

Minutes of the 35th Annual General Meeting (AGM)
Leicestershire & Rutland Area of the Ramblers Association
Saturday 27 January 2024 @ 9.30am

Present: Rob Jones - **Chair** (LRWG), Katherine Hardwick – **Area Secretary** (Rutland), Roy Denney – **Walking Environment Officer** (Coalville), Wendy Martin (Hinckley), Trevor Martin – **Membership Secretary** (Hinckley), Tony Smith (Hinckley), John Samson (Loughborough), Rosemary ... (Leicester), Stuart Tyler (Loughborough), Mike Goodrich (Leicester), Terry Bates (Leicester), Anne Bates (Leicester), Yvonne Lake (LRWG), Martin James – **Footpath Secretary** (Melton), Suzanne Elliott (Melton), Harry Cropper (Melton), Stephen Peck (Leicester), Rachel Hooke (L&R Area member), Mark Woodall (Leicester), Peter Williams - **President** (Leicester), Victoria James (Coalville), David Rogers (Coalville) Glynis Batchen (Coalville), Mick Sharpe (Leicester), Simon Peacock (Melton), Sue Bicknell (Lutterworth & Harborough), Chris King (Melton), Jo King (Melton) Di Green (Melton), Annie Christian (Melton), Anita Mothersole (Lutterworth), Tony Mothersole (Lutterworth) Mark Hewitt (LRWG) Richard Siddaway (Rutland) John Pitts (Rutland) Michael Gillon (Rutland), John Williams OBE (Rutland), Richard Jack (Loughborough), Gill Williams (Loughborough) Jay Ivory & Anne Ivory (Rutland), Richard Godbolt (Leicester)

Guest Speaker – James Lovatt, Head Ranger at Leicestershire Country Parks

Clive Sanders – The Ramblers, Director of Income & Marketing from the Executive Leadership Team

Apologies: Georgina Sear – **Communications Officer**, Chris Alger

Agenda items

1. Chair's opening remarks and welcome

Rob welcomed everyone to Gaddesby and thanked everyone for coming. Thanks to Melton for hosting.

2. Previous AGM minutes from meeting on 28 January 2023

All reports were circulated in the last Write of Way. Uploaded to the website. No issues or problems or amendments – approved.

3. Matters Arising from the minutes

- a. None

4. Officers Reports – as published in the Write of Way (WOW) magazine

- a. **Chairman** – Thanks to colleagues on Area Committee & thanks to Katherine for tenure as Secretary. And thanks to Georgina who will be staying on in part of her role looking after the website but stepping back from the Write of Way (WOW). Thanks to John Samson for taking over the WOW. And thanks to the Groups who give up their time to take part in walks. Sue reiterated thanks to Katherine.
- b. **Treasurer** - There are plenty of funds in the budget. We have tried to avoid excess for unnecessary funds which Central Office has requested is no more than 100% of expenditure.

Funds carried forward £6,416 excluding the Lost Ways account (£7,372 inc Lost Ways).

There was a following discussion generated by a question from the audience on how much money our membership sent to Central Office and how much money they sent to us. As membership fees go directly to Central Office it isn't possible to answer this question,

As a charity, the purpose of all the money held in the Area is for charitable impact. Clive advised that there is approximately £1m currently allocated across group & area budgets. If this money is being spent on activities that improve walking there is no problem. If this money is sitting there 'just in case', not being spent on

fulfilling the vision of the Ramblers Association, this could be reallocated. To clarify, Central Office has not cut any Areas budgets but ask that Areas plan prudently to keep budgets below 100% of their expenditure for this reason. Equally, if Groups have a big programme of activities planned, Groups can apply for funds annually and receive the allocation quarterly.

- c. A question from the audience regarding funding for First Aid courses and whether Groups can claim this back from Area, following a Safety for Walk Leaders training course where it was advised that Ramblers will cover the cost. Roy advised that in the past, members pay half and Areas pay half.

Action – Rob to clarify with Central Office

- d. **Secretary** – Katherine thanked everyone for their support during her tenure as secretary.
- e. **Footpath Secretary** – Martin shared a list of all footpath diversions taken place over the year. This will be put up on the website.
- f. **Walking Environment Officer** – Roy updated everyone on publication of Charnwood Forest map. New paths created, path from Mount St Bernards Abbey to avoid the road, huge benefit, full map has won international awards, more clear than OS map and shows pubs & tea rooms. Costs £6 to buy – if you wish to purchase please contact Roy directly. There was a question whether the map will be available digitally but as the map is a charity endeavour to raise money to promote projects that encourage walking it won't be. It would also be impossible to predict how many digital licences would be required, whereas a set number of paper copies can be produced and sold.
- g. **Membership Secretary** – Area membership totals taken from latest AEC meeting. There was a discussion about members who are not associated with a Group and categorised as 'Others' in the numbers; do Groups receive an allocation from Central Office for these members?

Action – Rob to check status of 'Others'. Do the 'Others' get an allocation from Central Office? If it can't be assigned to a Group, can the funding at least come into the Area pot? Can we get a list of the 'Others' so we can contact them and ask them to affiliate to a specific group?

There was a following conversation about declining membership and how to boost membership. We haven't had a particular concern across our Area but if you feel you have an issue in your Group, talk to Area and the Committee will support the Groups where needed.

Lutterworth have increased their membership significantly, including a name change for the Group to attract more new members, highlighting learnings across the Area. Georgina also did a lot of work with the Group to help with publicity in this instance.

Vice President John Williams OBE, founder of Rutland Round, took the opportunity to advise that he will be leaving the Area for Beckles and, now in his 88th year he is having to ease up. He thanked everyone for all the help offered while he "was busy enough to be a nuisance". Rob wished John all the best on behalf of the Area.

- h. **Communication Officer** – Georgina will be stepping back from some parts of her role due to ill health. WOW John Samson will takeover but Georgina will still help groups with their website when they need it. Role titles TBC.

Action – AEC to discuss role titles

- i. **Group Reports** – reports circulated in WOW.

Officers & groups reports **approved**

5. Adoption of the accounts as published in WOW

Accounts circulated via Write of Way.

Approved

6. Guest Speaker – James Lovatt, Head Ranger at Leicestershire Country Parks

James gave an interesting overview of his role & the role his team plays in the maintenance of Beacon Hill Country Park. His team is responsible for ensuring all the parks are compliant & safe. The park is run by the County Council, who look after 18 country parks across Leicestershire, receiving 700k visitors per year.

Beacon Hill is the third highest point in Leicester after Barden Hill & Birch Hill. It started forming 700m year ago and is older than the Pyrennees. It was part of the Beaumanor estate which was broken up and sold to LCC in 1947 due to inheritance tax with a purpose to “to protect the landscape and for the recreation of the people”.

Has to be very focussed on cost, as only 1p of funding comes from council tax with a view to getting down to zero cost to the taxpayer. Most income comes from car parking. Visitor numbers are up from pre-Covid but costs are adrift by c£200k from the increased costs of dealing with more people and balancing the needs of wildlife.

Key projects are to risk assess the park to keep user groups safe & happy. This will decide how best to appropriately manage the park. And to maintain the heathland - only 16% of the UKs heathland is remaining since 1808 – using sheep & cows to naturally manage the bracken which is invasive.

7. President’s Address

Peter gave his thanks to James for his excellent exposition of the issues that relate to Beacon Hill and how difficult it can be to manage sites through change, particularly at a time of financial stringency.

He extended his thanks to the Melton group for their hospitality and to everyone for being members of the Ramblers.

Peter drew everyone’s attention to narrow paths, particularly through farmers fields. Footpaths that cross a field should be 1 metre wide; those that follow a field edge should be 1.5 metres wide (from <http://www.gov.uk>). Asking whose responsibility this was, it became clear that it was partly due to the farmer but also partly our own faults. Peter requested that we don’t walk in single file; we should walk alongside each other through fields to keep the paths at their required width. If we all walked intelligently, we’d be helping the farmers as they wouldn’t have to come and cut the crops down when the County Council complains to them that their paths are too narrow. He quoted the Robert Frost poem, “The Road not Taken” and asked that we all consider walking “the one less travelled”.

8. Election of Officers

- Auto re-election of officers to AEC - Not contested.
- Richard Siddaway to replace Katherine – Martin proposed, seconded by Roy
- John Samson to join the committee to take on some of Georgina’s role. Created this as a new post, no need for a proposer & a seconder.
- John Samson to join as additional committee member. Martin proposed & Sue seconded.

Rob mentioned this will be his final 12 months as Chair and anyone who would like to step up please make yourself known to Rob.

9. Election of up to two members of affiliated organisations to the AEC

No candidates proposed

10. Confirmation of President & Vice Presidents

- Peter to continue as President
- John Williams to step down as VP
- **Action:** The AEC will discuss options for a replacement Vice President at the next meeting and bring it to the next AGM

11. Confirmation of appointment of an Auditor/Independent Financial Examiner as Chris Tipper

Chris Tipper has agreed to continue in role - **Approved**

12. Any proposed changes to the constitution

None

13. Any proposed motions for General Council

Two motions proposed, circulated on WOW. Roy will take them to General Council.

Motion 1

- 21 in favour, 0 against

Motion 2

- Amended motion with reference last sentence removed – 9 in favour

7 in favour of original motion

Vote carried for the amended Motion

Post the AGM, guidance from Central Office was received which advised that each area is allowed to submit only 1 motion, and is allowed 2 x General Council representatives.

14. Nomination of two representatives to General Council

Saturday 20 April 2024 at the Birmingham NEC. Attendees need to be confident to speak with conviction on the motion.

Action: AEC to discuss which Motion to take to GC & to nominate attendees

15. Report of any Central Office Representative

Clive Sanders – Director of Income & Marketing from the Executive Leadership Team

Clive introduced himself and advised he is happy to answer any questions that people have.

A question was raised about the decision to digitize the reporting/walk manager including a comment that users have very little confidence in the IT people at The Ramblers.

Clive responded that The Ramblers Association is a big organization. Every bit of IT is welcomed by some and hated by others. As an organization, there are increasing attempts to work with people who actually use the systems to see if it works for them prior to launch but there was a point it had to go live and issues are being worked through. Currently it hosts:

- 40,000 groups walks
- 52000 well being walks

That's a lot of routes and 90% of the groups around the country are using walks manager successfully. We can't manage every individual need and technology is moving very fast but the intention is to make things easier & we are going in the right direction. However he does understand the frustration.

A question was raised about the take up of Assemble, how many people use it.

Clive responded that Assemble emerged at time when volunteer governance was important. It was used by the Guides & the Police but perhaps it was not the right solution for the right audience in this case. Salesforce is now the main database for the organization and Assemble is not needed in the same way it was 5 years ago. There is too much behind the paywall that can't be accessed. A few thousand people use Assemble but we have 14,000 walk leaders. It doesn't matter what the package is called, it's intended to help people do their role.

A question was asked about how Central Office communicates with volunteers. Stating 'you must complete this course by x date' when you're a volunteer puts people off. You might expect to get this at work but not as a volunteer.

Clive responded that he has worked in charity for 20 years and recognizes that volunteers need to be supported not told.

A question was raised about the strength of the Webmaster role.

Clive responded that we have 500 groups, some use their own website but not everyone uses the Webmaster. There are approx. 20,000 walking groups that aren't anything to do with the Ramblers and there is no singular view of what works. He doesn't believe there is a power structure, people have said they want access to a system to allow them to promote their own Group and that is what they have. Martin also contributed that Georgina can help with access to Groups web pages in specific cases where this is problematic.

Regarding some of the other points raised across the morning:

We have >90,000 members. It's really hard to recruit members in a cost-of-living crisis when people are cutting back on their outgoings. This is not a challenge unique to us; British Cycling have lost 35,000 members in the last year. It's a tough market out there.

In terms of how we spend our money, we have had great coverage re footpaths that promote the Ramblers as an organization. We're a national charity. We have been working on an Access Bill for the Labour Party should they get elected and membership fees contribute c40% to our fees.

16. Area Events

- a. Area walk – Saturday, late summer - Rutland Group
- b. Area Quiz – Friday night Oct / Nov - Leicester Group
- c. Next AGM – Rutland group – 25 January 2025 - 9.30am start, aim for 12.30pm finish
- d. Rota of events

YEAR	AGM (Jan)	Quiz (Oct/Nov)	Area Walk (late summer)
2024	Melton	Leicester	Rutland
2025	Rutland	Coalville	Lutterworth
2026	Lutterworth	Loughborough	LRWG
2027	LRWG	Hinckley	Leicester
2028	Leicester	Melton	Coalville

17. Dates of next meetings

2024			
Type	Date	Start time	Method
Officers' Meeting	Thursday 15 Feb 2024	7.00pm	Zoom
Officers' Meeting	Thursday 21 Mar 2024	7.00pm	Zoom
AEC	Thursday 18 Apr 2024	7.30pm	Zoom
Officers' Meeting	Thursday 16 May 2024	7.00pm	Zoom
Officers' Meeting	Thursday 20 Jun 2024	7.00pm	In person
AEC	Thursday 18 Jul 2024	7.30pm	Zoom
Officers' Meeting	Thursday 15 Aug 2024	7.00pm	Zoom
Officers' Meeting	Thursday 19 Sep 2024	7.00pm	Zoom
AEC	Thursday 17 Oct 2024	7.30pm	Zoom
Officers' Meeting	Thursday 14 Nov 2024	7.00pm	Zoom