

Dear Member

I write to update you on recent developments and our hopes for the future. The last few months have been extremely difficult for Ramblers and also a very sad time with the departure of staff members and uncertainty over the future of our Scottish operations. Throughout this, I have been immensely heartened by the goodwill and strong support that has come from fellow Ramblers, the general public and politicians across the spectrum.

The budget crisis

The credit crunch has had a massive impact on Ramblers, with severe cuts in legacy and investment income, along with reduced grant support. Fortunately membership and income from raffles has remained strong and provides the bedrock for future planning.

The Ramblers Board, at its meeting on 30 May, decided to cut expenditure by around £1 million, including a cut of about £300,000 for Ramblers Scotland. On behalf of Ramblers Scotland, I told the Board that the proportion of the cuts imposed on Ramblers Scotland were completely unacceptable and that the Board decision was taken without a full understanding of the impact on our operational effectiveness, reputation and influence in Scotland. Over many years Ramblers Scotland has grown slowly and steadily, using mainly Ramblers core funds and some generated finance, all within budget. When 5 of our 7 staff left in early July, a total of 43 years of collective experience was lost.

Looking Ahead

We must, however, look ahead. It may be of some consolation that the Board, at its 20 September meeting, recognised the need to make some adjustments to its earlier decision, including a modest increase in Ramblers Scotland budget. Our office in Milnathort will now remain at least until the end of 2010. The Board also discussed calls from Scottish members for greater autonomy for Ramblers Scotland and recognised the need for a review of the organisation's governance. This should be the focus for our discussions at next year's Scottish Council, on 27 February in Stirling, allowing proposals to go forward to the General Council in April. There are several options, from full independence to various types of federal structure which would still maintain our presence within the wider Ramblers family. The challenge is to decide what is the best option and how can we make the process of change as amicable as possible.

Our priorities and funding needs

Last May, our Scottish Committee approved the future Vision Statement for Ramblers Scotland (see www.ramblers.org.uk/scotland), based on the discussion of the draft document presented to Scottish Council. We believe this is still an excellent strategy and our priorities include:

- Celebrating the Ramblers 75th anniversary by promoting increased protection and better path provision along the Scottish coast.
- Working with the Scottish Government and other partners to get people walking, fit and active as a key legacy of the Glasgow Commonwealth Games.
- Working with access authorities to safeguard the right to roam.
- Helping Groups to diversify their walk programmes so that everyone, of whatever age, can find good walks and good company.

We need to raise funds to deliver this programme and our target is £150,000 over the next few months. Every member in Ramblers Scotland can help by sending a cheque to our office in Milnathort, made out to Ramblers Scotland, or phoning the office to make a debit/credit card payment, or going onto the Ramblers website at: www.ramblers.org.uk/scotland, clicking **DONATE NOW** and ensuring that you write Scotland Appeal in the 'What prompted your donation today?' box.

Our staff and office

Finally, a word about our staff. I am absolutely delighted that Dave Morris, our long serving Director, is still at the helm. Having overcome some family health problems, he is never one to miss a challenge and will be taking leave in October to tackle a Himalayan mountain in the Everest area with his son, Calum. Angela Charlton our project fundraiser is responsible for raising funding for Ramblers Scotland and Ramblers Cymru. Within the next couple of weeks we expect to appoint a Ramblers Scotland Development Officer, based at the office in Milnathort, whose remit will cover a wide spectrum of policy, campaigning, fundraising and member support. Meanwhile, I am pleased to report that Kareen Robertson and Helen Todd have returned to work with us on a temporary basis and their expertise is invaluable.

There are many challenges ahead but, with your support, we can all work together to build a successful future for Ramblers Scotland. Let's go for it!

With best wishes



Dennis Canavan
Convener
Ramblers Scotland

P.S. All donations received will be restricted to the Ramblers Scotland fund.

On the matter of fund-raising, here is a special offer. I have recently had my autobiography, 'Let the People Decide', published by Birlinn and have negotiated a deal whereby Ramblers Scotland will get 20% of the retail price of every sale when the purchaser orders the book by phoning 0845 370 0067 and quoting the code LTP8. The retail price is £16.99 which means that Ramblers Scotland will get £3.40 for every such sale. The offer is open to anyone, so please tell all your friends, Ramblers or otherwise. The book is not just for political anoraks. There is even a special chapter in about the right to roam!