

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL MEETING OF GENERAL COUNCIL HELD AT 1 CLINK STREET, LONDON ON 17 APRIL 2021

The AGM was held as a limited physical meeting with Kate Ashbrook (chair) and Michael Penny (honorary treasurer) in the Ramblers' office at Clink Street. Council members were invited to attend the meeting by Zoom videoconference.

1 Welcome and introduction

Kate Ashbrook, chair of the board of trustees, welcomed members of General Council to the videoconference meeting. She said that it was not the meeting which had been hoped for and she was sad not to be meeting Council members in Birmingham as had been planned. She and Michael Penny were in the Ramblers new office in Clink Street where they were being supported by staff members Cheryl Lamb and Simon Kellas. She thanked in particular Simon for all his work in the lead-up to the meeting and today at the meeting. She also welcomed Julie Cribb of the LDWA, Rob Owen, the new chair of Ramblers Cymru, Janet Davis, who would be taking the minutes, and candidates for the trustee elections.

Kate explained how voting would be conducted during the meeting. Each Council member had been assigned a unique voting code which would be used for confidential voting via a voting website managed by Mi-Voice, a third-party, independent company that specialised in managing electoral processes. This would provide the necessary guarantee of confidentiality and impartiality. A member of Mi-Voice staff would support this process during the meeting and the results would be sent directly to Simon Kellas (member of staff), Michael Penny (honorary treasurer) and Janet Davis (independent volunteer). For motions and other general business Zoom polling would be used as a quick and anonymous way of managing those votes normally decided by a show of hands in the room.

Kate said that 2021 was an important year for Ramblers since it was the 70th anniversary of the creation of the first national park in England, the Peak District in 1951. Ramblers had been very much involved in the campaign to create national parks, and that campaigning spirit was still at the heart of the organisation.

She welcomed Ramblers president, Stuart Maconie, to the meeting and thanked him for the tremendous work he had been doing on behalf of the organisation, particularly through the publicity which he had attracted on TV, radio and social media. Stuart said he hoped that this was the last time Council would have to meet remotely but he thought that the experience of the last year was an important moment for the Ramblers. The pandemic had taken a terrible toll, but many people had realised the benefits of walking. People who wouldn't normally consider themselves to be walkers had been making use of urban green spaces and towpaths, acknowledging the social and therapeutic value of those places: Ramblers would be able to reach out to those people. He thanked everyone for their support and urged them to keep up the good work.

2 Approval of the minutes of General Council 2020

Council approved the minutes of General Council 2020.

3 Election of president and vice presidents

Stuart Maconie, the current president, has been nominated for a fifth annual term. No other nominations were received. Mr Maconie was elected *nem con*.

No new nominations for the position of vice president were received. The following current elected vice presidents were proposed for re-election *en bloc* at the meeting: Sir Richard

Lloyd Jones, Jonathan Kipling, Cath MacKay, Alan Mattingly, Dave Morris, Malcolm Petyt, Brian Reader, Paddy Tipping, Keith Wadd. All vice presidents were elected *nem con*.

The following past presidents automatically remain vice presidents: Kate Ashbrook, Andrew Bennett, Julia Bradbury, Chris Hall, Mike Harding, Chris Smith, Janet Street-Porter.

4 Annual report and accounts

The chair invited the chief executive and senior leadership team to address council. In doing so she thanked all members of staff for their hard work and dedication during the past year.

The chief executive, Tanya Curry, spoke to the annual report. She said that it had been a year like no other, and that she had no idea of what was to come when she had been appointed as interim chief executive at the beginning of 2020. The organisation had sought to work together across all three nations in a very different world. They had needed to be agile and responsive to external circumstances, seeking efficiencies and making the organisation relevant. The need to work from home meant new ways of working were essential and other changes included the move to new, smaller offices. However, everyone had pulled together to help fulfil the Ramblers mission which was to create a country where everyone had freedom to enjoy the outdoors on foot and to benefit from the experience. The priorities to take this forward were:

- Growing awareness and engagement with Ramblers and what we do.
- Growing our membership and income.
- Commencing the culture change required to make the charity an inclusive, engaging and diverse organisation.

Tom Platt, director of advocacy and engagement, outlined the work of his team on the first priority. Walking was more popular than ever and there was a need to capitalise on this by raising awareness and shifting perceptions of the Ramblers. It was time therefore to refresh how the organisation presented itself to make the Ramblers feel more contemporary, relevant and distinctive. To this end, later in the year there would be a new website and the branding of the organisation would be refreshed. *Don't Lose Your Way* had been the flagship campaign of the last year; thousands of volunteers, many of whom were not members, had taken part in the mapping exercise which had identified over 49,000 possible unrecorded rights of way and this had attracted much media interest with articles in The Times, The Guardian and an item on the One Show. The report *The grass isn't greener for everyone*, which showed the inequality of access, had also received good coverage in The Telegraph, The Guardian and The New Statesman, as part of the campaign to influence the content of the Environment Bill. In Scotland, we had celebrated the *Out There* awards which had been important in attracting the interest of 18-to 26-year-olds, encouraging young people to explore the great outdoors for the first time. Tom thanked both staff and volunteer teams for their hard work on these and other projects during the year.

Sarah Marfleet, director of membership and fundraising, said that Ramblers had weathered the pandemic storm in membership terms. Although membership had dropped to 97,314 in May and June 2020, it had grown again to 99,408 by the end of the year and although there had been a further drop with the January lock-down there would be new opportunities for recruitment in the spring and summer. To support this, there would be several innovations and invitations. Membership products would be enhanced to appeal to more people, both through the led-walks programme and self-guided walks, with Apps to help in talking to the outside world. We would be inviting more people to join us, through sales and marketing and enhancing the local welcome. Alongside growing the community of supporters, united by our cause, there was also a need to diversify and grow other income sources e.g., new and existing financial supporters, crowd-funding opportunities, and a strong portfolio of

corporate partners, trusts and foundations. A further three-year commitment from the Peoples Postcode Lottery (PPL) meant there was much to be hopeful about.

Rachael Bayley, director of operations and volunteering, reported that Ramblers had 22,000 volunteers providing support for members and the walking public, including the 90,000 *Wellbeing Walks* participants (the new name for *Ramblers Walking for Health*). In the first three months of 2020, much new training had been supplied e.g. first aid training and walks leadership. Throughout the pandemic, communication and support for volunteers had been crucial, with a 400% increase in emails to the volunteer support team, as they disseminated information about the lockdown regulations. To be able to supply that information, there had been much behind-the-scenes liaison with all three governments, outdoor organisations and sports bodies. A survey of volunteers in July had revealed that 84% of respondents considered the Ramblers to be a good place to volunteer and work was being undertaken to improve the training and support for all volunteers. *Assemble*, the new volunteer website, continued to evolve, providing news and advice, with all volunteer resources, including toolkits, being available on the document hub. New GB-wide training materials, including on walk leadership, are being made available on-line. 1,057 volunteers had already joined virtual training sessions and a new *Walks Manager* was being developed with a walking group of volunteers. Clusters were being developed as a means for Areas to network together and with staff to exchange information via virtual meetings. There was a great strength in the collaboration between staff, volunteers and external partners.

Michael Penny, honorary treasurer, introduced the financial report and accounts, which had been approved by the board of trustees, the auditor having declared a clean audit opinion. Surplus funds had increased because expenditure had dropped and income had increased over the last year. The increase in funds had resulted from PPL funding and from legacies, the decrease in expenditure level had arisen because of reduced activity at Area and Group during the pandemic, although clearly a reduction in activity was disappointing in terms of the charity's work. Membership income, including gift aid, had increased, despite fluctuating numbers, because of increases in gift aid. Legacy income was also good, rising to almost £1.8m, from 52 legacies, with a single legacy amounting to £400,000. Many thanks were due to those who had remembered the Ramblers in their wills. PPL funding was also steady, with between £2.6m and £2.9m being awarded in each of the last four years. In difficult circumstances savings had been achieved by making use of the government's furlough scheme, and by moving to smaller offices. The latter would result in a £160,000 pa savings in operating costs. Unrestricted reserves of £1.9m (three to four months of expenditure) meant that it had been possible to increase spending on rights of way and countryside protection work. It had been a strange year but overall, the organisation was in good financial shape. However, he remained mindful of the need to grow income. He thanked the finance team and Area and Group treasurers for their support throughout the year.

Questions on the annual report and accounts

The chair said that several questions had been received in advance of the meeting and were available, with answers, on the website. She invited further questions from the floor.

Charlie Bigley (Staffordshire Area) asked for a breakdown of the relative costs of the various IT systems, in particular *Assemble* and the Insight hub. Michael Penny said that he would review the question and answer initially given on the website.

Zac Kipling (Berkshire Area) asked about the *Walks Manager*. Rachael Bayley explained that this was the replacement for the Group Walks and Event Manager (GWEM).

5 Award of honorary life membership to Max Grant

Kate Ashbrook announced the award of honorary life membership to Max Grant in recognition of his long and dedicated service to the organisation since the 1970s. He had been active in Surrey and West Riding Areas and had spearheaded a campaign in the latter which had resulted in North Yorkshire County Council increasing its rights of way budget by £900,000. He had also served on the board of trustees before moving to Wales where he was now a vice president. Chris Hodgson, board of trustees and recently retired Welsh Council chair, said that Max's work in Wales had made a real impact on the ground. On Welsh Council Executive Committee, he had worked for devolution and on the development of the Ramblers Cymru constitution. He was also on the Cambrian Way Committee which had overseen the publication of a new book promoting the route and secured its waymarking. He had also been on the Rights of Way and Access Group and had been involved in developing policy on re-wilding and on renewable energy. He fought tirelessly for rights of way and access and made things happen on the ground. Max was a great walker himself, being a Munro bagger.

Margaret Thomas thanked Council, on behalf of Max, for this recognition and for these kind words, saying that Max's efforts had been to ensure that everyone could enjoy the countryside as he had done (he had tackled not only the Scottish peaks but also those in England, Wales and Ireland) and that he had been helped in his work by the cooperation of so many other like-minded staff and volunteers.

Kate Ashbrook thanked Max for all his work, describing him as one of our heroes.

6 Appointment of auditor

The firm of Crowe UK LLP was proposed by Chris Hodgson (board of trustees), seconded by Brian Reader (vice president), and approved by Council.

7 Election of the Chair of the board of trustees

There were two candidates for this position. Rebecca Dawson and Peter Rookes. As a result of the ballot Rebecca Dawson was elected.

Result

- | | |
|-------------------|----|
| 1. Rebecca Dawson | 94 |
| 2. Peter Rookes | 25 |

8 Election of the honorary treasurer

There was only one candidate, Michael Penny, so he was re-elected for a second three-year term. The chair thanked Michael for his work and support during the last three years.

9 Election of members of the board of trustees

There were eight candidates for three vacancies (each for a three-year term). These were Mark Chung, Ronnie Forbes, Kamaljit Healy, Anne Jones, Rajan Madhok, Malcolm McDonnell, Audrey Osler and Lucy Robinson. As a result of the ballot the following were elected: Malcolm McDonnell, Lucy Robinson and Ronnie Forbes.

Result

- | | |
|----------------------|----|
| 1. Malcolm McDonnell | 53 |
| 2. Lucy Robinson | 52 |
| 3. Ronnie Forbes | 49 |
| 4. Mark Chung | 48 |

5. Kamaljit Healy	48
6. Rajan Madhok	39
7. Audrey Osler	30
8. Anne Jones	24

The election of Rebecca Dawson as chair resulted in a vacancy for a two-year term on the Board. Ordinary member candidates who were unsuccessful in the 3-year ballot (who had indicated they were happy to do so) moved forward to a ballot for that place, along with Peter Rookes, who was eligible to stand for this vacancy. The candidates were Mark Chung, Kamaljit Healy, Peter Rookes, Anne Jones, Audrey Osler and Rajan Madhok. As a result of the ballot Mark Chung was elected.

Result

1. Mark Chung	28
2. Kamaljit Healy	25
3. Peter Rookes	18
4. Anne Jones	17
5. Audrey Osler	15
6. Rajan Madhok	12

Finally, because of the early retirement of an existing trustee, there was a vacancy for a one-year term on the board. Ordinary member candidates who were not successful in the 2-year ballot (who had indicated they were happy to do so), along with Kate Ashbrook, who was eligible to stand for the vacancy, moved forward to a ballot for that place. The candidates were Kate Ashbrook, Kamaljit Healy, Rajan Madhok, Peter Rookes, Anne Jones and Audrey Osler. As a result of the ballot, Kate Ashbrook was elected.

Result

1. Kate Ashbrook	66
2. Kamaljit Healy	11
3. Rajan Madhok	11
4. Peter Rookes	10
5. Anne Jones	7
6. Audrey Osler	5

10 Election of motions review committee members

There were six candidates for the five places on the motions review committee. These were John Esslemont, Elizabeth Lawie, Gwyn Lewis, Holly Matthews, Sylvia Popham and John Wainwright.

As a result of the ballot the following were elected: John Esslemont, Gwyn Lewis, Holly Matthews, Sylvia Popham and John Wainwright.

Result

1. Holly Matthews	89
2. Gwyn Lewis	82
3. John Wainwright	80
4. Sylvia Popham	78
5. John Esslemont	77
6. Elizabeth Lawie	60

Elizabeth Lawie was thanked for her long years of service on the committee.

11 Report of the motions review committee

Council noted the report of the Motions Review Committee on 2021 motions. The Committee was thanked for its work.

12 Open motions: review on actions from previous years

Council noted the report of this review and the following points were raised.

The chair said that motion 2018 [4] (Roadside signage of Public Rights of Way) was being left open because the situation needed to be monitored.

Brian Reader (Vice President) said that Surrey Area had been surprised to find that motion 2017 [6] (Funding for restoring Lost Ways) was being recommended for closure. Surrey Area had applied for funding and it had been refused. Tom Platt asked Brian Reader to send details of this refusal, saying that the *Don't Lose Your Way* was a priority and more announcements would be coming. The chair agreed that this motion should be kept open.

Des Garrahan (Inner London area) congratulated the board on having closed so many motions but expressed disappointment that little action appeared to have been taken on motion 2019 [7] (Diverse and representative General Council). He felt that Inner London Area had been disenfranchised in 2020 because the virtual GC meeting had been held during the working week and it did not appear that diversity data was being collected when Council members were appointed by Areas. He asked therefore what diversity data was being collected and when collection began. The chair said that the board was very aware of the need to improve diversity within the organisation and that information on gender balance and area turnover was being collected. Rachael Bayley said that work had begun to establish a baseline of diversity across the organisation (members, volunteers and staff). Improving diversity was one of the top three priorities for Ramblers.

Bernard Gill (Gloucestershire Area) asked about motion 2020 [6] (Minimum Width for Fenced Footpaths). He wanted to know if this was still being monitored and said he would like a progress report on both this and motion 2019 [5] (Erosion of riverbank paths).

Terry Pollard (Oxfordshire Area) reported that in respect of motion 2020 [3] (Opposition to the Oxford to Cambridge Expressway), the government had cancelled the road but it appeared that associated developments were still going ahead.

The chair reminded Council that just because a motion had been closed did not mean that work on the issue had ceased.

13 Motions submitted to General Council 2021

[1] REMOVAL OF PROCEDURES FOR TEMPORARY SUSPENSION FROM THE ARTICLES [Special resolution to amend the Articles; for a special resolution to be passed, 75% of those Council members voting must be in favour]

The following motion was proposed by Rebecca Dawson (board of trustees), and seconded by Malcolm McDonnell (board of trustees).

It is resolved by way of a special resolution that Article 15 of the Articles of Association be amended as follows.

Delete Article 15.4 and renumber the existing Article 15.3 as 15.4.

Insert the following as a new Article 15.3:

15.3 The *Board of Trustees* may determine policies and procedures to permit the temporary suspension of some or all of the rights and privileges, as defined in Article 17.1, of a *member* or *members*, when such temporary suspension is considered necessary to protect the lawful interests of *Ramblers*.

Insert the following additional paragraph at the end of the (new) Article 15.4:

The *Board of Trustees*, in its sole discretion, may specify a period of time during which an application for readmission by a *member* that has been expelled in accordance with this Article will not be considered for approval in accordance with Article 15.1.

In Article 15.5(e) replace “15.3” by “15.4”.

Delete Article 15.7.

92% of Council voted in favour of the motion and 8% abstained. The motion was carried.

[2] ACTION NEEDED TO INCREASE THE RAMBLERS MEMBERSHIP AND INFLUENCE

The following motion was proposed by Allen Pestell (South Yorkshire & North East Derbyshire Area) and seconded by Jeremy Kenyon (South Yorkshire & North East Derbyshire Area).

This General Council urges the Board of Trustees to increase its efforts to retain our current membership and recruit new members to the Ramblers. In recent years we have seen a loss of over 10,000 members. This loss cannot be overlooked if we wish to renew and sustain the organisation and ensure that the Ramblers is seen as relevant to current and future generations.

84% of Council voted in favour of the motion, 6% voted against, and 10% abstained. The motion was carried.

[3] CLUSTERS, COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE AND SPECIAL INTEREST GROUPS

The following motion was proposed by Alan Goffee (Essex Area) and seconded by Charles Shepherd (Lake District Area).

This General Council applauds the establishment of clusters, communities of practice and Special Interest Groups. As well as congratulating the Board of Trustees, the Senior Leadership Team and staff for this initiative and their continued commitment to change, Council urges the Board to evaluate the effectiveness of these new initiatives, consult with membership, extend their remit, resource them adequately and report back to General Council 2022.

Particularly in the case of the Special Interest Group concerned with directly elected Mayors, Council requests the Board to ensure that this group continues to meet following elections and expands its membership to include more Ramblers members from relevant Areas.

91% of Council voted in favour of the motion, 3% voted against and 6% abstained. The motion was carried.

[4] PRIORITISE IT DEVELOPMENT FOR SUPPORTING, ENCOURAGING AND RETAINING VOLUNTEERS

The following motion was proposed by Charlie Bigley (Staffordshire Area) and seconded by Geoff Mullett (Lincolnshire Area)

This General Council acknowledges the difficulty that Groups have in supporting, encouraging and retaining volunteers. To help address this, Council urges the Board of Trustees to prioritise those IT developments that directly assist the Groups. These will include help in

- managing their email distribution lists
- improving the information for membership secretaries
- logging into and running their own websites
- providing a programme of walks and coach rambles.

The following amendment was proposed by the motions review committee:

Insert “Areas and” before both occurrences of the word “Groups”.

The amendment was accepted by both the proposers and by Council.

The following amendment was proposed by Richard May (board of trustees) and seconded by Helen Tranter (board of trustees)

In the second sentence replace the words “prioritise those” with “consider.
In the third sentence replace the word “will” with “may”

The amendment was not accepted by the proposers. After debate, 45% of Council voted for the amendment, 47% voted against the amendment and 8% abstained. The amendment was lost.

The substantive motion reads:

This General Council acknowledges the difficulty that Areas and Groups have in supporting, encouraging and retaining volunteers. To help address this, Council urges the Board of Trustees to prioritise those IT developments that directly assist the Areas and Groups. These will include help in

- managing their email distribution lists
- improving the information for membership secretaries
- logging into and running their own websites
- providing a programme of walks and coach rambles.

71% of Council voted in favour of the motion, 21% against and 8% abstained. The motion, as amended, was carried.

[5] APPROVAL OF NEW FOOTPATH APPLICATIONS BY LOCAL COMMITTEES

The following motion was proposed by Dave Barraclough (Cheshire East Area) and seconded by Stephen Butterfield (Cheshire East Area):

This General Council is concerned about the administrative cost to Highway Authorities in England and Wales of processing applications for new rights of way, or amendments to existing rights of way. This will have the effect of reducing funding available for footpath maintenance work. Council therefore asks the Board of

Trustees to clarify that such applications should only be made in the name of Ramblers, or have any support from Ramblers, if approved in advance by the relevant Area or Group committee. Council further urges Areas and Groups to consider, before approving an application, whether there will be significant and sufficient benefits to the local footpath network.

The following amendment was proposed by Brian Reader (vice president) and seconded by Elliot Cairnes (Surrey Area):

Delete the first two sentences.

In the third sentence delete "Council therefore" and insert in its place "This General Council".

In the third sentence also delete "such applications" and insert in its place "applications for unrecorded rights of way, or amendments to existing rights of way, in England and Wales".

The amendment was not accepted by the proposers. After debate, 44% of Council voted in favour of the amendment, 40% against and 16% abstained. The amendment was carried.

The following amendment was proposed by Brian Reader (vice president) and seconded by Elliot Cairnes (Surrey Area):

Delete any reference to "footpath" and insert in its place "rights of way"

In the final sentence delete "will be" and insert in its place "are likely to be"

The amendment was accepted by the proposers and by Council.

The substantive motion reads:

This General Council asks the Board of Trustees to clarify that applications for unrecorded rights of way, or amendments to existing rights of way, in England and Wales should only be made in the name of Ramblers, or have any support from Ramblers, if approved in advance by the relevant Area or Group committee. Council further urges Areas and Groups to consider, before approving an application, whether there are likely to be significant and sufficient benefits to the local rights of way network.

47% of Council voted in favour of the motion, 47% against the motion and 6% abstained. In accordance with paragraph 22.1 of the Articles of Association, if the votes are level the chair does not have a casting vote, and as there was no simple majority (as required by Article 21.1) the *status quo* prevailed and this motion fell.

[6] POLICY ON RIGHT TO ROAM

The following motion was proposed by Keith Wadd (Vice President) and seconded by Mike Church (West Riding Area):

With a view to adopting a Right to Roam policy for England that is achievable and commands widespread support from members and the wider walking community, this General Council calls on the Board of Trustees to undertake a full review of the Ramblers' present position, including its response to the 2000 Countryside and Rights of Way Act, and the appropriateness of seeking to campaign for "off-path" walking in open countryside not covered by the Act.

21.5% of Council voted in favour of the motion, 75% against and 3.5% abstained. The motion was lost.

[7] DAMAGE TO RESTRICTED BYWAYS

The following motion was proposed by Peter James (Norfolk Area) and seconded by Julian White (Norfolk Area):

This General Council is concerned by the damage caused to restricted byways in England and Wales by the passage of motorised vehicles and calls upon the Board of Trustees to conduct a countrywide survey of the problem and make recommendations for action.

The following amendment was proposed by Edward Lifton (Avon Area) and seconded by Keith Weller (Avon Area):

Replace “and make recommendations for action” with “and consider making recommendations for action”

The amendment was accepted by the proposers and by Council.

The substantive motion reads:

This General Council is concerned by the damage caused to restricted byways in England and Wales by the passage of motorised vehicles and calls upon the Board of Trustees to conduct a countrywide survey of the problem and consider making recommendations for action.

24% of Council voted in favour of the motion, 65% against and 11% abstained. The motion was lost.

11 Closing remarks

The outgoing Chair, Kate Ashbrook, thanked all Council members for their cooperation in meeting in difficult circumstances, noting that some of the important issues aired that day might have been better dealt with as matters for discussion rather than as motions with the accompanying restrictions on debate. She also thanked Ramblers staff and her fellow Board members for their support both during the meeting and throughout the year and said that it was sad to be losing Peter Rookes and Chris Hodgson from the board. She had reached the end of her three years as Chair and believed that the organisation had come a long way over that time, making particular progress with the development of new IT systems and the *Don't Lose Your Way* campaign. She reminded Council that there were only 1,719 days left until the definitive-map cut-off date on 1 January 2026, although efforts were being made to get that provision amended. Other campaigning opportunities included seeking the inclusion of paths and access in the new agricultural subsidy regime and the local elections which provided the opportunity to lobby for paths and green spaces. There was much to be done to make Ramblers relevant to all walkers but we would walk forward together.

Kate said that the Ramblers had elected its first woman chair in 1995, and she was very pleased to be handing over to another woman chair, Rebecca Dawson, who was a great communicator and enthusiast for the Ramblers and who would be able to extend its reach and relevance. Kate would support her and do everything she could to make sure the Ramblers remained a fighting organisation.

The incoming chair, Rebecca Dawson, thanked Kate for her kind and inspiring words and thanked her trustees the significant amount time which they gave up for their board work. She thanked Kate for her leadership and said that she had left large walking boots to fill.

This was a time of significant challenges, not just those presented by the pandemic, but the pandemic had shown the need to adapt and to rise to opportunities. She also thanked those who had put themselves forward as candidates for the board, a diverse range of people with excellent skills, who would reach out to those who have discovered walking in the last 12 months. There was much to be done, but the Ramblers was moving in the right direction and the board was behind the proposed priorities.

Rebecca finished by thanking everyone for their patience during the videoconference and for their contributions. She offered particular thanks to Simon Kellas and the staff team for the organisation of the event. She hoped everyone would be able to meet in person for General Council 2022.