

**NOTTINGHAMSHIRE AREA RAMBLERS ASSOCIATION COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON
TUESDAY 18TH JULY 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 (Mansfield & Sherwood), Mike Stock (Rushcliffe), Jim Norris (Gedling), Joyce Pedersen and Caroline Lee (Newark), Yinka Soetan (One Step Walkers), Dave Hobson and John Young (Vale of Belvoir), Sally Williams and Linda Taylor (Collingham) and Dave Johnson (Robin Hood Way Flexi Group)

1 Apologies: Diana Munro (Membership Secretary and Worksop), Linda Honey (Nottingham), Keith Jacobs (Broxtowe), Keith & Janet Ross (Worksop), Dave Johnson (Southwell), Steve Parkhouse (Area ROW Secretary)

2 Minutes of the Previous Meeting 18th April 2023
Dave Johnson, Robin Hood Way Flexi Group, questioned Minute 4.4 which stated “The paper [on Solar Array and Grid Battery Bank] had not been seen or discussed by Area Council and its status was unclear.” Judith replied that this minute was correct as Area Council had not received the paper for approval or endorsement although it had been mentioned in an Officer’s Report.

Approved

Proposed: Alex Ellis

Seconded: Brian Tuffnell

3 Matters Arising from the Minutes of the Previous Meeting
None

4 Area Officers Reports
To ensure adequate time was given to the three discussion topics, Officer reports and the Group reports were taken as read, apart from the items below:

4.1 **Secretary** Appendix II
Rights Of Way Training Day – Council agreed to host, and fund, a ROW training day but several Groups asked for the proposed date of 14th October to be changed. Attendance would be 2 members from each Group (one to be the Footpath Secretary), the ROW Team and Area Officers.

4.2 **Treasurer** Appendix III
Area Budget and Funding Request for 2023-24 Neil explained the budget request for 2023-24 and proposed the following motion:

Area Council is asked to endorse the Area Budget and Funding Request for 2023-24

Proposed: Neil Stafford

Seconded: Chris Thompson

All in favour – motion agreed

Campaign for the Protection of Rural England – Neil explained the annual subscription for the CPRE membership was £36 and Area Council was asked to vote on the following motion:

Area Council is asked to vote to renew the membership of CPRE for a further year at a cost of £36

Proposed: Neil Stafford

Seconded: Jim Norris

All in favour– motion agreed

4.3 Rights of Way Secretary Appendix IV

Sue Rick had received a request from Steve Parkhouse for members to be involved in a ploughing and cropping survey. The original request had come from Nottinghamshire County Council and Ramblers had previously undertaken these surveys following training from NCC. It was agreed that further information would be required by Groups before they could make a decision.

5. Start and Finish Time of Future Area Council Meetings

Yinka Soetan proposed that future meetings started at 7.15 and closed at 9.15, unless those present agreed an extension. Members supported this proposal and future meetings would be organised on that basis but were reminded the Hall did not open until 7.00 PM.

6. Date and Venue of Next Meeting 17th October 2023

The next meeting will be held at Bilsthorpe at **7.15PM** on Tuesday, 17th October 2023.

7. Discussion Session – Solar Farms in Nottinghamshire Appendix VIII

Neil Stafford introduced a paper on solar farms. The Area Rights of Way Committee had produced a paper, received at April's Council meeting on planning applications affecting ROW and mitigation. This paper specifically concerned issues affecting the countryside, not just ROW. The recent Cluster Meeting had discussed this with other Areas raising concerns, particularly Lincolnshire as the number of applications continued to grow across the country. Nottinghamshire and Lincolnshire had existing power lines from the coal powered stations and these could readily be used. The size of the sites and their approval for 40 years could lead to the industrialisation of the countryside. The Council for the Protection of Rural England has highlighted the need for solar panels to be fitted on roofs and in car parks. The paper explained why land in Nottinghamshire was under pressure as much was not protected. The National Planning Policy Framework in relation to the Green Belt has to be considered by planning authorities and had been used by several Councils to reject applications. There were two long distance footpaths across the County which could be adversely affected by the solar farm schemes. The paper proposed that Nottinghamshire Area Ramblers should oppose any solar application that includes land within the Green Belt and any application that encompasses a long distance path.

Area Council was asked for their views and the following points were made:

- it was unfortunate the Countryside Officer post was vacant as that post should be leading the discussion and Area should be trying to fill it urgently
- the Green Belt should be protected not only from solar farms but from building
- a new estate was being built in Bingham but did not include a requirement to include solar panels on the roofs
- if Nottinghamshire and Lincolnshire joined together there would be strength in numbers
- the Ramblers should be leading on this across the country

- solar panels should be fitted on all new buildings – industrial and housing
- this is an emotive issue and Ramblers should not be seen as an anti-green body; rather than a blanket ban each application should be considered on its merits
- with each Council being required to agree to a number of houses being built there was already pressure on the countryside
- Ramblers need to make proposals on what should happen and perhaps suggest sites for solar farms
- the Trent Vale Way also crossed Nottinghamshire
- The Mid-Shires Way was being regularly walked by organisations such as the Scouts

It was agreed that the paper should be sent to Groups to discuss and be considered again in October. Neil was asked to contact Lincolnshire Area to discuss joint action. Neil would be willing to visit Groups to lead the discussion if they would find that helpful.

Area Council thanked Neil for producing the paper.

8. Discussion Session – Walks Manager and new Ramblers Website

John Young and Dave Hobson from the Vale of Belvoir Group introduced this session. Central Office had introduced changes e.g. new branding, the new website and walks manager but most of the activities of Ramblers were undertaken by volunteers in Groups. John wanted to seek the views of other Groups. Dave commented that one reason for the changes to Walks Manager might be so they could be viewed more easily on a mobile 'phone but the additional work for volunteers was excessive. Dave demonstrated the number of screens that had to be navigated to input a single walk and this showed how much time it took. Did every Group have the IT skills necessary to do this as the Walks Coordinator was becoming the 'biggest' job in each group.

Caroline Lee said she had begun entering walks on the system with no prior knowledge and had attended a Central Office training session. Walk leaders in Newark were putting information on themselves with Caroline acting as the Editor. Newark prepared their programme several months in advance and it was easier to do the entries on a lap top. In Collingham most walk leaders did not have computers and the Walks Coordinator put the walks on for them. There had been problems adding post codes to the walk entries. Joyce Pedersen congratulated Collingham on the walks now appearing on the new website.

Dave commented that in the Vale of Belvoir the walk leaders were not willing to input their own walks and were not aware of, or did not want to use, Assemble. The Walks Coordinator therefore needed to input all the walks. Although the Walks Finder spreadsheet was similar to GWEM it was not user friendly because the spread sheet was 38 columns wide making it impossible to check information quickly. The need to publish walk details to comply with Ramblers insurance was understood. Brian Tuffnell felt Walks Manager was no more difficult than GWEM and the Editor bar at the side allowed movement quickly up and down the screens.

Yinka Soetan explained that One Step Walkers had their own website and an excellent Webmaster. The Walks Coordinators put the walks on the OSW website. Mike Stock said Rushcliffe did not have problems and that walk leaders could enter their own walks if they wished. The on line training sessions were available for members to consult. Dave Johnson added that problems would be expected with any new system.

Neil Stafford had attended several Central Office briefing sessions on Walks Manager which had to be introduced as GWEM was not compatible with the new Ramblers website. Walks Manager was intentionally similar although the early discussions had resulted in changes to match what Groups wanted. A list of the 'bugs' with Walks Manager and the new website could be viewed.

Dave Hobson felt the recruitment of walk leaders was affected by the demands of Ramblers and the new system was unnecessary. There was a concern that Groups might decide to leave Ramblers to avoid the bureaucracy.

The Vale of Belvoir Group was thanked for bringing this item to Area Council.

9. 2024 AGM – How it Could be Enhanced

Neil Stafford introduced this item which had been delayed from April. The 2023 AGM organised by Southwell had been very successful and the 2024 AGM was being organised by Rushcliffe. Ramblers Cluster meetings had considered AGMs and how to increase attendance by making them more interesting. Members were divided into small groups and asked to discuss suggestions to enhance the 2024 AGM. The summary of the discussion is below:

The AGM Day Agenda – the host Group have traditionally held three walks of differing lengths in the morning, which are timed to finish around the same time (circa 1pm) to allow time for refreshments with the AGM meeting itself starting at 2pm. Some Areas reverse the order, and hold the meeting first. There was no support for this idea, with some suggesting that it might encourage members to arrive after the AGM, just to take part in the walks.

Guest Speaker – whilst Nottinghamshire Area has always invited a member of the Board of Trustees to make a presentation and answer questions there was strong support for inviting a guest speaker instead. That may still be a member of Ramblers staff (e.g. Jack Cornish), but a number of other suggestions emerged, Vicky McClure, Claire Balding, George Ezra – but it was recognised that it would be a challenge to attract such a high profile figure.

The Area Report – to make it more accessible, the ideas of producing an executive summary, and providing a visual (Powerpoint) presentation at the AGM, were both supported, although the need for suitable equipment was recognised.

The Venue - to provide more interest at the venue, the idea of providing display boards for Groups to display pictures/publicity leaflets etc. had only limited support. A video display also had limited support, although the suggestion of displaying the Major Rooke video, if there was a separate room, did resonate with a number of people.

The room layout – the suggestion of only having the key officers (Chair, Secretary, Treasurer and Minute Secretary) seated at the front, with the other Area Officers sitting with the audience was well supported. However, it was recognised that the logistics regarding microphones (to respond to questions) needed to be considered. It was also suggested that the chairs for the attendees should be arranged more informally, rather than in straight rows. Again, it was acknowledged that this depended on the shape of the meeting room.

Making the event more interactive- a number of ideas were suggested:

- Deserts as well as the usual cakes, made by members
- Bring & buy
- Raffle
- Second-hand books

- Stile naming competition
- Photos from walks – guess the location

The Title - whilst the words Annual General Meeting (or simply “AGM”) are a turn-off for many, changing the title was not supported. However, expanding the occasion by holding perhaps a members forum, or combining it with a social event were suggested.

Neil was thanked by members for arranging this discussion session.