

**NOTTINGHAMSHIRE AREA RAMBLERS ASSOCIATION COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON
TUESDAY 7TH OCTOBER 2025**

Minutes

Present Adrian Amer (Area Vice-Chair), Judith Anson (Area Secretary), Neil Stafford (Area Treasurer), Chris Thompson (Area Tourism & Heritage Paths Officer), Diana Munro (Area Membership Secretary and Worksop), Brian Tuffnell (Area Webmaster and Mansfield & Sherwood), Tom Munro (Worksop), Alan Burrell (Newark), Dave Johnson (Robin Hood Way Flexi Group), Mike Stock (Rushcliffe), Thelma Ward (Worksop), Yinka Soetan (One Step Walkers), Dave Hobson (Vale of Belvoir), Elaine Hobson (Vale of Belvoir).

1. Apologies: Alex Ellis (Area Chair), James McGill (Newark), Jim Sinclair (Southwell), Linda Honey (Nottingham), Keith Jacobs (Broxtowe), Andrew Cowell (Notts & Derbys Walking Group)

2. Minutes of the Previous Meeting
Minutes of the meeting held on 15th July 2025 were approved

Proposed: Alan Burrell

Seconded: Dave Hobson

3. Matters Arising from the Minutes of the Previous Meeting

- 3.1 **Walk Leader Training and Recruitment** – Diana Munro reported all walk leaders in Worksop had either completed the training or had self certified and there had been no problem. From the Group reports, several Groups were experiencing difficulties in persuading their leaders of the need to complete the process. Alan Burrell said Newark was following up all leaders who had not fulfilled the requirements. Chris Thompson had not received the notification but had now been confirmed as meeting the requirements. Dave Hobson commented that not all walk leaders had yet been approved in the Vale of Belvoir but the Committee was working on it. All Groups were aware of the need to have their leaders approved by the end of December.

4. Area Officers Reports

- 4.1 **Area Chair's Report**

There were no comments or questions.

- 4.2 **Area Secretary** Appendix II

Diana thanked Judith and the Area Officers for the time they had spent on the governance proposals.

- 4.3 **Area Treasurer** Appendix III

There were no comments or questions.

- 4.4 **Rights of Way Sub-Committee** Appendix IV

Diana commented the report contained a number of acronyms and it was agreed that future reports would contain the full wording.

- 4.5 **Area Membership Secretary** Appendix V

In answer to a question, Judith replied there were no full records of the age of members as this information was voluntary. There was an estimate based on those members for

whom the age was known. Adrian Amer asked whether Central Office focussed on recruiting young people. Tom Munro said there were a lot of people walking in the countryside but they were probably not Ramblers members. The photographs on the Ramblers website featured younger people and it was suggested there should be greater use of social media. Brian confirmed the Area Facebook page had now been reinstated and could be accessed through the Area website www.nottsarearamblers.org.uk

4.5 **Tourism & Heritage Paths Officer**

Chris apologised that he could not produce a written report due to computer problems. The Notts Guided Walks programme for 2025 had only been available on the Area website, following problems with WalkNotts which had agreed to take over the publication. Chris apologised to those Groups who had put walks forward. For 2026, Chris was seeking funding to publish a booklet to promote Ramblers Group walks and walking in Nottinghamshire. Chris would be contacting Groups asking them to put walks forward and other partners would also make contributions. Area Council agreed it would support Chris on the Notts Guided Walks Programme for 2026.

5. Group Reports Appendix VII

In view of time constraints, it was agreed to take the Group Reports as read. Yinka Soetan informed Groups that the What Three Words app had been updated and if they used this they needed to make the change.

6. Stiles and Replacement by Gates

Dave Hobson mentioned the article in Walk magazine about replacing stiles with gates. Neil commented on the Donate a Gate initiative in parts of the country where Ramblers teams installed gates donated by individuals and often dedicated in remembrance. Area had raised this with Neil Lewis at Nottinghamshire County Council but there was concern about insurance, who was responsible for future repairs and the land owner had to agree. Dave stated that the highest risk element of walking was using stiles. Neil informed members the Nottinghamshire County Council Countryside Access Management System (CAMS) map showed stiles and any issues could be reported. Tom pointed out that stiles limited access to the countryside.

7. January Discussion Topic – Health & Safety

Dave Hobson would lead the discussion topic for January on Health & Safety linked to risk management. This would include near misses as well as reporting incidents. Judith would liaise with Dave in advance of the meeting.

8. Ramblers Governance Proposals Appendix VIII

Judith gave a short explanation of the Governance Review process to date. Appendix VIII included all the responses received from Groups and Officers to the Governance Proposals issued on 11th September. Judith's comments were included in Appendix II, Area Secretary's Report. A response from Southwell Group was also read to the meeting. The papers received on 30th September from the Ramblers Board had withdrawn the proposals for Areas and Groups which had been the most important element of the changes for many members. This meant the time replying to these proposals had been wasted. The three remaining sections requiring a response were – 1. Company Members and AGM, 2. Board of Trustees and 3. Member and Volunteer Gatherings. The full questionnaire had been replaced by a Yes/No/Don't Know form to

which comments could be added. Area had to respond by Sunday, 12th October. Judith stated the Articles of Association and the Standing Orders were very complex and she had not been able to produce a comparison between the original Articles (amended in 2021) and the proposed Articles. This needed legal advice and there had been suggestions on Ramblers.NET that the draft Articles were not correct. For example, some of the original Articles had been moved into the Standing Orders and the implications of that were unclear.

Members then considered the three sections. The attached document was sent to Central Office on 12th October and includes all the comments received in writing and at the meeting. It was agreed the response to the question: "Are you happy with the updated proposals?" should be - Don't Know.

9. Special Area Council on Tuesday, 18th November

A Special Area Council would be held at 7.00PM on Tuesday, 18th November. The purpose was to consider the Motions to be presented to the Extraordinary General Council on 6th December and to advise the Area delegates how they should vote. Members discussed whether this should be held in person at Bilsthorpe or on Zoom. It was not known how many Motions there would be and therefore how much discussion time would be needed. There was concern that people might not be able to attend a critical meeting in person and the session should therefore be on Zoom. Others felt it was important to discuss it in person. It was agreed that members would reserve the date and time but the decision whether to hold the meeting in person or on line would be taken when the Motions were received. It was recognised this was likely to be short notice. Area Council agreed that a booking should be made at Bilsthorpe at a cost of £20 recognising that a cancellation fee might be charged.

10. Date and Venue of Next Regular Meeting

Tuesday, 20th January 2026, 6.30PM at Bilsthorpe.

NOTTINGHAMSHIRE AREA RAMBLERS – RESPONSE TO GOVERNANCE PROPOSALS DOCUMENT ISSUED 11 SEPTEMBER, AMENDED ON 30 SEPTEMBER 2025

This is the form from Central Office together with the response from Nottinghamshire Area, submitted on 12th October.

GOVERNANCE REVIEW: CONSULTATION SURVEY

INTRODUCTION

On 29 September the Board shared with Council members and Areas an updated proposal for a new governance model for the Ramblers.

The Board has listened very carefully to the ideas and feedback that we have received over the last two year period. Throughout the Board has been motivated by the desire to ensure that the Ramblers will remain strong and united and have the capacity to grow and flex over the coming decades to deliver our shared strategic intention to campaign for access to the outdoors and create walking opportunities for all.

You will see that we have further modified the proposals in the light of the outstanding concerns expressed about the Area and Group proposals. The Board now proposes not to move to establish a new structure for Areas and Groups at this point but to continue to work with you in the new year to agree a robust and practical way forward. We will set up a separate project to build on the learning to date and work in an open and inclusive way, to design arrangements which will work for everybody and meet the twin imperatives of preserving what is working well, and changing what is not.

All documents, including the 8 September consultation document and the 29 September update document, and the draft Articles of Association and Standing Orders, are available at www.ramblers.org.uk/about-us/general-council. NB These early drafts have been prepared by the charity's legal advisers on governance matters. These are not intended to be in any way final versions, but will be updated and completed following the conclusion of the current consultation period, and review of the feedback and further advice from our legal advisers. We would now like to invite each Area (via its General Council members or Area Chair/Secretary) - as well as individual Council members (if they wish) - to provide written feedback and comments.

Please note that we are now asking only for your feedback on the updated proposals which excludes changes to Areas and Groups.

The feedback you provide will assist the Board in preparing final proposals for decision by Council members at the Extraordinary General Meeting.

ARE YOU HAPPY WITH THE UPDATED PROPOSALS? *

~~Yes~~

~~No~~

Undecided /Don't Know

COMMENTS / FEEDBACK ON THE UPDATED PROPOSALS:

The 29th September document was discussed at Area Council on 7th October with Groups and Area Officers commenting. This document shows all comments received. Area Council made numerous observations on the process and these are included at the start of this document under A. The comments on the three sections in the Updated Proposals for Reform, then follow.

A – THE GOVERNANCE REVIEW PROCESS

1. Our members showed little interest in the proposed alterations to the governance of the charity. No strong feelings were expressed either way. One member did wonder how the proposed local government re-organisation of Nottinghamshire would impact if the current Area structure is retained. The members hope that the new arrangements will continue to allow the group to serve the membership in the way that it always has done.

2. Our committee would like a full and clear explanation of exactly WHY all these changes need to be implemented. We also would make a plea for Central Office to really take a thorough account of their members views, in 2026. The main thing we want to ask for is that the proposals will be explained and completely clarified next time. It is largely incomprehensible to us. Currently we have thirteen members on our committee who all have a specific role to act on. We fail to understand how our group would be able to run with only three officers. Who would look after our website, who would look after membership etc, etc?. Central Office need to fully explore how these changes would work at group and area level. We do not have any belief that they do understand what problems they may be causing.

At first our reaction that these changes have been now cancelled until 2026 was one of relief. We feel that Central Office showed a complete lack of understanding of how much pressure and extra work they were placing on their willing volunteers, by attempting to implement two major changes (Walk Leadership and Governance review) concurrently.

We would hope the fact that the review has been delayed displays that Central Office has listened to their paid up members. This would be encouraging for us. The two members of our group who each attended a different Zoom meeting about the changes in walk leadership; both noted the extremely hostile objections made in those meetings. However, the changes went through with a total disregard to those objections. We want Ramblers UK, to be working to strengthen the charity's working. At the moment the organisation seems to be floundering. How much money and time has been wasted on presenting this review, and then cancelling? We regret that so much of our volunteers' time has also been taken up by trying to respond to these changes. We want to spend our time walking and preserving footpaths, and encouraging others to walk.

3. We discussed the changes proposed by the Board of Trustees at our September committee meeting which was attended by 12 members. It was decided unanimously by a vote of 12-zero with no abstentions to support the changes. (This has of course been rendered irrelevant by the recent volte-face from the Board of Trustees). I have found the whole Governance Review frustrating and annoying. The CEO and the Board of Trustees should feel ashamed about how this has been handled, and resignations would not be out of place.

4. During both sessions I attended there was strong evidence that the Board had a very limited understanding as to the tasks that Areas and Groups actually carry out. Questions on how Rights of Way & countryside protection will be maintained were frequently raised at these consultation sessions. But the answers were vague. Indeed, the word "countryside" is completely absent from the Governance documents, and yet countryside protection is one of Ramblers four charitable objectives. It is therefore with some relief that the proposals for Areas & Groups have been shelved.

5. The processes under review in the Governance Proposals are of sufficient complexity that they preclude most members from giving an informed response. Understanding what is said, whilst quite painful at times, is not a problem. Appreciating the implications of what is being proposed is far more onerous and it is this element which precludes us from supporting them. This whole Governance thing seems to be an unholy mess and has probably seriously damaged the Board's credibility.
6. The governance proposals change Ramblers which will, in effect, become a new organisation. The democratic structure enshrined in the creation of Ramblers to ensure it is a bottom-up organisation controlled by members is removed. Decisions will be made in future by staff and the Board, to be implemented by Groups. A major concern is the absence of any sensible proposals for the rights of way work and countryside protection. The 29th September document does not even mention this despite all Areas raising it at the on-line sessions. This process has taken up a large amount of precious volunteer time in Groups and at Area, much of which has been wasted.
7. Our Group does not feel competent to comment on the proposals. There are concerns about the loss of links with Nottinghamshire as a whole and we want Area to continue.
8. The proposals are clear and easy to understand. Members are not going to read it. We need to look beyond the current system. The current system is wrong and it needs to be changed. Members just want to go on walks and are not interested in the organisation.
9. The process is a complete shambles and it is impossible to give a view unless clear proposals are received.
10. What experience does the Board have in change management as this is not how the process should be managed? There is very little detail on which to make a decision.
- 11 While there is need for change, there is also a danger of unintended consequences. If Ramblers becomes just a collection of walking groups, rather than focussing on campaigning, rights of way and countryside protection then what is its purpose? Many members join, not to join a walking group, but to support a charity which fights for those issues. Will they continue if Ramblers loses that focus?

B - COMPANY MEMBERS AND ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING (AGM)

1. Seems sensible to include the wider membership and encourage more member participation. AGM has a formal and transparent procedure.
2. It will bring us into line with other charitable organisations and could be more representative of the membership.
3. Whilst on the face of it this appears to be more democratic, the reality is very different. Only a very modest proportion of the membership would have a sufficient level of interest, or the time and energy, to evaluate Trustee candidates, or motions to an AGM/EGM. It should be noted that, when one-member-one-vote was last proposed ten years ago in 2015, the Board estimated that the annual cost of implementing it would be £100,000. In other words, around £1 per member. The Board has so far declined to say what the cost would be today.
4. Currently there is a small number of volunteers who work to run the organisation locally and provide leadership. These are the people voting at General Council to hold the Board to account and raise issues of importance to the grass roots organisation. They are democratically elected by members and the Motions are submitted by the Areas. With the removal of General Council, there is no longer an opportunity for the ordinary member to make a difference or influence the organisation. The Board members and staff will be in complete control and evidence shows they have much less knowledge about rights of way and how Ramblers actually functions (i.e. on the ground, rather than in theory) than members. The volunteers on the ground ARE Ramblers; the Board and staff are not.

C - BOARD OF TRUSTEES

1. Seems to be a more democratic procedure. There is a concern that if the majority of the Trustees reside in a particular region, the needs of other regions may be diminished.
2. Good if there is greater clarity and more choice for members.
3. This would bring Ramblers into line with other major charities and complies with Charity Commission requirements.
4. The Board is already London/South East centric. The proposal to elect Board members for the 4 English Regions would show better balance. What is the plan to ensure the elected Trustees are not all from one part of England?

D - MEMBER AND VOLUNTEER GATHERINGS

1. Opportunity to network with groups/hubs from other parts of the region. Meeting key staff and Trustees. However, without details the formalised process, it is difficult to comment on how these meetings operate and what they achieve.
2. If it means more consultation – good. But, payment for attendance needs to be clear and there need to be clear outcomes: not just a ‘talking shop.’
3. Such ‘gatherings’ sound like a really good opportunity for all members, rather than a select few, to meet the Board of Trustees and key staff. No doubt there would be speakers, stalls etc. and the opportunity to network with other Ramblers Groups and members. Personally, I look forward to being able to attend such an event.
5. Despite General Council voting to return to the 2 day event which allowed visitors to attend, the Board has refused to take this forward. Although no specific reason has been given, one of the reasons might be costs. What will be the costs of the gatherings? Given the large number of people attending, the costs must be greater than a 2 day General Council. Without the predicted costs, how can members make an informed decision? Where will the funds come from?
