



## **The Ramblers - Chesterfield and North East Derbyshire Group**

### **Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on Saturday 30th November 2019 at 10:00am in the Public Library Lecture Theatre, Chesterfield.**

**Present** Committee members: David Moore (Chairman), Paul Peters (Treasurer), John Graham (Secretary), Geoff Birkinshaw (Membership Secretary), Val Fenton (Programme Coordinator), Mel Hardy (Footpath Officer), Joyce Denton, Michael Fenton, Gavin Johns, Colin Pick, Mike Sims, Barry Whipp together with 22 members. (Full list of attendees available from the Secretary)

#### **1. Apologies for absence:**

Bill Eyre

#### **2. Minutes of last Annual General Meeting held on Sat 24th November 2018.**

Acceptance proposed by **Gavin Johns**, seconded by **Mel Hardy**.

#### **3. Matters Arising.**

None

#### **4. Chairman's Address and Report**

As usual, it's a mixed bag to report.

We've maintained a fairly strong programme of walks throughout the year, even though we struggle a bit to find enough leaders in some areas.<sup>[L]</sup><sup>[SEP]</sup> Our long and medium Wednesday car walks thrive, but the public transport ones have often resorted to being fortnightly.

We need a good weekend programme to attract walkers who work during the week. Saturday and Sunday car walks have continued but, owing to organiser illness, the long Saturday walks which attracted Ramblers from other groups fell by the wayside this summer.<sup>[L]</sup><sup>[SEP]</sup> Kath Collins has seen support for visually impaired walks dip and without sufficient volunteers the programme may disappear.

The fortnightly Monday programme of six mile walks is popular with some and was even joined by ITN News in October, seeking our comments on a Christmas general election.<sup>[L]</sup><sup>[SEP]</sup> In the midst of some very wet November weather it's useful to mention that summer evening walks have continued, usually with some refreshment at the end.

The shorter 'step' walks seeking to cater for a more relaxed way of walking for both our members and anyone wishing to promote themselves from the 'walking for health' programmes

have had varied support.

I will leave footpath maintenance to Mel Hardy, except to say that support and co-ordination with the County Council has continued to be disappointing.<sup>[...]</sup>They blame budget cuts and point to other services taking precedence. We acknowledge their situation but note that other councils do appear to be doing better on rights of way, not least in their support for volunteer working.

Many thanks to our membership secretary, Geoff Birkinshaw, who is retiring this year after four years in the job.<sup>[...]</sup>We recruit new members each month, but for various reasons, we lose them as well.<sup>[...]</sup>Group numbers have fallen by 10% this year from 409 in January to 373 now.

Our thanks are due to those who continue to support the Ramblers' aims, even when they have ceased to be active walkers.

The group is not alone in suffering a membership decline and it is something that both ourselves and Ramblers Central Office have to address.<sup>[...]</sup>The future may look brighter. There is an increasing need for people to get active, whether because of pollution / climate change, traffic congestion, or a growing obesity problem.

We know from our support of local walking festivals that there is a strong desire to get out walking.

Monthly committee meetings in Brampton have had added support in recent months, and many thanks to all who attend and perform the background work without which the group could not exist. Our thanks go to John Graham, who is now retiring from his role as Group Secretary and giving someone else the opportunity to shape how the group progresses.

Thanks in fact go to everyone in the group, whether they walk regularly or infrequently, in good weather or bad ; whether they organise or lead walks ; whether they help maintain our rights of way; whether they help to keep us in touch with the two Ramblers areas (SYNED and Derbyshire) with which we are involved; whether they ensure we keep financially solvent ; whatever they do to contribute to the Ramblers.

This will be my last AGM report as, like John and Geoff, I'm stepping aside after an enjoyable few years as Chair to give the opportunity for another group member. I'll still be around if required however in a 'publicity' role, whether it's the website, social media, or newsletters.

**DAVID MOORE**

**Chairman**

## **5. Adoption of Chairman's Annual Report**

Proposed Gavin Johns, Seconded Tricia Graham

## **6. Presentation of Accounts and Balance Sheet for year ending 30th September 2019**

I am pleased to present the accounts of the Group for the year ending 30th September 2019.

The Group had a surplus this year of approx. £767 on an income of approx. £3,639.

We collected approx. £509 from our Chesterfield Walking Festival and other walks and donated £255 to both PDMRO and the DLRAA.

We currently have £431 in our General Account.

We have £1,772 in the Round Walk fund for use on the maintenance of the round walk, its badges and leaflets.

We received a legacy from Betty Gibbs (deceased) of £1,000 which was used to purchase 3 signposts from P&NFPS.

The Group received £1,650 from the Area, 75% of the amount originally budgeted for the year.

This year our Group, based on our current budget estimates will be asking for approx. £2200.

We will be contributing £376 from our own funds in line with The Ramblers Reserve Policy.

Our thanks are due to our independent examiner Mr Andrew Milne.

**Paul Peters**  
**Hon. Group Treasurer**

Accounts tabled separately

## **7. Footpath Report**

### **Footpath Committee Secretaries Report.**

For the footpath committee 2019 has been a tough year, despite our best efforts, no progress has been made with respect to volunteering. Of course this has not dented our enthusiasm for protecting the network, the committee has worked tirelessly to ensure that footpaths are not built over or blocked as a result of the plethora of planning applications that have been submitted over the year.

We have developed an excellent line of communication for footpath groups in the Derbyshire area using the Derbyshire Footpath Secretaries meetings. Slowly we are beginning to establish a united front which we hope will assist in our dealings with central office DCC, BDC and CBC.

### Footpath Problem Reporting

During the 12 months period 1<sup>st</sup> November 2018 to the 31<sup>st</sup> October 2019, 306 separate reports of RoW problems were submitted. In the same period 117 problems have been resolved or have remedial actions agreed or have been rejected. The figure of 306 compares favorably with the 320 submitted during 2018. Although a small reduction is indicated it is considered to be insignificant. To achieve a significant improvement in the footpath network we need a much larger reduction in the numbers of problems identified. Of more importance is the fact that

these statistics are generated based on reports from just 14 people. We accept, of course, that other individuals may have submitted reports that we are unaware of. Unfortunately these figures indicate that I have failed at one of my objectives for 2019, i.e., that of “**getting more members involved in the reporting of path problems**”.

Despite extensive efforts we are still at an impasse regarding organized volunteering to maintain footpaths and RoW. There may however be hope, an independent report prepared on behalf of DCC has indicated, as one of its recommendations, that a volunteer organisers post should be reinstated.

Although we are still at an impasse regarding volunteering, we would emphasize that we are continuing to do everything possible to protect our local path network on behalf of all members and the general public.

### **Footfall.**

We have continued to monitor footfall, (we offer sincere thanks to all those who have assisted in this endeavor). Between January 1 and 11 November 2019, the group has walked an incredible 27919 miles, (last year's figure was 24084). This was achieved despite a fall in the number of members in our group. This is only a snapshot, we have complete information for Saturday car walks, Wednesday car walks, Wednesday evening walks, and Ashover walks as led by Richard Felton. Information on the remainder of the walks is incomplete. These are actual miles walked with no averages or estimates.

As footpath secretary I feel recording these figures to be of importance. Of course it is not essential to our endeavors, indeed not even considered necessary by most. However we are constantly reminded and aware of the fact that governments and controlling organisation only appear to respond to facts and figures. The most important fact is that when we are fighting for preservation or improvements we can conclusively prove that the footpath network is being intensively used and for the best of reasons. Improving and enriching the lives off all who are prepared to participate in walking our wonderful and yes amazing local countryside.

As ever I would like to record my sincere thanks, to all members of the committee, the group who support our volunteering efforts, those who contribute footpath reports and those that have taken the time to provide details of mileages walked, for all their hard work during 2018/19. Indeed I extend these thanks to all members; it is important to remember that the very act of walking a path helps to preserve it for the future.

### **Diversions Orders and Modifications.**

During the year the group commented on and monitored aspects relating to Modification Orders and Diversions as follows.

Type	2019	2018
Planning Applications	32	
Consultations and Outline Applications	13	
Confirmations	10	6
Orders Sealed		
Creation Orders	2	
Stopping up Orders		2
Appeals	1	

We responded to the majority of the submissions, requesting preservation of existing footpaths and the inclusion of new access paths for major building developments. This latter is to ensure residents on new housing estates are encouraged to access and use the footpath network. We

are currently communicating on three applications where footpaths have been built over, trying to promote outcomes that will be beneficial to walkers and landowners. It is encouraging to note that the more recent submissions from DCC, BDC, and Chesterfield have been more complete with respect to information provided. We believe this to be, in part, to our efforts in this area of the planning process.

The submission of planning applications appears to be on the increase, it is essential therefore that all our members be as vigilant as possible when walking. Any indication of blocked or unofficially diverted paths due to building operations should be reported to the committee as quickly as possible. This increased activity, associated with building, further emphasises the need for local knowledge or “footpath wardens”. Footpath committee members cannot be everywhere, if you are willing to help in this area then Mr. Mike Sims is championing this particular aspect of our activities.

We now communicate regularly with P&NFS on matters relating to planning, allowing CNEDRA and P&NFS to present a common front.

### **The Future.**

Although we have seen changes in 2019 our objectives for the future remain similar to those for 2018.

During 2019/20 we shall be focusing on-

- 1) Reinstating the volunteering work in a workable form using a national template.
- 2) **Continuing efforts relating to Ploughing and Cropping**, i.e., the reduction in the number of paths ploughed and the reinstatement of paths where ploughing is difficult to avoid.
- 3) Recording and claiming of Lost Ways.
- 4) Getting more members involved in the reporting of path problems, e.g., vegetation, broken stiles, fallen trees, electric fences, ploughing and cropping, to name just a few.
- 5) To continue canvassing to get local footpath wardens for all the parishes in North East Derbyshire. We are nearly there.

Any assistance we are given by individual members in these endeavors will be greatly appreciated.

We wish you all the best for the coming year, please be assured that the Footpath Group will be doing as much as possible to ensure you enjoy your rambles without let or hindrance.

**Mel Hardy.**

**Footpath Secretary**

## **8. Election of Officers**

- i) **Paul Peters** has agreed to carry on as Treasurer. This was accepted by the meeting.
- ii) **John Graham** retired as Secretary at this meeting after 4 years in the role. **John Graham** proposed **Barbara Milton** to take over the role, which she was happy to do. The motion was seconded by **Mel Hardy**
- iii) **David Moore** retired as Chairman at this meeting after 8 years in the role. **Edna Robinson** proposed **Isobel McCormick** to take over the role, which she was happy to do. The motion was seconded by **Tricia Graham**

## 10. Committee Members and Unfilled Posts

**David Moore** agreed to carry out the roles of Membership Secretary and Publicity Secretary, although immediately after the meeting it was agreed to that **Barbara Milton** would carry out the role of Membership Secretary as well as Secretary.

The roles of Area Delegates to represent the group at SYNED Area Council, and of Social Secretary are still outstanding. A request was made for volunteers into these roles.

It was reiterated that members would be welcome at the monthly committee meetings.

## 11. Election of Accounts Examiner.

Andrew Milne was now stepping down from the role and our thanks go out to him. A replacement would have to be found in the coming months

## 12. Any Other Business

- (i) **David Blackburn** proposed a vote of thanks to all retiring officers, this was seconded all.
- (ii) **Kath Collins** requested that members give their support for the Visually Impaired Group as without new Guides the group was in danger of folding. There are plenty of VIP members who want to walk but new members to the group have to be refused as the number of guides Kath can call upon are not sufficient. There needs to be a better ratio of 1 to 1 between walkers and guides in case of emergencies, Kath would be grateful if the word be put about to the other groups to ask for volunteers. The walks take place monthly and are about 5 miles in length taking place in the peak district and on trails. There is a conception that the walks take place on local footpaths but this is wrong, guides need to be aware of the terrain being covered and any height obstacles making their observations known to the walkers. Any one volunteering would have a contribution made towards fuel costs as the walkers would need picking up and returning

## 14. Date and Time of next AGM

To be discussed at the next committee meeting but the consensus was that the AGM should be held in October/November after the accounts have been finalised. The exact date would be dependant upon the Library venue being available.

*Following the meeting there was a splendid presentation carried out by Mel Hardy of photographs taken on various walks throughout the year, this brought back many memories. Our thanks to Mel and other members who contributed by forwarding their photographs to Mel.*