

WEIR WOOD SAILING CLUB
MINUTES OF 57th ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Sunday 26th November 2023 at 2pm in the WWSC clubhouse

1. Welcome and Introductions by the Commodore

The Commodore, Duncan Lawson, welcomed everyone to the meeting and was pleased to note an attendance of some 80 members. Duncan explained that, as indicated in the meeting documents, the club report includes all the detailed information and those presenting today will only pick out the highlights. However, in view of the importance of the issues concerning the head lease and the relationship with Weald Water Enterprises (WWE), Chris and Patrick will cover this area in more detail and answer any questions.

2. Apologies for Absence

Apologies had been received from Peter Hargreaves and 14 other members.

3. Headline Comments from Committee Members and questions

3.1 Secretary—Chris Daniels

Chris also welcomed the large turnout of members and noted that club reports have been circulated to members prior to the meeting and therefore the presentations from officers of the club will focus on the highlights and key issues.

Chris referred to the updates he has sent members regarding the issues concerning the head lease that have been raised by WWE and emphasised that this dispute is not of WWSC's making.

Chris explained that the club's position is that we believe the reservoir is a wonderful asset that is currently under utilised and we welcome the introduction of additional recreational activities.

The committee has worked hard to form a relationship with new users of the water and WWE. However, it quickly became apparent that that WWE are making demands on WWSC that are completely unacceptable.

Following the last AGM, WWE instructed its solicitor to send WWSC a four page letter alleging numerous unsubstantiated breaches of our lease. We rejected such allegations and, in the course of the following dialogue and continued attacks, WWE had presented a "Master Plan", which was a repeat of plans originally put forward by the previous owner of the Head Lease, but with no proper assessment or business plan. Under purported threat of forfeiture of its lease, WWSC was given six weeks to give up its long term lease with its exclusive use of the clubhouse and limited control over use of the water. All activities would then be under the control of WWE.

WWSC declined this approach. Subsequently, WWE initiated Court proceedings for Trespass and formal process alleging non-compliance with the head lease. The club's 50 year lease has some 44 years to run.

The attacks by WWE included:-

- Two surveys of the clubhouse resulting in numerous allegations that the club is not complying with various terms in the lease, notably in respect of proper maintenance.
- A survey of the dinghy parks to try to show that some WWSC members' boats are partly outside the area included in the club's lease.

- The erection of the two new gates without any agreement with WWSC regarding access at all times for our members.
- The new driving force behind WWE has also lodged two “Data Subject Access Requests” under GDPR, presumably to cause a huge amount of additional work for the club’s Committee to provide a response within the deadlines set. The second request was particularly onerous because it related to communications over a period of 15 months.

It is apparent that there is a tactic to wear down the resilience of WWSC but this will not succeed.

These attacks also stretch our financial resources, in particular because we have had to engage the services of solicitors. However, Patrick’s experience with legal matters has saved the day and helped to considerably reduce our legal costs. Nevertheless, we have actually had to spend some £44k fighting these attacks this year.

Other attacks have included attempting to influence the membership by additional gate signs and contacting some members directly to lobby them

Linda Hulley noted that a call was made to Tim Hulley at 11pm and she regarded this as harassment.

Chris advised that the club had tried mediation but this was unsuccessful, with WWE simply repeating their unacceptable demands.

Chris noted that the club can expect more challenges from WWE and asked members to ensure they comply with the terms of our lease e.g. returning cars to the car park after unloading.

Chris pointed out that WWE will now only communicate through their solicitors so it is not possible to discuss issues directly with the owner of the Head Lease.

Chris indicated that the club had repeatedly sought to negotiate directly with WWE rather than through solicitors but our landlord had refused to do so. We had made it clear that WWSC was willing to consider alterations to our rights to the water and Clubhouse but only if they delivered overall benefit for our members.

It was noted that some members have expressed concern that WWSC could suffer the same fate as Bewl Valley Sailing Club. However, Chris advised that BVSC appeared to over commit financially, employing paid staff, which in the end they could not fund without renegotiating their lease, which their landlord was unwilling to do.

Chris noted that the club’s finances are currently sound but it may be necessary to initiate a legal fund at some stage.

Members asked if WWE may be open to a buy-out and Chris pointed out that the head lease was sold for a sum very much more than WWSC calculated to be viable. Although the dispute with WWE is a civil one, concern was expressed regarding WWE contacting members directly to attempt to lobby them.

Chris confirmed that WWSC had not allowed the controlling force behind WWE to re-new his membership because of the attacks on the sailing club by WWE.

In a response to other questions, Chris confirmed that Brendan has a lease giving him certain rights and that WWE is currently renting some areas from Brendan.

Richard Williams asked if the RYA are giving advice and Chris commented that it is not practical for them to advise on particular cases.

Members asked if the club had publicised the problems currently being faced and Chris commented that, although this is a difficult area, the club had carried out two main initiatives:-

- Hand delivered letters to local residents explaining the sailing club's position and desire for the reservoir to be opened to other activities in a safe and affordable manner.
- Met with Southern Water to assure them WWSC is keen for the reservoir to be opened to other activities in a safe and affordable manner whilst safeguarding the rights of the sailing club. In spite of the potential safety issues arising from some of WWE's proposals, Southern Water's focus appears to be on a number of much larger issues that need resolving away from Weir Wood, as discussed recently in the media.

Members asked if WWE could continue with their current tactics for years ahead and Patrick replied that although this was possible it would eventually be regarded as vexatious. However, Patrick noted that the key tactic is for the club to stick together and not be intimidated. The club may have to sacrifice/delay some expenditure/projects to ensure we can maintain a robust defence and WWE may eventually realise that it is necessary to enter into meaningful discussions with WWSC; which is what the club wants.

3.2 Membership—Dick Lankester

Unfortunately, Peter Hargreaves could not be present but in his absence Dick Lankester was pleased to advise that the "memberships" number of 358 for the end of September in Peter's report has risen to 372.

Sue Grylls noted that in spite of the very healthy membership numbers, on Sunday 5 November there was no OOD and no support boat crew. Peter noted the importance of members arranging duty swaps on Dutyman well in advance of their duty date.

3.3 Racing—Ernie Hatton

Ernie mentioned that the "Ice Breaker" series has been advertised at other clubs and in Yachts and Yachting and no external entries have been received which is very disappointing.

Ernie also noted that the new signing on system is in operation following a few initial difficulties! He plans to introduce a new programme that will allow web sign on.

Ernie referred to the five Open Meetings held this year, including a 2000 weekend, Laser Training Day, 100 Inland Championships and Topper Open with 25-30 visitors.

He was very pleased to report that club members had achieved a 1/2/3 result at the 2000 Nationals plus the family title.

Ernie indicated that he would like an assistant to help with organising and running the racing and members were asked to contact Ernie if they are able to help.

Finally he advised that Mark Harrington has resigned as RS 200 class captain.

3.4 Cruising—Mike Summers

Mike referred to his report previously circulated and defined cruising as “anything that’s not racing” and included sailing at Weir Wood.

He plans to organise “Treasure Hunts” at Weir Wood next year.

Mike described a trip to Cornwall last year and plans to arrange cruising on the sea next year for those who would like to be involved.

3.5 Windsurfing and Winging—Tim Hulley

Tim reported that there are now some 70 additional sail board members and 20-30 who wing surf. He explained that foiling makes it possible to maintain speed through the wind lulls, which are so common at Weir Wood, and this is a huge advantage.

Tim described two principles of the group—keep it fun—help others progress. He mentioned the success of the WhatsApp group in improving communication and encouraging members to get on the water with their friends, resulting in some 40 wind surfers out last Sunday. Tim explained that another important aspect of the group is that it includes a number of ladies, youths and children.

Finally, Tim thanked Peter Hargreaves and the committee for their support in helping to establish windsurfing and winging at Weir Wood.

3.6 Training—Annabelle Larkin and James Hogbin

Annabelle

Annabelle referred to the success of the Shipmates initiative which has required a lot of work to get off the ground involving support from the RYA, the Training Team and the Committee.

Essentially, Shipmates involves children learning to sail and having fun with their families plus social events. The aim is for long term membership of the group.

In total, 24 children have taken part with a core of 16. There have been 13 days on the water plus 7 social events. Four parents have taken a DI course.

Planning is now taking place for next year with a Social in January or February and a visit to RNLI Shoreham planned. Activities on the water are due to start in April and it is hoped to include an Open Day for children.

Finally Annabelle noted that some children as young as four years old have been involved.

James

James referred to the Training Report previously circulated and provided further details of the Training Team’s activities as summarised below:-

- Tim Taylor is retiring as Training Principal but the Training Team want to retain the status of an RYA Recognised Training Centre (RTC).
- Duncan Lawson thanked Tim in his absence for his long and dedicated service to the Weir Wood RTC and the meeting endorsed Duncan’s comments wholeheartedly.
- James noted that on a typical Saturday training day, adult training takes place in the morning and in the afternoon the formal training continues with the addition of Race Coaching and the Shipmates initiative. This has resulted in up to 60 people undergoing some sort of training (sail

or power) on Saturday afternoons which can be demanding on training resources and power boats.

- James considered that the Training facility attracts a substantial percentage of new members each year.
- James pointed out that, in his view, the RTC requirements mean that liability for the RTC's operation falls on the RTC rather than the club. In this regard James mentioned the importance of the RYA Standard Operating Procedures.
- He expressed some concern about operating training with wind surfing/foiling taking place nearby and this will need to be carefully managed to ensure safety standards are maintained.
- He believed the club should continue to operate with an RTC and it will be important to involve the committee to work through any issue and agree how the club should proceed.
- The team would like to carry out more schools training but require additional instructors, especially SIs, to achieve this.
- He also raised the key issue of a replacement RTC Principal which he considered should be in post by March 24. He pointed out that the Principal carries out a management/organisational role and does not need to be a qualified instructor. In the meantime, James will carry out the principal duties but is not in a position to take up the role for any length of time.
- He raised the issue of whether a charge should be made for training children and Chris Daniels responded that this is under active consideration by the Main Committee. Nick Jones commented that he has experience of many clubs and supports the committee making a decision on charges based on enabling children to learn at minimum cost whilst balancing this with the cost for members.

3.7 House and Grounds—Mike Summers

Mike referred to his report previously circulated and summarised the main activities as the re-decoration of the entrance hall, the balcony replacement and substantial roof repairs. Members were very appreciative of Mike's achievements in the year.

Next year Mike is planning to carry out redecoration of the training room and repairs to the barbecue shed. Major work is also required on the race hut and Ernie has volunteered to supervise.

3.8 Development—Robin Courtney

Robin referred to his report and noted that although most plans have had to be deferred due to the ongoing dispute with WWE, opportunities have been taken to make progress where possible.

Robin mentioned the launch of the new web site and IT systems. He also expressed excitement at the launch of Shipmates and hoped that this initiative will attract youngsters and families to the club. He thanked all involved in Shipmates for their enthusiasm.

He confirmed that it has been a challenge to get Shipmates running and James Hogbin noted that a decision is needed on future charging arrangements. Robin pointed out that the Community Amateur Sports Club (CASC) requirements require the club to treat all members equally and any service that is free to one group must be free to all. Duncan pointed out again that this issue will be considered by the committee in conjunction with members.

Robin mentioned the planned change in the club's status from a CASC to Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) and advised that this has had to be deferred whilst we are in dispute with WWE.

Robin considered that a debate is required with members to agree a 3/5 year plan to define the objectives of the club. In this regard, Robin also asked that any members with experience of business

planning, grant applications or just having a passion to help the club, to please contact Robin. Mike Summers reminded members about the volunteer board.

3.9 Social—Duncan Lawson

Duncan thanked Fiona Harrington for organising the very successful mid-summer party. Duncan proposed that in future we should aim for one volunteer per event to avoid volunteer overload. . Duncan reminded members that the club had a target for social events to break even only.

Finally Duncan asked members to ensure they book for the Christmas lunch asap.

4. Financial Report

Patrick referred to the financial information circulated to members and discussed the following issues for members:-

- There was no Covid grant last year.
- Explanation of reserves and reserve plan
- Legal costs in relation to WWE of circa £44k and more to come
- Normal running expenditure is circa £98k and therefore the current legal costs are way ahead of our normal budget and, as we are not in a position to borrow, we need to ensure the necessary finance is available. Patrick also referred to the Reserves Plan.
- Any court proceedings will be expensive.

5. Acceptance of Accounts

Acceptance of the Accounts was proposed by Nick Skinner and seconded by Andrew Downey and approved by a unanimous vote in favour.

6. Approval of Subscriptions

Patrick referred to the information sent to members prior to the meeting and the proposal to increase the subscriptions for all classes of membership for 2024/25 by 10%.

The 10% increase was proposed by Ernie Hatton and seconded by Duncan Lawson and approved by a unanimous vote in favour.

7. Election of Members of the Main Committee and Sub-Committees

The following offered themselves for re-election:-

Commodore	Duncan Lawson
Secretary	Chris Daniels
Joint Membership Secretary	Peter Hargreaves (see below)
Treasurer	Patrick Jiskoot
Racing Secretary	Ernie Hatton
Duty Co-ordinator	Peter Meares
Services Officer	Mike Summers
Development Officer	Robin Courtney
Safety Officer	Chris Hopkins

Proposed by Duncan Lawson and seconded by Chris Wilson and passed unanimously by a show of hands.

Note: Patrick is continuing in his role as treasurer for the time being and a volunteer to eventually take on this position is actively required.

Nominations had been received for the following positions on the main committee:-

Joint Membership Secretary	Annie Davis
Joint Marketing and Communications Officers	Annabel Larkin and Jo Field
Family Representative	Jo Field

Proposed by Duncan Lawson and seconded by Chris Wilson and passed unanimously by a show of hands.

Nick Skinner was proposed as an additional committee member. Proposed by Robin Courtney and seconded by Chris Wilson and passed unanimously.

Chris Daniels noted that the following members of the main committee are stepping down after many years service and the meeting members expressed their thanks with rounds of applause:-

Tim Taylor	RYA Principal
David Whensley	Marketing
Dick Lankester	Special Duties
Carole Taylor	Safeguarding Officer

Chris Daniels reported that nominees for the post of Sailing Secretary had not been sought at this time as the Job Specification for the role was under review by the Main Committee. As soon as the responsibilities had been agreed the position would be advertised.

Chris Daniels pointed out that volunteers are urgently required to take on the GDPR and Safeguarding roles. (The training necessary to help willing volunteers become authoritative voices in these topics would be funded by the club.)

Chris Daniels also noted that the key post of RTC Training Principal is currently vacant and in the meantime, James Hogbin has agreed to attend meetings of the main committee to represent the Training Team.

17. AOB and questions from members

There was no AOB and the meeting closed at 4:50 pm.