

NOTTINGHAMSHIRE AREA RAMBLERS ASSOCIATION SPECIAL COUNCIL
MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 21ST NOVEMBER 2023

Minutes

Present Sue Rick (Area Chair), 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 (Mansfield & Sherwood), Mike Stock (Rushcliffe), Jim Norris (Gedling), Joyce Pedersen and James McGill (Newark), Yinka Soetan (One Step Walkers), Paul Fenton and Gail Parkinson (Vale of Belvoir), Dave Johnson (Southwell), Dave Johnson (Robin Hood Way Flexi Group) and John Young (Vale of Belvoir)

1. Apologies: Diana Munro (Area Membership Secretary), Linda Honey (Nottingham), Keith Jacobs (Broxtowe) and Keith & Janet Ross (Worksop)
2. Statement on Steve Parkhouse

Sue Rick read the following statement to be sent to all Groups:

“Nottinghamshire Area Ramblers members are advised that Steve Parkhouse has decide to step down from his roles as Area Rights of Way Secretary and Notts Walker Editor, with immediate effect, in order to focus on historic rights of way claims for the Don't Lose Your Way (DLYW) project.

Area wish to place on record our thanks to Steve for the huge amount of time he has devoted to Nottinghamshire Ramblers. Steve wrote and produced the Area newsletter, the Notts Walker, which has been highly regarded both locally and nationally. Steve's expertise on historic rights of way claims was recognised in a recent edition of Walk magazine. He will continue to play an important role in the national DLYW project, and is currently working on a large number of claims in our neighbouring county of Lincolnshire.”

Chris Thompson asked about the functioning of the Rights of Way Committee and Dave Johnson (RHW) stated that work would continue as usual. Sue Rick added that a new Area Rights of Way Secretary would be sought.

3. New Ramblers Strategy and Extraordinary General Council on 25th November 2023

At October's Area Council it was agreed a special Area Council meeting would be held when the draft Ramblers strategy had been published. The document (Opening the Way: Our Strategic Ambition for the Next Decade) had been circulated on 3rd November and Groups asked to submit their comments in advance of Council.

Area Council was asked to decide whether the Nottinghamshire delegates (Sue Rick and Judith Anson) to the Extraordinary General Meeting (EGM) on 25th November should vote for or against acceptance of the draft Strategy.

Sue Rick reported there was no motion at the EGM and it was assumed it would not be possible to suggest changes to the Strategy before the vote which be just for or against.

The meeting received Appendix X discussed at the October Area Council and a paper detailing comments already received from Groups on the Strategy. Although Nottingham Group had already submitted comments, Judith read additional comments from the Group as follows:

Additional Comments from Nottingham Group (Linda Honey) received 21st November

“ One member definitely feels the new strategy is "a move in the right direction, and feels it will keep the Ramblers relevant in the modern world. Another feels " we have to endorse it and will just have to hope it achieves its targets." Another would support the strategy, but as with most of our group would have very much welcomed more emphasis on attracting and retaining walk leaders. Another member feels the strategy is a complete waste of time and money, as it does not address the problems of risk assessment at all. And whereas the Ramblers have sent out their new proposals now for this, and it is a bit more workable, it is not the simplified version we were hoping for. And he stresses that he does not feel a 36 page draft document is the way to go!

Another member has expressed the view that "It sounds like the Ramblers are trying to be a social service, and this is not in the Ramblers Constitution." Another feels we should reject it, as they feel it has been drawn up without enough consultation. Another feels it should have been much more concise.

Personally, I feel that the strategy has some good points, but is just not really in touch with the everyday difficulties that Ramblers groups face. We are without doubt, struggling for leaders, and all their suggestions of widening our demographic groups to cover more diverse groups like asylum seekers, family groups etc could only greatly complicate risk assessments. We just do not have the walk leaders to be able to cover such groups at the moment. It just demonstrates the National Ramblers board is out of touch with their membership. However, I also feel that the drawing up of this whole new strategy must have already cost a phenomenal amount of money, and if it is rejected then even more money will be squandered redrawing it!

For all the above mentioned reasons, the Nottingham Ramblers group chooses to abstain from the voting, as we are so divided. It would be nice if it was possible to register our Group's disappointment in this rather irrelevant new strategy.

Discussion

All members were asked to comments on the Strategy and the following points were made:

- the one page summary has merit as Ramblers becomes a charity concentrating on walking for everyone but the four outcomes cannot be measured by Central Office; are Areas and/or Groups expected to measure these which means extra work?; there is reference to 'supporters' rather than members so how would these be quantified?
- to receive funding, Ramblers must be able to demonstrate targets and achievements against the targets to present information to potential funders; it was unclear who the target funders are but possibly The Sports Council
- walkers on the Well Being Walks are supporters as they do not have to be members
- the document states "we'll measure" but does not say who is doing the measuring
- the document is at a strategic level and it is not clear what it will actually mean and it needs to state what is being measured and how; the strategy was very laudable but how could it be turned into something useful and measurable?; an implementation plan was required
- Newark Group had sent it to 160 members and received 2 comments which were both supportive
- the document is very aspirational which makes it difficult to vote against but it is social policy while the real work of Ramblers is rights of way and currently the inadequate maintenance of the path network
- Vale of Belvoir members felt it was laudable but did not recognise the reality of Ramblers at Group level; the strategy did not pitch at the right level for members to understand the aims
- why were members subscriptions being used to produce such a large document when a one page summary would be adequate?
- why were consultants being paid out of Ramblers funds for this work when members could have been asked for their views?
- Ramblers state that a survey of members had received 7,000+ responses although there was no detailed feedback of the responses shared with members
- the proposal to extend increase the number of people walking could only be achieved with a new influx of volunteers as Groups were already having difficulty recruiting more walk leaders and volunteers; where would these new volunteers come from?
- were there any statistics on how many accidents or serious incidents had happened on Ramblers walks to justify the required risk assessments?
- risk assessments were an integral part of all activities and it was important to link this to accessibility
- the strategy had made one member consider how walks could be organised to include the wider community
- the examples given were inspirational but proposals needed to be practical for Groups and not prescriptive
- where finances were linked to initiatives, measures were often set up to focus on those initiatives, rather than the key issues which for Ramblers would be rights of way

- in the presentations Ross Maloney had said Areas and Groups should carry on with what they were currently doing
- although more people were now walking, Ramblers was not attracting more members; the local U3A had 7 walking groups although some people were Ramblers members; people needed to understand the work of Ramblers in keeping rights of way open to inspire them to support us
- the Ramblers app already allowed Ramblers to count how many people were on walks but only if the walk leader was able to provide the information which was not available for non-members; there might be GDPR issues about collecting information
- the Postcode Lottery already funded Don't Lose Your Way which could be measured
- Groups should receive more funding particularly if being asked to do more work for Ramblers Central Office which allowed more funding to be received
- the reference on page 10 was "Ramblers becoming an anti-racist charity" which implied that it was currently racist and needed to change; this should be changed to "Ramblers becoming totally inclusive"
- walks could never be inclusive for everyone e.g. mountain walks or walks with stiles

Sue Rick thanked all Groups who had submitted comments and members in the meeting for contributing to the discussion. Area Council was asked to vote on the following motion:

The delegates to the Extraordinary General Council should vote in favour of the Strategy

Proposed: Joyce Pedersen

Seconded: Dave Johnson (RHW)

Votes: in Favour: 15, Against: 0; Abstentions: 3

The motion was carried.

4. Leading Group Walks – Consultation Document

The consultation document had been circulated but had to be responded to individually and had not been sent directly to Areas and Groups. Members felt it was too wordy and attempted to cover all eventualities from a short, flat walk in an urban area to a long mountain walk in bad weather. It could deter potential walk leaders and Groups felt it would not help them recruit new leaders. There was particular concern about the ratio of 1 leader to 8 walkers which was felt to be unnecessary and impractical as walks could not be organised on that basis.

5. Notts Guided Walks Programme

Chris Thompson informed members he would be contacting Groups asking for walks to be included in the 2024 Notts Guided Walks Programme. Chris added there had been issues about including the Well Being Walks which should be for no more than 90 minutes. Several Groups worked with social

prescribing walks and this allowed the expertise of Ramblers walk leaders to be shared.

6. Date of Next Area Council

The next Area Council meeting would be held at 7.15PM on Tuesday, 16th January 2024 at Bilsthorpe.