

## THE RAMBLERS BEDFORDSHIRE AREA

### MINUTES OF THE AREA AGM HELD AT HOUGHTON CONQUEST VILLAGE HALL ON SATURDAY 30<sup>th</sup> NOVEMBER 2019 AT 1.45pm

**Present:** David Binns, Sue Cook, Jan Wolfarth, Gwen Hills, Wendy Ley, Andrea Deeley, Nigel Nauth-Mist, Ted Herbert, Linda Hartley, Mike Shephard, Helen Shephard, Roger McLeod, Stephanie Wilson, Ruth McNally, Marius Gmared, John Le Warne, Margaret Sawyer, Andy Knight, Gill Wilkes (N.Beds), Anne Griffiths, Tony Wilkins, Roy Carter, Linda Tongue, Nick Markham.

**Apologies for Absence:** Jeff Petts, Gillian Wilkes (IVG), Sandra Kelsey, Ramita Dey, Rita Tarron, Barry Ingram, Keven Barrett.

**Area Chairperson's Welcome and Report:** Nick opened the meeting and thanked North Beds group committee for organising the event and everyone for attending. He also thanked the speaker Richard from Norfolk Ramblers for his interesting talk on digital information, Ramblers new websites and membership. Nick said 2019 has seen some ups and downs but not so many changes as 2018 when we had to set up GDPR.

#### **Positive Aspects for 2019:**

- Numbers of members are growing across all our groups
- Numbers on walks are growing across all our groups
- The number of walk leaders is growing
- Participants on our training courses are growing

This growth is also helped by our wonderful growing number of volunteers and Nick thanked everyone for that. Everybody here today is a volunteer! This year we have organised walking holidays, coach trips, walks in London and a bingo night! We have participated in two county festivals and the Bedford Walking Festival which was very successful and our tenth anniversary. There are four Bedfordshire groups and we walk on six days of the week. Nick said he recognised some familiar faces from the training courses. We had two participants in the Ramblers road show and some people have been on the free first aid courses offered by Ramblers. Andy and Andrea have helped on the training courses. Nick plans to run three training courses in 2020. Regarding volunteers, Nick said only 64 are registered and he needs to know who is a volunteer and put details on the new system

Looking ahead plans are in place for walks over the Christmas period and Ramblers are rolling out their new IT structure and Ramblers App so lots to look forward to. However, Nick acknowledged the sad loss to the Area and Leighton Buzzard group of Joh Hartley, Peter Clarke and Diana Phelps who all made a valuable contribution to walking in Bedfordshire.

**Adoption of Minutes from Area AGM 2018:** Everyone had a copy of these as produced in the Area AGM booklet and Nick encouraged everyone present to read them. Nigel Nauth-Mist proposed, and Andrea Deeley seconded them as a true and accurate record of the meeting.

**Matters Arising from Minutes:** None.

**Matters of Urgency:** None.

#### **Reports:**

**Treasurer:** As Kevin Barrett was absent Nick read this report. This year's figures show a deficit of income over expenditure of £930.99 compared with a deficit of £1,058.83 for 2018. This was the result of the continued plan to reduce area reserves to an acceptable level, in accordance with instructions from Ramblers CO for groups and areas to hold a maximum of 80% of annual expenditure in reserve, subject to funding for special projects, i.e. Bedford

Walking Festival. Our reserves are in line with requirements and our 2019-20 budget has been modified accordingly.

Beds Walking Festival showed a surplus for the year of £660. This means we broke even as expenses claims were submitted for £522. However, as these were paid after September they are not included in the accounts at this time. Once all expenses were settled there was an overall surplus of £1,176.33 to carry forward. Over the last three years £3,180 has been received from local authorities to support the Walking Festival together with some funding from Bedford Borough Council which is not included in our accounts. There is no guarantee however that this funding will be available for the 2020 Walking Festival given the significant funding cuts facing all local authorities. We need to carry the reserve forward because of this.

The net budgeted expenditure for 2018/19 was £4,959, based on submissions from groups for their requirements and estimates from the Area officers for the remainder. After National Office funding and a contribution from the Area's reserves, the net budget became a deficit of £1,359 and this was approved by National Office without query.

Nick asked if there were any questions regarding the Treasurer's report and there were not. Nick thanked Kevin and all the local group Treasurers for their hard work.

**Footpath Committee Area Chairman:** Robert Tarron read his report and said following our objection to the closure of Stewartby FP5 at the level crossing on the East-West railway, Network Rail decided to withdraw their proposal and by agreement, we also withdrew our objection. In February he attended a "Rights of Way" workshop to discuss the proposed developments in the Brogborough-Lidlington-Marston Moretaine corridor and both he and Bruce Blott were alarmed by the proposal of 5000 new dwellings within the area. The local plan had described the development as a few new villages with open spaces between but the plans they were shown indicated very narrow gaps. They expressed their concerns and outlined their expectations with respect to footpaths within the development area. John Le Warne has objected to rights of way changes at Prologis Park. Central Beds Council are seeking planning permission to construct a new link road between M1 J.11A and A6 north of Luton and we have comments on their proposals.

Central Beds Council are pushing ahead with duelling the A421 between Milton Keynes and M1 J. 13. Luton Borough Council have introduced a sustainable walking strategy and 'Green Wheel' for both walking and cycling with 450 paths being noted so now the huge job of creating a definitive map can begin. The present government deadline for this is 1<sup>st</sup> January 2026 and most councils and local authorities will find it difficult to meet this. For us 2035 is a deadline.

This year we have seen far more planning applications for housing developments all over the county and this has/will affect many villages. The pace of change seems to be increasing all the time and we always need more Footpath Officers. However, Bob wished to congratulate and thank everyone for their hard work and enthusiasm over the past 12 months.

**Membership Secretary:** Membership numbers as supplied by Ramblers HO show a year on year increase in the Area. We now have more than 800 members, keep up the good work everyone.

**Publicity Officer:** Barry wrote in his annual report that the role of Publicity officer is probably the second most important position after the Programme Co-ordinator, as the role is to raise awareness of the Ramblers as an organisation and the activities of the Area and groups as a whole. Barry has produced flyers promoting the Christmas Festival of Walks, posters promoting our training courses and a leaflet giving information generally about the groups, training and footpath work. This work is on-going, and help is always needed with programme distribution, placement of posters, the Festival website, of which Nick Markham

does an excellent job. Thanks also to Jeff Petts who spoke on Three Counties Radio and we had an article with photos on the BBC Look East website.

We need to continue raising awareness of footpath activities and appropriate articles being sent to local newspapers. Our RIPPLE activities are usually sent to the appropriate parish/town council and local landowners who do show their appreciation. Other ways to publicise can be networking and meeting with borough and local Council Officers. Everything that raises the profile of Rambles and our groups and activities.

**Secretary:** Vacant.

**Membership Secretary:** Vacant.

**Bedfordshire Walking Festival 2019 Report:** The 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary was a great success with superb weather and good input from our groups, leaders and other organisations. To encourage new ideas for this year we set up hubs for a day in Woburn, Ampthill and Priory County Park. Generally, this year saw higher attendances on many of the walks compared to other years. Many thanks to Nick Markham for updating and refreshing the website. Greensands Challenge bookings came in late but enabled coaches to be filled. Red tee shirts with a 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary motif were provided to leaders. Next year 2020 will be our 11<sup>th</sup> Anniversary and will take place from 5<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> September.

**Election of Area Officers:** The following were elected en bloc, proposed by John Le Warne and seconded by Stephanie Wilson.

<b>Chair</b>	<b>Nick Markham</b>
<b>Treasurer</b>	<b>Roy Carter</b>
<b>Footpath Secretary</b>	<b>Mike Shephard</b>
<b>Publicity Officer</b>	<b>Barry Ingram</b>
<b>Training Officer</b>	<b>Nick Markham</b>
<b>Secretary</b>	<b>Vacant</b>
<b>Membership Secretary</b>	<b>Vacant</b>

**Any Other Business:** Volunteers needed for Ramblers General Council at Bristol on 4/5<sup>th</sup> April 2020. Nick will attend and will need one more person. Ask/tell Nick if you want to attend by mid -January 2020.

Richard the guest speaker from Ramblers spoke about membership and said we need to make new people feel welcome, especially for their first walk. Say how friendly we are and follow up with an email. Regarding data information, we need to try and link all groups online, so everyone knows what is happening. We already do that under the heading of Bedfordshire Ramblers. Ramblers have bought into a third-party website. We need a central hub for volunteers to communicate with one another. He spoke about some problems on Ramblers website making it tricky to find information. GDPR is now a six-page document instead of the original 23. Ramblers App on smartphone. There is a digital membership course. You can search for any walk whether in groups or alone. All walks on the App are for anyone to use, download to your phone. Lots of different discounts and special offers, including 10% off holiday accommodation! Ramblers need to know how many people go on walks and which walks are popular, details, length, time etc. A compulsory paragraph for people who do not want to register. Handy to take pen and paper on a walk to record new peoples' contact details then register them when you get home. All the local databases are being replaced by digital and this is a three-year project with Norfolk being the first. Let HO know who your volunteers are. Nick said a lot of volunteers are not registered. Ramblers insurance covers everyone on a walk. We need to create a new log in for 'Inside Hub' and one for the App. Member Path Watch App allows anyone to have a photo and it will be sent to Ramblers. Problems with most County Councils as they do not look at the path watch data.

**Date and Venue for 2020 Area AGM.** This will be hosted by IVG on 29<sup>th</sup> November 2020.  
Venue to be decided.

**The meeting finished at 2.40pm.**