

**Ramblers' Association, Northumbria Area**  
**Minutes of Area Council Meeting : Monday 16 October 2017 at 7 pm**  
**Held at Trinity Church, Gosforth, Newcastle upon Tyne**

**Present**

Penny Ford (Area Chair, & Alnwick)	Vicky Ludbrook (Morpeth Secretary)
Stephen Edwards (Area Treasurer & Ponteland)	Dorothy Watson Fenwick (Morpeth)
Pauline Hawdon (Area Mins. Sec., & Affiliated Group Sec.)	Anne Brunniche (Northumbria Walking Group)
Richard Fletcher (Area Vice Chair, & Durham)	Gill Dallow (Tyneside)
Muriel Goode (Chester-le-Street)	Paul Roberts (Tyneside)
Tony Royston (Chair, Derwentside)	Barry Russell (Tyneside)
Bill Gallon (Gateshead)	Judith Taylor (Tyneside)
Ken Murray (Gateshead)	Rob Hutchinson (Sunderland Walking Club)
C Sanderson (Hexham)	
Mavis Harris (Hexham)	

**Action**

**1Apologies:** Penny welcomed everyone and then gave apologies for A Emslie, J McChrystal, A Dickinson, N Allender, M McVey, G Forster, M Webber, J Darbyshire, and P Blacklock..

**2. Minutes of last meeting:** Having been circulated, were taken as read, and approved with an amendment to item 11.05 “**Sponsored walks** – If raising funds for another organisation, the second organisation must have aims which are in furtherance of the Ramblers’ charitable objectives. Anyone wanting to raise funds for an organisation with a different objective must advertise it as a private initiative.”

**3. Matters Arising:**

- 3.1. **Lost Ways** – Unfortunately Penny had been unable to open the email from Neil Allender. Alnwick group were looking at some of the railway paths around Alnwick with permission from the Duke.
- 3.2. **Heritage Way** – (Judith Taylor) – Way-marking was almost completed, and once the final proof reading of leaflets was carried out, information would be added to the web-site. Although the route could be walked now, it was intended to carry out an official launch at the Festival of Walks in May and it was hoped to get a lot of publicity. She appealed for anyone with professional marketing skills to get in touch. Penny had written to Central Office for their advice.
- 3.3. **Coastal Path** – (Nuala Wright) - Surveys had been completed by Alnwick from Amble to Bamburgh, and by Berwick from Bamburgh to the Borders. Details and photographs had been sent to Natural England.

**4. Finance**

Area Treasurer (Stephen Edwards)

Current balance is £1,862.23 – all invoices had been received and paid. Cotswold Outdoor paid for their advert in the Walks magazine after a further reminder. The next payment from Central Office is due end October and the result of our budget application is awaited.

There were insufficient funds to pay full Group allocations for the coming year in October, so these would be phased throughout the year. He hoped that groups with large reserves would be prepared to forego some, or all, of their allocation.

**5. Area Vacancies:**

There were vacancies for Secretary, Chair, Countryside Officer, Publicity Officer, and Local Access Forum Representative. If neither Chair nor Secretary vacancies were filled, the Area would be taken over from Central Office. Job descriptions for Area Chair and Area Secretary were circulated to groups. There would be support and a 2-day training course in London, and previous Chairs, Penny and Judith, would be there for advice. Secretary’s position could be split into smaller posts, (a) someone responsible for booking rooms, (b) someone to circulate circulating Minutes, and (c) Minutes secretary; members of the Executive committee may be willing to Chair on a rota. She appealed to groups to ask members and let her know by 17 December. If no-one forthcoming, then an emergency meeting would be held. ***Penny would send out an email.***

**6. Reports from Area Officers**

**6.1 Membership** (Malcolm McVey) – membership was 2064, now 2062.

**6.2 Training (Judith Taylor)** - Training takes place as part of a walk. Some bespoke courses had taken place but had not worked where there was not a natural link as there had been insufficient time to cover all items. Everyone who had completed the questionnaire was very enthusiastic and recommended the courses to their groups.

**6.3 Website (Tony Royston)** - Much effort had gone into moving across to the new website, which appeared to be working well and only one group had had a problem. All groups now had an editor but were encouraged to contact Tony if they had any problems.

## **7. Reports from Groups**

**7.1 Alnwick (Penny Ford)** - Alnwick Ramblers provided a full programme of walks throughout the year. Longer Sunday walks had been especially well-attended, attracting up to thirty people. Shorter midweek walks had been run during the summer with starting points throughout the county. On most occasions they had been joined by members from other areas or by new walkers keen to find out about The Ramblers. The Alnwick Ramblers website had been valuable in attracting new members, publicising walks and providing information.

In June many took part in a training event on 'Accidents and Medical Emergencies for Walks Leaders', organised by members of the social committee. Richard Holmes, who had many years' experience of mountain rescue, offered insights into how to keep safe in remote places and how to deal with emergency situations. As well as providing valuable advice, Richard had many suggestions which were quite novel. Who would have considered a kite to be a potentially life-saving piece of equipment! Above all, Richard challenged them to think creatively about responses to danger and to look well beyond carrying a first-aid kit.

Also in June, the group had a barbecue on Alnmouth beach to mark midsummer night. A large number of people attended and enjoyed near-perfect weather and a very varied selection of food.

Group members had helped to survey 'their' stretch of coast for the forthcoming English coastal path. Their Access Officer had also worked hard to raise the profile of walking in the area and to create or reintroduce new paths.

### **7.02 Berwick upon Tweed – None**

**7.03 Chester-le-Street (Mike Webber)** – Walks programme had increased to 75, including Sundays, Wednesday evenings and Thursday mornings, which continued to be well attended. Average attendance had risen from last year. Monthly social events also continued to be a success. Jon Davison, the Secretary, regularly and consistently kept members informed of events and walks by email and this was much appreciated. Photos were uploaded to Facebook after most walks, to encourage new members. 14 new members had joined so far this year. Current membership was 104. 3 members had been trained on Navigation courses offered by the Area and 8 members had recently walked the Dales Way.

Due to budget cuts, Durham County Council had been unable to deal with footpath problems reported to them.

Membership continued to rise, increased members walking, and a growing number of people viewing the website indicated that they were a thriving group. Mike personally wished to thank their committee and walk leaders for the work they did, and members for walking regularly.

### **7.04 Derwentside – No report.**

### **7.05**

**Durham – No report**

**7.06 Gateshead** – The group continued to walk every Saturday with sufficient volunteers to lead walks up until the end of January 2018. In June, the group again led a linear walk from Cow Green Reservoir to Dufton with a coach for the return journey, at a cost of £5 per walker. In July the group did a joint coach trip to Grasmere with the Hexham group with a choice of three walks to cater for all levels.

They had had 2 social evenings - a New Year meal in January, and a Summer meal in August.

Five new, regular walkers had joined the group with an average of 12 to 20 walkers attending walks. As the AGM approached they hoped to encourage more members to take up committee positions and place themselves forward as walk leaders.

The Facebook page seemed popular with the walks secretary taking photographs and placing them on line.

**7.07 Hexham (Julia Forster)** - Membership had risen from 132-139 - the web page seemed to be the most common means of contact.

Numbers on walks had dropped slightly recently (usually 10-15), but several new members were walking regularly and supporting the group in other ways.

The way-marking group had been out on a monthly basis since April. The parishes of Matfen and Gt. Whittington had been finished and they were working in Hexhamshire. They had walked and way-marked the Heritage Way from Ponteland to Wylam and checked their 12 mile stretch of Issac's Tea Trail on 2 occasions.

The market stall in Hexham in August was again rained off after 2 hours but there was interest from a number of people, including one who had moved her membership to the Hexham group.

At the end of September Mavis Harris was presented with a national volunteering award at an event in Hexham which included a talk by Chris Francis who had recently published a book on his walk from Land's End to John O'Groats. 50-60 people attended and money was raised for Tynedale Hospice at Home – the charity which Chris had chosen to support.

The local MP, Guy Opperman, had been invited to join a walk but for the 2<sup>nd</sup> time they had received no reply.

2 people have expressed an interest in training.

In early July the meal at The Car's Bog pub had been well-attended. The annual week-end stay with HF had been booked for April 2018 at Malham.

**7.08 Morpeth (Vicky Ludbrook)** - Membership stood at 72 with 3 new members joining recently. They had had a varied programme of walks with lengths ranging from 7-10 miles and it had been encouraging to see the increase in numbers joining walks particularly from other groups.

There was a good turnout for the meal at the Thai restaurant in Morpeth in July and a Christmas dinner was planned at the Ridley Arms, Stannington, in December.

They were shocked and saddened in late July when friend and colleague, Joyce Chapman, collapsed and died whilst walking with them on the Red Kite Trail. Despite the valiant efforts of 4 members administering CPR and the emergency services, she did not regain consciousness. Joyce had walked with them for many years and would be missed by all.

*Any major incident should be advised to Central Office. This had emphasised the importance of being registered for the emergency SMS service on mobiles, and carrying next-of-kin details. Richard Fletcher said he had 200 key fobs for inclusion of emergency details if anyone wanted any.*

*With regard to "obituaries", groups could include an item on their own website but this would not normally be on the Area website. Gateshead mentioned that they carried a defibrillator (weighing 5 lbs) but this decision was left to individual groups.*

**7.09 Northumbria Short Circuits** – Membership was 95. They had not taken up their annual grant allocation as they had adequate reserves. Due to bank closures, they now offered members the option of using online banking.

A walking weekend, 23-26 June, had taken place at the Windermere Hotel. 27 members did 3 short scenic walks – Elterwater, Holehird Gardens, and School Knott. 2018 weekend was planned around Grange-over-Sands.

Holy Island away day on 2 September was on a sun-filled day with a walk around the island, arriving just before the tide came in, so that many visitors had left. This was followed by fish & chips at Seahouses.

Footpath problems arose on Elsdon and Stamfordham walks, which were reported to Northumberland CC. There were also some rights-of-way issues on the Weardale walk which had been reported to Durham CC.

To comply with the Ramblers' Safeguarding Policy, they had drawn up guidelines which had been circulated to walks leaders.

**7.10 Northumbria Walking Group (Anne Brunniche):** Committee - new Chairman, General Secretary, and Social Secretary, meeting 2-3 times a year. AGM organised for 14 January 2018. Membership – Historically 120-150. Numbers at 14/9/17 – 194 affiliated to Ramblers; 140 on closed Facebook account. Group manual and Constitution setting good practice in place in line with Ramblers Association, had been discussed. They were making good progress and would link it to their public Facebook page.

Marketing and Growth – After discussions, they had gone live in February using Facebook very successfully. This was attractive to younger members, encouraging them to lead walks, organise socials, and a quick way to post events. Their Webmaster had added a link to Facebook on the NWG website, so the group could easily be found. They had 2 Facebook accounts – 1 public and 1 closed. The Public Facebook brought in new members; the closed one was about retaining them. They continued to keep members without Facebook informed of events. They were looking for someone with IT skills who could keep them up-to-date on the legal issues of Facebook.

YHA Group membership – was annually renewed to encourage members to participate in breaks away. They had visited the Lake District, Scotland, Wales, and Ireland.

Walking and other activities – Short, easy walks were usually 7/8 miles and progressed up accordingly. Attendances averaged 20+, but had been 45. Their busy and varied programme included: a Christmas weekend held in Ambleside; a Kielder Lakeside Way bike ride (27 miles); and a walking weekend in Glendalough, Ireland. The Programme Co-ordinator had trialled the OS mapping system with a group of members in the Lake District. The Chairman and Secretary had walked 135 miles, coast to coast from Helensburgh to Dunbarton on the John Muir Way, accompanied by members for shorter sections. A Ben Nevis weekend had been held.

Intentions for Forthcoming year - Christmas weekend in Glasgow; encourage a greater variety of members to lead walks; attend Group Training Courses with the proviso that when used, members would then lead a walk, social activities – pub quiz crawl, themed meals, theatre visits, City weekend walks, 2018 Walks Festival in May; possible committee member update; pay for advertising on Facebook and evaluate outcome; complete NWG Constitution and Manual; keep up with all the great walks they already do!

**7.11 Ponteland** (Steve Edwards) – A walk in memory of Dara Dastur was held at Slaley in May – many thanks to Mavis Harris and others who organised this. Money raised from the collection was donated to the Woodland Trust and an area of woodland in Hedley Hall Woods was now dedicated in memory of Dara.

Pattern of walks continued as before with shorter Wednesday walks being better supported. Shortage of leaders for Sunday group was beginning to create problems in maintaining a full programme.

A successful weekend at HF Coniston with Hexham Group had been held with thanks to Jill Bungay of Hexham for her work in organising it.

**7.12 Family Walking Group** – no report. n

**7.13 Sunderland** – No report

**7.14 Tyneside (Gill Dallow)** – had had a successful 6 months, the only downside being the cancellation of a social that Malcolm McVey had tried to organise. Perhaps being a large group was not in their favour in this instance.

With good co-operation and communication, the transfer between past and present treasurers went very smoothly and the website was going from strength to strength. Their web manager made sure the overall content was interesting and informative while each coach added details of their own programmes and events. Coach organisers had reported a small increase in their number of new members.

**8AGM – Saturday 3 February**, was being organised by Morpeth group and was to be held in Pegswood Community Hub. Penny would send out details with the Agenda in January. A walk would be led in the morning. A Central Office Trustee would attend.

Groups were requested to send details to Tony of any organisation/business asking for publicity. He would encourage them to pay for an advert in the Walks Magazine. Ramblers Worldwide Holidays had asked if they could attend the AGM and they had been invited to have a trade stand – a reply was awaited. Pacers would also be approached to have a stand, and if anyone heard of others, to pass them on to Penny.

**Groups/Tony**

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### **Festival of walks – May 2018**

Groups were encouraged to “flag-up” any walks they had that week. It was suggested that the Heritage Way could be walked in short sections and groups could adopt a section. The New President, Stuart Maconie, had been asked to launch the Heritage Way. The 82 mile route divided into nine sections were: North Shields - Seaton Sluice – Burradon – Ponteland – Newburn – Thornley Woodlands Centre – Beamish – Washington Old Village – Roker Pier – South Shields ferry. Every start and finish was on public transport but usually a hub into Newcastle. Bill Gallon offered to provide additional routes to make some sections circular. Penny had contacted Central Office about publicity and proposed to ask for an article to be included in the Walk Magazine.

**Penny**

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### **Any Other Business**

10.1 Bill Gallon suggested that people looking for to join others for a long distance walk could be linked together through the website.

10.2 Richard Fletcher suggested a monument or plaque to commemorate the linking of the English coastal access with the Scottish path. Penny would email Diane Simcoe who was based in Yorkshire and was our Northern link with Central Office.

**Penny**

### **11. Date of Next meeting – Monday 16 April 2018.**

There being no other business, the meeting closed at 8.30 pm.