

BRITISH MOUNTAINEERING COUNCIL

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LONDON & SOUTH EAST AREA MEETING

Meeting held by zoom call
on Thursday 10 September 2020 at 19.00

Minutes

1. Welcome and apologies for absence - Attendance numbers 25 (maximum)

Chaired Chris Stone (CS) Minutes taken by Robert Dufton (RD)

Apologies – Tim Crocker, Rya Tibawi

CS welcomed Lynn Robinson, BMC President to the meeting.

2. Minutes of previous meeting held on 19 May 2020

The minutes of the meeting on 19 May 2020 were approved (Y3, A10, N0).

3. Actions/Matters arising

CS reported on re-bolting work which had been carried out by the Harrison's Rocks Management Group at Bull's Hollow.

4. Changes in BMC board membership and response by National Council

RD as one of the two LSE area representatives on National Council reported on the changes in the membership of the BMC board and the response to this by National Council. Two of the three independent non-executive directors the board had resigned citing concerns over some behaviours within the Board. A third director, nominated by National Council to the board, had also resigned. The chair of the board had decided not to seek a further term of office. Subsequently a fourth director had resigned citing the comments of a small but vocal group of BMC members about him which were making it unable for him and the Board to continue to make good progress.

In the light of the initial resignations, National Council had had extensive meetings to discuss the situation. National Council had requested information from these directors and from all directors. National Council, in its role as representing BMC members and being responsible for holding the board to account, had the met again jointly with the board members (and separately) to discuss the actions which the board proposed to take to address the situation and the behaviours and differences of values of board members. National Council was receiving regular updates from National Council Directors and the Board about the board's recovery.

National Council was now supporting the board and its Nominations Committee in the recruitment of a future chair and two independent non-executive directors. LR added that it was RD who was providing the support (as a non-voting member) as he had wide and in-depth experience in board level recruitment.

CS, as a member of the board nominated by National Council, stated that the Board took this situation very seriously. It had engaged with Sport England, one of the BMC's main stakeholders. It would be holding facilitated sessions between board members and discussions had taken place between the board and BMC staff. A board evaluation which was later in the year would be brought forward (this was funded by Sport England). Three individuals with board experience and knowledge of the BMC (Louisa Stewart, Colin Knowles and Rab Carrington) had agreed to join the board as advisers for a period until new board members were in place. An interim executive would be joining the BMC for three months to work alongside the CEO and Deputy CEO on the strategic plan. The BMC would be recruiting to a new permanent post of Head of Operations.

CS asked members for any comments or questions on this matter which he and/or LR would answer.

Tom Hook asked whether the board would publish its action plan. CS explained that the steps he had described were the board's action plan but that it was intended to produce a timeline of future actions.

Sherry MacIver asked about the process of appointing the Interim Executive and whether the new Head of Operations would be a paid role or not. CS said that the interim post had been recruited through open appointment. The Head of Operations would be a paid member of staff. CS added that strengthening the BMC senior management team had been one of the agreed recommendations of the Organisational review group.

5. Covid-19 Update

CS stated the Covid-19 situations was fast changing. There had been an incredible increase in the number of members of the public taking part in outdoor activities. This was welcome but could lead to problems with e.g. inappropriate parking and fly camping. The BMC had launched two campaigns: its litter campaign www.thebmc.co.uk/lockdown-litter-picking and a campaign against inappropriate use of disposable BBQs www.thebmc.co.uk/disposable-bbq-moorland-ban-no-moor-bbq

LR encouraged members to send a letter to their MP about the threat to moorlands from disposable bbqs and open fires. This has been at the suggestion of the All Party Parliamentary Group who LR had met just before lockdown started. Littering and fly camping were big problems at some key climbing crags, including BMC owned-crags, and within national parks more broadly.

Members present discussed ways in which information could be shared and other work to change inappropriate behaviours, as well as the learning from other national mountaineering and climbing bodies in the UK and in Europe. There were positive developments e.g. CS reported a comment in the zoom chat from Helen Littlejohn that some independent retailers in the south west were no longer selling disposable bbqs.

6. Southern Sandstone/Harrison's Rocks Mangement Group Update

Damon Beail updated the meeting about activity at Southern Sandstone. During the Covid lockdown the Southern Sandstone crags had become the most popular crags in the UK, including many people who had not previously climbed outdoors before and were only previously climbing at indoor climbing centres. There had been a need for rapid education of the new climbers, both on social media and in person, both about sandstone climbing etiquette and more general issues, e.g. parking, litter and hygiene.

DB reported on the past and current closure of some SS crags because of the problems of overuse and/or parking problems at the request of landowners. The HRMG had worked hard to maintain a dialogue with the owners and to secure some continued access where possible. He reminded members that they should themselves, and encourage others, to look at the online Regional Access Database for up-to-date information. The SS RAD section would be strengthened with more information about SS climbing etiquette. DB said that people had been over-whelmingly positive and receptive when he and other members of the HRMG had found it necessary to point out inappropriate actions.

CS thanked DB and all members of the HRMG.

7 Area Reps update

7.1 Clubs

CS reported on behalf of Tim Crocker. TC was starting to get in contact with as many representatives of the 40 clubs based in the area in order to better understand the clubs and their concerns. He was also intending to build mechanisms to promote more sharing of ideas between LSE area clubs.

7.2 Hillwalking

Fabrizio Scaliogne updated members about the latest guidance from the BMC concerning organised club events. He also drew attention to guidance from the Ramblers Association which recommended a

maximum of 12 people on organised walks rather than the full 30 permitted for organised sport carried on outdoors. He was looking at the possibility of reviving the planned LSE area and The Chilterns Society joint walk. In summary the BMC advice for hillwalking remained to stay low and stay safe

8.3 Youth

Tanya Sage the area Youth representative reported that the BMC competitions officer Zoe Spriggins had had to cancel the national YCS finals which had been due to take place in September as they attracted upwards of 800 people (competitors, parents etc and organisers. However hoodies had been sent to all 300 children and young people who would have taken part. A debriefing of all Youth Competition reps was being undertaken and discussion was underway as to what might happen in 2021. The regional heats for 2021 which were due to have taken place in November and December 2020 also had to be cancelled.

8 Organisational Update

8.1 Organisational Development Group

CS posted links to the latest ODG updates. A consultation on the change of National Council to the Members Council was open. The proposal would be decided at the 2021 AGM. The consultation on the proposed terms of reference of the new Members Council closed on 11 September 2020. Further consultation was being carried out about improving voting procedures, including at area AGMs and other meetings. This was being led by Andy Syme the Deputy President of the BMC and the BMC governance officer Lucy Valerio.

8.2 Strategic Plan

CS reported on the consultation of the refreshing of the strategic plan in the light of Covid and the need to flesh out the agreed strategic aims into actions (which would be the work of the Interim Executive). There was a deeper review of the strategic aims around education and how this would be developed with partner organisations. This was open for feedback until 15 09 2020. The timetable was tight because of the need to feed into the BMC's business planning and budgeting cycle. CS outlined the main elements of the plan.

Members present commented, particularly on membership recruitment: (1) could the BMC arrange with the Association of British Climbing Walls that BMC membership would be uniformly accepted by climbing centres as showing the ability to climb safely; (2) could BMC membership be compulsory in order to climb on BMC owned crags. Other members felt it was important that the BMC was a body of people who wished to be members not who had been in effect compelled to do so. Whilst there was a desire on the part of many members to see the BMC generate more income, others also felt that it was inevitable that the BMC would need to prioritise carefully as it would not be able to achieve everything.

LR encouraged all members to feed in their ideas on this important topic.

SMCl was concerned about the lack of notice given to club reps about the consultation since it did not given them time to consult within their clubs. Another member asked for the BMC to develop multiple lines of communication to a broader group of club officers to ensure more effective communications.

9 Area "Noticeboard"

SMCl reported that the Alpine Club was giving clubcasts via zoom

10. LSE Area Social Media reps

CS said he was keen to recruit one or two individuals to be the area social media reps. These volunteered in some of the other BMC areas and were making a good impact. He asked anyone who was interested to discuss this with CS or RD via LondonSE.area@thebmc.co.uk

11. Date of next Area Meetings

The next area meeting (also the area AGM) would be held on Tuesday 27 October 2020 (by zoom)