

Essex Gliding Club

Minutes of a Committee Meeting held on 10 October 2024

At the Clubhouse Ridgewell Airfield Commencing 7 p.m.

Committee Members Present

John Whitwell (Chairman) Dave Hertzberg (CFI) Tony Brook (Treasurer)

Steve Jessup (Secretary) Callum Hitchings, Will Burry, Vince Earl

Apologies

None as all present

Also in Attendance

Gary Shepherd (for Item 3)

1. Opening Remarks

JW said that this was a pre meeting to the AGM but we needed to specifically speak about Voucher Flight issues as the special meeting at which this had been planned to discuss with the wider membership had been cancelled due to insufficient numbers of members wishing to attend

2. Minutes of last meeting

These were approved and are to be put on the website. **(Action CH)**

The actions prescribed by the minutes were reviewed

Communications

DH was continuing his regular update on flying matters through the WhatsApp bulletin

CH had not set up the committee WhatsApp group (but immediately did so at this meeting and that is now available)

Tug

JW had followed up the request to do two oil checks per year but had been advised that there was no value in doing this.

Voucher flights and implications of Wormingford possible closure.

The special meeting had been arranged (including booking the Hall) but it had to be cancelled due to lack of member interest. The Village Hall committee had been very good to us and refunded the booking fee.

Improving the field

The decision to hire a digger and dumper for two days had yet to be implemented mainly due to potential impact on flying operations. A suitable period would be identified by the site team once flying at Ridgewell had finished this year **(Action CH)**

Instruments in Club Gliders

New varios to be purchased for both PW6's DH to make final decision on type and consult with TB on funding. This has yet to be actioned **(Action DH/TB)**

Neighbour Relations

The open day suggestion was a matter of continuing discussion between JW and Mr Norris. Mr Norris suggested this should occur 'in summer but before the Harvest' **(Action JW to pursue further with Mr Norris)**

3. Voucher Flights

As agreed at the last Committee meeting an extraordinary Meeting of the Club specifically to discuss voucher flights had been set up and Ashen Village Hall booked for it. However few members expressed any interest in attending and so the meeting was cancelled.

Further discussion was therefore put on the agenda for this meeting in order to go through the points which seemed to be at issue.

This had two aspects

(i) The need for members to support the VFs (launching retrieve etc) was perceived as excessive

(ii) The pressure on BIs and IFPs to discharge the vouchers could also be excessive

It was clear that this really boiled down to decisions about;

1. Whether or not we should keep the tug
2. What would be the impact on club finances if we did not keep the tug
3. The impact on finances if we kept the tug but reduced the number of VFs
4. How to mitigate members concerns

Tony had produced spreadsheets showing club income/expenditure. Projected income from the VFs in the current year exceeded the total of member's membership and flying fees. It was clear that if income from VFs was reduced (by having fewer) then the deficit would need to be balanced by obtaining additional income from members by increasing membership, launch (especially aerotow) and flying fees.

DH pointed out that the availability of an aerotow option gave significant advantage, We could fly on days that were not suitable for winch launching and in the event of a prolonged winch breakdown (as occurred earlier this year) or when there were too few people to enable winch launching (which had occurred several times this year). The longer flight times also enabled swifter progress by trainee pilots as aerotows gave more stick time.

JW observed that when the club first came to Ridgewell the attitude of the BGA was that its runway length was really only suitable for an aerotow only club.

Decision The Committee did not support the removal of the aerotow facility

There was some discussion about limiting the number of aerotow launches per day but it was acknowledged that this would lead to backlogs due to days being lost through weather etc. and also affect revenue.

The real issue seemed to be those occasions when there were insufficient members present to support the number of VFs without overload on individuals. These occasions had been relatively few but we need to try to avoid them occurring.

One problem was that at the time Tony had to arrange the number of voucher flights for any given day, he had no real knowledge of how many club members would be present on the day. Cancellation of voucher flights on the day is problematic.

Decision We must encourage all members to sign in on Zweef as early as possible and for those who do not use it to sign up to it. This will enable TB to better balance the voucher flight numbers (Action DH).

There was some discussion about putting together a BI/IFP rota so that there was clarity about who was on duty to do the VFs, thus leaving non rostered BIs/IFPs not feeling obligated to attend on that day or free to attend but

fly their own gliders. It would also assist TB in allocating Vouchers to flying days. SJ mentioned that we could do with spreading the load by developing more BIs/IFPs.

Decision DH /TB will develop a BI/IFP Rota similar to Tug and Winch Rotas (Action DH/TB)

The possibility of enabling additional flying days to spread the number of VFs was discussed. The recent special Friday flying day had been quite successful

Decision We would trial one Friday per month next season aimed principally at spreading VFs over more days but also available as a normal gliding day for club members. (Action DH)

There was some discussion about more efficient running of VFs by reducing the amount BIs and IFPs had to cover on the field. Producing a video that VFs could watch might reduce briefing time and enabling pre filling in of Temporary Membership forms might help in getting people more quickly into gliders.

Decision CH would look into these matters to see what could be done (Action CH)

SJ mentioned the problem of VF passengers turning up late.

Decision VF holders to be asked to turn up 30 minutes before their flight time and to expect to be on the airfield for two hours (Action TB)

There was a long discussion essentially about target times for Voucher flights. The Into the Blue vouchers are sold not only with the launch height given but with also the mention of specific flight times. These being 15 to 20 minutes for Bronze, 25 to 30 minutes for Silver and 'Best part of an Hour' for Gold. EGC vouchers do not now give times although they previously did.

Discussion around this included how realistic these targets were and the safety and contractual implications of having target times. This led on to how the wording of advertisements and vouchers could be amended to remove target times or make them more realistic. We could usefully consider the wording used by other clubs.

Decision the only measure of the flight to be considered by the BI/IFPs when delivering them would be the launch height i.e. 2000, 3000, and 5000 feet. (Action BIs/IFPs)

The wording of advertisements and vouchers would be amended to remove target times or make them more realistic. (Action JW/TB)

TB said he will monitor effect on reviews, complaints and voucher sales. **(Action TB)**

There was discussion regarding the Voucher flight categories. DH expressed concern about the gold voucher on the basis that there were few days when they could be safely flown to 5000 feet. This was generally acknowledged.

Decision There would be no change to the voucher categories but the wording of the vouchers particularly the gold voucher would be examined and clarified if necessary to mention the potential need to offer substitutes on the day.

5. Treasurers Report and Future Finances

TB presented spreadsheets showing income and expenditure from 2022/23, 2023/24 and projected income and expenditure for the current year (2024/25) and for 2025/26.

These were concerning as since in 2023/24 expenditure exceeded income and that was projected to be the case for the current year and the next.

There was discussion about how costs could be cut.

It was felt that there was a need to increase fees to members. Annual membership fees had remained the same for several years. Suggestion was to leave full membership the same but increase Junior to £125. It was

suggested that Aerotow fees should go up to £35 for 2000 feet and maybe put winch launch fees up to £9 and flight fees up by a couple of pence.

There was a suggestion to increase income by starting flying earlier in the day.

Decision Further research on what increase in membership and flying fees should be done and a further meeting held before the AGM to finalise what the Committee would recommend. (Action TB/JW)

There was also discussion about the one month temporary membership bestowed upon those purchasing voucher flights and the possibility of this being abused. The origin of this privilege was not clear although there was some suggestion that this had been imposed by the BGA and indeed had originally been a three month membership. This needed to be clarified so that a decision on whether or not to continue this could be made. (**Action JW**)

6. Fleet Maintenance

It was agreed that WB and Nick Baker could investigate the issues with KRX wheel brake and carry out corrective works within the scope of CAA ORS9 – pilot owner maintenance permissions.’ (**Action WB**)

7. EGC Officer Role Changes

JW said that VE take over as Health and Safety Officer and CH would take over from VE as Technical Officer.

The meeting closed at 9.50 p.m.