



Annual General Meeting 2024

All members and representatives of affiliated organisations are invited to join us in the Rowms Lane Social Club, Swinton S64 8AE on Saturday January 20th 2024 starting at 2pm or via Zoom

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/86344776446?pwd=mGuYJQl a l lhHiC0nYG7LJaffuvLb I. I>
Meeting ID: 863 4477 6446 Passcode: 004286

AGENDA

1. Chairman' welcome and opening remarks
2. Attendance and Apologies for Absence
3. Remembering Area Members who have died during the last twelve months
4. President' Address
5. Minutes of the 2023 Annual General Meeting
6. Any Matters Arising from the Minutes.
7. Annual Report for 2022/2023
8. Financial statement – Accounts for year ending September 30th 2023
9. Appointment of Area President and Vice Presidents
10. Election of Officers and Council Members:
Area Chairman Area Secretary Area Treasurer
Area Access Officer Area Footpath Officer
Area Webmaster, Area Membership Sec
Area Publicity & Social Media Officer
- 11a. Two Members' Representatives on the Area Council
(we already have two names but other nominations will be welcome at the meeting but helpful if notified beforehand, with written agreement of nominees if unable to attend.)
- 11b. Group Secretaries should also provide details of up to 2 representatives of their Group appointed at their AGM to sit on the Area Council
- 11c. Two Representatives from the 5 walking groups affiliated to the AC
12. Appointment of Independent Examiner (Treasurer to Nominate)
13. Affiliation to like minded organisations
14. Appointment of Area Delegates to 2024 General Council on April 20th at NEC
15. Motions to General Council and for Consideration by the SYNED AGM
(none submitted by Dec 20th. Only emergency motions accepted)
16. Any Other Business / Notices (Please inform Chair/Secretary prior to start of AGM)

After the formal meeting and a short break:-

Clive Sanders,
the Ramblers Income and Marketing Director
will speak on current Ramblers concerns, activities & campaigns

Please indicate to Chair or Secretary if you have any other AGM business you wish to discuss asap (and prior to the start of the Meeting)

Please Note: This SYNED Area AGM will be Recorded

The Ramblers Association is a Registered Charity (England & Wales no 1093577, Scotland SC039799
And a Company limited by Guarantee, registered in England & Wales 4458492
Registered Office: The Ramblers, 13 Dirty Lane, London SE1 9PA

Report on Proceedings of the SYNED Ramblers Area AGM 2023

Held at Coal Aston Village Hall, Coal Aston, S18 3AX on Saturday January 28th 2023

2023AGM.01a: Present: David Blunkett, Area President; Allen Pestell, Area Chair; Gavin Johns, Area Treasurer; Malcolm Dixon, Area Secretary; Terry Howard (VP); David Gadd (VP); Cath MacKay (VP); Malcolm MacKay; Isobel McCormick; Bill Eyre; Rhona Gibbons; Angela Coles; Helen Barker; Julie Bashforth; John Bashforth; Basil Merry; David Moore; Mel Hardy; Eileen Blackburn; David Blackburn; Paul Heaton; Johnathan Revell; Bob Paterson; Sarah Cove; Peter Bower; Val Fenton; Kay Widdowson; Joyce Denton; Penelope Beal; Judy Gathercole; Sara Whitby; Elizabeth Couzens; Margaret Seaman; Les Seaman; Dave & J Rodgers; Richard Mills and Richard May (BoT guest speaker) in the room.
And on Zoom: Jim Conibear; Kate Frizzell and Claire Watkins (CO RET)
Technical set up and assistance provided by Doug Emery (Dronfield U3A) and John Reedman (CAVH)

2023AGM.01b: Apologies for Absence: Mike Pye (VP); Roly Smith (VP); Jeremy Kenyon (VChair); Michael Stainer; Mark Grayling; Phil Ryder; Jam Tidy; Liz Sharp; Lucia Contrino; Linda Cooley; Lynn Oxlade and Christine Whittaker.

2023AGM.02a: The Chair opened the Meeting by asking Isobel McCormick to make the official welcome on behalf of the Chesterfield & North East Derbyshire Ramblers our host group this afternoon. She thanked everyone for attending including the speakers and David our Area President. She hoped everyone who had been on it had enjoyed the morning walk and thanked Gavin Johns for devising and leading it.

She went through the housekeeping instructions and showed where the exits were. She reported that the Chesterfield Group had c370 members, with around 100 walking regularly with the Group. They organised upto 7 walks each week ranging between 5 to 14 miles, both circular & linear using both cars and public transport. They tried to make sure paths within their area remained fit for purpose, although they found the District Council often failed to respond to reports of problems and failed to engage to the Group's offers of help with path maintenance.

2023AGM.03: A **Minute's Silence** was held for those Area Members who had died during the last twelve months. These included: Jeff Pullman, Jack Burling, Chris Mellows and others.

2023AGM.04: Lord David Blunkett - President' Address

Thanked us for the invitation and very happy to be present.

He was pleased that the previous year's technical issues seemed to have been solved and people could hear each other whether present in the room or on line.

He explained he was dressed 'posh' for a walker as he would be leaving shortly to attend the FA Cup match at Hillsborough.

He felt he could have been used more and done more as President, but was happy to continue in the job.

He still enjoyed going out walking, even though most days it meant having to clean the dog afterwards due to the usually inclement weather. He also enjoyed cycling using a tandem bike.

He was pleased that the Ramblers membership numbers had started going up again. He felt we should tap into the fact that for single people going out walking was a good way to meet up and socialising.

He noted that due to the recent Dartmoor case, there had been a renewed interest in the Right To Roam, which had drawn people's attention to trespass and the right of access to open land. He was concerned that the National Park's offer to pay for the right to wild camp might lead to having to pay for the right to roam again and other restrictions, which would be a backward step.

He felt attention had dropped off about the health benefits of getting out, not just the physical ones but also the emotional and wellbeing benefits. Getting out in the countryside with others was uplifting in itself.

He felt we should publicise this more and join with GPs in promoting and encouraging people to exercise more. Many of us had got out more during the Covid period than previously and possibly since.

Things were looking up and he wished us all well for the year ahead.

David Blunkett was then re-elected as Area President for another year. Moved AP, Seconded LS.
Carried unanimously. Chair thanked David for his continuing support.

2023AGM.05a: Minutes of the 2022 Annual General Meeting

Secretary reported that these had been distributed via email but it hadn't been possible to post them out due to weight restrictions. They were displayed on the screen to members in the room.

Proposed that they be accepted: Moved: TH, seconded: DG CARRIED

2023AGM.05b: No Matters Arising from the Minutes.

2023AGM.06. Annual Report for 2021/2022 which had been posted to all members in the SYNED Area other than those we had email details for who had received a PDF version that way. Copies also available. Chair thanked the Groups for their detailed reports.

Proposed that the Area Annual Report be accepted: Moved: DG, seconded: TH CARRIED

2023AGM.07. Financial statement – Accounts for year ending September 30th 2022

A detailed financial report had been included in the Area Annual Report :-

Gavin Johns reported that the Area had not required its full allocation from CO and had distributed less than planned to Groups. The Area received £4,200 from Central Office and had spent £5,406 either as grants to our Groups or in administering the Area (approx. £1,200 during the year including in the production and distribution of the Area Annual Report) or in other payments

The Area's assets going forward would be £30,456, with c£15,655 in our general account (which included c£10k in the Ivy Cowan Trust Legacy Fund which remained available to be used for local group's projects. Funds allocated for the Bradfield Ancient Ways Initiative (BAWI) (c£9,989) would be carried forward for Phase 2 of the project which was still in the planning stages.

The Clarion Call book fund (from sales of the book) stood at £4,812. We were still deciding how this money should be used and we still had stock in hand so it didn't need reprinting.

The Groups have asked the Area for approx. £6,252 funding for the coming year

We will be contributing £997 from our own funds in line with The Rambler's Reserve policy towards our budget of £7,997 and will therefore be asking Central Office for £7,000.

The Accounts had been examined and found to be a true record of transactions.

They were then accepted by members present. CARRIED

GJ moved a vote of thanks to our independent examiner, Ms Lorraine Watson. CARRIED

2023AGM.08.

2023AGM.08a: Appointment of Tellers: CM and GJ CARRIED

Appointment of Area President - David Blunkett had already been asked to stay on as President for another year.

Vice Presidents - David Gadd, Terry Howard, Helen Jackson, Cath MacKay, Mike Pye, Roly Smith, would be voted in 'en bloc' proposed by LS sec: TH CARRIED

2023AGM.09. Election of Officers and Council Members:

Area Chairman:	Allen Pestell	m: GJ	CARRIED
Area Vice Chairman	Jez Kenyon		
Area Secretary:	Malcolm Dixon	m: JG	CARRIED
Area Treasurer:	Gavin Johns	m: JG	CARRIED
Area Access Officer:	Les Seaman	m: JG	CARRIED
Area Footpath Officer:	remains 'vacant'		
Area Webmaster:	Johnathan Revell	m: MD	CARRIED
(note any Area/Group news items should be sent to the Webmaster for posting)			
Area Membership Sec:	Judy Gathercole	m: MD	CARRIED
Area Publicity Officer:	Sara Whitby	m: MD	
&Social Media Officer:			CARRIED

(NOTE: Job Descriptions for all Area/Group positions can be found on the Ramblers Assemble website at <https://volunteer.ramblers.org.uk/portal/hub#folder=1551&document=>)

2023AGM.10a. Two Members' Representatives on the Area Council

Terry Howard and Cath MacKay moved by AP, seconded by MD

CARRIED

2023AGM.10b. Group Secretaries were asked to provide details of up to 2 representatives of their Group appointed at their AGM to sit on the Area Council on their behalf.

2023AGM.10c. Two Representatives from the (currently) 3 local walking groups affiliated to the Ramblers Names to be supplied by those organisations.

2023AGM.11. Affiliation to like minded organisations

CPRE, P&NFS, Peak District Green Lanes Alliance and Open Spaces Soc moved by LS, sec TH CARRIED

2023AGM.12. Appointment of Area Delegates to 2023 General Council on April 1st at NEC, Brum Allen Pestell, Malcolm Dixon and Nicki Speakman were interested in attending. Suggested they decide between them and report back to February Area Council

AGREED

2023AGM.13. Appointment of Independent Examiner

Lorraine Watson had agreed to continue as Independent Examiner moved: GJ, sec MD

CARRIED

2023AGM.14. Motion to 2023 General Council

Chesterfield and North East Derbyshire Area Committee proposed:-

"That Central Office lobbies the government to ensure that County and District Councils honour their legal obligations with respect to the preservation and protection of the National footpath network.

Specifically the emphasis should be on:-

Ensuring Public Rights of Way (PRoWs), are kept clear and safe to walk at all reasonable times.

To ensure landowners and tenants honour their specific obligations relating to that aspect of PRoW under their control with particular emphasis on ploughing and cropping.

To ensure safety aspects of PRoW preservation are enforced with particular emphasis on the use of barbed wire.

To promote the use of guidance given in BS5709 Gaps Gates and Stiles wherever appropriate."

Moved by Mel Hardy (C&NED Footpath Officer)

This Motion was based on the Group's experience of dealing with Derbyshire CC & other Councils. They were no longer carrying out their duties in making sure that landowners observe our rights of way along public footpaths. We had plenty of records where this had happened. Now wanted the Ramblers to lobby Government to force Councils and landowners to do their jobs and not evade their responsibilities in relation to our rights to walk public footpaths, be it footpaths being built over, damaged stiles or ploughing & cropping.

CARRIED UNAM

2023AGM.15. Motion to SYNED AC re Access to Riverside, Lakes & Woodlands

"That the SYNED Area pursue a campaign for greater access to Riversides, Lakes and Woodlands, within our area. We ask local groups to proceed immediately with an Audit of suitable locations to start this campaign for greater access to the countryside".

Proposed by Les Seaman, Area Access Officer Seconded by Terry Howard

Now looking for extensions and improvements to the 2000 CROW Act

The fourth part of the ELMS (which replaced CAP) which was to improve access has been dropped.

Still hadn't published the Agnew Report. Money might be available for replacing stiles but not for greater access. Ideally wanted something along Scottish Open Access Act but probably not going to happen. LS contended we would have to do it ourselves – campaigning locally. Research our local areas and get local support.

Find the areas left out of the CROW Act, including council owned woodland. Need to get it dedicated before it was sold off to raise money. Do an audit of where you live or where you walk with potential for greater access and report back to the Area Council.

Start the Campaign for Access to our Countryside again at both local and national level.

2023AGM.16: Motion of Information to the SYNED Area AGM Jan 28th 2023

"At the last Area Council meeting it was agreed that we should undertake a consultation with all our Groups to find a more inclusive way of involving all our Groups in the democratic running of the Area and Area Council meetings. As part of this review we would want to consider, the how, the where and when Area Councils will be held".

The preamble for this item:-

The number of Groups in our Area has steadily increased and since the recent pandemic new technologies have come along. So, it is always good practice to update our procedures.

We want to encourage all Groups to be involved in meetings and the management of our Area and we believe this can be best done by trying to accommodate their needs where possible.

This was not for voting on. This was to get people's views of where they want the Area Council to go and to do in the future and how it should operate for the best interests of all our members. We might not get an agreement on everything but we might get some consensus and direction.

Within the Area we have a range of age groups and each have their own considerations about timings of meetings or whether in person or on Zoom, which brings its own complications both for the person chairing and for the other participants, but it has its uses given the area we cover.

We want to get that range of views and try and get a fair but comprehensive representation of them.

We want you to engage with this either here or in your groups and feed that to the Area Council meetings.

Moved by Cath MacKay and formally seconded by Terry Howard

Followed by discussion

SW: Need to be open and make it easier for people to engage. Need to update our terminology.

KF: Don't mind using Zoom. Works well for committee meetings but like face to face for Group meetings.

CW: Zoom has worked well today but doesn't always. Often needs a lot of effort to make it work.

IM: Zoom-only usually works well but hybrid meetings don't and have proved difficult.

KF: The Zoom link has worked well and she was grateful for the efforts put in today.

CM: A lot depended on the venues we use and what facilities they have available.

DE: He was from Dronfield U3A rather than Ramblers. They had had the same issues as we had experienced but had built up knowledge, experience, equipment and expertise over time.

Also had received some funding from DCC to purchase the equipment and spread their knowledge.

2023AGM.17. Suggested amendment and voting on SYNED Motion to 2023 General Council

That we add the words **"and electric fences"** after barbed wire in second last paragraph of motion wording.

(Following an incident) Wording agreed by Mel Hardy on behalf of C&NED Group.

Motion, as amended, was then voted on and Carried unanimously and will go forward in our name to GC.

2023AGM.18. Any Other Business / Notices:-

1) C&NED Group were disposing of spare maps. Donations accepted.

2) Benefit gig in Hayfield for Edale Mountain Rescue on Feb 19th.

3) Ramblers were encouraging members to put themselves forward to join the Board of Trustees.

Had until first week in March to put your nomination into Central Office.

Formal meeting closed at 15:00 and was followed by a short refreshment break.

The Chair then welcomed **Richard May of the Ramblers Board of Trustees**

This was his third visit to the Area, and RM recalled his first visit some 8 years previously when the Board had been suggesting some changes to the Governance procedures and he got short shrift from the then AGM attendees. It was great to hear members' opinions and, as it happened, those opinions prevailed.

He had now come to the end of a 9 year term of office and would be retiring at April's GC. He thanked us for the invite and for the morning walk. Coming from Norfolk he felt he had climbed a mountain!

RM reported that the Ramblers had many local & national successes to celebrate and we should look forward to more in the year ahead. We shall be continuing to push for greater access to the outdoors for more people.

But there were challenges ahead. As previously mentioned we were disappointed over the ELMS outcomes with access being dropped but will continue to campaign and need everyone to continue lobbying at all levels. We were still looking for Freedom To Roam as they have it in Scotland but recognise that that won't happen soon, but it remains the long term aim we were working towards.

We were working on a new Paths Strategy. We wanted to break down the barriers to walking not just the stiles and barbed wire but also in relation to the groups of people that go out walking and the groups who didn't. The Ramblers should represent them all and include them all and help them all to get out walking. He commended the varied walks programme that the Area's Groups put on as a good example.

The Ramblers now had a new permanent CEO – Ross Maloney had joined from the Scouts Association. He was keen on developing a new strategy for the Ramblers. This was still in its early stages.

They were looking at how we could work as a Walking Charity for all the 2 million who say they go walking but remained non-members as well as the roughly 102,000 who had.

A new Footpaths Team had been created in Central Office to help local footpath workers improve and expand the existing path network and supporting path maintenance teams. It would incorporate the 'Don't Lose Your Way' campaign. The 2026 deadline may have been lifted, but the work still needed to be continued. The Team would also help with any legal action and support Areas if that proved necessary. In London the Ramblers had campaigned for the creation of 'Green Routes' – easy access paths and routes connecting green spaces. Now looking to copy that success in other cities such as Manchester and the West Midlands.

We continue to reach out to new walkers. Membership was growing and had grown over the last two years since Covid but we were barely touching the 2 million walking non-members. So we all needed to keep spreading the word about the work we do supporting all walkers using all forms of social & traditional media. They might not want to come out on our group walks but were willing to support the work we did. Many local groups were developing new ways to reach out to their local communities and to younger people. We had to show that walking was for everyone.

We had adopted new branding and a new logo. A new website had been developed which would also see the launch of Walks Manager to replace GWEM in listing all our Group Walks. Currently being piloted. Almost 40,000 Group Walks were organised last year. So thanks to all the walk leaders who contributed to such an important part of the Ramblers work.

RM then dealt with issues raised at last year's AGM and question put to Mark Chung the BoT speaker. Yes there was an office in London but most staff now worked from home most of the time. But it was felt that we needed to maintain a presence in London.

Trustees didn't represent any particular Area but all of GB and all walkers, so it didn't matter where they came from. They were volunteers and were voted in by the General Council delegates. We should focus on the skills they offered to the Board. The Trustees could always coopt upto 2 more if a particular skillset was under-represented. These co-optees also tended to be younger than most of the elected Trustees and so often had different views or opinions. Ramblers were keen to represent all ages and backgrounds. We wanted and also needed to be more diverse and inclusive.

Technology offered many benefits but also excluded many people who weren't able to keep up with it, so we needed to have ways of keeping them on board and involved. Doing things differently if necessary. RM accepted that not all decisions on new software and technology had been successful over the last few years, but hoped they worked for most members and volunteers.

RM reported that since the 2022 GC and questions about the Ramblers approach to risk management, we had taken a number of steps towards providing a safe, compliant and enjoyable walk experience for everyone either leading walks or coming out walking with us. Had set up a mixed task force to investigate risk management across the recreational & outdoor industry. Given the amount of volunteer led walks we provide we had to seek best practice across the board. We knew the benefits of walking outweigh the risks. However we considered that walking with the Ramblers was different from just walking with friends and comes with an elevated duty of care - both organisationally and for the individual. Will shortly be sending out a survey to all walk leaders to gauge their views about current and future support. We hope everyone engages with that survey. Also looking at providing online workshops. And will be holding further discussions with Group and Area leaders over the following months after GC. In the meanwhile CO wants leaders to follow current guidelines to ensure we inspire confidence in our fellow walkers, demonstrate best practice and satisfy our legal and insurance obligations. There were changes coming in relation to risk assessments. They weren't going away. They were part of the world we now lived in. RM was surprised we hadn't needed to have them before now. He wished we hadn't called them risk assessments as it was something of a toxic term and wasn't what was really required. We really only asking walk leaders to do what they've always done – continue to run safe walks, think about the potential risks and to write them down on a sheet of paper. So changes are to come and will be announced shortly. Hoped it would be kept as simple as possible. He finished by saying on behalf of the Trustees and Central Office staff - a huge "Thank You" to everyone who leads walks or takes on committee roles or is involved in path maintenance or joins campaigns and lobbies their MPs or just spreads the word about the Ramblers or just pays their subs and supports the Ramblers. You are doing a wonderful job and we couldn't achieve what we have achieved without you and your continual support.

QandAs Included:

SW: S40's already included Online Safety Checklists when walk was being submitted to their website.
 TH: Considered process of submitting an RA form was awkward, time consuming and wasteful. Also felt it was questioning his ability as a walk leader of some 30 years standing rather than supporting him. Anyone could tick a box, didn't prove anything.
 RM: The RA form wasn't intended to reflect on walk leaders abilities and knowledge, but have to make it safe for everyone and need to cover all circumstances and locations that walks may take place. Hadn't been communicated down well enough. Possibly simplified it too much for experienced leaders.

JR: Concern that what you wrote down or didn't write down would be open to interpretation especially by insurance companies. What were the consequences for walk leaders if there was an incident and they hadn't done their paperwork correctly?

RM: Had assurances from insurance company that the risk assessment wouldn't be used against the walk leader if something unforeseen happens. Might be an issue if a risk assessment hadn't been done at all.

MH: Believed the tick boxes were a waste of time. Often do far more when out on the recce than you can put down on a piece of paper or by ticking boxes. The really important risk assessment was what you do as you're doing the walk. Need to brief people at the start of the walk. But things may have changed since the recce was done. Doing a recce was the really important thing to do before the walk not ticking boxes.

CW: we did need to have something in place. It was a continuing process. Needed dynamic risk assessments. Will be looking at the whole thing again and coming back with new advice later in the year.

RM: The form had to cover both experienced leaders and those leading their first walk. Having the checklist might prompt them to do something differently or consider an issue differently.

Felt initial briefing at the start of a walk was much more important than filling out a form and putting it in a box. People needed to know what to expect and what possible issues there might be on the walk and that was based on the leader's own recce and assessments.

The other issue with RAs was that they couldn't be enforced. You can ask and hope that people follow a process but can't force them to or punish them if they didn't. We weren't managers. We hadn't that power and were being put in an impossible position. And that's why people had stopped leading walks and some had even left the organisation.

It was also an unnecessary barrier, along with the false barrier between members and volunteers. We were all members. Stop putting up barriers and telling us how to do things. The best way for new walk leaders was to go out with more experienced walk leaders and be mentored. We needed to pass on experiences. We need to pass on routes and how to do them safely.

RM: We've always had volunteers in the organisation. Those who do something in addition to being a member whether leading walks, maintaining paths or doing a committee role. And maybe they need some additional instructions, training and support to do that volunteering job properly - especially if it relates to safety.

And maybe we need that paper evidence too. He felt that if a walk leader refused to do an RA, then they shouldn't be leading walks for Ramblers as it implied they weren't interested in people's safety.

System wasn't perfect but hopefully made people think about what's happening on a walk.

Hopefully we could continue to improve the processes.

GJ: Questioned whether the new CEO was going to take the opportunity to review what the Ramblers does and how it does it? How its structured and financed? Where we are located? Who we employ and how many and what areas we cover? Were our governance structures still fit for purpose? And come up with some suggestions to take us forward into the later parts of the 21st Century and do so within the next 12 months? Possibly taking us in a new direction if necessary.

RM: Yes. We have initiated a Strategic Review using external consultants. Asking big questions at Board level about how the Ramblers were going to move forward. Any major changes to the governance structures would need General Council approval and a 75% vote in favour. Changes in the Ramblers were difficult to make as a result however necessary they may be. Board would certainly like to make those changes. But they have to fit with all our members – the current, often older, ones and our younger new members.

CM: Some years ago the Ramblers became a Limited Company which brought its own responsibilities. That's why we have Trustees. We are also a charity which is separate but also brings its own responsibilities and the need to show we provide benefits for the public not just for members. This was overseen by the Charity Commissioners. Wearing those two hats limits what changes the Ramblers can make and how they had to be done.

We had become a large amorphous organisation which made it difficult to manage especially as we were essentially a 'bottom-up' rather than a 'top-down' organisation and were not really structured to be run as a top-down organisation however much Central Office wants us to be. Many of us wouldn't accept it being top-down. Over the years there'd been many proposals to change how the Ramblers was run, but however good they were, they ran out of time – that is the time to allow for full and honest consultation and agreements at all levels. So let's have the conversations but remember where we've come from and the thoughts and feelings of all our members. They are the people who make the organisation work and without them there wouldn't be a Ramblers organisation.

Chair thanked Richard May for his talk and honest answers to our questions. It was a difficult job being a Trustee but pointed out that if the Trustees really wanted advice, guidance and information about walking and footpaths they should consult with the organisation's membership rather than going out to expensive external firms.

He thanked the Chesterfield Group for hosting the meeting, finding the venue & providing refreshments.

He thanked our two local technical experts Doug Emery and John Reedman of the Dronfield U3A for their help in setting up and operating the various bits of equipment.

He then closed the meeting and thanked everyone for attending and wished them a safe journey home.

Please Note: This SYNED Area AGM was Recorded

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