

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

MINUTES OF THE AREA COUNCIL MEETING
7 September 2009

Members Present

Nigel Agar, David Allard, Chris Beney, Chris Clyne, Graham Daniels, David Dickson, Phil Escritt, Ron Faulkner, Philip Greswell, Sue Jacobs, Norman Jones, Ray Peters, Bert Richardson (chairman).

Agenda Item

1. Apologies - Sarah Lea, Harold Stokes, Edward Walker, Mark Westley, David Whiskin, Rosemary Redwood

2. Minutes of Meeting held on 20 April 2009

Item 3 AOB – Larry Ball's name is mis-spelled in the heading but is correct in the text.

Otherwise Minutes approved

3. Matters Arising

Item 3 – Heartwood Forest. A very detailed Environmental Statement is now available via the Heartwood pages on the Woodland Trust website. Section 9 provides a brief summary of the main impacts and concept design. Appendix 23 is a map of the conceptual design showing access, walking routes and car parks

Item 4 – Ramblers Rebranding. Norman Jones is still working on this.

Item 5 – Welcome Letter. The text has now been finalised

Item 6 – Stile. We have no easy way of checking the address labels sent by head office and the effort involved would be greater than the benefit it would provide. It is known that some members receive more than one copy. There may be members who have been omitted

Item 7 – General Council. The members day planned for 5 September was cancelled.

Item 11 – Name change for Dacorum Group awaits the Group AGM in November

4. Financial Affairs

David Allard explained the main points of the paper he had previously circulated covering the budget reductions imposed by Central office and the decisions required.

We have received £1812.50 less than the approved budget for this year. At the same time the North Herts Group have requested an additional £1000 to fund leaflets for the Stevenage Paths Project (incorporating STOOP), and £500 to support the Hitchin Outer Orbital Path (HOOP). The Friends of the Hertfordshire Way have requested a donation of £1000 to fund publicity for their new guide and signs to replace those which have been vandalised.

There has been a proposal to delay the distribution of Stile and combine it with the AGM papers to save postage costs although the latest report from the Stile sub-committee does not recommend this as it may in fact cost more.

David requested everyone to submit requests for repayment of expenses as soon as possible so that he could finalise the accounts at the end of the month.

Norman Jones described his understanding of the national financial situation. The information which is available is not easy to understand. He questioned some of the assumptions behind the original budgets and suggested that action could have been taken much earlier. But he was in no doubt that the Trustees were right in the need for urgent action.

He also explained his understanding that the informal meeting in Leeds on 26 September is being organised by officers of the West Riding Area to determine the level of dissatisfaction and support for future action. One possible outcome is an EGM to challenge recent central office actions.

There was a long discussion expressing general dissatisfaction with the current state of the organisation. The following points received wide support.

- The central finances appear to have been bungled.
- Central office does not appear to have been candid about the real causes of these problems.
- The latest issue of Walk magazine contains no mention of the problems and as this is now the only medium of communication with most ordinary members this was regarded as a serious omission. It was widely condemned.
- The only consistent source of funds is membership subscriptions but central office have not given sufficient attention to sorting out the problems with the CMS system (membership records)
- They have ignored offers of expert help to solve the CMS problems and correspondence from membership secretaries is still unanswered.
- To restore confidence in central office the financial and CMS problems need to be sorted out quickly.
- Many members and affiliated societies support the Ramblers only because of their national role in the protection of rights of way. This core activity must be preserved.
- One affiliated society has hesitated before giving a financial donation because of concerns that the money may not be used to support this core activity.

The council considered its approach to the informal meeting in Leeds. It AGREED to send representatives who should take the following lines.

- At a national level the Ramblers core activity is the protection of rights of way. This must be preserved.
- The problems with the CMS must be resolved quickly and the finances must be transparent.
- Support for an EGM would depend on what it could achieve and in what timescale. Would motions at the normal AGM be more effective?

The Area Council AGREED:

1. The current edition of Stile should go ahead as planned and not be held back to be mailed with the AGM booklet.
2. The treasurer should apply to central office for additional funds specifically to cover the amounts required for STOOP, HOOP and the Hertfordshire Way.

3. At its next meeting The Area Council will decide how to divide any amount received as a result of this request.
4. In consultation with Bert and Chris Beney, the secretary will write a letter to Len Bannister of the Ramblers Trustees expressing the Area Council's concerns and requesting a written reply.
5. Bert Richardson, Graham Daniels and Chris Clyne will attend the informal meeting in Leeds as representatives of the Area and will express the views described above.
6. The Area will pay their travel expenses subject to our charity status.
7. The Area Council may be willing to support an EGM depending on its purpose and timing.
8. All Groups must send programmes to all their members. It is essential that every member of a Group receives a copy of the Group newsletters and walking programmes.
9. With the current level of volunteer effort it is not feasible to combine the mailing of Group newsletters and Stile.
10. At the next council meeting there should be a discussion of the possibilities of increasing the use of email to communicate with members.

5. Stile – Report from sub-committee

Harold Stokes had distributed a report prior to the meeting.

In discussion it was noted that Stile has improved but the web site needs updating in several respects. In particular the North London page is inadequate. Phil Escritt said that the sub-committee would welcome both proposals for articles and recommendations for people who should receive complimentary copies. It was suggested that copies could be placed in libraries.

The Council AGREED to the sub-committees three recommendations:

1. The autumn edition of Stile should be published to the timetable already agreed.
2. The sub-committee should develop procedures for a targeted distribution of Stile beyond members.
3. The sub-committee should recommend possible procedures for management of the Area website.

Minute secretary's note. Subsequent to the meeting David Allard undertook to make the necessary short term updates to the website including any submission from the North London Group. The Stile sub-committee will work on establishing procedures for future updates.

6. North Herts Young Walkers

The North Herts Young Walkers currently operate as a sub-group of North Herts Group but would now like to establish themselves as an independent 20s-30s group and are seeking the approval of the Area Council. North Herts Group is in agreement.

There was broad support but concerns about the absence of any information on financial implications and whether the group had sufficient Ramblers members to be financially viable. Chris Beney was unhappy with the ageism implications but it was pointed out that there are many precedents within the Ramblers.

Ron Faulkner said that the leaders of the proposed group were actively working on the organisational aspects and he was confident that they would make proposals that would be satisfactory.

The Council AGREED its strong support for the formation of this group subject to satisfactory constitutional and financial proposals being available before any formal approval is given by the Area Council.

7. Area Secretary's Communications

The Ramblers 75th Anniversary in 2010 includes a Baton Walk. This will be in Hertfordshire in September. Groups can include this in their walk programme.

Get walking day is 24th May. The General Council is from lunch to lunch on 10-11th April 2010.

There is new information for walk leaders on the RA website.

8. Officer's Reports

Countryside Secretary – Philip Greswell spoke about the importance of getting policies about walking and rights of way into the Core Strategies of Local Development Framework Documents. This may be our last opportunity to influence them. He has prepared a template suitable for all councils. It was AGREED that he should circulate this to all Council members.

9. Reports from Group Representatives

North London – Sue Jacobs said that members of her group were concerned about what to do if someone is taken ill on a walk. Information on a Ramblers guidance card appears to have been copied from a first aid manual and may be unsuitable if used by people who are not properly trained.

Bert Richardson felt it would be difficult to give guidance covering all circumstances and that common sense should be used. Ray Peters said that the important thing is not to attempt anything beyond your competence.

It was AGREED that the Ramblers guidance would be reviewed at a future meeting.

10. Area Relationship with HCC Countryside Management Service

Norman Jones drew attention to a recent article by the CMS talking about the excellent work done by Ramblers volunteers. Ray Peters said that CMS had been very helpful over HOOP.

As this subject had been raised by East Herts Group and there were no representatives of that group present it was AGREED to postpone further discussion to the next meeting.

10A. Speaker at Next AGM

Mark Westley gave a very interesting talk at the AGM of the Friends of the Hertfordshire Way and it was AGREED that he should be invited to speak at the Area AGM.

11. AOB

Members were reminded of the celebration event on 17 October and the need to give Harold Stokes an indication of the numbers who will attend. Len Bannister has said that he will be there.

The meeting closed at 21.30

Phil Escritt
Minutes Secretary

10 September 2009

Next Council Meeting 9 November 2009,
Area AGM 9 January 2010