

Derbyshire Soaring Club

Chairman's report -- November 2016

As is my habit on such occasions I intend to give a brief overview of what has been happening in the club during the past year, to answer any questions that may arise and then to hand over to other committee members to add some more detail in their specific areas.

It has not been a great season weatherwise and there seems to have been a lot less flying than is normal. This may go some way to account for the relatively good **safety** record on our sites with numbers of small incidents sometimes leading to minor injuries but few potentially serious near misses and no really life changing injuries sustained on our sites. This is in spite of the poor weather and the temptation to push the envelope of flyability that can occur and the larger numbers of active members on our hills so we can take some satisfaction that our pilots are aware and making sound flying decisions.

We have however had two members who have suffered terribly whilst flying abroad: Early in the season Rob Gregg, a hang glider pilot, was injured seriously whilst competing in the Nationals and remains in the spinal unit in Sheffield..we all wish him the best and speediest recovery possible.

And very recently Jen Lindsey was fatally injured whilst on holiday in Spain .. a terrible loss and our thoughts and best wishes go to Paul, her boys and her family and friends at what can only be a terribly sad and difficult time for all.....

Financially the Club is in rude health as a result of reduced outgoings since we abandoned the magazine and an increased income as a result of our increasing the subscription several years ago and the steady increase in our membership numbers so that now we must be one of the very largest Clubs in the country.

Socially it has been a brilliant year! Our Social Secretary Lee Cooper has excelled himself in organising all manner of events and I would like to thank him profusely on behalf of committee and all of our members.

Our **sites** have remained open all year except for the usual lambing closures which were generally well observed and there have been few major problems but some areas are still unsatisfactory.

The situation on **Rushup** remains unresolved with most of our members flying it as individuals but, with no management from us there have been some rogue flyers and one or two helicopter evacuations of such people. However the word on the grapevine is that the owner is as set against us as ever so it seems best to let sleeping dogs lie for the present.

Stanage has had the usual minor complaints mainly caused by flying in the overstones area.. These have generally been easy to deal with but as the management structure has just been radically overhauled by the new CEO of the Peak Park we no longer appear to have the close communication we have had in the recent past and the stress on 'full cost recovery' may bode ill for us.

The **Mam sites** are our main concern and we have appointed Steve Springys who lives locally to help Owen Dickenson to manage the seven sites. With the exception of the minor management problems mentioned below there have been few issues but only last week there was an incident which could threaten our ability to fly there. Without going into detail I'd like to remind all members that they need to keep well clear of members of the public when taking off, landing or ground handling and these activities should always be done, as far as is possible, well clear of the path. If any problem does occur and you are involved or witness it you should report it asap to a member of committee and do what you can to resolve issues on site or to get contact details of those concerned so that I or the sites officer can try to do so afterwards.

There have been several projects and some issues of concern to the club which I will mention in order to inform the membership of developments in these areas of interest.

Website: The new forum developed by our webmaster which came online a couple of years ago has failed to recapture the central role of the old forum in club communications. This is in part due to the unfortunate timing of the change, when all forums were declining due to the rise of social media and partly to its different format and style.

In efforts to remedy this we have followed two paths. The adoption of the DSC facebook page to try to meet immediate, day to day chat and information exchange needs and the development of a completely new website for longer term archiving and presentation of the club to the public and members, new ones in particular.

Progress has been slow, as is the way with such projects, and there have been technical difficulties such as getting the corridor notification system to work effectively, and there is a level of dissatisfaction among some of the membership with the situation. The new website is not yet the vibrant centre of the club we would all like it to be but progress has been considerable and the new site has great promise. I would like to thank our webmaster, Drew for the immense amount of work that he is putting in and the friendly and cheerful way in which he responds to requests for help and to every new demand on his time.

I would ask the membership to use the site as much as possible and as well as complaining about security, layout, immediacy etc to get involved in making it better!

Coaching is an area requiring work and development within the club. The new BHPA pilot development programme will put new demands on our coaching system which we are trying to prepare for. Work was started last winter on reviewing our methods and practices and progress was made in planning for the future. However the new programme has been slow in being presented to clubs and we have made few changes to our traditional approach.

Flying with other air users: there are three issues I would like to discuss under this heading.

LBA proposals. Leeds Bradford Airport has a proposal underway to take large areas of new airspace around its current control areas. These proposals have been presented informally and we have combined with other gliding clubs to make our views heard but the formal period of consultation begins shortly when the plans and early revisions are formally presented. This should happen shortly and the plans will be published on our website for you to read and comment on.

We will continue to work with the other affected gliding clubs to minimise interference in our sport but I have to say that, from the initial proposal, while the impact on us may be small it could also make flying into the Vale of York and on to the Yorkshire coast even more difficult than currently. Other clubs are affected considerably more seriously by the proposals which seem to be far more wide ranging than even the massively unrealistic traffic predictions or current traffic movement practices would require. There will be considerable opposition unless the formal proposals have been considerably moderated.

Model Flyers. We have long been tolerant of modellers flying near to our sites if they have appeared skilled and considerate, keeping reasonable clearances and landing when appropriate. However a mid air collision between one of our pilots and model flown by just such an apparently responsible modeller has lead me to reconsider this approach.

The investigation into this incident has been confounded by the disagreements and disputes that followed but the UK Airprox board who are still investigating are likely to conclude that it was an accident as the result of an unusual set of circumstances with no blame to be attached.

The lesson I draw from this is that it is not good or safe practise to fly in the vicinity of models and that our tolerance needs to be moderated by caution. The National Trust, as part of our agreement with us do not give permission to anyone else to fly within 1kilometre of our takeoffs and landings, though they reserve the right to do so in special circumstances, when we would be informed in advance. (the info given in the site guide on this is accurate!)

Modellers however are under the false impression that they have a national agreement to fly any National Trust site as long as they are insured! This impression extends right up to the national organisation of the BMFA who believe as did the BHPA until early this year that their old agreement still holds. The reality is that all permissions have been devolved to local level and that the Dark Peak office are well aware of this. I have been working at national level to try to reopen discussions between governing bodies but they can only write codes of practice for organised clubs sharing sites, such as at the Mynd, and not for the individual flyers we encounter.

If you see modellers on any site that you wish to fly please talk to them to establish a rapport and safe separation, point out to them the difficulties we have in flying near them and the fact that we cannot fly elsewhere while they can! If you cannot persuade them to move away you should seriously consider whether it is safe for you to launch. If it is a National trust site you could inform them that they do not have permission from the landowner as they might believe, though this is unlikely to make much difference. You could also call the number in the site guide to inform the National Trust and they should try to send out a ranger to reinforce that fact....I do not know if that will happen but until we make such calls we will never know!

Drones: Similarly with Drone flyers, who are much more difficult to relate to as they do not always seem to come from a flying background but often to be photographers or filmmakers. Our worries over the proliferation of these devices do not seem to have come to fruition and there have been few, if any, incidents on our sites this year. Maybe the national coverage of incidents and the police and aviation authorities embarking on an educational as well as enforcement programme has had the desired effect.

However there was a Notam issued for Drone flying on the mam landslip (about which I have been unable to find any information) and the club has been approached by a couple of individuals seeking our permission to fly drones in a very responsible and professional way. As we cannot give permission for them to fly they have been passed on to the National Trust but as far as I can tell they have found it difficult or impossible to start a dialogue there. I am concerned that if there is no legitimate way for professional or responsible drone flyers to arrange to fly they will simply ignore such channels and fly anyway. I am considering contacting the National Trust to try to develop such a system for permissions in well planned and notified circumstances though this would mean that we would lose the right to fly for a period on what might be a good day on the best site for the conditions! I'd welcome your views on this?

Speed flyers: We have always welcomed BHPA qualified and insured members who wish to fly speedwings into our club and this has never caused any problem as they have been few in number and well aware of our flying patterns and site agreements. However there has been a regular group of fliers during this season who have not been able to show evidence of any of the above and this has been a cause of much concern and some friction! We have tried to temper complaints about their flying practices and attitudes with an attempt to be welcoming and inclusive in order to encourage them to get trained and qualified and become members of the club. Working with the BHPA we have encouraged them to go through an alternative qualification system and to gain the club pilot award which three of them have almost now completed. We then aim to have a discussion about how we as a club might be able to include speedflyers as well as paraglider pilots in our membership. This would have effects on our site agreements and flying practices that will need careful thought, possible renegotiation and agreement on all sides. It has been our view that it is a worthwhile project in order to include rather than alienate such pilots coming in from related disciplines but it remains controversial and is still a work in progress.

All in all I would say that the club is progressing reasonably well; with growing membership and good relationships with landowners and tenants and providing some of the best flying in the country.

There are some areas we will need to address over the coming year and my view of them has been outlined above. I intend to post this document on the forum in the hope of provoking wider discussion wherever members feel it is needed ... your views and involvement in forming our policies is always welcome.

Denis Walker
DSC Chair
19 Nov 2016

In order to enable different parts of this rant to be commented on or discussed I have used some of the paragraphs to start threads on the forum. Please take advantage!