

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

**Minutes of the Meeting of the Area Council, 23 May 2011**

**Attendance**

David Smith	Chairman
Roger Bangs	Independent
Chris Beney	Independent
Chris Clyne	Finchley and Hornsey
Graham Daniels	Independent
David Dickson	Publicity Secretary
Roger Housechild	Watford and Three Rivers
Norman Jones	Secretary, West Herts
Sarah Lea	East Herts
Declan Leyden	Treasurer
Ray Peters	Independent
Harold Stokes	Vice Chairman, North Herts
Edward Walker	Independent
Phil Escritt	Minutes Secretary, St Albans & District Footpaths Society,

**Introduction.**

David Smith welcomed Roger Bangs to his first Area Council

**1 Apologies for Absence:** Mark Westley, Nigel Agar, Robin King

**2 Meeting held on 14 February 2011 and Matters Arising**

**Item 4 B1.** The meeting with Robert Peel has been announced in the latest edition of Stile. David Smith will write to selected affiliated groups inviting them to attend. All Ramblers Groups are requested to put the meeting and the walk which will precede it into their future programme.

**Item 4 B3.** The communications subcommittee is still considering the question of officer's email addresses. Several personal addresses are in the latest edition of Stile.

**Item 6.** Post Meeting Note from Declan. "A change of bank mandate requires a resolution passed by Area Council and signed by the chairperson (or another person authorised by Area council) and either the Secretary or Treasurer. The detailed wording is set out in the copy of the Bank document attached to the minutes of the meeting held on 14 Feb".

**Item 7b.** The Map Reading training was announced in Stile. It will be given by David Smith and Harold Stokes from the North Herts Group. Numbers are limited to 14 and there is already a waiting list of 4 people. The course comprises five Monday evenings: 6, 13, 20 and 27 June and 4 July.

Harold requested other Groups to provide helpers for the three field sessions on 13 and 27 June, and 4 July.

**Item 14.** There was no information regarding a change to the mileage rate but Norman understood that it is being considered by central office.

### **3 Treasurers Report**

Declan introduced his report. The budget for the financial year from 1 Oct 2011 to 30 Sept 2012 has to be submitted by 26 August which is before the next Area Council meeting. He reminded the Council that it is responsible for both the Area and Group budgets. The Area has one of the higher levels of expenditures on admin and meetings. There is also a need to identify and approve any major projects.

In discussion the Council recognised the importance of keeping costs down but noted that:

- Much of the admin supports the voluntary campaigning activity, particularly by Footpaths Secretaries. This contribution in kind is not reflected in the Area accounts.
- Money spent by local authorities as a result of this campaigning is also not reflected in the accounts.
- The printing and distribution of the AGM papers, which is a substantial element of these costs, will be reduced if the recommendation of the communications subcommittee is adopted (see below).

Chris Beney said that, subject to discussions with central office, there may be a need for expenditure on publications explaining the Defra Guidance adopted at the General Council. Roger Bangs suggested the need for a training session for new and prospective Footpaths Secretaries. Council supported both proposals in principle.

All budget requests, including Group budgets, must be submitted to Declan by 15 July. It was agreed that the final budgets will be agreed by a sub-committee comprising the Area chairman, vice chairman, treasurer and secretary. They were requested to circulate the final version to members of the Area Council.

The Council thanked Declan for stimulating this important discussion.

### **4 Report by Area Communications Subcommittee**

Harold introduced his previously circulated report and explained its recommendations and questions.

The Council agreed to the merging of Stile and the AGM calling notice and asked the subcommittee to make detailed proposals for the next meeting. Council members expressed appreciation for Justin's editorial work on Stile.

The Council agreed that the subcommittee should prepare a draft new "paper" website before any wider consultation but Groups were each invited to nominate an individual with particular interest or expertise to join the subcommittee for this activity.

In view of the shortage of available effort the Council agreed to postpone further consideration of e-communications at the Area level.

## **5 Feedback from General Council**

Phil had been impressed by the enthusiasm of delegates and staff and the quality of the debate. He paid tribute to material which Chris Beney had prepared in support of the Area's motion and which was a major factor in its unanimous acceptance.

### **Does the Area wish to host a future General Council from 2014?**

Norman has established that the University of Hertfordshire could be a suitable location. The main question is what level of support would be required from volunteers. Norman and David Smith will make further enquiries before wider consultation.

### **Area Structures in Greater London**

The motion approved by the General Council calls for "*a reappraisal of Area structures within the geographical area covered by the Greater London Authority, including consulting with the existing Areas*". The findings and recommendations are to be reported to the 2012 General Council.

The Area Council deplored the lack of any consultation before the motion was submitted and that the structure for the London region is being decided by delegates with no knowledge of the region. They agreed that all our own Groups would be fully consulted before formulating an Area response. It would also be important to get the views of our representatives on the Greater London Forum.

The representatives of the two London Groups want plenty of time to discuss the issue. Most of their walks are in the Hertfordshire area. The Hertfordshire Groups also greatly appreciate the contribution to the Area from the London groups.

The Council asks all Groups to consider the question but not to come to any firm conclusions before receiving the detailed consultation from central office.

### **Relationship with Affiliated Groups**

Norman had circulated a paper analysing the various groups which are affiliated to this Area and their relationship with the Ramblers. Some Council members commented that the affiliation fees are low. All agreed the desirability of recruiting affiliated group members to become Ramblers members as well but noted that there needs to be better communication between the Ramblers and the affiliated groups.

It was agreed to begin approaching selected affiliated groups to see how we can help each other. David Smith will propose a plan for going about this.

As a second step we should also start to identify the many walking groups in our Area which are not currently affiliated to the Ramblers.

### **Speaker for 2012 AGM**

The following names were suggested:

- Naseem Akhtar (the new trustee with the highest vote at the recent General Council)
- Eleanor Harris (a trustee from inner London)
- Des de Moor (Central Office)
- Janet Davis (Central Office)
- Richard Cuthbert (Head of HCC Rights of Way department).

David Smith and Norman will take this forward.

## **6 Initial Review of Area Officers for 2012-2013**

None of those present is currently contemplating stepping down.

## **7 Publicity and Recruitment Activities**

Beth Houghton had distributed a report.

Apart from the N Herts Young Walkers every Group shows a decline in numbers since October 2010. N Herts (-1.5%) and Watford and Three Rivers (-1.3%) have the least decline but overall the Area membership is declining at only slightly less than the national rate (-3.6%). If this continues we shall lose a third of our membership in five years.

Groups are successfully recruiting but the number of recruits is exceeded by those not renewing. We need to know the reasons why people are not renewing their membership and the Area and Groups need to consider how best they can retain existing members. This issue is also being looked into by the publicity and recruitment subcommittee.

## **8 Arrangements for Countryside Protection**

Nigel Agar has submitted a paper describing his own role but still has to address the question of an Area organisation. David Smith and Norman Jones will follow this up.

## **9 Other Officers Reports**

### **Secretary**

Norman reported that he has sent a response to the consultation on "Liberating Led Walks" based on contributions from himself, Harold and David Smith.

### **Footpath Issues and Others**

Council agreed that Mark Westley should speak for the Ramblers at the forthcoming inquiry into a claim for a footpath at Carbone Hill.

Phil distributed a paper with extracts from HCC's draft and final Walking Strategy showing the anticipated decline in the condition of rights of way as a result of the budget cuts. The salient figures are attached to these minutes. The Council agreed the need to register a strong protest. It was agreed that:

- David Smith will write to the Council Leader
- The information will be sent to Central Office for use in the national campaign
- Individual Footpaths Secretaries will be asked to write to their local County Councillors

## **10 Reports from Group representatives and 11 AOB**

None

The Meeting Closed at 21.30

Phil Escritt  
Minutes Secretary

Next meetings:

Area Council, 12 September 2011, 21 November 2011  
Area AGM, 21 January 2012

## Attachment to Area Council Minutes 23 May 2011

### Effect of Herts County Council Budget Cuts

At the Area AGM Richard Cuthbert warned us that the effect of the budget cuts would be to set us back years in respect of the condition of the rights of way network in Hertfordshire. We now have a quantitative estimate of the effect.

The ROW unit has a performance measure which is the % of the total length of footpaths and other rights of way that were easy to use by members of the public. In September last year HCC issued a draft Walking Strategy for comment which showed a gradual improvement in this measure. They have now issued a final version of this strategy which predicts a significant deterioration.

The figures in the two documents are:

2009/10            Actual 78%            same in both versions

Future targets

Year	Draft Strategy	Final Strategy
2015/16	80%	74%
2020/21	80%	70%
2025/26	85%	70%
2030/31	85%	70%

In other words instead of a 7% improvement over about 15 years they are now anticipating an 8% deterioration over 10 years.

The final version of this strategy is on the Herts Direct website at:

<http://www.hertsdirect.org/docs/pdf/w/LTP3walking.pdf>