

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

Minutes of the Meeting of the Area Council, 8 November 2010

Attendance

David Smith	Chairman
Nigel Agar	President
Chris Beney	Independent
Chris Clyne	Membership Secretary, Finchley and Hornsey
Graham Daniels	Independent
David Dickson	Publicity Secretary
Roger Housechild	Watford and Three Rivers
Sue Jacobs	North London and South Herts
Norman Jones	Secretary, West Herts
Sarah Lea	East Herts
Ron Neil	Observer
Ray Peters	Independent
Harold Stokes	Vice Chairman, North Herts
Edward Walker	Independent
Mark Westley	Footpaths Secretary
Phil Escritt	Minutes Secretary, St Albans & District Footpaths Society,

Introductory Remarks

David Smith welcomed Ron Neil who was attending the meeting as an observer having expressed interest in standing as a candidate for Area Treasurer.

1 Apologies for Absence: David Allard, Bert Richardson, Philip Greswell.

2 Corrections to Minutes of Meeting held on 6 September 2010: None

3 Matters Arising from Minutes of Meeting held on 6 September 2010

Item 5: Budget Pressure on HCC Rights of Way Unit. Norman Jones reported that at a non public meeting of the Local Access Forum (LAF) Richard Cuthbert had reported that he was expecting a budget cut of 25%. His hope was that it would be phased over four years and not be a single immediate cut. The papers would be considered at the HCC Highways and Transport Panel on 9 November and are available on the Herts Direct website.

[\(http://www.hertsdirect.org/yrccouncil/civic_calendar/hightranscp/15946149/\)](http://www.hertsdirect.org/yrccouncil/civic_calendar/hightranscp/15946149/)

The LAF had sent a letter to Councillor Pile expressing support for a phased rather than an immediate cut and had received a non-committal response.

Area Council members reiterated their concern about the potential effects of these cuts.

Sarah Lea reported that, at the East Herts AGM, Bob Fenton of HCC Rights of Way Unit had said that, under the Big Society, volunteer work in maintaining footpaths may become even more important.

Minute Secretary's Note: Subsequent to the meeting HCC have published papers relating to cuts in other environmental services eg Countryside Management Services, Groundwork Trust etc. They are on the agenda for the Environmental and Planning Panel on 16 November and can be found at: http://www.hertsdirect.org/yrccouncil/civic_calendar/environmentplanningcp/15960979/

4 Area AGM

Area Treasurer: David Allard has confirmed that he wishes to resign from the post of Area Treasurer and from the Area Council. He will continue as a Footpaths Secretary and will continue to take the minutes at the Footpaths Subcommittee. At the AGM the chairman will express the Area's thanks for the 15 years service that David has given to the Area Council. The Council hoped that Ron Neil will feel able to confirm his candidacy for the role.

Countryside Secretary: The latest edition of Stile magazine contains three articles relating to the Countryside role and the need for additional volunteers but so far no new people have come forward.

David Smith outlined two options for continuing this work a) an ad hoc service via Footpaths Secretaries b) seek to recruit more district Countryside Officers and, with better local cover available, to ask Philip Greswell if he would be willing to act in a less-demanding, coordinating role.

In discussion it was suggested that, with the withdrawal of the East of England Plan, all planning will be at a local District/Borough level. It will require local knowledge and will be too much for one person at an Area level. The title of Countryside Secretary may be off-putting.

Although there is not a good geographical match between our Group boundaries and the local authority boundaries it may still be best to try to tackle this problem at a Group level. It was agreed that the Chairman will write to each Group asking them to look for volunteers willing to undertake the role in their local area.

This issue will need to be considered further at the Area AGM.

Area Membership Secretary: Chris Clyne has indicated that she wishes to resign from the role of Membership Secretary although she will continue to represent Finchley and Hornsey on the Area Council. She explained that the job now requires more computer skills than she possesses. Until now Beth Houghton has provided backroom support in a most efficient manner but she is not willing to join the Area Council.

The chairman thanked Chris for maintaining this role through the very difficult time of the transition to the new membership system and the Council expressed its thanks to Beth for her assistance.

The job description for this role is on the central website at: <http://www.ramblers.org.uk/Volunteer/AreaGroup/Resources/MembSec.htm>.

All Council members were asked to seek possible volunteers for this role.

AGM Organisation: The Council confirmed that Chris Hall, a former Ramblers Chair and a current Vice-President, will be the invited speaker.

Robert Peel, our contact on the Board of Trustees, has indicated that he intends to attend. The Council very much welcomed his presence as an opportunity for us to meet him and exchange views.

Mark Westley agreed to lead a walk in the morning. Norman Jones was asked to ensure that the car park will be unlocked before the walk and the hall will be open when the walkers return.

Sue Jacobs confirmed that North London and South Herts will provide the refreshments.

Norman Jones emphasised the need for him to receive reports from all Groups and Area Officers, and for details of any changes to Group Officers, before the end of November so that he can prepare the AGM booklet.

5 Reports of National Meetings

Concerned Ramblers – 2nd October

Robin King and Norman Jones both attended this meeting and Norman has circulated a report. Norman said that the meeting had been constructive and that contentious issues had been abandoned. Two vacancies on the committee have been filled with people in whom he has confidence. There was satisfaction about the priority being given to rights of way work.

Robert Peel had been keen that the Ramblers should provide guidance on websites. David Smith commented that Leon Fotiadis, webmaster for North Herts is willing to help Groups set up websites and has made an offer of help to the two Groups in our Area without websites.

Meeting with Chair and Chief Executive – 2nd November

David Smith and Harold Stokes had attended this meeting which had been reported in Tom Franklin's blog (<http://tomsramblog.blogspot.com/2010/11/ramblers-volunteers-meeting-in-london.html>).

David reported that the meeting had been positive and constructive. There were robust comments that the Centre still needed to learn how best to engage the grass roots of an organisation like ours, although several volunteers are now working in the Centre.

There was emphasis on the need to recruit and retain new members. The Centre was keen that Areas should experiment. For example the Essex Area is trying to establish closer links with affiliated organisations. Other Areas have found that leading organised walks as part of local festivals (and charging up to £7/head) can attract new members.

6 Report on Action on Motions passed and Remitted at General Council 2010

Full details of the Trustees actions are on the Ramblers website at: <http://tinyurl.com/generalcouncil2010>

Phil Escritt had extracted the details for our own motion on the organisation of the General Council and the Essex Area motion on access to woodlands and waterways and these had been circulated in advance of the meeting.

With regard to our motion the Area delegates reported that the organisation of the 2010 General Council had been a satisfactory model for the future and the Area Council agreed there is no need for any further action.

In discussion Area Council members recognised the difficulties in pursuing access to woodlands and waterways in the short term but there was support for it to be a longer term aim. Several members expressed concern that the Trustees appeared to be sidelining it. It was agreed that this is an appropriate topic to be raised at the Area AGM.

7 Possible Motions for General Council 2011

Chris Beney said that, subsequent to the information in Stile, DEFRA have now published guidance on gaps, gates and stiles on rights of way. He suggested a motion encouraging the adoption of this guidance and he distributed copies of the guidance document to those interested. There was wide support in principle and Chris was invited to provide a form of words to be put in these minutes.

Chris has subsequently responded with the following proposal:

“Ramblers welcomes the issuing of government guidelines on the authorisation of path structures by local authorities, with its emphasis on least restrictive option.

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

Council members were invited to submit any other proposed motions, or suggested amendments to the above, to Norman Jones before the end of November so that Norman can include them in the Area papers for consideration at the AGM.

David Smith also invited Groups to submit proposals for motions to the General Council to Norman in the same timescale, so that a final selection can be made at the AGM.

8 Report on Area Publicity and Recruitment Steering Group

David Smith reported that there were just enough volunteers for this group to be started. One Group chair had said that it was a useful opportunity for Groups to look outside their own activities. It was agreed that the Steering Group should go ahead, possibly taking stock of its progress after a year.

9 National Communications

Norman Jones drew attention to the following:

Policy and Guidance for Safeguarding Children and Vulnerable Adults: This policy has been redrafted see <http://www.ramblers.org.uk/Volunteer/News/safeguarding1010>. Some members commented that it was an improvement.

Dead End Campaign: See <http://www.ramblers.org.uk/Campaigns+Policy/deadend>

Council members agreed that this is an important campaign but several thought that the name did not clearly indicate what it is about. Some of the early publicity had verged on the hysterical although more recent publicity has been more measured. A roadshow in London on 27th November was noted but the circulation of the announcement seemed flawed.

Putting London on the Map Campaign:

See <http://www.ramblers.org.uk/Campaigns+Policy/maplondon>. Conflicting views were expressed on the value of this campaign. Some thought it is not necessary. Others though it would safeguard alleyways.

Response to the Law Commission on Level Crossings.

See <http://www.ramblers.org.uk/Volunteer/News/Response-to-the-Law-Commission-consultation-on-level-crossings>. It was agreed that this is potentially very important in our Area. Council members were invited to comment directly to central office.

New Recruitment Leaflet including New Membership Rates.

See <http://www.ramblers.org.uk/Volunteer/News/New+membership+rates>

2010/2011 Business Plan

See:

<http://www.ramblers.org.uk/Resources/Ramblers%20Association/Website/Volunteering/Documents/Ramblers%20Business%20Plan%202010-11%20executive%20summary.pdf>

10 Report from Stile/Communications Subcommittee

Harold Stokes had provided a full report in advance of the meeting. He said that the latest edition of Stile had been issued a little late as the first draft had been a bit too heavy. Some articles had to be omitted and an important article from the HCC Rights of Way Unit has been postponed to the next edition. In the next edition we will try for some lighter articles and more pictures.

The report contains proposals for updating the Area website, recognising the recent improvements to the central and Group websites and the new Ramblers house style. Harold invited Council members to comment on the details.

The subcommittee has concluded that we need to recruit a new webmaster with appropriate skills. Phil Gryce who has been doing the job is remote from the Area and it has proved very difficult to get responses from him. Council members were requested to let the subcommittee know of any potential candidates. The vacancy should be advertised in the AGM papers.

Chris Beney advised that the new website may incur some costs and it was agreed that any urgent requests would be considered by the Treasurer and Chairman.

In accordance with the recommendations in the subcommittees report the Area Council agreed

- its proposed Terms of Reference
- that its work on the Area website is an acceptable way forward
- the immediate need to find a new webmaster

11 Treasurer's Report

The Area Council noted the report which David Allard had previously circulated.

David Smith drew attention to the central office's analysis of funding requests which showed that our Area is in the top 30% of all Areas and that in particular our expenditure on admin is significantly above average.

In discussion it was noted that a major part of our Area expenditure is on Stile and the AGM booklet, both highly regarded by Council members. The communications subcommittee accepted that this is within their terms of reference and agreed to consider how costs might be reduced by extending the use of electronic communications, preferably on an opt-in basis.

Other Areas raise money e.g. from led walks during festivals (See Agenda item 5) or by making a surplus on Group trips etc. This is contrary to our current practice but may need further consideration.

12 Reports from Other Officers

Countryside Secretary: Philip Greswell had circulated a report whose implications had been discussed under Agenda item 4 above.

Membership Secretary: Chris Clyne reported that the major concern is maintaining the numbers. Headline figures are on the national website. Herts and North Middlesex now has 3477 members. See <http://www.ramblers.org.uk/Volunteer/News/Membership+by+Area+-+November+2010>. Since the figures one year ago were not reliable it is not yet easy to see any trend.

13 General Council 2011

The next general Council will be at Keble College, Oxford from Saturday 16 April to Sunday 17 April. Two delegates need to be appointed (costs borne by Central Office) and in addition the Area may opt to send up to two visitors at its own cost. The Council agreed to recommend David Smith and Phil Escritt to the Area AGM as the Area's delegates and left the AGM to decide if it wished to nominate visitors able to add value for the Area by attending.

14 Revised Constitution for East Herts Group

Sarah Lea explained that the revised constitution replaces the one which was created when the East Herts Group was first established and which does not conform to the latest guidance. The new constitution conforms with this guidance and was approved at the recent Group AGM. The Area Council approved the revised constitution for the East Herts Group.

15 Ramblers Greater London Forum

The Council was informed that Howard Hopkins and Tony Mallindine now attend this forum.

North London and South Herts Group had led two legs of the Baton Walk and reported gratifying levels of participation.

Council members suggested that the representatives to this forum might be invited to submit brief reports to the Area council and that they should be asked to provide a report for the AGM booklet.

16 Reports from Group Representatives

North London and South Herts: Sue Jacobs reported a successful AGM with some changes of officers. Scott Bullock will replace her as the representative on the Area Council but unfortunately had not been able to attend this meeting.

The question of the very low rate of interest from the Unity Bank had been raised. Higher rates are available from other banks. This should be raised with the centre.

Minutes Secretary's note: Norman Jones will write to Central Office enquiring if we are getting the best possible deal.

Finchley and Hornsey: Chris Clyne reported that the Group had put its autumn walk programme on the national website but had decided not to do it again. The Group had welcomed new walkers, given them leaflets and invited them to join. People had declined on the basis that they could get the information free from the website. Others had turned up ill equipped or not sufficiently fit for the length of walk.

Harold Stokes said that North Herts had had exactly the opposite experience. He was supported by other Group representatives,

Watford and Three Rivers: Roger Housechild reported that the Group AGM will take place on 16 November.

East Herts: Sarah Lea reported a successful group AGM

North Herts: Harold Stokes distributed copies of the Group's latest newsletter.

West Herts: Norman Jones said that there was some interest in proposing a more permanent status for the Alban Circle Walk. Several Groups have now walked the route. All agreed that it is very enjoyable but some suggested it may be more than 10 miles long.

David Smith stated that a key role of the Area is to support its Groups. To facilitate this he proposed that Groups should have "Area Matters" as a standing item on their agendas. Current topics could include:

- Circulating Group newsletters/walks programmes to each other
- Sharing walks leaders (both proposed at the Group Chairs meeting)
- Response to the proposal to set up an Area Publicity and Recruitment Steering Group
- Area Council vacancies and the Area AGM
- Motions for the General Council

17 AOB

Mark Westley requested sight of any HCC contribution to the AGM booklet before he prepares his own report.

Norman Jones reported that HCC is consulting on version 3 of its Local Transport Plan (LTP3). It includes the Rights of Way Improvement Plan and Walking Strategy. Comments are due before the end of November. See <http://www.hertsdirect.org/docs/pdf/l/ltbulletin13.pdf>

The Meeting Closed at 21.30

Phil Escritt
Minutes Secretary

Next meetings:
Area AGM, 22 January 2011.
Area Council, 14 February 2011