

SECRETARY GENERAL'S SPEECH

2024 proved to be another year of challenges and opportunity for the NRA. As the Treasurer has explained we ended the year in financial good shape and are now busy reaping the benefits with a large programme of improvements on Bisley Camp well underway.

Amongst the challenges ahead are the rapidly changing priorities for the armed forces as our politicians wrestle with growing threats from abroad. The announcement of the withdrawal of the cadet target rifle appears counter intuitive; a depleted army needs every source of prospective recruits, especially those who have been trained to shoot.

This brings into sharp focus the need for the NRA to invest in developing our own programme to encourage youth participation in target shooting. We have all the assets to hand – ranges, rifles and shotguns, ammunition and instructors – to deliver high quality airgun, small bore, shotgun and full bore shooting.

What we need are the staff to develop and deliver a sustainable programme of youth shooting. To this end we have just appointed a full-time Youth Shooting Officer. Collaborating with other shooting organisations and securing the enthusiastic support of our volunteers will be critical for success.

The dark clouds of new legislation are gathering ahead and we are facing yet another consultation on firearms regulation. Well-intentioned initiatives to reduce the risk to the public from legally held firearms can create a blizzard of process and procedure that distract police firearms licensing staff from the key task of assessing the certificate holder.

Focusing on the number of firearms and quantity of ammunition on ticket should not be a priority; great harm can be committed with one shotgun and a box of shells by someone with evil intent.

The NRA works hard to engage with the Home Office and police and other shooting organisations to promote responsible shooting. We are investing considerable resources developing and delivering firearms awareness training days for police firearms enquiry officers as part of the new College of Policing Training programme.

The course has a morning of “show and tell” presentations where we explain what we do, why we do it, how much ammunition we use; followed by the opportunity to handle the most common rifles and shotguns. Afternoons are spent shooting a wide range of rifles and shotguns.

These courses are funded by the NRA and provide an excellent opportunity to engage positively with firearms licensing staff, demonstrate a wide variety of firearms, and enhances the reputation of the NRA and Bisley with police forces, the College of Policing and Home Office.

We are still waiting for the response from DEFRA to the UK Reach report recommending the prohibition of lead ammunition used outdoors. The report includes a proposed derogation to allow the continued use of lead ammunition on outdoor rifle ranges. In preparation we have been working up a Code of Practice for the management of lead on outdoor ranges; I am grateful for the advice and guidance from a group of regional range operators who have made sure our procedures are appropriate for a wide variety of ranges away from Bisley.

One of the most important tasks in 2024 was the recruitment of the new Secretary General. Trustees set to work in September to attract good applications from talented candidates. Having screened over 160 applications, conducted many interviews the Council secured the services of the stand out candidate Simon Lee who is experiencing his first AGM with us today.

He is, unlike his predecessor, extremely bright and personable and excited with the prospects for the NRA ahead. Simon will be joined by Geetha Jackson as Chief Finance Officer when they both start on Monday 16th June. They join a talented, committed and thoroughly professional team of staff and I have every confidence in a bright future for the NRA.

The new team of staff will have but a few short months with the current Chairman, David Lacey, who returns to the ranks at the end of his term of office in February 2026. David has been an exceptional Chairman and has worked tirelessly to help navigate the NRA through challenges with the Charity Commission, Covid, lengthy contractual disputes, and the major RDA fire. He is without ego or any desire for aggrandisement and I have learnt a great deal working with him. Members of the General Council are charged with the weighty task of appointing his successor.

His fellow Trustees also deserve special mention for their commitment to the NRA cause; their work is often poorly understood and rarely appreciated.

If I were asked, at this my last NRA AGM, to summarise the key learnings over the 12 years in post I would offer the following:-

1. Pretty much all of the discord about shooting comes from within the shooting community.
2. Target shooting's rich heritage counts for little in the modern world; the NRA needs to be relevant, thoughtful about how we are perceived from outside; and engaged with key stakeholders.
3. We are all members of an enormous shooting community; there should be nothing more than friendly banter between the disciplines, including air, small bore, shotgun and live quarry.
4. The NRA is not a shooting club created for the benefit of the current cohort of members; it is a charity that must be relevant to both current and future generations of shooters.
5. NRA staff do the heavy lifting and respond well to friendly and supportive engagement; and
6. Generating financial surpluses is in the best interests of the NRA and essential to securing its future.

Dealing with so many interesting, passionate, kind and supportive members of the shooting community has been a great privilege.