

SUGGESTED MOTIONS FOR GENERAL COUNCIL

The Area Executive Committee is suggesting two motions to be put before the General Council next spring. These have to be agreed at our own AGM at the end of January

At our AGM the members will have the right to accept them, amend them or reject either or both of the items completely.

When submitting them we have to provide the actual motion being proposed and some background notes by way of explanation.

The first suggestion is to try and simplify the administrative burden on groups who constantly struggle to find people prepared to take on roles.

The second is to seek support for our endeavours trying to stop Network Rail attempting to close footpath crossings without providing realistic and safer alternatives. They do so without apparently complying with legal requirements and we have twice had to resort for issuing formal notices on the County County to enforce the reopening of crossings and in neither case to date has the issue been resolved.

We understand that this is not unique to our Area and that Network Rail are taking this bullish approach across the network

A) Group Administration

Motion: That this General Council:

- i) expresses concern that the present archaic, cumbersome and overly demanding requirements on local officials are making it increasingly difficult to fill voluntary roles;
- ii) calls on the Board to create a much simpler system and present proposals to the General Council in 2017;
- iii) with that objective in mind, calls for a simplified accounting system whereby groups get an allowance calculated by any appropriate means but should then be able to spend it in whatever way they choose within the aims of the organisation and the requirements of the Charity Commission;
- iv) Council then proposes that in future groups may report on their income and expenditure by way of a simple pro forma without the need for formal accounts; without any audit and without having to go through their Area.

v) In the interests of further simplification Council also asks the Board to consider Groups being allowed to decide how many officers they need to carry out whatever functions they elect to fulfil, other than having to have a Chairman to oversee and supervise whatever is being done and a Treasurer to look after their funds.

vi) In the interests of further simplification Council also asks the Board to consider Groups not being asked to attend Area meetings more than twice a year but that they should either attend two meetings or send in a report to the two designated Area meetings

Background Notes:

Most members involved in trying to run the organisation have realised for a long time that the present arrangements are archaic and dysfunctional, cumbersome and overly demanding. The Ramblers has seen vacancies in organisational roles increasing and the formation of new groups reducing to a trickle, probably due to the complexities of both setting one up and then running one.

For that reason, we propose making things simpler at group and area level, giving groups more independence of action and making less demand on them by way of formalities and allowing them to avoid needing so many volunteer officers.

We support an idea which has been floating about for several years which allows groups to decide how many officers they need to carry out whatever functions they elect to fulfil. We see a need for a Chairman to oversee and supervise whatever is being done and a Treasurer to look after their funds.

There will be some secretarial needs which some groups may decide can be carried out by the Chairman and others possibly by having a Financial Secretary doing Treasurer and Secretary. Other groups may still elect to have a Secretary as a stand alone role. It is entirely down to each group and we suggest that the Ramblers centrally just require groups to have at least two officers, one designated as Chairman and the other responsible for finances. Groups can still have walking programme officers, footpath officers and indeed any officers they like down to their local ambitions.

This should avoid the need for many meetings other than an AGM and save all the time and effort in preparing for, attending and reporting on the meetings as is the case at present.

Equally we do not feel groups need attend Area meetings other than perhaps twice a year but that they should either attend two meetings each year or send in a report to the two designated Area meetings

We feel the role of group treasurers' role can be made far more simple by giving groups a fixed allowance each year to spend as they see fit, subject only to an annual report to London on a simple pro forma. This could do away with the need for any local audit and production of comprehensive local accounts.

This also removes the need for any Area involvement, much simplifying the role of area treasurers.

There will be further adjustments required in the way we conduct our affairs if these suggestions are adopted and these can be introduced as proposals at the 2017 Council if these basic suggestions are adopted.

To make this system work areas would have to be responsible for any out of the ordinary expenditure.

If a group wishes to do some campaigning or promotional work they could present a targeted and costed case to Area who would have a budget to fund such projects and any campaigning work the area undertakes itself.

It would also be Area responsibility to keep the wider local membership aware of what is going on within the area given the majority of our members do not get involved with any group.

We see Areas still having three principle officers in Chairman, Treasurer and Secretary but also a number of other specialist roles. They will need a footpaths officer.

The publicity, membership and promotion functions must be covered and these all overlap and could include editor of any newsletter and web site content and these roles can be shared amongst whatever members are available in various combinations.

B) Network Rail

Motion: That this General Council:

i) believes that all pedestrian rail crossings at grade, earmarked for closure should be subject to an objection by Ramblers unless an adequate diversion has been provided and, where no evidence has been shown that accidents have occurred at the crossing point in question, a convincing case has been made that it is dangerous. Wherever possible the line should be bridged.

ii) requires the National Executive to prepare a national policy statement, within 3 months, to cover the Ramblers' approach to proposed rail crossing closures by Network Rail

iii) asks the Board to use the Ramblers' parliamentary connections to press government to require Network Rail to adhere to proper procedures

iv) asks the Board to instruct Ramblers staff to engage with Network Rail at national level and to fully support regional volunteers fighting individual cases.

Background Notes:

Network Rail has a policy of closing or diverting footpaths that cross rail lines, to prevent accidents. We have no objection to this provided that a suitable diversion is offered involving only minimal loss of public amenity. Most footpaths were there long before railways crossed them and they are an integral part of our highways network. Even where Local Authorities reject such applications, we have seen cases where they have been closed anyway without any diversion. We have a case locally where Network Rail were refused a temporary closure by the Highway Authority, but then blocked off the footpath under Health & Safety Legislation which has no proven authority to obstruct a highway.

Statistics are produced about incidents at crossings but rarely differentiate between road crossings and footpath crossings. Neither do they always exclude suicides. There are far more accidents with crossing on roads and walkers take care when they know there is a possible risk. Alternative routes in country areas can often involve walking on dangerous roads with no footway and where there is already a history of accidents.

We cannot leave Network Rail to decide what is dangerous as they will just say they all are. We, by objecting, do not decide it is not dangerous we merely oblige them to convince the Highways Authority if they want a temporary closure and to convince an inspector at a public enquiry if they feel danger is grounds for a permanent closure

We are currently fighting an extinguishment order where there is a perfectly achievable bridging solution and no reasonable diversion route, but where they seek to close all rights because they cannot accommodate horses on what is at present a bridleway.

A lower cost alternative to bridging can often be better signalling, display boards and improved safety measures.

Network Rail was involving us in more and earlier consultations with some positive outcomes and locally we were prepared to accept reasonable compromises and trade offs but Network Rail's attitudes have now hardened and they are apparently ignoring local representations and in some cases actually ignoring the legal process.

A similar motion was before Council last year but the situation is getting more desperate and Ramblers need to take firmer action.