arguments persuaded enough MPs to support our campaign, and .50" calibres were saved, at least for now.

We failed completely to save MARS and lever release rifles; the challenge to overcome shooting friendly politicians' concerns that these rifles were semi-automatics in all but a name proved very difficult. It is fair to say that internet videos of enthusiastic MARS and lever release shooters demonstrating the rate of fire of their rifles did not help our cause.

At times it appears to me that the greatest threats to shooting sit inside rather than outside of our tent. Our passion for our sport sometimes strays outside the realms of rationality.

I can quote one example; one enthusiastic proponent of MARS rifles wrote to his MP, copying me, explaining what carnage he could achieve using a moderated .22 rim fire semi-automatic rifle at two pre-prep schools and a kindergarten located at the end of the road where he lived. He graphically described how, and I quote, “a shot to the head would enter the skull and rather than exiting to the other side (as a higher calibre weapon would), it would ricochet back and forth inside”. This description was intended to persuade the MP to oppose the firearms prohibitions in the Offensive Weapons Bill.

Shooting will struggle to gain support from those who govern us and garner positive PR when we have such views being expounded from within the shooting community.

One of the many lessons we have learnt in the Offensive Weapons process is that it is usually far too late to start a fight when the matter has reached Parliament. We need to engage in the debate at a much earlier stage in the process with licensing police, the Home Office and other bodies.

To this end we have recently started discussions with the Home Office on matters including miniature rifle range exemptions that are very much under consideration at the moment, and compensation arrangements for MARS and lever release rifles.

Away from Bisley there is greater scrutiny on the activities on private ranges, and we are investing increasing resources providing both technical and practical advice to range operators. These are both clubs and private individuals. I was particularly pleased last year to welcome to Bisley three new range operators; we hope a tour of our ranges gave them each an insight into the practical operations that turn the technical build programme into an efficient and enjoyable range complex for target shooters.

On another subject, managing the NRA's relationship with the MoD is interesting; we are blessed with a long history of positive engagement but cannot rely solely on this to ensure continuing access to MoD ranges for our affiliated clubs. We need to respect the MoD's rules, regulations and indeed ethos, and ensure that civilian shooting continues to be viewed as a safe and remunerative activity conducted by responsible clubs and individuals.

We have also been active lobbying for shooting to be included in the 2022 Birmingham Commonwealth Games. Last December Bisley was proposed as the preferred venue for all shooting disciplines. The decision as to which additional sports will be added to the games programme was promised in January but further deadlines have come and gone without any decision being confirmed.

The additional sports will require additional funding from central government; it is hard however, not to surmise that the febrile state of politics at present are proving a distraction to making a decision.

On a brighter note, 2019 is a very busy year at Bisley for the NRA, we have to deliver a successful 150th Imperial, we've recently opened the new Pavilion café and kitchen, we are getting towards the end of constructing an additional 39 serviced caravan pitches on Waldegrave site. We are having a significant amount of work generated managing the consequences resulting from noise complaints, some from within the camp, others from outside. And of course, as the Chairman has already mentioned, we are furiously planning the execution of the management of Cottesloe Heath and Long Siberia ranges.

Thank you for your attention; I will now hand back to the Chairman

Chairman:

Thank you Andrew.

Before I open the floor to questions, I'd like to ask John Bloomfield to step forward. We are well aware of some concerns amongst the Target Rifle community about the concerns around the 2019 GGG ammunition which has just arrived.

So John has volunteered to give a short update to the meeting on progress into our investigation.

John Bloomfield:

Thank you Chairman.

As has been said, we are well aware of the problems that some people are reporting and I'll come back to that in a minute. And there is a fairly large-scale investigation going on which includes myself, Tom Rylands, whom I must thank, and who has picked up a great deal of the donkey work on this, LEI, who are the suppliers of the ammunition in the UK, and GGG who are the manufacturers, and Fergus Flanagan who is currently an under-graduate at Cambridge University, who has been very helpful in bouncing some ideas off.

So I would personally like to thank them for the assistance that they have given.

I don't want to get into the detail of the investigation, because it is still by no means complete, and the problem with giving, how should we put it, interim reports and interim updates is that things may change, and then you have been given the wrong information, and that I do not want to do.

Just to try and put things in context first of all, we have sold so far, 43,000 rounds of this ammunition. Out of that, we estimate a reported, correctly reported number of failures, not more than 30, and some of those inevitably are multiple failures of the same weapon.

It is extremely difficult to get solid figures from this for two reasons; one is that people do not report that they have had a problem, and the second thing is when people do say something, the internet variably inflates it far beyond its actual happening.

One example of that is the rumour that has gone around this week, that Fultons had sold out of the 10 extractors that they possessed. This is rather difficult in the fact they only had two in the first place. So you can tell the sort of inflating that is going on.

Inevitably, some of that is not deliberate. It is the fact that X has heard it from Y and Y has heard it from Z and so therefore they both report it, so instead of one incident, you get three.

So, the numbers failing are actually quite small and they are divided between Barnard actions and RPAs. We've not heard of any failures with any other actions, except one Grunig, which in the opinion of three gunsmiths that have looked at it, there is a chamber problem with that particular rifle.

So, divided between the two, the Barnards, very largely, have suffered from the problem that when you pull the trigger, on occasion, the extractor becomes slightly displaced in its seating in the bolt. And the effect of that is when you open the bolt, it will open perfectly easily, but you will not be able to withdraw it back, because the extractor jams on the lug inside the bolt.

Sometimes, with a bit of fiddling, you can get it to re-seat itself, or come out altogether, and you can then re-use the rifle. Other times it is a gunsmith's job to take the barrel out, remove the extractor from where it is lodged, and then you can get the bolt open.

The RPA extractors have broken in two places, and they break rather than stop working. They either break at the bottom near the pivot pin on the back of them, or the top of the claw comes off.

When an RPA extractor breaks, the only thing that the shooter suffers from is a certain amount of inconvenience in that the rifle needs rodding out for the rest of the shoot. He can continue his shoot. The Barnard problem means he cannot always do so.

We are therefore looking at a solution to the Barnard problem, and we think at the moment, we have a partial solution, and we are investigating that further.

Hopefully, we will be able to resolve that and before too long, advise people on how to get that particular problem sorted out.

The RPA extractor problems that they break; that is the end of the matter. You have to have a new one fitted. But the rifle will remain useable, albeit with a certain amount of inconvenience.

Those of you in the room that go back as far as I do, will remember the endless tales of broken Swing extractors from years ago, with which people coped with aplomb, apart from myself who was woken up regularly at 6am to replace at least two or three on a daily basis in those days.

So in context, it is a problem, but it's a relatively minor problem, and we hope to have a resolution for it as soon as we can.

There are no safety issues with any of the ammunition that we have seen. It has been tested for pressure by the manufacturer, GGG, and comes out exactly where we would expect it. It has been tested for pressure by the Birmingham Proof House, and is within the two limits that we are set, which is within the barrels of the specification that we use, and the CIP barrel, and the Birmingham Proof House has given us a report on that and it complies with what is required.

So far as the rest of the cartridge is concerned, it complies, so far as we can tell at the moment, with all the dimensional requirements. So it complies with the CIP drawings and the SAAMI drawings which are very similar, so it is within the specification dimensionally and so far as the brass is concerned, that complies with the Stanag Military specification. CIP and SAAMI do not specify the brass; Stanag do, and whilst Stanag's specification is not published, I have a copy of it, I have the reports from the manufacturer, and it is completely and clearly compliant.

What is causing the elongation of the cases, at the moment, we do not know. We have a number of theories and we are working towards trying to come up with an answer that we will be able to give you in due course.

The final thing I would like to say is, it clearly shoots extremely well. So the problem of last year appears to have gone away. And to give you an example of that, last weekend a far less than full strength England team shot a national match course, and the members of the team, who were mostly youngsters, shot a national match course and made the third highest score on record for that course, even allowing for the smaller targets that we introduced in January this year.

Paul Charlton:

It is also worth noting that it was on a smaller target.

John Bloomfield:

That's exactly what I just said.

So clearly, the problem that we suffered last year has been sorted and resolved. There is a bit more reporting that I will make in due course on that. It has simply been put to one side to deal with the immediate problem, which is trying to resolve the extractor issues with this year's ammunition.

Thank you very much.

Chairman:

Thank you.

Well I throw the meeting open to the membership and the floor.

John Kynoch – British Sporting Rifle Club:

I refer to the current intention of Andrew Mercer, not to renew the current 21 year lease of the British Sporting Rifle Club and the British Sporting Rifle complex which terminates at the end of this month.

My question is in two parts.

Is it the intention of the Trustees to foster a broad church of well run and differing disciplines as being the best option of achieving the Associations objectives and, specifically, to foster that of the sporting rifle with its running boar and running deer, the latter going back to the second meeting at Wimbledon, making it the oldest rifle shooting discipline of the NRA.

The BSRC was founded 100 years later in 1960 to save the Running Deer from oblivion, and has done so rather well. And now it's stores a uniquely different world-first double diagrammed electronic moving target scoring system.

If the answer to this question is yes, which I hope and believe it should be, will the Trustees make it their business to ensure that Andrew Mercer, who as far as I know has never observed the operation of our ranges in any detail, and he has only recently to have understood that it is a feature of moving target shooting that only one person can shoot at a time, that this be done properly and due diligence be done properly to convince the Trustees that he can muster and pay for a very considerable input of both expert and other hitherto voluntary labour that will be necessary to keep the complex running, so that he might earn more from that area for the Association, rather than by a fair rent, completely trouble free to the NRA, that would arise from the renewal of the BSRC lease.

Chairman:

Thank you, and John kindly gave us a copy of the question. So let me answer the first part first and I shall probably turn to Andrew for the second.

So there are eight disciplines and twelve sub-disciplines under the National Governing Body, the NRA's, aegis and Sporting Rifle is one of those.

And so it is important to us that it is seen to continue. So I think the essential answer to your first question is yes.

I think the issue is going to come to "control of the ranges" and control and management of the ranges that are part the facility here. You and I have had an ex-parte conversation before this meeting, but I think I should share this with everybody because I think everybody should hear it.

Clearly, we feel as a charity that we can only fulfil our objects if we have the full control and management of this facility.

There has been much noise about taking the sporting clays activities back in house. Actually clay shooting is deemed by the Charity Commission to be a non-charitable activity. But even so, taking it back inside into our trading company allows us the flexibility to manage Cottesloe Heath and Long Siberia to the full effect of all the members of the NRA, and to the full effect of fullbore shooting. The result is we will not be limited to 83 days of shooting on the right hand side of Stickledown every year for example.

So having the full management of all of the ranges on the footprint of Bisley Camp is important. The decision that will then apply to the lease for the British Sporting Rifle Club,

will quite clearly fall under that policy, but because it is one of those eight full disciplines, and/or twelve sub-disciplines, it will come to the full Council as it should. It is on our agenda for our June Trustee meeting which is to be held in mid June.

Andrew Mercer:

It is a fair point, am I an expert in the machinations of what happens on the British Sporting Rifle Club range, do I understand in fine detail what happens, how it happens, how the courses of fire operate? No I don't.

You can say I'm equally ignorant on pretty much every single discipline that the NRA is involved in.

What is very clear to me is that with growing demand on our ranges, we need to have greater access to ranges, and I think the British Sporting Rifle Club is in a unique position of all our tenants, on being the licensee of an integral part, an important part of the fullbore range complex at Bisley.

All of our clubs and all of our tenants are special, but I think the British Sporting Rifle Club is a particular peculiar and important decision to get right.

I've no intention of going through the offers and counter offers that have flown back and forth between myself, negotiating on behalf of the NRA, and my colleagues and the British Sporting Rifle Club, and at the moment there is clearly some distance between us.

I think there are two issues. I think there is one, the Trustees and the Chairman and indeed me and my staff, are firmly of the view that we are keen that Sporting Rifle as a discipline remains at Bisley, and that is an explicit instruction that I have that I carry with me from the Trustees. So, yes, I'm under a clear instruction to ensure that Sporting Rifle remains at Bisley.

But that is a different question as to who should be the range operator on the British Sporting Rifle complex.

There are complexities, understandable complexities, to running the British Sporting Rifle range complex.

But my firm belief, and more importantly, the belief of my technical staff, is that it poses a different, but not unachievable, technical challenge compared to any of the other ranges that we operate here at Bisley.

Steve Wallis:

In terms of your staff's abilities, and this isn't intended to be a derisive comment, I had an instance recently which you are aware of, with Rick Wells telling me that "his staff were itinerate" when it comes to being able to paste up a target properly to shoot at this weekend, have you got any idea of the complexity of pasting up a running deer target properly.

If your target shed staff cannot paste up a bog-standard A0 photo onto a piece of corex, they stand absolutely no chance whatsoever of correctly pasting a Running Deer target onto a board.

Andrew Mercer:

I think the conversation that you allude to actually was a lively conversation, as I understand it, with two strong minded individuals, who were both challenging each other as to what they knew, what they understood.

So I would, in some respects, discount what was quite a lively discussion.

Are my staff capable of running electronic targets? Yes they are.

Steve Wallis:

That wasn't the question I asked. The question was are they capable of pasting a target on properly, given that the aiming points are specific.

Andrew Mercer:

Are you capable?

Steve Wallis:

I'm not, no. But there are people who are.

Andrew Mercer:

There are human beings that are based at Bisley who are capable of doing this task are there not?

John Kynoch:

Yes there are. They are all BSRC members.

Andrew Mercer:

So it is not impossible to imagine other human beings cannot be trained to do the same, is it?

Steve Wallis:

It is not impossible, but given the comment that Rick made to me, I'm asking you the question.

Chairman:

I think the point is made.

Nick Thomas, BSRC Chairman:

Andrew and I are very much in dialogue as he has alluded to.

One of the issues I have got, because we have at great length gone to print as well on the complexities of the range, we've made it quite clear that it is a complex range to run and there are difficulties.

At this moment, I am not aware, given that your staff have said that they are perfectly capable of running it, that none of them have approached us, or even looked at what happens on the range.

Added to that, I have grave concerns because in the last 5 months we have been having our range inspections, which apparently we should have been having since the beginning of our lease, 21 years ago. These were re-started in December and to date the stories and the things that I get personally through on range inspections, leave me to believe that those people that are doing range inspections have no idea what they are doing, to the extent where this month we have been asked to put some yellow paint around a hole and been asked to cover up a hole where a flagpole goes.

We have been asked to shorten the run on the Running Boar which would not comply with ISF regulations.

It patently shows that the people who are looking at it are either not interested, because they have not approached us to ask, or really just don't understand.

And that is really of grave, grave concern for the future. Because if I thought that the NRA could run it successfully, I would go back to the membership and say this is the best route. And I would offer that up, but at the moment I cannot do that based on evidence that I have seen and experienced myself.

I do not believe that the NRA are capable of successfully running the Sporting Rifle complex.

John Rossiter:

Could I just say, the targets of which we spoke, they were built for us and that range complex. I think the first thing your guys will ask is where is the handbook, where is the manual.

There isn't any!

You've got to learn it from scratch and the only people who know how to do it are BSRC members. Will they tell you?

You'll have to ask them nicely!

Chairman:

That is the institutional problem that the policy is trying to correct.

David Morris:

I am also a member of the British Sporting Rifle Club.

Thinking more in practical terms as an ordinary member, I turn up and shoot and nine times out of ten the targets work. But there is a tenth of occasion where you need to go down and maintain them during the course of the day.

If you take over the control of the range of the NRA, does this mean that we have to approach you to bring one of your operatives down to fix the problem, because as we are only hiring the range we can't do it ourselves, because it is not our equipment?

Chairman:

Clearly to be determined. It depends on what we decide.

David Morris:

Then the point being that if that is still to be determined, there is no reason why the BSRC members cannot control or look after the range themselves.

Andrew Mercer:

So is it your assertion that the only people capable of ever running the British Sporting Rifle Club range complex is the British Sporting Rifle Club membership?

(No)

That's good enough. The answer no is fine.

David Morris:

That is not the full answer! Can I give a full answer?

Chairman:

Yes you may.

David Morris:

Because it wasn't a yes or no answer! The full answer is, at the moment I don't think it is possible for anybody who hasn't had training from the BSRC to run that range safely or successfully, because not only do you have shooting considerations to take account of, the machinery itself can be dangerous.

The sporting rifle club machinery moves at quite a speed. You need training to keep yourself safe, and the range safe.

It doesn't seem that the NRA have so far made any approach to anybody to see what they are likely to be taking on, and whether they are actually capable of taking it on with their current administration and their current staff and so on.

Chairman:

Which is to be determined.

David Morris:

And we have only got a month to go on that lease. Now what is going to happen when that lease ends and we can't use it. Two hundred odd members of British Sporting Rifle Club are going to be very disillusioned with the NRA, bearing in mind that we support the NRA entirely by insisting that every single member is a member of the NRA.

Andrew Mercer:

Are you not aware of the extension to the end of this year that has been proposed?

David Morris:

Well, the only thing I'm aware of, is that some kind of extension has been offered on terms which are not similar to the terms that we are currently working on.

I may be wrong..

Chairman:

This is not for an AGM to discuss. Your point has been made and it will be taken by the Council at their Trustee meeting in June.

Phil Northam:

Does the change in the operation of British Sporting Rifle Club includes the clays over the back of Stickledown?

Chairman:

No. Two different activities.

Bisley Shooting Ground, which is the sporting clays operation run out of the Old Council Club is separate from British Sporting Rifle Club which is the ranges to the left of Melville.

Phil Northam:

I was under the impression they were run by the same organisation. Thank you.

Steve Willingham, NRA Member:

This is a question to Andrew Mercer.

What makes you think that you can run the sporting clays and all the British Sporting Rifle Club any better than the current management of those two clubs, or more profitable?

Chairman:

I'll take the sporting clays, you (Andrew) take the Sporting Rifle Club. Let me do the sporting clays first.

The sporting clays operation currently pay to the NRA, in rent, less than 1% of our income.

If we stopped sporting clays tomorrow, we would probably get that income back just from the increased fullbore shooting that we could undertake on the righthand side of Stickledown and on Century.

So this is purely financial?

No. My point is that Bisley Shooting Ground tell you anyone who will listed that they are an incredibly important part of the Bisley finances. They're not. They are less than 1% of our current income.

However, if we were to take that operation in-house, and if we were to be as successful as we think we can be, we could be generating, for the membership, somewhere between £250,000 and £350,000 a year. I would rather that money comes to the NRA, rather than the shareholders of Bisley Shooting Ground. It's that simple.

This is not, however, the sole reason that we would do it. We want to take the control back and the management back of the footprint of the ranges here, so that if, in 25 years' time, we

may have a completely different makeup to the demand for our ranges, we don't want to be held up because we have got a 21 year licence with somebody - who may well be trousering £250,000+ that might have been ours. Sorry, I am burlesquing it, but it just brings it into fairly sharp relief.

Andrew Mercer:

So I think the question was can we run British Sporting Rifle Club to a greater degree of profit?

Steve Willingham:

Not it wasn't.

It was what makes you think that you can run it more efficiently than the current management.

Andrew Mercer:

I think we can run it equally as efficiently as the current management of the British Sporting Rifle Club. I wouldn't claim that we could run it better than. I think we could run it more efficiently and to the greater advantage of the wider NRA.

Steve Willingham:

Sorry – how does that, if it is just the same, there is an old adage of if it ain't broke, don't fix it!

Hear Hear

So if you can't improve it...

Chairman:

As it has already been said here today, the only people who know how to operate this system are all sitting down in front of me somewhere. What happens, God forbid, if they all get killed on the M6 on the way home. How do we operate this range? Apparently there is no operating manual. And the machinery is too difficult for the NRA to operate. We're told the institutional knowledge departs when they depart.

So not only is this a policy issue, it's a management problem.

Steve Willingham:

Most of the people who can operate, make the targets, by the way, I can make a deer target, it takes me four hours for even one target, just for the record.

But those people are volunteers. In all the to-do, are you intending to employ people ongoing and add the cost of wages to keep the electronics going, because it is all volunteers at the moment?

Andrew Mercer:

That is the traditional model that we use to deliver targets to every other single fullbore shooter on Bisley Camp.

So we use a combination of paid staff and volunteers to deliver fullbore shooting on Bisley Camp.

Chairman:

I think the question has been asked and answered.

Gillian Kaile:

I'm sure your systems will improve and the electronic targets are working better, but they are by no means fool proof. So at the minute we have people at the far end pasting up when we fire.

Today in a competition it has not been unusual, we've got many of your staff pasting up a four as a V-bull and making two mistakes in competition.

I am concerned from the amount of shooting that I do, that your current staff need training even more at the butts end on their current operation. I can't speak for this, but if this is a lot more complicated, it doesn't mean in the future it shouldn't go forward. It's a bit like the previous one where I think, I'm not against electronics, but I think you need to change it.

But frankly you're talking about expansion and the number of people who are using targets, you are going to have to train a lot more people up, even up above the current butts party. I'm by no means certain that your training from what I've seen of the current operations of targets is up to the level, which at the moment with expansion, will take on a further dimension.

Andrew Mercer:

Two points I'd make.

One is are you absolutely certain that these are NRA employed markers? Because a great deal of the markers who are down in the butts are private markers, of which we have no control over. And that is a big issue for us.

Secondly, as at this time of year, this is almost the worst time of year for us to recruit markers. Despite the fact of having 29 electronic targets, replacing 29 markers, we are being consistently short of markers and it is particularly poor as we run into May and we start in early June. Why? Because the kids are at school, revising furiously for exams.

And that is a traditional problem, and that has been one of the key drivers for the move to electronic targets.

No target system, and I'm sure my friends in the British Sporting Rifle Club will support me on this, no targets, be they manual or electronic, are perfect and will behave perfectly all the time. There is always elements of failure – it may well be that you've got a marker who is not paying attention, it may well be you've got a marker who hasn't been properly trained, it may well be that your electronic target isn't working, it may well be that the target face was pasted in the wrong place – they are a multitude of different failures.

The challenge is making sure that the success rate increases and the failure rate declines.

Gillian Kaile:

Thank you very much. And you've just said it – you need to improve your training on your staff for the number of targets you've got, let alone the way you say you are going with the number of people you are recruiting.

Nigel Wells:

Going on the British Sporting Rifle, my question to you is that are you going to arrange for your staff, with the British Sporting Rifle Club staff, to be trained?

Chairman:

Sounds like it, doesn't it.

Nigel Wells:

Then the question is, how much extra is it going to cost the members of the British Sporting Rifle Club to use the range because all the people operating it will have to be paid?

Chairman:

To be determined, as we want to understand that.

Steve Wallis, Sporting Rifle Discipline Rep:

You've recognised the discipline quite rightly. Andrew, I think at the end of the second question you answered some time back, I didn't get to ask you at the time, you mentioned to the benefit of the wider NRA membership.

This is a range which has very specific targetry on, which are the core of a lot of sporting rifle shooters shooting at Bisley. Is it your intention therefore from what you have said, if I heard you correctly, to utilise that range space for other people other than sporting rifle shooters, because if it is that concerns me greatly?

Andrew Mercer:

What is happening today Steve?

Steve Wallis:

That is under the terms of the existing lease, for certain days to be set aside during the calendar year for these events.

I understand that, and I would accept that as the norm.

Andrew Mercer:

And so I think, as the demands for range space actually ebbs and flows and changes direction, we are continually reviewing as to what ranges are allocated for what type of shooting, for what proportion of the year.

That is something that I don't think can be cast in stone, and I don't think that we've got any range committed for the next 21 years for a particular format or discipline. We've got no ranges committed in that way.

So, the intention, as I said from the outset, is to retain Sporting Rifle in its entirety at Bisley. Whether that demands the sole use of the British Sporting Rifle Club, whether it requires less use of the British Sporting Rifle Club ranges, or more use, that is something that needs to be determined.

Nigel Jackson:

We've heard so many comments that are all on the same sort of theme.

I get completely that Council would wish to take up an expiring lease and increase their control of the estate at Bisley. I can see that.

What I don't understand, is the business model that the NRA is proposing for the British Sporting Rifle Club.

At the moment the club is not a particularly cheap club to be a member of. The club runs, as we have heard, on volunteers and an enormous well of experience that has been built up over the years, and investment by the club in very specialised targetry which is completely outside the ken for the target rifle shooting experience. It's specific to Sporting Rifle.

Should the NRA take the view that they wish to take control of the British Sporting Rifle Club and run it as part of their organisation, they may lose the goodwill of the existing club members, and if that awful situation was to take place, you would have to figure out how to run it without any information, without any experience, and at the moment the volunteers provide a huge amount of work on that range, which you would have to be paying people to be trained and in attendance on a very regular basis.

So the cost, unless you're planning to amortise the acquisition cost, training cost, running cost, material cost, technical equipment advance cost, and all the capital expenditure that would go into that complex over time, across the entire NRA footprint, perhaps you could subsidise it.

But if you were to keep that as a sole cost centre in itself, I cannot see how much shooting there as a visitor, or a guest, or a member of one of the clubs, could possibly be a cost effective experience for us.

Chairman:

Your point has been made. As I say, we have a Trustee meeting in the middle of June when this will be discussed.

Nick Thomas:

I would just like to make the point that during all of the negotiations without going into any detail, we have not seen any financial model that the NRA have based their acquisition of the range on.

Now, I know you keep saying that is work in progress, work in progress, but we are as we all know are very close to the end of the lease, and a seven month extension only gives us seven months to sort out what we are going to do.

I for one believe that the NRA are rather remiss if they have not done a complete financial model, and that would include the training and everything else that we've discussed, before they make any sort of suggestion.

Andrew Mercer:

Can I ask you to inform the meeting when you actually provided the schedule of assets on which the range depends, that you've been asked for several months. When was that delivered Nick?

Nick Thomas:

It was provided when you asked for it.

Andrew Mercer:

It was provided two weeks ago, I think you'll find.

Nick Thomas:

It was provided when you asked for it.

Andrew Mercer:

So, if I can finish.

Nick Thomas:

If we are going to get into that, I would also point out that we had a meeting with you in August and you took until December to even reply. And you sent your reply on a Friday afternoon a week before Christmas, which is basically saying, this is the option take it or leave it.

I don't feel that was a particularly good way of operating a negotiation. I don't wish to get into a slanging match, but that's the truth.

Chairman:

Let's not get into a tit for tat.

Phil Northam:

Changing direction.

Firing points. They've suffered in some areas from intensive use, especially where the electronic targets are fixed, and Butt 19, heavily used, very popular. It is quite constrained, Butt 19, because of the car park. So the use there is very heavy, the concentration of people on the firing point is very heavy.

But I'd like to compliment the implementation of two stage stepped firing points to stagger the firing points back and forward, I thought worked very well. It has made a difference, a noticeable difference.

Is that something that we could take forward and actually build into the ranges infrastructure that we have an everyday recreational hard-wearing firing point, and possibly, just in front of it, we have a competition, tea absorbing, non-dog poo firing point for Target Rifle shooters.

Is this something we can build in?

Chairman:

After last year's summer, we all recognise the grass took a battering. So yes, we understand that is an issue.

Phil Northam:

We have done staggered firing points as a temporary measure, I think it is the way forward.

Chairman:

We will take it under consideration.

Margaret Thomas, GB Pistol:

My concern is, Cheylesmore A range with electronic targets, which is not being used, or hardly used at all this year, as Andrew knows.

For those of you who don't know, there are two banks of five electronic targets for Olympic disciplines, Olympic Rapid Fire and Ladies 25m Pistol. One was paid for by the Army, one was paid for by the NRA, and then the GB Pistol Team pay for half of the maintenance.

The Army Club can't use it because the CNC use the next range, Cheylesmore B, and there isn't a ballistic wall between it so the Army can't get on there, they don't use it when the CNC are there. I've checked all the details.

GB Pistol can no longer use it because we can't afford it anymore. When is the ballistic wall going to be made? All year that's been out, so nothing has been done. Is there any movement, because at the moment we are losing business because the Lord Roberts Centre is being used on the turning targets, and that range is being left empty and the Lord Roberts is about the same price. So actually, you're not doing any service to the NRA at all.

Andrew Mercer:

I think there are two issues.

The CNC's use is known and planned and scheduled quarterly in advance.

Margaret Thomas:

Well, I've checked with the Army coach and they don't know – they would like to know a month in advance when they can possibly use it. They go to the Lord Roberts. So all those electronic targets have been paid for and are not being used.

Andrew Mercer:

And the other point that I'd make actually is that CNC don't shoot Saturdays and Sundays.

Margaret Thomas:

Yes, with the Army - there are some full-time athletes, one of whom is currently trying to get a quota place for Tokyo, and we have one of our GB athletes currently trying to get a quota place for Tokyo and they can't use that range. They are using the Lord Roberts.

Andrew Mercer:

But they can use it Saturdays and Sundays.

Margaret Thomas:

Yes, but unfortunately GB Pistol can't afford to use it at all.

Andrew Mercer:

Well that is a separate issue, isn't it?

Margaret Thomas:

Yes, we might resolve that.

Chairman:

It sounds like we could do with some scheduling, because we know three months in advance.

Margaret Thomas:

What is happening about the ballistic wall?

Andrew Mercer:

My understanding of the ballistic wall issue is that a recent CNC range inspection identified a potential risk. I don't understand what that risk is and I think we have ongoing discussions.

Margaret Thomas:

It was noticed about January or February, I don't know why we've got this far with nothing being done. There are sleepers down the middle of it, it's not just a flimsy wall unlike the Lord Roberts where you can actually fire into 50m range if you are that careless.

Chairman:

We will take it under advisement.

Margaret Thomas:

Can I perhaps speak up at another time about the use for the GB Pistol Team?

Andrew Mercer:

The problem with the GB Pistol Team is that through a special concession, you weren't paying anything. And now you are being asked to pay.

Margaret Thomas:

We've paid our affiliation fee and now we can't use it.

Andrew Mercer:

But you are being asked to pay a range hire fee.

Margaret Thomas:

There are very few of us.

Andrew Mercer:

And I think it is entirely appropriate, that like everybody else in the room, you pay

Margaret Thomas:

Then we will just carry on using the Lord Roberts and you can leave your range empty. And can we have our money back for the maintenance we paid for if we're not going to use it.

Andrew Mercer:

Because that was to return the targets to the condition they were before you started shooting on them.

Martin Osment:

Just a brief comment regarding BSRC. I've only had the opportunity of using that range complex once and I can only say I was extremely impressed with the skills and abilities of the volunteers who ran such a sophisticated range.

I certainly, even though I'm a qualified RCO, I would not attempt to operate that range myself.

But question is, has a cost benefit analysis been done and please could we see it?

Chairman:

No, because the Trustees haven't considered it because they will only consider it in their June meeting.

Neville Stebbings

So a question about Butts 18 and 19, well certainly Butt 19 with the car park. I experienced some problems last year shooting on those Butts during the Imperial which I eventually worked out, I think, was due to car park surface producing an extreme mirage in comparison to the grass everywhere else on the range.

If you are not aware of it, it becomes quite misty when it blanks out all the other mirage down the length of the range. Obviously the surface of the car park becomes very hot if the sun comes out. That means that firing on those firing points now, you will have different conditions to the rest of Century Range.

There have always been problems on that end anyway with the wind over the trees, but the mirage is very extreme when the sun comes out onto the car park.

I don't know whether anybody else has brought this subject before, but is there something that can be done to change the colour or the surface of the car park so that effect doesn't happen?

Chairman:

We'll look into it.

Andrew Reynolds:

I'd say due to a better mirage effect, the better the wind reading (*laughter*)

Neville Stebbings:

But it is only at very short distances.

Chairman:

I am mindful of the fact that it's 7.40pm and we have been going on for an hour and 40 minutes.

Does anybody have any further questions?

Paul Cutts:

Not a question, but an observation. Simply observation that this room to be very, very aware of having all ones eggs in one basket.

And your quip about the whole of the BSRC work parties getting killed on the M5 is entirely unlikely, in fact having a strike of the staff here would be much more likely.

Chairman:

My point is that institutional memory is that institutional memory is very difficult to reconstruct when things are run by volunteers. I know this from a fact when I joined as Chairman of the NRA six years ago; the institutional memory in this place was very very difficult to construct even amongst the paid staff of that time. Worse still when shooting tends to run by volunteers.

You need operating manuals and you've got to do some really dull stuff, because ultimately that means that everybody, all 9200 members, can get a chance to have a go at all the shooting that they want to do.

Also, as we get more and more people coming to this place - we are getting 1000+ more membership applications a year - we've got to think about where they are going to shoot. We've also got to think quite seriously about how they pay for their shooting. As I have said at this podium before now, if you are a natural monopoly with a restricted supply and an increasing demand, the obvious way of regulating that demand is to jack up prices.

We haven't been doing that because we're determined to seek efficiencies and productivity first. Please give us some credit for being reasonably good at taking an organisation 6 years ago that was at the thick end of losing £1M over the previous 3 years, and putting it into a much better place.

Kevin Hill:

The NRA spent a lot of money restoring what was the English XX Clubhouse. It now has new tenants and this weekend we see a very ugly 6ft fence around it, blocking the view.

(Hear hear)

Was this considered when organising the lease?

Chairman:

So first the assertion that the NRA spent a lot of money. I'd like to know where you got that from

Kevin Hill:

Well, it's been done up! I don't know....

Chairman:

OK, can I suggest you don't assert such things if you do not know whether that was an NRA expense, or whether it was actually a dilapidation obligation from the English XX?

Kevin Hill:

My main complaint is...

Chairman:

Your main complaint is that you don't like the fence around what formally used to be the English XX.

Yes

John Bloomfield:

Can I second that?

Andrew Mercer:

And in fairness, that hasn't missed my attention and a conversation has been had, and the matter is being addressed

Gillian Kaile:

This is different, it is entirely different.

What I would like for next year is to hear a little bit more about the backing for the things that you are doing, and I think that's come out, the cost benefit analysis and the fact that we now, since November last year, have gone over the peak, going up in three troughs since 2008, and it does look as if the economy is going to be more restricted.

Also the 26 year olds is dropping away – that lovely new group that you are getting will come here for a few years, but I would like to hear a little bit more about proper, long term strategy and your policies backed by real facts and information if contested.

Thank you.

Nigel Wells:

Take note where the road between Spencer Site and the new caravan site is considerably narrower, effectively vehicles are having to stop to let vehicles pass. Is there going to be a one way system put in or what is going to be coming?

Andrew Mercer:

The fencing that is there is not a permanent feature.

Nigel Wells:

I understand that, but even when you take the fencing away, it's still not going to be a two lane road.

Andrew Mercer:

It is no narrower than it has ever been.

Neville Stebbings:

I think the difference is that before most people who drove along that would go on the grass!

Andrew Mercer:

Elcho Road is going to be re-engineered.

Phil Northam:

Given the uncertainty of the ammunition, would you please consider extending the 10% discount to entry. There are people who have waited for technical reports for confidence that the ammunition was good before they enter.

I do realise that there are more entries, and that entries are good, but there are people who are still uncertain and they are waiting to hear news of the outcome, so would you extend that window.

Chairman:

We will take that under consideration.

Thank you everybody. We're adjourned.