



Hertfordshire & North Middlesex Area

Minutes of the Area Annual General Meeting

Held on Saturday 9 January 2010 at 2pm in Woolmer Green Village Hall

Present: The secretary holds a list of the 28 people in attendance

Preamble

Before opening the meeting Bert Richardson referred to the document "The Ramblers in crisis; what is to be done" which had been made available to all those attending. This document has been produced by the committee established at the informal meeting of "concerned Ramblers" which had been held in Leeds. The Area Council sent representatives to this meeting but at this stage it neither supports nor opposes this document which will be discussed at the next Area Council meeting. He invited everyone to make their views known to the Area Council via their Group representatives and requested every Group to ensure that it would be represented at this important meeting.

1 Welcome by the President

Nigel Agar welcomed all those who had braved the weather to be present and especially those who had participated in the earlier walk in the snow.

As this will be an election year it is appropriate to review the record of the present government on Access and Rights of Way issues and the likely effect of any new government.

He judged the performance of the present government to merit 7 out of 10. They had implemented Right to Roam legislation which, although not as comprehensive as some other countries such as Scotland, is an important step forward. The coastal access legislation has just been passed. Although neither has a major impact on Hertfordshire they are valuable when we walk elsewhere.

The jury is out on Local Access Forums. They lack power and nationally there are issues about representation of landowning interests. In the Herts forum landowning representatives have been sympathetic to access issues.

Progress on lost ways had been disappointing and the 2026 cut off date remains. Is this a lost cause? Anyone with data on lost ways should get the claim in now.

After the election there will be savage cuts whoever gets elected. He encouraged everyone to raise the issues of Access and Rights of Way with canvassers from any party. It is important to ensure that these issues remain at the forefront of British politics.

2 Apologies for Absence

Patricia Dalby, Hazel Hewett, Eunice King, Sue Smith, Carol Stokes, Chris Clyne, Ken Payne, Philip Greswell, John and Geraldine Spicer, Annette Cotter, Bob Fenton (HCC).

3 Minutes of the 2009 AGM

Approved

4 Matters Arising

Para 5.1 Phil Escritt said that the Woodland Trust have produced a comprehensive Environmental Statement about the Heartwood Forest. They have included most of the access points we requested and have included proposals for a network of paths. They continue to state that walkers will always have access to the entire area but decline to create any definitive rights of way. He suggested that this should be taken up again when the forest has been developed a bit further.

Mark Westley said there were no legal obstacles to a trust creating rights of way and it could have advantages for them. Sarah Lea suggested that members of the Woodland Trust should write individually encouraging the Trust to dedicate rights of way through the new forest.

Para 5.4 Nigel Agar said that Ramblers should continue with strong opposition to the closure of the path near Hockerill College.

Para 5.6 Bert Richardson reported that Chris Clyne has said that the membership system is still not perfect but she is beginning to be hopeful.

Para 5.7 Phil Escritt said that neither the Ramblers nor HCC had submitted new evidence on rights of way issues to the second inquiry into the proposed Radlett rail freight terminal. This inquiry has finished and the government intends to publish its decision before 23 June.

Para 5.9 Bert Richardson commented on the interesting contents of Stile. Sarah Lea said that Justin Lumley had demonstrated himself to be an excellent editor. The meeting recorded a vote of thanks to all those involved.

Para 9 Bert commented on the success of the Area 25th Anniversary Celebration walks and particularly the well attended final celebration organised by North Herts.

Para 10 Eric Addicott suggested that the AGM should be held later in the year. It was said that the timing may be constrained by the needs to approve the Area accounts for consolidation into the central accounts and to permit the AGM to discuss resolutions for the General Council. The Area Council was requested to consider this proposal.

5 Len Banister (Ramblers Trustee and Chair of Ramblers Greater London Forum) Report on National Issues

On behalf of all the Trustees Len thanked all the volunteers who had worked for the Ramblers, particularly in the areas of footpaths and recruitment, through a difficult year.

He contrasted the age of the original Ramblers campaigners with those of today. The leader of the Kinder Scout mass trespass was 21, the current generation of campaigners are between 55 and 70. Under Tom Franklin the Ramblers has this year achieved a bigger increase in members aged between 20 and 40 than for several years. Hopefully the next generation of campaigners will be younger.

Using lottery money the Ramblers has introduced about 30,000 new people to walking. There are indications that some of these people will join the Ramblers.

Some of this new walking is in an urban environment. The Ramblers Greater London Forum is working with the Mayor's Transport Strategy and Len hopes that members living near London will benefit from this work.

This activity is not popular with some people. Their anger is increased by the financial crisis and the problems with the membership computer system.

The Leeds document (*referred to in the preamble to these minutes*) is a great disappointment. It is the product of a Ramblers network with about 300 subscribers of whom about 20 are active. In the beginning much of its material was extremely good and was influential with trustees. The present document is malicious, vitriolic and mean. It pulls to pieces what has been achieved.

The problems have not all arisen in the last two years.

The old membership system was beginning to collapse six years ago. One man had all the information on an antiquated machine. It was impossible to find relevant information.

Our new system will develop into a very sophisticated management system but its introduction, before Tom Franklin's time, was a disaster. There was no written requirement specification, no consultant to help with the introduction and no staff training. For the first time in four years we really know how many members we have. Len was pleased to hear that the Area membership secretary was seeing promising signs.

The Kipling report (*by the new Treasurer*) on the financial crisis is an excellent piece of forensic accounting. For 17 years the Ramblers had operated with a deficit budget relying on legacies to make up the shortfall and for years it worked. Last year the legacies did not come as expected resulting in the financial crisis. Len noted that

at the last general council no-one had questioned the deficit budget. Tom Franklin had perhaps known about the problem for two weeks and it was not clear what the general council could have usefully done.

Len was proud of the tough action taken by the trustees which was sufficient to ensure that the financial situation is better than it has ever been. The Kipling recommendations are being implemented and the finances are being well managed. Trustees now get monthly financial reports and performance is within the new budget.

Robin King questioned whether the Ramblers is still a campaigning organisation?

Len replied that the first aim of the Ramblers is to keep rights of way open. The business plan includes a target to create or re-open 500 paths this year. The budget contains more money for legal costs than the previous two years. The expenses of all 34 current legal cases are covered and the trustees are inviting suggestions for new legal claims.

Legal action should always be a last resort if negotiation fails. Len commended the Area for its excellent relations with the HCC Rights of Way Unit. He knew of very few areas with such good relations.

Chris Beney questioned whether the fall in legacy income was the real cause of the financial crisis.

Len replied that the problems with the membership system must have affected subscription income. He restated the importance of recruiting as many new members as possible.

Bert Richardson brought the questioning to a close and thanked Len for coming to our AGM, for his very interesting presentation and for the way in which he had consulted and informed us over the year.

6 Officers' Reports

6.1 Chairman

Bert Richardson thanked the Royston Group for providing the food at this AGM. He thanked all the footpath officers and Area Council members for their support in his caretaker year.

Norman Jones reported that the Watford and Three Rivers Group took exception to the remarks in the chairman's report about its attendance at Area Council meetings. Members of the Group Committee had strong objections to the actions the Area Council had taken over the footpath over land owned by Ramblers Holidays and were not prepared to attend the Council meetings.

Sarah Lea responded that if Watford and Three Rivers want to complain about the actions of the Area Council they should do it by sending a representative to the meeting. In the absence of a representative, Bert indicated that the Area Council will need to consider the matter further.

6.2 Secretary

Norman Jones apologised for using an unexplained acronym in his report. The IPROW is the Institute of Public Rights of Way and Access Management. Richard Cuthbert the Head of the HCC Rights of Way Unit is one of its directors.

6.3 Treasurer

David Allard reported that all groups have now received their allocated amounts and at the Area level we should have sufficient funds for the year.

Chris Beney proposed and Sarah Lea seconded the acceptance of the accounts. It was carried unanimously.

6.4 Footpaths Secretary

Mark Westley thanked all Footpaths Secretaries for their work. He said that there are vacancies for Footpath Secretaries in North Herts, East Herts and Welwyn Hatfield. Bert suggested that the Area Council should consider ways of recruiting additional people.

6.5 Publicity Secretary

David Dickson said that he continues to make leaflets available at a variety of places

6.6 Membership Secretary

On behalf of Chris Clyne, Norman Jones reported that the latest figure for the total Area membership is 3495.

He subsequently provided the following breakdown for inclusion in these minutes.

| Group | Members |
|------------------------|----------------|
| Dacorum | 699 |
| East Herts | 372 |
| North Herts | 530 |
| N London & S Herts | 703 |
| Royston | 189 |
| Watford & Three Rivers | 397 |
| Finchley & Hornsey | <u>608</u> |
| Total | 3498 |

(The small difference in the total arises from differences in the timing of the reports used)

Members commented that this total appears to represent a considerable fall but in view of the problems with membership database, which until now had failed to delete some categories of lapsed members, it is impossible to be sure. It will be important to compare the figures next year.

6.7 Countryside Secretary

Bert Richardson thanked Philip Greswell for his continued hard work in this important matter. He welcomes Philip's regular reports. The prospect of so many more houses in Hertfordshire is very worrying.

6.8 Editor of Stile

Harold Stokes reported that the sub-committee is due to meet again very soon and will again be soliciting articles for the next edition.

7 Group Reports and Accounts

Eric Addicott suggested that any non member who walks more than three times with a Group should be required to become a member before participating in further walks.

David Smith commented that the reports from the Groups were inspirational and revealed a wide diversity of activities. He requested that they should continue to be included in the AGM booklet.

Graham Daniel noted that some of the affiliated organisations have a very large membership but their affiliation fees are very low. He proposed that they should be required to pay a levy per member. Bert Richardson said that he would be proposing a motion for the General Council along these lines. Norman Jones said, and Len Banister confirmed, that this issue is being considered as part of this year's national business plan.

8 Report from Herts County Council Rights of Way Department

Phil Escritt said that the rights of Way Department should be thanked for providing such a comprehensive report on its activities and for their efforts in maintaining the county's rights of way at a high standard. This was strongly supported by those present.

In response Richard Cuthbert thanked the Ramblers for the relationship which has been established with his department and for the way in which they lobby for improvements in the network.

Bert Richardson commented on the cost of buying a set of definitive maps and asked whether they could be made available to small organisations at a reduced price. Richard pointed out that these maps are now available on the county website. They are at present available in many libraries but this is under review now that they are available on the web. Chris Beney reported on a recent consultation to remove some elements of copyright from Ordnance Survey data. If this happens it could reduce costs.

Richard reported that his unit had recently provided a training session on rights of way issues to a large group of County Councillors. His unit now reports to the Highways and Transportation Panel.

Richard explained that in addition to rights of way his unit now looks after Access Land, Commons and Recreational routes. The budget and staff for these tasks has been transferred to his unit.

Richard answered question on progress on some individual paths and explained how some of them were being tackled under the Rights of Way Improvement Plan.

9 Election of Officers and Committee Members

As there were no additional nominees Chris Beney proposed, and Roger Bangs seconded, a motion to elect all the nominees on page 3 of the AGM booklet en bloc. This was unanimously approved. The elected officers are listed on an attachment to these minutes.

10 Group Representatives and Representatives of Affiliated Groups

The nominations on page 4 of the AGM booklet were noted and are listed on the attachment.

11 Election of Individual Members

As there are five nominations and five possible positions David Allard proposed and Mark Westley seconded a motion to elect all five nominees. This was unanimously approved. They are also listed on the attachment.

At this point Bert Richardson handed over the chair to David Smith

The meeting unanimously agreed a vote of thanks to Bert for his chairmanship during the past year.

David Smith introduced himself. He is a member of the North Herts Group and was its chairman for six years. He has represented the Group on the Area Council and proposed a vote of thanks to the Council for its sterling work. He said that his aspirations are to help the Ramblers achieve its aims, to promote the work of the Area Council and to run efficient meetings which finish on time. But he did not want the job for life!

12 General Council

Sarah Lea proposed and David Allard seconded a proposal that David Smith and Harold Stokes should be the Area's delegates to the General Council. Norman Jones and David Dickson should also attend as visitors. This was unanimously agreed.

13 Date of AGM in 2011

This had been covered under matters arising.

14 Resolutions for General Council

Bert Richardson proposed two motions with the intent that:

- a) The fee for affiliated groups should be set at £1 per member
- b) The duration of the General Council should be two whole days at a fixed location in the north of England

In discussion it was suggested that if these motions were to be supported the wording would need to be couched in more general terms than Bert had proposed. Chris Beney said that as chairman of BADFA, one of the affiliated Groups, he strongly opposed the first proposal. The matter was referred to the Area Council.

15 Representatives on Ramblers Greater London Forum

As there were no nominees it was agreed that the Secretary would write to the Chairs of the two London Groups within the Area inviting nominations.

16 AOB

Harold Stokes said that The Times was planning an article on STOOP as part of an article on the 75th anniversary of the Ramblers.

Norman Jones reported that the inaugural meeting of the North Herts Young Walkers is likely to take place soon.

The Meeting Closed at about 3.45pm.

Following refreshments provided by the Royston Group Mark Westley gave a talk on "Highways and Byways of Hertfordshire"

Phil Escritt, Minutes Secretary, 16 January 2010

ELECTION RESULTS AT AREA AGM 10 JANUARY 2010

Area Council 2010/2011

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 | David Allard, 8 Chilcourt, Royston, Herts SG8 9DD Tel: 01763 242677 |
| 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 | Chris Clyne, 10 Temple Gardens, London NW11 0LL Tel: 020 8455 2893 |
| Minute Secretary | Phil Escritt, 2 St Stephens Avenue, St Albans, Herts AL3 4AD Tel: 01727 866743 |
| Countryside Secretary | Philip Greswell, 56A Orpington Road, Winchmore Hill, London N21 3PG Tel: 020 8886 0835 |
| Access Officer | as Secretary |
| Independent Examiner | John Heap, 16 Tall Trees, Royston, Herts SG8 7EG Tel: 01763 241525 |

Group Representatives

| | |
|------------------------|---|
| Dacorum | as Secretary |
| East Herts | Sarah Lea, 34 Cozens Lane East, Broxbourne, Herts EN10 6PX Tel: 01992 302514 |
| Finchley & Hornsey | as Membership Secretary |
| North Herts | as Vice Chairman |
| North London & | Vacant |
| South Herts | Sue Jacobs (Chair) currently attends Area Council Meetings. |
| Royston & District | Robin King, 44 Kneesworth Street, Royston, Herts SG8 5AQ |
| Watford & Three Rivers | Vacant. |

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 |
| Bert Richardson | 53 Green Drift, Royston, Herts SG8 5BX Tel: 01763 244509 |
| 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 |

Representatives of Affiliated Groups

| | | |
|---------------|--|---|
| 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 |