

In spring 2020 during the depths of the first wave of the pandemic, it was very difficult to overstate the threats to the future of the NRA. However, Bisley never closed completely, with staff working hard to provide ranges for police firearms training, serve the membership, keep camp facilities ticking over, and plan for the day when we could welcome members and clubs back to our ranges.

As restrictions ebbed and flowed our policy was to open the ranges as quickly, fully and safely as guidance allowed. Two factors have been key in enabling us to do this. Firstly, the decision by Government to list outdoor ranges alongside golf courses and other outdoor sports facilities; and secondly the inherent order and discipline of shooters on ranges. We have been able to rely on the common sense and support of members and clubs in playing their part in maintaining a COVID secure environment; this has been greatly appreciated by our staff.

Whilst 2020 was the year to survive, 2021 is the year for recovery, to facilitate a year for progress in 2022.

As the Chairman said, repeated by the Treasurer, today the NRA has no borrowings, having quietly paid off the overdraft accumulated during the pandemic. Membership continues to increase gently. Participation in our competitions continues to recover. Demand for NRA training is strong. NRA affiliated clubs are back on MoD ranges.

Despite all these positive signs we remain cautious not to loosen our firm grasp on costs. Our staff have borne the burden of smaller teams and challenging conditions, whilst working their proverbial socks off to deliver a quality service to members and clubs. I would be remiss if I did not take this opportunity to thank them publicly for their professionalism, graft and commitment to the NRA cause.

Away from Bisley, clubs and range operators have experienced a difficult year, particularly those with indoor ranges. A good number have received Government grants that have eased their financial stress, but the road to recovery will require sustained and substantial support from club members.

Looking ahead we face a major challenge to target shooting from proposals to prohibit lead ammunition. Whilst it is hard to make any link between lead in ammunition used on ranges and harm to human health, the threat is real and substantial. Our arguments to secure exemptions for target shooting must be thoughtful, not emotive, and evidence based rather than relying on custom and practice.

Despite all the challenges we are optimistic that the NRA will recover and flourish. Much has been learnt through the pandemic and we will use these experiences to guide us throughout the rest of this year.

Andrew Mercer
NRA Secretary General