

Minutes of the Somerset Area Council meeting held on the 15th June 2019

Members Present

Les Stather	Chair
Phil Bisatt	Secretary
Robin Downton	Treasurer
Mavis Monahan	Somerset Rambler Editor
Carl Earl	Area Footpath Secretary

Apologies

Ed Levy	Sedgemoor
Maggie Thompson	Woodspring
Reg Young	Woodspring
Gerald Swayne	West Somerset

Minutes of the Meeting held on 19th January 2019

The minutes of the previous meeting were approved.

Matters Arising

Complaints procedure – the Chair had downloaded and edited the Ramblers Complaints Procedure as a basis, but had not yet circulated it. He agreed to do this.

Additional costs arising from the Area newsletter – the money received by Area from Head Office does not cover the cost of distributing the newsletter to Groups. Postage was averaging £75-80. It was noted that Woodspring and Mendip Groups distribute an estimated 60-70% of newsletters by hand, but this still implies posting out to about 100 people.

Les Stather had contacted former SYWG members and advised them what local Groups they could join. No responses had been received. It was felt that former SYWG members were not renewing their membership.

SYWG finances – Robin Downton had been advised that the Finance Officer had been on jury service, which had been causing a lot of pressure at Head Office, but that the money should be coming to Area, although it had not yet appeared in the

account. Les asked whether the account should be frozen. Head Office have said that no money has been taken out of the account for more than a year. There is about £650 in the account.

Profile in the media – Les had been quite active on this. He had established a contact in BBC Radio Somerset (Emily Brown) on the Breakfast Show, who came to a walk on the Saxon Kings' Way, between Frome and Bath.

Les had also contacted Rod Carne (a blind Rambler) who would be interested in being interviewed. This has since happened. Peter Gatenby, who has walked the Four Corners (of the UK), and another member who has walked the Pilgrims' Trail, are also going to appear on the radio.

Les suggested that Groups should consider who in their membership has done something that the media would like to report on, who would be interested in appearing on the radio, and try to get people to appear once a month.

Carl Earl said that Ian Williamson, who has been raising money by walking for Yeovil Hospice, could be approached in South Somerset.

Contact with BBC should be made via Les Stather.

Les suggested putting an article in the next Area Newsletter on publicity, and how Groups can engage.

Donate a Gate Scheme – Les Stather and Carl Earl had met with Peter Hobley. They had also raised with him the problem of missing bridges. The response was that bridges are now covered by the highways capital budget, and the impression was given that bridges are no longer seen as a particular problem. Les Stather said that he would send Jake Taylor (volunteer co-ordinator) at SCC details of the Isle of Wight Donate a Gate scheme. Carl Earl said that he would also speak to Jake.

Regarding parish councils' powers to spend money on Rights of Way, Les Stather asked whether Carl Earl whether he could put something together for the Area website. For example, Parishes can employ someone, hire contractors, use volunteers (who can go through training), buy equipment, or ask Ramblers' groups to do work. Liability remains with the Highway Authority, so they have to be kept aware of what is happening. Carl advised that parish councils can effectively do anything that is for the benefit of local people – he would check on the current position with regard to their powers.

General Council

Phil Bisatt gave some feedback on the 2019 General Council, which along with Maggie Thompson he had attended in Manchester on 13/14 April.

Noted the 'middle-aged and white' composition of delegates. There had been a discussion on the long-term decline in membership and how we let people know what Ramblers actually do. The big thing we do that other walking groups don't is the RoW network.

Motion 3 – Public Rights of Way and Recruitment – noted that some Groups already put stickers from Head Office identifying work as being done by Ramblers.

Carl Earl suggested get the local media along to work sites, or take a photo and send it. Jake Taylor takes photos and puts on the Volunteer Somerset facebook page.

Motion 4 – developing links with schools as means of attracting young people to join. Noted that this is a difficult area involving people under 18. Taking school children on a walk involves risk assessments, etc. Declining proportion of children walking to school – high proportion of women working who have to take children to school.

Motion 5 – erosion of riverbank paths – no absolute right to deviate. English Coastal Path – there is legal provision to move the path if there is coastal erosion, subject to negotiation with landowners. Motion was remitted to the Board. Carl Earl noted that a change in the law would be required to address this problem.

Motion 6 – planning system and rights of way – Carl Earl noted that one issue is that Ramblers are not a formal consultee on planning applications. Although Ramblers are consulted on resultant diversions, by then it may be too late if the planning application is unsatisfactory from walkers' viewpoint. Motion proposed that LPAs should be required to consult Ramblers at the pre-application stage. Carl agreed to write to Somerset LPAs and ask them to notify Ramblers where a RoW is affected by a planning application.

Diverse and Representative General Council – motion from London area – request for monitoring. Noted that even where there was a significant proportion of ethnic minorities in the population, relatively few joined Ramblers. There was a brief discussion on some of the possible reasons for this. Feeling that General Council should reflect membership – it was asking too much for it to be representative of the population as a whole.

Noted that 2020 General Council would be in Bristol – probably the nearest it will ever get to us. People should be encouraged to attend as visitors.

Treasurer's Report

Noted that Ramblers were benefitting financially from external funding sources. People's Lottery had certainly been very helpful. Income from Ramblers Holidays was now going into the self-funded account, so it could be used as the Groups wished.

Group budget packs had been sent to Treasurers.

Reports from Area Officers and Group Representatives

Footpath Secretary's Report

Carl Earl provided additional information about the recent meeting he and Les Stather had held with Peter Hopley at SCC.

There was a large backlog in claims in Somerset for unrecorded Rights of Way.

Historic claims are based on historic records, many of which have not been digitised. Could we put a note in the newsletter asking if there are any members willing to volunteer to photograph archive documents.

4 longstanding footpath obstructions – one had got 'lost in the system'. All were in South Somerset. SCC have promised to take these up.

Errors in mapping – SCC are to check situations where paths join public roads but where the connection is not shown on the definitive map. Description of route is a legal document just as much as the illustrative map.

There had been discussions about cropping, field margins being too narrow, errors on the interactive map where reported faults were responded to as being 'not valid'.

Winsham diversion – Carl had met with the landowner, who is approachable, and the proposed diversion was via a bridleway. This was of benefit to horse riders, so if Ramblers objected at an Inquiry we would be unlikely to convince an Inspector. The diversion is significant and involves loss of a route through a scenic valley. Carl has managed to persuade the landowner to dedicate an alternative footpath route within the valley, which he felt was a reasonable outcome. He will seek to make sure that the Diversion Order is linked to the alternative footpath route. The proposal is currently in a backlog of work at SCC.

Membership

The up-to-date membership figures were noted.

Group Reports

Group reports had been received and circulated.

Woodspring Group – there appeared to be a potential issue of people who were not members of Ramblers participating in working parties: how are they insured? It was suggested that the Group ask Head Office for clarification. It was noted that Somerset County Council insurance only covers people up to the age of 75, and Ramblers to age 80.

Taunton Deane Group – it was noted that Phil Bisatt would be liaising with Jake Taylor at SCC regarding continuation of working parties by that Group.

Any Other Business

None.

Date of Next Meeting

To be arranged.

Agreed that there would be one meeting of Area Committee per year, just before the AGM. Groups would be asked to agree this mode of operation at their own Committees. The reason is to save money and the need to travel long distances across the Area. Les Stather to circulate to proposal Groups.

The Meeting closed at 1144.

Action	By
Advise Groups of the revised arrangements for Area Committee meetings	LS
Circulate Complaints Procedure to Area Council members	LS
Send details of Isle of Wight 'Donate a Gate' scheme to Jake Taylor at SCC	LS
Speak to Jake Taylor about Donate a Gate scheme	CE
Produce item for Area website on the powers of Parish Councils re Rights of Way	CE
Write to Somerset Area LPAs asking them to consult Ramblers on planning applications where a RoW is affected.	CE
Note for the Area Newsletter asking if there are any members willing to volunteer to photograph SCC archive documents.	CE
Article for Area Newsletter about publicity and how Groups can engage with the media	LS
Contact Peter Hobley re 'Donate A Gate' scheme	LS/CE
Lobby parish councils about their footpath role	All members

Philip Bisatt
Area Secretary