

CEO Report – January 2022

National Centre

Activities at the National Centre have wound down a little for the winter with the main usage being season ticket holders. The volunteer team remain busy, preparing the site for winter and undertaking a program of maintenance on the plant and equipment.

Manny has published full updates on the National Centre website should you wish to find out more, the most recent being 22nd December: <https://nationalcentre.bmfa.org/national-centre-blog-winter-2021-2022>.

The National Centre also appeared on the TV Show 'Susan Calman's Grand Day Out' where she was hosted by long standing NC volunteer Richard Phillips who did an excellent job for us. If you missed it, it is still available on My5: <https://www.channel5.com/show/susan-calman-s-grand-days-out/season-2/episode-4>. We're in 'Shakespeare Country' apparently.

Manny and I have commenced initial discussions on how we might best utilise the National Centre to accommodate the ultimate closure of Chacksfield House.

The Valuation Office revalued Buckminster Lodge during the latter half of 2021, which has resulted in a very significant increase in Non-Domestic Rates which Melton Borough Council backdated to the start of our occupancy. Initially, this resulted in a demand for almost £75K! This did not take into account the £23K we had already paid in NDR over the period or include any allowances/relief. I have challenged MBC on this, and they are 'seeing what they can do'. At the same time, we have engaged the services of Hampton Lovett to challenge the valuation with the VOA. They carried out an initial assessment which confirmed that it would be worthwhile making an appeal and this is in progress. We are meeting with them again at Buckminster on the 19th January to finalise the appeal submission.

DMARES & CAA

There has been no further progress in terms of the CAA's project to ask the Associations to issue Flyer ID's to members. We'll be chasing this up with the CAA shortly.

CAA Working Group for Electronic I.D. & Conspicuity

There have been no further meetings since I last briefed you.

However, I have raised the issue with Stuart Lindsey and Jonathan Smith at the CAA who are leading the ongoing Airspace Modernisation Strategy and they have agreed that VLOS operation of unmanned aircraft is something they had not adequately considered (but will now do so).

Following the GAAC meeting at Cranfield in December, I am also in communication with the team at Altitude Angel but don't want to disclose too much about this in the public domain at the present time.

Article 16

At the start of December, I applied to the CAA for a new Article 16 Authorisation to come into effect on the expiry of the current one. The application included a draft of the updates to the 2022 BMFA Members' Handbook.

We received our new Article 16 Authorisation on the 21st December and it came into effect immediately. The only real changes to note were those made to reflect the changes to the law in terms of Control Line flyers who no longer need to register with the CAA as an Operator if operating aircraft weighing less than 7.5Kg on lines not exceeding 25 metres.

Our guidance, including the Quick Start Guide and the Members' Handbook have been updated accordingly. The Handbook will be published shortly but the Quick Start Guide was published immediately,

The impact of COVID-19

Little has changed for us in terms of operations at Chacksfield House. The office is still staffed daily but with staff working most of their time remotely. Two staff members have recently had COVID-19.

On a personal basis, I have continued to enjoy the vast reduction in travel and the improvement in work/life balance it has yielded. I have no desire to return to 25K miles/year in the car anytime soon.

CAA UAS Stakeholder Group

There was a meeting on the 6th October during which the CAA provided a general update. The next meeting is scheduled for 11th March.

ARUP – Stakeholder Group to advise the National Police Chiefs Council and College of Policing on unmanned aircraft.

I have attended a couple of further meetings of the UA stakeholder group organised by ARUP on behalf of the Police. We (BMFA/British Drone Flyers) have received an offer of help from a former member of this panel who has now retired from the Police and is one of the DfT's Aviation Ambassadors (see <https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/aviation-ambassadors-group>). This is an interesting development and we have agreed to have an initial discussion in the next couple of weeks.

CHIRP

The CHIRP Drone/UAS Advisory Panel met in November, and I agreed that we would explore the possibility of sharing occurrence reports in cases where lessons could be learned from 'human factors'.

GAAC

The GAAC held a meeting at Cranfield on 7th December which was also attended by representatives of Altitude Angel. John Gilder and Ann Bartaby of the GAAC have been reviewing a planning decision for the Lancaster and Morecambe Model Aircraft Club for us and we have passed their advice onto the club for consideration.

British Drone Flyers

At the time of writing our BDF membership is approaching 900. Whilst a number of 2021 BMFA members have transferred to BDF membership, we have also attracted back a significant number of lapsed BMFA members, who perhaps left us for more 'drone specific' alternatives and we are now attracting them back. Many are completely new to us though which is great. It's been a steady start, but we remain optimistic that we are moving in the right direction.

We are in the process of slowly establishing County based groups to organise local activities. So far, we have Yorkshire, Shropshire and Lancashire groups but hope to expand this through the course of 2022.

We are also working on improving the 'drone specific' membership benefits.

Membership Insurance

Our 2022 insurance arrangements have been something of a headache. With Hiscox quoting us an additional £3/member plus withdrawal of certain key benefits (they had already removed USA/Canada cover but were proposing to remove the contingent motor liability for members driving their cars airside on airfields), we therefore took the decision to move the BMFA's business to AXA XL and I met with the underwriter in Manchester in early November to discuss how to proceed.

Although the underwriter was very familiar with our requirements (having been the architect of our original arrangements for his former employer when we moved to Doodson's in 2012) there has been a great deal of work required to ensure that key policies were in place in time for renewals. However, work has been ongoing, and I gave up a good part of the leave I had booked over the festive period to progress matters with Tysers and AXA XL. The updated 2022 insurance documentation didn't arrive with me until after Christmas and there were then some amendments required meaning that we were unable to make the documents live in the membership system prior to New Year. We hope to upload them imminently but there is still one minor clarification awaited from Tysers.

The insurance market in general has 'hardened' and it has been a challenge to secure arrangements for some covers. There is one policy we have yet to finalise (management risks) which I hope to resolve with Tysers in the next few days. This is far from ideal but an indication of the difficulty we have had with the negotiations this year.

AXA XL have kept their premiums competitive but have already indicated that they will be anticipating an extra £1 per member at the next renewal.

Members' Handbook

The 2022 Members' Handbook has been drafted and its annexes should be updated within the next few days too. Should anyone have any input/amendments they would like me to consider then please expedite them to me.

Happy New Year!

Dave Phipps

January 2022