

ramblers
at the heart of walking

The Ramblers: **Our approach to volunteering**



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Foreword



Jonathan Kipling Ramblers Chair

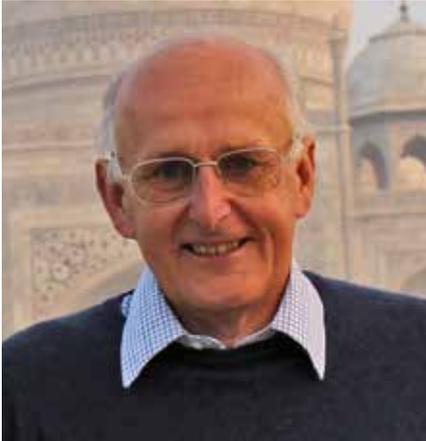
There are many reasons I'm proud to be involved with the Ramblers and one of the main ones is that it's such an outstanding volunteering organisation. If walking is good for the soul then volunteering is at the heart of the Ramblers. All the great things we have achieved and continue to achieve are only possible with the hard work, dedication and enthusiasm of thousands of volunteers.

Everyone who gives their time to the Ramblers for no financial reward is a volunteer, whether that's helping to run a local area or group, clearing a path, leading a walk, lobbying a councillor, researching a walking route, baking a cake for a social event or even chairing the Board of Trustees.

Volunteers are central to delivering our mission and to tackling the challenges we face such as the current reductions on footpath spending by local councils. And all this in a much more challenging environment for volunteering – where people have less spare time than in the past and have changing expectations of what they expect from the organisations they volunteer for.

So it's vital that we keep on continuously improving as a volunteering organisation, ensuring everyone is treated consistently and is valued, supported and developed so they can give their best. This message has come across loud and clear, not only from volunteer surveys, but also as I travel round the country talking to volunteers.

This approach to volunteering sets out how we will be a great organisation for volunteers now and in the future. It will act as a guide in the coming years for the organisation as we improve our support for volunteering and attract more volunteers. So if you are involved with managing volunteers, especially if you are responsible for running an area or a group, please read on.



David Ross

Ramblers Volunteer Sounding Board

Once I had some spare leisure time I decided to join a walking group, which just happened to be one of the Ramblers' local groups. It was expected that most members would also lead walks so I simply took my turn. It was only when I was asked to help with the group committee that I started to think of myself as a 'volunteer'.

A spell working as area secretary and attending several General Councils followed and now I concentrate on looking after our local footpaths. As a volunteer I have had a great opportunity to make new friends and influence the way we work. I get satisfaction from knowing that the work we do keeps virtually all of our local path network 'easy to use'.

Through my area work I realised that our aims could never be achieved just by our staff. We are fortunate that we have many thousands of volunteers who when properly motivated and guided can move mountains. But I felt that there was a huge gulf between the aspirations of many of our members and the zeal of a few activists. I believe we have to capture the desires of our members and motivate them to deliver our charity's goals.

In February 2013 I saw an article on the website and volunteered to join the Volunteer Sounding Board. It's a small cross-section of volunteers from the Ramblers and other outdoor charities. We first met in April and have exchanged ideas, identified gaps and helped to document some of the existing good practice.

This document is a great start on the journey of maximising the effectiveness of the way we treat our volunteers, helping them to encourage others to walk and to deliver the exemplary walking environment that we all seek.

About this document

The Ramblers depends on volunteers – the many people who, in different ways, give their time to us for no financial reward. This document sets out our approach to volunteering and how we plan to develop volunteering opportunities and look after our volunteers over the next three years.

These principles apply across the whole of the Ramblers and across all of our volunteering, from volunteers managing other volunteers to staff who manage volunteers. We want every volunteer – whoever they are, wherever they're based, whatever their role – to have a consistently great experience, now and in the future.

What's in the document

This document sets out:

- why volunteering is so important for us
- our mission, and how volunteering fits within it
- what volunteers can expect from us
- what we expect of volunteers
- how volunteers can expect to be treated at every stage of their relationship with us – the “volunteer journey”.

Who is the document for?

Anyone involved with developing volunteering and managing volunteers within the Ramblers. It's particularly aimed at those of you who are volunteers yourselves, and who recruit and manage other volunteers locally.

What's not in the document

We haven't attempted to describe in detail how you should put these principles into practice. We'll cover this with future practical resources, including a volunteer handbook.

How will the document be used?

This is the first step in a long-term effort to improve the way we support all aspects of volunteering. It sets out the principles we'll apply in future stages of this work, which will include:

- plans to improve particular aspects of volunteering
- guidelines and supporting materials for various groups of volunteers
- measuring the impact of volunteering initiatives.

We'll start to apply these principles right away when developing new volunteer initiatives, whether locally or nationally. And we'll follow them as far as possible in everyday, ongoing work with volunteers.

You'll probably find there are many things you do already which follow these principles. But following all of them may be a challenge. Don't worry: just do your best for the time being. In time we'll provide support to help you make all of them happen consistently and to a high standard.

We'll be using the approach outlined here to guide and prioritise the actions we take to improve volunteering over the next three years (until the end of our next business plan in September 2016). It will also help shape our aspirations beyond that.

These principles aren't written in stone – we'll continually review what we do, and be ready to adapt accordingly.

Why we created this document

Volunteers have always been at the heart of the Ramblers. They carry out the vast majority of the work we do, and are vital to our ethos. Volunteers do everything from governing the charity to making things happen on the ground.

But we could do more to make sure our volunteer base is as strong and effective as possible, in particular by improving our overall management of volunteers. All volunteers are managed in some way, whether formally or informally. We have an obligation to ensure they're managed well.



Why volunteering is important

Volunteers founded the Ramblers in 1935, and they remain the heart and soul of the organisation. Today over 15,000 volunteers across England, Scotland and Wales directly deliver our charity's mission to protect and expand the places people walk and to promote walking. They've played a vital role in our many achievements, from creating National Trails and national parks to winning the right to roam across huge areas of open country.

Among many other things, our volunteers currently:

- run a network of around 60 local areas and 550 groups
- lead 45,000 walks every year
- help tens of thousands of people improve their health through walking
- monitor and challenge changes to around 2,000 footpaths in England and Wales every year
- manage over 100 path maintenance teams working in partnership with local councils
- protect 1 million hectares of open land in England and Wales, and even more in Scotland
- oversee the running of a charity with 110,000 members, 70 staff and a £7 million annual budget.

Every minute of the time they give counts towards the success of our mission.

But it's not just about the work volunteers do – it's about the way they do it. Volunteers are members of their communities, delivering benefits to those communities. They know best how to deliver things people want and need, in ways that enjoy widespread and deep-rooted support.

Every volunteer is a champion for the Ramblers and for walking. Even when they're not actively working for us, volunteers can influence their networks and communities, from politicians and local decision-makers, to friends, family and workmates. Volunteers help in:

- raising our profile
- creating a positive and accurate image of who we are and what we do
- influencing people to support our mission, campaigns and objectives
- influencing organisations and decision-makers to work alongside us and fund us, both nationally and locally
- encouraging people to support us directly through joining, volunteering or donating.

Volunteers are also instrumental in deciding what we do, and how we go about doing it. We're a democratic organisation: all members can participate in our decision-making. We're governed at all levels by volunteers.

People have widely differing motivations and reasons for volunteering besides simply supporting our work. As a successful volunteering organisation we need to recognise this, and be clear about how volunteering benefits volunteers themselves. No one should ever give their time reluctantly, through a sense of obligation or guilt.

We also believe that volunteering itself is a positive thing for society. Among other things, volunteering:

- brings people and communities together to make a positive difference through collective action
- empowers people and helps them make their voices heard
- broadens people's knowledge, skills and experience
- widens and strengthens social networks and increases people's participation in civil society.

The Ramblers' mission and how we achieve it

The Ramblers helps everyone, everywhere, enjoy walking and protects the places we all love to walk. We are the only charity dedicated to looking after paths and green spaces, leading walks, opening up new places to explore and encouraging everyone to get outside and discover how walking boosts your health and your happiness.

You can find out more about our current work by visiting www.ramblers.org.uk and clicking on What we do.

Our values

How we go about achieving our mission is important to us. We always strive to work in accordance with our values, which are to be:

- **welcoming** – to all, and particularly to newcomers
- **positive** – looking to have fun and create enjoyment
- **empowering** – helping give people the confidence to help themselves
- **inclusive** – welcoming people from diverse backgrounds, and being sensitive to the needs of different communities
- **ethical** – being respectful of others, honest in what we say, and thinking through the consequences of what we do
- **democratic** – working to deepen and improve democracy within our organisation
- **environmentally responsible** – promoting activities and behaviour which are sustainable and which benefit the environment.

A well-run organisation

As a charity, we have a duty to use the resources at our disposal, including the time and effort of our volunteers, as effectively as possible in pursuit of our mission.

Good management is essential to this. In practice, all volunteers are managed, though you might not think of using the term. Some office and project volunteers are formally managed by named members of staff, while area or group volunteers may be managed informally by other volunteers or through committee structures.

Obviously volunteers aren't managed in quite the same way as paid staff. But we have just the same obligation to ensure their time is used as effectively as possible and that they're supported and developed so they can give their best.



How volunteering fits within the Ramblers

Volunteers get involved in the Ramblers in two main ways:

- volunteering through our local network of volunteer-run areas and groups
- volunteering for specific projects supervised by staff or to help in our offices.

Most volunteers are members, which means they can get actively involved in their local area, and have a say in all our decision-making. We do, though, also offer volunteering opportunities for people who aren't members.

Areas, groups and our democratic structure

We have around 60 “areas” across Great Britain, and within each area are several local groups – a total of around 550. Areas and groups are both managed by volunteers, usually through committees. These volunteers manage others who carry out our work locally, with the benefit of national strategies and support. This gives us a powerful combination of effective local action and a strong national voice.

Areas elect delegates to **General Council**, our annual meeting, which discusses policies and other strategic matters, and elects most members of the **Board of Trustees**. The Board has overall responsibility for the Ramblers and sets our strategic direction. Some of its members are coopted or delegated from Scotland and Wales.

Scotland and Wales have their own annual countrywide meetings, Scottish Council and Welsh Council, open to all members and to areas. The councils elect executive committees which oversee our work and take most of the decisions on campaigning, policy and priorities in their countries.

Members of the Board and the Scottish and Welsh committees are all volunteers.

The chief executive and Ramblers staff coordinate, support and implement our work under the strategic direction of the trustees and in partnership with volunteers.



We also run a number of specific **projects** outside the area and group structure. These are often externally funded, and offer a range of opportunities for volunteers including:

- researching, writing up and checking walking routes
- becoming a footpath warden
- taking part in online campaigning
- promoting walking in projects like Walking for Health and Let's Walk Cymru.

For more about ways to get involved in Ramblers volunteering, see under Support Us -> Volunteer at www.ramblers.org.uk.

Walking for Health is England's network of health walks, with 600 schemes and a pool of 10,000 volunteers. Since April 2012, we've led the programme in partnership with Macmillan Cancer Support. We also jointly manage the equivalent programme in Wales, **Let's Walk Cymru**.

Local schemes are run by a variety of organisations including councils, the NHS and voluntary groups. While we don't directly manage volunteers in these schemes, we advise schemes on how best to manage volunteers, in line with the approach in this document.



What volunteers can expect from us

We want all our volunteers to be able to agree with the following statements:

I feel welcomed, respected and valued.

I understand what the Ramblers is trying to achieve and how my work contributes to this.

I can see the benefits and positive outcomes of my work.

I know what's expected of me and feel comfortable with it.

I know what I can expect from the Ramblers.

I feel I have the right skills, knowledge, abilities and resources to do the work, or I am being supported to gain the right skills, knowledge and abilities through training and mentoring.

I feel supported, and know what to do and/or who to speak to if I'm uncertain or if things go wrong.

I feel confident that the Ramblers will look after my health, safety and wellbeing when volunteering.

I know how I can contribute to decision-making within the Ramblers, and feel confident to do so if I wish.

I feel proud to be part of a national charity, even if I'm mainly working locally.

I feel confident that I can move on from my role when I choose to do so without causing undue problems.

My volunteering is rewarding, enjoyable and fun.



What we expect from volunteers



We also need to have expectations of volunteers, so we can all work together effectively.

We expect all our volunteers to be able to agree with the following statements:

I will work collaboratively with other volunteers, members, staff, the public and people from partner organisations to achieve the Ramblers mission, within agreed strategies and priorities.

I will uphold the values of the Ramblers and promote them in all of my work, both within the Ramblers and when representing the Ramblers externally. I will challenge attitudes and behaviour which disregard our values.

I will be clear about my volunteering commitments and do my best to keep them. If I am unable to keep my commitments I will arrange cover or notify the appropriate person as soon as possible.

I will work within the structure, policies, procedures and guidelines of the Ramblers, including receiving and acting on communications essential to my role.

I will strive to contribute to an environment in which everyone who works or volunteers for us will find their work rewarding, enjoyable and fun.

More about policies and procedures

We have a legal and moral responsibility to look after the health, safety and well-being of volunteers, staff and everyone who works with us. We must work within the law, and are also accountable to other organisations including the Charity Commission, the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator, Companies House and HM Revenue and Customs. To help fulfil these obligations, and maintain our reputation as a trustworthy and responsible organisation, we have a number of policies and procedures which everyone, including volunteers, must follow. For examples, see Appendix 3.

The volunteer journey

We want volunteers to have a positive experience of the Ramblers at every stage, from their first awareness of volunteering opportunities through to the time they move on. It can be helpful to think about the sequence of interactions between volunteers and the Ramblers in a structured way, as the **volunteer journey**.

Every volunteer is at a particular point on their journey. We all have a responsibility to ensure they complete each stage successfully and in accordance with the principles above.

Attracting and recruiting

We want to be open and welcoming to everybody, and that means offering flexible opportunities for a wide range of people. This stage includes the opportunities we offer and how we go about offering them, from advertising to personal approaches. It covers how we respond to enquiries about volunteering and assess people's suitability, or how we handle elections where the role is an elected one. It's also important to be clear about mutual expectations from the outset.

Supporting and developing

When a volunteer starts working with us, they should feel included and empowered. This stage covers their welcome and induction, the training and resources provided, and the ongoing support and supervision they receive. Volunteers should have opportunities to develop their skills and interests, receive feedback and learn from experience. We also need to deal with potential problems and conflicts.

Recognising

It's vital that we recognise and value the work and successes of volunteers. This includes everything from everyday acknowledgements, to awards schemes, to keeping volunteers informed of the impact of their work.

Resigning, replacing and reassigning

The final stage is about ensuring volunteers have a positive experience when they retire from their role, either moving on to another role or, hopefully, continuing to support us in other ways. It also involves managing that process so the volunteer is replaced as seamlessly as possible.



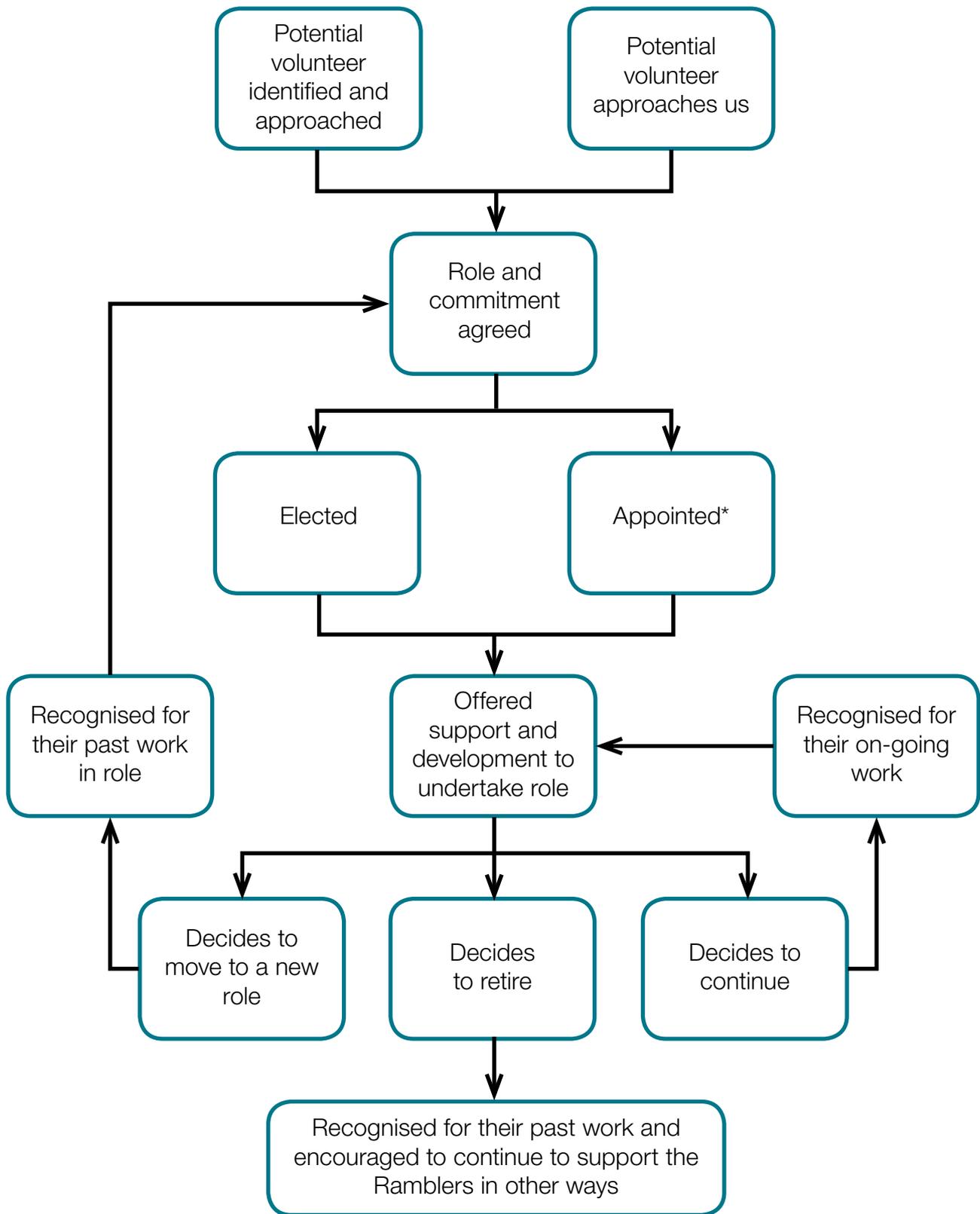


Diagram of the volunteer journey

* Appointment could be a formal process, but more often it takes place informally when someone invites a volunteer to fill a particular role.

Appendix 1: Charitable objectives

The charitable objectives of the Ramblers, as set out in our Memorandum and Articles of Association, are to promote, encourage or assist in:

- The provision and protection of footpaths and other ways over which the public have a right of way or access on foot, including the prevention of obstruction of public rights of way.
- The protection and enhancement for the benefit of the public of the beauty of the countryside and other areas by such lawful means as the trustees think fit, including by encouraging the provision, preservation and extension of public access to land on foot.
- The provision of facilities for the organising of open-air recreational activities and in particular rambling and mountaineering with the object of improving the conditions of life for the persons for whom the facilities are intended, namely the public at large, and in the interests of social welfare (including health).
- Advancing the education of the public in subjects relating to access to, and the preservation and conservation of, the countryside and of the health benefits of outdoor recreational pursuits.

Appendix 2: Code of conduct

For Members, Volunteers, Trustees and Staff

The Ramblers' main expectation for members, volunteers, trustees and staff is that we work together to help the Ramblers achieve our charitable aims and deliver our strategy. While doing this, we should be guided by our values at all times. Our values are to be welcoming, positive, empowering, inclusive, ethical, democratic and environmentally responsible.

Our Code of Conduct sets out the basic principles of how everyone involved in the Ramblers should work together in a spirit of mutual respect and understanding.

1. Volunteers, members, staff and trustees will work together collaboratively to deliver our strategic aims and, in doing so, benefit the wider public.
2. We will uphold the values of the Ramblers and promote them in all of our work – with each other and when working on behalf of the Ramblers with people outside of the Ramblers. We will challenge attitudes and behaviour which disregard our values.
3. We will recognise the structure of the Ramblers and acknowledge that we may have differing lines of accountability which means that we may have to say no to requests.
4. We will recognise that our organisation is accountable to external organisations and is regulated externally, which means that we cannot always do what we may want.
5. We will aim to communicate our requests and decisions clearly, effectively and with courtesy. We will avoid language or behaviour which may come across as offensive. We will try to listen to each other, especially where we may disagree.
6. We will strive to make the Ramblers an enjoyable environment for everyone who works or volunteers.

Appendix 3: Examples of policy and procedure

- **Health and safety** – To ensure volunteers don't endanger themselves or others, we incorporate health and safety considerations into all our guidance and give detailed health and safety briefings where appropriate, based on the best available advice.
- **Insurance** – We provide civil liability insurance cover for all volunteers, and personal accident insurance for path maintenance teams, and specific procedures need to be followed to ensure volunteers are covered.
- **Data protection** – Running the Ramblers involves handling personal information covered by data protection laws, and we have policies in place to ensure volunteers with access to this information stay within the law.
- **Safeguarding young people and vulnerable adults** – We are committed to safeguarding young people and vulnerable adults as well as those who regularly work with them, including volunteers who depending on their work may need to have a Disclosure and Barring Service (criminal records) check.
- **Finance** – As a charity, our financial affairs are closely monitored, so we have detailed policies and procedures for handling money, from claiming expenses to keeping area accounts.

Detailed information on all these topics is available in the Volunteer Zone at www.ramblers.org.uk under Volunteer toolkits

Acknowledgements

This document is the result of considerable research and thought by a very large number of people which includes:

- research into the way other successful voluntary organisations manage volunteers, and the recommendations of national bodies that promote volunteering more generally, for example the National Council for Voluntary Organisations
- extensive discussions with our Volunteer Sounding Board created in 2013, which includes a wide range of Ramblers volunteers with broad experience of areas and groups, staff-managed projects and volunteering with other organisations
- an online survey of experiences and attitudes among our volunteers
- discussions with area chairs as part of our series of area chair forums.

We would particularly like to thank the Ramblers Volunteer Sounding Board, whose contribution has been indispensable.

- Dave Cavanagh – Vale of White Horse, Oxfordshire
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- Sandy Murray – Independent member
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- Peter Stone – Henley & Goring, Oxfordshire
- Richard Trueman – Tiger Bay, Glamorgan

We would like to thank our volunteer photographers Ian Dickin, Mark Treacey and David Jones for the images they have provided for this document.

The best place to go for all volunteering news and resources is the Volunteer Zone at **www.ramblers.org.uk**.

Our approach to volunteering

The Ramblers depends on volunteers – the many people who, in different ways, give their time to us for no financial reward. This document sets out our approach to volunteering and how we plan to develop volunteering opportunities and look after our volunteers.

If you have any questions or comments about this document, or would like to contribute to the ongoing process of improving volunteering in the Ramblers, please email volunteer@ramblers.org.uk

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