

Securing the future of the VMCC

A contribution to debate

The following is offered as a positive contribution to the democratic debate going on in the Club at the moment in response to the consultation documents produced recently by the Board.

The undersigned believe that the recent consultation documents are not clear enough in describing or defining the type and style required for the future operation of the Club and the underpinning values that will sustain that.

It is recognised that the signatories (see below) represent a large number of long standing members who have contributed through volunteering their services in the past. This does not make their views the only ones worth having. In fact they represent to a large degree the past and the immediate present, and it is accepted that to attract additional members, very many of whom are bound to come from a younger generation, then other perspectives need to be taken into account.

Yes. This document is an attempt to influence the debate, but it recognises that it is one point of view that needs to be factored into the future.

All we ask is that you, the membership, read the document and allow it to become part of your deliberations, which in turn we would then urge you to report to the Board of Directors so that they can factor your opinions into their decision making as part of the rightful democratic process.

A 'call to arms'

It also has one other proposed function. It is 'a call to arms', not to use against each other but to use on behalf of the Club to help it and the current and prospective directors in their pursuit of developing and delivering the VMCC into its future phase.

This Club needs and will continue to need willing volunteers - to act as Directors, to help run events at national and Section level and to deliver member services, such as library research, machine dating, or the use of Club machines. If you feel, having looked at all the documents in the current consultation exercise, that you can help and be part of this, then please contact the appropriate Director or Section official to offer your services. Let us put the word CLUB firmly back in the Vintage Motor Cycle Club.

Reflecting on the Club's aims

The VMCC is a unique organisation offering broad marque specialism and other activity associated with vintage motorcycling. It was created 75 years ago to foster the active enjoyment of vintage motorcycles through riding, rallying, competing at clubman level in a range of motorcycle sports, sharing technical and historical information and allowing like-minded folk to engage in camaraderie and to socialise around their chosen enthusiasm. In addition, it emphasised a desire

to extend and encourage this interest into later generations. We currently have a membership of 12,300 and 91 geographical and specialist Sections.

Over this time there has been much social and technological change. Both the extent and the diversity of interest in old motor cycles have grown. The Club too has grown and changed in structure, but it has never lost its overall aims.

Growth and change

In order to accommodate the needs of its growing membership the Club chose to become more commercial and to take on a central premises, staff and to expand its services to members to include specialist insurance, retail of specialist and more general parts, and an active research facility in the form of a well stocked library.

Unfortunately this model has been hard to sustain due to mounting financial pressure from falling membership and increasing competition in an insurance market that saw commission fall to zero at the end of 2020. Other attempts at alternative income sources have only yielded short-term results and are difficult to manage profitably in what is a largely volunteer organisation. The cost of membership has grown while choices for motorcyclists across the wider 'old bike scene' have expanded apace. The Club now faces an on-going operating deficit, a further likely drop in membership numbers and consequential reduction in its only reliable future income source – subscriptions - see Appendix One.

Things finally came to a head in 2020 and action now needs to be taken as a matter of urgency.

What needs to happen now?

The right mix of measures is now needed to begin to address unsustainable costs, to modernise central administration and to stem the fall in membership due to non-renewal. And it is essential to continue to improve the Club's core communications at every level, including via the Journal, website, the Forum, use of Social Media and bulletins to officials. Modernisation, greater efficiency and more effective control of costs are now clearly needed to turn things around, but robust decisions about these cannot be taken unless there is also clarity about the Club's overall mission and the really essential things that it needs to do to promote and enhance the enjoyment which its members derive from owning, restoring, maintaining, riding and enthusing over old motorcycles.

The 'beating heart' of the Club

In particular, the Board needs to focus on how the Club's overall business plan can be directed most effectively to supporting the activities of the VMCC's local and specialist Sections which are the beating heart of the Club. Winning new members and expanding the membership benefits package are clearly important for the future but the vitality of Section life must be accepted as the Club's Number One Key Performance Indicator. This means promoting and supporting the Sections and their programmes, allowing them to facilitate new activities and the 'sharing and comparing' of ideas and experiences across the Club enabling greater cooperation.

A 'Sections focused strategy'

It is envisaged that engagement with Sections has the potential to both increase membership and expose new members to a range of vintage and classic motorcycling experiences. While the central administration of membership records, finance, insurance, contracts, governance support, communications and the maintenance of external links are all central functions that need to be carried out as efficiently as possible, choices about all other matters need to be made on the basis on how essential they really are to growing and sustaining the Club at the local level and expanding opportunities for riding and enjoying veteran, vintage and classic machines. That, after all, is what our Club is all about.

Key ingredients

- The Journal, website, Forum and also Social Media are important means of communication which bind the VMCC family together and give it an identity. They need to be retained and improved, including through the adoption of the right mix of staff and volunteers, supported by the most effective IT systems.
- But the VMCC's national events programme (including racing, training days, rallies and presence at shows) needs to be re-balanced, with more events run by Sections as well as regionally - unless they can be proven to run more cost effectively from the centre.
- New cost effective solutions will need to be found to rationalising and accommodating the library while preserving the really essential parts of the Club's archive, ensuring members' access to it and supporting our marque specialists and dating services.
- New arrangements will also need to be found to assure the future supply of otherwise-hard-to-access spares ('Unobtanium') and regalia - but through a suitable arrangement with a trusted supplier on a commission or call-off basis.
- The Club's collection of machines will need to be reviewed and rationalised. More importantly, more opportunities need to be found for new members particularly to make it easier for them to borrow and experience riding exceptional vintage and classic bikes.
- New ways will also need to be found to pass on detailed machine knowledge and skills, including via electronic media.
- Advisory Groups of volunteers need to be maintained, for example to maintain links with like-minded organisations while scanning the scene for legislative and other potential threats and speaking up when necessary to defend our members' right to go on riding older machines.

- And above all the Club also has to work imaginatively to find new ways, including at Section level, to draw upcoming generations into our pastime in order to pass on knowledge, skills and enthusiasm.

Whilst accepting that any club with an age profile similar to that of the VMCC will be suffering membership loss for demographic reasons, it must also be recognised that there are many potential new members out there interested in engaging in the "real" world of vintage and classic motorcycling, but initially gaining access to it through their preferred social media platform. This group represents the bulk of a significant source of new membership who can be drawn towards the hobby of old motorcycling and make their way seamlessly and painlessly into the more active side of our hobby.

A new draft business plan

All this must be set out in a clear and succinct three-year business plan consulted on with the membership and delivered with effective operational cost control and reporting, a first draft to be prepared by Easter 2021. Delivery and regular monitoring of progress against the plan must be completely open and transparent. Decisions about the future of Allen House as a base for the Club's HQ need to be taken carefully in the light of market conditions, the likely availability and cost of suitable alternative accommodation and the office space requirements longer term. There are several other challenging decisions to be made and which need to be approached realistically to ensure the continued existence of the Club.

A new approach to Club governance

In due course a new approach to the governance of the Club will be needed in which the VMCC effectively becomes a 'Federation of Sections' supported by a relatively small but fit-for-purpose centre overseen by a Board drawn from the Sections and charged to deliver cost effectively what is needed to maintain and grow membership and to support Club activity at this level. To the greatest extent possible any new development work at centre level should be undertaken by limited- life task groups made up of suitable volunteers with clear terms of reference. Sections should be asked, on behalf of the Club, to take responsibility (for a defined period and with suitable central finance/support) for the delivery of certain things like events, publicity at shows, particular services or projects. A commission to find a simpler and more effective decision-making structure for the Club will be needed.

A great future, but only if...

While it is a club and not simply a profit driven business, the VMCC must be run in a suitably business like way. It has a great future ahead of it but only if approached transparently by the Board on the strategic basis set out here, recognising that the Club is essentially its members and that its success can only be assured by putting them at the heart of its plans and engaging them fully in decision making.

Signed by:

Roger Bibbings MBE, Herefordshire and Mid-Wales Section Secretary (and Convenor of the Regulatory Advisory Group) and:

Countersigned by the following:

Darol Baker	KOBI and former Cotswold Section Secretary
Bette Barber	Past VMCC President
Committee	Cheshire & North Wales Section.
Ian Clarke	Secretary Wessex V&V
Graham Daniels	Secretary E/L Section
Jim Dwelly	Brooklands Section
Tony Donithorne	Vice President since 2012
Bernie Dunmore	Concerned Member; C&NW section
Peter Fielding	Treasurer West Wilts Section
David Giles	Past VMCC Director
Graham Gott	Sec. Cheshire & North Wales Section.
Eddy Grew	Past Racing Section Chair
Mike Griffiths	Did not say -East Lancs and new area rep?
Brenda Hallard	Long time member
Rodney Hann	Past President & Area Rep
David & Jane Jarvis	Concerned Members; C&NW section
Peter Kent	Former Chair, Cotswold Section
Robert Livesey	BHR Chief Scrutineer and E/L member
Geoff McGladdery	Hereford Section
Peter Miller	Past VMCC Chair
Michael Olstowski	E/L member for decades
Bill Phelps	Past president, Marque Specialist
Ron Pratt	Concerned Member - Oxford Section
David Prisma	Chair East Lancs Section
Albert Risely	Concerned Member
Pat Robotham	Past VMCC Chair
David Sellars	Secretary, Sheffield & South Yorks
David Thorp	E/L member for decades
Harry Wiles	Past President & Past Area Rep
Ian Young	Past President & Previous Editor

Appendix one - Financial Assessment and Projection

The Club's operating account (income and expenditure) for many years has been adversely affected by declining income from the likes of insurance, events, raffles, retail and library activities, together with the cost of overheads. We have some income streams that have grown like advertising and at times, raffles (with correct bike) and sales of surplus library books etc. - all comparatively low risk and helpful. Set out below are some of the key facts and a proposal to address the financial pressures of declining membership but retaining the low level essential services needed to run the Club and support the Sections.

New cost effective solutions and rationalisation are needed to operate within budget and income, allowing for efficient and effective use of the income.

Membership Table indicates membership numbers estimated to continue until 2024:

October 16	15300	September 17	14733
October 17	14733	September 18	14803
October 18	14855	September 19	13453
October 19	13453	September 20	13453
October 20	13453	January 21	12296
<i>February 21</i>	<i>12296</i>	<i>September 24</i>	<i>9000</i>
Actual Reduction	October 2016	February 2021	3004 reduction
<i>Forecast trend</i>	<i>March 2021</i>	<i>September 2024</i>	<i>3296 reduction</i>

Total membership reduction over 8 years estimated 6000

Over the four year period very few increases have taken place in subscriptions. The reduction of member subscription income is of concern; the Club needs to operate efficiently to provide members with essential services. A shortfall of income may result in a subscription increase, which must be kept to a minimum.

Financial Prediction - To achieve keeping the membership subscription fee as low as possible and balance the operating finances, the Club must promote new membership and gain further income from Journal advertising, raffles, and the sale of regalia and special parts (unobtainable elsewhere) as a unique service. The operating and overhead costs must also be reduced. This means working to a much reduced budget with a potentially falling membership income and taking appropriate decisions on the likes of retail, Allen House costs, staff costs, and maintaining and disposing (but only if necessary) of all/some of the Club bikes etc. to balance the books each year with a surplus for years 2022 to 2024 and beyond with a return of £10-20K (not as at present for the past 2 years, a financial loss of between £138 – 200K each year).

Good financial control and cutting out some of the unnecessary cost items are essential. Along with consultation with Sections and Members it is possible to

operate the Club on a better footing. The correct use of improved communications and computer technology investment is required in order to minimise staff and overhead services which must be kept to a minimum but still provide a cost effective service to Sections and Members. The Club can no longer continue the way it has been operated and change is needed at the centre and careful use of member's income is vital.

It will not be easy, but it is possible and we all hope that the Club will attract further income from new members. This financial prediction is based on looking at the past four years in outline of the financial performance and a prediction for the next three years. With the proper financial management and the right people keeping the Club's operation simple, it will be possible to achieve savings and get the Club back on a sound financial footing to support all Sections and the Members in the enjoyment of motorcycling.