



**Leicestershire
& Rutland**

37th Annual General Meeting

24th January 2026

The Hansom Suite, Lutterworth Town Hall

PRESENT

Martin James - Area Chair
Rob Jones - Area Treasurer
Carol Gillespie - Area Secretary
Roy Denney - Area Walking Environment Officer
Sue Bicknell - Area Officer
Trevor Martin - Area Officer
John Samson - Area Communications Officer

Melton - Helen Mee

Lutterworth - John Divine, Sue Featherstone, Pam Kennedy, Anita Mothersole,
Tony Mothersole, Val Deacon

Leicester - Rachel Hooke, Mark Woodhall, Sue Forsythe, Ian Forsythe

Hinckley - Wendy Martin, Mike l'Anson

Loughborough - Tess Kay

LRWG - Yvonne Lake

COALVILLE - Alistair Blane

Janet Gee - Trustee

1. **Chair's welcome** - On behalf of Peter Williams, Martin welcomed everyone & introduced guest, Janet Gee - Trustee from Central Office. Lutterworth was thanked for organising and hosting the meeting.
2. **Apologies for absence** - Ray Phipps (Area membership Secretary), Georgina Sear, Dave Rogers, Glynis Batchen, Dianne & Brian Thorpe, Mike Goodrich
3. **Approval of minutes of previous AGM on 25.1.25** - Minutes approved
4. **Matters Arising**
 - a. Mailchimp costs to be investigated by Area. Orienteers are welcome to contribute to this review. JS explained annual costs have reduced due to different costing tiers.

- b. Roy raised points relating to Walking Environment matters
 - i. New housing developments & encroachment on PROWs
 - ii. *Charnwood Forest Geopark now has a website, and is being incorporated as a legal entity and its application for UNESCO Global Geopark Status has been approved by the British committee. International inspectors are due to come here for 5 days during the spring to check out our structure, etc. We are confident we tick all their boxes and should become a UGG sometime next year. This status will provide some protection against unwanted development. (amended post meeting)*
 - iii. Stan Warren way route to be created & also bench at Bradgate Park in his memory.

5. Annual Reports

- a. CHAIR'S REPORT - as circulated
MJ commented that walk leader training is going very well. Workshops at Rearsby, Rutland, & Hinckley were very successful. Mike said very positive feedback was received afterwards. It was very contentious beforehand, however only 3 of 33 leaders have been lost.

- b. TREASURER'S REPORT - as circulated

Rob summarised the figures as at 1st Oct 2025 & explained there was an excess of funds amounting to £4433.70. At the recent Area meeting it was agreed to return a sum of £2,500 to Central Office. The remaining balance of c. £1,300 will cover planned expenditure to 30 Sept 2026.

Q: Alistair Blane asked what other options were considered other than returning the money. RJ explained there were rules & restrictions on how money is spent.

Roy D - would rather have seen the money spent on campaigning however in the absence of any such work agreed about return of funds.

Sue B commented - as a charity we are limited to how much we can hold in our funds.

Q: Mark W - asked what was the justification of giving Leics group less than requested, which left under 40% minimum funding requirement & caused more problems than it was worth. Walks take place every day except Monday, therefore recce costs are higher.

Roy D commented all groups should manage within allocated allowance, bearing in mind groups get funding for non-walkers.

Mileage claims have been an ongoing issue in recent years. Policy says only those doing recce can claim mileage. It was commented that if a walk was 30+ miles away, recce costs should not be claimed.

Opinion was that there should have been consultation with groups before a decision was made to return funds.

Rob reiterated that the excess was classed as 'Excess Funds' and there are guidelines and limitations laid down by Central Office on how money is used. Any future extra funding required can be budgeted and requested.

£955 (Lost Ways money) held separately - partnership between a number of organisations including Access Forum all of which contributed £500 for joint campaigning.

- c. SECRETARY'S REPORT - as circulated.
- d. FOOTPATH OFFICER'S REPORT - as circulated.
- e. WALKING ENVIRONMENT OFFICER'S REPORT - as circulated.
- f. MEMBERSHIP REPORT - as circulated
Overall numbers slightly increased over last year. LE96 numbers have increased.
Membership Sec of Leics: members settings on website are not clear, especially when members have left and rejoined. Should be alerted to the fact not listed as a specific group member.
Rachel: same debate every year about this issue. Renewing members are left outside groups of their choice.

Q: Can LE96 MEMBERS be asked if they would prefer to be in a group? MJ to get list & will speak to Ray Phipps

Q: Could we ask for the default for new members to be allocated to their local group? (Alistair B)

Currently it's by postcode which is not necessarily appropriate for groups.

Roy D suggested asking new members which group they want to be assigned to. **Action MJ**

Mike I'A commented that in his experience enough info is in the records within Insight on Ramblers' website.

The following response was received from Central Office, following MJ's enquiry, subsequent to the meeting.

'So, thank you for getting in touch and for sharing the concerns from your Area/ groups. I completely understand the frustration about LE96, and I want to reassure you that we've been giving this issue a lot of attention.'

Members join the Ramblers for many different reasons. While most choose to connect with a local group and take part in group walks, some prefer to join for independent routes or to support the wider charitable work we do. Not every member wants to be linked to a local group, and we need to respect that choice.

At present, new members can either join their local group (our default option), select a group of their choice, or opt for “no group”. Around 18% of new members currently select no group. Because overall recruitment has grown strongly – 18,000 new members joined last year – the numbers in “no group” (sometimes referred to as Group 96) have grown too.

The picture varies a lot by channel:

- *Website: 85% of new joiners select a group (the majority of members join this way)*
- *Private site events: 90–95% select a group (~1,000 members per year)*
- *Telemarketing: 95% select a group (~3,000 members per year)*
- *Boundless (corporate partnership): only 15% select a group (~2,000 members per year)*
- *Phone/other: 82% select a group (smaller numbers)*

Progress:

- *Welcome calling trial – We’re phoning a proportion of new members without a group to explain the benefits of joining one. Around 25% of those called are choosing to move into a group – but 75% are still choosing to stay unaffiliated. This trial is also helping us understand what makes the difference to first-year retention.*
- *Data improvements – Two fixes are now in progress. Rejoining members will be reconnected to their last active group if they don’t choose a new one, and gift memberships now allocate a group by default rather than “none” (this change is complete).*
- *We will also be reviewing the way our Boundless membership works to see if we can make any improvements in this area*
- *Finally, as part of the wider governance review, there was an option to affiliate each member with a group. Changes to Areas and groups have now been removed from the governance review. Work will continue in the new year, building on the work to date, to agree what reforms would best allow Areas and Groups to continue to function efficiently and effectively in future. If no further changes come about, we will review the join form to make this more user-friendly and prompt more new members to join a group - but this work is on pause for now.*

g. COMMUNICATIONS OFFICER'S REPORT - as circulated.

h. GROUP REPORTS - as circulated.

Reminder from Anita: a First Aid course will run on 7th Mar all day. RD commented that he had heard of a first aid course being offered FOC.

6. Adoption of accounts & acceptance of officers' and Groups' reports - all accepted

7. President's Address

Peter Williams was not present at the meeting. MJ informed the meeting that Peter is prepared to serve for 1 more year. Chair only serves for 3 years.

8. Election of Officers

Martin James - proposed by Roy Denney & seconded by Sue Bicknell.

All other officers proposed en bloc by Martin James & seconded by Wendy Martin.

9. Confirmation of vice President

Role vacant at present. To be discussed at the next AEC meeting.

10. Confirmation of appointment of auditor / independent financial examiner

Chris Tipper has agreed to continue as auditor. We are very grateful for his long service to the Area.

11. Any proposed changes to the Area Constitution - none at present.

12. Nominations of 2 representatives to General Council

Martin James & Sue Bicknell - proposed by Roy Denney, seconded by Trevor Martin.

The next General Council meeting is to be held in Birmingham on 25th April, a letter to follow from Central Office. It was noted that observers are no longer permitted at GC.

13. Address and Q & A with Janet Gee - Trustee

Janet has visited Staffordshire, Lincolnshire, Gloucester areas to familiarise herself with local issues. Further visits to Warwick & Liverpool are planned. Lives in Kenilworth. Her background includes the role of National Chief Exec of Young Farmers in Wales 2000 - 2005. She worked in governance & compliance in charities running her own business; also worked as a wealth manager and financial advisor, retired in 2022; is on independent board of Warwickshire ramblers. Kenilworth is an affiliated group. Will have been in trustee position for a year in March 2026. This year Janet wants to concentrate on persuading the board to focus on grass roots activities.

Janet summarised the main changes following the ongoing Governance Review.

- Board of Trustees to be reduced to 12 (down from 15)

- 6 elected from membership ie GC members

- 4 trustees to be appointed by Board of Trustees (to ensure correct skill set (ie to run a uk wide charity in line with best practice); *Scotland and Wales retain their elected roles.*

- More trustees now to be recruited, packs to be sent out imminently, esp for the northern regions.

Ramblers have to comply to both Charity and Company law - proposed change 1 member 1 vote.

The current governance review is exploring how effectively Areas work. New 'Gatherings' are being proposed, 4 in England SE SW Midlands & North Trustees will have more direct interaction with members at Gatherings. The new proposed structure needs to be approved by the existing board.

Roy D suggested mini gatherings within Gatherings.

Sue B expressed a strong concern about self-nomination without proposer & seconder, with the worry this could attract those who wish to promote self-interests & status. JG to feed back to Central Office.

MJ asked about the next stage. Janet confirmed Area changes have now been shelved & stressed the importance of Area to local campaigning. This supports a key area of Ramblers' work i.e. the crucial work of footpath protection. Not all areas are as successful as ours on footpath campaigning.

Q. Roy D local government officer - major re-org with county boundaries - how will Ramblers align to new authorities? Yet to be confirmed.

Q. U3As are leading regular walks and taking away from Ramblers membership. SB What is CO doing about that? (Sue B)

It was commented that there should be more publicity about Ramblers. U3A members belong to several groups and pay less, but other organisations don't contribute to footpath maintenance. LFA campaigns and charges £6 per year. Q. Is there a PR department? - tbc.

Wendy M : We need to be getting messages out about Ramblers' work including the importance of promoting social connection, friendships & the benefits to mental health & wellbeing.

Sue F commented that her daughter is head of PR at Slimming World - this would be another opportunity of linking.

Roy D: socialisation after walks e.g. meals can promote offers of involvement i.e encouraging individuals to take on a more active role within the Ramblers.

14. **AOB** - none

15. **Area Events**

Area walk - LRWG - early summer

Area quiz - Loughborough - Oct / Nov

AGM - LRWG - 23.1.27

Meeting closed at 11.58 am