

ANNUAL REPORT
(Covering the period 1st October 2015 – 30th September 2016)

Area Chair (Keith Wallace)

I took up my post after the February AGM and set out some of the ideas that I would be looking to implement in a 'manifesto for change'. These were discussed with the other Area Officers and sent out to Group Representatives as well as being published on the Area website. The Area Council also discussed the ideas when it met in April.

One of the first things that I did as Area Chair was to go for a walk with every Group in Nottinghamshire. I was made welcome by everyone and learned quite a bit about the individual Groups and their active members. One thing that came across was a 'dis-connect' between the Groups and Area with several Group members saying that they didn't know what Area did. Partly, in response to this, I set up some quarterly Members Days. The first was at Cropwell Bishop in May then we had another one in August at the Idle Valley Nature Reserve. Both days saw members and Area Officers come together from across the County to walk, talk and socialise.

Another change was to start to set up sub committees to focus on three core Ramblers areas. We already had a footpaths group and a group of District Coordinators who looked after the rights of way. These were brought together so that the District Coordinators and the Group Footpaths Officers could work more closely together to safeguard and enhance the network. A second committee were starting to look at how we communicate between Area, Groups and Members. A new website had already been set up and a regular newsletter was starting to be sent out to members who have given their email address to Central Office. The latest addition is a Facebook page with items of interest to Ramblers members. This committee will also look to draw upon expertise from Group members and Area Officers to raise the profile of Ramblers in the County. A third committee was in the planning stage which would again call upon expertise within the Groups as well as from Area Officers to both retain members and recruit new members. These committees would then report to Area Council.

There were other plans including better support for the Groups; the use of the AGM as a promotional event for the Ramblers; better promotion of the work done by the Ramblers to open up new paths and get them on to the Definitive Map.

Unfortunately, a lot of the initial work came to a halt.

During August, Ramblers Central Office started to put upon me an increasing burden

of work that interfered with what was being done within our Area and took up more and more of my time. By October, the calls being made upon me by Central Office were such that I could no longer continue as Area Chair and still do my work for Walking for Health and my own Group, Mansfield & Sherwood. I resigned as Area Chair just before the October Area Council.

Area Vice Chair (Rod Fillingham)

I supported Keith during his time as Chair and attended the new initiative 'Members Days' at Cropwell Bishop on Saturday 7th May 2016 and the Idle Valley Nature Reserve on Saturday 6th August 2015.

As Vice Chair you really do not have a very active role unless the Chair is unable to fulfil any of the duties as Chair but you are part of the support network for the Chair and as such you are invited to any Honorary Area Officers meetings. With Keith being in his first year as Chair I also offered my guidance and support while he got to grips with what the post entails without affecting his own agenda.

Unfortunately, due to the circumstances as laid out in the Area Chair's report Keith felt he could not carry on as Area Chair and at this time I suffered a heart attack (just prior to Keith's resignation) so unfortunately I was unable, at that time, to take on the mantle of acting Chair. Also because of all the above circumstances I reassessed what I could realistically keep doing for the Ramblers and have decided that I will not be standing for any Area position at the next AGM.

I would like to thank all of those within the Nottinghamshire Area and beyond who have made my time since I took on Area duties such an enjoyable and pleasurable part of my life and I hope that those that come after me have as successful and rewarding an experience that I myself had of being part of the Area Management Structure.

Area Secretary (Jenny Fillingham)

I have enjoyed another busy and enjoyable year as Area Secretary. It was particularly enjoyable and interesting working with Keith who had so many good ideas to take Nottinghamshire Area forward. It was with great sadness that I read his resignation letter but respect why he has decided to resign.

Over the year, I have attended General Council held in York 2nd & 3rd April 2016; Torksey Viaduct Opening Friday 22nd April 2016; Ramblers Volunteer Day held in Nottingham on Saturday 23rd April 2016.

Together with Rod, Alex and Marian Staniforth we have taken the Area publicity stand to: Gedling Show Sunday 4th September 2016; Southwell Ploughing Match Saturday 24th September 2016 (Allan and Kath Rogers also helped).

I particularly enjoyed the two members' days at Cropwell Bishop and the Idle Valley Nature Reserve. It was good to meet other walkers and put names to faces. Both days enjoyed dry and sunny weather.

It is with sadness that I have decided not to stand for any Area Positions at the AGM.

Rod's heart attack made us both look at our lives and decide what we could carry on with. We are both Trustees of Gedling Country Park and this seems to be taking more and more time as it is developing; family commitments are very important to us and as most of you know we are also involved with the Robin Hood Way. After much thought, we decided that the Ramblers had more members able to take over and so our decision was made.

We will still represent the Nottinghamshire Area Ramblers at the local shows (we really enjoying meeting all the different types of people) and we will endeavour to progress footpaths linking to Gedling Country Park.

I have had the support of many members and would like to thank them all.

Area Treasurer (Jack Prust)

Annual Accounts

30th September 2016 marks the end of my third full financial year in office and the accounts show a surplus over the period of £3,339, mainly because the budget for the year included provisions for the Nottinghamshire Walker and legal expenses which were not actually required. Therefore the budget for 2016-2017 has been aimed at reducing this surplus to a more reasonable level. The independent verification of the accounts will be presented at the meeting in February.

Annual Budgets

The annual budgets for 2016-2017 have been submitted to central office and have been agreed. This means that all groups will be receiving the amounts they have requested for the year, and the first payments have already been made to the groups in late November.

Annual Returns

I have now received most of the annual returns for 2015/2016 and these have been forwarded to central office. I am hopeful that the outstanding annual return will be submitted over the next week. Many groups have already sent in their accounts with the independent verification required, and the deadline for these has been set at 31st January 2017.

Area Rights of Way Secretary (Chris Thompson)

At the beginning of the year the DC Committee changed its name to the Rights of Way Committee. This was due to its constitution and the need to widen its brief to link all the Nottinghamshire RA Groups. Meetings have continued in the main to be held quarterly with the District Coordinators (DCs) linking with their local Group(s) and also working locally dealing with all rights of way issues. Much local work has been achieved in respect at looking at local planning applications, sorting out local rights of way problems and consulting on rights of way orders sent out mainly by

Notts County Council and also Borough Councils. Much thanks and appreciation must be given to all DCs and Groups for all your work carried out for the Area.

Many thanks must be given to Stephen Parkhouse who has set about covering all the parishes north of the River Trent to look at claiming modification claims. However, at time of writing this report, The Deregulation Act has not been published. This is important as we are not able to serve notices using the new approved scheme until this Act is published. We keep being informed the new way of dealing with these claims will be published but sadly not yet. The problem we also have is that cut-off date to make rights of way modification claims still remains at 1st January 2026.

One good point to report, work carried out under the old system by Steve and myself, we have continued to see successful claims being confirmed. As an example we have new paths at West Markham/Tuxford area, Owlthorpe/Kinoulton, South Leverton and Hodsock area. These new paths will create better connectivity and reduce your walks away from the roadside.

In October 2015, there was an inquiry about the claim Burton Road Gedling to Stoke Bardolph. Sadly the Inspector did not confirm the order, but in further discussions with RA Central Office, a decision was made to challenge the decision and we await a Judicial Review with a top Barrister (George Lawrence) presenting the case for the Ramblers. We hope we are successful and see a path created in the memory of the late John Lord, Gedling Group, who did a lot of work on the claim.

In July this year, Notts County Council contracted out its highway functions including rights of way. The new company is called VIA East Midlands. There is still a small team working also representing Notts County Council who work in partnership with VIA East Midlands. At the time of this report it is early days, but work is going on by the Ramblers to build up a relationship with the new company. We must thank our retired chairman (Keith Wallace) for starting those negotiations.

One major concern at the moment is Network Rail wanting to close off several railway crossings. At last year's AGM we did report that there were aims to close several railway crossings in the Bassetlaw/Newark on Trent area along the East Coast Mainline. Due to funding, the government withdrew from that project, but Network Rail still continue to want to close off several railway crossings. I must thank James McGill who has attended several meetings with Network Rail to discuss closure of railway crossings in the Newark area. The problem we have is that Network Rail is using temporary closure orders instead of either the Railway Crossings or Diversion process. The reason for that is these orders are too cumbersome and time consuming. Temporary closures are instant and the Ramblers find it difficult to reopen the paths.

A major issue the committee have been involved with is providing improved facilities for cyclist using the rights of way network. We have to accept that cross country cycling has vastly increased and whilst there are many cycle/walk linear tracks, cyclist require more linking rights of way to improve their cycling routes. From a walker's perspective, this is a difficult challenge, but one that will have to be dealt with. The ROW committee have been involved with the local Sustrans group for a

new cycle route from South Clifton to Collingham. There have been several meetings and with support from landowners several new cycling paths could be established with minimum use of footpaths. We wait further on the final route chosen.

We are delighted this year that Notts County Council/VIA East Midland are experimenting on winter closures of Byways for four wheel vehicles. This will mean from October to March, a series of Byways mainly in the Clarbrough area will be closed off for these vehicles. The reason for this decision is because of motorised vehicles accessing these routes when the Byways are very muddy. The vehicles do much damage with the result of expensive repairs to make these routes available again. The intention will be to have further Byway closures next year.

I would like to thank David Hunt as Chair of the Rights of Way Committee for being so supportive to the work of the Committee. He has chaired our meetings so well, and has always been available if you wanted help or advice. In addition, I thank Allan Rogers, Area Information Officer, who has continued to provide all the consultations to all DCs and other important rights of way updates. I would also like to thank Martin Smith who has decided to call it a day. He has been involved for many years as Group Footpath Secretary then DC, all for the Rushcliffe Group. In addition, he has assisted the Area by taking on all rights of way problems and reporting these to the county and seeing that the problems are resolved. A big thank you Martin for all your hard work. Also, firstly to Keith Wallace for his work as DC for Ashfield/Mansfield and as Area Chair. Thank you for all your support and hard work for the committee and thanks to Quaine O'Neil, who tried to replace Keith as a DC, but due to his working hours and family commitments was unable to continue to do the role. We now have two vacancies for DCs (Ashfield/Mansfield & Rushcliffe Area) We appeal to any interested person interested in rights of way work to contact me (Chris Thompson 07719827808 or nottsrow15@outlook.com) Full support will be given. Thank you to our President Paddy Tipping who has served us well for many years. Finally, to our partners and in particular Notts County Council Rights of Way Department and their excellent team and you our members for your support and interest. A big thank you to you all.

Area Walking Environment Officer (Peter Revill)

I took up this [co-opted] role in May 2016 following discussions with the then Area Chair and after meeting other members of the Area Committee. This, therefore, is my first report and reflects a growing but still restricted perception of the task and responsibilities required of a Walking Environment Officer. There is still much for me to learn about this role, its responsibilities and its extent and limitations. One thing is clear, it is a demanding role requiring a significant understanding not only of national policies as set out by the Ramblers themselves, but how these are reflected locally not only across the country, but also the individual groups which comprise and make up the Notts. Area Ramblers. I have a hard act to follow, my predecessor, Jim Norris, had undertaken the role (albeit under a different role title) for many years and was and indeed is, well grounded in the issues that we face and which will continue to challenge us. I am grateful to Jim for the help and advice he has provided to me since accepting the role and I know I shall be reliant on his expertise for some time to come: many thanks. I am also grateful to many others who have offered advice and guidance, indeed, in some cases, taking me out on walks to help explain various

issues and show me some of the challenges we face, I am indebted to Chris Thompson particularly. I should also like to take this opportunity to thank Keith Wallace, who recently resigned as chair of Notts. Area Ramblers, for the advice and guidance he has provided to me and for the opportunity to share his vision for Rambling in Nottinghamshire [and beyond], for the groups and for the challenge of addressing the serious demographic challenges we face in our association. His resignation is and will be a sad loss to our group.

In his last report Jim outlined two key themes for the year: one related to the increasingly active Government policies relating to housing and planning, the other related to the production of energy. In Nottinghamshire, this is having an impact in two ways: the development of fracking and the development of renewable energy sources, particularly wind power and solar power. I will deal with fracking later, but with respect to renewables this is a subject which creates much debate as to, their impact on the countryside, do they, for example, provide significant benefits or do they represent an urbanisation of the countryside? There will continue to be applications to extend these and develop new ones which, we do need to consider on an individual basis.

These are issues of significant importance. Perhaps to be added to this is the now confirmed extension of HS2 through the region.

The Ramblers provide a handbook of “guidance for Walking Environment Officers based upon that provided for “Area Countryside Secretaries.” And I quote from Jim’s last report: “This provides the following useful concept about countryside protection “it often helps to think about “the view from the footpath””. The goal is two-fold: to **enhance** the countryside by supporting positive sustainable projects; to **protect** it by opposing potentially intrusive or damaging developments and plans. It occurs to me that we seem to be forced by circumstances into concentrating on the **protecting** role. This perception is without doubt still the case. Further more Walking Environment Officers look broadly at the various environmental and ecological issues relevant to the walking infrastructure in our area. This involves working closely with Access Officers and Footpath Secretaries to ensure that the countryside and urban public space are accessible to the public and that the special qualities of these places are preserved and enhanced by influencing local decision-makers and landowners.

To this end I also attend whenever possible, Rights of Way Committee meetings and participate and support their discussion and decision making: albeit at this stage it is very much a listening role rather than participation from a position of knowledge.

Jim stated last year that “there is now a presumption that “[development] proposals can be approved wherever possible”; there is no longer a “precautionary principle” relating to building on flood plains and it is no longer incumbent on developers to “robustly justify” why full compliance with policy requirements is not viable or feasible. These new principles are combined with the government view that planning permission for housing should be granted on brown field sites”. Various District Councils are now submitting development plans and we must encourage our local groups to be alert to these, to offer comment and respond to them, based upon local knowledge, supported wherever possible by the Area Environment Officer. I am

learning quickly that there is a need to rely upon such local knowledge, as it is difficult for one person to have a detailed knowledge of the whole county: supporting local groups offering advice and guidance where possible, but also tempering this guidance in the light of the understanding and standpoint of local people, but in the light of a wider issues and national policy. This is particularly true where and when it is necessary to campaign in respect of certain issues and it is important that these are approached in a sensible and methodical way: ensuring that any campaigns with which we are involved are well researched and our views based upon substantive evidence rather than emotive or opinion based approaches.

This is certainly the case with respect to such issues as Fracking and perhaps HS2. Various areas in Nottinghamshire are at risk from applications for licenses to 'test' drill for Shale Gas and these need to be constantly monitored to ensure that we can contribute to any responses to consultations, providing evidence based views on the effects such activity may [or may not] have on the walking environment. With respect to HS2, Government have announced the extension of the route through Nottinghamshire and this requires that we monitor and respond to any issues this throws up: the HS2 route essentially covers the area around East Midlands Airport and its route through Broxtowe and Ashfield Districts: northwards much of the route is in Derbyshire or S Yorks. We must be alert to the implications for footpaths and Rights of Way issues in these areas.

VIA is a new company, set up in partnership between Nottinghamshire County Council and Cornwall County Council; it provides highways and fleet management services in Nottinghamshire. For information: the name "VIA" is taken from the Latin for road. The new organisation became fully operational in July 2016 and is supported by both Nottinghamshire County Council and CORSERV, a company owned by Cornwall Council. It will be based in existing Nottinghamshire County Council highways buildings. This new arrangement is due to reducing budgets and the need for work to be managed differently to meet budget challenges. A meeting has been set up to meet with and establish relations with the staff of VIA.

Finally, I would like to suggest that many of the issues mentioned above and others are also of importance to a range of organisations who represent a membership which sees benefit from the 'outdoors'. Whilst the Ramblers is here to represent the interests of its members and rightly so; it is important, I believe, to recognise this commonality and to demonstrate a willingness to both cooperate and work with others to achieve common goals. Many of us are not just ramblers, but also cyclists and/or horse people and enjoy each equally: to quote the late Jo Cox: *"we have so much more in common with each other than that which divides us"*.

I hope my next report, should I retain the position, will be somewhat more comprehensive as I become more familiar with the role of Walking Environment Officer and the issues which confront our Association. Again, my thanks for the help and support I have received.

Area Membership Secretary (Judith Anson)

AREA MEMBERSHIP REPORT 2015/16

GROUP	NEW AND REINSTATED IN YEAR	TOTAL AT 1.10.16	TOTAL AT 1.10.15
Newark	15	126	135
Nottingham	28	319	340
Retford	17	86	81
Ravenshead & Hucknall	4	103	107
Worksop	12	73	79
Rushcliffe	28	310	304
Broxtowe	19	212	224
Gedling & Dukeries	22	228	240
Mansfield & Sherwood	28	114	99
Southwell	8	66	63
Collingham	5	54	56
Vale of Belvoir	9	94	96
Notts Derbys Walking Group	40	223	231
One Step Walkers	39	143	132
Robin Hood Way	3	3	
Not in Group	13	48	48
Area Total		2202	2235

National Totals: 1.10.16 - 105,990 - 1.10.15 - 107,369

All Groups have recruited new members but despite this, there has been a drop in numbers overall. The numbers joining are not keeping pace with leavers. Although I have no specific figures for Notts, the overall retention of members at the end of their first year is particularly low. The national drop is particularly worrying but I am unaware of any initiatives to increase membership.

Please note that the new/reinstated figures cannot be matched back as they do not show numbers leaving. These figures may also reflect a change of members between Groups, so one Group's loss is another's gain.

The Robin Hood Way Group is a new flexi-group.

I would like to remind members and Groups that every member can now log in to their own membership account on the Ramblers website. This means they can change their personal details, address, Group, etc. Members have to register at <https://www.ramblers.org.uk/register.aspx> Then they can log in to their account.

Area Groups Officer (James McGill)

I have very little to report this year apart from some marginal involvement in a publicity morning at Cotswold Outdoor.

It seems to me that our Groups are largely self-contained and function without the need of much input from Area - in fact, Groups have little contact with Area and any involvement they have arises from the personal interest and commitment of individual members.

My channels of communication with the Groups seem to have dried up and it was my intention not to seek re-appointment at February's AGM as I was devoid of ideas.

However, I have been re-energised by the December meeting of the Communications Group and will be putting my name forward at the AGM to continue in post.

Members will be aware that the Notts Area website has been completely revamped. We hope that it will help to improve links between Groups and Area and I have been using my contacts with Groups in the "Secret Life of a Rambler" feature.

Another idea we have come up with is for me to run a feature on each Group which will involve joining them for a walk and then writing it up for the website.

I remain interested in recruitment but have not pursued my plan of looking into the formation of new Groups. It strikes me that the country is absolutely stuffed with walking groups and that our efforts would be better channelled into contacting local Groups and persuading them of the virtues (and benefits) of joining Ramblers.

Area Minutes Secretary (Jenny Fillingham)

The title more or less says it all. I have taken minutes at all the Area Council Meetings, prepared and sent out the Agenda, Minutes and Reports to Area Officers and Group Secretaries.

Over the years, the method of sending out these papers has changed. It all used to go out by mail but now everyone appears to have access to a computer which makes this job so much easier and cheaper. In fact, some members do not even print them off but bring their laptops/smart phones to the meetings and just open the documents up.

Before the Area Footpath set-up changed I also used to send out the Area Footpath Minutes and Agendas. They were totally different to the Area Council Minutes and I learnt a lot of new village names. I did attend one Footpath Meeting but got so confused did not attend another one. Lovely memories though!

My last job will be to write up the Notts Area AGM Minutes in February 2017. Life has really changed from writing minutes up in a hard-backed book to just saving them on the computer and passing them on just on a little stick or disc (this is Rod's department not mine)!

Thanks to everyone over the years for all their help and patience.

Area Communications Sub-Group (Judith Anson, Chair)

This Group was formally established at Area Council in October 2015 with the following terms of reference:

- the ongoing development and maintenance of the website and other social media
- the production of the Notts Walker and Notts Area Newsletter
- the enhancement of communications within Area Council, between Area and Groups and also between Groups themselves
- the development of a County-wide strategy for recruitment of new members
- to raise the profile of Ramblers within Nottinghamshire through publicity
- additional responsibilities may be added subject to Area Council approval.

Membership is:

- Area Webmaster - Steve Holland
- Notts Walker editor - Steve Parkhouse
- Area Groups Officer – James McGill
- Area Press and Publicity Officer – vacant
- Area Membership Officer – Judith Anson
- Dave Hobson, Vale of Belvoir Group
- Keith Wallace, Mansfield & Sherwood Group

Notts Area Website

The website www.nottsarearamblers.org.uk went live at the end of 2015 and has been the initial focus of attention for the Sub-Group. The website should not be static but should evolve and change over time and all comments, suggestions and ideas are welcome. We are also seeking contributions of photographs and articles to reflect all Groups across Nottinghamshire. The intention is for the Area website to complement Group websites and vice-versa. If someone looks at the Area site it should encourage them to look at the Group site where they live or to search for Group walks. When people are searching the web for walking in Nottinghamshire, the Ramblers site(s) should be what they find. We want people to join Ramblers and know that Ramblers is the charity dedicated to looking after rights of way and green spaces. There is further development needed on the website, particularly on rights of way.

James is managing the feature “Secret Life of a Rambler”, giving interesting insights about individual members and why they are in Ramblers.

The contact for the website is info@nottsarearamblers.org.uk All formal details about Area work and Area Council now appear on the website. All Area Officers now have a generic email address. This means the email remains, even if the person changes and Officers are not using their own address.

It was hoped to set up a forum for Webmaster and Social Media Editors to share ideas, good practice and help for members in Groups taking on these responsibilities but very few responses were received. Groups will be contacted again, following their AGMs, when new people may be in post.

Notts Walker

This email communication is being sent to all members who have given their email address to Ramblers Central Office and other interested parties. This was a total of 1,166 addresses in October and there has been a consistent opening rate of over 50% so it is very successful. The aim is four editions per year but there have been several, much shorter editions featuring particular issues such as the members' days. The Notts Walker serves as a pointer to articles of importance and interest on the website and highlights other Ramblers initiatives with links to the central Ramblers website where appropriate. Groups and members are encouraged to send items and articles for which they would like wider publicity e.g. places on coach trips or holidays, social/special events or the opening of a new path. If members are not receiving the Notts Walker they should contact the email address below or make sure they have given their email address to Ramblers.

Contributions should be sent to notts.walker@nottsarearamblers.org.uk

Facebook Page

This is being managed by Keith and has a growing following. Groups and members are invited to send photos and posts. www.facebook.com/nottsarearamblers

Notts Area Newsletter

This was intended as quarterly pdf newsletter available on the website but it became clear that it duplicated most of the information in the Notts Walker and on the website. It has been discontinued.

Other activities

Now we have the communications in place, the Group is moving to look at enhancing publicity and recruitment. Members with an interest in the Sub-Group's area of work will be very welcome to join – there is no requirement to be a member of Area Council or on a Group Committee.