

Ramblers Somerset Area
47th Annual General Meeting
Sunday 14th February 2021 – By Zoom

Minutes

21 members joined the online meeting by Zoom or by dialling in.

Also joining the meeting: Ronnie Forbes, Ramblers Trustee

Welcome from Mike Plaskitt, Mendip Group. Mike welcomed members from across the Area to this year's AGM. He observed that a good walk had been enjoyed in the morning, despite the wet weather.

1. Apologies: Mavis Monaghan, Marion Davies.

2. Minutes of the 46th AGM held on Sunday 16th February, 2020 at Henton Village Hall

Subject to correcting 'Tony Sheehan' to 'Terry Sheehan', the minutes were approved (proposed: Robin Downton, seconded: Brian Lucas).

3. Matters Arising

Under Item 10, Phil Bisatt explained what had happened to the motion that the 2020 AGM had agreed would be forwarded by Somerset Area for consideration at General Council. He explained that, as there had been no normal General Council owing to the pandemic, motions had been remitted to the Board of Trustees for consideration. Our motion had been considered as an amendment to a motion out forward by Wiltshire & Swindon Area, and had been accepted by the Trustees. Action would need to await future Government legislation.

4. Chairman's Annual report 2020

Les Stather introduced and gave a summary of his report. He noted that walking had become even more popular during the Covid-19 pandemic, which was very welcome; however this had resulted in impacts on the rights of way network, such as path spreading, with some adverse reaction from landowners. He emphasised the importance of people keeping to the right of way and acting responsibly. There had

unfortunately been more dog attacks on sheep and an increase in the amount of litter being deposited.

Area membership had fallen slightly to 1463.

Les thanked Rod Carne and Peggy Fortunati for their work in organising the 2020 Area Holiday in Derbyshire, which unfortunately had not been able to take place owing to the pandemic. In terms of a 2021 holiday, we will wait to see how things pan out once the Covid 'lockdown' ends.

Les sadly had to report the unexpected death during the year of Carl Earl, Area Footpath Secretary. This was a great loss to Ramblers, as Carl had not only been a very experienced champion of our rights of way, but was also much liked and respected by all who knew him. Les had taken over as Footpath Secretary on an interim basis, and was proposing to continue in this role going forward, subject to the AGM's approval. In view of this change, Phil Bisatt had taken over as interim Chair and David Thompson was acting as Secretary.

Les drew the AGM's attention to the fact that Brian Lucas (present) had been appointed as the Somerset Area's co-ordinator for Ramblers' 'Don't Lose Your Way' initiative. Somerset County Council had a backlog of 366 Definitive Map Modification Orders pending – which at the current rate of progress, would take 30 years to implement.

Les thanked Robin Downton and Phil Bisatt for their work in 2020 as Treasurer and Secretary respectively.

Rod Carne advised from the floor that the hotel had been booked for the 2022 Holiday, but that in the meantime it had gone into liquidation. Robin Downton advised that Christian Guild had indeed gone into administration but that he was in contact with the Administrator in the hope of getting back the Area's deposit when the property was sold. We would need to consider how best to pay deposits in future – credit card is most secure, but the Area account does not have a credit card facility.

5. Receipt and adoption of the audited Statement of Accounts

The Treasurer, Robin Downton, presented the Statement of Accounts which had been made available online prior to the meeting (copy attached below). This was agreed (proposed: Mike Plaskitt, seconded: David Thompson).

6. Election of Honorary Officers

The Chair, Secretary and Treasurer had all agreed to stand for a further year. Les Stather was stepping down as Chair to take on the role of Area Footpath Secretary. Phil Bisatt would take over as Chair, and David Thompson would take over the role of Secretary.

These commitments were to be for one year only. The meeting agreed to re-elect the officers en bloc (proposed: Mike Plaskitt, seconded: Jim Turner).

David Thompson informed the meeting that there had been a meeting of Group Chairs with the Area Committee on 18th January 2021. At that meeting, it had been agreed that, from 2022, Groups would take it in turn on an annual basis to 'host' Area activities, with the Chair of the host Group acting as Area Chair. As in previous years, the Area AGM would be hosted on a rotating basis by Groups. Thus, in 2022 the host Group would be South Somerset, with Taunton Deane following in 2023 and Sedgemoor in 2024. These future arrangements for running Area were approved by the meeting (proposed: David Thompson, seconded: Mike Plaskitt).

7. Election of two individual members

The current Groups representatives were willing to continue. No nominations had been received for the two vacancies for individual members.

8. Appointment of an Independent Examiner

Robin explained that our independent examiner, Terry Sheehan, had sadly died during the year. Ed Levy offered to take over this role, and this was gratefully agreed (proposed: Robin Downton, seconded: Jim Turner).

9. Nominations to General Council 2021

Les Stather (Mendip) and Robin Downton (Woodspring) agreed to act as delegates from Somerset Area to Ramblers General Council (to be held on April 17th). This was agreed by the meeting (proposed: Mike Plaskitt, seconded: Brian Lucas).

10. Address from Ronnie Forbes, Ramblers Trustee

Ronnie thanked everyone for their participation in this year's AGM. He also thanked all members, volunteers and campaigners for their efforts on behalf of Ramblers in what, owing to Covid-19, had been a difficult year.

He explained that he had been a Ramblers' member for 7 years and led walks in the Fort William and Oban area. He was currently Chair of Highlands & Islands, and was Scottish Convenor in 2020.

Rural areas 'were not working for our members' in terms of access. This is somewhat ironic, as more people than ever have been discovering the pleasures of walking under the situations produced by Covid-19. There is a need to hold the Government to account on the Agriculture Bill.

For 2021, there were three key Ramblers priorities:

- Membership – reaching new members and retaining existing ones.
- Awareness and engagement – more people need to know about the Ramblers. Our website needs to be easier to use and show the public what we do. The website will be updated and our 'brand' refreshed.
- Focus on becoming more relevant and inclusive – we need to make more people feel that Ramblers is for them.

Our membership nationally has fallen below 100,000 (99,408 as at end of December 2020). The Spring 'lockdown' saw net growth. 630 lapsed members re-joined. Unfortunately it is expected that there will be another fall in membership overall during 2021. The aim is for Head Office to contact each member by phone and email on the first anniversary of their joining to encourage them to renew. There will be an emphasis on using technology to make Ramblers more attractive to younger people.

Questions to Ronnie from the 'floor':

Robin Downton said he hoped that a refresh of the Ramblers brand should not involve paying a large fee to a consultancy for a 'circle and a line'. Ronnie advised that consultants have been used.

David Thompson – the Assemble website – a lot of the information on it is regurgitated or old. For example, the 2007 constitution is shown. The roles and responsibilities are also too vague. GWEM – what is this? Ronnie Forbes – GWEM is going to be updated as part of a new webpage. David Thompson – it's difficult to update your details on Assemble. Ronnie agreed to get back to David with some answers to these points.

Rod Carne – as a marketing person it is disappointing to see the number of walkers that Ramblers attract. There is a need to be able to attract people to the Ramblers without them having to pay a £37 membership fee. People can walk for free. Ronnie – the strategy is to emphasise the non-walking benefits of Ramblers membership e.g. working to maintain and improve access using the rights of way network. If people are not interested in these things then it's not easy to see what Ramblers can do.

David Thompson – health walkers are not joining Ramblers. Ronnie Forbes – there has been internal discussion about this within the past few weeks. Ramblers has got funding from Sport England. Walking for Health Groups will become affiliated to Ramblers.

Jim Turner - people were suggesting sticking with 'Bubbles' of 6 people, to avoid the need for risk assessments. Walk leaders are worried about the legality of the Ramblers' risk assessments and what this will mean if something goes wrong.

Ronnie Forbes – agreed that there is a danger that people will not return to leading walks for Ramblers because of the requirement to do a risk assessment. The risk assessment form really formalises what walk leaders should be doing already. Jim felt that Head Office could do more to explain what the risk assessment forms are, and to alleviate concerns, e.g. about keeping the form for a year. The term ‘risk assessment’ is ‘admin speak’ and puts people off.

Mike Plaskitt – for the form to be a proper risk assessment, there should really be a ‘probability’ and ‘effect’ section on the form. As currently written, the form really amounts to a requirement to think about the risks, and is not a risk assessment as such.

Ronnie confirmed that there had been ‘feedback’ that the risk assessment form wasn’t well written.

Les Stather – observed that perhaps the most important thing a recce does is to make sure that when out leading a group of people, you don’t become lost.

The Meeting closed at 1459.

Phil Bisatt
Area Secretary