

**NOTTINGHAMSHIRE AREA RAMBLERS ASSOCIATION COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON
TUESDAY 17TH OCTOBER 2023**

Minutes

Present Sue Rick (Area Chair and Mansfield & Sherwood), Adrian Amer (Vice-Chair), Judith Anson (Area Secretary), Neil Stafford (Area Treasurer), Tony Norcross (Minutes Secretary), Chris Thompson (Area Tourism & Heritage Paths Officer), Alex Ellis (Groups Officer), Brian Tuffnell and Martyn Gill (Mansfield & Sherwood), Mike Stock (Rushcliffe), Jim Norris (Gedling), Joyce Pedersen and Caroline Lee (Newark), Yinka Soetan (One Step Walkers), Paul Fenton and Gail Parkinson (Vale of Belvoir), Keith & Janet Ross (Worksop), Dave Johnson (Southwell) and Dave Johnson (Robin Hood Way Flexi Group)

1 Apologies: Diana Munro (Membership Secretary and Worksop), Linda Honey (Nottingham), Keith Jacobs (Broxtowe), Steve Parkhouse (Area ROW Secretary) and John Young (Vale of Belvoir)

2 Minutes of the Previous Meeting 18th July 2023
The minutes were approved as a correct record.

Proposed: Alex Ellis

Seconded: Mike Stock

3 Matters Arising from the Minutes of the Previous Meeting
None

4 Area Officers Reports

4.1 **Area Chair** Appendix I
There were no questions.

4.2 **Secretary** Appendix II
Rights Of Way Training Day – Groups were reminded about the ROW training day on 28th October and places were still available. Lincolnshire Area were sending 2 Footpath Secretaries.
Ploughing & Cropping Survey 2024 – all Groups had been contacted and encouraged to participate.
Nottinghamshire Routes & Rides 3 – Nottinghamshire County Council (NCC) were producing a third booklet and had asked Ramblers to assist. Several Groups had already come forward for Routes 4, 5 and 6 (see Appendix). Dave Johnson agreed Southwell Group would survey Routes 1 and 2 and Chris Thompson Route 3. Judith would liaise with NCC and confirm with the Groups on next steps.
Area Facebook Page – the page had been removed by Facebook and all attempts to restore it had failed. Despite numerous requests no reason for the removal had been provided by Facebook. Advice had been sought from other Groups and followed without success.

4.3 **Treasurer** Appendix III
Neil thanked Group Treasurers for their Annual Returns. Central Office had not yet approved the Area and Group budgets.

4.4 **Rights of Way Secretary** Appendix IV

Judith reminded Area Council that the work of the Area Countryside Officer would be the responsibility of Area Council as the post was currently vacant. Chris Thompson reported he was receiving communications from the Planning Inspectorate about DMMOs submitted in his name but the Area Rights of Way Team was not informing Chris. Chris asked that he be kept informed and receive a copy of the minutes of the Rights of Way Team meetings.

- 4.5 **Membership Secretary** – There was a welcome increase in both Area and national membership figures.
- 4.6 **Tourism & Heritage Paths Officer** – Chris reported the Notts Guided Walks Programme was asking Groups to provide walks in 2024 to be included in the booklet. These should be 5 – 7 miles and provided free publicity for Groups.

5. Group Reports

One Step Walkers – Yinka sought clarification on what level of scrambling could be included in technical walks. Groups replied the most important factor was for people to have an accurate description of the walk so they could decide if it was suitable for them. This would ensure the insurance would cover the walk. If scrambling was involved, the write up should say that hands would be needed on some of the ascents and describe the level of difficulty. All walk leaders were able to make a decision not to accept a walker if they felt they would not be able to complete the walk or did not have the appropriate clothing and equipment. It was accepted this would be difficult if the walker was not known to the leader. One Step Walkers had also been concerned about threats to Bunny Wood from a solar farm application. Paul Fenton replied that a formal application had yet to be received but there were concerns about the proposals. It would put the long distance footpath in a corridor of trees with loss of views. Paul thought Ramblers would object when the final application was received. Yinka added the OSW Facebook page had 900 followers.

Rushcliffe – Mike reported the Area AGM venue had been changed to East Leake as this was more suitable.

Gedling – the Facebook page was very popular.

Vale of Belvoir – the Group did not use Facebook but had a blog including a map of every walk. The number of people attending walks was steady.

6. Date and Venue of Next Meeting 16th January 2024

The next meeting will be held at Bilsthorpe at **7.15PM** on Tuesday, 16th January 2024.

7. Discussion Session – Solar Farms in Nottinghamshire Appendix VIII and Appendix IX

The last Area Council had discussed Appendix VIII and agreed the issues raised should be discussed by each Group and a further discussion session held at this meeting. All Groups not able to attend had been asked to submit their written comments and votes on the motions. The comments were included in Appendix VII Group Reports and the Area Rights of Way Committee had submitted Appendix IX.

Area Council was asked to consider the following motions:

1. It is therefore proposed that Nottinghamshire Area Ramblers opposes any solar application the includes land within the Green Belt

2. It is therefore proposed that Nottinghamshire Area Ramblers opposes any solar application that encompasses a long distance footpath

In proposing the motions, Neil reminded members this was being discussed by Area Council as the Area Countryside Officer post was vacant. In Neil's view this was particularly an issue for Nottinghamshire because of the existing infrastructure and links to the national grid. Applications were being submitted for profit and not to assist with the reduction of climate change with schemes being targeted below the level requiring referral to national consideration. Development was not permitted on AONB or in National Parks which put pressure on counties such as Nottinghamshire. The applications would remove farm land from food production – arable and livestock. Special circumstances were required if applications were approved in the green belt and Rushcliffe Council had refused a solar array on those grounds. The two motions reflected the importance of the green belt and long distance paths to Ramblers and all walkers. There were already alternatives to solar arrays in other parts of the country with solar panels on roofs and in car parks with electric car chargers underneath the canopy. All these options should be supported by Ramblers before the industrialisation of the countryside. Neil suggested Area Council propose a motion to General Council

Paul Fenton spoke to Appendix IX submitted by the Rights of Way Committee. Following a planning application at Halloughton which was won on appeal, the policy of the ROW Cttee had been to work with the developers to seek mitigation and if the policy was refused but then won on appeal, these would remain in place. Ramblers could still decide to object to the application at the final stage, even if mitigation measures had been approved. Ramblers in Nottinghamshire worked closely with the British Horse Society. The ROW Team felt if developers knew Ramblers would object to all applications in the green belt and which affected long distance paths, they would have no reason to negotiate and opportunities for mitigation would be lost. Applications should be considered individually, on their merit. Objections must be evidence based on the particular circumstances. Ramblers could encourage the use of brownfield sites. The ROW Team did not support the motions.

Members present made the following comments:

- was this being proposed as an action for Nottinghamshire or to be implemented nationally?
- each planning application should be considered on the local issues e.g. views, effect on the walking environment
- the problem was in the wording of the motions which was prescriptive and other objections would also be needed on each individual application
- this was a local issue for Nottinghamshire rather than Ramblers centrally telling Area what it should do
- it would be possible to be more responsive in comments and identify other legitimate grounds for objection
- Nottinghamshire Area Ramblers had not objected to the Gotham scheme although all the Parish Councils had opposed it – why? Would the Ramblers have objected to a housing scheme on the same site?
- if Councils want to object they could ask Ramblers for assistance
- the motions should be reworded so there was not a blanket objection to all applications although the principles were supported

- Ramblers should campaign to have solar panels on roofs which would link to the green agenda and appeal to younger people; representation could be made to Councils to consider this in all applications
- the Ramblers statements about solar arrays were on Assemble and not available to the public or to most Ramblers members
- there was also no Ramblers statement on green energy
- the ROW Committee had developed its policy together with the BHS as there was no Ramblers guidance at that time
- it was far cheaper for solar panels to be on houses or large new buildings roofs than to develop new sites in the countryside and Ramblers should lobby the government about this
- applications for solar arrays could only be changed by negotiation, not by a blanket restriction and it was essential to talk to developers as it might be possible to make beneficial changes to the applications
- when approved, the solar arrays or battery installations would be there for 40 years irrevocably changing the countryside
- some of the proposals for mitigation meant walkers would be effectively be walking down tunnels, when the trees grew, unable to see the countryside they were walking in
- the ideas behind the motions were supported but the wording was incorrect; there should be emphasis on other options for solar panels, rather than on agricultural land

Neil stated that in view of the comments made by members, he would withdraw the motions with a view to rewording them. Members thanked Neil for the paper and the opportunity to debate the issue.

8. **New Ramblers Strategy and Extraordinary General Council 25th November**

Judith presented Appendix X and thanked John Young for his screen shots of the presentation. The final strategy would not be published until 3rd November and members agreed that a Special Area Council be held on Tuesday, 21st November at Bilsthorpe. This meeting would discuss the strategy and advise the Area delegates, Sue Rick and Judith Anson, how they should vote on behalf on Nottinghamshire. All Groups would be asked to submit their views in advance to aid discussion in the meeting.