

DRAFT Minutes of Somerset Area Council meeting held 26th March 2011

Present: Ann Foxhuntley, Chair
Rod Porter, Secretary
Jean Mantle, Treasurer
Paul Wright, Footpath Secretary
Gus Halfhide, Membership Secretary
Rod Senior, Access Officer
Ruth Goodland, South Somerset Group
Marion Davies & Robin Downton, Woodspring Group
Diane Knight & Keith Oldham, Clevedon Group
Guy Emery, S.W.A.G.
Mary Henry & Bill Tate, Independent Members

1. Apologies: Tony Goverd, President
Roger Conway, Vice-Chair
Edward Levy, Newsletter Editor & Publicity Officer
Hugh Pratt, Countryside Officer
Les Stather, Webmaster
Tony Fawle, Sedgemoor Group
John Ollerenshaw & Graham May, Taunton Deane Group
Kate Turner, S.W.A.G.

It is most unusual to receive this number of apologies. Unfortunately the date clashed with 'away weekends' organised by three of our Groups.

Before starting on the Agenda items, Gus explained why he felt he had to resign from the Board of Trustees over an issue of governance. Details of the circumstances are being sent to Group Chairs & Secretaries.

2. Minutes of meeting held 8th January 2011: AGREED.

3. Matters arising: Re item 4, Reports, a total of 55 places have now been booked for the Area holiday to Tenby.

Re item 7, Campaigning, the 'thank your council' postcard introduced by Central Office was replaced by an online version because of operational difficulties. Full details were advised to Groups and Area on the 24th January.

Re item 8, Membership, the comments raised were advised to Central Office. Although these were simply noted, it was interesting to learn that (i) others had put forward similar comments, and (ii) Central Office will provide the same level of assistance and support whether a membership growth pledge has been signed or not.

4. Reports from Area Officers & Group Representatives: Reports were distributed ahead of the meeting. However the following are 'new' items -

a) Progress report re a Somerset walking festival in 2012

Approaches are being made to a range of organisations with responses of interest and goodwill. The aim is for joined-up effort.

Members of the Somerset Footpaths Campaign Team are taking the lead role - Mary Henry (project leader), Paul Wright and Adrian Kellett.

The next step is to have an exploratory meeting of interested organisations - hoping for the first week of May. The lead role campaign team members have held a briefing meeting.

Research of other local authorities with walking festivals has shown the importance of having in place an experienced organiser / co-ordinator.

Key issues are funding and management of the scheme.

Funding - With local government staffing and budgets being severely cut there is need to look for other sources of possible funding. Central Office is exploring the possibility of being part of Somerset County Council's bid to the Local Sustainable Transport Fund. If successful, Ramblers would be able to introduce 'Get Walking, Keep Walking' to smaller towns including Somerset. In Somerset an ambition would be to get a portion of the 'Get Walking, Keep Walking co-ordinator's time allocated to a 2012 walking festival.

Central Office is asking for an Area pledge along the lines 'Area welcomes the possibility of Ramblers introducing an externally funded local co-ordinator for Somerset to deliver 'Get Walking' targeted programmes'.

Central Office is keen to help us make bids to other sources.

Management - The aim is to set up an inter-agency steering group which would include identified campaign team members and be chaired by the project leader. The steering group will keep the Area Chair fully in the picture and report to Area Council.

If decisions need to be taken between meetings it is recommended that the model used by the campaign team is followed - of being made by the Area Chair and by identified campaign team members.

While receiving this verbal report, it must be noted that no decision was made on any part of its content.

b) Area Website

Area confirms its agreement to the three aims put forward in Les's report:

To provide a service to Area Council.

To provide a hub from which Group web sites can be accessed plus a basic service provided for Groups without their own website.

To attract new members and promote walking.

c) Request from John Ollerenshaw of Taunton Deane Group

'I wonder if I might prevail on you to ask groups who have copies of *Rambling in Somerset* to sell to members to either send me a cheque for books sold or bring money to next meeting. Thanks.'

d) Late report from S.W.A.G.

SWAG is having a good start to 2011 with both the walks and socials well supported. The highlight so far has been sharing one weekend with the Hampshire 20s to 30s group who were staying near Glastonbury.

Both groups agreed the weekend was a resounding success with SWAG arranging both the walks and the socials.

Our Winter-Spring programme concludes in April with four walks across Somerset, a couple of meals in Taunton and a Youth Hostel weekend in the

Brecons. On top of this, our email address continues to be popular with members for arranging additional events such as film nights and barn dances.

e) Legs Explore

It is hoped to re-launch this Group and, in the meantime, parents are organising a family walk each month.

5. Report and comments on the Area AGM: A good attendance, lots of positive feedback and many thanks to West Somerset Group for being excellent hosts. Professor Brown has again apologised for being unable to attend as our guest speaker. He has agreed to lead two walks in the summer, one from Crowcombe Park Gate and the other based on Crook Peak. Rod will forward details to both West Somerset and Woodspring Groups for their consideration.

6. Instructions for delegates to General Council: Copies of motions going to General Council were distributed ahead of the meeting. Each motion was discussed and our voting delegates duly instructed.

1. Standing Orders Amendment - Use discretion.
2. Rights of Way spending cuts - Support.
3. Rights of Way Network - Reservations re the wording but support.
4. HS2 Railway Lines - Various views emerged although we all want to see the footpaths network protected. No doubt there will be amendments to this motion and delegates are to use discretion.
5. Consultation on Initiatives - Support.
6. Walk Leader's Check List - We do not see a problem with the current list. Vote against.
7. Get Walking Keep Walking - Support.
8. Regional Structures - Concerns London only. Abstain.
9. Abandoned proposal re selling / leasing forestry land - Await amendments. Support in principle but concerned re wording 'opposition to any future proposals'.
10. Campaign Policy Progress - Abstain. A progress report is in fact included in the delegates' Information Pack received yesterday.
11. Government Guidelines on path structures - Support.
12. Direct Debit Incentive - Such decisions should be left with the Marketing Team. Vote against.
13. Equestrian establishments causing footpath problems - Support.
14. Usage Level of Access Land - Support.
15. Rights of Way Network - Support.
16. Multi User Paths - Support.
17. Annual Accounts Publicity - Support.

Additionally, our delegates are to use their discretion re (i) the election of candidates to the Board of Trustees and to the Agenda Committee, and (ii) any decisions arising from discussion on the reports from the CRM and governance inquiries.

Rod was concerned that the delegates' Information Pack included a Group consultation paper. This is the first sight of the paper (not as yet announced on the website or by email) and it is to be the subject of an early morning workshop. Rod will request an electronic version from Central Office and forward it to all Area contacts for comment ahead of the General Council weekend.

7. Discussion on the purchase of equipment for shared use: Specific items included in our discussion were a digital projector and a brushcutter. The outcome was that such purchases would not be a cost effective use of Area funds.

8. Feedback on the 'short' version of the Annual Report: The new version seems to have been welcomed and no adverse comment has been received to date. AGREED that, as part of our end-October meeting, we fully review how the Area AGM is notified and conducted.

9. First steps towards electronic communication with members: As previously reported, S.W.A.G. is already 'paperless' and it was good to hear that other Groups are encouraging members to accept electronic copies of walk programmes and newsletters. It does of course mean a long on-going effort with results slow to come through. However, there are substantial cost savings to be obtained and Rod suggested that he, Robin and Edward look further into the issue and report back with recommendations in say six months.

10. Items for discussion at the next Area Council meeting on Saturday 25th June:

- Decisions made at General Council
- Discussion on involving Ramblers' affiliated members and other representative bodies.
- Adopting a more active approach to determining our 2011/12 budget requirements.

The Chair declared the meeting closed at 12.15 p.m.