



## The Chairman's Letter

In accordance with tradition, the Christmas lights came down from the loft and failed to light, having been put away in working order. That aside, and despite being knee deep in snow during the lead-up, I had a wonderful Christmas with a succession of family and friends coming to stay. I hope that you too had a really enjoyable time and, together with my colleagues on the Board, wish you every good fortune for 2010.

Looking to the year ahead, we already know that it will be challenging. VAT has been restored to its previous level and may yet rise further while inflation is creeping back into the picture. As a result, it seems certain that our cost base will go up, although we continually strive to find cost efficient alternatives wherever we can. With this in mind, we are asking you to support a Special Resolution that will enable the Board to consider alternative accountant practices as our auditors. Newby Castleman has given excellent service over the years and continues to do so. However, we believe that it is right to review the market and see whether there is a cheaper option that would meet our requirements. I hope that you will feel able to support this motion either by voting in person at the AGM, where it would be good to see as many of you as possible, or by appointing a proxy to vote on your behalf. We will, of course, be talking with our current auditors to see if there is scope for a reduction in their costs.

Staying with costs, one of our Owners, quite reasonably, wrote to me expressing surprise that the Management Company charged £5 for accepting payment of the annual charge by debit card. I, too, was somewhat surprised as, although I knew that a charge was made for payment by credit card, I had not registered that debit cards also incurred a charge. With the demise of cheques being discussed by the banks, it seemed possible that more Owners might wish to pay by debit card. Therefore, I examined the issue with the Management Company. In essence, the charge is levied because there is a cost involved.

Payments by card have to go through Barnsdale Hotel, a separate company, since neither we nor the Management Company has a card reader. The charge covers the cost to the hotel of transferring payments across to our account. We could get a card reader but that would cost around £300 per annum plus an initial one-off charge; either way, a cost has to be met. Staying with the current system of using the Hotel's card reader, the lowest that we can get the charge to is around £2 per transaction. For 2010, we have decided to



absorb this cost within the Management Company, thereby spreading it among everyone, rather than passing it on to individuals. The more people who pay by debit card, the higher the cost. To keep this to an absolute minimum, the more people who set up an on-line transfer, the lower our operating cost. I know that not all of our Owners are familiar with electronic banking, but if everyone who was made use of that facility, we would receive more payments on time, there would be fewer lost or unsigned cheques and, hopefully, a reduction in the number of Owners who incur a penalty charge. Please think about this and help us all by going electronic if possible; thank you.

Enough about costs, let's move on to the brighter subject of our Gold Crown! You already know that we retained that award in the year to last August. I am pleased to report that, so far, we are on track to keep our Gold Crown this year. Our scores in all areas are consistently above the minima set by RCI which is a very creditable achievement. Thanks are due to Dusty Miller and his team on the Lodge & Leisure Committee and to Russell Waters and his team in the Management Company who, together, have worked so hard to make sure that our resort stays at the top of the league. I would also like to pay thanks to John Wedgwood who, through pressure of work, has had to leave the Board. John set up a system of analysing performance that enabled us more effectively to prioritise exactly where your money should be spent. He also gave up many Saturdays to inspect all of our Lodges on a rotational basis. John's hard work has provided a strong foundation for the high scores we are now achieving. All of us on the Board are sorry that John has had to resign, thank him for his valuable contribution, and wish him well for the future.

*continued on page 2*

### AGM – 6th March

With this newsletter you have received the official notice of the Annual General Meeting of the Owners' Association. This will be held at 2:30pm on 6th March in the Edith Weston Suite at Barnsdale (not the Lake View Room as previously). I hope to see you there.

*The Chairman's Letter continued...*

For our future, we continue to scrutinise all areas of Barnsdale Resort. The kitchen refurbishment is continuing, but we are giving more emphasis to replacing bathrooms and a higher priority to soft furnishings. As with everything, we do not please everyone, although we have received a number of complimentary letters. If you have any suggestions for improvements, please write and let us know. We also continue to look carefully at how we can reduce the carbon footprint at Barnsdale. One initiative was the installation of electricity meters in all of the lodges. Asking occupants to pay for what they consume, rather than a fixed charge, and being able to advise them of apparently high usage is helping to reduce the overall power consumption at the Resort.

Talking of electricity consumption, my Christmas lights are now back in the loft having worked perfectly: I am not holding my breath for 11 months time! What I would like to do is, again, wish you all a Happy New Year with the hope that you will join us at the AGM on Saturday 6th March 2010.

Best wishes



### *Friends of Barnsdale*

You may recall that, in the last Newsletter, there was an item about a non-owner seeking to exchange his week into Barnsdale. I understand that Paul Murphy received several responses, but nothing which quite met his needs.



### *Membership Referral Scheme*

This is simplicity in itself. If you have a friend or acquaintance who you think would also be interested in becoming an Owner here at Barnsdale and the introduction results in a sale, you will receive a cheque for £200.

There is no limit to the amount of people you can recommend so start ringing around today and earn some extra cash!

For further details call Sue in the Membership Services office on 01572 725148.

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# Lodge & Leisure Report

**Committee:** Dusty Miller (Chairman)  
Sheila Bunten, Patrick Candler, Lisa Neale

The New Year has arrived and I, for one, shall be in the 'calling it twenty ten camp' – so best wishes to all for 2010!

We start on a rather sad note as John Wedgwood, after many years of work on the L&L Committee, has decided to resign. John has made a big contribution to the work of the committee particularly in respect of lodge inspections, mainly done on a Saturday during changeover time, and the very detailed and robust reporting system he designed which forms the basis of our refurbishment plans. Many thanks John and best wishes to you and your family for the future. As always however things move on and we welcome Patrick Candler to the committee and look forward to working with him.

Some of the results of our work are obvious to owners and visitors, for example new curtains in lodges, and I am pleased to report that in the near future this programme will be complete for all the Lodges. A quick glance through the invoices, which have come in thick and fast as we strived to take maximum benefit of the VAT reduction, show good progress with kitchen and bathroom replacements, as well as carpets and lounge furniture where needed. We are now in the process of auditing bedroom furniture to find the most cost effective way of updating these as well.

The initiative with the electricity meters is not so obvious but will put the responsibility of payment for amount used being allocated to individual lodges. A word of warning here for owners who regularly use their lodges rather than exchanging or renting: it is important that you inform the management office of your intentions i.e. let them know if you are definitely coming and, just as importantly, if you are not intending to come. If no contact is made there will be a charge for the electricity used in the apartment – this is particularly important in the winter as some heaters are kept on so the lodge is warm for new arrivals. The importance of this new metering system can be demonstrated by two incidents that have happened

since it has been up and running. In the first incident the master board indicated that electricity was being used by a non-occupied unit – a check discovered that the previous occupants had left high consuming appliances on, so these could be switched off and money saved. In the second incident it was noticed that after three days one of the units had used in excess of £50 worth of electricity. A check with the occupants found that every heater in the unit was on full power, even in rooms not being used! – needless to say the grateful holidaymakers quickly made the necessary adjustments. As this initiative with the meters is classed as 'green' we are very grateful to Mr. Penman who offered to share the cost of the installation with us.

During the course of a year we receive letters from owners who raise issues which concern them. Some have no obvious or immediate remedy but each is taken seriously and discussed in detail at meetings. Late last year we received one letter from a long standing, elderly owner who raised one or two issues. It appeared that, being of small stature, the lack of cushions on the settees meant it was difficult to sit comfortably. This is easily rectified and reception will deal with it. The other point was to do with sleeping arrangements and the difficulty encountered by many elderly visitors/owners of climbing stairs in some of the lodges. This is more difficult to solve and after the committee visited the lodge it was decided to write to the owner and arrange for them to discuss possible solutions with Sue Moore in the Member Services office.

No doubt 2010 will throw many more interesting problems our way but I am sure that we shall be able to find some, preferably low cost, way of solving them. We are particularly indebted to Russell Waters, the General Manager, who deals quickly with any requests for information and is very adept at finding suppliers offering a good service and value for money. Without him our rate of progress over the last year or so would have been greatly reduced – so from the L&L Committee many thanks to Russell and your team.

## Owner's Letter

In the last issue our Chairman suggested the introduction of an Owner's letter section. We have not received any candidates for this column yet, so I repeat his description: "The idea would be to allow you to say how you feel we are doing, what we could do better, what improvements could be made to the resort etc. Unfortunately, we will not have space to publish every letter but we would give a written reply to those that were not printed. Letters for this forum should be addressed to: The Newsletter, Barnsdale Owners' Association, Barnsdale Hall, Nr Oakham, Rutland, LE15 8AB. Obviously, this would not be the best means of addressing specific, individual problems and these should still be addressed personally to me as Chairman. We are very conscious that we are spending your money and we would like you to have a greater say in how that money is spent."



## Beware the Cold Call

Many of you will have received a call recently from a company called Extra Weeks. One of our owners sent me the following email:

*"I am sending this message as I am most concerned. A few days ago I received a phone call from a company called Extra Weeks... they claimed that as a long standing time share owner, I was entitled to two free weeks in any resort, with 180 to choose from, to be taken within 3 years. As a long standing owner at Barnsdale I would also be able to have a free weekend break at any hotel in Europe. The company knew I owned at Barnsdale. No information could be checked, they wanted £299 to secure the booking, although no choices made. They asked for my e-address in order to send me an e mail re the bookings, they also wanted £299 via credit card. I declined to have a deal."*

I think that was a wise thing to do. Although I have no proof that this was a scam, most (if not all) of these calls are. This particular organisation is apparently based in Malaga, as is common.

Your Board and Barnsdale have been unsuccessful in finding out where these organisations obtain their contact details. It is not from Barnsdale, and the exchange companies insist that it is not from them either.

Our strong advice remains that you should not respond to any of these offers – hang up immediately (in my case they never got as far as making me an offer). If you receive an unexpected call from Barnsdale or an exchange company, and have any doubt whether it is genuine, take a name and call back on a number you have found for yourself. Clearly if you call back on a number that the caller gives you, this is no check at all.

Some people must be taken in by these calls, or they would not keep trying. Don't be one of the victims.

## Yet Another Scam!

Recently, an Owner was contacted by a lady who claimed to be representing RCI and who was offering 2 additional weeks in recognition of length of membership. These weeks could be banked and exchanged against all resorts in the RCI directory. The weeks would be available for 3 years and the cost would be £250. A reference number was quoted against which the reservation would be held. Fortunately, the Owner had a suspicious nature and was wary of any unsolicited calls that purported to come from exchange companies and so he declined the offer. He then contacted RCI by e-mail to find out whether or not the offer was genuine and this is the gist of the reply that he received:

*"I have spoken to the call centre and this is not an offer that we would do.*

*We would never advise that bonus weeks would be banked as they are available year round subject to the availability at the time of the offer.*

*When you receive these calls we recommend that you request the caller to advise the membership number and/or add a password to the account."*

Please take note of this and be very careful when someone says that they are calling from any exchange company.

## Editor's Notes

Our thanks to Dial an Exchange for contributing to the cost of the last newsletter, in return for the inclusion of their leaflet. We look forward to more co-operation with DAE in future.

You will see that we have decided to print in colour from this issue. This is not only so that my Christmas pictures look better, although I hope that you agree that they do, but also so that other pictures and advertisements are presented more effectively. My choice of photo has been severely restricted in the past, by only being able to use those which would work in black and white – I hope that colour will allow more opportunities.

As I reach the end of my third year as your editor, I repeat my pleas for contributions. It only takes a relatively short time to write a description of a memorable exchange (whether memorable for good or bad reasons) and I am sure that your fellow readers would find it useful and interesting. Please give it a try, and post to Membership Services at Barnsdale, or email to me: editor@boanews.co.uk.

## COMMITTEE JOTTINGS

The minutes of only one meeting, held on 19th October 2009, have been approved since my last report on the Board's work on your behalf:

### Owner's Comments:

The Chairman distributed a copy of comments raised by an Owner, following a recent stay, and a draft form of reply. Having discussed the matter fully, the Board approved the draft response. The Chairman undertook to send the reply to the Owner. It was noted that the same Owner had made almost identical comments a year ago and had had a full reply on that occasion.

### Company Secretary's Report:

The Secretary reported that there were 149 non-payers as at 19th October which compared with 115 at the same time last year. The Secretary confirmed that he would be sending appropriate letters to all remaining non-payers at the beginning of November.

### Treasurer's Report:

The Treasurer's Report for the period to 19th October 2009, showing a balance of £35,086.56 was accepted.

### Lodge & Leisure Report:

The Board noted a projected spend of up to £191,000 for 2009/10 and set the following order of priority:

Soft furnishings  
Bathrooms  
Kitchens

The Board approved completion of the re-curtaining programme. The management company undertook to speed up the process of transferring money received to date from Owners to the Association, so that the programme would not be delayed.

### Management Report:

In response to a suggestion that the colour chosen for the new lodge furniture might not be durable, RW advised that stain repellent had been applied. For future purchases, he undertook to consider a darker colour.