

Introduction

An organisation's strategy is fundamental to its survival and growth. Often combined with a business plan, it defines the purpose of the organisation, and maps the direction which it intends to take in the forthcoming period.

As an organisation, AUK can be considered in three ways:

- as a Company limited by guarantee (our legal status),
- as a membership club, and
- as a national sport governing body with international obligations.

Our strategy and organisation must address the needs of all three.

AUK has not hitherto formally adopted a strategy, though work was done to create one for the period 2012-15. At the same time, a more specific strategy for events received support, and has now been developed as part of this overarching AUK strategy. Taking these as a starting point, we now cover the period to 2020, but the strategy will be reviewed by the Board annually, with a more in-depth review after three years (2018). Progress and forthcoming plans will be presented to the membership through the Annual Report each year.

Progress since 2012

In 2012 the 'mission statement' for AUK was suggested to be

"To continue to be recognised internationally and nationally as the primary organisation in the UK for long distance cycling, with an increasing number of participants year on year in our recognised events, especially those of 300km or longer."

Since 2012:

- Membership has increased during the period by 25%;
- the four-year average number of SR awards has increased from 283 to 322.
- the London-Edinburgh-London 1400km event in 2013, organised by Danial Webb and his team for LEL Ltd., attracted a big entry from many different countries out of a total of nearly 1000 riders.
- An annual 'National 400' event has been (re-)established in the Calendar, giving a high level of support aimed at riders wanting to extend their objectives to longer events.
- A consistent house style for Audax UK, present in the form of banners at events, clothing and publicity, has been established.
- The governance of the organisation has recently been reviewed, to establish a more strategically focussed Board function.
- Engagement with members has been enhanced through the creation of an AUK forum, allowing member not only to take part in general discussions, but

also to debate forthcoming proposals to be put to the AGM. Voting on AGM motions is now available to all members, whether or not attending, in line with company law.

- Significant progress has been made in rationalising AUK's financial function, including bringing accounting practices into line with the size and complexity of the organisation, and laying the foundations for comprehensive budgeting and reporting.

Purpose/ Mission statement.

Any strategy must be built around the purpose for which the organisation exists. Fundamentally this is the purpose contained within the Articles of Association, but usually translated into a more succinct and immediately understandable form.

An informal debate at the 2015 AGM revealed quite a wide variety of opinions, but founded on a generally accepted view that the fundamental purpose of Audax UK might be summarised as Randonnees of 200km or greater, recognising also that shorter events under Brevet Populaire regulations have a role to play in introducing riders to Audax and as feeders for the randonneurs of the future. That's not to abandon the other challenges which our members appreciate and which form part of our offering. It seems that continuing our activities broadly as now is an acceptable way forward, and there is an implied (and occasionally overt) opinion that we should become more visible and attract more riders – if not more members.

The Board believe that, against a background of a buoyant interest in sport/leisure cycling, founding a strategy based on these general principles, with the aim of maintaining or improving our relative position in the cycling world, is the right way forward.

Background

The rise in the popularity of cycling, triggered by the success of British riders in the Olympics and road racing in particular, is self-evident. Halfords reported in June 2015 that their sales had topped £1bn, and that they had sold 1.3 million bikes over the year, with the sales of 'premium' bikes up 25%. The Association of Cycle Traders reported an increase of 15% in the number of bike shops.

The sport side of cycling is a big part of this boom. In 2013 British Cycling claimed that cycling was the third most popular sport in England, and that there had been a 20% increase in competitive events, with sportives showing a 29% increase over six months. A quick examination of the calendar of events maintained by BC shows many more sportives being run than our own extensive programme of Audax events.

There is also a surge in interest in triathlon, with participation in Britain up from 120,000 to 196,000 over the five years to 2014. Interestingly, and for the slightly more mature participant – typically in their 50's – endurance sports are particularly attractive, and the more challenging the better. 'Ironman' triathlon events are in particular demand.

One of the key aspects of the rise in interest is that participants are generally in the more affluent sections of society. Those pursuing endurance events will typically look to top-of-the-range equipment, and be prepared to spend significantly on their chosen discipline.

So how should Audax UK react? We already appear to be benefiting from the trend; membership is up to unprecedented levels, record numbers are achieving an SR series, and – in line with the reported trends – the prestige events such as PBP and LEL are attracting more interest than ever. Should we be looking to capitalise on the situation to grow Audax even more, or do we simply allow the tide to carry us along?

If we want to increase participation in Audax significantly, now ought to be the time to do it. The interest in endurance events within a general increase in cycling seems just the opportunity we would need, and the growth in sportives demonstrates that there ought to be a ready market for what we have to offer. To make a significant impact, though, would need much more in the way of resources, probably including professional help. We are also very dependent on a loyal and dedicated group of organisers to supply the necessary events, and for riders who will probably be looking for, and being prepared to pay for, a higher level of support than we can generally provide. Indeed, pressure for a higher level of support could jeopardise the very concept of self-reliance which is a key feature of our discipline.

Just riding the wave has already been beneficial, though we may well be losing our share of the non-competitive sport cycling scene. The prestige events will continue to be popular, and our flagship London-Edinburgh-London, providing sportive-like support at a longer distance than generally offered by sportives, will continue to attract sportive riders. Other events will benefit, at least in the short term, but we run the risk of becoming an interesting footnote to sportives.

In practice, a position between these two seems the best way forward for Audax UK, taking into account our resources and the fact that the ethos of self-reliance we embrace is slightly at odds with fully-supported, money-no-object approach of many of those attracted to sportives. To maintain our relative position we will need to continue to publicise, and to welcome new participants with a comprehensive programme and stepping stones to allow them to develop and take on new challenges. We will also need to keep abreast of developments such as the widespread use of GPS, while maintaining a clearly separate identity and ethos.

While this low-key approach may seem unambitious, it will nevertheless need resources, but unlike a more aggressive attitude, is more in keeping with the resources we are likely to have, and is most likely to maintain our position in cycling and the key features of Audax which we value.

Looking forward

Over the next three to five years, therefore, the main tasks of AUK will be:

- to maintain at least AUK's relative position in cycling, commensurate with the increase in the interest in sport cycling in the UK;

- to develop AUK's governance and administration to serve a larger membership and to maintain technical competence.

Maintaining AUK's position

To ensure that we at least maintain our position, we need to make Audax more visible, therefore attracting more riders generally, and then to encourage them to challenge themselves further. Becoming a member of AUK is an indication of such commitment as well as an encouragement. In this way we should naturally see more riders at the longer events, but it is unlikely that we would do so without the underpinning programme of 100km and 200km rides.

The strategy for events envisages a structure of national, regional, club and 'bare bones'/DIY events with decreasing requirements for support. National and regional events are particularly aimed to encourage rider progression to the longer distances, with the other levels designed to continue the AUK traditional formats.

AUK cannot achieve this by itself, as we do not run events. What we can do is:

- work to achieve a higher profile for AUK and the events run under our regulations;
- more actively manage the calendar, in conjunction with organisers, to give a sensible spread of events in type, distance and location (as laid out in the events strategy);
- continue to provide and enhance our support for organisers and participants, through advice, encouragement and support systems;
- work with key organisers to produce and support 'flagship' events such as the National 400;
- recognise the growth in DIY Permanents and work to streamline administrative processes and to develop new route planning and measurement standards;
- find ways of encouraging more riders to become members
- through the events structure and the calendar, encourage and support riders to progress to events of 300km or over.
- maintain good relationships with LRM, ACP and other relevant international and national bodies, to maintain the reputation of AUK as one of the world's leading randonneur organisations.

Supporting activities.

To support this, we need also to:

- maintain and improve the public face of Audax UK in line with technical developments in event management and recording of results;
- improve our communications with members and the wider cycling public, in line with changes in the way the world communicates;.
- Continue to keep the governance and management of AudaxUK under review to ensure the organisation has policies and procedures to maintain it on a sound footing.

What this means in practice.

Maintaining the profile:

This falls mainly to the Communications Director – though we all have a part to play. Over the past couple of years a coherent and more modern face to AUK has been implemented, and the introduction of a new and more modern clothing range together with co-ordinated banners has made AUK more visible on the road and at events. We need now to focus more on the outward-looking activities (liaison with press, relationships with relevant bodies etc.), as there are too many cyclists who may well enjoy the challenges and sociability of Audax who remain ignorant or confused about the discipline. AUK lacks the widespread understanding of and interest in sportives among sport and leisure cyclists, which reflects the publicity given by the press and cycling organisations such as British Cycling to sportive events.

Specific actions

- more focus on exposure outside Audax itself, through articles in the press and online (through more general cycling websites);
- Consideration of paid advertising about AUK and Audax generally;
- Develop a better understanding of how we can make use of social media and other developments to improve communication with the membership and the wider cycling world..

Increasing participants:

This is partly covered by the previous section, but we should also consider how we might work with individual organisers to make individual events more visible. The separate events strategy will guide this work.

(Potential) actions will include:

- working with organisers to establish some well-supported flagship National events;
- Implementing the strategy for calendar and other events as laid out in the separate events strategy paper;

Increasing membership:

We need to consider why would anyone want to join when it's not necessary other than to be recognised for awards.

Specific actions:

- review the membership offering, and work more actively to persuade non-members, especially those who ride more than the odd event, to join us. Becoming part of the AUK community will be an incentive and encouragement to riders to stretch their ambitions to the longer events.

- provide the necessary marketing collateral to organisers and existing members to help in this work.

Increasing the progression of participants to longer events:

The separate Events Strategy gives more detail on this, recommending the establishment of events at differing levels of support too encourage riders to progress, while maintaining a good overall selection of calendar events. The introduction of the National 400 is an example of the way in which we can ease the way for riders to challenge themselves with longer rides.

Specific actions:

- publicise the requirements for national and regional events as defined in the events strategy and invite submissions from organisers;
- consider paid publicity. It seems logical that if riders are attracted to the general format of LEL, for example, the National 400, which has a similar level of support, ought also to be attractive.

We do seem to ask organisers to take a significant risk on such events, and while it's important that they are properly planned and budgeted, there could be a case for more generous underpinning or even a contribution, where an event clearly fulfils some national objective. This is covered in the events strategy.

IT support:

AUK is highly dependant on its IT systems. All the membership, event management, validation and reporting are managed through web based systems, which are highly customised to support AUK. Although they work well on a day by day basis, the current configuration poses a considerable threat to AUK in terms of “reputational risk” and “ability to enable future growth”.

There are reputational risks because

- The Aukweb service has continued availability issues;
- The current configuration does not comply with the Government Cyber Security Guidelines. There is a risk of prolonged loss of service or private membership information leakage through malicious attack;
- The membership portal is dated and cannot be upgraded.

Our ability to support future growth is limited because

- Many of the processes required to support the existing Membership, Event Management and Validation activities require a considerable manual overhead to maintain accuracy and integrity;
- Software enhancements cannot be introduced to improve working practices, and support new ride initiatives (eg GPS DIY);
- Attracting and retaining members is held back by the restrictions that the “look and feel” of the current web site provide.

While some of the resilience and data security concerns can be tackled in the short term, there are two major risks:

- The software configuration will continue to be vulnerable as the underlying systems architecture is outdated and no longer supported. Until a major rewrite takes place AUK plc data security will remain vulnerable;
- Knowledge of the systems is restricted to one or two key individuals. The continued goodwill from those individuals can not be taken for granted, and handover to a third should take place as quickly as possible.

Actions Required

- Short Term Security (3 Months[¶])
 - Adopt the Government Cyber Security For Small Businesses guidelines;
 - Implement IT project to improve resilience, data and cyber security, as practical, in the short term.
- Medium Term (1 Year[¶])
Redevelop IT systems to provide:
 - Effective IT Data, Cyber Security and Resilience;
 - Rationalised AUK internal processes and practices;
 - Improved “look and feel” of the members’ experience to a contemporary standard;
 - A platform that enables future growth, with secured systems knowledge.
- Long Term (> 1 Year[¶])
Enhance IT Systems to provide:
 - “Best of Breed” user experience;
 - Facilitation of the latest developments in long distance cycling into AUK custom & practice.

Governance and management:

Much has already been done, though our strategic approach needs to be more formally recognised and built in our deliberations, and there is work still to do on budgeting and treasury matters.

Specific actions:

- continue to develop our financial management, through budgeting and reporting;
- review our policy on reserves (which should be done regularly);
- review the way in which AUK is financed, in particular the balance between membership, events and other sources of income, and the overall financing requirements.

[¶] From May 2016.

- consider using paid help to carry out key functions or particular projects where it proves difficult or impossible to find voluntary resources;
- Re-write AUK's governing documents to be fully compatible with the Companies Act.

Financial considerations.

Given the healthy balance AUK currently enjoys, and the continuing surpluses generated year-on-year, financing 'one-off' actions should not be a problem.

However, it would be good practice to review the way in which AUK is funded, including the balance of income and expenditure between events, membership and other sources and expenses. Much of this structure has now been in place for a decade or more, and would benefit from another look.

More detailed analysis needs to be made of the potential costs of any programme. More generally, it would be reassuring to the membership, and a matter of good practice for an open organisation, to present plans for the forthcoming year as part of the financial report to the AGM and alongside the programme proposed.

Next steps

This is a programme for, in principle, five years. For the purposes of planning and presentation, this needs to be broken down into a year-by-year programme, so that everyone is clear what are the priorities for the current year. Each year we should review what we've achieved, and modify the programme for subsequent years appropriately; after three years we should review progress on the overall strategy, and if necessary make modifications to it.

Presentation and communication

The Annual Report should highlight progress made during the year, and outline plans for the coming year. As part of the financial report, it would also be useful to present an outline of the financial commitments, and the expected out-turn for the year ahead.

*AUK Board
June 2016*