



The Ramblers' Association
Buckinghamshire, Milton Keynes and West Middlesex Area

Annual Report

1 October 2016 - 30 September 2017

Annual General Meeting: 2.00 pm on 3rd February 2018 in Holy Trinity Church Hall, Medway Drive, Perivale, Greenford, UB6 8LN

The nearest underground station is Perivale: approximately a 20 minute walk. Cross Horsenden Lane South to a footpath alongside the railway, emerging on Scorton Avenue; turn right into Woodhouse Avenue, and Medway Drive is the fifth turning on the left. Parking at the hall itself is very limited, but there should be adequate roadside parking in neighbouring streets. If you require further information about the meeting please contact the Acting Area Secretary.

Before the meeting there will be a walk of about five and a half miles starting at 10.15 am from the church hall; alternatively, you can join the walk at 10.30 am at Perivale underground station. The meeting room is booked from 1.00 pm and will be available for anybody attending the morning walk to eat packed lunches.

After the formal business of the meeting, and a break for light refreshments, we shall hear from a recent recruit to the campaigns team at Central Office whose work since joining the staff has focused on two aspects, possible implications for walkers of Brexit and shared use of footpaths by cyclists, and our two members of the Board of Trustees about recent developments at national level.

Please come to the meeting: this is your opportunity to participate in the Association's democratic processes and to discuss any matters that concern you.

Note that, for data protection reasons, personal information has been removed from this version of the report. Use the website email facility to send a message to the Area Secretary, who can forward it to the appropriate individual.

The Ramblers' Association is a company limited by guarantee, registered in England and Wales.
Company registration number: 4458492. Registered Charity in England and Wales number: 1093577.
Registered office: 2nd floor, Camelford House, 87-90 Albert Embankment, London SE1 7TW.

**Agenda for the Annual General Meeting
at 2.00 pm on Saturday 3rd February 2018
in Holy Trinity Church Hall, Perivale**

1. Apologies for absence
2. Minutes of the AGM held on 4th February 2017 (incorporated in the Annual Report, pages 3-5)
3. Matters arising from the minutes
4. To receive the Annual Report and Accounts:

(a) Chairman	p6	(i) News Editor	p12
(b) Acting Secretary's Report	p6	(j) Publicity Officer	p12
(c) Treasurer's Report and Accounts	p6	(k) Area Web Site	p12
(d) Footpath Secretary's Report	p9	(l) Walks Editor	p12
(e) North Bucks rRIPPLE Report	p10	(m) Member and ALO Reps	p12
(f) Membership Secretary's Report	p11	(n) London Forum Report	p13
(g) Access Officer	p11	(o) Planning and countryside	p14
(h) Press Officer's Report	p12	(p) Local Group Reports	p14
5. To consider any motions of which due notice has been received (in writing, by the Acting Area Secretary, not less than 7 days before the meeting, i.e. by Saturday 27th January 2018):
"This AGM approves West London Group's request to transfer to the Inner London Area, and the consequent removal of the London Boroughs of Ealing and Hounslow from the Area's territory, and instructs the Area Officers and/or the Area Executive Committee to take such steps as are necessary to facilitate the transfer, including by seeking approval from Inner London Area and the Board of Trustees."
6. Election of Officers:

(a) *Chairman	(h) Press Officer
(b) *Vice-Chairman	(i) Access Officer
(c) *Secretary (<i>vacant</i>)	(j) News Editor (<i>vacant</i>)
(d) *Treasurer	(k) Countryside Secretary (<i>vacant</i>)
(e) *Footpath Secretary	(l) Publicity Officer (<i>vacant</i>)
(f) Membership Secretary	(m) Walks Editor (<i>vacant</i>)
(g) North Bucks rRIPPLE Coordinator	

Nominations are invited for all posts
Only those marked * are required by the constitution to be elected at the AGM
7. Election of Executive Committee Members not appointed by Local Groups:
 - (a) Not more than 5 representatives of Individual Members
 - (b) Not more than 5 representatives of Local Organisations affiliated to Ramblers
 (In recent years none of the places in the latter category have been filled)
8. Appointment of Independent Examiner
9. Appointment of two Council Members to serve from the 2018 General Council AGM
10. Any other business
11. Speakers and discussion

**Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held at 1.45 pm on Saturday, 4th February 2017
in the Park Room of the Stoke Mandeville Community Centre**

33 members of the Area and one visitor added their names to the attendance list.
The Chairman introduced the Annual General Meeting and welcomed those present.

1. **Apologies for absence** were received from three members.
2. **Minutes** of the AGM held on Saturday 6th February 2016 were signed as a correct record.
3. **Matters arising** from the minutes. There were no matters arising.

4. Annual Report and Accounts

The Chairman drew attention to the printed copies of the Annual Report which contained reports from Area Officers. Additional comments made during the meeting included the following:

(a) Chairman's Report:

An additional report was distributed drawing attention to the work of the Ramblers Greater London Forum and the successful launch of the NB rRIPPLE Donate-a-Gate scheme. The Chairman commented on likely disruption when construction of HS2 commences.

(b) Acting Secretary's Report:

Nothing to add to written report.

(c) Treasurer's Report and Accounts:

The Treasurer said that a decision on the appeal against our budget cut was expected shortly. The Aylesbury Group treasurer commented on the negative effects of limited funding on the group's attitude and ability to carry out footpath work. A trustee stressed that we must remember that we are all part of one organisation; additional funding for footpath work is available; she would ask the new Chief Executive Officer to consider a visit to Aylesbury Group. A member was concerned that the Area was insufficiently active in developing projects that could legitimately use additional funding. The following motion was approved (carried nem con, with one abstention): "This meeting deplores the proposed cap on our budget for 2016-17, which could reduce funding available for achieving our charitable aims, and urges the Finance and Operations Subcommittee not to impose the cut, and to consider our future budgets flexibly."

The meeting was asked to approve the accounts. Carried nem con.

(d) Footpath Secretary's Report:

The Footpath Secretary thanked Path Checkers and reminded the meeting of the list of vacancies. She urged groups to consider following the example of those which combine path checking with group walks. She mentioned the ongoing inquiry on path diversions at Harrow School. She asked members to consider volunteering to assist with the project to record historic paths before 2026.

(e) North Bucks rRIPPLE Report:

The coordinator said that, to date, over £4000 had been raised by the "Donate a Gate" scheme; he thanked the treasurer for his assistance. He drew attention to the NB rRIPPLE logo and to the availability of his activity reports on the Area website. He wanted to push the idea of localism, on the lines of Oxfordshire's Parish Path Warden scheme. He was keen not to be "taken for a ride" by Ringway Jacobs, but considered that the aim of having all paths easily usable by 2020 could only be achieved by volunteer effort.

(f) Membership Secretary's Report:

There was discussion of the possible effect of members choosing not to join a group on the viability of groups and their ability to find leaders. The Chairman drew attention to the impact of other providers of led walks.

(g) Access Officer's report:

The Access Officer mentioned the lack of funding for proper signage of access land. He asked for views on local plans sanctioning developments on green belt land; some considered that building on unprotected land could also threaten the environment. Money for replacing closed bridges had been made available but then withdrawn. He was asked to obtain lists of closed bridges and of parishes involved in path clearance.

(h) Press Officer's Report:

Nothing to add to written report.

(i) News Editor:

Nothing to add to written report..

(j) Publicity Officer:

Nothing to add to written report.

(k) Web Master:

Nothing to add to written report.

(l) Walks Editor:

Jay Wilson had resigned since publication of the annual report.

(m) London Forum Report:

The Chair of the Forum reported a new enthusiasm in the forum, though with some conflict between participating Areas. He was concerned that, while staff members are all enthusiastic, there was no way of knowing who is responsible for what.

(n) Local Group Reports.

Nothing to add to written reports.

The Chairman asked the meeting to approve the Annual Report. Carried nem con.

5. **Motions:** to consider any motions of which due notice has been received (in writing, by the Area Secretary, not less than 7 days before the meeting, i.e. by 28th January 2017):

No motions had been received.

6. Election of Officers

	<i>Elected</i>	<i>Proposed by</i>	<i>Seconded by</i>
Chairman			
Vice-Chairman			
Secretary	<i>vacant</i>		
Treasurer			
Footpath Secretary			
Membership Secretary			
Press Officer			
Area Access Officer			
Walks Editor	<i>vacant</i>		
NB rRIPPLE Coordinator			
Area News Editor	<i>vacant</i>		
Countryside Secretary	<i>vacant</i>		
Publicity Officer	<i>vacant</i>		

In the absence of nominations for the post of Secretary, the Acting Secretary agreed to continue until a replacement could be found.

7. Election of Executive Committee Members not appointed by Local Groups

(a) Representatives of Individual Members

Three existing members were re-elected.

(b) There were no nominations for representatives of Affiliated Local Organisations.

8. Appointment of Independent Examiner

The existing post holder, having indicated that he was willing to continue in post, was appointed.

9. Appointment of Area representatives to General Council 2017

Two representatives were agreed by those present; two other members were interested in attending as visitors.

10. Any Other Business

The magnificent contribution of two members to the footpath network in Buckinghamshire for almost 50 years, and of their work on behalf of the Area, was recognised by presenting them with a framed certificate; in reply, one of them commented that much of what they had done in the early days might fall foul of current health and safety concerns. Interest was expressed in first aid and walk leader training; the Chairman would investigate whether this could be organised through Central Office.

This ended the formal business of the meeting.

11. Speakers

Our first speaker introduced himself as a leader for Ramblers Holidays. He gave a brief overview of the history of the company and explained its recent rebranding. The financial contribution of the Walking Partnership to groups, including several in this Area, was noted.

One of our Officers, speaking as a trustee, noted a late member of East Berkshire Group, as an outstanding example of the contribution made by our volunteers. She summarised our ten year plan. More training is planned, in Oxfordshire but covering northern Buckinghamshire, for the “Don't Lose Your Way” project; She stressed the need for work to be organised to avoid duplication. The need for improved support for volunteers and campaigning is recognised.

The Chairman, also speaking as a trustee, spoke of our responsibility, as a charity, to help all walkers, participation in walking for health being an example. He mentioned recent improvements to *walk* magazine and the importance of festivals in recruiting new members. He noted the contradictory results that tend to come out of surveys. He outlined the structure of the organisation and called for volunteers to come forward for election as trustees.

Roadshows were welcomed as helpful and informative; more local ones were requested. Other topics discussed included the implications of “Brexit” and recent trustee resignations.

Area Annual Report 1 October 2016 - 30 September 2017

Chairman

The Area Chairman remains in post, and was re-elected to the Board of Trustees at the General Council meeting in April.

Acting Secretary's Report

It is sad, but not untypical of the difficulty in finding volunteers for many posts within Ramblers, that almost five years after failing to fill the post of Area Secretary at the 2013 AGM, we have still not found anybody willing to take the job on. It need not be excessively onerous or time consuming, and job sharing would be possible. Other posts left unfilled at the 2016 AGM have also failed to attract volunteers.

I see the Secretary's job as being to do what nobody else does, and I thank our other officers for all their work. As last year, the Area Executive Committee met three times; one meeting was timed to allow discussion of the motions submitted for consideration by General Council. Part of an Area's task is to keep informed of the activities of our Groups. Communication is patchy, and I am grateful to those Groups which do let us know what they are doing.

It has been Area policy that we are willing to pay for up to two visitors to attend the Ramblers' General Council meeting in addition to the two Council Members we elect at our AGM who can speak and vote on formal business (and those that attend in other capacities). Two members attended as visitors in 2017. We would welcome expressions of interest in attending in 2018.

Treasurer's Report

The accounts are prepared on a receipts and payments basis, in line with Central Office recommendations. Thus, for example, certain expenses claimed for the year ending 30 September 2015 but not paid until October of that year appeared in last year's accounts.

Up to date accounts are circulated to committee members prior to each meeting of the Area Executive Committee for scrutiny and subsequent approval at the meeting. Two signatories are required to make any withdrawals by cheque or internet banking from the Area's bank account. Current cheque signatories are the Chairman, Vice-Chairman and Treasurer while, in addition to those, the Membership Secretary is authorised for internet banking.

Ramblers' accounts are required to show expenditure under headings relating to our charitable objects. The fact that we had no expenditure under two such headings ("Countryside" and "Access") should not be taken as meaning we were inactive; rather this, and the low level of governance expenditure, reflect the negligible cost of email communication and the generosity of officers and other volunteers in not claiming expenses to which they may be entitled. Our expenditure under the "Rights of Way" heading has again increased dramatically, thanks to the excellent practical work being undertaken by the NB rRIPPLE team, working in north Buckinghamshire; much of the expenditure has been offset by his "Donate-a-Gate" scheme, with donations mainly from individuals and parish councils. Donations are treated as restricted funds, to be used only for replacement of stiles by gates.

Last year several groups agreed to reduce excessive reserves by taking no funding. The scope for similar economies this year was thereby limited, so that group funding has increased. Those groups which continued to ask for less than a basic allowance based on their membership deserve thanks for their prudent financial management. While groups are encouraged to use funds in support of Ramblers' charitable objects, excessive money held in bank accounts is not considered a good use of charity funds.

Our budgeted request for funding from Central Office was cut and, as a result, the year end main fund reserves are below the recommended minimum level of 40% of annual expenditure. We appealed against this decision but our appeal was unsuccessful. Any cut in our requested budget for 2017-18 could have serious consequences for the Area and its groups.

I would like to thank all the Group Treasurers for their hard work in notifying me of funding requirements for the year to September 2017 (including preparing budgets where required) and completing their end of year accounts and annual returns. Also, I thank the Area Independent Examiner for scrutinising and checking the Area accounts, and Group Independent Examiners for similar work at Group level.

The following table gives a brief summary of group main fund income and expenditure. Self funded activities such as socials and coach trips are not included. Columns are (A) main fund balance at start of year + (B) funding via Area + (C) other main fund income – (D) walks related expenditure including programmes – (E) other main fund expenditure = (F) main fund balance at end of year.

	A	+	B	+	C	-	D	-	E	=	F
Amersham	627		532		214		335		84		954
Aylesbury	345		366		250		175		533		253
Chiltern YW	396		0		0		0		68		328
Chilterns WW	341		488		90		147		172		600
Hike MK	45		50		0		0		41		54
Hillingdon	1013		426		670		71		409		1629
Milton Keynes	312		356		0		131		213		324
NW London	533		0		110		220		65		358
W London	558		1500		284		1086		414		842
Wycombe	885		314		220		122		436		861

Note:

The accounts, as approved by the Independent Examiner, are reproduced on the following page. The signed copy may be viewed on request.

INCOME & EXPENDITURE ACCOUNT FOR THE YEAR ENDED**30 September 2017**

	Year ended	30/9/17	30/9/16
INCOME:			
Funding from Central Office		5200.00	4900.00
Donations to restricted (Donate a Gate) fund		7949.48	2313.00
Bank interest		<u>0.00</u>	<u>1.97</u>
Total income		13149.48	7214.97
EXPENDITURE:			
Funding to Groups		4032.25	2725.00
Promoting Walking (South East Walker)		1264.95	1231.65
Rights of Way: main fund		579.12	1055.43
restricted fund (gate installation)		6303.36	1405.88
Governance: Area committee meetings		71.25	71.25
Area AGM		65.00	40.00
Visitor(s) to General Council		360.00	180.00
Annual Report		<u>7.00</u>	<u>7.00</u>
Total expenditure		12682.93	6716.21
SURPLUS / DEFICIT for year:			
main fund		-1179.57	-408.36
restricted (Donate a Gate) fund		<u>1646.12</u>	<u>907.12</u>
Total		466.55	498.76
Funds brought forward from previous year		2626.40	2127.64
Funds carried forward to next year		3092.95	<u>£ 2626.40</u>

BALANCE SHEET

Assets:	Main fund balance in bank at 30 September	539.71	1719.28
	Restricted fund balance in bank at 30 September	<u>2553.24</u>	<u>907.12</u>
	Total assets	3092.95	2626.40
Liabilities:		<u>0.00</u>	<u>0.00</u>
	Total liabilities	0.00	0.00
NET ASSETS		<u>£ 3092.95</u>	<u>£ 2626.40</u>

Treasurer

24 October 2017

INDEPENDENT EXAMINER'S STATEMENT:

Having carried out procedures in accordance with the Area and Group independent examination guidelines, I consider the Buckinghamshire, Milton Keynes and West Middlesex Area accounts to give a fair representation of the Area's/Group's financial activities for the year to 30 September 2016.

Independent Examiner

24 October 2017

Footpath Secretary's Report

During the year our volunteer path checkers walked many miles, checking the paths in their parishes and reporting problems to the highway authorities. The results were collated by the path check coordinator for each district and borough.

In Aylesbury Vale District we checked 54 out of 111 parishes and 1,063 out of 2,183 paths, walking 807 km and reporting 237 problems. This took at least 854 volunteer hours, where time estimates were given. The most common problems were poor or missing stiles or gates, overgrowth, cropping, trees across paths and missing signposts.

In Wycombe District we received returns for 28 out of 29 parishes, 83 per cent of the paths in those parishes were checked and 165 problems were reported. Volunteers spent about 864 hours checking paths and reporting problems.

In South Bucks parts of a few parishes were checked and problems were reported such as overgrowth and missing signposts. Similarly, in Hounslow a few problems were reported. At the time of publication no information had been received for Chiltern District.

In Milton Keynes 696 paths of the total of 776 in the 48 parishes were checked and 398 problems were found. Volunteers walked 542 km and spent 280 hours checking and reporting. The most common problems were missing waymarks, overgrowth, missing signposts, poor gates and stiles, and cropping.

There were 18 path-change proposals during the year. We challenged a cycle tracks order for footpath 40 in Beaconsfield and asked Buckinghamshire County Council how it proposed to limit the speed of cyclists so as not to endanger walkers (reply awaited).

We objected to planning applications where they affected public paths or the view from the path, such as an equestrian development at Valentine Farm, Skirmett (which was turned down) and a housing development at Studdridge near Stokenchurch (decision awaited).

We also objected to a proposed public spaces protection order for High Wycombe footpath 80, to be made on grounds of preventing crime and anti-social behaviour. We argued that closing the path would merely push the problem elsewhere while gravely inconveniencing legitimate users.

We were represented as an objector at a six-day public inquiry into the proposed diversion of footpaths 57 and 58 across Harrow School grounds, supporting local people. We were delighted that the inspector rejected the proposed changes, and Harrow School has had to reopen footpath 57 which it had obstructed many years ago with tennis courts.

We continue to be deeply worried about the shortage of rights-of-way staff in all our local authorities. We wrote to Buckinghamshire County Council's cabinet member for planning and the environment Councillor and, shortly after the year's end, met him to discuss our concerns. There are still only two Area rights-of-way officers for the whole county which is clearly insufficient.

I should like to thank, in particular, the Group footpath secretaries for all their help in analysing path check, corresponding with path checkers, checking their own parishes, and generally giving me welcome support and assistance. We are indebted to all our path checkers for their vigilance on paths in their patch and for their advice on path changes. But we now have more vacancies than ever, so please look at the list of vacant parishes in this report and volunteer if you can (perhaps on a one-off basis first). If someone is occupying your chosen parish please let us know, as there is always scope for job-sharing.

Please see page 18 of this report for vacancies.

Footpath improvement by North Bucks rRIPPLE (ramblers Repairing & Improving Public Paths for Leisure & Exercise)

Our ever more experienced team of six retirees, average age close to 70, continues to concentrate on replacing stiles with gates, going out two to five of us at a time, around three to four times per month. The stiles replaced are mostly dilapidated and/or dog walker unfriendly. This year we have averaged one gate installation per week, frequently installing two in a day. On 15th November 2017, with a team of five out, we set a record by replacing three stiles with three gates in a single day on Aston Abbotts FP 2 at Norduck. The primary objective is to have a day out in the fresh air, visit places we don't know, meet farmers and landowners, get some physical exercise, have a good chat and end up in the pub for a well earned pint, and in the process the footpath network benefits considerably from our activities.

This year we have invested in more tools including a 2-stroke jack hammer and have developed some tools of our own. One of these is a very simple lightweight timber gauge that simulates the "H" of the gate frame and helps ensure we dig our holes in the right place and the right distance apart: quite important. From a quality and durability perspective we now support our gates on either side with Redwood UC4 15 year treated timber posts that are additionally protected with Postsaver sleeves and tamped into the ground with 20 and 40 mm stones. Hopefully the posts will have a reasonably long life to partner the galvanised steel gates.

Another development during 2017 has been the close collaboration with the people of Oving where they had identified over fifty footpath problems. One of our group was instrumental in liaising with and setting up Oving Paths Action Group (OPAG). Oving people have generously supported the Donate-a-Gate scheme and wearing their "localism" hats, they have negotiated the implementation of numerous improvements with a number of farmers and landowners housing some very longstanding unresolved problems. We were royally entertained to an OPAG tea-party on New Years Day 2018.

As a Ramblers footpath maintenance group, we are totally self-sufficient. We are no drain on Buckinghamshire County Council whatsoever, as we have our own gate and timber storage facility, our own 4 x 4 off-road capability complete with trailer, and a very extensive range of hand and power tools, not to mention six dedicated volunteers. All we need from BCC is a Countryside Access Management System (CAMS) job sheet and away we go. BCC's outsourced contractor, Ringway Jacobs, that operates Transport for Bucks, in fact no longer has a Land Rover in North Bucks, following its MOT failure, so we've been asked to do jobs that they can't actually get to.

Our Donate-a-Gate scheme is continuing to prove popular and donations have topped £10,000 since its inception in February 2016. By January 2018 we will have installed our 100th gate. Our quarterly Activity Reports are now timed to coincide with our report that's published in South East Walker. Every one of our gates has a before and after photo in the relevant activity report on the web page, www.bucks-wmiddx-ramblers.org.uk/donate-a-gate. The activity reports are somewhat detailed, more like a log. This is deliberate to remind us what has been discussed and agreed, as we can be working with or negotiating with up to a dozen parishes at any one time. Activity Reports now include a work completed summary table.

At the end of the day we have to ask ourselves if it is all worth it and if we're doing the right thing. If we weren't doing this, no one else would be. BCC's rights of way department simply doesn't have the resources to maintain the footpath network fully open and accessible. Our input is helping. If more members of the public go out and actually find their walk is a success and they don't have to turn around half way due to an impassable collapsed stile, then they'll try other walks and tell their friends.

I'd like to thank the team members, none of whom are actually Ramblers members.

North Bucks rRIPPLE Co-ordinator

Membership Secretary's Report

The table below shows the total membership of the Ramblers, our Area and its constituents at 30 September 2017, and at 30 September 2016 for comparison. Area Membership relates to those members who have joined the Area in recent years and opted not to be allocated to a group. Non Group Members are those members who joined prior to the 1990s when members were not allocated to a group by default and who did not opt to join a group.

	2017	2016	Difference	% Difference
<u>Ramblers</u>	104,694	105,990	-1,296	-1%
<u>Area</u>	3,031	3,089	-58	-2%
<u>Groups</u>				
Amersham & District	447	450	-3	-1%
Aylesbury & District	277	285	-8	-3%
Hillingdon	324	341	-17	-5%
Milton Keynes & District	247	262	-15	-6%
North West London	213	235	-22	-9%
West London	496	483	13	3%
Wycombe District	329	337	-8	-2%
Chilterns Weekend Walkers	398	400	-2	-1%
Hike MK	51	53	-2	-4%
Chiltern Young Walkers	107	101	6	6%
	2,889	2,947	-58	-2%
<u>Individuals</u>				
Area Membership	44	37	7	19%
Awaiting Allocation	1	1	0	0%
Non Group Members	96	102	-6	-6%
	141	140	1	1%
<u>Affiliated Clubs</u>	4	4	0	0%

There was a small decline in Ramblers membership during the year. Our Area membership fell at a greater rate. Some groups in the Area did better than others. .

Access Officer

Our Area Access Officer, remains a member of the Buckinghamshire Local Access Forum. Though there have been no significant developments with respect to access land in our Area in the course of the year He has been able to keep the Area Executive Committee up to date with matters discussed by the Forum.

Press Officer's Report

We publicised the results of the Ramblers' Big Pathwatch, the presentation of a certificate at our AGM in February and our opposition to the public spaces protection order for High Wycombe footpath 80.

News Editor

This post was not filled at the 2017 AGM. The Acting Secretary has endeavoured to ensure that sufficient material has been forthcoming for our Area's page in *South East Walker*.

Publicity Officer

This post was not filled at the 2017 AGM. The Area Webmaster remains willing to advise groups on publicity matters. Any publicity effort in our Area is, therefore, coming from our groups.

Area Web Site

The Area webmaster is willing to continue in the absence of other volunteers.

Walks Editor

The Walks Editor resigned, having moved away from the Area, and a replacement has not been found. As a result, the walk descriptions and associated information on our website are likely to become increasingly outdated.

Representatives of Individual Members and of Affiliated Local Organisations

The inclusion of such representatives on the Area Executive Committee is specified not just in our own constitution but also in the Model Area Constitution approved as part of Ramblers' constitutional documents. In recent years none of our local organisations have appointed representatives. There is no formal definition of the role of "representative of individual members" and we have used it as a means of adding useful additional individuals to the Area Executive Committee, either by election at the AGM or by co-option.

One of the representatives has said that he believes the role would benefit from a clearer definition of what is expected from whoever is elected. He comments:

"I rely on people contacting me and over the last year a small number have done so: reporting problems; offering assistance; seeking information. For my part I try to stay aware of Ramblers policies, involve myself in activities that bring me into contact with other walkers by leading walks, attend meetings, and comment on issues likely to be a barrier to walking. Overall, people are positive about their walking experience but, from a personal point of view, I do despair at the attitude some authorities have to keeping their paths in good order. Local people, by commenting directly or through their elected representatives, can make a difference. Be positive, don't just moan!"

Planning and countryside

For several years we have advertised an unfilled vacancy for a Countryside Officer, in connection with one of the Ramblers' charitable objects: "the protection and enhancement for the benefit of the public of the beauty of the countryside ...". In the absence of such an officer the Footpath Secretary has made representations, where appropriate, on planning applications directly affecting rights of way. Broader issues have been handled on an ad-hoc basis, or by our groups.

Ramblers' Greater London Forum

A work in progress! RGLF has held a number of meetings in London including an AGM. These meetings discussed a range of topics relating to walking in London. In addition, the meetings looked at the following issues concerning the actual role of RGLF: why it came into existence in the first place; what it is all about; what is needed to be done to promote, develop, and protect walking opportunities in London; where RGLF 'fits in' with the Ramblers 'vision' and current plans and, does RGLF still have a role. Finally, whatever the future holds for RGLF it is very important that all who live, work and walk anywhere in the London area take some sort of active interest in encouraging their local council and the GLA/Mayor.

RGLF Chairman

Reports from Groups

Amersham and District Group

In July, the Group Chairman decided to step down. She has been leading walks since the 1970s and has been Chairman since 1998. We very much appreciate all the support and encouragement she has given to the Group over the years.

During the year, the Group offered 251 walks of varying length. Shorter walks continue to be popular and the Friday leisurely walk continues to be enjoyed by those who wish to take a little longer to admire scenery and other points of interest. The venue for the Group's Autumn Break was St Ives where Cornish walks brought sunshine, cream teas and exploration of 'Poldark' country.

The Christmas lunch and summer barbecue were both well supported. The last few miles of the Seven Shires Way were completed in July and the Cotswold Way, which was commenced in September, has proved popular with the first section including great views and pretty villages.

Retiring Secretary

Aylesbury and District Group

During the year the Group held weekly walks on Thursdays and Sundays and on alternate Tuesdays. All these walks have continued to be well attended with over 30 walkers participating on several occasions.

The Group continues to have a successful website which contains over 500 walk maps and over 3500 members photos and is visited frequently by members and non members. We are particularly pleased about the number of visits to the Outer Aylesbury Ring section.

During the year the Group had two walking holidays, one in the Cotswolds and the other in North Yorkshire, and held two social events, a summer barbecue and a winter meal.

We have continued our monthly path clearance programme.

Chairman

Chiltern Young Walkers

This year has seen the successful relaunch of the former Chilterns 20s-30s Walking Group under a new name at a barbecue held during the summer.

Chilterns Weekend Walkers

2017 has been another action packed year for the Chilterns Weekend Walkers. We continued our regular programme of weekend walks from a dedicated band of volunteer walk leaders.

Special interest walks were very popular, including a visit to Otmoor to watch the spectacle of the Starling roost and another to hear the dawn chorus at Batchworth, Rickmansworth. We also enjoyed a Mindfulness Weekend, “walking in silence practicing mindfulness by being aware of our surroundings and being in the moment”.

Two CWW members returning to walking after injury and illness each led a programme of “Walking Back to Fitness Walks”. These also proved popular with people new to recreational walking. A series of themed walks included plum and blackberry foraging and an Autumn sausage feast.

The highlight of the year was the CWW Challenge. A very special thank you to Jill and Steve Dowling for going above (literally) and beyond the call of duty in bringing us a truly memorable CWW Challenge this year. Travelling to Snowdon on many occasions at their own expense to prepare for the Challenge, the organisation was top notch and they made sure everyone had a great time and stayed safe on the mountains.

We also enjoyed trips to Yorkshire, Wiltshire, the Shropshire hills, Hull and the Yorkshire Wolds, South Wales and a holiday in the Dolomites.

CWW members also enjoyed a fresh, original socials programme including a Christmas Party and Summer barbecue.

Retiring Chair

Hike MK

This has been a difficult year, to be honest, for Hike MK. Many of the previous core walk leaders are busy elsewhere in their lives leaving only three regular leaders. In spite of this the group has continued managing a walk most weekends, a weekend in Church Stretton, night hikes and socials. Members have pursued outdoor interests outside of the group including the Yorkshire Three Peaks challenge, Alpine walks and Via Ferrate. We will look to put the latter on for the group next year together with perhaps the Snowdonia zip wire.

Secretary

Hillingdon and District Group

Although there has been a small drop in membership, the Hillingdon Group continues to organise a full programme of walks. The Wednesday walks continue to flourish, with new members joining and subsequently becoming leaders with very little prompting. Saturday walks are popular. Sunday walks are supported by a small but enthusiastic group. The Tuesday and Thursday walks programme has had some success but could do with some new leaders to support the small band who already do so much to support the programme.

A popular project this year has been the Lea Valley series of walks. This has combined walking with visits to places of interest and has attracted Ramblers from many different groups. Members have also enjoyed four days walking in the Cotswolds in May and a week's holiday in Hassness in the Lake District in September.

Social events included a successful quiz night in March and a well-attended Christmas lunch. In order to publicise our group and Ramblers' activities in general we attended the Ruislip Woods Open Day in May. We also have a representative on the Colne Valley Park Forum, and we hope that this will lead to greater publicity for the Ramblers as projects are developed to encourage walking in that area. The group has also donated £250 to the Chiltern Society for the purchase of a gate.

We have been very pleased to welcome new members to the committee this year, although we still have some vacancies. The new members are our First Area Representative, our Sunday Walks Organiser and our email Distributor.

Acting Chairman

Milton Keynes and District Group

We set an objective this year to try to end the year with at least the same membership numbers as last year. Like the general trend we did not manage this, and ended 15 down at 247 members. We have made some strides to publicise the group: our programmes are in the outdoor shops; we have continued to supply details to the local press and have even appeared on Secklow Radio. We have tried social media and we have a Facebook page.

The coach trip made a successful return, and will take place again next year. We have tried to add a social element with some walks, and this seems to go down well. We continue with our countrywide walks, completing the Macmillan Cross Britain Way and starting the Greensand Way (Surrey and Kent), and our Easters are spent on the Wales coast path.

The annual path check survey ended on 30 September and we received summary reports for all 48 parishes and about 90% of the paths were checked this year. Almost 400 problems were reported on about 500 km of paths in Milton Keynes. We also managed to check about 700 paths this year and based on the Summary Reports evidence seems to be growing that the condition of the paths is deteriorating.

In my opinion the Ramblers is going full steam as a campaigning organisation and seems to be alienating the local groups who just want to have a good walk. The membership is dropping each year. The Ramblers support walking for health, which is good, but why would anyone want to pay to walk short distances with us if they can do it free elsewhere? We also have the U3A led walks competing for people's time.

Chairman

North West London Group

The Group has continued to provide a full programme of Sunday walks, including a number arranged jointly with Hampstead Group.

Group membership has decreased during the year by 8%.

One of our members who has been a walk leader for the group for over 50 years, and Rambles Organiser continuously since 2006 as well as 3 previous spells, has been awarded a framed certificate by The Ramblers.

A new volunteer has taken over from our previous Group Treasurer.

Acting Secretary

West London Group

The West London Group has had a busy year of planning walks, walking, path checking and dealing with local authorities. We have continued with a full programme of walks both at the weekend and during the week, both rural and urban. Many thanks to all our leaders including the new recruits to the team.

To support the Ramblers' objective of encouraging use of the path network the group is organising a series of walks along our national trails. This started with the North Downs Way last year, which has been completed in the autumn of 2017. Nearer to home the Capital Ring and the London Loop have been added to the walks programme. These walks have proved to be popular and hence other trails such as the Vanguard Way and Chiltern Heritage Trail are being added to the programme. The organized holidays were also much appreciated by those who went on them to explore the path network and enjoy the scenery in other parts of the country.

The group's work of checking paths in South Bucks and the London Boroughs of Ealing and Hounslow continues but there is still a need for more volunteers to help with this work. For the second year the group had a publicity stall at events in west London and there was some success in generating interest in Ramblers. We have a full programme of walks going into 2018, and intend to continue with publicity events and path checking.

Secretary

Wycombe District Group

We have had another good year of walking with 205 walks completed, ranging from 6 to 13 miles, with good attendance on the majority of them. Included in our program is an 8 mile walk for the London Blind Ramblers each October. We have offered this over a number of years; thanks are due to many of our members who volunteer to guide each individual as necessary and appropriate.

We have had a good social program with a Festive meal, a long weekend away in the Wye Valley, a summer barbecue and an extra weekend away in Worthing, all well supported.

Our new format AGM in November was well supported and approved of so we aim to continue that for the foreseeable future, basically a 6 mile walk followed by a light lunch and then the formal business followed by tea, coffee and cake!

We do have some challenges - we are an ageing group, we are short of Publicity and Social committee members and we struggle to have a long walk every Sunday from time to time due to leader shortage. That said our membership of around 360 is very stable with new members replacing those who have left over the year and the committee members we do have all are experienced and happy to continue for a further year.

Chairman

Path Checkers and Co-ordinators

Until a few years ago we included in the Annual Report a complete list, by parish, of our Path Checkers. Partly because changes are frequent, and partly for data protection reasons, we decided to omit the list. If you wish to discuss path problems please contact one of the people listed below who can, if necessary, put you in touch with the appropriate person.

Path Checkers are asked to walk all the paths in their parishes at least once a year and to report problems. They will also be consulted about any proposals for path changes. New volunteers are always welcome and should discuss what is involved with one of the people listed below. A list of vacant parishes in December 2017 follows but if you are interested in a particular parish which is not listed please get in touch: the current Checker may be happy to share, or change, responsibilities.

Vacant parishes

Aylesbury Vale District: Addington, Adstock, Akeley, Ashendon, Aston Sandford, Barton Hartshorn, Biddlesden, Boarstall, Brill, Calvert Green, Charndon, Chetwode, Coldharbour, Creslow, Cublington, Cuddington, Dunton, Edgcott, Edlesborough Northall and Dagnall, Fleet Marston, Foscott, Gawcott with Lenborough, Granborough, Great Horwood, Grendon Underwood, Hardwick, Hillesden, Hoggston, Hogshaw, Kingswood, Leckhampstead, Lillingstone Dayrell with Luffield Abbey, Lillingstone Lovell, Long Crendon, Ludgershall, Marsh Gibbon, Oakley, Padbury, Pitchcott, Poundon, Preston Bissett, Quainton, Radclive cum Chackmore, Shalstone, Soulbury, Steeple Claydon, Stewkley, Stoke Hammond, Stone with Bishopstone and Hartwell, Stowe, Thornborough, Tingewick, Turweston, Twyford, Waddesdon, Water Stratford, Westbury, Westcott, Whitchurch, Winslow, Woodham, Worminghall, Wotton Underwood

Chiltern District: Amersham, Chalfont St. Peter, Little Chalfont

South Buckinghamshire District: Farnham Royal

Wycombe District: Bledlow-cum-Saunderton, Downley, Ellesborough

Milton Keynes: Bletchley & Fenny Stratford, Calverton, Shenley Brook End, Shenley Church End, Stantonbury, Wavendon, West Bletchley

London Boroughs: Brent, Harrow, Hillingdon

Contacts

Area Footpath Secretary

Aylesbury Vale District

Chiltern District

South Buckinghamshire District

Wycombe District

Milton Keynes

London Boroughs

Please make contact via the Area website.

Group Secretaries

Amersham & District Group
Aylesbury & District Group
Chiltern Young Walkers
Chilterns Weekend Walkers
Hike MK
Hillingdon & District Group
Milton Keynes & District Group
North West London Group <i>(Acting)</i>
West London Group
Wycombe District Group

Group Web Sites

Amersham & District Group	www.amershamramblers.org.uk
Aylesbury & District Group	www.aylesbury-ramblers.org.uk
Chiltern Young Walkers	www.chilterns2030s.org.uk
Chilterns Weekend Walkers	www.chilternsww.co.uk
Hike MK	www.mk-northbucks2030s.org.uk
Hillingdon & District Group	www.hillingdonramblers.org.uk
Milton Keynes & District Group	www.mkramblers.org.uk
West London Group	www.westlondonramblers.org.uk
Wycombe District Group	www.wycomberamblers.org.uk

Alternatively, basic information about the Area and its groups, including links to individual websites, can be found on the main Ramblers' web site, <http://www.ramblers.org.uk>. Click on “Find your local group”, then click on the “Groups” tab. Either page through the list to reach our Area and its groups or enter the name of the group of interest in the “Enter location” box, choose from the list generated and click on “Search”. Clicking on the group name then leads to further information. Some of the Area's Groups publicise details of some or all of their walks on the Walks Finder database on the Ramblers' web site; brief details of forthcoming walks and links to further information can be found on the pages accessed as described.

Direct links to the Area and group pages on the main Ramblers' web site are as follows:

www.ramblers.org.uk/buckinghamshire-milton-keynes-west-middlesex
www.ramblers.org.uk/amersham-district
www.ramblers.org.uk/aylesbury-district
www.ramblers.org.uk/chilterns-20s-30s-walking (former name of Chiltern Young Walkers)
www.ramblers.org.uk/chilterns-weekend-walkers
www.ramblers.org.uk/hike-mk
www.ramblers.org.uk/hillingdon
www.ramblers.org.uk/milton-keynes-district
www.ramblers.org.uk/north-west-london
www.ramblers.org.uk/west-london
www.ramblers.org.uk/wycombe-district

Area Executive Committee October 2015 - September 2016

*note: this list does **not** include any appointments since the end of September*

Chairman
Vice-Chairman
Secretary <i>vacant: the Treasurer has continued as Acting Secretary</i>
Treasurer
Footpath Secretary
Membership Secretary
North Bucks rRIPPLE Co-ordinator
Countryside Secretary <i>vacant</i>
News Editor <i>vacant</i>
Publicity Officer <i>vacant</i>
Walks Editor <i>vacant</i>
Press Officer
Access Officer
Representatives of Individual Members
Representatives of Affiliated Local Organisations
<i>vacant</i>
Group Representatives
Amersham
Aylesbury <i>vacant</i>
Chilterns 20s-30s
Chilterns Weekend
Hike MK
Hillingdon
Milton Keynes
North West London
West London
Wycombe

Area website: www.bucks-wmiddx-ramblers.org.uk

Ramblers Central Office: The Ramblers' Association, 2nd Floor, 87-90 Albert Embankment, London SE1 7TW
Tel: 020 7339 8500 Fax: 020 7339 8501 www.ramblers.org.uk ramblers@ramblers.org.uk