

When you have just had a new unelected chairman foisted upon you, it is reasonable for that person to give a bit of information to the membership by way of introduction, and so you have some idea of what you have let yourself in for.

My name is Pat Robotham, I live in the midlands, and have been a club member for forty years. Most of my interests in terms of motorcycling are focussed around earlier machines, and my "modern" bike is my 1959 Ariel VH that is on the road all year, but not in the ice and snow. Otherwise I like the pre war, veteran and vintage stuff, mainly because I understand it and can fix it most of the time. I am retired but when I worked commuted most days on a bike so had a few modern ones, as my employer liked me to get to work reliably.

I also spent thirty years riding in club off road Trials, where my enthusiasm was definitely greater than my skill level, but I did eventually get good enough to occasionally win something minor. I also rode for twenty-five years in the MCC trials and am a keen member of the Ariel Owners Club.

A few years ago, (I am very bad with dates and names) I was elected as a director of the VMCC and did two years, eighteen months of which as chairman. I stood down at the end of my two-year term, intending to reclaim my life. Following the most recent debacle culminating in the AGM, I made a foolish offer to help out if needed, got co opted as a director and here we are back as chairman on the wishes of my fellow directors.

My basic belief is that the VMCC is a membership organisation that must be run in a business-like way. It happens to be registered as a limited company; this was done to protect the shareholders, that is you the members, from liability for its actions and activity. This is a reasonable position to take, and places little constraint on the club in terms of what it can and can't do, so long as it does not knowingly trade insolvently and that it operates within the terms and constraints of good governance. These are the only two responsibilities of directors, to make sure that these two things are adhered to.

Directors do not own the club, you the members do that. Directors act on your behalf and in the best interests of the club bearing in mind the need for solvency and good governance. It goes without saying that the club must have a viable number of people who want to bring their skills to the table on a biannual basis to be elected as directors. Currently, and for a few years now, this has not been the case, so we need to put that right and get people to come forward, fully informed as to what will be required of them. Making sure this happens is one of the "governance responsibilities" of current directors.

The club as a membership organisation has a main source of income, that of membership subscriptions. Currently that is insufficient to maintain the activities of the club and to deliver member services. In the end subscriptions are bound to have to go up, this will result in many of the membership asking, "what services do I get for my money and is it worth it?" That places the onus on improving and diversifying the member services on the directors, HQ staff and the overall management committee. However it would be wrong to simply charge off developing such proposed services unless we actually know what the membership really want now and into the future. So we now need to consult widely to find out. It is your opportunity to have your say so please engage with the discussion process. I am aware that it is much easier to say what you don't want than what you do, we want to know what you want not what you don't.

It is quite likely that a number of the current alternative income streams currently used to try to improve the cash position may be dropped or simply dry up. These decisions will be taken on a business case by business case basis, again this is a director responsibility, to prevent the club going into insolvency sometime in the future when the current cash rich position runs out.

To avoid being entirely reliant on membership subs the club needs to develop more income.

It is my opinion that the club's strength is in its size, its history and what it currently does and how it behaves, I believe in modern parlance this is referred to as its BRAND. If you look at the world of social media you will see brands based on people who are famous only for being famous, The Kardashian family is a good example. What they are extremely good at is exploiting this commercially via the social media.

It is my opinion that the VMCC has a powerful brand, despite any recent self inflicted damage it may have done. This can and should be exploited and developed to provide an extensive range of electronic member services, which have commercial potential for exploitation as well. The way we develop and disseminate the material that we hold in our archive could have enormous potential here.

Is this something that could usefully have some of the Cobbing legacy spent upon it?

Anyway these are simply my ideas, they have no more status than any other ideas, but I offer them as a starting point for debate, if you need one.

Please bear in mind that financially the club is not in a position to be able to expose itself to financial risk by embarking upon some potentially expensive and ill-conceived idea. It is also my oft spoken view that the VMCC has no god given right to survive if it can't get organised properly and in a business like manner.

The clock is ticking. The discussions will be led and organised by elected President Alistair Alexander and elected Director and Vice Chair Justin Harvey James. The plan is to get through this and have some fully costed planning proposals within 4 to 5 months.

All the best, and strictly for a limited time only.

Pat Robotham, Co-opted Chair of directors/ management committee.