

Venue: Saracen's Head, Worcester: noon for 12:30pm start

Present

BIRMINGHAM: Ash Corbett-Collins (CAMRA National Chairman), Mark Parkes (Deputy Regional Director: West Midlands)

CHELTENHAM: Peter Bennetts (Gloucestershire ACC), Guy Vowles, Rob Gidwell, Tony Lucas, Dave Hyde

GLOUCESTERSHIRE: Malcolm Campbell, Derek Hore, Peter Corfield, Pete Webb

NORTH COTSWOLD: Jenny Jones, Martin Jones, Chris Knight, Peter Rowe

STROUD: Chris Hall, Tony Hill

TEWKESBURY: Bill Hunt, Steve Tisby

HEREFORDSHIRE: Mark Haslam (Press Officer, Pubs Support Officer), Mike Condra, Paul Grenfell, Malcolm Rochefort

OXFORD: Graham Allen, John Winney

SOUTH OXFORDSHIRE: Graham Hards (Oxfordshire ACC), Barry Davis, Bob Smith, Paul Dixon

REDDITCH & BROMSGROVE: Brett Laniosh (Regional Director), Fred Carter (Herefordshire & Worcestershire ACC, Public Transport Coordinator), Paul Richards (Good Beer Guide Coordinator), Gez Quinn, Cy Day, Andrew Brain, Ali Fitton, Rob Hunt, Catherine Etchels, Ange Cross-Clements, Philip Cross-Clements, Tracy Carter, Graham Chapman

WORCESTER: Mike Wheatley (Finance Officer), Mike Sorfell, Marc Griffith, Viv Clarke, Martin Clarke, Neil Berry, Wendy Berry, Joanna Weir

WYRE FOREST: Nick Yarwood (Pub Data Coordinator), Rob Budworth (Champion Beer of Britain Coordinator, Pub of the Year Coordinator), Dave Bareford, Karen Bareford, Paul Compton

CAMRA National Executive: Ash Corbett-Collins (CAMRA National Chairman)

SOUTH DEVON: Tim Webb

Apologies: NORTH OXFORDSHIRE, CIRENCESTER

1. Welcome, introductions and outline of the day (Brett Laniosh -Regional Director)

Brett opened the meeting by welcoming the attendees and thanking them for attending. He introduced the Area County Coordinators (ACCs) and Regional Officers.

2. Regional Director Election (Mark Parkes)

Mark emphasised the importance of a transparent election and all of the West Central branches have been informed of the voting process. There is one candidate applying for one position which would be for a period of one year, after that there would be a further appointment of three years subject to agreement. All votes

must be in writing on a ballot paper with one vote per branch. The candidate must achieve over 50% of the votes which would be nine positive votes. Proxy votes have been received from Forest of Dean sub-branch, North Oxfordshire, Stroud, Tewkesbury, White Horse and Worcester.

Brett addressed the meeting of how the West Central region reached its position following the Regional Review to keep a county structure so that people could work together through Area/county coordinators (ACCs) so that the new region could move forward. A Regional Director is often a thankless role as it could be the worst job as well as the best. He gave a vote of thanks to the ACCs for making this meeting happen.

Brett Laniosh was duly elected as Regional Director for the CAMRA West Central Region. The votes were verified by CAMRA National Chairman Ash Corbett-Collins. A vote of thanks was given to Mark Parkes for presiding over the election process.

3. Vision and Priorities for the West Central CAMRA Region (Regional Director)

Brett outlined a plan to have concise physical business meetings once a year that would be followed by a regional social. The ACCs would be the first point of contact for branches and would attend branch AGMs and meetings as required. The RD and ACCs hold monthly online meeting and going forward regional officers will be invited to attend these. He recognised that activation is a concern, particularly in North Oxfordshire. He encouraged branches to appeal for help sooner rather than later. He also wanted to increase the presence of the region through regular communications via the comms tool, beer scoring and magazines. The aim is for all branches to have full branch status.

4. CAMRA National Chairman (Ash Corbett-Collins)

Ash opened his address by explaining how he got to be the CAMRA National Chairman. He was originally the vice-chairman and was thinking of standing down in April before Nik's illness was announced and was elected in Penrith in September.

CAMRA members need to be pushy, making ourselves heard, and be evolving about what we want to be, making it clear who is right and who is wrong. We need to be bolder, brasher and make demands. A lot of people on the other side often don't know what they're doing either. Pints aren't affordable at the moment and there is a big price difference between regions across the UK.

Ash discussed his recent meeting with the Welsh Ministry and emphasised that they're not doing enough to ensure protection for pubs is in place compared to England. He emphasised his goal within CAMRA is not to do things for members but give volunteers the tools that they need to get things done smoothly.

Ash recognised that we have to be realistic around our current membership and be practical and focused about what we do. We have lost 50,000 members since COVID and we have also seen a big cost of living increase.

Q: Has the number of CAMRA beer festivals recovered since COVID? No, attendance is down also but the volume drunk is slightly more. There is no concern so long as a festival can make a surplus. We need to help people have more festivals.

Q: Can we get more people from Head Office volunteering at beer festivals? The work that the CAMRA Head Office do is incredible including volunteering. It is frustrating as CAMRA is often seen as a drinking organisation. We need to find a way forward but it's not a good time at the moment.

Q: Can we get more CAMRA appearances in the media? We are getting more appearances when we're more successful. Local media has declined in the last few years and we need to be smarter. Some argue that we do too much social media, others say we don't do enough. There have been requests for us to make appearances on TikTok. We have to be careful as these things require a lot of investment to make it look professional. Also people will comment and moan so we have to be proactive about what is posted. Press Officer Mark Haslam added that when dealing with the press we need to be dynamic and it needs to be the right person who can spin things to make the press contact you. We need to make the most of opportunities and we can't refuse them saying 'sorry we're too busy at the moment' or we may not get another opportunity.

Q: How did the new logo come about? This was a two-year project that started after CAMRA's 50th anniversary. There is an impact of new branding and it needs to be justified and show what we want to achieve. The cost was £25,000 and hopefully we will see some improvements.

Q: What can we do to increase our young members? I joined CAMRA through Birmingham Beer Festival and there aren't a lot of young members around. Before COVID there were 10,000 people under 30 and 2,000 were under 21. Most of these members were recruited at beer festivals in the excitement and these people often renew at festivals the following year. Looking at these people's habits, they often move for work and rent while they're young, which often means that they don't buy into their local communities. We need to target slightly older people who are homeowners with disposable incomes who have free time when their kids have begun growing up. We also focus on people who are new retirees and people who are looking for community support. We need to benefit from spare money, spare time and enthusiasm.

Q: What do you believe is the modern purpose of a beer festival? Encourage more people to drink more real ale, and give their time and money to invest in CAMRA. Some people actually visit for a few days and explore the local area which supports the nearby pubs as well.

Q: Does CAMRA work with University Real Ale Societies? We have made a national offering to the National Union of Students offering their members CAMRA entry to beer festivals but there has been little take-up. We need to hear of success stories that we can replicate.

5. State of Beer in the World/Engaging CAMRA magazine articles (Tim Webb)

Brett introduced Tim Webb as helping to produce the second local beer guide in Worcestershire in 1981. Tim is recognised as an international beer judge in 18 countries.

Worldwide, brewery numbers are on the increase but it's just four companies that produce over half of the world's beer. In the UK, 70% of beer is produced by four large companies and the method of control that these companies use is often obscure which makes it difficult to get accurate data. Their breweries often go through a process of vertical integration. Carlsberg celebrated the new year by axing eight of their brands, while Molson Coors isn't really a brewery any more but a brand brokerage.

Since 1980, beer consumption has dropped by around 50% while alcohol consumption is up 50% on 1970, with wine being the winner. Wine targeted the baby boomers and their parents. Supermarkets caught onto this trend which replaced consumption at traditional pubs. Young people drink less in their teenage years but drink better products in later years. In 2023 beer consumption dropped by 8% and the 2024 figures are expected to drop by another 8%. Beer is going out of fashion. The globally controlled brewing companies to do stupid things. If we're going to save cask ale, we have to save beer - it is no longer the other way round.

Q: How does CAMRA influence multi-national companies? It's really not clear. They might not listen to us but they might watch us a bit more. Ash Corbett-Collins added: We need to help these people learn and show them what the cause and effect of their actions can be. We need agitated and passionate people to keep speaking up about beer.

Q: What is your view of craft beer? We are in support of better tasting beer. It's a lost and ambiguous term. In the rest of the world it's used to describe an independent brewery but craft is a meaningless term in the UK.

Q: How do you view the success of Doom Bar? A lot of pub landlords are forced into it through their pubcos.

CAMRA Magazines

Most effective Pub Campaigning Article: Hereford Hop Vine to save the Old Boot in Wellington. I appreciate the author's descriptions of what is happening and its portrayal of CAMRA showing that it knew what it was doing.

Article most likely to increase CAMRA Membership: White Horse, Summer 2022. The article focused on what happens when a pub closes and used an excellent direct closing line: "Use your pub more and join CAMRA".

Best beer-related article: Pint Taken. A weak spot is that it doesn't give a local focus of CAMRA but it does give the reader an interesting read about what is happening with beer world-wide by a writer of more national renown.

Magazine with most outstanding features: Oxford Drinker. An article of interest titled: "Pub Co: Next Generation" focused on the future of pubcos and how young people would use a pub. There is also a pub sociology study comparing our pubs to the bar scene in the US.

Best Front Cover: Soxon Ale. A great graphic design of autumnal light over the pub sign of the Red Lion, Brightwell-cum-Sotwell.

6. Host Branch Introduction (Mark Griffiths)

Worcester Branch Chairman Marc Griffiths welcomed the attendees to Worcester. He invited people to the Dragon Inn after the meeting which is owned by Church End Brewery and is their current Pub of the Year. It's also conveniently on the other side of the road. Mark also explained the Worcester has good pubs and very good pubs and hoped that attendees would be able to visit some of them. A city centre map was provided.

7. Opportunities for Regional and County Officers

Brett introduced the regional officers and explained that all contact details were on the regional website www.westcentral.camra.org.uk He also asked that if anyone was interested in taking on a regional role to get in touch with him.

Good Beer Guide Coordinator (Paul Richards): Reminded branches that the deadline to submit pubs is fast approaching (Monday 4 March) and that proofs would be sent out around two weeks afterwards.

Public Transport Coordinator (Fred Carter): Focusing on improving public transport and getting people involved to lobby transportation companies and local councillors/MPs.

Pub Data Coordinator (Nick Yarwood): Branches are making progress on responding to feedback from Whatpub and the CAMRA website. A Pub Data Report will be sent out to branches alongside the minutes of this meeting.

Champion Beer of Britain Coordinator (Rob Budworth): Would like to find out more about branch beer festivals and encourage them to run judging competitions. He is running the competition in conjunction with the West Midlands region which only hosts three competitions. There are twelve categories.

Regional Finance Officer (Mike Wheatley): If you're struggling with COBAS like me please let me know.

8. Any Other Business

Q: Is it possible to broadcast meetings online for those who can't attend? It can be done but I would need someone to take on the ownership of getting it done. In the past I've seen that it requires a lot of equipment to set up and do it. It's not something that I can take on myself, but if someone wants to do it for the region then that would be great.

Q: Will minutes of this meeting be available? Paul Richards is taking minutes for this meeting and they will be distributed afterwards.

Q: Is the Gloucestershire Pub of the Year Competition a branch or a county round? The Gloucestershire ACC will chair a separate meeting to discuss concerns to resolve directly after the regional meeting.

The meeting was closed at 2:20pm.