

**THE RAMBLERS ASSOCIATION
HERTFORDSHIRE & NORTH MIDDLESEX AREA**

MINUTES OF THE AREA COUNCIL MEETING
23 February 2009

Corrected Version

Members Present

Nigel Agar, David Allard, Chris Beney, Chris Clyne, Graham Daniels, David Dickson, Phil Escritt, Philip Greswell, Sue Jacobs, Norman Jones, Robin King, Sarah Lea, Hywel Morris, Ray Peters, Bert Richardson (chairman), Harold Stokes, Edward Walker, Mark Westley.

Agenda Item

1 Apologies - None

2 Minutes of Meeting held on 10 November 2008

In Item 9, Footpath Secretary's Report, replace "Creation Orders" with "Creation Agreements".

3 Matters Arising

Item 12 – Officer Reports

There is only a need for written reports when there are significant items to be discussed but regular financial reports would be appreciated.

Item 9 – Treasurers Report

Bert Richardson thanked David Allard for taking on the role of treasurer at short notice.

4 AGM Matters

There was a general discussion about the organisation and arrangements of the AGM and a series of votes. The AGREED conclusions were:

- To retain a central location rather than move the venue around the Groups (12 in favour, 4 against).
- To request Bert and Norman to look for a new venue (with better heating) in the Welwyn Garden City Area.
- To provide wine and fruit juice rather than tea and coffee for refreshments (12 in favour 2 against).
- To retain the circular arrangement for the seating.
- To continue the successful arrangement of including all reports in the AGM booklet (including Herts County Council).
- To repeat the successful practice of allowing only updates to and questions on written reports.
- To ensure more time for the invited speaker by providing and following a strict timetable for the agenda.

Royston Group volunteered to provide the refreshments at the next AGM.

There was a brief discussion about potential chairmen for next year.

5 Regular Group Representation at Area Council Meetings

It was agreed to keep a note of the Group representatives at each meeting and to monitor the situation before deciding on any specific action. It was noted that every Group except Watford and Three Rivers was represented at this meeting.

6 Area Silver Jubilee

Robin King reported that the date of the Finchley and Hornsey walk has been changed from 9 August to 16 August but the dates of the other walks are unchanged. The updated list is:

- Royston Sunday 5 July
- Dacorum Sunday 26 July
- Finchley and Hornsey Sunday 16 August
- Watford & Three Rivers Sunday 23 August
- North London & South Herts Sunday 6 September
- East Herts Sunday 27 September
- North Herts Saturday 17 October

Harold Stokes reported on the arrangements for the North Herts walks. There will be three walks starting at Woolmer Green village hall:

12-15 miles starting at 10.00

7-10 miles starting at 12.00

4-5 miles starting at 14.00

All three walks will return to the hall by 16.00 for a celebration tea. North Herts Group will provide tea and coffee and a celebration cake but participants would bring their own food. North Herts will undertake all the organisation but will need an estimate of the numbers attending from each Group about three weeks before the event.

The arrangements for all these walks will be advertised in the next Stile.

It was noted that a budget of £1000 had been agreed at the last meeting.

7 Area Secretary's RA Correspondence

09/01 New Branding - Norman Jones reported on the meeting he had attended concerning the new branding of the RA. This provoked a general discussion about the revised strategy of the RA which showed a diverse range of opinion. Some felt that the RA was neglecting its existing constituency. Others thought that the change was absolutely necessary. It was suggested that it was aimed at getting lottery funding.

Some members felt that the absence of a full time lawyer was short sighted but it was explained that the fluctuating workload made it difficult to justify and that a panel of part time solicitors was under consideration.

Some were not impressed by the new chief executive. Others thought he was inspirational. Some questioned whether he would be a good manager.

Norman was requested to ensure that if possible an electronic version of the new brand should be available for use as a letterhead.

There were no proposals for questions to the General Council.

It was AGREED that the new Chairman of North Herts should be invited to attend the Central Office Open Day.

Chris Beney had expected circular requesting comments on the first draft of DEFRA guidance on Structures on Rights of Way. He distributed copies for comment.

8 Finchley and Hornsey Group Revised Constitution

The revised constitution of the Finchley and Hornsey Group was APPROVED.

9 STILE – Report from sub-committee

Harold Stokes spoke about the report from the Stile sub-committee who planned to meet with Justin on 14 March to finalise the contents of the next edition.

In researching the cost of colour the sub-committee had asked for alternative quotes. This had revealed that, for the same service, the printer used by the North Herts Group would be cheaper than the existing printer regardless of whether the printing would be in colour or black and white.

It was AGREED that the cheaper printer should be used and that once the new contract was final a letter should be sent to the old printers thanking them for their services.

Harold reported that he had received an email from Justin with reservations about the need for colour and the amount of work involved in making the transition.

In discussion there was widespread understanding of Justin's concerns about the workload involved but strong support for an eventual transition to colour printing.

The Council GAVE AUTHORITY to the sub-committee to work with Justin to agree a transition plan including decisions on what is feasible for the next edition.

It was noted that a substantial saving could be made by purchasing the necessary stamps before the forthcoming price increase.

The Council also AGREED to the purchase of an Ordnance Survey licence so that future editions of Stile could include maps.

10 Officers' Reports

Treasurer

The following Group budgets have been approved by HQ

Royston	£Nil
North Herts	£850
North London/South Herts	£1200
East Herts	£1500
Watford & Three Rivers	£750
Finchley & Hornsey	£1300
Dacorum	£850

The total of £6450 is the same as last year. It was AGREED that these amounts should now be paid to the Groups.

David Allard said that Victor Parker, a chartered accountant, who acts as independent examiner for the Royston Group is prepared to act as independent examiner for the Area this year. His appointment was AGREED.

Secretary

It was AGREED that Norman Jones could attend the General Council as a visitor and that his expenses would be paid by the Area.

Footpaths Secretary

Mark Westley reported that Clive Gillingham's remaining parishes would be covered by Dennis Zwolinski. Vickey Jackson's parishes will be taken over by Sue and Peter Garside. Mark Westley will take Buckland and Wyddial from Sue and Peter Garside. Peter Haigh will take over Pirton from Frances Morland.

Countryside Secretary

Philip Greswell asked whether the North Herts Group could include leaflets about Lilley Bottom with their next newsletter. Harold and Ray explained that the newsletter would be mailed at the end of the week and that they were not able to agree without the approval of their committee. They agreed to include a link on their website.

Membership Secretary

Chris Clyne said that the situation was a bit better but there was still a long way to go. It was particularly disappointing that the most recent address lists did not include any new members as this meant that they would go two months without being contacted and might miss some mailings.

She had been to a meeting at HQ in January where she had learned that there was only one IT expert working on the problem and he was being called to do other things. At the meeting two people with appropriate expertise had volunteered to help but she did not know if these offers had been accepted.

President

Nigel Agar reported on a meeting of the County Council's Rural Advisory Panel which had discussed the Local Access Forum and its work. He was concerned that, at a political level, the County Council was taking the view that they had no duty to search for lost ways. He believed that this was not true. Richard Cuthbert had said that the Rights of Way Unit was receiving 40 claims a year.

Mark Westley was concerned that the Council was giving the lowest priority to potential rights of way which they discovered in the course of researching other claims.

Nigel suggested that it is important to claim any potential rights of way as soon as possible.

Heartwood Forest

Phil Escritt had submitted a written report on Woodland Trust's development of the forest north of Sandridge to be known as the Heartwood Forest. The land has been purchased and consultations have started with "key stakeholders" including the RA. He concluded by recommending that the RA should make an unconditional donation of £500. This should be decoupled from any claim for statutory access rights which should be pursued separately.

Mark Westley disagreed. In his view the forest was of only marginal benefit to walkers and would convert good farmland into wasteland. If we do not get statutory access we should not give any money. He questioned whether we could legally give such an unconditional donation. He drew attention to the Woodland Trust's wood at Charlton where access is actively discouraged.

In discussion there was support for both viewpoints and a vote was taken. It was AGREED that, subject to the treasurer checking the legality with HQ, the Area would unconditionally donate £500 to the Woodland Trust for the Heartwood Forest (8 in favour, 4 against, 3 abstentions). The letter will be sent by the Chairman.

Graham Daniels drew attention to the following notice on the Woodland Trust website:

"To give us a chance to explain our plans and to hear your comments, come along for a brief guided walk with us on one of these days:

Wed 25 Feb 2.00pm

Thur 12 March 11.00am

Tue 17 March 2.00pm

- leaving from the scout hut on Sandridgebury Lane, a short walk up the bridleway from Sandridge.

*Or drop into the scout hut at any time from 10.30 am onwards on Sat 28 Feb
See you there"*

11 Ramblers Greater London Forum

Chris Beney said that Howard Hopkins has agreed to attend the next meeting.

12 Reports from Group representative

Nothing raised.

13 AOB

The Bedfordshire Walking Festival from 5 to 13 September is sponsored by the RA.

Norman Jones said that the Dacorum Group want to change their name to West Herts and this will be brought formally to the Area Council at a future meeting.

The meeting closed at 21.30

Subsequent Meetings: 20 April, 7 Sept, 9 Nov 2009. Area AGM 10 January 2010

Phil Escritt (Minutes Secretary)
26 February 2009