

Ramblers Somerset Area

46th Annual General Meeting

Henton Village Hall - Sunday 16th February 2020

Minutes

31 members signed the attendance sheet.

Also present: Dr Peter Rookes, Ramblers Trustee; Nicky Wilson, Ramblers Area Support Officer – South

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

1. Apologies: Ed Levy,
2. Minutes of the 45th AGM held on Saturday 17th February, 2019 at Shipham Village Hall

These were approved (proposed: Mike Plaskitt, seconded: Peter Gatenby).

3. Matters Arising – there were none.
4. Chairman's Annual report 2019

A copy of Les Stather's report is appended. Les opened by considering the issue of membership, which needed to be given highest priority – it is now very close to 100,000 nationally, from a peak of 140,000. In Somerset membership stood at 1463, a decline of 20 since last year; however in 2012 it had been 2000 members. This trend of slow decline would, if continued, inevitably impact on Ramblers' resources and influence.

Les expressed his thanks to members of Area Council, especially Carl Earl, Area Footpath Secretary – the Area was fortunate to have someone in this key role with such knowledge and tenacity. We are also fortunate to have working parties in Somerset. Thanks were also due to Robin Downton as Treasurer and for the role he had played in funding the Area Holiday. Thanks also due to Mavis Monaghan as Area Newsletter editor – this remains the major means of communicating with our members.

Rob Carne and Peggy Fortunati continued to play a major role in organising our Area Holiday, which was a great way of bringing people together from the Groups

Les explained that it had been decided to have an Area Council meeting just once a year, just before Area Council. Each Group still elects a representative to Area Council. Issues that arise during the year will be dealt with by e-mail and other communication.

People sometimes ask what is the purpose of Area. Areas are the main means of co-ordinating activity on rights of way issues, and provide the conduit between Groups and Ramblers centrally.

Publicity – Les explained that since last year more had been done on this and he had personally given three interviews to Radio Somerset. Whilst not easy to demonstrate specific outcomes it was essential to show to people what Ramblers do, which is more than just going out for a walk once or twice a week!

5. Receipt and adoption of the audited Statement of Accounts

The Treasurer, Robin Downton, presented the Statement of Accounts which had been circulated at the meeting (copy attached below). This was agreed (proposed: Carl Earl, seconded: Trevor Letcher).

Robin explained the reason for the increase in expenditure on Area Holidays. This was because a payment for 2019's holiday in West Wales fell due on 1st October, whereas the Ramblers financial year ran to 30th September.

Grant in past years from 'Walkabout Fund' from Head Office – we have £400 to promote walking that we have not spent. If any Group wishes to use some of this to promote walking they were welcome to apply to Area for funds.

6. Election of Honorary Officers

The Chair, Secretary and Treasurer had all agreed to stand for a further year. The meeting agreed to re-elect officers en bloc (proposed: Mike Plaskitt, seconded: Tony Parsons).

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

Tony Sheehan had indicated that he was willing to continue for a further year. This was agreed by the meeting (proposed: Mike Plaskitt, seconded: Tony Parsons).

9. Nominations to General Council 2020

Les Stather (Mendip) and Carl Earl (South Somerset) had offered to act as delegates from Somerset Area to Ramblers General Council (to be held in Bristol in April). This was agreed by the meeting (proposed: Mike Plaskitt, seconded: Brian Lucas).

10. Motion to General Council

Carl Earl had proposed, and Area Council had agreed, that the following motion be submitted on behalf of the Somerset Area:

“That Ramblers seek to ensure that when a right of way is diverted to a field edge or fenced for the landowner’s benefit that the landowner be responsible for keeping the route clear at all times.”

Carl explained that, where a path is moved from cross-field to the field edge, even when not fenced, all too often it suffers from a lack of maintenance – Highway Authorities don’t have the capacity to maintain it, whereas previously it would have been the landowner’s responsibility.

The meeting agreed that the motion be forwarded for consideration at General Council (proposed: Tony Parsons, seconded: Maggie Thompson).

11. Presentation by Professor Trevor Letcher on ‘Sustainability’

Mike Plaskitt welcomed Professor Trevor Letcher to the meeting as guest speaker. Trevor explained that during his lifetime, he had worked all over the world, and was also a published author and editor of books on sustainability. He was also a member of Ramblers! Ramblers were, he suggested, well-known for ‘talking in the ranks’.

Over the years Trevor had talked about climate change, plastic waste and many other sustainability issues. Although sustainability had become an over-used buzzword, it was a very serious topic. Broadly it means, meeting the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Simply put, we must leave the planet in the condition that we found it.

The planet is getting smaller – we cannot simply move on to find additional resources that we haven’t exhausted. We are actually running out of key elements. Helium gas, for example – crucial for cooling magnets e.g. in MRI scans – we can’t make it, or find it anywhere else. It occurs in only a few oil wells in the world, which are about to become exhausted. In 100 years’ time, 16 elements will be in very short supply – two of these are lithium (needed for batteries) and platinum (used as a catalyst and thereby ‘lost’, unlike gold).

Pollution – filling the environment with gases and plastics – is a major concern. 70 years ago, digging up old rubbish dumps yielded broken crockery and glass bottles – today it’s plastic containers and

packaging. As with many inventions, plastic is a case of unintended consequences. Over the past 70 years we've come to rely on plastics. 10 billion tonnes of plastic produced, of which only 10% is ever recycled. We must 'reduce, reuse, recycle'. Many supermarkets now have plastic-free aisles. 2 major problems with plastic – collecting it and not mixing it. 12 or so numbers now assigned to different types of plastic so that they can be separated; a dye can also be used. We should limit the number of types of plastic that we use. Recycle e.g. for outdoor posts and benches – if we really can't reuse it, then it can be burnt in industry. Collection should be better, we can separate out plastics at home, but currently we don't. We know what to do, but we need the will to do it.

Global warming is a bigger problem than plastic. A rise in sea levels of 1mm per year doesn't sound much but adds up over the years. Weather changes e.g. typhoons and hurricanes. By 2075 there will be 500 million people looking for a new home – the 'climate refugees'. Biggest impact of gas in the air is actually water vapour that's stopping the heat escaping into space – 10 times the amount of CO₂. Methane is 200 times less in quantity than CO₂, but as a greenhouse gas is 25 times more potent. Rise in methane is enormous over the past 150 years – especially from agriculture. We need gases to keep the planet warm enough, but we currently have too much of them. The main sources of CO₂ are producing electricity (30%), transport 30%, agriculture 15-20%.

There were 'tipping points' at which climate change will accelerate away – one is the melting of the Greenland ice sheet. White ice melts and forms dark water that absorbs heat rather than reflecting it. Increase in air temperature in the tundra region (Russia etc.) – this is heating permafrost, when it melts, methane is released. Heating of peat bogs – CO₂ is released, the higher temperature the greater this effect. Third tipping point – flooding. Examples - New York (people are thinking of leaving), New Orleans, San Francisco. The Gulf Stream very important to the UK (remember that we are at the same latitude as St Petersburg).

We must leave the fossil fuels in the ground. Stop burning coal in power stations. We should have a tax on all countries sending things to us which have coal fired power stations. UK will have closed all its coal fired power stations by 2025. China has 1000, the USA has 100. Who is going to police this? Europe is the most advanced. Only one rational answer – world governance!

Population increase – 1800 – 1 billion people; 1938 – 2.5 billion; 2020 – 7.7 billion. Rate of increase is slowing down – 2% in the 1930s, today only 1%.

World is moving towards renewables, but % of renewables isn't rising because more people want electricity.

In all of history, no generation has been asked to do something to benefit future generations that don't also benefit the current generation. This was true of some activity in the past e.g. medieval cathedrals, but we don't build like that now. Rate of CO₂ increase – are we sure? Yes, although we can't do a control experiment.

Our planet protects us from the harshness of space, but we don't protect the planet from the harshness of us!

After an opportunity for questions, people expressed their thanks to Professor Letcher in the usual way for a most interesting presentation.

12. Tea and Cakes

These had been prepared by host Group members and were very much appreciated.

13. Presentation by Dr Peter Rookes, Ramblers Trustee, and Discussion

Peter addressed a number of issues that frequently come up when considering the role and future of Ramblers. As well as emphasising what Ramblers do for walkers – we don't just lead walks - it was essential to introduce and nurture new members. He also spoke about the role of Areas in Ramblers' organisation and why it was important to make sure that people register when attending walks.

Peter thanked all those members who were in attendance and the sponsoring Group, Mendip, for their organisation of the venue, refreshments, and for the morning walk.

Phil Bisatt
Area Secretary