

Ramblers' Association, Northumbria Area
Minutes of Area Council Meeting : Monday 26 October 2015 at 7 pm
Held at Jesmond Methodist Church, Newcastle upon Tyne

Present

Penny Ford (Area Chair, & Alnwick)	Bill Gallon (Gateshead & Pennine Way Association)
Richard Fletcher (Area Vice Chair & Durham)	Julia Forster (Hexham Group)
Stephen Edwards (Area Treasurer & Ponteland)	Mavis Harris (Hexham Footpaths Secretary)
Malcolm McVey (Area Membership & Tyneside)	Josie Lowden (Hexham Chair)
Pauline Hawdon (Area Mins. Sec., & Affiliated Group Sec.)	D W Fenwick (Morpeth)
Alan Mitcham (Area RoW Co-ordinator & Ponteland)	Vicky Ludbrook (Morpeth Secretary)
Nuala Wright (Area Access Officer)	Barrie Russell (Tyneside Chair)
Jon Davison (Chester-le-Street Secretary)	Gill Dallon (Tyneside Secretary)
Kathleen Tweddle (Chester-le-Street Chair)	Gillian Darbyshire (Sunderland Secretary)
Tony Royston (Derwentside Chair)	Rob Hutchinson (Sunderland CHA/HF walking club)

Action

1. **Apologies:** Peter Blacklock (Gateshead), Ann Dickinson (Shotley Bridge), Ken Hughes (Hexham), and Dave Turnbull (Area Media).
2. **Minutes of last meeting:** Having been circulated, were taken as read, and approved after the amendment to 9.2 that key-rings would be ordered by Sunderland group and not Chester-le-Street.
3. **Matters Arising:** No matters arising.
4. **Area Vacancies:** An appeal was made for volunteers to fill the positions of: Secretary, Rights-of-Way Officer (Alan Mitcham was to resign at AGM), Countryside Officer (Gilbert Roberts had resigned), and Publicity Officer – it was suggested this position could be combined with Media Officer. At the suggestion that the Countryside Officer might be combined with Rights-of-Way, it was stated that he had responsibility for investigating general applications, such as wind-farms and open-cast sites. Gill Atkinson had resigned as Treasurer but Stephen Edwards had offered to replace her. Much appreciation was expressed to Gill for all her work.

5. Finance

Area Treasurer (Stephen Edwards)

As signatories were still changing over, he did not have access to the accounts. He urged groups to submit their reports quickly. Central Office had approved our budget and money would be distributed to groups. He reiterated that under Charitable Law, groups must not hold reserves but they could apply to the Area for money for legitimate purposes.

It was mentioned that money would be required for General Publicity and updating the Heritage Way Path depending on what Local Authorities were able to provide. The Heritage Way was a walk around the periphery of Tyne & Wear – additional volunteers were required to walk the route, update the description leaflets, and way-mark the route.

6. Reports from Area Officers

6.01 Area Access Office (Nuala Wright)

England Coast Path: The Marine and Coastal Access Act, passed in 2009, allowed for the development of a continuous coast path around the English coastline, including spreading room (additional area for picnics etc.), and a legal right to walk on beaches. First section in Dorset was opened in 2012. Volunteers from Northumbria, North Yorkshire, and South Durham areas prepared a report for the route from Whitburn to Seaton Carew which was submitted to RA in London and Natural England and the consequent report from Natural England was approved by the Secretary of State in July 2013 and the route opened in April 2014.

A 69 kilometre section from South Bents to Amble was now to be included and Natural England was meeting with North Tyneside and South Tyneside Councils, land owners, tenants, and user groups prior to 'walking the route' and would welcome input from the RA. Anyone interested in walking sections of the coast, identifying a preferred route and extent of spreading room should contact Nuala. The ferry could be used to link South and North Shields, but suitable routes to cross the River Blyth and Wansbeck needed to be identified. The information should be presented to Natural England in early Spring 2016. Consultation meetings were to be held as follows:-

Northumberland County Council meeting

– Wednesday 2nd December 2015, 10 am to 1 pm, at Dan Stevens Centre, Blyth Beach

– Wednesday 2nd December 2015, 2.30 pm to 5 pm, at Visitors Centre, Druridge Bay Country Park

South Tyneside Council meeting

- Thursday 3rd December 2015, 11 am to 2 pm, at Norman Kaid Suite, Ocean Road Community Association, Ocean Road, South Shields, NE33 2DW.

North Tyneside Council meeting

- Thursday 3rd December, 4 pm to 7 pm, at Whitley Bay Customer First Centre, York Road, Whitley Bay, NE26 1AB.

Further information on England Coast Path could be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/england-coast-path-improving-public-access-to-the-coast>.

6.02 Rights-of-Way Co-ordinator (Alan Mitcham)

Cut-backs meant that County Councils had to prioritise as insufficient people to deal with everything. The Big Pathwatch had produced some problems as Central Office had forwarded some path problems to the wrong authorities creating some frustration.

Morley Hill Farm: Northumbria Ramblers' objection to the closure of the footpath was upheld at a public hearing in November 2013 but Newcastle Council had done very little other than recognising that the path needed to be diverted. Recently developers of the proposed new Hazlerigg housing estate had agreed to purchase a strip of land alongside the Brunswick Industrial Estate and dedicate this as a public footpath.

Heritage Way – Small groups had been surveying sections of the route and checking the original instructions devised in 1980's, which went around the outside of the Tyne & Wear border and into parts of Northumberland and Durham. Some small route changes would be required. He had met with local authorities who seemed supportive.

Wind-farms – two large wind-farm applications near Belford (St Cuthbert's cave and St Cuthbert's Way) had been rejected and the developers had not appealed.

Lost Ways – routes which were no longer on Ordnance Survey maps. Alan had attended a seminar in Lancaster on identifying and researching paths which had the potential to be claimed as rights-of-ways using historical evidence. He would be interested to hear from anyone who would like to be involved in the research and submission of these claims to County Council. Many of the historic records were held at County Records Office, Woodhorn Museum. (Please contact Alan Mitcham or Judith Taylor). Paul Hargreaves had also attended the course. **Alan Mitcham/Judith Taylor**

Alan was resigning at the AGM. He said Rights-of-Way Officer duties were not necessarily rigorous; he had not done as much he could but not as much as he would have liked.

Penny thanked him for all his hard work over the last 5 years and said she would contact Paul Hargreaves.

Penny Ford

6.03 Membership Secretary (Malcolm McVey)

He did not have everything up-to-date but so far the Area had gained 14 overall with 222 new members. Central Office seemed interested in the emergency key-rings and if they agreed to make a large order, this would greatly reduce the price. Central Office was also working on an Emergency APP.

6.04 Website (Tony Royston)

He would welcome comments about the website. He would look again at the national website to see what could be incorporated into it. About half of groups had webmaster access and Tony Royston and Ian Tait would be happy to help anyone as required. Tony felt our website should be updated to a newer version as there were maintenance and security issues, but did not feel he had sufficient expertise to do this. Ian Tait had mentioned someone who might help but this may involve some expense. Penny Ford would follow this up with Ian.

Penny Ford

7 **Group Reports (summary)**

Alnwick (Penny Ford)

12-20 people attended walks each week. There had been changes in officials at the AGM on 1st September. Penny had been Chair and Footpaths Officer for 5 years - Heather Corby was now elected as Chair. Linda Law (Secretary) had resigned as she was moving south. The Scarborough group had joined them for a walk and they hoped to repeat this.

Chester-le-Street (Jon Davison)

They had ended the year with 91 members, with a monthly average of 97. 15 had left and 11 had joined. Attendance on Sundays averaged 25-30 and numbers on coach trips had improved using a smaller coach and cash up-front. They were updating their website as and when required but were in the process of building a new "Joomla" based website with the assistance of a moderator. This site would be sponsored/funded by Ramblers Central Office. The quarterly newsletter had been discontinued because of lack of articles. Their footpath officer had organised a "Big Path Watch" event and planned more. The Walks Co-ordinator was loading walks into the national database and forwarding links to members. Mid-week walks continued to be well attended, especially those with coffee shop en route. Social events had included crown green bowling, archery, and a ceilidh and future events were being planned.

Derwentside (Tony Royston)

The AGM had been held on 25 October. Membership was holding up and the Treasurer had agreed to continue. Walkers each week averaged 12.

Durham (Richard Fletcher)

They continued to do well with attendances on Sundays of 12-18. Wednesdays were most popular, and 20-30 had attended the 6 weeks of Summer evening walks. Cliff Ludman, who was recovering from a broken neck, was walking 2-3 miles, although he felt unable to join the group because of his difficult feeding problems.

Gateshead (Peter's report)

Gateshead had set up a face-book page with the assistance of Alison Emslie, rather than using email, although people had to register in order to partake. It was proving very popular with members. Their walks programme was included on the face-book page.

Hexham

Total membership was 132 with 10%-15% regular walkers. They attempted to encourage new members but membership continued to gradually drop. The Chair and Secretary were both resigning at the AGM. There were between 2 and 21 walkers on walks of 7-8 miles. Their socials included pub meals, and a trip to the Lakes with HF. The way-marking group continued to work closely with the Rights-of-Way Officers and to go out once a month. They had completed the Slaley area and some of Isaac's Tea Trail near Allendale. They had now started on the Haydon Bridge area.

Morpeth (Vicky Ludbrook)

Total membership was 75 with one new member via the Health Walks initiative. They had 8-10 regular walkers and more had volunteered to lead walks. A new Chair had been elected at the AGM. Socials included Christmas dinner at the Sun Inn, Morpeth, luncheon at Ridley Arms, and fish and chip meals after walks. The Richmond group had joined them on 27 September for a walk on Hadrian's Wall.

Northumbria Short Circuits (Derek Coleman)

They were doing well - 44 people had attended the previous Saturday.

Ponteland (Steve Edwards)

The group continued to walk alternate Sundays and two Wednesdays a month. Wednesdays were better attended with averages in mid-teens. They had published details of activities, resulting in several new members, who preferred to walk midweek. The Christmas mince-pie walk and the annual dinner at the Beresford Arms, Whalton, were both very successful. They joined Hexham group for a walking weekend in The Lakes, thanks to Jill Bungay who organised it. The group continued to support Ponteland Town Council Footpath Users Group in maintaining paths in Ponteland parish and in efforts to reinstate a blocked path at Morley Hill, near Dinnington.

Sunderland (Gillian Darbyshire)

Membership was slightly down at 152, with attendances on Wednesdays of 25-30, and 12 on Sundays. Their AGM was to be held on 28 October. Short Health & Wellness walks, organised through Antony Hindmarch, had been led by one of their members. Some, who wanted a longer walk (than the Health & Wellness walks), had joined with older members of the Sunderland Group for short walks. A holiday to Pitlochry had been organised and there was a healthy social programme which included a Christmas meal.

Tyneside (Gill Dallon)

Due to the size of the group, their finances were professionally audited and were published in an Annual Report, which took a lot of time and led to the AGM being held in February. As this was after the Area AGM, they had been asked to bring it forward. In future they intended to publish their Annual Report on-line, saving considerably on postage and time, and it had been agreed that future Tyneside AGMs would be held on the last Thursday in January. They thanked Penny Ford for being extremely helpful and supportive throughout.

Because of ongoing health problems, Barbara Harrington had tendered her resignation in July, and Barrie Russell had agreed to be proposed as Chairman and had been co-opted to the committee in the meantime.

The wood for the seat in memory of Ann Key had been felled and was maturing. The position chosen was near Joe's Wood and as Jonathan Farries, Forestry Commission, was using the seat as a project for his apprentices, there would be no charge.

They had had a successful half-year and some members, including the Footpath Maintenance Group, were involved in the revival of the Heritage Way.

8

Website and email access to members

Website training for groups had proved successful and Penny had send out information to all those unable to attend. She passed on relevant information from Central Office to Secretaries for forwarding to members. She asked whether it would be useful for the Area to have individual addresses and email them directly. As permission would have to be sought from individuals and some would be unwilling to pass their addresses to the Area, Group secretaries present felt this could result in some members receiving two copies or some none at all. It was agreed to continue as at present with Penny emailing information to Group Secretaries, for them to forward to their members.

Malcolm McVey said he did not have many email addresses.

9

Pathwatch

Chester-le-Street and Tyneside Groups had walked some squares. There were 10,000 squares in total of which 34% (250 square kilometres) were to be sampled, giving the appearance that there were more Urban area squares than countryside. 33,000 footpath problems had been registered but some were very petty. Hexham Group had found difficulty in getting into the squares.

Dates had been set up with little response, although Tyneside Group had 14 interested people, but only 1 could attend on the date given. It was proposed that if Groups wanted training, they compile a list of names, suggest dates and then Judith would set it up with Richard Holmes. Penny would email secretaries listing the types of training available, which could be tailor-made for their group. Some groups would have large numbers, so smaller courses could be run for 2 people, as costs would be averaged out. Those who had attended the Blanchland venue "First Aid in the field" felt it was very worthwhile.

11. Any Other Business

- Penny mentioned that if groups wanted to link with Health Walks she could put them in touch with Clara.
- 16 September 2016 was to be a Ramblers' Volunteer Day at Durham – see www.ramblersvolunteerdays.eventbrite.co.uk.
- Donations to the Open Spaces Society had been discontinued.
- Sunderland Group had a supply of emergency key-rings if anyone wanted to order them.
- It was agreed that Group Chairmen's meetings for North and South had been useful as an exchange of ideas and Penny would arrange some dates.

Penny Ford

12. **Annual General Meeting** – Saturday 6 February 2016 at Whickham Church Hall.

Date of next Area Meeting - April 2016.

There being no other business, the meeting closed at 8.15 pm.