

Ramblers' Association, Northumbria Area
Minutes of Area Council Meeting : Thursday 6 April 2017 at 7 pm
Held at Jesmond Methodist Church, Newcastle upon Tyne

Present

Penny Ford (Area Chair, & Alnwick)	Doug Moffatt (Gateshead)
Stephen Edwards (Area Treasurer & Ponteland)	Julia Forster (Hexham Group)
Pauline Hawdon (Area Mins. Sec., & Affiliated Group Sec.)	Mavis Harris (Hexham Footpaths Secretary)
Neil Allender (Area RoW Co-ordinator/Tyneside)	Vicky Ludbrook (Morpeth Secretary)
Malcolm McVey (Area Membership)	Dorothy W Fenwick (Morpeth)
Nuala Wright (Area Access Officer)	James Connolly (Northumbria Walking Group)
Richard Fletcher (Area Vice Chair, & Durham)	Barrie Russell (Chair, Tyneside)
Anne Dickinson (Short Circuits)	Judith Taylor (Tyneside/Independent Member)
Mike Webber (Chester-le-Street)	Bill Gallon (Independent member)
Jon Davison (Chester-le-Street)	

Action

1 Apologies: Penny welcomed James Connolly of the Northumbria Walking Group and then gave apologies for R Hutchinson, G Darbyshire, G Dallow, A Emslie, T Royston, and C Sanderson.

2. Minutes of last meeting: Having been circulated, were taken as read, and approved.

3. Matters Arising:

- 3.1. **Lost Ways** (Neil Allender) – He had met with the newly formed Alnwick lost ways group, no actions yet. He has had no response from other groups and was concerned that time was running out. He appealed again to groups to find volunteers and was willing to talk to groups or individuals to explain how to get started.
- 3.2. **Heritage Way** – Judith was making slow, steady progress and hoped the route will be launched by summer. Hexham and Tyneside groups were way-marking and a graphic artist was designing a website. She would like ideas for a high profile figure for a grand opening. Details would be linked to Ramblers page, including access from public transport, and leaflets would be published. It was suggested it could be included in the festival of winter walks.
- 3.3. **Coastal Path** – (Nuala Wright) - The section from South Bents to Amble had gone out for consultation. If there were no objections it should go to the Secretary of State this year. Way-marking would not start until it had Government approval. She noted that Alnwick and Berwick groups would assist with survey work on the section from Amble to Bamburgh and Bamburgh to the Border and has spoken to both groups.

4. Area Vacancies:

It was pointed out that if we had neither Chair nor Secretary then the Area would be taken over from Central Office. Groups were urged to get in touch if they could help at all. The following positions are vacant:-

Secretary:

Countryside Officer (to review planning applications):

Publicity Officer:

Local Access Forum - A user representative was needed, who need not be a group or committee member. Nick Rosseter of Hexham group was on the forum.

Chairman will be vacant from next AGM.

5. Finance

Area Treasurer (Stephen Edwards)

Current balance was £3,047.18, but one item outstanding for AGM. Cotswold Outdoor had not paid for their advert in the latest walks book. The invoice (£60) was sent on 19 January and followed up with a reminder in March, which they acknowledged. Payment of £810 was due from H.O. at the end of April.

Our appeal against the budget cap was not successful, but we will continue to spend in line with budget for the rest of the financial year. Spending officers had been advised of any revised limits. We may need a new approach to group funding for the next financial year.

6. Website

All groups had now transferred to our Area section on the National website; the Northumbria old website will be in existence until October with a link to the Area section on the National site. The training day had been very useful and further sessions would be held if required - Groups to contact Penny or Alison Emslie

7. Northumbria Walking Group Constitution (James Connolly)

He had recently taken over as Chairman, discovered the Group did not have a Constitution, so the group has asked to use the model Constitution with some amendments. Area Committee approved this action. They have around 200 transient members (some in their 20's) and new members are coming in regularly. They have had a training session and are changing the way the group is set up, most people contacted them through Facebook.

8. Reports from Groups

8.01 Alnwick (NN01) had 72 members, with 15-18 people attending walks. New people had joined and their programme included shorter walks of 5 miles. They had some new social events.

8.02 Berwick upon Tweed – were considering moving their AGM back to fit in with Area programme. Members were keen to help with coastal path survey.

8.03 Chester-le-Street (NN02) – A total of 55 walks included Sundays and Wednesday evenings. 15-25 people regularly attended walks from a total of 95 members. The Secretary sent regular emails with details of events. New members were encouraged by uploading information to their Facebook page. They have a membership and record secretary and noted that their webpage was regularly visited.

8.04 Derwentside – No report.

8.05 Durham – Continued to thrive with walks on alternate Sundays & Wednesdays with 15-19 walkers. They would be starting fortnightly Monday evening walks. They were recently joined by a visually impaired person, who had been a Northumbria Ranger. With occasional help he had managed without any problems. They were recently contacted by a TV producer regarding a reality programme about walking, which would include walks in other countries. It was suggested they liaise with Central Office before committing themselves. They had two events with meals a year and had raised £135 for the Macmillan Trust.

8.06 Gateshead – They have a Facebook page – walks were well attended and they had a few new younger members. They always carried a defibrillator and first aid kit. They had an Easy fund-raising contact where they received a small contribution for ordering items over the internet. Their programme included walks on Saturdays and some weekends. A small group were walking the West Highland Way and intended to also walk the East Highland Way. The walk with Natural England to High Cup Nick was becoming an annual event. Membership is 120.

7. **Hexham (Julia Forster)** - Membership had risen from 130 to 132. They had several new members, although others had died or resigned. The web page seemed to be the most common means of finding the group. Their walk programme (and Ponteland's) had been published in a free magazine distributed in the Ponteland & Darras Hall area. A new Haltwhistle magazine, called "ReadMe", had published an article about the Hexham Group. They had a good response to their first 5 mile walks but not from health walkers who they were aimed at. Their own members who wanted to reduce their distance had found them attractive. The existence of membership list NN98 (for members not allocated to a group) emerged through a member on a 5 mile walk. Generally around 15 walked regularly – double numbers of previous years.

Way marking group starts at the end April with an outing to check a 10 mile section of Isaac's Tea Trail. They were also involved with helping with the Heritage Way route from Ponteland to Wylam

In August they will have a market stall in Hexham, selling bobble hats which some members are knitting now.

At the end of April about 25 members were going to HF Coniston for a weekend. This was a well-established annual event. They also had linked with Gateshead group for a joint coach trip to the Lakes in July.

5 people had taken up the recent training offer and would be going to Blanchland for a walk leadership and First Aid course on 26 May.

8.08 Morpeth (Vicky Ludbrook) - Membership was currently 70 with 4 new members since October. All new members were walking regularly with an average of 10-15. Walks over the winter had been varied with 5 coastal walks; several countryside walks and one urban walk at Christmas around North Shields where they had a lunch of fish and chips at a Fish Quay restaurant. A most enjoyable Christmas dinner was held at the Ridley Arms in December and they continued to enjoy a meal together after their twice-yearly meetings. One member attended the volunteer training day in Durham last September and found it useful. She had become their Publicity Officer as a result. Penny and Vicky did a promotion Day at Heighley Gate but did not get a huge response. Penny has the stand and leaflets. A new rights-of-way course was being held at Howden Woods.

8.09 Northumbria Short Circuits – approximately 36-42 people walked up to 6 miles every second Saturday and always had a back-marker. A Path-finders sub-group pioneered the walks. They intended to make the Summer Walking Festival an annual event. They had had a coach excursion to Holy Island ending in Seahouses for fish and chips. They had had 111 walks with averages of 22 per walk. 35 people had attended the post-Christmas meal at the Millstone in South Gosforth. They were organising an Away Day on 2 September, based in Windermere. They had attended the rambles' website training course for basic instructions. They had taken notice of the Ramblers "Safe guarding" policy and would investigate purchase of walkie-talkies.

8.10 Ponteland (Steve Edwards) - Dara Dastur, a long-standing member and well known walker had died in February and a walk and lunch in his memory was being arranged by friends, details were available on the website. Their pattern of walks continued as before with shorter Wednesday walks being the best supported. The Group annual dinners were well attended.

8.11
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Family Walking Group – no

8.12 Sunderland – 20-30 people walked each week with the least on Sundays. They did shorter walks in the Winter.

8.13 Tyneside – 4 coach groups were going out every week with over 1000 walks per year. The footpath group were carrying out regular maintenance. They had had some Christmas events and were looking into an informal meeting at Newcastle Beer Festival.

9 General Council feedback (Richard Fletcher)

The Board of Trustees had had 7 resignations, 2 of which had only completed one year. Robert Peel had stepped down as National Ramblers Treasurer for Mr Hudd to take his place, but he had resigned also. Election to General Council took most of Saturday and Sunday so that other business did not start until 3 pm. Des Callaghan, Chairman of the Board of Trustees, was appointed as Chairman of General Council. A presentation was made by the new Chief Executive who worked previously for the National Trust for Wales, and her husband has a background in Media. Following her was a presentation by a Staff Member. There was no mention of Coastal Access. She talked about a Tapestry Programme costing £720,000 which included a series of linked programme to improve data.

The new Treasurer's report indicated that the greatest expenditure was for staff. It did not include any discussion on the degradation of rights-of-way and lack of local authority funding. Richard felt that too much time was spent on the election of Trustees and not enough about countryside issues. There was very little mention of Pathwatch which had cost £250,000.

Neil Allender pointed out that members and groups needed to report path problems to him and to Local Authorities, so that they had reason to increase funding. He thanked everyone who had protested about the diversion of the Hadrian's Wall Path. A letter of Protest was sent to National Parks and Natural England.

Nuala expressed concerns about joint use of paths, particularly those shared with cyclists.

10 Reports from Area Officers

10.01 Membership (Malcolm McVey) – There had been Membership problems since November. According to Central Office figures, there was an overall increase of 10 members. As there was 119 new members, this meant a loss of 110.

There was some confusion about Area reference numbers – NN98 are -non-group members and NN96 are Area members. **Total Area Membership was 2077**, Life members are included, but as there was no communication with them, the result is that that number may not be accurate. The group part of the membership number had been removed **from all membership cards. As a result, members have no indication of which group they are attached to.**

- 2. Training (Judith Taylor)** – There was a lot of interest but getting dates organised was difficult. It worked well if the groups got a few people together, but it was difficult with individuals. Richard Holmes, the trainer, would organise a session with only 2 people. Information was included on the website.
- 3. Rights-of-Ways (Neil Allender)** – With regard to new safeguarding protocols, members under 18 years must be accompanied by an adult. New advice was that dogs, even on rights-of-ways, should be kept on leads. He was looking into footpath diversions in view of the A1 upgrade.

11 Any Other Business

11.01 There was some funding for landscape enhancement in the National Park – Penny would cascade the information if anyone was interested. Kate Ashbrook, has given details of Voluntary Forum to keep communications open. Penny forwards information to Group Secretaries, s who should pass on what they think is relevant after discussion with their Chair.

11.02 Key fobs which included personal details were supplied by Micromark.

11.03 Bill Gallon – North Pennines Area of Outstanding Beauty has reinstated **Pennine Patrols**, and are seeking people for the area from Teesdale to Greenhead.

4. Annual General Meeting 2018 – Morpeth group volunteered to host the next AGM and have booked Pegswood Community Centre for Saturday 3rd February 2018. Janet Davis has been booked as a speaker.

11.05 Sponsored walks - According to Statutory Law, it was illegal for anyone to raise funds for another charity. Anyone wanting to do this must advertise it as a private initiative.

11.06 **Elizabeth Dodds walks** – Ramblers have been asked to assist with researching and developing routes carried out by Elizabeth Dodds during the First World War. Funding would be available. Penny would chase this up.
Penny

11.07 Penny would try to organise a meeting in June for Northern **Group Chairs and Secretaries**. Richard may organise one for the Southern Groups, if possible.

12. Future Meetings

Executive Committee: Monday 9 October at Trinity Centre, Gosforth
Area committee meeting; Monday 16 October at Trinity Centre, Gosforth.

There being no other business, the meeting closed at 8.50 pm.