

## **Secretary General's Statement**

This time last year I told members at the Annual General Meeting that whilst 2020 had been the year to survive, 2021 was the year for recovery, to facilitate a year for progress in 2022.

Looking back it was one of the rare predictions I got right in 2021. I remember telling our staff to expect a gentle start when we re-opened from lockdown at the end of March, and that we could expect a plentiful supply of candidates to fill the many vacancies that we had. What we experienced was quite different – great demand for our ranges and a fiercely competitive market for staff. Thankfully our staff and volunteers once again excelled themselves and delivered a successful year for the Association. I would like to record my personal thanks to each and every one of them.

As the Treasurer has reported, the financial damage caused by COVID has been largely repaired and we are busy making progress to address the large backlog of repairs, improvements and developments. Investing in our ranges, both rifle and shotgun, remain a priority, along with resources that facilitate their use such as the range office and accommodation.

We have announced plans to develop two new serviced caravan sites to build on the success of Spencer Site in 2016 and Waldegrave Site in 2019. Such projects are never universally welcome, and we work hard to smooth the passage of change for those owners who need to move to alternative sites.

We are also working hard to catch up with routine painting, road repairs and tree work. There is much to do but I hope visitors to Bisley can see real progress when they return this year.

Increasing range capacity away from Bisley is another priority, and we are investing our resources to re-open ranges for civilian shooting in Scotland and Dorset. I remain firmly of the view that participation in target shooting is limited by lack of range access, not lack of demand or high cost.

Gaining access to probationary training in the regions can also be difficult. Covid restrictions curtailed much club training throughout 2020 and 2021, and there has been strong demand for our Bisley courses. We are exploring opportunities to deliver more training away from Bisley and will be visiting clubs to learn how they deliver their own courses.

Despite being an eternal optimist I fear proposals to severely restrict the use of lead ammunition in rifle, shotgun and airguns in the recently published Health and Safety Executive report pose a material threat to all target shooting. We face the considerable challenge of persuading politicians that we need to continue shooting with a known toxic material. The proposed derogation to allow lead to be used on licensed rifle ranges is encouraging; however, the devil will be in the detail, and we are consulting with regional range operators to develop practical and affordable lead management protocols.

I fear efforts to counter proposals prohibiting the sale and use of lead shot in both quarry and target shooting will be severely hampered by some game shooting organisations' support of a voluntary ban of lead shot by 2025.

It is essential that target shooting organisations work together on the response to the lead consultation. We all have particular and peculiar priorities and perspectives, but we value the guidance and support of colleagues from organisations including the Clay Pigeon Shooting Association, the National Smallbore Rifle Association, the British Shooting Sports Council and the Historical Breechloading and Small Arms Association.

Despite the current challenges I am optimistic that the NRA will continue to flourish. The Association has experienced periods of momentous change and has weathered them all.

The war in Ukraine suggests that Defence of the Realm is not such an anachronism as some might suggest; I hope that promoting and encouraging marksmanship may come to be seen in a more favourable light.