



Hertfordshire & North Middlesex Area

Minutes of the Area Annual General Meeting

Held on Saturday 22 January 2011 at 2pm in Woolmer Green Village Hall

Present: The secretary holds a list of 58 people in attendance

Preamble

The chairman, David Smith, welcomed everyone and particularly Chris Hall our speaker. This meeting has been deliberately arranged to be 2 weeks later than previous years. He asked everyone to adhere to the meeting timetable he had circulated and requested Roger Bangs to call the time if any item should over run.

1 Welcome by the President

Noting the current emphasis on the role of volunteers in the "Big Society" Nigel Agar said that volunteers have always been an essential part of the Ramblers activities. But we still need the professionals. He spoke of the HCC Rights of Way unit and other local authority units with environmental responsibilities. He mentioned the Chilterns Conservation Board and the Lea Valley Regional Park Authority and the very different kind of areas for which they are responsible. The staff of all these organisations have unrivalled expertise and it is not reasonable to expect them to do their work without being properly staffed and rewarded.

He turned to the problem of woodland access and the recent proposals to sell off Forestry Commission land. He was concerned that in private ownership public access could be much restricted. He was personally concerned about public access to Bramfield Wood now that the Forestry Commission is no longer managing it. He urged everyone to become aware of the proposals and to communicate their concerns to the government.

2 Apologies for Absence

Apologies had been received from Sue Jacobs, Ken Payne, Julia Haynes, Roger Housechild, Robert Peel and Bert Richardson.

Bert is now at home slowly recovering after major operations. The meeting agreed to send a card to Bert and flowers to his wife Sheila.

David Smith explained that Robert Peel is our nominated contact with the Board of Trustees. It became apparent that there would not be enough time within this agenda to do justice to what Robert intended to cover. The Area Council will investigate how best to set up a suitable meeting with Robert.

3 Minutes of the 2010 AGM

The minutes were approved without amendment.

4 Matters Arising

Item 6.1: All Groups are now sending a representative to the Area Council

Item 12: Our motion concerning the arrangements for the General Council was remitted to the Board of Trustees without discussion as time ran out. The Trustees subsequently rejected the proposal. David Smith said that in fact the arrangements in 2010 were satisfactory and the same arrangements are proposed for 2011.

Item 16: David said that the North Herts Young Walkers Group is still getting itself fully established. It is doing good work and deserves our congratulations and support.

5 Officers' Reports

5.1 Chairman

David Smith noted that perhaps five out of six of our approximately 3500 members are not associated with any Group. He asked those present to indicate whether they are members of Ramblers mainly for the Group activities or mainly for the Ramblers other activities. A show of hands showed that a slight majority of those present were members because of the other activities. David observed that we are not good at tapping into the "non-Group" resource for help in our work.

He had received two letters in response to his report in the AGM booklet. One suggested that Ramblers might try to improve the behaviour of those cyclists and dog walkers who are inconsiderate to other footpath users.

He is trying to bring Groups together. A meeting of Group chairs has produced interesting results and he has found that walking with other Groups is most enjoyable. He commended this to others. Overall Groups are doing a great job.

5.2 Secretary and Access Officer

David Smith thanked Norman Jones for producing the AGM booklet; it involves a lot of work but provides a superb record of our activities.

Norman referred to two recent developments mentioned in his report. The government White Paper "Healthy Lives, Healthy People" refers to work by Defra to create a new designation to protect "green areas of particular importance to local communities" but with few details. A letter from Natural England reports its plans to place a much greater reliance on voluntary organisations for activities such as management of national nature reserves, organizing "walking for health" and statutory access work. Access work includes access to open country, new coastal access and the creation and ongoing management of National Trails. He had copies of the relevant parts of these papers for those interested.

5.3 Treasurer

David Allard reported that, because of the Ramblers financial situation, our income from central office had been limited to 75% of the previous year. The Area finances had also been helped by refunds from three Groups. We cannot continue at this level and this year we have asked for £15,420 of which £5,520 is for Groups. We shall receive the funds in four installments and pass the funding to groups in two equal installments, the first of which has already been paid.

RA Services has recently become a company limited by Guarantee. This change of status means it is no longer possible for Ramblers Area to hold shares. We will receive cash for the 239 shares held.

He reminded Groups that if they do not submit a budget they will only get a small per capita allowance.

David Smith thanked the Groups for being creative in self funding and helpful in the financial situation.

David Smith noted that David Allard was standing down as Area Treasurer. He has been on the Area Council since 1996, 13 years as secretary and 2 years as treasurer. In that time he has championed the Area website, written the Area history, been a parish Footpaths Secretary, taken the minutes for the Footpaths subcommittee and is a walk leader. He is one of the most familiar faces on the footpaths of Hertfordshire. We are all very grateful for all that he has done and pleased that he will be continuing with his footpath work. The meeting unanimously agreed a vote of thanks to David Allard for his contribution over the years.

5.4 Footpaths Secretary

Since writing his report Mark Westley said that he has at last received a decision from the Government Office for the North East (GO-NE) on the Dene Lane case which originated in 1997. GO-NE has concluded that it is a right of way. Action now lies with HCC.

It has been decided that all Government Regional Offices will close in February. All rights of way casework will be transferred to the Planning Inspectorate in Bristol. They will start work in April.

David Smith observed that footpath activity takes place at the Area level. It is one of the unique features that make the Ramblers so special. It is an opportunity for involvement by members who do not participate in Group activities

5.6 Membership Secretary

In her last report as membership secretary Chris Clyne noted that it was three years since the CRM membership system had been introduced. Although it is not yet perfect it is at long last getting better. She thanked all Group membership secretaries for their tolerance.

Ramblers main concern is falling membership. She quoted recent information from Tom Franklin. National membership on 1 December 2010 was 120,479, a decline of 1,019 in the two months since 1 October 2010. In the same period 87% of members have renewed their membership which is above target, but recruitment is well below target.

On 1 December there were 3455 members in our Area, a decline of 20 over the previous two months. Across the country only 10 Areas show an increase over this period against 49 Areas with a decline. In absolute numbers of gains and losses we rank 39th out of 59 Areas.

On the positive side she reported 20 new members in November and 39 in December. Overall she felt that the situation is improving. It is important to spread the word and not be too gloomy.

She expressed her very grateful thanks to Beth Houghton for her help in processing the computer supplied information.

David Smith thanked Chris for all her efforts particularly during the period of the CRM implementation.

He said that a new working party with a good mix of representation from all Groups is meeting to consider what we can do to increase membership. It already had proposed some ideas such as the flyers available at this meeting.

In a lively discussion the following points were made:

- We could target people graduating from health walks and looking for longer walks.
- Affiliated Groups can charge as little as £2 and there is no incentive for their members to pay £31 to join the Ramblers
- The importance of retaining members. In one Group more than 50% of members did not renew after the first year.
- Do either we or central office give sufficient attention to following up people who do not renew?

5.7 Countryside Secretary

Philip Greswell said that it had seemed to be an impossible task to prevent massive housing development in the Hertfordshire countryside but with the change in government it now seems possible. The threat of a new runway at Stansted has also receded. It could not have been done without others but the Ramblers have come out of it with a good name. This seems an appropriate time to step down.

Decisions on housing will now be made by local people and we need local reps with knowledge of their locality. They will be able to monitor local developments, ensure that footpaths are protected and that when developments do take place we get greenways not urban alleyways.

Philip thanked the Area Council and all Area members for their support.

David Smith thanked Philip for all that he has done. Starting from nothing he has worked out what needs doing and put in massive time and effort to make it happen. He has set the standard for others.

David said that we are still feeling our way on how we should be organised in the future. Ideally we should have an Area secretary to coordinate countryside matters and 13 local representatives, one for each planning authority, as eyes and ears in each locality.

It was suggested that the new high speed railway HS2 could be the next challenge. Norman Jones said that the Bucks Area is working on this but coordinating with us as the proposed route crosses a small part of Hertfordshire

5.8 Stile and Area Communications

Harold Stokes reported that the sub-committee meets four times a year and has been asked to look into the best use of electronic communications in the Area. Much of the money we receive is spent on paper communication with members.

Electronic communication could save money but there are two problems. Many people like to have a paper copy and there are technical difficulties with managing address lists etc for which we do not at present have a solution.

In discussions the following points were made:

- Could Stile and the AGM booklet be mailed together,
- For people who do not walk with a Group, Stile and the AGM booklet are the only tangible benefits from their membership,
- Not everybody has email,
- It is difficult to track members' changes of email addresses,
- Email has benefits in giving rapid distribution of information such as in campaigns.

6 Group Reports and Accounts

The Group reports and accounts were noted.

Tony Mallindine and Norman Jones apologized that the Finchley and Hornsey financial statement was not included in the AGM booklet. Tony will supply a copy on request.

7 Report from Herts County Council Rights of Way Department

In answer to questions about simplifying the procedures for volunteers to undertake path maintenance, particularly when they had their own insurance, Bob Fenton said that he is looking into it but the problem is not simple.

Nigel Agar asked how the department is being treated in the current financial environment. Richard Cuthbert said that there is a 25% cut in both staff and revenue budgets. The capital budget is under review and may be cut rather less but this will be at the expense of the budget for the Rights of Way Improvement Plan. The only money for future improvements is likely to be the result of Section 106 agreements with developers.

On the staffing side Eoin Bell will take early retirement and other officers will cover his areas. With the reduction in ROWIP funds Julia Clarke will be able to support this work. Four of the Access Officers have offered to work shorter hours, four rather than five days a week, so that there will be no compulsory redundancies.

It will all mean longer waiting times and less money for maintenance. The situation is likely to resemble that ten years ago.

Phil Escritt thanked Richard and his staff for all their efforts in maintaining the footpath network and the definitive map and for their positive approach to the financial cut backs. This Area recognizes that we cannot do without their work. There was general agreement to this sentiment.

8 Election of Officers and Committee Members

There were three vacancies for which no nominations had been received prior to the AGM. Declan Leyden volunteered to be the Area Treasurer for one year only. Beth Houghton agreed to continue to process the Area membership records but would deal with the Area Council by correspondence only. She will be designated "Membership Secretary (Corresponding)". Nigel Agar volunteered to take on the Countryside Secretary role.

There were no duplicate nominations for any post and with these three additions the nominations in the AGM booklet were unanimously accepted. An updated list of Area Council members is attached to these minutes.

9 Group Representatives and Representatives of Affiliated Groups

The nominations in the AGM booklet were noted and are listed on the attachment. Scott Bullock was welcomed as the new representative for North London and South Herts.

10 Election of Individual Members

There were four nominations for five possible positions. Roger Bangs agreed to join the Council as an individual member and with this addition the five nominees were unanimously approved. They are also listed on the attachment.

11 General Council

The Area Council had nominated David Smith and Phil Escritt to be the Area's delegates to the General Council and these nominations were approved. The Area can also send up to two additional visitors. Scott Bullock, Chris Beney, Harold Stokes and David Dickson were all suggested with the final decision left to the Area Council.

12 Motions for General Council

There were no proposals from any Group and the Area Council had proposed the following motion.

"This General Council welcomes the issuing of government guidelines on the authorization of path structure by local authorities, with emphasis on the least restrictive option.

Recognising that few local authorities yet follow this guidance fully, the Ramblers will ensure that all our members are made aware of its key features and that in particular our footpath secretaries are given specific guidance and encouraged to assist their authorities in implementing it"

This motion was approved subject to any drafting changes necessary to accord with the requirements.

13 AOB

Colin Knight enquired whether anyone had undertaken the "Mystery Walker" action to survey paths in a specific area - he had. No-one else had. Further details are available at:
<http://www.ramblers.org.uk/Campaigns+Policy/Mystery+Walker>

David Smith drew attention to the plaques now available to identify where Ramblers have undertaken path maintenance work. Details are at:
<http://www.ramblers.org.uk/Volunteer/News/Tell+walkers+about+your+practical+path+work>

The Meeting Closed at 3.35pm.

Refreshments were provided by the North London and South Herts Group.

After the break David Smith thanked this Group for the excellent refreshments.

He then introduced Chris Hall the invited speaker. Chris is a former National General Secretary and current Vice President of the Ramblers, he is an active member of the Concerned Ramblers and a celebrated protagonist in the High Court where in 1998 he won a famous case against the Secretary of State for the Environment. A summary of Chris's talk is attached to these minutes.

Phil Escritt,
Minutes Secretary,
31 January 2011

Herts and North Middlesex Area AGM 22 January 2011

Area Council 2011/2012

Area Officers

| | |
|---|--|
| President | Nigel Agar, 34 Oakfield Avenue, Hitchin, Herts SG4 9JB Tel: 01462 459870 |
| Chairman | David Smith, 30 Whitney Drive, Stevenage, Herts SG1 4BH Tel: 01438 318568 |
| Vice Chairman | Harold Stokes, 15 Whitney Drive, Stevenage, Herts SG1 4BE Tel: 01438 353666 |
| Secretary | Norman Jones, 47 Cedar Walk, Hemel Hempstead, Herts HP3 9ED Tel: 01442 211794 |
| Treasurer | Declan Leyden, 57 Collingwood Avenue, London N10 3EE Tel: 020 8444 6887 |
| Footpath Secretary | Mark Westley, Little Hollies, 38 Shephall Green, Stevenage, Herts SG2 9XS Tel: 01438 234564 |
| Publicity Secretary | David Dickson, 27 Warwick Road, St Albans, Herts AL1 4DJ Tel: 01727 853458 |
| Membership Secretary (Corresponding) | Beth Houghton, 58 Nursery Road, London N14 5QH Tel: 020 8882 0910 |
| Minute Secretary | Phil Escritt, 2 St Stephens Avenue, St Albans, Herts AL3 4AD Tel: 01727 866743 |
| Countryside Secretary | as President |
| Access Officer | as Secretary |
| Independent Examiner | To be arranged |

Group Representatives

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|--------------------|---|
| East Herts | Sarah Lea, 34 Cozens Lane East, Broxbourne, Herts EN10 6PX Tel: 01992 302514 |
| Finchley & Hornsey | Chris Clyne, 10 Temple Gardens, London NW11 0LL Tel: 020 8455 2893 |
| North Herts | as Vice Chairman |

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|----------------------------|---|
| North Herts Young Walkers | Paul Marriott Tel: 01438 223730 |
| North London & South Herts | Scott Bullock, Flat 2 Seacole Lodge, 80 Pennington Drive, London N21 1TR Tel: 0208 3509687 |
| Royston & District | Robin King, 44 Kneesworth Street, Royston, Herts SG8 5AQ Tel: 01763 245750 |
| Watford & Three Rivers | Roger Housechild Tel: 01923 855273. |
| West Herts | as Secretary |

Individual Members

| | |
|----------------|---|
| Chris Beney | 12 Woodlands Road, Bushey, Herts WD2 2LR Tel: 01923 211113 or 240107 Information Technology contact |
| Ray Peters | 55 Derby Way, Stevenage, Herts SG1 5TR Tel: 01438 353583 |
| Edward Walker | 85 Ely Close, Stevenage, Herts SG1 4NP Tel: 01438 226590 |
| Graham Daniels | 16 Dellcott Close, Welwyn Garden City, Herts AL8 7BD Tel: 01707 321053 |
| Roger Bangs | 130 Tudor Way, Rickmansworth, WD3 7HL Tel: 01923 720143 |

Representatives of Affiliated Groups

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|---------------|--|
| Phil Escritt | as Minute Secretary St Albans & District Footpaths Society. |
| David Whiskin | 16 Westlands Drive, Brookmans Park, Hatfield, Herts AL9 7UQ Tel: 01707 654911 Mid Herts Footpath Society |

Herts and North Middlesex Area AGM 22 January 2011

Summary of the Talk by Chris Hall

In his introduction Chris congratulated the Area on the quality of the debate at this AGM and of the literature available. Both Stile and the AGM booklet are very good. He also spoke of his appreciation for Philip Greswell's work.

He outlined some of the history and achievements of the Ramblers. Before the last war local people knew where the paths were and they were kept open by use. After the war there was little money for maintenance, cars became more available, the paths were used less and became more and more obstructed.

Post-war the first great achievement was the 1949 National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act which enabled the establishment of national parks and created the definitive maps, although it took many years before either was fully implemented.

A second major achievement was to get the rights of way marked on Ordnance Survey maps. Subsequently the Ramblers led the campaign to preserve the 2½ inches to 1 mile scale maps which eventually led to the excellent Explorer series of maps we have today.

A more diffuse achievement was in gradually persuading highways authorities and landowners to drop proposals to "rationalize" the footpaths network. This would surely have led to fewer and less interesting paths.

In the late 80's and early 90's Ramblers successfully campaigned against privatization of the Forestry Commission (we may have to do it again). It also re-launched its campaign for the right to roam leading ultimately to the Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) act and sizeable additions to land over which we can walk.

Throughout the post-war years membership continued to grow. This is important. Increasing membership gives an organisation more clout. With a declining membership it loses clout.

In about 2002/3 something went wrong. Membership started to decline.

Most people join the Ramblers because it does something good and useful for people who walk. Membership began to drop because it stopped campaigning.

In the financial crisis subscriptions could have been increased to maintain campaign staff. We do not need a glossy magazine like *Walk* which is still not doing the right job for the Ramblers. We did not *need* a new logo. The membership database problems should have been addressed earlier.

Things are getting better. The decline in membership has been slowed but has not yet been reversed. We now have footpaths and access at the top of our agenda and the chairman and chief executive are out meeting the members. But there is more to do.

The Concerned Ramblers organisation will maintain its pressure on the Board of Trustees. There is more to do before the Ramblers becomes again a campaigning organisation.