

# Minutes of the 38<sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting

## Dorset Area of the Ramblers' Association

Held on 24<sup>th</sup> November 2012 at the Osmington Village Hall

### 1 Introduction

The meeting was hosted by the South Dorset Group and was opened by the Area President Laurie Fairhurst. He welcomed the members present and the guest speaker Robert Peel, Honorary Treasurer of the Board of Trustees.

### 2 Present

There were 26 persons present.

### 3 Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Graham and Madeleine Hemsley, Susan Blake, Jan and Bruce Woodcock, Geoff Carey, Colin Richardson, Geoff Mercer and Louise White

### 4 Minutes of the 37<sup>th</sup> AGM

These had been circulated to all present at the start of the meeting.

They were accepted as a true record of the meeting with no objections and were duly signed by the Chairman.

### 5 Matters Arising from the Minutes

There were no matters arising.

### 6 Annual Report and Statement of Accounts

Laurie Fairhurst introduced the 38<sup>th</sup> Annual Report for the Ramblers Association Dorset Area for 2011/2012 which was noted without comment.

#### Chairman's Report

After my article in Winter Issue of Footnotes, I have started to implement some of the initiatives to increase Membership across the Dorset Area.

Firstly, you may have seen an article in The Dorset Echo about my plans to put the Ramblers in the Dorset Area to take steps forward to improve their image and to gain a higher profile.

Secondly, I am hoping to set in motion at our next meeting with Area Council's approval the formation of a New 40's + Group this hopefully will increase the Membership as this is an area nationally where membership has increased the most.

We have made steady progress with the New Group with 24 on a mailing list and a Dorset4050 Group Facebook page. We have organised 2 events with a good response and are planning an early Xmas walk on the 1st December. I am planning the official formation of the Group in the Spring.

With the SDG's help we have recently raised the Ramblers profile at the WPNSA 's Outdoor Show at Portland on March 31<sup>st</sup> 2012, which was a great success.

We particularly had a good response from Families for short walks, this leads me onto my next venture in the South Dorset area of which I will be resurrecting Family Rambling Fun Day on the 1<sup>st</sup> July in Thorncombe Woods near Dorchester.

This walk is aimed to encourage families to enjoy the many benefits of walking all with Parents, Children, and Grandparents etc. joining in to have a Fun Day, with possibly a Quiz or Treasure Hunt.

This is part of my ethos for The Ramblers in Dorset to encourage all ages and abilities to enjoy the many benefits of Walking.

On July 6th the Ramblers, with Natural England, and DCC Ranger Service and with Kate Ashbrook the New President officially opened the first Part of the New Coastal Trail from Rufus Castle to Lulworth Cove. Many thanks to Brian Panton; he was presented with a small gift from Kate Ashbrook on behalf of the Ramblers for his efforts in organising the event. There was a Coffee stop organised by the Ramblers Central Office at Furzy Cliff followed by lunch at "The Smugglers" at Osmington where Scott Titt of the

British Mountaineering Council and Mary Creagh Shadow Secretary of State for the Environment spoke of the need for continued access to all our coastline for everyone. For the final leg all the dampened walkers were rewarded with a "Cream Tea" to greet them all at Lulworth Cove.

Finally on July 22nd we had another very successful Area Walk and Picnic on the Purbecks, with all the walks meeting at the Mary Baxter Memorial Stones for lunch. Many thanks to all the walk leaders for their time and efforts in making this event so memorable on such a beautiful day.

### **Income and Expenditure Accounts**

Mike Heckford summarised the accounts and thanked Martin Forde-Horne for his excellent work in auditing/inspecting the accounts and to the various Group Treasurers throughout the year with special mention of Arthur Hunt (WDG) and Steve Ryder the retiring Treasurer of SDG as well as Susan Blake (Wessex Wanderers) and Rosemary Bramah (Jubilee Trail).

Approval of the accounts was proposed by Peter Evans and seconded by Rosemary Bramah. They were approved with no objections.

### **Area Footpath Secretary Report**

In addition to the written report, included in the Annual Report Jan thanked the members of the Area Footpath Committee specially Laurie Fairhurst in his role as Chairman for their support and patience during her first year in this position.

Jan gave a brief description of the Dorset CC Public Rights of Way Pilot Scheme where three managers currently report to the directorate but they are looking to reduce that to one manager by integrating the responsibilities and, along with other actions, make an annual saving of £450,000 over 3 years.

It should be noted that the national average for ROW is 400 miles per officer whereas in Dorset it is 700 miles.

### **Presentation by Peter Evans of South Dorset Group**

Peter advised that South Dorset Group were organising another Leaders Training and Navigation Day on the 16<sup>th</sup> of March 2013. This would be an all day event taking place in Portesham Village Hall and as there are expected to be a few spare places the other Group were asked to advise their members.

### **Presentation by Rosemary Bramah Jubilee Trail Coordinator**

Rosemary advised that there was a small display at the rear of the hall with the latest Guide Book for sale.

She explained that all the profits from the guide are used to maintain and improve the furniture on the trail. This is going very well with many of the stiles being replaced by kissing gates. Most of the remaining stiles are in West Dorset where many of the landowners dislike gates.

The trail is actively monitored by volunteers, each with a short section of trail, with the longest serving monitor having done it for 15 years

## **7 Election of Members and Officers**

The following valid nominations had been received and were elected unopposed in accordance with the constitution

<b>Position</b>	<b>Nominee</b>	<b>Proposer</b>	<b>Secunder</b>
Chairman	Keith Seymour	Ian Quarrinton	Peter Evans
Treasurer	Mike Heckford	Peter Evans	Jim Scott
Area Footpath Secretary	Jan Wardell	Kate Gocher	Mike Heckford
Newsletter Editor	Douglas Pigg	Keith Seymour	Jan Wardell
Membership Secretary	Mary Ibbotson	Jan Wardell	Keith Seymour
Individual Member	Derek Watkinson	Peter Evans	Jim Scott
Coastal Access Officer	Brian Panton	Jan Wardell	Keith Seymour

The Chairman asked for nominations from the floor for the remaining vacant positions with the following result.

<b>Position</b>	<b>Nominee</b>	<b>Proposer</b>	<b>Secunder</b>
Area Secretary		- No nomination	
Countryside Secretary		- No nomination	
Publicity Officer	Cheryl Hadnutt	Peter Evans	Keith Seymour
Individual Member		- No nomination	
Representative of the Affiliated Clubs	Ian Ibbotson to continue – no proposer or seconder required		
Area Delegate for General Council 2013	Keith Seymour	Mary Ibbotson	Mike Heckford

As there were no other nominations the above were elected unopposed.

Note that Jim Scott has agreed to continue acting as Secretary until the next Area Council Meeting in January where a Secretary will be co-opted in accordance with the Constitution.

## **8 Appointments**

Martin Forde-Horne has agreed to continue as Independent Examiner and as there were no objections or alternative proposals he was appointed.

Laurie Fairhurst to continue as President.

## **9 Questions**

There were no questions

## **10 Talk by Robert Peel, Honorary Treasurer of the Board of Trustees**

Robert explained that he would be making an interactive Powerpoint presentation and would welcome discussions and questions related to each topic.

**Note that responses in the discussion sections will be shown in italics for clarity.**

The overall theme was the view from the Board of Trustees in relation to the various issues affecting the Ramblers and how they are responding to them.

### **Concerned Ramblers**

Robert stood for election to the Board of Trustees initially because he shared the concerns of the Concerned Ramblers which was formed in 2009. The concerns which they had were

- Direction, especially reduced emphasis on public rights of way work and country walking
- Finance, bearing in mind the up-beat presentation at GC 2009 followed quickly by budget cuts and redundancies
- Competence, especially in the light of the CRM (membership system)
- Democracy and accountability

The on going results of this were

GC 2010 - Motions on public rights of way work passed

- Two sympathetic candidates elected to Board of Trustees

GC 2011 - Three more sympathetic candidates elected to Board

GC 2012 - Two more sympathetic candidates elected to Board

### **Decline in Membership**

Two slides were displayed showing the continuing decline in membership however this did show a reduction in the rate of decline over the past year

### **Discussion and Comments:-**

Everyone who walks or enjoys walking should join or contribute. Other organisations should be asked to contribute

As an organisation should we be talking more to the “non normal” membership profile.

We must ensure that we don't upset the present membership and miss out on the present member profile group.

It should be noted that there is a forecast 40% increase in the 60-64 age group in Dorset.

Have the Ramblers considered corporate sponsorship

*Corporate membership was tried in a private hospital in London and the results were very poor with an extremely low take-up. The reason wasn't known.*

*We do need to improve the product packaging to attract a wider range of members.*

*One of the questions potential members raise in my Area – Kent – is "Can I bring my dog" which is a thorny subject with many groups. In addition Kent Area is having an extended discussion with Central Office in relation to Assistance Dogs on walks as the blanket guidelines have created concerns with some leaders.*

*Walking for Health is now run by the Ramblers with funding from the Macmillan Cancer Charity with the aim of building walkers up from a very low activity level to walking distances of 3 miles. It is hoped that after that the walker will feel able to go on the regular shorter walks with the Ramblers. However many of the Groups don't lead sufficient shorter walks.*

South Dorset Group did try a programme of shorter walks but the uptake was very low so it was dropped.

The problem with shorter walks in relation to Dorset is that walkers are unwilling to drive significant distances for a short walk which, with a geographically dispersed membership as in Dorset, is a problem.

West Dorset Group had a series of short walks in summer – Sunday Strolls – advertised locally as an easy 1½ to 2 hours walk from the centre of Bridport with typical 10 – 15 turnouts but this only generated 2 new members.

The key challenge for increasing membership is that group walks are apparently not the main reason for joining the Ramblers judging by the low proportion of members who actually walk with the Groups.

### **Financial Status**

Two slides were displayed showing that the nominal surplus has been declining since the peak in 2010, after the major restructuring, but is still positive. However if legacies are excluded the situation is worrying as there was a deficit of over £500,000 in 2012 and the income from legacies is also reducing.

### **Discussion and Comments:-**

Is the surplus for the Ramblers as a whole or just for Central Office

*It is for the Ramblers as a whole but doesn't include any reserves held by Areas and Groups*

Will legacies continue to reduce.

*It is feared that legacies will reduce for two reasons.*

*There are fewer members and therefore there may be fewer dying and there is a suspicion that fewer younger members are leaving bequests to the Ramblers.*

Even though legacies are not included in the budget there is still a deficit if they are excluded.

*The aim is to budget to break even on regular activities but the budget can provide for a deficit as a result of one-off items funded by surpluses in previous years that produced by legacies. However, in the financial year just ended, there was a deficit on regular activities, a situation that has to be addressed.*

Projects – Central Office are still bombarding us with new projects. Surely it would be better just to concentrate on the areas which we are good at.

Have staffing level increased at Central Office since the major reduction and are you considering the benefits of moving to a lower cost area outside London

*Staffing levels are still lower than before the cuts*

*The office location will be reviewed next year as there is a break point in the lease in 2015. However the cost benefits of moving out of London are not clear cut as the present offices are relatively inexpensive and recruitment within the charitable sector is easier in London.*

Why is there a split in the financial function between the Financial Director and the Honorary Treasurer?

*The Honorary Treasurer is a member of the Board of Trustees. The Board determines strategy and the staff implement it. In fact, following the resignation of the previous Financial Director, a temporary appointment has been made as there may be organisational changes that affect the functions and responsibilities of that role.*

What is the age profile of the staff at Central Office and are most of them members of the Ramblers.

*The majority of the staff members are in the Ramblers and the average age is 30 – 40.*

#### **Senior Personnel changes in the past year**

- New Chief Executive
- New President
- New Chairman
- New Treasurer
- Departure of Finance Director – replaced by temporary appointment

#### **Achievements in the Past Year**

- Walking for Health
- Forests
- National Trails
- Welsh Coastal Path
- Progress on English Coastal Access
- Campaigning Against the Cuts
- New Promotional Materials

National Trails – The current position is that Natural England has overall responsibility for the National Trails but now wish to delegate all responsibilities to the individual trail coordinators. Ramblers consider that there is a definite need for an overall coordinating body and that funding for this should be provided.

There was then a short discussion related to the merits or otherwise of having an overall coordinating body.

Promotional Materials – There was a complaint about the frequent changes in recruitment/joining leaflets which cannot be cost effective given the quantity which need to be discarded when new ones arrive.

#### **Issues in the Past Year**

HF Holidays

The agreement with HF Holidays is for three years and we will be monitoring the renewal rate for those who joined under the 12 months free membership offer. In this regard it should be noted that when we had a first year for £1 offer the renewal rate after the first year was over 50%.

We are working towards a better understanding with Ramblers Worldwide Holidays.

BUPA

There was no sharing of contact details between the two organisations.

Affiliated Groups

The large increase in affiliation charges has been reversed and the increase is now only £10 per annum.

It was commented that many of the Affiliated Clubs have joined the HF scheme to benefit from the free insurance cover.

**11 Votes of thanks**

Keith Seymour thanked Robert Peel for his presentation and his responses to the wide range of question.

Laurie Fairhurst thanked the volunteers from South Dorset Group for organising the venue and the refreshments.

Signed .....

Date.....