

**Minutes of Executive Committee of Northumbria Area Ramblers
held at St Nicholas Church Hall, South Gosforth, Newcastle
on Monday 7th October 2019 at 7 pm**

Present:

Mike Webber, Area Chair	Alison Emslie, Independent member
Neil Allender, Rights of Way Officer	Malcolm McVey, Area Membership Officer
Steve Edwards, Ponteland and Area Treasurer	Bill Gallon, Independent member
Wendy Maxted, Area Secretary	Alexa Rainsford (Observer)
Pauline Hawdon (Minutes Secretary)	Nuala Wright, Area Access Officer

The Chairman welcomed Alexa Rainsford, who was observing the meeting and may consider being Publicity Officer. Action

1 Apologies for absence: Rony Royston, Robert Hutchinson, Moira Pearson, and David Crowe...

2 Minutes of the previous Executive Meeting were approved.

3 Matters arising:

3.1 Mark Nugent wished to continue as an Independent Member.

4 Heritage Way

Bill Gallon said that maintenance had been difficult because of exceptional vegetation growth this year, obscuring many way-markers. Ideally the path should be checked at least 3 times from June when growth was at its greatest. Groups were congratulated on their work involved in the upkeep and improvements of the Heritage Way, which was obviously being used by the public. Bill would like to use the new Sunderland bridge as an easier route than that published, but to avoid re-publication, suggested adding this as an alternative. Nuala said that a book was planned and costings were being considered. Malcolm McVey said a GPS route had been designed but was not included on the website. David Dallow had done a lot of work on the Heritage Way but wished to withdraw now.

Mike Webber said he would request that Groups include in their Annual reports, details of work carried out on the Way. *Item to be included on Area Council Agenda*

5 Priorities for 2019

5.1 **Revised Format for Area Report** – David Crowe was compiling the Area Report to Central Office and getting costings for professional design and printing.

5.2 Business Plan

The suggestion that individual members of the Executive Committee visited selected groups would be put to the Area Council meeting to see whether or not groups would be in favour. Nuala had visited Berwick group regarding the coastal path and found it very useful. *Item to be included on Area Council Agenda*

5.3 **Encouraging Members** – Lost Ways – there is a Training Day on Saturday 12 October. Mike will attend.

5.4 **Walking Festival** – It had been suggested that something similar to the Great North Walk be resurrected. This could be linked to the Ramblers Walking Festivals. Chester-le-Street group are giving their local walks names as a start of plans for their own Walking Festival Day. Mike hoped that this might graduate to becoming a Northumbria Walks Festival in the future.

5.5 **Membership** – Central Office were greatly concerned about membership numbers which had been falling for the last 17 years. They received funding from the Post Code Lottery which may not be so forthcoming if membership fell further. They have employed a consultancy company and seconded area members as representatives to carry out a detailed review of the Development, Organisation and Location (D.O.L) which will produce proposals to be submitted to the Board of Trustees in January. Every area had a representative – Mike is our North East representative. He felt it was very important that each Area and every group should have a Publicity Officer to improve this decline. He gave out a leaflet designed by the Chester-le-Street group, based on Central Office's template, 5,000 of which had been distributed in their area by a distribution company and C/L/S members were in the process of handing out the remainder to people attending their Park Runs in his area on the last Saturday of each month. This had increased membership.

It was felt that the Ramblers in general needed to emphasise more the work done on footpaths, preventing closures by Railtrack and others etc. We are not just a "walking group".

6 Coastal Path Update (Nuala Wright)

Sections of the England Coast Path, from Filey to Amble, were now open to the public. From Amble to Bamburgh, had been published for comment this summer and is currently with the Secretary of State for determination. He will consider all representations and objections before making a decision about the approval of Natural England's report.

The section from Bamburgh to the Scottish Border was in the development and proposals stage. Natural England would visit all the land that is likely to be affected by proposals and discuss the options in detail with people who own or manage the land, plus relevant local and national organisations who have an interest in this stretch.

After final discussions have been held with those who have a legal interest in the land, Natural England will refine and check their proposals to improve access. This may start sooner for some sections than others.

The proposals will be finalised and published in a report to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, which is expected to take place in Autumn 2019. Once published, the report will be available on GOV.UK and advertised in the local press. Copies of the report will be placed in council offices and other appropriate locations in the local area for people to view. There will be 8 weeks to comment and anyone wishing to comment will be able to make a representation on the report, and owners or occupiers of affected land will be able to make an objection.

When completed in 2020, this will be the longest coastal path in the world (2,795 miles). Nuala thought that approximately 60% was now open.

7 Group Annual Awards

It was agreed to use the National Award Scheme - groups could also be nominated for the present scheme. We would have our own if we thought it necessary in the future.

Bill Gallon suggested linking with other organisations, such as CPRE (Campaign to Protection Rural England England).

8 Finance (Steve Edwards)

Current balance - £4,299.47 with nothing outstanding

Budget request had been submitted for £4,500 for 2019/20, against a predicted spend of £6,800; approval was awaited.

Year-end annual returns process was underway.

Next payment from Central Office was due at end of October.

He continued to experience occasional attempts to scam our money, generally in the form of someone posing as our Chair and requesting money transfer to a specified account.

9 Officers Reports

9.1 Chair (Mike Webber)

January - he had acted as intermediary for "Evelyn" a true film about the effects of a teenage suicide on a family, which was shown throughout the country. The showing at the Tyneside Theatre was followed by a walk (organised by Gill and David Dallow, Tyneside Group).

February - he chaired a successful Area AGM, which included a walk around Lumley Castle and a presentation by Jack Cornish on "Lost Ways". Wendy Maxted became Area Secretary.

March - accepted as Area Representative for the Ramblers' "Development, Organisation and Location review" following an hour-long telephone interview.

April - Attended the General Council meeting in Manchester. Falling membership was the dominating main concern.

May - Seven area members took part in a Walk Leadership training day, which he organised.

June - Attended the first meeting in London for those involved in the DOL review.

Free First Aid training began in June, run locally by St John's Ambulance.

July - Chester-le-Street had had a leaflet professionally designed. 6,000 were printed and 5,000 distributed for £320.

August - acted as intermediary for the Area AGM preparations, sending information to Central Office re location, possible speakers etc. Email sent out inviting all members to attend, as there was some doubt who could attend.

September - Chester-le-Street group started a devise-and-name local walks, eg "Riverside Round, Cestria Seven, Causey Arch March etc. as initial steps towards a future Walking Festival.

6 October - Arrangements for Mark Crosby (Head of Ramblers Operations) and Diane Simcoe (Northern Area Support Officer) to attend a walk and talk in Chester-le-Street, were cancelled due to severe weather warning.

He would re-submit an update of our application to hold the 2021 General Council meeting locally, when Central Office asked for "Expressions of Interest" in the next few weeks.

9.2 Long-Distance walks (13-15 miles) – Neil Allender

16 walks had been held with 50 people attending, led by 10 leaders. An average of 8-9 people attended per walk. We would be continue a programme for another year. Members from any group could attend.

9.3 **Membership (Malcolm McVey)** – He was unable to give a detailed report, having just returned from holiday. Total Area Membership to date is 2047. Looking at the last six years :- 2013 total was 2,228. 2014 was 2,153. 2015 was 2,120. 2016 was 2,065. 2017 was 2,059. 2018 was 2,052. These figures are reflected all over the country and are now a 'Cause for Concern' to the Ramblers nationally. All groups must start to take action in an effort to reverse this downward trend.

Ramblers place some new members into a NN96 group which seemed to be a miscellaneous group.

10 Any Other Business

10.1 Bill Gallon mentioned that 2020 was the "Year of the Saints" in Co. Durham. An article "Camino Inglesie" route through County Durham" had appeared in the Northern Echo and some local free newspapers that a meeting of business, church, County Council and interested parties had been held at Ushaw Moor, when 6 or 7 "pilgrim" routes, terminating at Durham Cathedral, had apparently been made "official". Richard Fletcher was also there. One route was from Finchale Abbey to Escomb Church through Auckland Castle.

See www.britishpilgrimage.org.

10.2 Bill Gallon was storing the Heritage Way display boards. Groups were to be informed at the Area Council that they were available for their use. If more convenient, Mike Webber was also willing to store the boards to allow local groups to borrow them. **To include on Area meeting Agenda - Wendy**

10.3 Bill mentioned that Clavering Estates were appealing against Gateshead Council's decision to keep open a footpath in the area.

10.4 Steve Edwards asked that if the Annual Reports and Accounts were to be available only on the website, that members be informed beforehand so that they could look at them before the AGM.

A note to be added to email sent out with agenda for Area AGM -Wendy

10 Dates of future meetings –

Area Council – Monday 21st October at 7 pm at St Nicholas Church Hall, South Gosforth.

Executive Committee – Monday 20th January 2020 at 7pm