

The 2020 Area Annual General Meeting of the South Yorkshire & North East Derbyshire Area of the Ramblers

**Minutes of the AGM held on 25th January, 2020,
held at the Victoria Methodist Church, Stafford Road, Sheffield S2 2SE**

Welcome

Nigel Lamb, Chair of the Sheffield Walking Group welcomed everybody to the AGM. He said that the Sheffield Walking Group want to encourage young people to walk. Many young people come to Sheffield to work and to study and that the Group hopes to provide a social connection by providing walks, social activities and weekends away. He then introduced Allen Pestell, Chair of SYNED, and David Gadd, Secretary.

Present

Jonathan Bergwerk, Ramblers Trustee, Mike Pye (Vice President), Jack Burling (Vice President), Ted Talbot, National Trust, and from Area Council, Allen Pestell (Chair), David Gadd (Secretary), Les Seaman (Access Officer), Christine Whittaker (Information Officer), Cath MacKay and Terry Howard (Members Without Portfolio), Nicki Speakman (Barnsley and Penistone), Jez Kenyon (Sheffield 40s), Wayne Grounsell (Sheffield 40s), Nigel Lamb (Sheffield 20s), Philip Ryder (Rotherham Metro), and Cynthia Ashton (Sheffield Co-operative Ramblers). There were an additional 39 members present.

Apologies

David Blunkett (President), Roly Smith (Vice President), Gavin Johns (Treasurer), Philip Lee (Dearne Valley Ramblers), and Christine Hewitt (Sheffield Visually Impaired Group).

Notification of AOB

There items had been notified:

- i) The Don't Lose Your Way co-ordinator
- ii) The Trespass Act
- iii) The Loxley Valley planning application.

Appointment of Tellers

Mike Pye and Cath MacKay.

President's Address: Lord David Blunkett

'Please accept my humble apologies for not being able to be with you in person.

Margaret and I had a long-standing holiday abroad booked into the diary long before I knew about the date of the AGM. I hope you'll forgive us for 'rambling' elsewhere, and in a little warmth!

I wanted just to say that I've enjoyed very much working with everyone over the last 12 months, as well as taking part in major events.

In addition to the very interesting walk around the boundaries of Rotherham to promote the booklet, there have been a whole range of other events.

I'm still reeling from the fact that I joined the group (Chesterfield and North East Derbyshire) which combine guide dog owners with visual guides. The arrangement to meet at Carlton Lees on the Chatsworth Estate would have gone fine it weren't for the fact that having arrived at the car park, there were a whole range of different groups, some of them with dogs. I was warmly welcomed by one large group who thought that I'd somehow learned about the proposed itinerary and turned up to surprise them – they weren't the group I'd come to see!

The most memorable event was the 70th anniversary of the 1949 Act. All of you who were present will remember it. Most of all because of the unbelievable weather. Stalwart, really tough, and I have to say very brave people walked across the hills. I have to admit that I turned in by car. I have never known it such inclement at the end of April, and to be frank, for it to be so unpleasant for walking.

Nevertheless, it was a great occasion and I was so pleased that as well as those from our own east of the Pennines and Manchester branches, we also had Jarvis Cocker and Stuart Maconie.

There will be members who can remember a wetter autumn than this last one but I can't. Every time I went out walking, I either got soaked or up to my knees in mud. November and December have to be remembered for testing the commitment of all good ramblers.

Anyway, let's hope we have a really decent 2020 and an opportunity to still blow away whatever is troubling us, by enjoying the wonderful countryside, rejoicing in nature, and of course in each other's company. My thanks again for everything that you are all doing to promote access to and enjoyment of the countryside. With very best wishes, David Blunkett'

Approval of the minutes of the 2020 AGM

The minutes had been circulated prior to the meeting. Proposed by Cath MacKay and seconded by Mike Pye.

The minutes were approved.

Matters arising from those minutes

None.

Annual Report

Hard and digital copies of the report had been circulated prior to the meeting.

Cath MacKay and Les Seaman proposed and seconded that the report be accepted. Agreed unanimously.

Report of the Area Treasurer - For the year ending 30th September 2019

Gavin Johns apologised for his absence.

During the year the Area received £6,400 from Central Office and distributed £5,796 to Groups in the Area. The Area spent approx. £723 during the year on administering the Area, including production of the Annual Report. We allocated £19,217 from the Ivy Cowen Trust Legacy Fund to the 5 Year Ivy Cowen Project to support the Area and Groups to meet the Ramblers charitable objectives. To date we have spent £1,120.

We allocated £8,000 from the Ivy Cowen Trust Legacy Fund to the Bradfield Ancient Ways Initiative (BAWI) in their work to replace and improve a number of stiles and walls in the Bradfield area. We also received £3,050 in donations to the BAWI.

Clarion Call earned £896 in book sales.

Groups have asked the Area for approx. £6,124 funding for the coming year

We will be contributing £974 from our own funds in line with Rambler's Reserve policy towards our budget of £7,474 and will therefore be asking Central Office for £8,500, an increase from last year.

Unfortunately, our independent examiner, Mr Andrew Milne, has had to stop reviewing our accounts due to ill-health. Our thanks go to him for his work over the years. Paul Peters, Treasurer, Chesterfield Group, very kindly stood in at short notice to review the accounts. A letter of appreciation has been sent to Andrew Milne.

The financial report was approved by Allen Pestell and seconded by Jez Kenyon. Approved unanimously.

Election of Officers

Vice Presidents: Mike Pye, Roly Smith, Cath MacKay,* Terry Howard, Helen Jackson and Jack Burling were elected en bloc. Proposed by Jez Kenyon and seconded by Les Seaman. Agreed unanimously.

The following, proposed by Allen Pestell, seconded by Mike Pye, were elected as Area Council officers en bloc: Allen Pestell (Chair/Countryside), David Gadd (Secretary/Membership Secretary), Gavin Johns (Treasurer), Les Seaman (Access), Christine Whittaker (Information Officer).

Affiliated representative: Christine Hewitt (Sheffield Visually Impaired Walking Group).

Co-opted member: Cynthia Ashton (Co-operative Ramblers).

Members Without Portfolio: Cath MacKay, Terry Howard.

All nominations were agreed by the membership.

* Cath MacKay pointed out that she can attend only two of the four Area Council meetings per annum and would be happy to stand down if someone would like to take her place.

Affiliation to Kindred Organisations

Les Seaman explained that SYNED is affiliated to the following like-minded organisations: Peak District Green Lanes Alliance, the Open Spaces Society, the Peak and Northern Footpath Society and the Council for the Campaign to Protect Rural England. The Open Spaces Society, in particular, has a significant drain on resources due to the large number of legal cases it needs to take on.

Proposed by Les Seaman, seconded by Terry Howard. Carried unanimously.

Motions

‘This AGM calls upon General Council to adopt a pro-active attitude towards affiliated groups to increase their numbers and thus to enable Ramblers to speak with a louder voice’.

Background: In April 2012 central office raised the joining fee for affiliated groups from £45 to £95, with no consultation or warning - a 112% increase. This led to the decline in number of groups affiliated within the SYNED Area from 29 to the current number of 10. The fee was subsequently reduced to the current £65, but the damage had been done. The 29 original groups included small walking groups and a number of parish councils.

More recently, Area Council asked central office what, if anything, was being done to encourage walking groups to affiliate to Ramblers. The answer was that nothing was being done. It is almost impossible to find any information for a prospective affiliated group and the link to the related form was not working. The latter issue has been fixed but merely searching for ‘affiliated groups’ is ineffective, although we have been told that it will be sorted. The upshot of all this is that Ramblers is clearly not taking the possible increase in the number of affiliated groups seriously. We feel that a serious efforts should be made to encourage a growth in the number of affiliated groups. Several members said that they know of walking groups who were previously affiliated and now choose not to be because of the fee increase. It was also pointed out that the Ramblers Association was originally formed with affiliated groups. A related issue is that the so-called benefit of cheaper third party insurance by affiliating is invalid, with no decrease in the fee accruing to affiliation.

The motion was passed unanimously.

Delegates to General Council

Allen Pestell and Nikki Speakman were nominated to be the delegates for SYNED at General Council in Bristol, 4th/5th April.

Speaker’s Address: Ted Talbot, National Trust Manager for Kinder and the High Peak

Ted’s presentation was titled ‘Our Countryside at the Crossroads’ and went on to feature flooding in recent years, specifically in the Lake District in 2015 and the more recent flooding in our area. Many habitats are under threat and one of the NT’s main aims now is to restore our natural capital. The Lawton Review ‘Making Space for Nature 2011’ suggested that our surviving wildlife areas need to be better, and bigger and that they need to be joined up. The NT has responsibility for 13% of the National Park, which includes 50 tenant farms, responsibility for land management including visitor facilities, car parks etc and has 65 staff based at three offices. About 250 individual volunteers plus long term volunteer placements also contribute.

Locally the NT works in partnership with such organisations at the Bumblebee Conservation Trust and badger groups. On the Eastern Moors the NT is in partnership with the RSPB and has set out to create an exemplary model of how conservation and access can coexist. As part of the Sheffield Moors Partnership the NT works with the Peak District National Park, the RSPB, the Sheffield and Rotherham Wildlife Trusts, Natural England, Sheffield City Council to monitor wildlife and to carry out research. The NT also aims to engage people and inspire the next generation. There is a 50 year vision and plan for the High Peak Moors to develop healthy peat bogs on Kinder, to plant more trees and shrubs in the valleys and cloughs and to have a vibrant wildlife, including birds of prey.

Following the recent election it is too soon to say how the new government will treat the countryside. However we live in a time when many more people than in the past are engaged in the protection of wildlife and the countryside.

At the end of his presentation Ted was happy to answer questions from members.

Speaker's Address: Jonathan Bergwerk, Ramblers Trustee

Jonathan introduced himself by saying that he had been a trustee for 9 months now, that he is passionate about walking. He loves the thrill of a challenging new hike and the comfort of a familiar walk. He said that he is an independent walker and has never been on a group walk. He wants to broaden our appeal to independent walkers, who have different needs to group walkers.

- The Trustee's role is
 1. To meet our objectives for the public benefit.
 2. To provide strategic leadership
 3. To use resources prudently; don't take undue risks
 4. To comply with the law; ensure there is good governance
- Part of Trustee role is to act as channel back to Central (Support) Office
- My early impressions of Ramblers – staff are passionate and have a desire to do a good job, the organisation is in transition with lots of change needed, especially in communication / relationships with Areas. Nobody wants to do a bad job.
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Our vision is **"At the heart of a growing movement of walkers, helping people to become healthier and happier, through spending time in nature"**

This vision can be broken down into 4 areas:

Helping everyone find their feet

Diversifying our walking offer

- Ramblers delivered a huge range of short group walks (30-90 minute) – including our Walking for Health programme – helping 80,000 walkers (supported by 5,000 volunteers) across England to find their feet.
- Ramblers Scotland launched Young Adults programme
- Opportunity to diversify our walks and walking programme further

Quality led walks

- The volunteers who make all this happen are really important
- In 2019 we've run over 211 First Aid Courses for our walk leaders and members – in partnership with St. Johns Ambulance
- Implemented new Walk Leadership training in Scotland. We will roll this out across England and Wales – with a new 1-day Essentials for Walk Leaders courses designed to raise confidence in walk leading. Also, a Next Steps' course after 6 months.
- New investment in our website and local group pages to help promote our walking offer

Country designed for walking

Path maintenance and signage

- 169 Path Maintenance teams play key role in enabling people to walk – by keeping the path network open
- A great example is our waymarking of the **Cambrian Way** and where we have also produced a new guide-book.
- **Looking forward** next year to a new version of Pathwatch.
- Complete English Coastal Path by end 2020

Campaigning

- Over the last year we have raised our profile through campaigns such as **Britain's Best Walking Neighbourhood** 12,000 people votes for 10 shortlisted won by Falkirk
- Great media coverage with new project **Don't Lose Your Way** – which provides opportunities for the public to discover lost rights of way and get these on to the definitive map before 1/1/26.

- Two new advocacy posts have been created
- Agricultural Bill – paths should be in good order or the landowner will lose money. The new bill has just been brought back to Parliament; essentially it is the same as the old one.

Grow members, supporters and income

Membership and fundraising strategies

- Ramblers has done very little proactive work before
- New approaches to membership - targeted campaigns via Facebook (300). Cumulative new members = 11,200 (up 18%). Decline halted. Membership is now stable at 103,000.
- New Welcome pack to increase retention; improving ways to join online – 85% of people now do this
- Taster walks (3 free walks for potential members)
- Testing doing phone calls for renewal
- Testing gift membership over Xmas
- Peoples Postcode Lottery have supported our digital work and areas such as first aid.
- Seeking to find new ways to generate income –through corporates, trusts, legacy giving

Independent walkers

- Membership is not just about our group walking offer and our campaigning – it's also about appealing to independent walkers
- Already most of our members don't go on group walks.
- 10 million active walkers in UK; only 1% belong to Ramblers
- Current initiatives are through 3000 downloadable and accessible routes. Much more needs to be done
- Want to be the 'Go to destination' for all things walking

Becoming a great charity

Data and digital

- New members app has had over 20,000 downloads
- We have improved how we manage supporter data, access to information (via the Insight Hub) and we've just started rolling out the new volunteer website called Assemble.
- More developments to come – including new walks and routes developer and support for communications.
- Thank you to those who have used the app. Your feedback is important to help inform future development.
- We need your help in testing new systems.

One team, fit for the future

- Lots of changes as we try to become more - relevant, responsive and modern, whilst retaining all the good things about the Ramblers.
- All of this is only possible by us working as one team – staff, volunteers and members – in the spirit of trust and support and as one walking community

- 1) Continue to think about and **try new things** to reach and welcome more people – whether that's through your **communications** or the diversity of your **walking offer**. Please **share ideas** of how we might appeal to people who are not currently involved. What **support** do you need to do this?
- 2) Give **new tech** a go! Please do feedback on what you'd like to see happen and what support you'd like to have to make the most of this.
- 3) We want to have a **diverse board** and a good representative of the members. We are looking for new trustees. Please step up! (deadline for nominations to be received is 22 February 2020)

At the end of his presentation Jonathan answered questions from members.

Any Other Business

- i) DG explained that central office are hoping to kick-start the Don't Lose Your Way campaign by asking all Areas to provide one volunteer to liaise with central office co-ordinate to provide specialist advice when needed. The role of this person will be circulated soon.
- ii) Les Seaman explained that a new Trespass Act was in the offing and that there were serious implications.
- iii) Cath MacKay told the meeting that a planning application for a large housing development on green belt land in the Loxley Valley was imminent, with considerable local opposition.

Vote of Thanks

The Chair gave a vote of thanks to the visiting speakers, Ted Talbot and Jonathan Bergwerk, and to Nigel Lamb and the Sheffield Walking Group for hosting the event including the provision of refreshments and ensuring that the digital projector worked well.

Minutes taken & written up by David Gadd.

Future meeting dates:

- 2020 ACROW meetings start at 6.30pm and Area Council meetings start at 7.15pm. All meetings are held in the Quaker Meeting House, St James Street, Sheffield S1 2EW.
24 February, 1 June, 7 September, 23 November.
- 2020 General Council: 4th/5th April. Bristol
- 2020 25th April. Spirit of Kinder. Manchester, 2.00pm.
- 2021 AGM: 23rd January

Approved at the 2021 SYNED Area AGM – January 23rd 2021