



2008 Annual General Meeting of the BHPA

Minutes of the meeting held on Saturday 29th November 2008 at the National Exhibition Centre, Birmingham, commencing at 11.00am

These minutes are not to be taken as a true record without referring to the minutes of the Executive Council meeting at which they were approved.

Present:

John Aldridge
Marc Asquith
Jennie Burdett
Ed Cunliffe
Mark Dale
Paul Dancey
Martin Heywood
Angus Langford
Angus Pinkerton
Joe Schofield
Dave Thompson
Steve Walsh

In attendance:

31 Voting members
of the Association

ITEM 1: CHAIRMAN'S OPENING REMARKS

BHPA Chairman, Martin Heywood, welcomed members to the AGM. He said it had been a very quiet year, we have not sued or been sued by anyone. Things are very difficult for our schools at the moment and we are trying to help them by allowing training abroad.

Martin then explained that the formal business part of the meeting would be conducted first, followed by the presentation of awards and then there was one topic for discussion. There would be fewer awards than usual being presented as the sponsors of the paragliding competitions wanted their presentations to be made in the main hall.

ITEM 2: RESOLUTIONS

2.1 That the Accounts and Report of the Executive Council for the year ended 31 March 2008 be approved.

The resolution to approve the accounts was passed.

2.2 That the following members be elected to the Executive Council: E. Cunliffe, E. Geczy, B. Janaway, A. Pinkerton, S Walsh.

The resolution for the election of members to the Executive Council was approved.

2.3 That Clear & Lane be re-appointed as auditors and the Executive Council be authorised to fix their remuneration.

The resolution was approved and this concluded the formal business of BHPA Limited.

ITEM 3: OFFICERS' REPORTS

All officers had submitted written reports which were in the AGM folders. Each Exec Member gave a brief outline of his report and answered any questions from the floor.

3.1 Treasurer

Angus Langford said our policy on financial reserves has been managed very well over many years and the Association has good reserves. Our policy going forward is to break even in order to maintain these reserves.

We have been suffering from bad weather over the last couple of years so the membership is in decline and subscriptions are down. The good news is that we had a refund on the insurance from profit sharing so this has turned a slight loss into a surplus.

Membership figures are down; interest rates are dropping too and Sports Council funding has dried up as we are not any Olympic sport. This will have some effect on us.

Membership fees were increased this year but it has not resulted in a large drop off in members.

Bill Morris referred to the difficult financial climate and asked whether we are taking precautions in regard to our reserves and decreasing interest rates. Angus replied that he believes that the biggest impact on our Association is the weather. However, he will be watching the finances carefully and saving money where possible. Exec will be keeping a close eye on what is going on. He added that although historically Exec have always tried to hold subscriptions down, he feels that to stay in the black we will have to make a nominal increase every year.

A major problem would be if the banks that hold our money went bankrupt but since the government now controls these banks we are OK. We will be splitting our money up to make it safer when it comes off deposit in December. Angus confessed that he had had a few nervous moments when our bank was in difficulties so it was a relief when it was taken over by Lloyds.

3.2 Insurance

Martin Heywood informed members that there would be a discussion on the topic of £5m insurance cover later in the meeting.

Martin reported that the BHPA had persuaded the National Trust to accept £2m cover on their sites but having said that we do have some private sites where landowners are asking for £5m.

Martin was asked if we had had any personal injury liability claims. Martin replied that we did have one five or six years ago but in recent years we have only had people landing on cars or causing damage to property.

3.3 Skywings

Paul Dancey reported that advertising revenue was down and now that we are in a credit crunch things are likely to get worse before they get better.

3.4 Website

Paul said that since taking over the running of the website he had tried to make it more user friendly. It is now possible to search for your nearest school by putting in your postcode.

Brett Janaway asked if it would be possible to put profiles of Exec Members on the website and Paul said that this is already in progress.

3.5 Competitions

John Aldridge reported that there had been problems with the weather during the year which had affected all disciplines. He also said that competition at the bottom end is not going well and needs new people in, particularly in hang gliding.

There is almost certain to be a competition run alongside the British Open that will have simpler tasks and no turn points. John asked clubs to encourage their members to go along.

3.6 Sites

Steve Walsh said that the Sites Purchase Fund had almost doubled in size in the past twelve months and whilst it is still not enough to buy a site, this coupled with the Loan Fund may be. It

is not meteoric but it is improving.

Other points Steve mentioned were the Sites Database, which now has more sites on it than at this time last year, and the National Trust agreement which is on going.

Michel Carnet said that his club had accumulated funds towards buying a site and he thought there must be other clubs around the country in the same position. Michel wondered whether all these clubs should put their money together in one place.

Bill Morris did not believe that this would work. He said he had been involved in the proposed purchase of Shining Tor and even clubs that were literally next-door would not let their site fund go to another club's site. The purchase of Shining Tor failed by a big margin because clubs are not prepared to use their reserves to help to buy a site for another club.

Michel felt that all these small amounts of money would get a better return if they were in one big pot. Sometimes sites come up for sale without prior warning and we need to react quickly. There is not generally time to contact all clubs and ask for donations.

Bill added that if any club thought that they might one day want to buy their site, they needed to be thinking about it now.

Steve agreed to discuss this with Michel and possibly put something in Skywings.

3.7 Paramotors

Ed Cunliffe said he had nothing to say other than what was in his written report and there were no questions from the membership.

3.8 Admin

Marc Asquith reported that the office continues to run efficiently and our systems are kept up to date.

Bill Morris asked whether the BHPA had a company pension scheme for its staff and Marc replied that it did not. Bill then suggested that it was time for the BHPA to give this some serious consideration and Marc agreed to look into it and make sure it was discussed at the next Exec Meeting.

3.9 External Representation

John Aldridge explained how the BHPA fits in within Europe and internationally where we need to have a voice.

3.10 FSC

Angus Pinkerton reported that the figures from schools over the last year were not as bad as we had expected, only 10% less in the number of CPs qualified although this is probably because people were finishing off from last year so we may have a significant drop off next year. As the weather for training has been so bad, FSC have now come up with a mechanism to allow schools to train abroad and hopefully this will result in more members.

Angus said only sixty-one incident reports were received last year and he was not sure whether this was because people were not filling them in or because there were fewer incidents. He encouraged members to complete IRs as they are really valuable in identifying accidents that are likely to be repeated. A Safety Notice is about to be issued concerning 360 degree turns and nose-down spiral dives. If all the people who had actually experienced the problem had sent in an IR, we would have been made aware of the problem and this SN could have been issued several months earlier.

In regard to reporting accidents, the AAIB have now realised that they have neither the time nor the expertise to investigate HG/PG accidents and have given the responsibility back to the BHPA. We are therefore back to the system that applied before 2006 when the AAIB took over investigations.

As of 1st January 2009 there will be one PG testing standard, EN926. Brett Janaway asked how much input the BHPA had had to the scheme and Angus replied that he is the head of the committee. There followed some discussion about the tests and the difference between the DHV and EN schemes. DHV would now be testing to the EN standard.

ITEM 4: PRESENTATION OF TROPHIES

Unfortunately our President, Lembit Opik, MP, was unable to get to the meeting in time to present the trophies and John Aldridge, Chairman of the Competitions Committee, therefore made the presentations.

After presenting numerous trophies to competition winners, the President's Trophy was awarded to Angus Pinkerton for services to the sport.

The Wings Over The Cloud award for the best article in Skywings went to Martin Cray for 'Trust Your Inner Eagle' published in the January issue.

ITEM 5: DISCUSSION - £5m INSURANCE

Martin Heywood explained that Thames Valley HGC have to have £5m cover to fly their site at Milk Hill and that we have a system whereby members can top-up their insurance cover to fly on designated sites. The top-up cover premium is £30.

Alexander Kirk-Wilson (TVHGC) said that the difficulty is not with landowners in general, private landowners were not bothered at all, but councils and other public bodies seem to have a default setting of £5m. The problem seems to be mainly in the south of England but there are now six clubs having difficulties. Alexander felt that next year the BHPA should be looking at £5m cover for all members.

There was much debate about whether the whole of the membership should be forced to pay increased fees in order to cover the sites that required £5m. Michel Carnet said that if covering the whole Association for £5m would only reduce the premium from £30 to £26, members would never agree to it. The majority of the membership would be paying £26 extra for a few sites that they would never fly.

Bill Morris made the point that these public bodies all follow each other without any good reason. They will put rules in place simply because the council or body down the road does it. Once a public sector memo goes round then everyone jumps on the bandwagon. Going back to them and making them consider why they are doing something, sometimes resolves the issue and BHPA should make the approach. Bill went on to say that our President is an MP and we could ask him to ask a question about why public sector bodies are insisting on this huge amount of insurance.

Marc Asquith asked members to go out and speak to their local councilors and ask why they are demanding £5m insurance. They want your votes so should be willing to look at this. He then mentioned the minimum premium that we have to pay to our insurers and said that if we raise our cover to £5m, the minimum premium will go up. As we have declining membership numbers, we could find ourselves having to pay the insurers from our reserves.

It was also pointed out that if we have £5m cover and we have a £5m claim, we would be uninsurable thereafter. No insurers would touch us with a claim like that on our history.

Michel Carnet said that a few years ago we were having trouble finding insurers, he asked if this was better now and whether £5m cover would make any difference. Martin Heywood replied that we have a good relationship with our insurers now and if we change insurers they may not be so flexible. We do keep an eye on things and if it looks as if we can do better we will.

Martin then thanked everyone for attending and closed the meeting.