

Minutes of Somerset Area Council meeting held 30th October 2010

Present: Ann Foxhuntley, Chair
Roger Conway, Vice-Chair
Rod Porter, Secretary
Jean Mantle, Treasurer
Mary Henry, Footpath Secretary
Edward Levy, Newsletter Editor & Publicity Officer
Carl Earl, Area Footpath Adviser
Nick Harding, Mendip Group
Kaye Savory & Rod Senior, Sedgemoor Group
Ruth Goodland, South Somerset Group
Geoff Taylor, West Somerset Group
John Ollerenshaw, Taunton Deane Group
Marion Davies & Robin Downton, Woodspring Group
Kate Turner, S.W.A.G.

1. Apologies: Tony Goverd, President
Gus Halfhide, Membership Secretary (and RA Trustee)
Les Stather, Mendip Group
Tony Fawle, Sedgemoor Group
Diane Knight & Patrick McGreevy, Clevedon Group
Guy Emery & David Tate, S.W.A.G.

2. Minutes of meeting held 26th June 2010: Agreed.

3. Matters arising: Two discussion items arose.

Should votes be recorded in the minutes re decisions made? Although this is not normal practice, it is accepted that voting details would be recorded should an Area Council member so request. Such request should be made before moving on to the next item of business on the agenda.

Should Council members' names be included throughout the Minutes? An individual concern was expressed as agreed minutes are accessible through the Area website. Although impossible to implement in full, this will be borne in mind.

4. Treasurer's report: Income and expenditure accounts for the year ended 30th September have been completed and are now with our auditor, Rose Docherty. As anticipated, the loan of £2500 from Central Office has been fully repaid by Taunton Deane Group and Area starts the 2010/11 financial year with a cash reserve of £2000.

5. Coastal access: A one day training course for all who volunteered to take part in the survey for the Coastal Access Scheme was held on 16th October at Woolavington Village Hall. A total of 14 volunteers from West Somerset, Mendip and Sedgemoor Groups attended.

The course was led by Justin Cooke, the Ramblers' Senior Policy Advisor, and split into three main sessions - detailed coverage of the Coastal Access Scheme; the practical side of surveying and planning routes on maps, and a discussion on how the volunteers should complete our section of the Coastal Trail from Minehead to Stert Point.

The section has been split up into four parts:- Minehead to Watchet; Watchet to Quantockshead; Quantockshead to Hinkley, and Hinkley to Stert Point.

Of these, West Somerset will cover Minehead to Quantockshead; Mendip will cover from Quantockshead to Hinkley, and Sedgemoor will cover from Hinkley to Stert Point.

The only probable problem is the stretch from Watchet to Quantockshead which has caravan parks and possibly unfriendly landowners.

To date Sedgemoor has carried out the first walk of their route and Mendip are starting theirs on Tuesday 2nd November.

The report has to be completed by April 2011 and progress meetings will be held at regular intervals.

6. Working parties:

a) Update on Somerset County Council's position re voluntary working parties - Mendip Group has received a copy of S.C.C.'s cost benefit analysis re the completed pilot scheme. County's conclusions are that:

More use should be made of volunteers to clear path vegetation.

There are a number of sites where path furniture has been incorrectly installed by Mendip Group's working party and a programme of works to correct this has led to additional costs for S.C.C.

This last point is obviously contested by us as all previous work had been fully 'signed off' by Mendip District Council's officers. Further discussions with S.C.C. are needed but efforts to arrange a meeting have been unsuccessful to date.

AGREED that Mendip Group and the Somerset Footpath Campaign Team work closely together to identify how the current situation can best be progressed.

b) Update re working relationship with North Somerset Council - There is a much improved and positive position here as reflected by the following report from Martin Raines, Woodspring Group's Footpath Maintenance Officer:

'It is now six months since we started our physical relationship with North Somerset Council and it is moving on at a pace. The procedures of path selection, landowner contact, health and safety risk assessments and site inspections are all working well and don't seem to need any modifications at this time. However, moving forward with any more complex ventures, i.e. stile repairs or other furniture replacements, may require revisiting the risk assessments with the council.

Three of our members have attended and passed a one day strimmer course at North Somerset Council's expense. They are now licensed to use petrol powered strimmers in public places and this complies with all legal, health and safety and insurance requirements.

The Council is to supply us with two strimmers, one new strimmer bought specifically for us and one from their stock. The stock strimmer will be replaced in April with another new one from their next funding. The Council is supplying a full harness and full forestry helmet for each machine and fuelling is also being funded.

All of this equipment is to be maintained by North Somerset Council and the full service log will be available at any time. I will be keeping a usage log for each machine so that they can be monitored for their service requirements.

Since its inception, our group has cleared many paths, two of which were in Churchill. One had been 'lost' for over 10 years and the other for over 20 years. We already have clearances itemised for November and December plus a projected clearance for January of a lost path in the Bleadon area.

From the spring of 2011 we will be undertaking working parties on the 1st and 3rd Tuesday of every month. The 1st Tuesday will remain our normal clearance day but the 3rd Tuesday will be a maintenance day, revisiting paths cleared the previous year to

ensure they are still clear. This will be undertaken through a strict schedule and will adhere to all the procedures that apply to clearances.

I think the partnership Woodspring Group has with North Somerset Council is invaluable and a huge asset to us all. I cannot speak highly enough of the Council officers involved, all of whom are not only very helpful but also really nice people.'

7. Code of Practice for Rights of Way: Further comments on the draft document have been received. These will be considered and a revised Code of Practice distributed ahead of our next meeting

8. Annual review of 2009 report 'Broadening The Base': AGREED that the report continues to reflect Area's view and should remain in place.

9. Campaigning: Members will be acutely aware of the financial problems facing local authorities. Somerset CC is proposing swingeing cuts with Transport, which includes Rights of Way, likely to bear an unduly heavy burden. According to the local press the county's Transport section is being asked to save, over 3 years, £46million towards the county deficit of £75million. These proposals have led to the resignation of the Cabinet Member, Councillor Trollope-Bellew. The latest local paper reports the resignation of two further county councillors. The county's budget proposals go through the process of Scrutiny Committee, Cabinet, then full Council meeting. Major decisions are likely to have been made by mid-December.

Ramblers' Somerset Footpath Campaign Team plans action in the following ways:

i) Work in association with Central Office's 'Dead End' campaign. Central Office staff are bringing the 'Dead End' roadshow to Taunton on 16th November.

ii) Once the budget proposals being put forward are known - Ask for meeting with RoW officers and Cabinet Member (key item 'How can Ramblers help county to cope?'); write to County Councillors; send out a press release, 'Why footpaths matter'; rally members' interest; target local MPs, and pursue work for a Walking Festival for Somerset.

Apart from the general benefits of walking, a Walking Festival has added bonuses. These include introducing new people to walking; increasing interest in and use of footpaths locally; boosting tourism and the local economy, and offering scope for working across organisations.

AGREED that the Area Footpath Secretary writes to Group Secretaries with offer of an Area wide meeting or a group committee meeting with AFS in attendance. The aim is to discuss ideas and share research material the Campaign Team has undertaken from other parts of the country.

10. Membership:

a) Membership report - Distributed ahead of the meeting, the accompanying comments were noted.

b) Initial thoughts re drawing up a membership recruitment plan - This is one of the recommendations in the Ramblers business plan 2010-2011 (See agenda item 16 below). No specific action will be taken as yet but good to hear that S.W.A.G.'s committee have already identified a membership target for the year.

11. Area Holiday:

a) Report on Eastbourne holiday - Enjoyed by all, despite wet weather and exposed landscape. Many thanks to Mike Beveridge for the time and effort he put into organising this.

b) Proposal re next year's holiday - AGREED that this will be to Tenby from Friday 30th September to Monday 3rd October. Also AGREED that Roger Conway takes on the necessary organisation on the clear understanding that this does not entail any personal liability.

12. Group news:

Sedgemoor

Edward Levy organised another enjoyable Summer Outing to Brixham and Kingswear, South Devon in July. This was well attended and three walks were enjoyed by all.

This year's Summer Lunch was again an enjoyable day and commenced with a short walk and back to Tony & Jenny's house for a delicious lunch and sociable afternoon.

Members of East Staffordshire travelled down on Friday, 4th June and joined us for the first Twinning week-end. A full week-end of walking was planned with evening meals at The Malt Shovel, Cannington and the Enmore Inn on the Friday and Saturday evenings. Members of Sedgemoor were there to welcome our guests and enjoy the walks and the whole week-end was a great success. Thanks to Annette for leading a very enjoyable walk on the Sunday and to the 8 Sedgemoor members who hosted the 11 guests in their own homes and worked hard to give the visiting East Staffordshire Ramblers a week-end to remember.

Our return visit was equally successful in September when we stayed for a weekend in Burton on Trent and enjoyed walking around Barton under Water followed by an evening stroll around Sudbury with a meal in this historic village. Saturday we enjoyed an 11 mile walk in the Peak district and were joined on all walks by other members of East Staffs Ramblers who made us feel very welcome. Sunday we started walking from Ashby on to Melbourne (not Australia!) for an 8 mile walk before returning home. This was a superb weekend, blessed with sunny days and great hospitality.

South Somerset

Again we have had a wide variety of walks including Railway and a Friday evening Pub walk. In July we held a summer lunch and a summer supper, both had a walk on offer before the meal.

One Sunday in September seven of our group joined North Dorset Ramblers for a coach ride to Axmouth, then a linear ramble along a 7.5mile section of the South West coast path to Lyme Regis, with time to relax in Lyme Regis before pick up. Weather was fantastic making it a very enjoyable day.

Woodspring

The group had a very enjoyable week's walking in Dolgellau last month, with daily walks of varying levels. Another week away has been planned for next year to Northumberland and also a weekend of walks in Painswick to continue the Cotswold Way.

Despite an extremely wet start to the day, a good number of stalwart members of the group completed the final stage of walking the Coleridge Way which has been covered in 6 stages. They were rewarded for their efforts by the rain clearing for wonderful weather in the afternoon.

Our usual social additions to the programme of skittles, darts and quiz included a short walk up Hellenge Hill in Bleadon and returning to watch the dancing of the local Morris Men, followed by a pub supper.

We have now extended our weekday walks and are happy to be able to currently offer between 2 and 4 walks per month, on Wednesdays and Thursdays.

Two members of our committee have been involved in the discussions with Mendip AONB on the Conservation and Restoration of Burrington Ham and Blackdown.

Currently the repair and restoration of the many paths has been the focus of attention and a site meeting was held recently. We await further developments.

S.W.A.G.

The AGM is almost upon us and this year has built on the success of the last one with numbers up again (92% turnout from 75 members), full walks and social programmes and a new website. Our programmes continue to be varied with walks across Somerset and into Dorset and Wiltshire too. Social events include meals out, trips to the theatre and hostelling on Exmoor. These activities have been supplemented by events posted to our email address. So, all in all, another excellent year for SWAG!

13. Area's Annual Report:

The Area Secretary proposed that we reduce the report to the minimum requirement to save time and cost. AGREED.

14. Update on the 2010 General Council motions: The PDF received from Central Office was distributed ahead of the meeting. There were no comments arising.

15. 2nd annual meeting of Concerned Ramblers: The Area Secretary had attended and his written report to Council members was accepted.

16. Ramblers business plan 2010-2011: This also had been distributed ahead of the meeting. The general view was that there was insufficient information to show how objectives will be achieved and also a lack of appropriate costings. We await further and more detailed updates.

17. Items for discussion at the next Area meeting on 8th January 2011:

- a) Whether to purchase a digital projector for shared use by Area and Groups.
- b) Final arrangements and nominations for the Area A.G.M. on 12th February.

The Chairman thanked everyone for attending and closed the meeting at 12.15 p.m.
