

ACU EASTERN
(AFFILIATED TO THE Auto Cycle Union)
Minutes of the 1st Meeting of the Board 2024 held Monday 11th March 2024
Claydon and Barham Community Centre

President	Mr A Penny (AP)
Chairman	Mr C Keeble (CK)
Minutes Secretary	Mrs B Fenn (BF)

Also in attendance were:-

E Hood (EH)	Triangle	C Cook (CC)	Braintree
K Weavers (KW)	Halstead	R Booty (RB)	West Essex
K Doherty (KD)	Eastern Marshals	P Sewter (PS)	Norwich Vikings
A Wright (AW)	Halstead	J Nash (JN)	Southend
P Nash (PN)	Southend	S Kenny (SK)	Harwich
R Chaplin (RC)	Sudbury	V Hearn (VH)	Stowmarket
P Fenn (PF)	Essex & Suffolk Border	J Hearn (JH)	Stowmarket

Following the numbering of the agenda:-

1. The Chairman, CK, opened the meeting and welcomed all present.

Apologies were accepted from Mr R Greengrass, Mr A Hay, Mr A Foskew, Mr J and Mrs B Douglas, G Brace, A Brace, A Waters and D Blyth.

- 2. Previous Minutes**

The minutes of the Board meeting held on 12th November 2023 were circulated following the meeting and have been approved via email.

- 3. Matters Arising**

No matters arising from those minutes to discuss were raised.

- 4. Chairman and Acting Secretary Report**

CK gave his report to the Board as follows:-

- 1. ACU Head Office**

CK confirmed that just before the November Board meeting, he had attended a meeting of National Council at Rugby and reported that they were working on a plan for the future of the Union and the sport as a whole entitled "The Way Forward". Matthew Wear also gave some details regarding this at the November meeting.

In January CK attended a meeting of Centre Chairmen at Rugby which focused almost exclusively on "The Way Forward". This meeting outlined the ideas of the Board which were very similar to the plans which were presented at the November meeting of National Council

No decisions were made at that meeting and the Centre Chairmen were instructed that the details were not for general publication. However, CK confirmed that they are looking at a full root and branch review of the way that the sport operates that will affect us all in some way.

The ACU Board established a working group to work through the details and put together a time line for implementation of “The Way Forward” – CK is a member of that group

The first meeting of the working group was held last Tuesday evening (5th March) via Zoom. The working group comprises 10 of the centre Chairman and it was proposed that each of them will pair up with another Chairman to gather thoughts from all Centres.

The Group will be meeting monthly with the intention of putting proposals to the Board in advance of the November meeting of National Council.

JN asked why there was no 2024 paperwork on the ACU website. The ACU wants the paperwork to be used but it is not there. CK confirmed that Head Office has had problems with others using their paperwork. Therefore, they have removed this for the time being. The paperwork can be requested from the Commission Co-ordinators (formerly the Sports Committee chairmen). The documents will eventually be put back on to the website behind a password facility via Sport 80.

VH indicated that she used to be able to see previous events the club had run but can no longer see this information. CK indicated that he thought this should still be possible – this point has been raised previously and he has some information as to how to get round this. He will circulate the details.

2. Centre Committees

CK confirmed that he had attended meetings of the Competitions committee, the Motocross committee, the Motocross forum and the Enduro forum. CK had been invited to a meeting of the Enduro committee but had been unable to attend due to a prior commitment. Neither the Trials committee or the Grass track committees have met since November and therefore CK has not attended meetings for those disciplines.

The Enduro committee have made a request for full devolution which is being dealt with by the Competitions committee and the Administration committee with draft terms of reference being considered.

3. Centre Administration

Since last November a lot of work has been carried out by the small team who are managing the Centre including:-

- Compiling and publishing the fixture list for 2024/25
- Preparing the Centre handbook for 2024
- Updating of the Centre database
- Tracking ACU Eastern trophies which have not been awarded
- Distribution of official passes for ACU Eastern events

- Purchasing of recruitment banners and creation of web site page to encourage new supporters
- Correspondence with ACU Head Office and Centre Clubs.

CK indicated that it may be thought these tasks, which are carried out in the background, are simple and straight forward. However, the administration of the Centre is being made far more challenging than it needs to be as a consequence of clubs and individuals not responding to correspondence, not following established Centre procedures and in many instances not following the ordinary rules and courtesies of everyday life.

For many years, at these Board meetings, we have listened to doom sayers warning us that the ACU Head Office wants to get rid of the Centres. CK made the point that if Head Office really want to get rid of the Centres then they need to hurry up because some of the members of this Centre are well ahead of the game and are doing their best to dismantle the Centre from within.

The clubs are not supporting the Centre, and, regrettably, in some instances they are positively working against the Centre.

In early January CK circulated to all clubs asking them to provide him with updated contact details and to confirm their Board delegate's names. It was only last November that delegates assembled at the Annual meeting of the Centre to vote upon proposed changes to the byelaws. Those changes were democratically rejected but in order to vote at that meeting delegates must have actually read the old byelaws which they wished to retain. Those byelaws require that clubs notify the Centre Secretary of the names of their delegates by 1st January. Therefore, it is difficult to understand why CK has had to chase several clubs to reply to his emails and why he has still not had a reply from all clubs. CK can only conclude that clubs are aware of the byelaws that they voted for but have taken a conscious decision not to comply with them.

Similarly, towards the end of last year, all clubs were asked to submit their dates for events in 2024. Again, several clubs had to be chased to reply. There was not even the basic courtesy to send an email or make a telephone call to explain why they did not reply.

The Webmaster and Gazette editor spend an inordinate amount of time making sure that the website and Gazette are operated professionally. However, clubs do not provide him with reports or results or the like which makes it impossible for him to publish them. We have to accept that social media is here to stay but its use does not prevent publication of information via the official channels and clubs are not prevented from moderating posts on their social media sites to maintain a professional appearance. It has not been uncommon for announcements to be made by social media with the Webmaster/Gazette editor being told afterwards (if at all).

The Permit secretary also spends a considerable amount of time maintaining the fixture list but on several occasions this year she has been notified by Head Office that Centre clubs have applied for permits for events which are not on the published fixture list. The fixture list is there for many reasons. It prevents events clashing for the benefit of clubs, competitors and the general public who have to endure what many people regard as anti-social motorbikes. CK indicated that he did not understand why clubs find it difficult to contact the Permit

secretary beforehand. Perhaps it is the case that clubs are making a deliberate decision to work against the rules and ignore common courtesy.

All clubs running events are sent forms to declare the amount of Centre Support Charges that are due. However, the Treasurer is continually having to chase clubs for those declarations. The Treasurer is a busy person and does a lot more than simply “keep the books”. Those defaulting clubs must either have no respect for the Treasurer’s time or once again are making conscious decisions not to comply with laid down procedures.

Prior to the November meetings of the Board and the Centre, CK received some requests from clubs to register additional delegates to the Board. Following the update, which was carried out at the beginning of this year, I was notified that some of those new delegates together with some long-standing delegates have resigned from that role. We now have less delegates than at this time last year.

Based on the byelaws, this Board should have 63 club delegates plus Officers and Vice Presidents. However, clubs have only nominated 38 delegates and 6 clubs have not appointed any delegates at all.

Looking at the attendance at the meeting today

- The number of delegates should be 63 (28 clubs)
- Delegates not nominated at all 27 (6 Clubs)
- Delegates under nominated 10 (8 clubs)
- Expected number of delegates 36 i.e. 57% of entitlement

- Actual number of delegates in attendance 16
- Apologies received from delegates 3
- Delegates who do not have the courtesy to offer apologies 13

As a reminder the first objective of the Centre, as set out in the byelaws (which all delegates must have read back in November), is “To foster and encourage the sport of motorcycling and carry out such administration as may be required from time to time by the Centre or the Union”

The Centre comprises all of the clubs and therefore this objective is the responsibility of all of the clubs not just the small team of officers and officials.

If this Centre is to survive and prosper, which should be our combined ambition, support is needed or at the very least a lack of detrimental actions from within.

CK also indicated that the clubs who have not replied to update their details are St Georges and Southend.

4. Moving Forward

CK acknowledge that his remarks may have been overly negative but there is an opportunity to easily correct that.

The next meeting in July is to discuss sustainability which gives every club the opportunity to register their full complement of delegates and put forward positive suggestions for the future of the Centre.

CK stated that he would like to think that, by then, the Centre will have a full complement of 63 delegates and all of them will attend with positive suggestions for the furtherance of the Centre.

Whatever the Centre decides to do they will be regulated by the ongoing Head Office review but something must be done. The Executive Officers spent time last year attempting to tidy up the byelaws as a first step. Since those proposals were democratically rejected, it is now the responsibility of the Centre, and in other words the clubs, to follow up that rejection with positive suggestions.

If the clubs do not want the Centre then the July meeting is the time for their delegates to attend and say so. There was some discussion as to what the date of the July meeting would be. JN and PN may not be able to make the July date. If the date is a problem, they are able to appoint someone to attend the meeting in their place.

RB asked what the purpose of the sustainability meeting was as this may be confused with environmental issues. CK confirmed that this was to discuss the future and looking forwards. It may be that the name needs amending so as not to cause any confusion.

CK will send out the information about the meeting in due course and try to get people along to discuss new ideas.

PN indicated that the ACU had talked of removing the remaining Centres. He asked whether the Centre could work with both the ACU and AMCA and get the best of both. Southend club have joined AMCA as well as the ACU so that they can get additional permits for practising events. CK asked PN to send him the contact details for AMCA. CK indicated that the services of AMCA were not equivalent to those of the ACU. The ACU has done a lot of research and do know that things need to change. They have not been making significant money for some time. There is a lot of change happening at Head Office and CK will report on this when he can.

5. Financial Report from Centre Treasurer

The Report was given by CK in the absence of AH – CK noted that it was very unusual for AH to miss a Board meeting and had been a difficult decision for AH to make.

The Financial Report had been circulated ahead of the meeting today and was self-explanatory.

CK highlighted that AH had been unable to finalise last year's figures as he is still awaiting Centre Support Fund declarations from some clubs.

AH had also put forward a proposed budget for 2024.

As can be seen in the Report, the ACU Head Office made a decision very late at the end of 2023 (and which was not clarified until January 2024) to remove all funding to the Centres from Head Office. This means that the Centre will no longer receive any permit fees, club affiliation fees or rebates on insurance funds collected and they will no longer get paid £50 per speed event. A system of sporting grants has been introduced but no guidelines have yet been set for this and any payments are at the discretion of Head Office.

The only income the Centre can now receive is that which it raises itself. Therefore, AH has proposed that the Centre Support Charge be increased to 60p per rider and that an inscription

fee for all Centre Championship rounds be introduced of £20 for trials and £50 for speed events both applicable from 1st April 2024. This would be an equivalent loss of one entry fee per club.

These suggestions then raised several points for discussion.

PN asked how much we have in the Centre accounts. CK confirmed there was approximately £25,000 in the accounts. The Facilities Fund also contains £96,000. PN asked why these accounts cannot carry the loss to the Centre for a year or why the Facilities Fund could not be used to top the Centre accounts up for a year. VH also made the point that interest of just under £1,000 has been made on the Facilities Fund account – could this not be used towards the Centre finances? CK indicated that whilst interest had been earned inflation had reduced the value of the funds overall.

VH asked if the suggested inscription fee for Championship rounds could be reviewed annually. CK confirmed that it could.

PN then asked if the introduction of the inscription fees could wait until the end of the year and be introduced for 2025. AW made the point that some events have already been published without allowing the increased rider and inscription fees.

CK confirmed that he was happy to add into the proposals that the inscription fee could be reviewed annually and that the introduction of the proposals could be pushed back by a month to take effect from 1st May 2024. However, he was not prepared to make any other amendments to AH's proposal in his absence.

Some discussion was then had about it being too late into the season to change fees. CK made the point that the ACU had only notified the Centre in January that it was removing the funding and solutions then had to be sought as to how to cover the deficit this would cause. SK indicated that AH had been a good Treasurer for many years and was simply trying to resolve the problems now caused by the ACU withdrawal of funding. CK confirmed that the Centre needed to manage things for this year to try and keep the Centre going. Once Head Office has sorted out the way forward, we will have more of an idea as to which direction we are going in.

CK put forward the following proposals to the Board:-

- (a) The Board notes the 2023 Accounts – all voted in favour and this was carried
- (b) The Board approves the draft Budget for 2024 – 12 voted in favour and 2 voted against, this was carried
- (c) The Board approves the levelling up of the Centre Support Charge – 8 voted in favour and 6 voted against, this was carried
- (d) The Board approves the introduction of an inscription fee of Centre Championship events – 6 voted in favour and 8 voted against, this was lost

Further discussion was then had about the impact of the ACU withdrawing the funding from the Centre. CK confirmed that the ACU had stopped the funding as they now wanted to retain all income. Barbara Douglas can no longer issue permits, this is all done through Head Office and they receive the fees directly. CK indicated that we are not the only Centre who is unhappy with the new arrangements. CK is going to try and ask Head Office to be more open about their finances and emphasise that the ACU only survives because of events which the Centres are running.

CK indicated that Matthew Wear has a background in the sport and has been involved with running events and that Tim Lightfoot (the new Chairman) is aware of the challenges which we all face. They are looking to change the set up of the ACU Head Office and are getting specialist advisers more involved. They are reviewing any contracts being entered into so that these can only be approved by the Board going forwards.

PF made the point that there was not much that the Centre could save money on. CK confirmed that even with the introduction of both new proposals, the Centre would still be £1500 short this year. Hopefully, better solutions can be put forwards once the ACU gets itself in order. Any changes the ACU wishes to make has to be approved by the National Council who generally meet in November. Any proposals would be put before the Board in October which only gives the ACU approximately six months to try and get things in order for next year, which does not give them very long.

6. Competitions Committee Report

CC said there was not much to report on behalf of the Competitions Committee. The Committee is obviously concerned about the increasing costs.

CC asked the Board to approve the minutes of the Committee held on 28th September 2023, 7th December 2023 and 25th January 2024, which had all been posted on the ACU Eastern website. The Board did not raise any questions regarding these minutes and all voted in favour of their approval.

7. Environmental Issues and Rights of Way Report

RB went through his report. RB had found a copy of the one page Sustainability Policy on the ACU website. There is also a copy of the ACU Environmental Code for 2023 on their website. These indicate that there should be an expert on environmental issues at all events and that the Clerk of the Course should have received training in this area.

The Environmental Code is basically a copy of the FIM Code and does not contain any guidance as to how to reduce the environmental impact of the sport.

RB indicated that MotorSport UK are currently taking action with regard to reducing emissions. The ACU are not presently doing this. RB has a seat on LARA but this has not come via the ACU – RB has offered support regarding the environmental issues but the ACU do not seem to want the support of RB or LARA.

RB also mentioned that he had raised the question regarding Arena Essex to Matthew Wear in November as this has apparently been purchased by a private owner. He wanted to know what the ACU are doing to ensure that this venue is used for motorsport but does not yet have an answer to this question.

RB asked if the Board wanted to add any of the environmental information to the website. PS indicated that he did not see any reason why this could not be added as content.

8. Eastern Centre Gazette and Eastern Centre website

(a) Statement from Centre Chairman regarding Gazette Account at Barclays Bank

CK confirmed that the issues with Barclays Bank continue. Barclays had threatened that the Gazette Account would be closed unless certain documentation was produced. The account for the Gazette has been reinstated after CK provided Barclays with a copy of the Board minutes. However, the account name has now been given as “ACU Eastern” because this was the heading on the Board minutes. CK had to accept this account name or the account would have been closed. However, CK will try to visit the local Barclays to see if he can find someone sensible to change the account name to “ACU Eastern – Gazette Account”.

(b) To accept the resignation of Mr Paul Sewter from his posts as Gazette Editor and Webmaster effective from 31st December 2024

CK indicated that this was a vital role and it would be hard to find someone to replace PS with the same level of experience and abilities. The Board gave a vote of thanks to PS for all of the hard work he has done for the sport over the years.

CK asked if all clubs could let him know if they are aware of anyone on the Centre who we could approach to take over the roles from PS. PS confirmed that he is happy to work with someone to assist with the take over and ensure a smooth transition. CK indicated that he could not continue in his role without a replacement being found for PS.

(c) To receive a report from the Gazette Editor and Webmaster

PS did not have much else to report other than to say that he is now starting to get content for the Gazette after ten years of reduced material. He hopes that this will enable the Gazette to keep going.

(d) To receive a report from the Gazette Treasurer

In the absence of Ron Greengrass, this was covered by CK. The Reports for the final quarter of 2023 and the whole of 2023 had been circulated prior to the meeting. These indicate that the Gazette is in a good position financially. No questions were raised about those Reports.

(e) To discuss the recruitment of a replacement Gazette Editor and Webmaster

This has been covered above.

9. Benevolent Fund Report

In the absence of Debbie Blyth, this was covered by CK. The Report had been circulated prior to the meeting. There is not much to note here. The person dealing with the Benevolent Fund at Rugby has now left and, therefore, Debbie is still awaiting updates regarding any grants which have gone to Centre riders.

10. Copdock Bike Show

CK commented that last year was the first time the Centre had had a presence at the Copdock Bike Show. This appears to have been well received by visitors particularly by those who had not known how to get children involved in the sport.

The Centre's stand had been stand alone. However, several Centre clubs have their own exhibits and it would be good to work with them to share signage, posters, leaflets etc to reinforce the presence of off road sport at the show.

There is no charge for the Centre to have a stand and we receive eight entry tickets with this. The only costs incurred are the printing of leaflets and posters which are already included within the promotional budget for this year.

All members of the Board approved the Centre presence at the show again this year. If the Centre is happy with this then we will discuss with the other Centre clubs attending how to combine resources and messages to visitors to promote the off road side of the sport. EH indicated that we will need more supporters at the show – last year there were only members from Essex and Suffolk Border, Lowestoft and Harwich clubs in attendance on behalf of the Centre.

11. Any Other Business

RB asked for the date of the Copdock Bike Show. Others were not sure and suggested 3rd September – note this was the date of last year's show and so it is not clear what the date for this year's show is.

It was mentioned that the TRF are advertising that they have over 9,000 members who are all given a licence. Is this taking members away from the Centres?

There being no further business, the Chairman closed the meeting after thanking everyone for their attendance.

Next meeting date to be arranged