



**South Yorks &
N.E. Derbyshire**

Minutes of the SYNED Area Annual General Meeting

Saturday 20th January 2024

Held in person at Rowms Lane Social Club and via Zoom

Present: Malcolm Dixon, Area Secretary (Sheffield); Karen Martin (DVR); Kath Drabble (DVR); Sara Whitby, Area Publicity Officer; Christine Stott (DVR); Sarah Cave (DVR); Johnathan Revell (Ch. DVR); Kate Frizzell (DVR); Caitlin Revell (DVR); John Watson (DVR); Pat White (DVR); Peter Drabble (DVR); Angela Karck (DVR); John Karck (DVR); Helen Barker (DVR); Lucia Contrino, (S40's Footpaths officer); Bob Paterson (DVR); Les Seaman, Area Access Officer; Gergelk Budak (S20s&30s); Judith Jarvis (DVR); Ruth Law (DVR); Pauline Gibbons (DVR); Malcolm Mackay (Sheffield); Cath MacKay, VP (Sheffield); Jez Kenyon, Area Vice Chair (S40's); Clive Sanders, guest speaker (Central Office)

Via Zoom: Liz Sharp (Ch S40's); Jim Conibear (S40's)

Apologies: David Blunkett, Area President; Gavin Johns, Area Treasurer; Roly Smith, Area VP; Terry Howard, Area VP; Michael Stainer (Ch. Chesterfield); John Harker, Peak & Northern Footpaths Society; Marion Clulow, Peak Walking Group; Judy Gathercole, Area Membership Secretary (Sheffield); Chris Morton (Sheffield); Stuart Bloom (Sheffield); Adrian Roxan (Sheffield); Sue Haywood (DVR); Gordon Haywood (DVR)

1. Chair's welcome and opening remarks:

Vice Chair Jez Kenyon opened the Meeting by asking Johnathan Revell to make the official welcome on behalf of the Dearne Valley Ramblers, our host group this afternoon.

Johnathan thanked everyone for attending and hoped everyone had enjoyed the morning walk led by John Watson. He also gave a special mention to Pauline Gibbons, one of DVR's original founder members, who was present today and who has attended every AGM and event hosted by DVR.

Jez thanked DVR and then spoke about our current Chair, Allen Pestell. Allen has sadly been very ill and stepped back from the role in May after a long period serving as Chair of SYNED. Cath MacKay spoke movingly about the extensive work Allen has done for Ramblers and expressed thanks on behalf of us all to Allen.

2. Attendance and apologies for absence: as above

3. Remembering Area Members who have died during the last 12 months:

A minute's silence was held, and tribute paid to Mike Pye and Tony Alsop and any other members who have sadly passed away in the last year. Les Seaman paid tribute to Mike, and Cath MacKay to Tony, re their achievements for Ramblers.

4. President's Address: Lord David Blunkett – David was unable to attend in person due to a scheduling conflict but sent a video message. He reviewed his time as President, touched on local issues affecting Ramblers, sent thanks, and emphasised he remains supportive of

SYNED aims though this has been his final year as President. **Action:** We will write and convey our thanks to David.

5. **Minutes of the 2023 Annual General meeting** accepted with one minor correction sec. 18, S40's should read S20s&30s.

6. **Matters Arising from the 2023 Minutes –**

- a. The motion was taken to the Central Council regarding ensuring that local authorities maintain their obligations to look after the footpath network. Noted that landowners have a responsibility to maintain footpaths on their land and that LA's have the power to enforce, however they do have limited funds for this purpose. GC passed the motion, and we look forward to seeing how this progresses nationally.
- b. River walks project – this has been shelved due to a lack of progress.
- c. Operations of area council – discussed at SYNED council meetings several times, not much progress but noted we have had much more engagement with both SYNED groups and with external groups of interest.

7. **Review the Annual Report for 2022/2023** Noted that we owe a debt of gratitude for the thousands of hours of work by volunteers from our groups and those who have gone before us and a duty to carry on the good work. There are many ways for members to get involved e.g. Don't Lose Your Way project, path maintenance teams, lobbying local councils, everything that helps maintain the footpath network, just get in touch if you wish to get involved.

8. **Financial statement – Accounts for year ending September 30th, 2023.** Accounts are within the Annual report – JK presented on behalf of Gavin. Funds and spending summarised. Noted changes to ladder stiles using BAWI funding. **Accounts accepted.**

9. **Appointment of Area President and Vice Presidents –** David Blunkett has now stepped down. JK explained the role is an honorary one, ideally someone high profile who supports Ramblers aims and can represent us. If anyone has any suggestions, please let Malcolm know, otherwise the post will remain vacant for the next 12 months. We currently have 6 Vice Presidents, all to continue, proposed and accepted. David Blunkett and Allen Pestell proposed as additional VPs as per tradition, proposed and accepted.

10. **Election of Officers and Council Members –** all proposed/nominated, seconded, and accepted as below.

Area Chair – Jez Kenyon

Area Vice Chair - **vacant**

Area Secretary – Malcolm Dixon

Area Treasurer – Gavin Johns

Area Access Officer – Les Seaman

Area Membership Secretary – Helen Barker

Area Minutes Secretary – Helen Barker

Area Publicity & Social Media Officer – Sara Whitby

Area Footpath Officer - **vacant**

Area Webmaster – Johnathan Revell – help with maintaining the SYNED website would be welcomed by Johnathan if anyone is interested. It uses the same tools as the group websites.

Area Countryside Officer - **vacant**

If anyone wishes to get involved or is interested in knowing more about any vacant positions, please let Malcolm know.

11. Other council members:

a. Two Members' Representatives on the Area Council – Cath McKay proposed and seconded. Terry Howard has also previously taken on this role but would like to offer it up to someone else – put a call out to all groups for nominees.

b. All Group Secretaries – ACTION REQUIRED please provide details to Malcolm of up to 2 representatives for their Group (as appointed at their AGM) to sit on the Area Council.

c. Two Representatives from the 5 walking groups affiliated to the AC – no current reps – to write to them all and ask for nominations.

12. Appointment of Independent Examiner – Lorraine Watson thanked and proposed/approved for a further 12 months.

13. Affiliation to like-minded organisations – as an area we affiliate to 4 organisations.

These are: Campaign for the Protection of Rural England; the Peak & Northern Footpath Society; Peak District Green Lanes Alliance; and the Open Spaces Society. Continuation of these affiliations proposed and approved. No further nominations for similar groups made.

14. Appointment of Area Delegates to 2024 General Council on April 20th at NEC – Jez and Cath spoke about the role of General Council and how it is a fantastic opportunity to learn and share with other areas. All Ramblers areas are represented, and it is where decisions on national policy are debated and taken. Currently we have no nominations for SYNED area, we need 2 delegates. No expressions of interest at today's AGM, so to be taken to the next Area meeting – please do let Malcolm know if you are interested in attending.

15. No Motions submitted for General Council this year.

16. Any Other Business / Notices –

Cressbrook Mill – we have around £13000 left in the Ivy Cowan legacy fund – this was money left to us by a local lady, Ivy Cowan, some years ago. Cressbrook Mill footbridge needs replacing (has been closed for 4 years), it connects the Monsal Trail with Cressbrook Mill over the River Wye. This will cost around £200,000 in total. Peak Park have put in £20,000 but can't afford to fund it all. The Peak Park Foundation have also given £20,000. British Mountaineering Council have given £10,000. Proposed that we offer £5000 from the Ivy Cowan legacy towards this. Les Seaman spoke about the project and the benefits of this very useful footbridge being replaced. It is a concessionary footpath, not a PROW which is why the council won't fund it. Replacement would mean that a road crossing to connect the Monsal Trail would be avoided. Liz Sharp spoke to support the donation. Proposed/seconded and approved unanimously.

Agricultural Transitional Plan (ATP) – Les Seaman spoke about a letter received from DEFRA in January regarding the ATP. This is a 5-year plan regarding paying landowners for concessionary 'open' access to their land (£92 per hectare). No clarity on what happens after 5 years or how this will work. Jez states this is a perfect example of why it is worth members getting more involved in footpath issues.

No further AOBs.

After the formal meeting and refreshments, our guest speaker **Clive Sanders**, the Ramblers Income and Marketing Director, spoke to us on current Ramblers concerns, activities & campaigns.

Clive reiterated about the benefits and opportunities of attending General Council. He spoke about the achievements of groups in delivering over 44000 group walks last year, plus around 50000 wellbeing walks. Last year Ramblers trained around 12000 walk leaders, Ramblers is seeing much more diversity at a community level and Clive reiterated how the training can help build skills and confidence. Clive told us that around 15500 new members were recruited last year, total membership floats around 102 to 103 thousand members – much healthier than it was during covid when we were unable to offer group walks and many people paused their membership. Ramblers continues to focus on paths work – it continues to resonate with people about the importance of retaining and maintaining the paths network.

Clive spoke about the Ramblers refreshed strategy - a 10 year strategy. There are unprecedented challenges around the footpath network with reduced funds available from local authorities due to other pressures on them. He spoke about ELMS (the reform of the Common Agricultural Policy) and Ramblers continue to lobby politically at a national level and are involved with cross party work on white papers behind the scenes. Clive spoke about the importance of sharing successes and recognising that local differences are integral to change and removing barriers. He spoke about Ramblers new president, Amal Latif. Amal is blind and is a great role model for walking for all.

Clive spoke about recruitment, how this is harder, and we must open our appeal to a broader audience, change perceptions of ramblers, promote walking for all. We ARE Britain's walking charity. Our pathway network is a huge asset within the UK, much more limited in many other countries, and we need to appreciate it.

Clive then offered a Q&A session, condensed highlights below:

Jez: have health agenda/benefits of walking been a bit lost along the way? Funding issues, but prevention is better than cure?

Clive: short termism is an issue. Active transport has had lots of funding e.g. cycling which benefits relatively few, how many really benefit. Walking is the cheapest and best form of exercise. Unblocking the footpath network leads to a free increase in health. Barriers need addressing – social and physical. It is a challenge.

Liz: 1. At group levels, is there tension between Ramblers serving current membership and opening up to more? 2. Inconsistencies in income streams for various campaigning organisations.

Clive: beneficiaries v benefactors – if the same, are we delivering? Keep doing what we do but also learn from other groups/areas. 2. Orgs get pulled in all directions, need to draw some lines to remain focused on core objectives. Ramblers get called in as consultees on various things. Both local and national connections.

Les: Many groups are involved in the Sheffield walking forum, not just ramblers, interest is really building but we find we must go to them to get groups involved, they don't come to us.

Clive: great example, the more we can do that the better. Really important to keep raising awareness.

Jez: asked room if we'd joined ramblers as 'local' or 'national' – about half and half – we all join for many reasons.

Cath: some concerns re new strategy now allayed. Spoke about the debate at the last general council & concerns that were expressed there. Noted that the language used in the documents is off-putting.

Clive: agree, terms get bounced around and fall into use. E.g. 'active transport'. we need clarity and to be mindful of 'are we helping people' & 'can we explain how'.

Lucia: asked about last year's motion to GC – what is central office doing about lobbying central government?

Clive: they are lobbying on several things e.g. access, green routes, peri urban access to nature etc. Constant dialogue with government about these, using different angles, funding streams etc. Agree there is always more to be done.

Liz: the new strategy of having 1 leader to 8 walkers is causing some concerns – where are we on that?

Clive: that has softened now, new version is due to be published in Spring, length of guidance has been reduced too. Emphasised this is aimed at giving people who have never led a walk the skills and confidence to do so, it's about raising standards across the board. We need to know what 'good' looks like and we need a standard to both work to and answer to.

Jez thanked Clive and closed the meeting.

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National website: www.ramblers.org.uk**

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