**National Chairpersons report 15th February 2025**

**19th National Annual General Meeting**

**84th Annual National Conference**

Dear Friends,

Welcome to Northampton a town with a rich history of shoe making before the 1930's decline. Did you know that Matt Smith, Faye Tozer, Joan Hickson, Francis Crick, and Richard Coles all came from Northampton?

Every year I have been National Chair it has been different, and this year is no exception. Craig Bunyan and Lauren Crawley joined the National Executive Committee (NEC). Bringing new people with fresh ideas is something we are so in need of for the survival of Plus.

Over the year the NEC has met in numerous ways with mixed success. May's meeting was online via zoom. With the August meeting being held in Northampton using a venue nearby. The November meeting was another face-to-face meeting with very few attendees.

Communications with the NEC have been much improved with email the primary use. We do have some members who sporadically use other methods like text, zoom, teams, what's app and Facebook messenger. If your message is important then why not call me. It is disappointing when you read members complain about reaching out and not getting any responses. Then on investigation find a Facebook message unread for a couple of weeks. To put it in contrast it is the first contact in the past 12 months. So not really important or else they would had called me.

My recommendation in 2023 was to have proper video equipment should we continue to hold hybrid meetings. This is because capturing the sound and vision is challenging using a standard tablet or camera in a room. Even zoom meetings have encountered issues in connection with some attendees having issues with their internet service providers. With the majority of the NEC preferring to use zoom. Then this is the most cost-effective way for the NEC to meet. The NEC decline to agree so no-one should be saying anything differently if they find online meetings challenging.

Over the year I have attended several events with one of the most memorable being the Kings Lynn Camping Weekend. The event had lost its long-term venue but that did not deter the committee. They found a new venue and advertised it in a positive way. On arrival any new venue

can be daunting but as we settled in and found our way around. The weekend was a complete success, and I am looking forward to returning this year. For me, the success was a combined effort by the committee, the attendees, and the staff at the venue.

This is what I had suggested to the WASH committee 3 years ago when the number of attendees started to drop dramatically. To reinvent your event into a completely different format is both a risk and a worry. The Kings Lynn Weekend combined camping and accommodation at an affordable price. With the option of bringing your own drinks or using the events' own bar. Then everyone can attend and fit it within their budget, which is something we should consider for the future of Plus.

Value for money is an essential part for any event to succeed in a time that we are facing a cost-of-living crisis. The Centre Parcs Weekend has always strived to maintain value at the heart of the event. We had considered going to Europe with Holland as the first country. However, feedback considered that it was not the right time. With travel costs on top of the price, staying in the UK was the right thing to do. This year it is being held at Longleat with some staying the whole week. Last year some attendees stayed the whole week, and the extra cost was only £25 per person per night. This has driven the event and so a small party of us will trial the expansion into Europe in the hope we can go in 2026.

As a social activities organisation what we lack is people with a vision to see into the future. As November is now vacated by WASH. Then there is an opportunity to organize a new event. Several people contacted me with ideas to fill the spot. Their ideas did need some more work, but I am confident that this year one of those ideas will become a reality.

What we do need to consider carefully is the need to ensure that the entire year events are spread out. With careful budgeting to allow members to take part in their chosen event. It is a balancing act, and it can be done if there is plenty of time allowed for members to budget. Events like the Centre Parcs weekend allow for small payments to be made over the year. For this to work then organizers need to plan this carefully to be successful. Another factor is the weather as over the last 10-20 years it has changed beyond anyone's imagination. This too will have an impact on the types of events being held.

Last year NAGM faced some challenges with those attending who wanted to have their say. Several speakers failed to get in front of a live microphone preferring to speak out from the floor. This irritated the meeting as no one could hear what they said. In the meeting recording we could not make out who or what they said. When they did get in front

of a microphone this made the meeting longer than required. And finally, it was disrespectful to the meeting, members attending and the Chair. I will be taking a firmer line this year and persistent offenders will be asked to leave the meeting. In the hope that they will reflect on their actions and when they return they will be more respectful to the meeting as a whole.

In the past year we have been without a National Internet coordinator but after talks during the summer last year. John Smith and Mark Hewson have devised a plan to move our current domain to a new service provider. This will ensure the website is secure for the future with the puppy site now closed down. We still need a National Internet coordinator to take the project forward. There is support available and this is an opportunity for someone with flare to stamp their mark and use their talent for web design.

There has been in the past few months an active discussion around the decision by Lloyds Bank to charge account holder of a community account with them. Some groups and Area's are considering moving their accounts to Metro Bank. Whilst they offer free banking we have to note that they have already moved to close their branches on Saturdays and Sundays. Only a few years ago they participated in a financial restructuring. Santander is reported to be considering leaving the UK and First Direct are no longer accepting cash deposits in some HSBC branches. The era of free banking is starting to disappear. With branch closures of all of the major banks still at an elevated level. Then as an organisation we need to consider carefully what to do. Southern Area has decided to stay with Lloyds as we view that jumping from one provider to another and then another is not cost effective. If as we predict free banking will go completely. Then the low charge by Lloyds will seem worthwhile over the time to move and move. The decision is still down to the Group / Area what they want to do. But some consideration is needed regarding the service of their current provider and what to do if their new provider starts to charge.

I am confirming that it is my intention to re-stand as National Chairperson. If after reading my report you would like to join the NEC and help rebuild Plus then do please contact me or come forward at the meeting.

Regards,

Steve Rolfe

National Chairperson