

**MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL MEETING OF
GENERAL COUNCIL HELD AT THE UNIVERSITY OF READING
30TH MARCH-1ST APRIL 2007**

ATTENDANCE LIST

* denotes a member of Council (voter)

PRESIDENT

Chris Smith*

VICE-PRESIDENT

Andrew Bennett*
Geoff Eastwood*
Chris Hall*
Richard Lloyd Jones*
Cath MacKay*
Alan Mattingly*
Malcolm Petyt*
David Sharp*
Paddy Tipping*

CHAIRMAN

Kate Ashbrook*

VICE-CHAIRMAN

Kevin Matthews*

TREASURER

Denis Fuller*

HONORARY SOLICITOR

Jerry Pearlman*

BOARD OF TRUSTEE MEMBER

Des Coles*
Tom Fisher*
Kate Gocher*
Gwendoline Goddard*
Alison Mitchell*
Owen Plunkett*
Terry Pollard*
Brian Reader*
Ian White*
Rodney Whittaker*
Ron Williams*

AGENDA COMMITTEE MEMBER

John Dowding*
Elizabeth Lawie*
Ron Moore*
Sylvia Popham*

AVON AREA

Jill Fysh*
Peter Gould*
Adrian Noyes

BERKSHIRE AREA

David Bailey
Gerald Barnett
Margaret Bowdery
Denise Buchan
Fred Carter
Phoebe Chandler
Elizabeth Cuff*
Jane Kiely
Greg McGill
Dave Ramm
Stuart Shurlock*
Lesley Webb

BUCKS & W MIDDX AREA

John Esslemont*
John Frankland
John Wainwright*

CAMBS & PETERBRO AREA

Brian Foster*

CORNWALL AREA

Carol Craze
Christine James*
Hazel Perham
Jane Sloan*

DERBYSHIRE AREA

Lynne France*
Frank Ogden*

DEVON AREA

Eileen Linfoot*
Joan Long
Eric Smith*

DORSET AREA

Ron Davis*
Mike Heckford*
Brian Panton
Patricia White

E YORKS/DERWENT AREA

Peter Ayling
Chris Bush*
Malcolm Dixon
Tom Halstead*

ESSEX AREA

Len Banister*
David Cullington*
Colin Jacob
Hazel Jarrold*

FORTH VALLEY, FIFE & TAYSIDE AREA

Chic Nash*

GLAMORGAN AREA

Ian Fraser
Alex Marshall*
Terry Squires*

GLOUCESTERSHIRE AREA

Jill Byrne
Frances Cloke
John Gerrard*
Bernard Gill
Mavis Rear*

GRAMPIAN AREA

Anne MacDonald*

HAMPSHIRE AREA

Clive Frankham*
Colin Hudman
Brenda Parker
Angela Potts*
George Williams

HEREFORDSHIRE AREA

Arthur Lee*
Phil Long*

HERTS & N MIDDX AREA

David Allard*
Annette Cotter*
David Dickson
Justin Lumley

HIGHLAND & ISLANDS AREA

Ken Davidson*
Vic Royce*

INNER LONDON AREA

Phil Marson*
Clare Wadd*

ISLE OF WIGHT AREA

Carol Crawford*
Miachel Marchant*

KENT AREA

David Law
Les Preston*
Peter Skipp*

LAKE DISTRICT AREA

Brenda Iles
Tony Iles*
Peter Jones*

LEICS & RUTLAND AREA

Anne Donegan
Ken Storer*
Stan Warren*

LINCOLNSHIRE AREA

Stuart Parker*
Colin Smith*
Miriam Smith

LOTHIAN & BORDERS AREA

Bridget Wilcox*

MANCHESTER & HIGH PEAK AREA

Keith Pennyfather*

MERSEYSIDE & WEST CHESHIRE AREA

Jeanette Beasor*
David Callan
Gloria Thayer*
Vi Williams

MID LANCASHIRE AREA

David Kelly*
Andrew Manzie*

NORFOLK AREA

Richard May*
Ian Mitchell*

NORTHAMPTONSHIRE AREA

John Hadley*
Will Lovell*

NORTH & MID CHESHIRE AREA

Christina Goddard*
John Lilley*

NORTH EAST LANCs AREA

Peter Aizlewood
Susan Appleton
Susan Baxendale
Christine Harrison*
Allan Richards*

NORTHUMBRIA AREA

Ken Hughes*
Mary Moore*
Rachel Orange

NORTH WALES AREA

Max Grant*
Gerald Moss*

NORTH YORKS/S DURHAM AREA

Jo Bird*
Simon Gotch*

NOTTINGHAMSHIRE AREA

Jenny Fillingham
Rod Fillingham*
David Hunt*
Sarah Matthews
Chris Thompson

OXFORDSHIRE AREA

Patrick Lonergan*
Susan Maguire*
Peter Stone

POWYS AREA

Harry Chandler*
Robert Seabrook*

SHROPSHIRE AREA

Vivienne Hodges*
William Hodges*

SOMERSET AREA

Gus Halfhide*
Owen Star*

S YORKS/NE DERBY AREA

Peter Haines*
John Harker*

STAFFORDSHIRE AREA

Graham Evans*
Harry Scott*

STRATHCLYDE, D&G AREA

Hilary Graham*
Barry Pottle*

SUFFOLK AREA

Dick Leech*
Gordon Leverett*

SURREY AREA

Mike Arnold
Keith Bagot
Graham Butler*
Kate Colley*
Eric Fowler*
David Newman
Peter Rogers
Geraldine Thompson
Damian Wheeler

SUSSEX AREA

Mike Charman*
Nigel Sloan*
Chris Smith

WARWICKSHIRE AREA

Steven Wallsgrove*
Inese Wood*

WEST RIDING AREA

Andrew Bibby*
Michael Church
Keith Wadd*
Derrick Watt

WILTS & SWINDON AREA

Joan Crosbee*
Philip Wilson*

WORCESTERSHIRE AREA

Clive Bostle*
Douglas Castle*

CAMPING & CARAVANNING CLUB

Jim Perry*
Sylvia Perry

OPEN SPACES SOCIETY

Donald Lee*

RAMBLERS' ASSOCIATION SERVICES

Peter Balchin*

THE LONG DISTANCE WALKERS ASSOC

Paul Lawrence*

THE WOODCRAFT FOLK

Richard Kirkwood*

**ULSTER FEDERATION OF RAMBLING
CLUBS**

Ronnie Carser*

GUESTS

John Andrews
Len Clark
Allyson Davies
Tony Drake
Penny Farncombe
Jacquetta Fewster
Kathryn Gregory
Arthur Howcroft
George Laurence
Helen Lloyd-Jones
Liz Page
Margaret Sharp

20's-30's

James Binning
Amanda Bodey
Stephen Dodd
Karen Green
Andrew Greenall
Anna Grigson
Jeanette Grose
Cath Guest
Robert Hill
Dan Hooke
Rachel Hooke
Mike Knapp
Caroline Mcdonagh
Tim Miller
Dominic Moran
Paul Rhodes
Bernie Roche
Nancy Sydenham
Abigail Williams
Mandy Willoughby

STAFF

Gwen Campbell
Andrew Chadwick
Kate Conto
Justin Cooke
Janet Davis
Jancy Davies
Sophie Dawson
Des de Moor
Kathleen Dolan
Martin Dowson
Lois Ford
Sarah Gardner
Des Garrahan
Patrick Grady
David Joseph
Martin Key
Mike Mills
Adrian Morris
Beverley Penney
Sarah Perry
Jo Smith
Eugene Suggett
Fiona Syme
Helen Todd
Frances Warneford
Simon Waters
Ruth Wembridge
John Wightman
Mariusz Wilczynski
Paul Wilkinson
Sharon Woods

YOUTH HOSTELS ASSOCIATION

John Templeton*

AREA HELPERS

Alec Barnes
Jill Betts
Pauline Binnie
Chris Bintcliffe
Catherine Breen
Sheila Brown
Rob Cameron
Nicky Chambers
Gail Cullen
Karen Durie
Juliet England
Maggi Fletcher
Christine Fox
Nick Garrard
Jean Hall
Pam Hall
Anne Harrison
Dorothy Hart
Sue Hester
Ian Hunt
Andy Knee
Cliff Lambert
Les Maple
Margaret Marshall
Ian Montague
John Moules
Sonia Nash
Fiona Newcombe
Kathryn Parker
Mary Price
Nick Price
Kevin Priestley
Lynton Prior
Janet Readings
Neil Selby
Graham Smith
Jenny Smith
Avril Stapleton
Sara Stewart
Heather Stratford
Russell Summers
Sylvia Sussman
Jean Paul Tanner
Paul Townson
Thelma Townson
David Turner
Mary Walker
Sue Walker

1 WELCOME BY JANE KIELY, BERKSHIRE AREA CHAIRMAN

- 1.1 Jane said that in the year of the celebration of the 75th Anniversary of the mass trespass on Kinder Scout, Berkshire Area was proud to welcome General Council to Berkshire for the first time. She admitted that Berkshire was not the first place you would think of to come for a walk and that it was a far cry from the Peak District, but the slides on display showed just what Berkshire did have to offer.
- 1.2 Jane asked why people would come to Berkshire to walk. It wasn't in "walk" as one of the top three areas to walk in and there wasn't a lot of mountain, moor, heath or down, so there wasn't much access land under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act. However it contained some quintessentially English countryside, open spaces and very few walkers. It also contained the Ridgeway which was not only a National Trail but a National Treasure. It was, however, the least used of all the National Trails but it was hoped that more people would start using it now the surface was acceptable and the four-wheel drives had been regulated.
- 1.3 Jane remembered coming to General Council many years ago when Berkshire had asked for a fringe meeting to discuss the problems of four-wheel drives destroying roads used as public paths and byways. At that stage no-one at Central Office knew what the problem was, or even that there was a problem, and they were given a very small room—74 people crammed into it— and they realised they had a big, national problem. It was thanks in part to the Green Lanes Environmental Action Movement (GLEAM), which started in Berkshire, and many others, including the RA, that there was now some protection of these green lanes through the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act.
- 1.4 Jane said that other Berkshire highlights included the highest chalk hill in England, Walbury Hill, near Coombe Gibbett, on the Wessex Ridgeway, the Test Way, and Windsor Castle and Windsor Great Park with some of the finest trees in the country. Dave Ramm and the East Berkshire Group had produced numerous books and the Group has been able to set up an Endowment Trust with the RA centrally, utilising profit from the "Walking for Pleasure" series of books.
- 1.5 Jane went on to describe the Area's recent achievements. It had risen to the RA Challenge to walk all the paths in Berkshire, and so far over 95% had been walked. It was felt to be a good challenge and everyone who took part enjoyed finding new paths, which hopefully would be incorporated into new walks. The Area was also very proud that Margaret Bowdery, one of the stalwart footpath secretaries in Berkshire, was awarded the MBE last year, celebrating her years of dedication to getting the rights of way usable in east Berkshire. West Berkshire Group had won the RA prize for being the "Best Group" in the country for the breadth of the work undertaken, from members going out once a fortnight, parish by parish, to waymark, clear stiles and paths, with a group of people known affectionately as post pushers, to a group being formed called ROAR made up of people with learning difficulties, and West Berks members going out clearing paths and litter picking each week.

- 1.6 Jane finished by wishing everyone a great Council, whether first-timers or old hands. She thanked all the university staff who had been so helpful during the preparations and she also thanked Jo Smith from RA Central Office who had been a tower of strength in helping to arrange the weekend.

2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

- 2.1 Apologies for absence were received from David Grosz and Maxwell Ayamba.

3 WELCOME TO GUESTS

- 3.1 The Chairman welcomed all guests to Council, in particular, Len Clark who had last year celebrated his ninetieth birthday, George Laurence QC, and Allyson Davies, the consultant helping with the recruitment of the new Chief Executive.
- 3.2 The Chairman also congratulated Paddy Tipping on his appointment as Deputy Leader of the House of Commons, and Malcolm Petyt on his election as Vice-Chairman of the Yorkshire Dales National Park as successor to Jerry Pearlman who had just finished his term of service as a member of the park authority.

4 APPOINTMENT OF TELLERS

- 4.1 **Tellers:** Pauline Binnie
Anne Harrison
Sue Hester
John Moules

5 NOTIFICATION OF ANY OTHER BUSINESS

- 5.1 There was no other business.

6 MINUTES OF GENERAL COUNCIL 2006

- 6.1 John Gerrard (Gloucestershire Area) proposed that minute 9.6 be amended as follows:

Delete the first two sentences and replace with 'John Gerrard (Gloucestershire Area) expressed concern that as the RA Honorary Solicitor's, Mr Pearlman's, financial arrangements regarding fees did not accord with accepted governance practice, it might prejudice our position with the Charity Commission.'

This amendment was approved by council.

Addendum to the above minute:

Gloucestershire Area of the Ramblers Association, represented by John Gerrard, accepts that the financial arrangements regarding fees between JJP and the RA are in accordance with accepted governance practice and that Mr Pearlman has not in any way harmed the Ramblers Association and apologise for any embarrassment that may have been caused to Mr Pearlman.

- 6.2 It was proposed by Hazel Jarrold (Essex Area), and seconded by Ron Moore (Agenda Committee) that the Chairman be authorised to sign the minutes of General Council 2006 as a correct record.

7 REPORT ON ACTIONS TAKEN TO IMPLEMENT MOTIONS PASSED OR REMITTED AT GENERAL COUNCIL 2006

- 7.1 John Esslemont (Buckinghamshire & West Middlesex Area) asked whether, in the context of making best use of e-mail in communications, there were any plans to collect e-mail addresses of existing members. Paul Wilkinson, the Interim CEO, said that when the new membership database was operational all renewal letters would include a request for e-mail addresses. In the mean time this data was already being collected in respect of new members: over 300 addresses had been collected from 700 new members.
- 7.2 Terry Pollard (Board of Trustees) said that he was disappointed that little had been done to promote the Youth Hostels Association (YHA) within the RA, in the light of the hostel closure programme, and he asked if the YHA representative, John Templeton, could give a report on the current situation with the closures. John Templeton reported that there was good news on this issue. Many of the hostels had been bought at auction by parties who were proposing to operate them as hostels under a YHA franchise scheme, thus they would remain available for public use. The new owners were planning to upgrade those hostels and the money released by the sales would be used by the YHA on its remaining hostel network.
- 7.3 Barry Pottle (Strathclyde, D&G Area) asked if the results of the affiliated clubs questionnaire would be published, and in particular if Areas would be able to see how affiliated clubs in their territories had responded. The Interim CEO said that the Membership Development Team was analysing the results of this survey and that they would report back in due course. The problem was that many of the 900 clubs *had* responded and he was not sure if a detailed breakdown by Area would be possible. Keith Wadd said that he was pleased that there had been a positive response and hoped the RA could learn from the exercise because many clubs were highly successful and were in direct competition with the RA.

8 ANNUAL REPORT

- 8.1 The Chairman moved the adoption of the annual report. This was seconded by Ron Moore (Agenda Committee).
- 8.2 The Chairman briefly spoke to the report, thanking Dan French, the publications manager, for producing such a lively and bright document. She said that it showed the commitment of staff, volunteers and the Board of Trustees. She commented on the enthusiasm and hard work of the staff and thanked them for their work. In particular, it had been very sad to lose Jacquetta Fewster from the staff after 15 years of outstanding service. It was however a joy to have Jacquetta back at council and to know that she would be joining the Board of Trustees.
- 8.3 The Chairman also gave her thanks to the existing Board members for their work during the last year.

- 8.4 She concluded by saying that change was on the way. If successful, the lottery bid would move the RA in a new and different direction but change should not be viewed as a criticism of what had gone before. Core work would remain: there were big court cases in all three countries, and much to be done on access. The challenges were to get the credit for our efforts, to become more inclusive and to get more support.
- 8.5 The Interim CEO spoke to the report saying that although much of this year's Council would concentrate on looking to the future there was time to look at past achievements. In particular, the past year had seen great advances in promoting walking in all three countries. In England the 'Get Walking ... Keep Walking!' project had been piloted to help people in deprived urban areas to go walking independently. In Scotland there had been a 135% increase in the number of short walks organised and in Wales the Cerrig Camu/Stepping Stones project had gone from strength to strength with 200 leaders providing 3–5 mile walks in 17 out of 22 local authority areas.
- 8.6 In footpath work, the 'Use Your Paths' challenge was proving highly successful. By the end of September 2006 17,000 grid-squares had been completed by more than 1,000 participants. The introduction of Part 6 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act had been a great victory, largely bringing to an end the situation whereby a claim for motor-vehicular access over an existing footpath or bridleway can succeed on the basis that it was once used by horse-drawn vehicles. Much work was being done in preparation for the 'Dorset case' which was due to be heard in the House of Lords in May, and in Wales a 'big hit' campaign had been launched to try to improve the condition of paths in Conwy.
- 8.7 In Scotland, 2006 saw the first anniversary of the implementation of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 but it also saw challenges to the access delivered by the Act, in particular at Kinfauns Castle. Over £20,000 had been raised to help fight that case in the courts. In England, the freedom to roam team was concentrating its efforts on the closures and restrictions regime, and on coastal access.
- 8.8 Countryside protection work had included continuing work on the campaign for the South Downs National Park, and for better protection, through some form of designation, of the Cambrian Mountains. Work on energy issues, in particular wind-turbine proposals and power-line development, had also been intensive, notably in Scotland on the Beaully–Denny power line.
- 8.9 A survey of 4,000 members had been carried out, the largest ever, and fundraising efforts (the raffles and legal cases appeal) had been well rewarded. The bid to the Big Lottery Fund was substantial at £5 million. If it was successful the funding would be matched by Ramblers Holidays Charitable Trust over a five-year period.
- 8.10 '**walk**' magazine had been re-designed in a larger format with more pages. With a more commercial appeal it was hoped that it would attract new members. '**hike**' magazine had also been redesigned and new contributors had been recruited from its readership. Work on the new edition of 'Rights of Way: a guide to law and

practice' (the 'blue book') had also been commenced. Publication, alongside a new 'blue book extra' website, was planned for May 2007.

- 8.11 The press office had also kept the RA in the news, reaching an estimated 35 million newspaper and magazine readers, as well as radio listeners and TV viewers. Coupled with this, the website was receiving 72,000 unique hits per month, and 21,000 walks had been uploaded by volunteers last year, making the 'Groups Walks Finder' a huge success.
- 8.12 Paul finished his presentation by saying that these successes were achieved by staff, volunteers and the RA in all three countries working together. It was this synergy that made the RA successful and also set us apart from other organisations. Now was the time to look forward to a great year ahead.

Questions and comments on the annual report

- 8.13 With reference to the second paragraph on p.11 of the annual report, John Esslemont (Buckinghamshire & West Middlesex Area) asked whether the interpretation of 'ease of use' used as the basis of the Best Value Performance Indicator (BVPI) values gave the impression that it was more difficult for people to walk in the countryside than it really is. The Interim CEO said that the BVPI is all that we have as a national measure of the state of the network. The RA had fought to retain it and to improve it. It is a measure of legal compliance tested through a strict methodology and is of value.
- 8.14 John Esslemont also queried the first paragraph on p.20, asking if it was appropriate to have produced an energy policy without consultation. He also said that the policy read more like a briefing document than a policy document. The Interim CEO said that the policy had been developed by the Board who had been elected by GC. It demonstrated that we had researched the issue and it was detailed so that it could be used easily within the RA when responding to Government consultations, press queries and other inquiries.
- 8.15 Les Preston (Kent Area) said that the report was well presented but he was concerned that the pictures were all of young people and thus gave no indication of the true age profile of the membership. This should be rectified in the future.
- 8.16 Keith Wadd (West Riding Area) said that he had no problem with an energy policy that opposed wind farms in inappropriate locations but he urged caution against taking it further than that, into subjects that were beyond our objects.
- 8.17 Stuart Parker (Lincolnshire Area) said that he was concerned about the scant mention of using public transport to reach the start of walks, particularly group rambles. Far more publicity should be given to this issue in all RA publications, including the website.
- 8.18 Council agreed to adopt the annual report for the year 2005/06.

9 ACCOUNTS

- 9.1 The adoption of the accounts for year to 30 September 2006 was proposed by the Treasurer, Denis Fuller, and seconded by David Hunt (Nottinghamshire Area).
- 9.2 Speaking to the accounts, Denis said that the RA was a well known and respected brand but that it needed a steady income to sustain its growth and successes and to carry out its core work. For example, in the last financial year nearly £1.2 million had been spent under the heading of rights of way. Unfortunately RA membership was falling and although many people walked they took rights of way for granted and did not join the RA.
- 9.3 In real terms, RA income had decreased over the last two years but expenditure had increased. In the current year it would be necessary to call upon the reserves.
- 9.4 'Waymarking the Future' had set a target of 170,000 members by the end of 2007. Sadly that target would not be reached with only 138,000 members at present, so it was essential that everyone encouraged their walking friends to join.
- 9.5 Denis finished by thanking Area and Group Treasurers and David Joseph and the central office Finance Team for all of their hard work on the RA finances.

Questions and comments on the accounts

- 9.6 Owen Plunkett (Board of Trustees) said that it was time to get tough on the question of the funds which were being held in reserve by Areas and Groups. Denis said that he hoped that the new budget arrangements would help to ease this situation.
- 9.7 John Harker asked for information on the income and expenditure on 'walk' magazine. David Joseph, Director of Resources, was asked to reply. David said that the detailed breakdown was not immediately available but he was able to say that the income was primarily from the advertisements, which were carefully selected. The magazine was seen as a member benefit and it was not, at the moment, a profit generator.
- 9.8 Chic Nash (Forth Valley, Fife & Tayside Area) queried why only £40,000 had been spent on membership development when over £300,000 had been allocated for that purpose and membership was falling. The Interim CEO explained that this was because staff had not been in post to carry out the work. This money was being carried over into the current financial year when it would be used.
- 9.9 Mavis Rear (Gloucestershire Area) asked for a progress report on the new membership database. David Joseph said that a project team had been set up last year and that following extensive consultation it had been decided to install an integrated management system rather than just a simple membership database. The RA was now in a position to appoint the supplier. The installation would involve a number of stages which would be rolled out across the remainder of 2007.
- 9.10 Council agreed to adopt the accounts for the year to 30 September 2006.

10 PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS BY THE LORD SMITH OF FINSBURY

- 10.1 Chris said that it was always a pleasure and joy to attend the RA's General Council and that he was deeply honoured to be here and to be proposed again as president, although this might be for the last time.
- 10.2 He had studied the Annual Report and found the quantity and quality of the work amazing: not just that undertaken at central office but throughout the organisation. The real strength of the RA was its army of volunteers. From their efforts there were huge benefits for both rural and urban paths. The 'Use your Paths' challenge meant that paths were being walked, and various projects were encouraging more people to go walking. This was terrific work and big congratulations were due to all concerned.
- 10.3 Chris said that the past year had not always been easy for staff and he paid tribute to Paul Wilkinson for steadying the ship and taking the organisation forward.
- 10.4 There were three issues in particular that Chris wanted to mention. Firstly, he could not ignore the triumphant implementation of the access provisions of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act. At the start, the process had looked terrifying and he was concerned that it would take 10 to 20 years. However it didn't, and it went remarkably well. It had now been demonstrated that access to open country can and does work and this bodes well for the coastal access campaign. There was now better access to the countryside than ever before and this could largely be attributed to the RA.
- 10.5 Secondly, there was the potential threat of the Serious Organised Crime and Police Act which he had mentioned at General Council last year. This Act makes trespass a crime on designated sites. The RA had been given assurances that the provision would not diminish public access, and when the order setting out a list of designated sites was published, it set out the expected royal residences and places such as 10 and 11 Downing Street and Chequers. Kate Ashbrook had however spotted that the site designated around Chequers did include a small area of access land. Kate was now pursuing this with the Home Office to remind Ministers of their promises, and to get the designation amended.
- 10.6 Thirdly, there was the question of access to the coast which we had always thought would be the next big challenge. We are an island nation and one of our greatest pleasures is to visit and to walk along the coast, but in many places there is no right to do this. In some places the coast cannot be accessed at all and elsewhere it is only allowed under sufferance. As with access to open country we are not demanding access to private gardens and we understand that in certain places the interests of nature conservation will need to be observed. However it is nonsense that there is a legal right to travel in a boat across a stretch of water but there is no legal right to walk in the same place when the tide goes out.
- 10.7 The Natural England proposal for a coastal corridor was a good one, and concerns that the new Agency might have let nature conservation concerns override access have in this proved unfounded. Defra's consultation on the subject had been delayed and it was to be hoped that this was just because of the local elections, not because of any change of heart, and that their proposals would be broadly in line with the Natural England proposals. When the consultation did take place it would be incumbent on all concerned to tell the Government just how important access to the coast was.

- 10.8 Chris went on to say that the RA was one of the most effective campaigning organisations that he knew. RA cases were always well researched, well argued and backed up with examples from experiences on the ground. There would always be a need for these campaigning skills to protect paths and access and to fight for a real countryside for all to enjoy.
- 10.9 The RA was however faced with a dilemma. Despite its great track record, its local support through Areas and Groups, and its professional staff, membership was declining. Public perception of the RA did not match the reality of what it actually achieves. We need to think how we can tackle this. At the moment, RA concerns and passions are coming to the top of the political agenda, in respect of both health and the environment, but the RA doesn't have the image to put it at the forefront of these issues. Wind-farm policy is a case in point. In wanting to see alternative energy sources, including wind farms in the right places, the RA was pursuing a sensible policy but if it was perceived that we do nothing except object to wind farms then our real concerns are masked and we give the impression of an organisation that is opposed to all wind farms and not concerned about wider environmental and climate change issues. Positioning ourselves properly in this changing world is the biggest challenge we face in the next few years.
- 10.10 The National Trust has a membership of over 3 million and the RSPB of over 1 million and both are still growing. People do not join the RSPB to get anything but because they identify with what the RSPB does, and the RSPB has succeeded in marrying people's concerns with birds to the wider environmental issues of climate change and habitat destruction. We need to do the same—by tapping into people's sense of enjoying the countryside.
- 10.11 Finally, Chris said, we must never lose sight of our fundamental objectives and the reason that we enjoy walking. He had recently been asked by 'Country Walking' magazine to name his favourite outdoor book. Chris had named 'Undiscovered Scotland' by W H Murray from which he then read an extract describing 'true country'. Making sure that everyone could have the same sense of the 'true country' was what the RA must always be about and we must not lose sight of this.
- 10.12 The Chairman thanked Chris for his inspirational talk and the challenges it presented and for all of his work during the last year, and for agreeing to stand again as President.

11 ELECTION OF OFFICERS

Officers were elected as follows:

President

The Lord Smith of Finsbury

Proposed by Des Coles and seconded by
Gwen Goddard

Vice presidents (not elected: past presidents automatically become vice-presidents)

Andrew Bennett
Chris Hall
Mike Harding

Peter Melchett
Janet Street-Porter

Vice-presidents

Proposed *en bloc* by Terry Pollard and seconded by Owen Plunkett

John Bunting
Geoff Eastwood
John Foster
Jack Ibbott
Richard Lloyd Jones
Cath MacKay

Alan Mattingly
David Sharp
Paddy Tipping MP
Malcolm Petyt
Jerry Pearlman MBE LLB

Vice-chairman

Ian White

Proposed by Gwen Goddard and seconded by Owen Plunkett

Honorary Solicitor

Jerry Pearlman MBE LLB

Proposed by Ian White and seconded by Tom Fisher

All officers were elected unanimously by council.

12 APPOINTMENT OF AUDITORS

It was proposed on behalf of the Board of Trustees by Kate Gocher, and seconded by Tom Fisher that Sayer Vincent by re-appointed as the Association's auditors. This was agreed by council.

13 NOMINATION FOR HONORARY LIFE MEMBERSHIP

It was proposed on behalf of the Board of Trustees by Jerry Pearlman, and seconded by Gordon Leverett of Suffolk Area, that John Andrews, long-serving Area Footpath Secretary for Suffolk, who was shortly moving to Scotland, should be awarded honorary life membership of the Association. Jerry said that John had made an outstanding contribution to footpath work in his own county and beyond through his unrivalled knowledge of footpath law, in particular definitive map work, and his absolute determination to use that knowledge to improve the quality and extent of the network. This proposal was agreed by council and John's acceptance speech was greeted with a standing ovation.

14 MEMBERSHIP OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES AND AGENDA COMMITTEE

Elections were not necessary to the Board of Trustees as there were only three valid nominations for three vacancies, nor to the Agenda Committee as there were only four valid nominations for five vacancies. The Chairman introduced the members of the new Board and the new Committees to council.

Board of Trustees

Andrew Bibby (new member), Jo Bird (new member), Des Coles, Jacquetta Fewster (new member), Tom Fisher, Kate Gocher, Gwendoline Goddard, Alison Mitchell, Terry Pollard, Brian Reader, Ian White, Rodney Whittaker, Ron Williams.

The Chairman thanked Kevin Matthews, who was standing down as Vice-Chairman and from the Board due to his current career opportunities, for all of his hard work, particularly in respect of the development of young people's groups, and Owen Plunkett, who was also standing down from the Board, for his enthusiastic contribution to the work of the Board.

Agenda Committee

John Dowding, Elizabeth Lawie, Eileen Linfoot, Sylvia Popham.

The Chairman thanked Ron Moore, who was standing down from the Committee, for all of his work.

15 EMERGENCY MOTIONS

- 13.1 Council considered the addition to the agenda of one emergency motion.
- 13.2 It was proposed by Mike Heckford on behalf of Dorset Area, that an emergency motion on pedestrian level crossing safety be taken. This was seconded by Ron Davis (Dorset Area). Council voted to debate the motion. The motion is set out as motion [13] in item 16 below.

16 MOTIONS

[1] Toll rides

The following motion was proposed on behalf of Avon Area by Peter Gould and seconded by Jill Fysh of that Area:

This General Council notes that TOLL RIDES (landowners permitting horse riders across their land for payment) is a growth industry. It also notes with concern that landowners are entitled legally to route a Toll Ride along a Public Footpath, leading to

- a. Public Footpaths becoming, in effect, Bridleways with attendant damage to the surface of paths

- b. Health & Safety issues (such as a posse of galloping horses meeting a group of walkers)
- c. Possible growing discord between the walking and riding groups

Therefore this General Council instructs the Board of Trustees to investigate the legal and policy issues surrounding Toll Rides, and to report back to General Council 2008 with appropriate recommendations for dealing with the issue.

The motion was carried unanimously.

[2] Downgrading of BOATS

The following motion was proposed on behalf of Surrey Area by Brian Reader and seconded by Eric Fowler of that Area.

This General Council deplores the damage caused to unadopted roads in the countryside, formerly classed as RUPPS but now classified as BOATS or Restricted Byways. To prevent damage by needless wear and tear this General Council urges the Board of Trustees to pursue with the Government and local highway authorities the downgrading of BOATS to bridleway or footpath status as appropriate.

In the meantime this General Council urges Areas and Groups to seek greater use of Traffic Regulation Orders banning unnecessary vehicular use.

On behalf of the Board of Trustees, Ron Williams proposed remission of the motion. This was seconded by Owen Plunkett. Remission was accepted by Surrey Area.

The proposal to remit the motion was carried.

[3] Register of permissive paths

The following motion was proposed on behalf of Nottinghamshire Area by David Hunt and seconded by Rod Fillingham of that Area.

This General Council calls upon the Board of Trustees working in partnership with landowners, major agencies and local highway authorities in England & Wales to establish a register of permissive paths in each county to enhance access opportunities.

Further, this General Council calls upon the Board of Trustees to ensure that the register be made available not only to RA members via the Area and Group Circulars but also to the wider community by placing it on the RA main website and be kept as up-to-date as possible in order to provide an accurate as possible record of permissive routes that are available.

Buckinghamshire and West Middlesex Area proposed the following amendment. This was accepted by Nottinghamshire Area and by Council:

In the first paragraph, after 'to establish' add 'the feasibility of'.

In the second paragraph, replace 'ensure that the register be made' with 'investigate making such a register', and replace 'be kept as up-to-date as possible' with 'to consider procedures for updating it'.

The amended motion reads:

This General Council calls upon the Board of Trustees working in partnership with landowners, major agencies and local highway authorities in England and Wales to establish the feasibility of a register of permissive paths in each county to enhance access opportunities.

Further, this General Council calls upon the Board of Trustees to investigate making such a register available not only to RA members via the Area and Group Circulars but also to the wider community by placing it on the RA main website and to consider procedures for updating it in order to provide an accurate as possible record of permissive routes that are available.

The amended motion was carried.

[4] Highway authorities' workloads

The following motion was proposed on behalf of Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Area by Brian Foster and seconded by John Esslemont of Buckinghamshire & West Middlesex Area (after Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Area confirmed that it accepted the amendment below):

This General Council deplores the continuing action of certain Highway Authorities to control their work-load by assigning low priority to an arbitrary selection of public rights of way, and particularly the action of Cambridgeshire County Council which has chosen to remove an apparently random selection of entire parishes from its programme of pathwork, (apart from health and safety emergencies), for periods of six months at a time.

Council calls upon the RA to emphasise to all Highway Authorities that their duty in law is to maintain the whole of the rights of way network, and to urge central Government to ensure the provision of adequate funding for the purpose.

Buckinghamshire and West Middlesex Area proposed the following amendment. This was accepted by Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Area and by Council.

Delete the first paragraph and replace with:

This General Council recognises that, with limited resources available to them, highway authorities are forced to prioritise their workload of maintenance of public rights of way. Council is concerned that such prioritisation should not appear arbitrary and urges highway authorities to discuss their criteria for assigning priorities with user groups.

Also add the word "further" after "Council" at the beginning of the second paragraph.

The amended motion reads:

This General Council recognises that, with limited resources available to them, highway authorities are forced to prioritise their workload of maintenance of public right of way. Council is concerned that such prioritisation should not appear arbitrary and urges highway authorities to discuss their criteria for assigning priorities with user groups.

Council further calls upon the RA to emphasise to all highway authorities that their duty in law is to maintain the whole of the rights of way network, and to urge central Government to ensure the provision of adequate funding for the purpose.

The amended motion was carried by an overwhelming majority.

[5] Semi-improved grassland

The following motion was proposed on behalf of North Wales Area by Gerald Moss and seconded by Max Grant of that Area:

This General Council instructs the Association at all levels of the organisation to campaign for the inclusion of semi-improved grassland in Open Access.

The Board of Trustees proposed the following amendment. This was accepted by North Wales Area and by Council.

The motion to read: 'This General Council urges the Association to campaign in England and Wales for areas of semi-improved grassland to be mapped as open countryside under the CRoW Act at the forthcoming decadal review.'

The amended motion was carried unanimously.

[6] Better access to access land

The following motion was proposed by Tom Halstead on behalf of East Riding and Derwent Area and seconded by Chris Bush also of that Area.

This General Council is disappointed that much of the open access land in the Yorkshire Wolds and other downland areas have no, or only a single, means of access and that, because of Defra and Natural England budget cuts, local authorities have no money available to pay for the creation of new means of access. This General Council urges the Board of Trustees to investigate ways by which this situation might be remedied and, in particular, to lobby Defra and Natural England to restore the Access Management Grant Scheme and Parliament to ensure long-term central government funding to ensure that the new access rights provided by the Countryside and Rights of Way Act can be enjoyed fully.

The following amendment was proposed by West Riding Area:

To add a sentence after the 'creation of new means of access.'

'A similar problem pertains to moorland access in North Yorkshire and several other local authorities.'

This amendment was accepted by East Yorkshire & Derwent Area and by Council.

The following amendment was proposed by Mid Lancs area:

- a) line 2 – delete 'downland' and replace with 'access'
- b) line 2 – after 'means of access', insert 'or a large distance to the next access point'
- c) add a new paragraph 'It will also be necessary for local authorities to provide adequate publicity for the access points provided, so that walkers can make best possible use of access land.'

This amendment was accepted by East Yorks & Derwent Area and by Council.

The amended motion reads:

This General Council is disappointed that much of the open access land in the Yorkshire Wolds and other access areas have no, or only a single means of access or a large distance to the next access point and that, because of Defra and Natural England budget cuts, local authorities have no money available to pay for the creation of new means of access. A similar problem pertains to moorland access in North Yorkshire and several other local authorities. This General Council urges the Board of Trustees to investigate ways by which this situation might be remedied and, in particular, to lobby Defra and Natural England to restore the Access Management Grant Scheme and Parliament to ensure long-term central government funding to ensure that the new access rights provided by the Countryside and Rights of Way Act can be enjoyed fully.

It will also be necessary for local authorities to provide adequate publicity for the access points provided, so that walkers can make best possible use of access land.

The amended motion was carried unanimously.

[7] Climate change

The following motion was proposed on behalf of the Board of Trustees by Terry Pollard and seconded by Des Coles.

This General Council recognises that climate change will have many implications for walkers and calls upon the Board of Trustees to prepare a strategy on how the RA should address climate change for presentation to General Council 2008.

The following amendment was proposed on behalf of Buckinghamshire & West Middlesex Area by John Esslemont and seconded by John Wainwright of that Area:

Delete from 'to prepare' onwards and replace by 'to consult widely within the Association on whether it is appropriate to adopt a strategy on issues relating to climate change and, if so, on what specific policies should be included in such a

strategy, with the aim of submitting any conclusions for approval by General Council 2008.'

The proposed amendment was lost. The motion was carried.

[8] Payment of membership fees

The following motion was proposed on behalf of South Yorks & NE Derbyshire Area by John Harker and seconded by Peter Haines of that Area.

This General Council instructs the Board of Trustees to look at alternative ways of paying the membership fee to encourage greater membership and implement as soon as is practicable.

The motion was carried unanimously.

[9] Action on motions

The following motion was proposed on behalf of Strathclyde, D&G Area by Elizabeth Lawie and seconded by Hilary Graham of that Area:

This General Council recalls the assurances given at the time of the amendment to the Memorandum and Articles in 2005, that General Council motions would be taken seriously and not overruled or ignored, unless there were exceptional circumstances. It is concerned to note that the Board of Trustees has decided to abandon the decision made in 1997, that there should be a triennial Area Secretary's Conference. It feels that this is a breach of the assurances given in 2005.

The following amendment was proposed by the Board of Trustees:

Replace 'This General Council recalls' with 'This General Council calls upon the Board of Trustees to reaffirm its assurances ... ' and delete from "It is concerned to note that the Board of Trustees has decided.....".

In the course of the debate, the Board gave the requested reaffirmation, and the proposed amendment was accepted by Strathclyde, Dumfries & Galloway Area and by Council.

The amended motion reads:

This General Council calls upon the Board of Trustees to reaffirm its assurances given at the time of the amendment to the Memorandum and Articles in 2005, that General Council motions would be taken seriously and not overruled or ignored, unless there were exceptional circumstances.

The amended motion was carried unanimously.

[10] Review of led walks

The following motion was proposed by Vic Royce on behalf of Highlands and Islands Area and seconded by Alison Mitchell, Chairman of Scottish Council Executive Committee:

The General Council calls upon the Board of Trustees to take action on the delivery of an action plan on the recommendations made in the report 'Review of Ramblers' Association led walks' by Bob Barton, in particular that of enhancing the assurance of quality and safety of led walks. This work to be built into the RA's proposed new strategic plan.

John Esslemont (Buckinghamshire & West Middlesex Area) asked the Chairman to rule the motion out of order on the basis that few members of Council had seen the report. The Chairman declined to do so.

Allan Richards (North East Lancs Area) proposed remission. This was seconded by Pat Lonergan (Oxfordshire Area).

The proposal to remit the motion was carried.

[11] Publicity display material

The following motion was proposed by David Kelly on behalf of Mid Lancs Area and seconded by Andrew Manzie of that Area.

Members of General Council are appreciative of the work done by volunteers in arranging displays at public events to promote the name and work of the RA, and were pleased when Central Office provided each area with a set of display boards, and recently of three general type posters which may help with brand type recognition, but is still concerned about the lack of suitable promotional material being provided by Central Office for use at exhibitions.

General Council therefore instructs the Board of Trustees to arrange for further materials to be provided for use at exhibitions, to include further large posters at a size of A2 or A3 (to feature footpaths and access aspects), and then for these to be updated at regular intervals.

On behalf of the Board of Trustees Kevin Matthews proposed remission. This was seconded by Owen Plunkett.

The proposal to remit the motion was carried.

[12] Model constitutions for Areas and Groups

The following motion was proposed by Brian Reader on behalf of the Board of Trustees and seconded by Ian White of the Board.

This General Council approves the revised model constitutions for Areas and Groups attached hereto.

The following amendments to the revised model constitutions were proposed by Nottinghamshire Area:

Model Constitution for Areas

Clause 2: Objects

Clause to read: 'The objects of the Area are to carry out within its territory (see succeeding clause) the objects of the Association, taking account of any changes decided from time to time by the General Council or the Board of Trustees.'

Clause 10: Resignation or retirement from Area Council of sub-committees

In the Introductory sentence and in 10(i). Replace 'he' with 'he/she'

Clause 11: Annual General Meeting

Reword the opening paragraph as follows:

'The Area Council shall hold an Annual General Meeting of the Area, not later than five months after the end of the financial year. In any event the Annual General Meeting should be held before the last date for submission of ordinary motions to General Council, as will be advised from time to time. Fourteen days notice of the Annual General Meeting shall be given to each member of the Area. Each individual member of the Area ... '

Clause 12: Special General Meeting

Heading to be changed to 'Special General Meetings of the Area'

Clause 13: Finance

Reword the second sentence of Clause 13 (iii) to read:

'All monies received shall be paid into the bank and all payments, other than petty cash payments, shall be made by cheque or appropriate form of electronic transmission subject to appropriate controls.'

Model Constitution for Groups

Clause 2: Objects

Change to read: 'The objects of the Group are to carry out within its territory (see succeeding clause) the objects of the Association in such ways ... '

Clause 5: Relations with the Area and the Association

Delete 'Governing body' and replace with 'Council'.

Clause 6: Management

In Clause 6(i), insert 'Group' before 'Annual or Special General meeting'

In Clause 6(vii), delete 'governing body of the Area' and replace with 'Area Council'.

Clause 9: Resignation or retirement

In the introductory sentence and in 9(i), replace 'he' with 'he/she'.

Clause 11: Special General meeting

Change heading to 'Special General Meeting of the Group'.

Clause 12: Finance

In Clause 12(iii) at the end of the second sentence add 'or appropriate form of electronic transmission subject to appropriate controls.'

These amendments were accepted by the Board of Trustees and by Council.

The following amendment was proposed on behalf of Strathclyde, D&G Area by Barry Pottle, and seconded by Hilary Graham of that Area:

Add to Clause 11 of the draft model Constitution for Areas the following sub-clause:

'(vi) Appoint representatives to General Council'

Add at the end of Motion 12:

'This General Council further recommends that versions of the model constitutions should be created by the Board of Trustees and the governing bodies of Constituent Parts, for the use of Areas and Groups within each constituent Part. Such versions shall be based on the models hereby approved, but may contain adaptations to cover:

- the style of name to be used by Areas and Groups within that constituent part,
- reference in the Objects Clause to matters decided from time to time by the governing body of the Constituent Part,
- appointment of representatives, and submission of motions to the governing body of the Constituent Part,
- the text of the model constitutions to be used in any language other than English, used in that Constituent Part, and
- any other adaptations considered appropriate by the Board of Trustees and the governing body of the Constituent Part.'

The amendment in respect of Clause 11 was accepted by the Board and by Council.

The amendment in respect of the substantive motion [12] was subject to debate and was lost.

The motion, subject to the agreed amendments, was carried.

[13] Pedestrian level crossing safety

The following motion was proposed on behalf of Dorset Area by Mike Heckford, and seconded by Ron Davis of that Area:

This General Council instructs the Board of Trustees to urgently liaise with the Rail Safety and Standards Board and Network Rail to insist that a railway industry standard is issued for railway pedestrian (footpath and bridleway) level crossings to

provide for a statutory minimum level of signing, equipment and maintenance in the interests of the safety of users.

The motion was carried unanimously.

17 VENUE FOR GENERAL COUNCIL 2008

General Council 2008 would take place at Winchester University: 4 – 6 April 2008.

18 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There was no other business.

19 CHAIRMAN'S CLOSING REMARKS

- 19.1 The Chairman thanked all of those who had helped to make General Council 2007 such a success, in particular Ramblers Holidays for providing the wine for Saturday evening's dinner and the prizes on their stand. Berkshire Area members were thanked for their outstanding contribution to the smooth running of the event, in particular Jane Kiely for coordinating the event, Elizabeth Cuff for the walks, Stuart Shurlock for the transport, and Mary Walker, John Moules and Cliff Lambert. Thanks were also due to the staff of the University of Reading and to Jo Smith for the overall organisation of General Council.
- 19.2 The Chairman particularly thanked Paul Wilkinson for taking on the job of Interim CEO in January and the calm and efficient way he was taking the organisation forward.
- 19.3 The Chairman felt it had been a good natured and constructive Council. There had been reflection on past achievements but, importantly, a start had been made on deciding how to take the RA forward through the development of the next strategic plan. This could not happen overnight, and the whole organisation would be involved.
- 19.4 The RA needed to continue to be a tough campaigning organisation and to get credit for what it achieves. The general public needed to understand the role which the RA plays in protecting paths and access.
- 19.5 The Chairman urged members of Council to go back to their Areas and Groups and tell other members what happened at Council. Areas and Groups should also not forget to invite Board members to their AGM and other events—communication between all parts of the RA was vital.
- 19.6 Finally, we must not forget that our passion is for walking, and for the peace and tranquillity of the countryside. RA volunteers were those who were prepared to fight for these things which they hold dear—not just for themselves but also for the wider membership and the public.
- 19.20 The Chairman's remarks were warmly applauded.

THIS ENDED THE BUSINESS

