

From: Wing Commander Allan R Hildage RAF(Retd)



The charity that supports the RAF family

Royal Air Forces Association
Newark & District Branch
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15th September 2022

Ladies & Gentlemen,

SPECIAL GENERAL MEETING – THURSDAY 6th OCTOBER 2022
THE FUTURE OF RAFA NEWARK & DISTRICT BRANCH & CLUB?

I appreciate that our calling for a Branch/Club Special General Meeting is something of a rarity so I am writing to provide you with the need and rationale for the proposals being tabled. The first two are straightforward and are for the confirmation and ratification of our two co-opted committee members to become duly elected as Branch Trustees in accordance with Charity Commission and RAFA regulations.

The third proposal is to empower the Branch Committee to close/dissolve the Club to allow HQ RAFA to dispose of the premises and thereby relieve the Branch of the ongoing and escalating burden of maintaining the building, obviously, not a proposal that has been reached lightly! Whilst this is perhaps marking the end of an era, it also provides the exciting opportunity for a remodelled Branch to re-emerge as a stronger and more resilient organisation moving forward? Please read on.....

Background

As you will be aware the RAFA Newark & District Branch and Club have endured some difficult and turbulent times over the past few years that has been injurious to our reputation and indeed we were facing entire closure in early 2021. However, thanks to a small cadre of dedicated members who rallied to raise the necessary Committees to save the day and keep both the Branch & Club going!

Situation

Since then considerable effort has been expended and achieved in trying to rebuild the Branch/Club to a continuing and viable part of the overall Association. Whilst the Branch has a membership of headcount of some 280, it has become increasingly clear that the reality is there is only a dedicated core of 20 or so active members many of whom are now of advancing years. Appreciating that still somewhat in the immediate post-COVID era, there is a reluctance for some to venture out and get involved in social events, indeed the Branch 75th Anniversary Celebration Event could only attract 2 members in addition to Committee members attending!

Importantly, as with other like clubs / organisations locally, we are not attracting any new or younger members which does not bode well for the longer sustainability of RAFA in



Newark and certainly not in its present guise? As mentioned we are not alone in this situation similar associations locally with Club premises are struggling to continue and survive and we have already seen the closure of a local RBL Branch, at least two Regimental Associations similarly closing through lack of support in the past year.

As mentioned, we have successfully raised the two necessary separate Committee's to run the Branch and Club in accordance with Association and Charity Commission requirements, but it is proving increasingly difficult to sustain their viability due to increasing work diversions of the younger members who, whilst remaining keen and enthusiastic members, they are quite correctly having to prioritise their time and effort in support of their primary roles to the detriment of the efficient running of the Branch / Club.

As you will be aware, we have appealed for additional / replacement volunteers, but unfortunately few have been forthcoming and we are having to rely on the goodwill of the 'few' who are increasingly being overstretched and now often fulfilling more than one role. Clearly, this situation is unsustainable in the medium to longer term!

The Club's Committee and management team have done extraordinarily well in a relative short period of time in re-establishing the business as an emerging profitable and ongoing commercial concern to support our collective charitable aims. However, this has been achieved in the main by hosting private events such as wedding receptions, birthday parties, funeral wakes, etc., but most importantly through the dedication and concerted efforts of our appointed Club manager and her family. Having said that, it should be recognised that this is also a potential single point of failure with an immediate detrimental impact should 'they' choose to 'walk away' for any reason?

Financial

Also, we have recently received a utilities bill for £8.7k (this was before the recently announced price increases!) and other unanticipated but essential building maintenance bills totalling some £2k. It is also recognised that there will soon be a requirement for some roof and guttering repairs and despite some recent refurbishment work, we are advised that the building will probably need a complete electrical rewire and re-plumbing in some areas in the medium term. This will potentially cost some £20-30K. Whilst we have met the current expenditure by drawing down some reserves, it is appreciated that this is very much a one off solution and is not sustainable in the longer term (nor perhaps indeed the best use of what is after all, charitable monies?)

Equally and more importantly it is felt that any future revenue generated could be necessarily diverted to the maintenance of the premises rather than for the primary charitable purpose of our raison d'etre.

Potential Solution

Whilst both the Branch and Club committees have been pondering and discussing these issues and potential solutions at length but without much success, we have received a serious approach from a local charity who are keen to form a 'Blue Lamp Club' to serve as a social hub. This would be for the use of all Armed Services Veterans and Emergency Services' personnel. This Charity has expressed an interest in buying our Branch & Club premises in their entirety and with additional sufficient funding to facilitate the total repair and refurbishment of the premises. If this were to happen, they have already indicated that the Branch would be welcome to continue to meet and 'operate' from the premises, the terms of which could possibly be negotiated as part of any sale agreement?



The Way Ahead?

We have been in discussion with RAFA HQ who are not adverse to disposing of the premises and have commenced negotiations with the Charity directly. However, the final decision rests with the Branch membership who have to vote to close the Club and hand the building back to RAFA HQ to finalise any arrangements. Rather than wait until all negotiations have been completed and avoid any potential further or unnecessary delay, we are asking that the membership votes now to empower the Branch / Club committees to make the decision at an appropriate time once the negotiations are completed.

Clearly, this is not a situation that any of us would have wished to have found ourselves or be placed in, but realistically having spent much time discussing all the possible options moving forward, the disposal of the property came to the fore as undoubtedly the most practical for our Branch's continuing survival.

As already stated, this would mark the end of an era for RAFA Newark & District Branch, but please be assured that we do believe that without the burden and continuing diversion of maintaining an increasingly expensive property, the Branch itself can begin to properly regain its strength and readily return to its former success. I know that collectively, your committee members have the will and determination to succeed in all their endeavours, thus, I have no hesitation in commending the proposal to you.

I look forward to hopefully seeing you at the SGM to be held at the RAFA Newark & District Branch/Club commencing at 1900 hours on Thursday 6th October 2022. If you are unable to attend personally, please do take the opportunity to vote by proxy using the accompanying form. In the interim, should you wish to discuss any aspects of the proposals please do not hesitate to contact me directly either by email (allanhildage@btinternet.com). Thank you!



*Allan Hildage
Chairman
RAF Newark & District Branch*

