

# Minutes of the 39<sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting

## Dorset Area of the Ramblers' Association

Held on 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2013 at the Toller Porcorum Village Hall

### 1 Introduction

The meeting was hosted by the West Dorset Group and was opened by the Area President Laurie Fairhurst. He welcomed the members present and the guest speaker Paul Strong Head of ICT at Ramblers Headquarters and also Caroline Wheeler from Headquarters

### 2 Present

There were 41 persons present.

### 3 Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Graham and Madeleine Hemsley, Joan and Stan Faris, Sue Blake, Julia Matthews and Alan Harris,

### 4 Minutes of the 38<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 39<sup>th</sup> Annual Report for the Ramblers Association Dorset Area for 2012/2013 which was noted without comment.

#### Income and Expenditure Accounts

Mike Heckford advised that the Group budgets have not yet been agreed at Central Office as they are still being looked at by senior officers. This is unusual as we are now nearly two months into the current financial year.

Mike thanked the independent examiners and the group treasurers with particular mention of Martin Ford-Horne who audits and prints the financial statements for the Area and East Dorset Group AGM's

He also thanked Rosemary Bramah and Sue Blake for looking after the various payments associated with the Jubilee Trail Fund.

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

#### Area Footpath Secretary Report

Jan Wardell stated that she would briefly enlarge on the annual written report.

One important part of the Group Footpath Secretaries role is to consider all applications for any changes to paths in their 'patch' under the Wildlife and Countryside Act, Highways Act or Town and Country Planning Act, and to report on these to the Area Footpath Committee. This gives the committee members the opportunity to discuss and comment on any aspect of the proposals. During the past year we have considered 50 application and 5 pre-application consultations.

She congratulated two members of the Area Footpath Committee Sue Blake for her BEM for amongst other work – services to the Ramblers, and Brian Panton for his Ramblers' Volunteers Award, for his work on Coastal Access.

She continued that the new structure of the Countryside Access/Rights of Way team at Dorset County Council came into being last Monday the 18th November, and as these are obviously early days, it will take time to settle down, but if members would like further details, please contact her.

## 7 Proposed changes to the Dorset Area Constitution

### **Clause 16(ii) Change proposed by Jim Scott and seconded by Keith Seymour**

The reason for this change was explained by Jim Scott as being to avoid the possibility of a second mass mailing where an Amendment is to be discussed at the Area AGM with the associated costs (in excess of £600).

Existing Clause

*Any proposal for such alteration must be delivered in writing to the Secretary of the Area not less than forty-two days before the meeting of the Area at which it is to be discussed and not less than fourteen days' notice of this meeting, giving the terms of the proposed alteration shall be given to the members of the Area.*

Revised Clause

Any proposal for such alteration must be delivered in writing to the Secretary of the Area not less than forty-two days before a Special General Meeting or not less than ninety days before the Annual General Meeting of the Area at which it is to be discussed and must be included in the notification of that meeting sent to the members.

The proposed change was agreed with no objections.

### **Clause 6(i) f) Change proposed by Cheryl Hadnutt and seconded by Peter Evans and Kate Gocher**

The reasons for this proposed change were explained by Cheryl and Kate as being to promote democracy within Area Council and encourage volunteering, by removing a perceived barrier to election onto Area Council. The anticipated benefits being:

An increased likelihood of Area Council posts being contested at Annual General Meetings, through allowing people to stand who because of inability to commit their time in advance or reluctance to challenge an incumbent post-holder, were not prepared to accept a prior nomination;

Increased attendance at Annual General Meetings, as members perceive that they are likely to cast a vote; and that their vote could affect the outcome of the election (both convictions that may be lacking at the moment);

A higher turnover of Area Council members, bringing new ideas to Area Council and reducing the burden on long-standing volunteers;

Through non publication of the nominees list, greater encouragement to members to volunteer for the Area Council post they feel best suited for, rather than the posts without a valid prior nomination.

Existing Clause

*All nominations for election, or re-election where appropriate, at the Annual General Meeting shall be submitted to the Secretary not later than ninety days prior to the Annual General Meeting and shall include the names of the proposer and seconder and the nominee's agreement to stand. Later nominations may be accepted at the discretion of the Area Council. All persons nominated must be Dorset Area Members and must be named in the notice of the meeting sent to members. The proposer and seconder must also be members of Dorset Area. In the event insufficient nominations are received further nominations may be taken at the Annual General Meeting*

Revised Clause

All nominations for election, or re-election where appropriate, made prior to the Annual General Meeting shall be submitted to the Secretary not later than ninety days prior to the Annual General Meeting and shall include the names of the proposer and seconder and the nominee's agreement to stand. Later pre-nominations may be accepted at the discretion of the Area Council. All persons nominated must be Dorset Area Members. The proposer and seconder must also be members of Dorset Area. Further nominations for any post may be taken at the Annual General Meeting.

The proposed change was agreed with no objections.

## 8 Election of Members and Officers

As no valid nominations had been circulated to the membership in accordance with the existing clause in the constitution all volunteers or nominations for positions were made from the floor. The following were nominated and elected.

<b>Position</b>	<b>Nominee</b>	<b>Proposer</b>	<b>Seconder</b>
Chairman	Keith Seymour	Peter Evans	Steve Ryder
Secretary	Jim Scott	Jan Wardell	Bruce Marriott
Treasurer	Mike Heckford	Rosemary Bramah	Kate Gocher
Area Footpath Secretary	Jan Wardell	Bruce Marriott	Kate Gocher
Newsletter Editor	Douglas Pigg	Peter Evans	Mike Heckford
Membership Secretary	Mary Ibbotson	Jan Wardell	Cheryl Hadnutt
Publicity Officer	Cheryl Hadnutt	Denise Pearson	Mary Ibbotson
Coastal Access Officer	Brian Panton	Heather Picken	Kate Gocher

There were no nominations for Countryside Secretary or for the two vacancies for Individual Members

Area Delegate for General Council 2014	Keith Seymour	Bruce Marriott	Cheryl Hadnutt
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Representative of the Affiliated Clubs - Ian Ibbotson to continue – Proposer and seconder not required

## 9 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.

There were no suggestions for the post of Vice President but members were asked if they had any subsequent thoughts or suggestions to advise the Secretary.

## 10 Questions

There were no questions

## 11 Talk by Paul Strong Head of ICT and Web Services

Paul had intended to give a Powerpoint presentation but in the event he gave a verbal summary of the presentation and advised that the same presentation was being given to all Areas where there was a speaker from Central Office and that there were three themes being covered

**Mission:** That the organisation is being focused back on mission and doing so strategically by weaving the different elements of the mission together rather than seeing them as competing elements.

**Participation:** That staff, trustees and volunteers are increasingly working together to deliver better outcomes for Ramblers

**Partnership:** That Ramblers is working with a wide range of partners, not acting in isolation

The following were the main points covered in the presentation

### **What have we achieved**

There are 25,000 volunteers and 107,000 members who have safeguarded 140,000 miles of public path and 1 million hectares of open access land in England and Wales.

There are 102 path maintenance teams who improved over 600 paths and saved over 800 paths overall from being blocked, closed or badly diverted

Saved the English coastal path! - Yes it was a battle but we won! From the moment we heard that government cuts might be used as an excuse to put the coastal path and access on the backburner, we mobilised quickly. Nearly 20,000 people signed a petition

in a very effective lobbying campaign focused on coastal MPs and using a variety of tactics, including at one stage an ice cream van, we made the case for the coast

### **So what are we**

The guardians of the footpath networks

The advocates of the right to roam

The protectors of the countryside

The champions of walking

And healthy, friendly and fun to go walking with

### **What are the challenges we face**

Delivering all of the mission everywhere forever

To attract people and resource

To discover the courage to deliver our work in new ways and with new people

### **Our Business Plan Priorities**

Developing a new ten year vision

Delivering our Mission well

Creating stability

Supporting Volunteers

Communicating better

### **Our Vision**

We've been asking people to give us their views on what we need to do to protect their ability to enjoy the outdoors and what they think Ramblers should do about it.

It's part of developing a positive framework for what we would like to achieve as Ramblers over the next 5-10 years.

This will let us go into our 80th anniversary year (2015) with a clear picture of where we are going. Part of this process has been looking at our rights of way and access strategy. We held a gathering in the Peak District for volunteers from England and Wales to discuss this vital part of our work.

Further discussion will be held at the 2014 General Council in Liverpool. It's already interesting seeing what is coming out in terms of people's interest in us working with young people, and tackling problems of public transport as well as keeping rights of way open

### **Communications**

Last December we launched the new Ramblers website. We have continued to improve the site since then and very shortly we will be moving the content from the walk magazine website onto the main website to save costs and also to make it more interesting.

We are undertaking an audit of our communications because I think it is self-evident that we have a communications issue. Interestingly it's actually not that we are not in the papers as much as we used to be - we are! We've had a very good year for getting media coverage and the launch of Ramblers Routes saw a great piece in the Independent which actually led to several hundred people joining us.

We need to make sure that we are explaining to members the full range of our mission and ensuring that they feel part of a single organisation so that they feel good about our achievements made outside of their local area.

We also want to provide more help for Groups and Areas to communicate with members and that is something that we are going to be looking at over the next year.

## **Focus on Keeping People**

We know what the problem is.

### **90% of all leavers with less than five years membership are under 40.**

40% of them cite the reasons for leaving as the days, times, lengths and number of walks. Generally you could summarise this as: they fail to find within Ramblers what they expected. We need to create a home for these younger walkers.

### **90% of those leaving with over five years membership are over 80 years old.**

As people are no longer able to go walking with us, they lose their connection with their Group and leave.

You'll notice that the above groups are people for whom walking with us is the defining facet of their membership. We have not been successful enough in explaining to members that we do so much more than organise walks – however great they are. For example only 31% of members think we are the guardians of footpath network. This means that when we recruit and while people are members we need to constantly reinforce the benefits of supporting us even if you cannot go walking with us. We may be an expensive walking club but we are a cheap charity!

### **Volunteers, you are at the heart of Ramblers.**

The volunteer sounding board and staff have been busy working away looking at the fundamentals of how Ramblers should help you to deliver our mission. We need to tell people support they can expect – how they'll be trained and indeed, how they will be managed. Yes, *managed*, because though leaders who have been doing it for 20 years and committee members who have been doing it for 25 years don't need much management, we hear everywhere we go that Areas and Groups need more volunteers and if we are to recruit new volunteers we need to be ready to let people know what it's like; what will happen; can they get training.. We'll be bringing a new framework for volunteering to the General Council in Liverpool in March.

We've been piloting volunteer development days where we bring volunteers together for a range of training and development activities and a chance to meet each other and staff and trustees. These seem to have gone down very well and we'll be carrying them on over the next year.

## **12 Questions and Discussions**

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

There were several wide ranging discussions which will be grouped and summarised below

#### **IT and Website Development**

Use of Apps to give easy access while out walking including reporting path problems

Addition of post codes to start points in Walks Finder to help with the use of in car navigation systems It was however noted that post codes can be useless in country areas due to the large area covered by a code but most car GPS units will accept latitude/longitude input which will be much more useful so an automatic conversion would be very simple to implement.

*There has been no development of the Walksfinder. There has however been significant investment in the online routes projects and the ramblers.org.uk content management system was replaced at the beginning of the year.*

#### **CRM System of new member notifications**

The present system provides weekly updates to Group Membership Secretaries for new and reinstated members but not for transferred in members. This has the effect that a member transferring in will receive no documentation (welcome letter, walks programme, area newsletter, etc. until the monthly report is received. This could mean a delay of 5 to 6 weeks after the actual transfer before they receive anything,

*Will take this back and investigate.*

*PMN This will require some further development work which will need to be prioritised along with existing IT activities and projects.*

**Automatic notification of direct debit failure**

This does not appear to be working correctly as we are aware of several members who have not renewed when they thought they had having received the new membership card and in some cases this has meant that we have lost the member permanently.

It was suggested that members whose payment has not been received should be contacted by phone where possible to check whether this was intentional and, if so, the reasons why they haven't renewed.

**Recruitment and Retention**

Where do the Ramblers see the potential membership growth opportunities and have we considered targeting specific groups.

It was noted that the vast majority of members don't walk with the Groups so it must be assumed that they joined because of the work which the Ramblers do in other areas related to the general walking environment. In this respect it was considered that although Walk Magazine is now a very good read for general information about walking and walking gear there was very little in it about the work of volunteers and the work we all do in keeping paths open. A section of a few pages related to that would be a very useful addition perhaps incorporating some parts from Footpath Worker.

*The perceived problem is not with recruitment but retention where the main reasons given were the types of walks or the days are not suitable and the pressures of work.*

Would it be possible for the relevant Area and Group Officers to receive anonymised statistics from that data to assist in the recruitment and retention at group level

*This will be investigated as a possibility*

**13 Votes of thanks**

Keith Seymour thanked Paul Strong for his interesting talk and his responses to the wide range of question. He also thanked the volunteers from West Dorset Group for organising the venue, morning walks and the excellent refreshments.

Signed ..... Date.....