



INFORMAL REPORT OF THE RAMBLERS GENERAL COUNCIL HELD AT BANGOR UNIVERSITY, 7 – 8 APRIL 2018

Presentation from the board and senior management team

Des Garrahan, chair of the meeting, welcomed everybody to general council, especially those attending for the first time. Joanna Slattery, area chair for North Wales, welcomed everybody to Bangor. Chris Hodgson, chair of Welsh Council Executive Committee, added a further welcome, stressing that although the Ramblers encompassed three nations, with devolved powers for matters of rights of way and access, it was one body, working to common objectives. At the start of business on the second day, Denis McAteer, president of Ramblers Cymru, welcomed delegates back to general council.

Highlights from 2018 and future strategic direction

Vanessa Griffiths, chief executive, and the senior management team reported on the achievements of the last year and the future work programme, business plan and strategic priorities, including:

- transforming our data and digital capabilities;
- developing a regular cycle of major campaigns;
- increasing mutual support for volunteers;
- generating diverse income streams;
- improving internal infrastructure.

Annual report and accounts

Alex Mannings, honorary treasurer, gave a presentation on the annual accounts for the year 2016–2017, bringing to a close his three-year tenure as treasurer. He said that the organisation was in a strong financial position, solvent and with a stable income, which would enable it to take forward the exciting plans outlined by the senior management team.

Council adopted the annual report and accounts for the year to 30 September 2017 and appointed Crowe Clark Whitehill as auditors for the following year.

Board of trustee elections

Kate Ashbrook was elected as chair and Michael Penny was elected as honorary treasurer. Both elections were uncontested.

There were eight candidates for three ordinary member positions, and the hustings were chaired by Paddy Tipping, vice president. The hustings provided the candidates with an opportunity to supplement the information provided in their written nomination statements.

As a result of the ballot, the following were elected to the board of trustees for a full term of three years: Ronnie Forbes, Malcolm McDonnell and Dr Peter Rookes.

As a further vacancy on the board had been created by Kate Ashbrook's election as chair, the candidates who were not elected as a result of the first ballot were invited to stand again. As a

result of the second ballot, Peter Carr was elected to the board of trustees for a term of one year.

The Ramblers' board of trustees 2018 now comprises the following members:

Kate Ashbrook	Chair
Michael Penny	Honorary treasurer
Dr Peter Rookes	Vice chair
Chris Hodgson	Chair, Ramblers Cymru
Alison Mitchell	Convener, Ramblers Scotland
Peter Carr	Ordinary member
Sophie Clissold-Lesser	Ordinary member
Rebecca Dawson	Ordinary member
Ronnie Forbes	Ordinary member
Richard May	Ordinary member
Malcolm McDonnell	Ordinary member
Teri Moore	Ordinary member
Paul Rhodes	Ordinary member
Aynsley Jardin	Co-opted member

In memoriam

At each council there is always a few minutes' silence and, with sadness, council remembered those members who had died in the last year.

A special tribute was paid to Jerry Pearlman, Ramblers vice president, who had passed away in March, and who had served as honorary solicitor for than 30 years, conducting many court cases for the Ramblers to protect paths, and who had been a lead campaigner for freedom to roam on open country. Tribute was paid to his outstanding efforts to protect public rights across the country.

Election of president, vice-presidents and agenda committee

Stuart Maconie was re-elected the Ramblers' president.

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

The following serving cadre of vice-presidents were re-elected: John Foster, David Grosz, Richard Lloyd Jones, Jonathan Kipling, Cath MacKay, Dave Morris, Alan Mattingly, Dave Morris, Malcolm Petyt, Brian Reader, Paddy Tipping and Keith Wadd.

The following general council members were elected to the agenda committee to serve for the following year: John Esslemont, Des Garrahan, Elizabeth Lawie, Sylvia Popham and John Wainwright. The election was uncontested.

Motions

Questions were taken about the stated position on outstanding motions from previous councils.

Three new motions were passed:

Risk to the adequate maintenance of Rights of Way

This general council is concerned that during the current period of financial constraints being placed on local authorities with responsibility for Public Rights of Way (PRoWs) some may be

unable to meet their statutory obligations. This can result in unreasonable delays or longer-term failure to keep PRowS free of obstruction and with infrastructure such as gates, stiles and bridges being inadequately maintained by landowners or themselves.

The board of trustees is encouraged to continue to make the case to government, including health and tourism benefits, for necessary resources to be available to local authorities to meet their obligations on PRowS, and to work with others in securing this. In addition, the board is encouraged to provide support to areas and groups to campaign at a local level for adequate levels of appropriately qualified and experienced staff responsible for keeping PRowS open including definitive map teams with access to the other resources that they require.

Donate-a-Gate Schemes

This general council requests the board of trustees to:

- encourage areas/groups to set up 'Donate-a-Gate' schemes;
- as far as practicable, provide support and resources necessary to set up and operate such schemes;”
- publicise this good work in helping to maintain the walking environment, with the aim of attracting new members.

Roadside signage of Public Rights of Way

This general council notes that it is the 50th anniversary of the 1968 Countryside Act requiring English and Welsh highway authorities to signpost public rights of way where they meet with metalled roads. It further notes that the Pathwatch data indicates that few authorities have complied with the requirements in full. Council therefore requests that the Ramblers gives priority to working with the relevant authorities to bring about a full compliance within the next five years as part of the Pathwatch campaign.

Two other motions were debated but not passed.

Closing remarks

Incoming chair Kate Ashbrook thanked Des Garrahan for his leadership and hard work over the last three years as chair, and for his good humour in conducting the last three general councils. Des Garrahan said that there was a bright future for the Ramblers and he had found it both a privilege and honour to work for the organisation. Thanks were also given to the trustees and to all members of general council who symbolised the Ramblers democratic structure. He said that volunteers were hugely important to the Ramblers: we have 103,000 members, 25,000 of whom are thought to be volunteers.

And finally...

A huge thank you to all of the wonderful North Wales area volunteers who helped to make general council so successful this year. The area volunteers were crucial to council's success by greeting everyone at the registration desk, leading three lovely walks and acting as tellers, timekeepers and scrutineers during the meeting.

Thank you also to everyone who attended and participated in such a terrific couple of days. We are delighted to be able to confirm that general council 2018 will take place in Manchester on 13 and 14 April.

We very much look forward to seeing many of you there.

Kind regards

Kate Ashbrook
Chair, board of trustees