

NOTTINGHAMSHIRE AREA RAMBLERS ASSOCIATION SPECIAL COUNCIL MEETING
HELD ON TUESDAY 14TH MAY 2024

Minutes

Present Adrian Amer (Vice-Chair), Judith Anson (Area Secretary), Neil Stafford (Area Treasurer), Chris Thompson (Area Tourism & Heritage Paths Officer), Brian Tuffnell (Area Webmaster and Mansfield & Sherwood), Alex Ellis (Groups Officer), Jim Norris (Area Countryside Officer and Gedling), Dave Moore (Mansfield & Sherwood & ROW Committee), Joyce Pedersen (Newark), Peter Robinson (Newark), Keith Jacobs (Broxtowe), Dave Johnson (Robin Hood Way Flexi Group & ROW Committee), Diana Munro (Membership Secretary and Worksop), Tom Munro (Worksop & ROW Committee), Gail Parkinson (Vale of Belvoir), David Hobson (Vale of Belvoir), Howard Lloyd (Rushcliffe & ROW Committee) and Julie Lloyd (Rushcliffe)

- 1 Apologies: Sue Rick (Area Chair and Mansfield & Sherwood), Linda Honey (Nottingham), Bob Shield (Nottingham & ROW Committee), James McGill (Newark), Dave Johnson (Southwell & ROW Committee), Mike Stock (Rushcliffe), Phil Sellars (ROW Committee), Ralph Middlemore (ROW Committee), Paul Fenton (ROW Committee), Peter Somerville (ROW Committee)

- 2 Sue Rick

Adrian Amer explained he was taking the Chair as Sue Rick was ill and asked Brian to give an update. Brian reported Sue had been released from hospital but was waiting for test results. Members signed a card and asked Brian to pass on their best wishes.

- 3 Introduction

Adrian explained this special Area Council meeting held jointly with the Rights of Way Committee had been arranged following April's Area Council. The purpose was to consider a way forward for the management of rights of way work in the County. Paul Fenton had resigned as Area Rights of Way Secretary and several members of the Rights of Way Committee had also resigned. Three papers had been received and circulated. The meeting would be structured around these papers.

4. The Constitutional Position of Area Council and the Rights of Way Sub-Committee, Appendix I

Judith spoke to this paper explaining that it was a factual record of the position. The Rights of Way Committee was one of the two formal Sub-Committee of Council. It was essential Council members were fully aware of what powers had been delegated to the Rights of Way Committee, what decisions were being made in its name and, in particular, who was making them. The Rights of Way Committee had an agreed membership last updated in 2014. The need for a review of the operation and membership of the Rights of Way Committee was necessary to ensure its relevance to 2024. The Rights of Way Committee had continued to operate, chaired by Sue Rick since November. Planning applications and correspondence continued to be managed although the lack of all computer, paper and email records (except for Stackmail and the DC Info records) meant issues could not be effectively tracked.

Tom asked whether the Rights of Way Sub-Committee should be able to make decisions or whether all proposals should come to Area Council. Judith replied that many planning applications, path orders and similar were time limited and there would not be time to return to Council. In these matters the Sub-Committee had delegated powers but all policy issues and non-time limited matters should return to Council. Diana asked about the terms of reference and Judith confirmed these were set out in the 2014 documents agreed by Area Council. Howard questioned why these had not been circulated. Judith responded the purpose of this meeting was to determine a way forward. Detailed documents would be considered by the Working Party established to work on the revised rights of way structure.

5. Rights of Way Team Proposal, Appendix II

This paper had been prepared by Paul Fenton, who was not present, and was introduced by Dave Johnson. Dave informed members that Paul had been elected as Area Rights of Way Secretary at the AGM but had resigned in March. The Rights of Way Committee was currently not working well and Paul had resigned because of interference in his role. Paul should be able to undertake the role as he saw fit. If Paul was given the freedom set out in Appendix II then he would be willing to return as Rights of Way Secretary. Paul agreed there should be a review of how rights of way were managed. This was urgent as planning applications continued to be received and Paul asked Area Council to agree the paper. Dave and James McGill had met with Sue, Neil and Judith to discuss a draft of the paper. The Executive Officers had stated the paper was factually incorrect, contrary to the constitution and could not be implemented as it stood. Although changes had been proposed in that meeting, agreement had not been reached and the paper was therefore presented to Area Council unchanged.

The meeting started to consider the Appendix in general although it was noted that assumptions were being made about Paul's intentions. It was clear the members of the Rights of Way Committee had not been aware of the constitutional position. It was then agreed to go through the Appendix systematically discussing the wording of each section to reach agreement. The intention was that Appendix II could be changed to be acceptable to both Area Council and to Paul. There were strong views on all parts of the document but agreement was reached on several of the numbered points and suggestions made. The aim was to present the changes agreed to Paul for him to decide if he would return as Rights of Way Secretary on that basis. Dave then stated that Paul was not willing to accept any amendments. Appendix II either had to be accepted as it was, unchanged or it had to be rejected. It was therefore agreed to take a vote:

Proposal: that the meeting accept Appendix II as a whole, without amendment

Proposed: Dave Johnson

Seconded: Diana Munro

Vote: For: 6, Against: 11, Abstentions: 1

The vote was lost and Appendix II was rejected

As a way forward, it was agreed that any member present could set out their views in writing to Paul, via the Area Secretary. Paul could then make a decision on whether to return as Area Rights of Way Secretary. In view of the urgency, members were asked to send any responses to Judith by 21st May. Judith would collate these and forward to Paul by 28th May. Paul would be asked to respond within 7 days. All correspondence would be shared with Area Council and the Rights of Way Committee.

5. Rights of Way Committee Review – A Discussion Document Appendix III

Neil spoke to Appendix III which set out suggestions of how the Rights of Way Committee could work in the future and revised volunteer roles. People joined Ramblers to protect rights of way and it was a key function of Area. Groups had not been fully involved in rights of way work but their members were the experts on their patch. When volunteers joined the Rights of Way Committee there should be an induction pack so they were clear on their role.

In response to a question about how other Areas could help, Neil mentioned a discussion with the Derbyshire Area Rights of Way Secretary, Martin Bennett, at General Council. Martin had asked about the Nottinghamshire County Council Rights of Way Improvement Plan (RWIP) which Neil was unaware of. Other Areas would be willing to assist and information shared.

While members were generally supportive of the paper, it was agreed a response from Paul Fenton was required first. The Rights of Way Committee was continuing to meet and planning applications and correspondence responded to. Appendix III would therefore be discussed at the July Area Council.

The meeting closed at 9.00PM