



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

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.

Annual Report

1st October 2021 - 30th September 2022

Annual General Meeting: 2.00 pm on 4th February 2023 in the Cherry Baker Room of the Wades Centre, Stratton Road, Princes Risborough, Buckinghamshire, HP27 9AX.

Join us for our Area AGM to find out what Ramblers is doing for *all* walkers!

This is your opportunity to exercise your democratic rights and make your views known on matters of concern to you. After the formal business of the meeting, as per the agenda on page 2, we shall hear from a Ramblers Trustee, with a question and answer session.

All Area officers and committee members (other than those appointed by groups or affiliated organisations) are elected, or re-elected, at the AGM. This year the Chairman and (Acting) Secretary have indicated that they do not wish to stand for re-election; the Acting Secretary would prefer, additionally, to be replaced in his other role of Area Treasurer. There are a number of other, long-standing vacancies (see Agenda, page 2). Any offers of interest in any officer or committee role, or enquiries about what is involved, are welcome; please contact the Acting Secretary. Failure to fill the roles of Chairman and Secretary would probably be considered as rendering the Area non-viable, in which case the Board of Trustees would take responsibility for ensuring continuance of Ramblers' activities in our territory.

At the Area AGM we elect our two members of Ramblers General Council, who are entitled to speak and vote at the annual General Council meeting, to be held at the NEC, Birmingham on 1st April 2023; expenses are paid by Central Office. Areas are encouraged to seek candidates from all parts of the membership, in line with our values of being inclusive to all and welcoming people from diverse backgrounds. If you wish to put your name forward or to find out more about what is involved, please contact the Acting Area Secretary.

Two walks are available in the morning, each starting from the Mount (pay and display) car park opposite the Wades Centre: a 7.5 mile route starting at 10.10am and a 4.5 mile route starting at 11.35am. The meeting will be followed by a short team quiz to test your walking knowledge with prizes for the winning team. Further details of the meeting and walks can be found on the Area website:

<https://bucks-wmiddx-ramblers.org.uk/>.

**Agenda for the Annual General Meeting
at 2.00 pm on Saturday 4th February 2023**

1. Apologies for absence
 2. Minutes of the AGM held on 5th February 2022 (incorporated in the Annual Report, pages 3-5)
 3. Matters arising from the minutes
 4. To receive the Annual Report and Accounts:

(a) Chairman's Report (b) Acting Secretary's Report (c) Treasurer's Report and Accounts (d) Footpath Secretary's Report (e) Membership Secretary's Report (f) North Bucks rRIPPLE Report (g) Access Officer (h) Press Officer's Report	- p5 - p5-6 - p6-8 - p9 - p7 - p9-10 - p10-11 - p11	(i) News Editor (j) Publicity and Area Web Site (k) Member and ALO Reps (l) Countryside Secretary (m) Local Group Reports	- p11 - p11 - p11 - p11 - p12-15
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 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 28th January 2023)
 6. Election of Officers:

(a) *Chairman (b) *Vice-Chairman (<i>vacant</i>) (c) *Secretary (<i>vacant</i>) (d) *Treasurer (e) *Footpath Secretary (f) Membership Secretary (g) North Bucks rRIPPLE Coordinator	(h) Press Officer (i) Access Officer (j) News Editor (<i>vacant</i>) (k) Countryside Secretary (<i>vacant</i>) (l) Publicity Officer (<i>vacant</i>) (m) Walks Editor (<i>vacant</i>)
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- 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 2023 General Council AGM
 10. Any other business
 11. Quiz
 12. Ramblers' Trustee, questions and discussion

**Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held at 2.00 pm on Saturday, 5th February 2022
at Stoke Mandeville Community Centre and by zoom videoconference**

[Note that, for data protection reasons, personal names have been omitted from this version of the minutes, whilst they are retained in the file copy. The relevant names can be revealed at the meeting on request.]

5 members attended in person and 8 by zoom.

The Chairman introduced the Annual General Meeting and welcomed those attending.

1. **Apologies for absence** were received from 8 members.

2. **Minutes** of the AGM held on Saturday 6th February 2021 were signed as a correct record.

3. **Matters arising** from the minutes. There were no matters arising not considered elsewhere on the agenda.

4. Annual Report and Accounts

The Chairman displayed the Annual Report which contained reports from Area Officers. Additional comments made during the meeting included the following:

(a) Chairman's Report:

Nothing to add to written report.

(b) Acting Secretary's Report:

Nothing to add to written report.

(c) Treasurer's Report and Accounts:

The meeting was asked to approve the accounts (duly proposed and seconded). Carried nem con.

(d) Footpath Secretary's Report:

The Area Footpath Secretary thanked group footpath secretaries and path checkers, and commented that parishes could be shared or swapped; Buckinghamshire Council's communications had improved; reporting of problems remained important.

(e) Membership Secretary's Report:

Nothing to add to written report.

(f) North Bucks ramblers Repairing & Improving Public Paths for Leisure & Exercise (NB rRIPPLE) Report:

The meeting thanked the co-ordinator and his team for their continuing good work.

(g) Access Officer's Report:

The retiring Access Officer was thanked for his work over many years. The Footpath Secretary reported on a consultation on long-term restrictions to access at Chawley Manor; objections had led to an improvement.

(h) Press Officer's Report:

Nothing to add to written report.

(i) News Editor:

Contributions for the Area's page in *South East Walker* had been sparse.

(j) Publicity and area Website:

Nothing to add to written report.

(k) Individual Member Representative and Affiliated Local Organisation reports

A representative reported on Local Access Forum discussions on greenways, which tend to have insufficient width for all categories of user.

(l) Planning and countryside

Nothing to add to written report.

(m) Local Group Reports.

The transfer of Hike MK to a flexigroup was complete. Arrangements following dissolution of North West London are under way.

The report was approved subject to correction of dates in the page 6 heading (duly proposed and seconded). Carried nem con.

5. Motions: to consider any motions of which due notice had been received (in writing, by the Area Secretary, not less than 7 days before the meeting, i.e. by 29th January 2022). Three motions had been received:

From Wycombe Group (duly proposed and seconded): 'The Group committee request that Area officers motion the General Council to review the use of Risk Assessments (to be retained for 3 years) which is having an impact on our leaders, a number of whom have not returned since the introduction of these forms, and find a solution that will still provide adequate insurance without this bureaucracy.'

From Amersham Group (duly proposed and seconded): "This AGM calls upon the Area officers to submit a motion for debate by General Council deploring the effects that bureaucracy, in particular risk assessments, is having on walk leaders and programmes, and asking for a solution that retains adequate insurance whilst reducing demands on leaders."

From Hillingdon Group (duly proposed and seconded): "This AGM calls upon the Area officers to submit a motion for debate by General Council deploring effects that bureaucracy, in particular risk assessments, is having on walk leaders and programmes, and asking for a solution that retains adequate insurance whilst reducing demands on leaders."

Messages of support for these motions had been received from Aylesbury and Milton Keynes groups. Following discussion the Chairman put the following motion, composited from the above three, to the vote: "The AGM requests that Area officers submit a motion to the General Council to review the use of Risk Assessments (to be retained for 3 years) which is having an impact on our leaders, a number of whom have not returned since the introduction of these forms, and request a solution that will still provide adequate insurance cover without this bureaucracy and reducing demands on leaders." The motion was carried, with 11 votes in favour and 2 abstentions. The Acting Secretary would write a General Council motion and give the Area Executive Committee the opportunity to comment before formal submission.

6. Election of Officers

	<i>Elected</i>	<i>Proposed by</i>	<i>Seconded by</i>
Chairman		<i>All duly proposed</i>	<i>All duly seconded</i>
Vice-Chairman	<i>vacant</i>		
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 Treasurer agreed to continue as Acting Secretary until a replacement could be found. A member accepted the Access role subject to limitations and with assistance.

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

(a) Representatives of Individual Members

One member (duly proposed and seconded) was elected.

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

8. Appointment of Independent Examiner

The current Independent Examiner, having indicated that he was willing to continue in post, was appointed (duly proposed and seconded).

9. Appointment of two Council Members to serve from the 2022 General Council AGM

Proposed, Seconded and agreed by those present that the Chairman be appointed. He would seek to find a second volunteer.

10. Any Other Business

There was no other business.

11. Speaker

The Footpath Secretary, speaking as a Trustee, discussed national developments including: campaigning for access provision in the Agriculture Bill and government “levelling up” plans; restructuring of campaigns and path teams; concerns about extension of trespass and limitations on right to protest; progress with “Don’t Lose Your Way” and the England coast path; new staff leadership team; new brand/logo; possible organisational changes, with several Areas being in abeyance. Communication still needs improving, though clusters and special interest groups are helping.

12. Questions and discussion

The Acting Secretary asked whether the promotion of an existing staff member to head the new paths team would have a negative impact on work on “Don’t Lose Your Way”, and was assured that this should not be the case.

The Chairman was thanked for his organisation of the meeting, and closed it at 3.42pm.

Area Annual Report 1 October 2021 - 30 September 2022

Chairman’s Report

The installation of the 300th gate by NB rRIPPLE at the end of the Ramblers’ year is a great success in the Area. This is balanced by the continuing and increasing impact of active HS2 construction, which has led to more path closures and diversions throughout the year. While local communities are directly given some additional information, it remains difficult to understand at a glance which paths are currently open or closed and whether or not there is a diversion in place and if it is open for use.

The groups in the Area continue to run an active programmes of walks. Our annual path check continues to discover issues on the rights of way network and I thank everyone who has volunteered over the past year.

Acting Secretary's Report

Having served as Acting Area Secretary in addition to Area Treasurer for almost ten years since we failed to fill the post of Secretary at the 2013 AGM, I am unwilling to continue in the role; we appealed for volunteers in the December issue of *South East Walker*. I have attended a number of Zoom meetings of the South East Cluster, and it seems that we are not alone in having difficulty filling officer roles.

We were one of four Areas to submit motions critical of risk assessment requirements for walk leaders for debate at General Council, as mandated by last year’s AGM. The four were consolidated, by the

Motions Review Committee, into two composite motions, both of which were passed by the meeting. By the time of writing the Board of Trustees had issued a preliminary response, subject to further investigation, but the requirement for leaders to complete these remains for the time being.

The excellent work of NB rRIPPLE (of which more elsewhere) suffered an unfortunate setback when tools worth in excess of £1000 were stolen from the co-ordinator's Land Rover, not being covered by his insurance, though they were his personal property. The Area Executive Committee agreed to fund replacements (which would then become Ramblers' property), up to a value of £1250, provided there were satisfactory assurances of measures to minimise the risk of future loss. The co-ordinator has undertaken that tools will no longer be left unsupervised in the Land Rover, and has confirmed that his insurance would cover theft from his home. Reimbursement was not finalised until after the end of the accounting year.

Treasurer's Report

The accounts are prepared on a receipts and payments basis, in line with Central Office recommendations, showing actual receipts and actual payments during the accounting year, October 2021 to September 2022. Thus gift aid on this year's eligible donations, £1100.14 received in October 2022, will be included in next year's accounts, whilst the gift aid of £437.54, shown in this year's accounts, was for donations made in the previous year. The figures for room hire for meetings include some for future years.

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, (former) 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 increased, as has income from our "Donate-a-Gate" scheme, with practical work being undertaken by the NB rRIPPLE team getting back to full capacity after covid-19 lockdown. Donations are treated as restricted funds, to be used only for replacement of stiles by gates. Our other main expenditure is on funding to groups and for our share of the costs of *South East Walker*.

Our budget request for funding this year was for £5500 but, as anticipated expenditure by the Area and its groups was reduced because of the pandemic, we were able to tell Central Office that we did not require the final quarter's funding payment. Most groups took less than the funding they initially requested, for which we are very grateful. Even so, most groups (as shown in the table below) ended the year with reserves higher than the recommended range of 40-100% of expenditure. This probably reflects readjustment after the unusual circumstances of the pandemic and I do not view it as a matter of particular concern. Income included transfer of funds from the closure of accounts of the sadly defunct North West London group and of Hike MK which, as a flexigroup, no longer has a bank account.

I would like to thank all the group treasurers for notifying me of funding requirements (and, in most cases, agreeing to reductions) and for 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 Area independent examiner has decided to retire after doing the job for 11 years, and deserves particular thanks.

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. (G) is any funds designated for particular use in future years and (H) is reserves (F-G as a percentage of D+E).

	A	+	B	+	C	-	D	-	E	=	F	G	H
Amersham	1823		0		40		0		600		1263	219	174
Aylesbury	773		251		90		76		369		669	70	134
Chiltern YW	1057		210		20		408		35		844	250	134
Chilterns WW	334		100		0		0		412		22	0	5
Hike MK	63		-63		0		0		0		0	0	0
Hillingdon	640		200		0		0		58		782	700	141
Milton Keynes	372		85		0		0		92		365	250	125
NW London	639		-609		0		0		30		0	0	0
Wycombe	117		350		0		88		140		239	0	105

Note: The accounts, as approved by the Independent Examiner, are reproduced on the following page.

Membership Secretary's Report

The table below shows the total membership of the Ramblers, our Area and its constituents at 30 September 2022 and at 30 September 2021 for comparison. Although the North West London group has ceased to be active, members are still allocated to this group. During the year the three categories of membership shown under Individuals were merged into one.

	2022	2021	Difference	% Difference	Gains	Losses
<u>Ramblers</u>	102,356	101,130	1,226	1%		
<u>Area</u>	2,257	2,265	-8	0%		
<u>Groups</u>						
Amersham & District	340	366	-26	-7%	36	62
Aylesbury & District	259	247	12	5%	45	33
Hillingdon	315	327	-12	-4%	50	62
Milton Keynes & District	224	249	-25	-10%	29	54
North West London	207	206	1	0%	55	54
Wycombe District	290	276	14	5%	36	22
Chilterns Weekend Walkers	304	288	16	6%	30	14
Hike MK	51	53	-2	-4%	15	17
Chiltern Young Walkers	137	135	2	1%	44	42
	2,127	2,147	-20	-1%	340	360
<u>Individuals</u>						
Area Membership	130	44	86	195%		
Awaiting Allocation	0	2	-2	-100%		
Non Group Members	0	71	-71	-100%		
	130	117	13	11%		
<u>Affiliated Clubs</u>	5	5	0	0%		

The Ramblers and Area membership remained stable last year. Some groups did better than others.

INCOME & EXPENDITURE ACCOUNT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30th September 2022

	Year ended	30/9/22	30/9/21
INCOME:			
Funding from Central Office		4125.00	3750.00
Refund of deposit for AGM hall booking		75.00	0.00
Transfer of funds from closed group accounts		672.41	0.00
Donations to restricted (Donate a Gate) fund		9216.00	5616.22
Gift Aid on donations		<u>437.54</u>	<u>411.27</u>
Total income		14525.95	9777.49
EXPENDITURE:			
Funding to Groups		1196.50	1411.50
Promoting Walking (South East Walker)		1200.14	1056.02
Rights of Way: main fund		1023.13	760.26
restricted fund (gate installation)		9188.51	7288.76
Governance: Area committee meetings		54.00	0.00
Area AGMs		88.12	75.00
Annual Report		0.00	0.00
Postage		56.00	0.00
Bank charges		<u>1.20</u>	<u>0.60</u>
Total expenditure		12807.60	10592.14
SURPLUS / DEFICIT for year:			
main fund		1253.32	446.62
restricted (Donate a Gate) fund		<u>465.03</u>	<u>-1261.27</u>
Total		1718.35	-814.65
Funds brought forward from previous year		4067.74	4882.39
Funds carried forward to next year		5786.09	4067.74

BALANCE SHEET

Assets:	Main fund balance in bank at 30 th September	3408.60	2155.28
	Restricted fund balance in bank at 30 th September	<u>2377.49</u>	<u>1912.46</u>
	Total assets	5786.09	4067.74
Liabilities:		<u>0.00</u>	<u>0.00</u>
	Total liabilities	0.00	0.00
NET ASSETS		<u>£ 5786.09</u>	<u>£ 4067.74</u>

Treasurer

1st November 2022

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 financial activities for the year to 30th September 2022.

Independent Examiner

1st November 2022

Note: signed copy available for inspection on request.

Footpath Secretary's Report

We ask our path checkers to walk all the paths in their parishes at least once a year and to report problems. If they wish, they are consulted about any proposals for path changes. New volunteers are always welcome and are invited to discuss what is involved with me, or with their group footpath secretary.

In Aylesbury Vale District we checked 22 out of 111 parishes. Out of 2,185 paths, 444 (20.3 per cent) were checked and our volunteers reported 70 problems. This took at least 274 volunteer hours.

In the former Chiltern District, 15 out of 18 parishes were checked, some partially. The Amersham and District Group held a path-checking day in August, walking about half of Ashley Green paths, and 11 issues were identified and reported. In total, over 200 problems were reported to the highway authority, or rectified by the group's volunteers, mainly overgrowth, installing waymarks and removing fallen trees. Many problems were similar to last year's: overgrowth, missing waymarks and signposts, poor stiles and gates, and a few fallen trees.

In South Bucks part or all of nine parishes were checked and 31 problems were reported, the most common being fallen trees, broken or missing signposts, bad stiles, and overgrowth, with three bridges out of repair. We still need a coordinator here.

In Wycombe District we received returns for 18 out of 28 parishes; 90 per cent of the paths in those parishes were checked and 79 problems were reported. Volunteers spent about 324 hours checking paths and reporting problems.

In Milton Keynes, 397 paths in 21 of the 48 parishes were checked, and 140 problems were reported. Volunteers spent more than 82 hours checking and reporting. The most common problems were missing signposts and waymarks, unofficial diversions, overgrowth, and poor gates and stiles.

There were 27 path-change proposals during the year and we objected to seven of them but were able to withdraw our objections to three after discussions with, and some amendments by, Milton Keynes Council. The remaining four were in the landowner's interest with little or no public benefit. We also objected to three planning applications which would have an adverse effect on public enjoyment of paths—at Denham, Little Marlow, and Turville.

We were delighted when Natural England accepted our objection to proposed restrictions on access land at Chawley Manor Farm and Wayside Farm in Bledlow-cum-Saunderton parish, agreeing to amend the plans so that the restrictions applied only to people with dogs, who must keep to routes around the edge at certain times.

We are grateful to a path checker in Milton Keynes, who led on producing a detailed and well-researched response to the Milton Keynes review of the rights of way improvement plan.

Our former Access Officer, who has represented walkers on the Buckinghamshire Local Access Forum since its inception, stepped down and was replaced, in November 2021, by our Aylesbury and District path coordinator.

I should like to thank, in particular, group representatives 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.

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

North Bucks rRIPPLE continues to operate around the year replacing stiles with gates at a rate of around 3 per month. On 21/9/22 we installed our 299th and 300th gates in Dorton. We were joined for the occasion by a newly hired Buckinghamshire Council rights of way officer for a "work experience" day out in the country. In appreciation of our work and achievements we received a nice letter from the Cabinet Member for Transport at Buckinghamshire Council.

In mid summer we had our Land Rover broken into and around £1,250 replacement value of tools were stolen. Following area committee members discussion a very sizeable contribution was made from area funds to replace the most needed items for which the group is very grateful.

We have become increasingly aware of and concerned about the failure of the “D” loop hasp on numerous Centrewire gates necessitating replacement of the gate leaf. We developed our own bolt-on fix-kit using two 12 mm bolts to simulate the hasp. Centrewire has been slow in the extreme to modify their design or produce their own fix-kit. We are currently sourcing gates from Secure-a-Field that have, in our opinion, a superior and more robust latch design.

Waddesdon Estates contacted us. The Head of Sustainability and Conservation for the Rothschild Foundation asked us if we could install up to seventeen gates for them that they had been given. So far we’ve installed three at their stud including a fine timber gate at their entrance and one on the Thame Valley Walk. A number of their tenanted farms along the River Thame feature awkward stiles which we are hoping to change for gates.

We received a plea from Thame & Wheatley Ramblers to help with resolving a perennial flooding problem at Notley Old Mill on the Wychert Way at SP713087. With considerable help from the landowner/farmer, and contributions to pay for aggregate from parish councils and individuals and local organisations, this project, to build an embankment to raise a 20 m long section of footpath above the anticipated local flooding level is nearing completion.

All our activities continue to be recorded in detail in our activity reports on the area website including before and after photos: bucks-wmiddx-ramblers.org.uk/donate-a-gate.

The group would welcome a visit during a session from a committee member or an area member. Ramblers HQ sends Volunteer Delivery Officers along every now and again to get hands on experience on how Ramblers maintenance teams operate. Just contact the group’s coordinator.

North Bucks rRIPPLE Co-ordinator

Access Officer’s Report

In addition to my role as Area Access Officer I represent the interests of walkers generally on the Buckinghamshire Local Access Forum. I have attended three LAF meetings during 2022 and have submitted reports on them to the Area Executive Committee. Topics discussed have included the following.

Buckinghamshire Council has increased rights of way staffing to 7.5 full time equivalents. Hot weather in 2022 has resulted in abnormally high growth and there would be a second cut. Latest BVPI’s rated 75% of paths and 94% of structures easy to use with 94% of paths signed from the road. There are 46 definitive map modifications currently in progress, 8 of which are now under investigation.

HS2 continues to close many paths and apply for planning permission under the HS2 Act. Rights of way which are not included but maintenance tracks and bridges provide the forerunner to Schedule 4 applications. These will in due course divert all rights of way and put in new cycleway sections.

East West Rail construction continues with 16 PRoWs to be diverted and 1 to be permanently stopped up; 8 new bridges are to be built with two currently in construction. There is huge and widespread pressure including from Buckinghamshire Council to construct the Aylesbury link. This is now awaiting a government response which, if successful, would mean implementing more path diversions/closures as previously agreed with Network Rail.

Natural Environment Partnership: being set up to improve the local environment, in conjunction with a Local Transport Plan to encourage walking, cycling and public transport in preference to motor vehicles. High Wycombe’s local transport strategy includes their vision statement based on local, regional and green spaces and 26 transport schemes covering all forms of transport.

Definitive Statement: other highway authorities (including Oxfordshire) have theirs online; Buckinghamshire is investigating making theirs available.

Long distance routes: a relaunch of the Bernwood Jubilee Way was paused following the death of Her Majesty and rebranding is in progress. The Ridgeway is 50 years old in 2023 and the Ridgeway Board is inviting everyone to enjoy events along the way to celebrate.

Apart from LAF meetings I have attended, with other interested parties, a meeting with a representative of HS2 to discuss issues of road closures in the Wendover area blocking access to paths including the Ridgeway, Aylesbury Ring and Outer Aylesbury Ring. He presented plans for signed temporary diversions, but timing of the closures is not yet known. It also appears that there will be no access across the HS2 route south west of Aylesbury for a prolonged period, affecting the Round Aylesbury Walk and the Thame Valley Walk. The South East Aylesbury Road Link and housing developments will also affect paths in the Aylesbury area, but will include new cycleways.

The 10 year review of access land is due to commence this year as required under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act and my name as Access Officer has been put against the Ramblers initiative for the Area. The Ramblers see this as a two pronged project which will also include the campaign to expand open access rights to new land uses. Once it starts I will rely heavily on input from all our Area's groups.

Press Officer's Report

Shortly after the year's end we issued a press release celebrating the installation of rRIPPLE's 300th gate, in the parish of Dinton with Ford and Upton.

Please remember that I am always ready to publicise Ramblers' issues throughout our territory.

News Editor

This post was not filled at the 2022 AGM. The Acting Secretary has endeavoured to ensure that sufficient material has been forthcoming for our Area's page in *South East Walker*.

Publicity and Area Web Site

The post of Publicity Officer was not filled at the 2022 AGM. Any publicity effort in our Area is, therefore, coming from our groups. Our Webmaster, who has continued as Area Webmaster in the absence of other volunteers, remains willing to advise groups on publicity matters.

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 or by co-option. Hike MK, having converted to a flexigroup, is not entitled to appoint representatives to the committee, but the appointment of one of their members as a representative of individual members allows the flexigroup to be kept informed of developments at Area level.

Countryside Secretary

This post was not filled at the 2022 AGM. The Footpath Secretary has made representations, where appropriate, on planning applications directly affecting rights of way. Broader issues are handled on an ad-hoc basis, or by our groups.

Reports from Groups

Amersham and District Group

The Group has had a good year following the lifting of Covid restrictions on Group walks. The Chair is stepping down this year. Our thanks go to the Chair for her hard work over the past year. The 2021 AGM was held on the 24th November by Zoom. The Group's AGM will be held on the 23rd November 2022 at Coleshill Village Hall.

A comprehensive walks programme continued to be offered with thanks to our dedicated walks leaders and programme coordinator. The committee encouraged new leaders to come forward to lead walks. Most leaders were uploading their walks on GWEM for approval, supported by the day walks leaders and the Programme Coordinator. The Programme Coordinator and several experienced walk leaders are participating in the trials of the Ramblers Walks Manager website. Amersham was one of eight groups to take part in the trials.

There were vacancies for footpath checkers in a few parishes. Footpath checking continued to be well supported by members. The Footpath Secretary organised a footpath checking day and training sessions for members.

This year was the Group's 50th Anniversary and the event was celebrated on 9th July 2022 with an anniversary walk and lunch at the Cock Inn, Sarratt. The Group's annual walking holiday was held this year at HF Nether Grange, Alnmouth from 11th to 15th October 2021. Over 30 members attended and enjoyed the walks and evening entertainment. The Group's Christmas lunch was held at Chartridge Golf Club on the 21st December 2021.

On behalf of Amersham Ramblers a big thank you to the members who organised the above events.

Secretaries

Aylesbury and District Group

We returned to our standard walk programme in August 2021, with walks being provided on alternate Tuesdays and every Thursday and Sunday. The major issue impacting the group has, however, been the difficulty in attracting enough walk leaders, which has put a lot of pressure on a diminishing pool of willing leaders.

In some instances, we have been unable to fill gaps in the programme. A fallout from Covid appears to be a changing dynamic within the group with some previously active members no longer walking and previously active leaders preferring not to lead.

Our membership base is not shrinking but we do now have a significant number of fee-paying members who are not walking at all. This appears to be a problem for many groups, and we will be focussing our efforts on trying to recruit and train more leaders over the coming months.

We await the results of the trial of the new Walks Manager system and hope that this will not create any further barriers to attracting walk leaders.

We were delighted to be able to hold a face-to-face AGM in December 2021. Attendee numbers were slightly down on previous years due to the understandable reluctance of some members to join in indoor group events.

We had planned to hold a Winter Meal in January 2022 but due to uncertainty over potential numbers and the caution around meeting indoors we decided against it; we do plan to resurrect this for 2023. We held a Summer BBQ in June which was well attended.

There was also a very successful September group holiday to Buxton in the Peak District with 24 members walking.

Finally, we are looking forward to celebrating 10 Years of the Outer Aylesbury Ring next year and are aiming to attempt to walk all of it during the year.

Chair

Chiltern Young Walkers

Chiltern Young Walkers have had a successful year overall. We have seen overall member gains and managed at least a walk every weekend, our modest goal. Numbers on walks have been consistently high and 15 members have pitched in to lead walks over the year.

We led a series of successful evening walks in the summer which proved incredibly popular, as well as a number of socials and a weekend away in Pembrokeshire. The first weekend away since 2019 went off very well and 28 members joined us in a bunkhouse in the Stackpole Estate. For many members who have joined since the start of the pandemic this was their first weekend away, and has sparked a renewed interest in walk leaders to host their own.

We've been able to grow our social media and will likely hit 1,000 followers in the next couple of weeks. One particular strategy we've found that works is to collaborate with the places we hold our socials so we share engagement, and this usually results in a boost in engagement and followers for both, as well as new people coming along for walks who wouldn't have found us otherwise. We were also invited to come and speak on BBC 3 Counties Radio about walking in the Chilterns during a special outside broadcast in Wendover, which was a great opportunity.

Next year our focus is on putting on many more introductory walks, more regular socials, recruiting new walk leaders and offering a greater variety of walk lengths. We also have some collaboration planned with other Young Ramblers groups nearby. Finally, we plan to put on a series of walks along the Ridgeway to celebrate its 50th birthday.

Chair

Chilterns Weekend Walkers

CWW has overall had a very smooth and enjoyable year, showing the group going from strength to strength. This has been the first "normal" one for a few years, where COVID did not seem to in any way affect its running: nor did the extremes of heat this Summer! Seeing 4 walks offered over a weekend has not been uncommon, with some midweek and evenings walks and a range of Socials.

The biggest recent development has been the increase in the range and diversity of walks on offer, suiting all tastes and abilities; in particular, the increase in the number of middle-length walks (ie 8-10 miles). The previous perception that we have focused on the longer, faster and hillier walks with there being a relatively small number of shorter walks has eroded and this can be backed up with statistics. With more leaders "on our books" offering a full continuum, this gives a greater opportunity for walkers to try out and enjoy something different and meet other people.

Highlights of the year have included a steady stream of pub socials, post-walk meals, comedy nights, cream teas and Stately home walks, a "Dawn Chorus" walk plus number of London Walks as well as our perennial favourites; the Watlington Train Quiz and "Ye Olde Xmas Sarratt Walke and Meale". There have been some well-enjoyed weekends away, such as to Stratford upon Avon, a 6-day coverage of the Oxfordshire Way and a South Wales trip. Our Flagship event for 2022, was the "Festival of Walks", which took place on Saturday 17th September, where 5 different walks were offered starting at different times from the green at Penn Street. Despite having taken place during sad times (following the recent passing of Queen Elizabeth II), it was a great success with over 50 people attending.

We held our AGM on Sunday 9th October with a good attendance and where the CWW Constitution was agreed and approved. This was "topped and tailed" respectively by a 6-mile walk in the nearby Great Missenden area and an engaging talk on Chalk streams from the Chiltern Society (who also contributed a number of walks to the group over the past year. CWW which has certainly broadened appeal and interest.

Finally, it is worth noting that CWW's Meetup initiative has been running successfully to attract new walkers and make them feel at home on shorter more sociable walks as an introduction to the group.

All of this is, as ever, testament to our organisers, leaders and volunteers who have given up their time to plan, recce and lead these events for us!

Chair

Hike MK

The group has reconstituted itself as a flexigroup, and continues to run a programme of walks.

Hillingdon and District Group

Hillingdon is returning to a full programme of walks although the pandemic does seem to have had an effect on the number of leaders. There is now a regular programme of walks on four days a week, on a Sunday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Saturday. The group has also enjoyed a walking holiday in the Marlborough Downs this year and more holidays are being planned for next year including one in West Wales.

The group was able to complete its Golden Jubilee celebrations, delayed from 2020, with a walk and cream tea in July and a barn dance in September.

We now have an updated website which is proving very popular with information about forthcoming walks, illustrated reports on past walks as well as useful information about the group and Ramblers more generally.

Our committee has been strengthened this year by three members joining and just one committee member retiring. We also have a number of members who do not wish to join the committee but who carry out many important roles.

Acting Chairman

Milton Keynes and District Group

At our AGM our treasurer for 8 years stepped down and thankfully another member has volunteered to take over. Also, on the finance side our independent examiner has stepped down. We still need to find a replacement. The Chairman also advised he would step down next AGM. We also have vacancies for a footpath secretary, publicity secretary and representatives on the Area committee.

We held 59 walks throughout the year, well down on the pre-pandemic numbers. We have found 4 new leaders though. The Milton Keynes Parks Trust walking festival was held once more, and we were able to support it by putting on some walks.

We had the opportunity to have a stand at an Over 55s' Fair put on by our local MPs. It was the first occurrence of the event. Our stand did attract visitors and it remains to be seen if more members result. At the 2021 AGM we had 254 Full members, but this is now just 222. Also, on a less positive note we have only welcomed 25 new members since the last AGM, which is 18 less than last year.

Without a footpath secretary our path checking results were incomplete once more but those available have been submitted. There are currently 8 parishes without checkers.

Chairman

North West London Group

Following an unsuccessful appeal in the September issue of *South East Walker* for volunteers to help run the group and lead walks the AGM in October passed a motion to close the group. Members are being invited to transfer to other groups or to remain as non-group members of the Area.

Wycombe District Group

Despite some challenges, our group has enjoyed a good year's walking and we look forward to another year ahead. In contrast to the previous year, our walking has not, thankfully, been much interrupted by Covid, although from time to time walk leaders and members have continued to experience sickness. As ever, regular walk leaders have been wonderful at stepping in when necessary to ensure that walks can continue.

Our social activities this year have included an enjoyable meal at the Hit or Miss in Penn in January, a successful weekend to Selworthy in April and at the end of October there will be a weekend in the Brecon Beacons, which hopefully will be similarly enjoyable. Plans are already in hand for a spring weekend away at Church Stretton and another shared meal in January.

Although membership of our group remains steady, the numbers of active walkers has reduced significantly since before the pandemic. The Group Committee has spent time discussing the implications of this. We would like to encourage more people to join us in walking in our wonderful countryside and are considering a publicity campaign in the New Year. The numbers of active walk leaders has also decreased and we continue exploring how to address this. Committee members are also considering how to respond to the fact that there seems to be a significant amount of interest in more leisurely walks or slightly shorter ones. Regular pleas for such walks to be added to our walk calendar have, so far, not met with success.

As a consequence of the dwindling numbers of walk leaders, our walk programme has not been completely full at the time of its publication in paper and email form. Regular walk leaders have been wonderful in volunteering additional walks at a later stage to ensure there are few gaps and for most people the website is proving an easy way of checking on upcoming walks. Maintaining a full walk programme is currently proving challenging, but it is also clear that those members who are active walkers appreciate all that is offered and, especially on our Wednesday walks, there is regularly a good attendance.

In contrast to years gone by, the Committee is now rather small and carrying a number of vacancies. Current members are doing what they can to encourage others to come forward. I do not think our group is alone in facing some of the challenges I have outlined. However, those members who are regularly active continue to enjoy the interesting and varied walks in the wonderful Chiltern Hills offered by Wycombe Group.

Secretary

Elected Members of the Area Executive Committee October 2021 - September 2022

Chairman	
Vice-Chairman	<i>vacant</i>
Secretary	<i>vacant: the Treasurer has continued as Acting Secretary</i>
Treasurer	
Footpath Secretary	
Membership Secretary	
North Bucks rRIPPLE	
Countryside Secretary	<i>vacant</i>
News Editor	<i>vacant</i>
Publicity Officer	<i>vacant</i>
Walks Editor	<i>vacant</i>
Press Officer	
Access Officer (<i>from Feb 2022</i>)	
Representatives of Individual Members	
<i>From Feb 2022</i>	
Representatives of Affiliated Local Organisations	
<i>vacant</i>	
Group Representatives	
Each of our groups is entitled to appoint two members of the Area Executive Committee, and substitutes are welcome to attend meetings of the committee.	

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

Groups

Walks and other activities within our Area are organised by our seven groups and one flexigroup:

Amersham and District Group	https://www.amershamramblers.org.uk/
Aylesbury and District Group	http://www.aylesbury-ramblers.org.uk/
Chiltern Young Walkers	https://www.chilterns2030s.org.uk/
Chilterns Weekend Walkers	https://www.chilternswalkers.co.uk/
Hillingdon and District Group	https://www.ramblers.org.uk/hillingdon
Milton Keynes and District Group	http://www.mkramblers.org.uk/
Wycombe District Group	https://www.wycomberamblers.org.uk/
Hike MK (flexigroup)	https://www.hikemk.org.uk/