



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

1 October 2023 - 30 September 2024

Annual General Meeting: 2.00 pm on 1 February 2025 in the Small Barn Hall of the Amersham and District Community Association, Chiltern Avenue, Amersham, Buckinghamshire, HP6 5AH.

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 have a question-and-answer session with a Ramblers' trustee.

All Area officers and committee members (other than those appointed by groups or affiliated organisations) are elected, or re-elected, at the AGM. The Acting Secretary is standing down and we seek a replacement (the role could be sub-divided). He 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. Do not assume that other current officers would not welcome offers to replace, or assist, them.

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 5 April 2025; expenses are paid by Ramblers GB. 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. The longer one, a 13-km route, starts at 9.15 am at the pay-and-display car park adjacent to the hall and calls at the station for those coming by train. The shorter one, 9.6 kms, starts at 10.40 by the taxi rank opposite the station, near to the all-day parking. Both return to the hall by 1pm. 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 1 February 2025

1. Apologies for absence
2. Minutes of the AGM held on 3 February 2024 (incorporated in the annual report, pages 3-4)
3. Matters arising from the minutes
4. To receive the annual report and accounts:

(a) Chairman's Report	p5	(i) Press Officer's Report	p10
(b) Vice-Chairman's Report	p5	(j) News Editor	p11
(c) Acting Secretary's Report	p5	(k) Publicity	p11
(d) Treasurer's Report and Accounts	p6-7	(l) Web Master's Report	p11
(e) Membership Secretary's Report	p8	(l) Member and ALO Reps	p11
(f) Footpath Secretary's Report	p8	(m) Countryside Secretary	p11
(g) North Bucks rRIPPLE Report	p9	(n) Local Group Reports	p12-15
(h) Access Officer's Report	p10		
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, ie by Saturday 25 January 2025)
6. Election of Officers:

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

Nominations are invited for all posts
 Only those marked * are required by the constitution to be elected at the AGM.
 Note that the Web Master is an appointment by the executive committee, as opposed to an elected post (though the current Web Master serves on the committee as a local group representative).
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 has been filled.)
8. Appointment of Independent Examiner
9. Appointment of two council members to serve from the 2025 general council AGM
10. Any other business
11. A Ramblers' trustee with questions and discussion.
12. Quiz

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held at 2.00 pm on Saturday 3 February 2024 in the Small Barn Hall, Amersham and District Community Association

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

24 members of the Area and 2 guests attended.

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

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

2. **Minutes** of the AGM held on Saturday 4 February 2023 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 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:**

Particular attention was drawn to the work of a former Vice-Chairman and Access Officer and a dedication in his memory was suggested.

(b) **Vice-Chairman's Report:**

Nothing to add to written report.

(c) **Acting Secretary's Report:**

Nothing to add to written report.

(d) **Treasurer's Report and Accounts:**

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

(e) **Footpath Secretary's Report:**

Group footpath secretaries and path checkers were thanked, and the need for more checkers was stressed.

(f) **Membership Secretary's Report:**

Nothing to add to written report.

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

Thanks were expressed to the coordinator and his team, expected to instal their 350th gate soon.

(h) **Access Officer's Report:**

Nothing to add to written report.

(i) **Press Officer's Report:**

Nothing to add to written report.

(j) **News Editor:**

Nothing to add to written report.

(k) **Publicity:**

Nothing to add to written report.

(l) **Web Master's Report:**

The Web Master was thanked for his work on renewing the website.

(m) **Individual Member Representative and Affiliated Local Organisation reports:**

Nothing to add to written report.

(n) **Planning and countryside:**

Nothing to add to written report.

(o) **Local Group Reports:**

There was discussion on group membership figures.

The report was approved (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 27 January 2024). No motions had been received.

6. Election of Officers

In the absence of nominations for Secretary, John Esslemont was willing to continue as Acting Secretary for one more year; it was noted that the role could be split.

	<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			
North Bucks rRIPPLE Coordinator			
Area News Editor			
Countryside Secretary	<i>vacant</i>		
Publicity Officer	<i>vacant</i>		

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 had indicated willingness to continue in the role, and was appointed (duly proposed and seconded).

9. Appointment of two Council Members to serve from the 2024 General Council AGM

Duly proposed and seconded and agreed by those present that two representatives be appointed.

10. Any Other Business

There was no other business.

Formal business was concluded at 3.10pm followed by a break for refreshments and a team quiz.

Speaker and discussion

A presentation by the Ramblers' Director of People and Digital was taken before the formal business of the meeting. He presented apologies from the Ramblers' Chief Executive Officer, who had originally been scheduled to attend. Topics covered included:

- the refreshed strategic plan, to be regarded as an evolution rather than a change in direction;
- the launch of Walks Manager, which is still work in progress with bugs to be resolved;
- the path network, with reference to Ramblers' 175 maintenance teams and the recent BBC report on path problems;
- Assemble is under review and likely to be dropped as the level of usage does not justify the expense; there will be consultation on what is actually needed, and accessing information should become simpler;
- it was acknowledged that draft proposals for safety on group walks had been poor in both content and tone; a new version would be shorter and would emphasise common sense; in particular, it would be made clear that failure to observe guidance does **not** compromise insurance cover;
- in response to a question the speaker outlined the reasons for keeping a London office.

The speaker presented certificates to the retiring Chairman and to the Acting Secretary in recognition of their long and significant service to the Ramblers.

Area Annual Report 1 October 2023—30 September 2024

Chairman's report

Firstly, let me thank all who volunteer their time to make this charity function at Area and group level, especially our dedicated walk leaders who are the heart of our daily operations. I have a special thanks for the unseen volunteers, path checkers, and path-maintenance teams who work hard to keep our paths open.

I have been to six of the seven group AGMs. There is a common thread about not getting new volunteers to step forward for committees or as walk leaders. This means the work is being done by an ever-smaller number, with some groups' walks programme running with over half the walks led by five or fewer. This will be sustainable only for a limited amount of time.

We should *all* reach out to our active members to seek more involvement. We could also investigate ways to engage with our non-active members, many of whom have skills we need. Our committees, group and Area, need to find new people who can join in non-functional roles to learn what is involved. This is especially true for our Area where we *must* find one or two people to take on the Secretary role from John Esslemont who has valiantly covered this position for about 12 years and is now standing down.

Ramblers GB has finally issued the long-awaited Walk Leader Guidance Handbook although it is still not to everyone's taste. Ramblers are starting a review of governance which will include Area and group structures and consultation meetings are taking place. If you are interested, look out for engagement session invites through your email.

I hope that we have a good turnout for the AGM and that we have several members stepping forward to join the committee

Vice Chairman's report

In my first year as Vice Chair of the Area I have helped where I can to bring continuity and to resolve issues as they have arisen. There is more we can do as an Area to publicise our own work and the activities of all our groups, and I hope to do more of that in the forthcoming year.

Acting Secretary's report

I have served as Acting Area Secretary in addition to Area Treasurer for almost 12 years since we failed to fill the post of Secretary at the 2013 AGM. I reluctantly agreed to continue after the 2024 AGM but agreed with the new Chairman that this would be the last year for which I would fill both posts. We again appealed for volunteers in the December issue of *South East Walker*. There is scope for the Secretary role to be shared.

It is unfortunate that the December *South East Walker* was only available electronically, and may not have been seen by all members. This resulted from the decision not to publish the corresponding issue of *Walk* in print. The cost of posting *South East Walker* on its own to members in the participating Areas would have been prohibitive.

My personal opinion is that the new guidance for walk leaders, published during the year, is excessively onerous in a number of respects, and that the requirement for new leaders to complete online training is likely to act as a deterrent to some potential recruits. Groups may wish to report to the AGM on their experiences to date.

The Area executive committee has met twice at the Great Missenden Memorial Centre, and once by Zoom. It is expected that Wendover Library meeting room, which was formerly our regular meeting place, may be available again from Spring 2025. I, together with the Chairman and Vice-Chairman, have attended various meetings of the South East Cluster.

Just after the year's end we were sorry to learn of the death of David Bradnack, our Area Secretary from 1996 to 2007, and path checker in Aylesbury Vale.

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 2023 to September 2024. Thus, for example, gift aid on this year's eligible donations to our Donate-a-Gate fund, £187.64 received in October 2024, will be included in next year's accounts, while the gift aid of £462.77, shown in this year's accounts, was for donations made in the previous year. Donations (including gift aid) are treated as restricted funds, to be used only for replacement of stiles by gates.

The Area has fixed assets, in the form of tools used by the NB rRIPPLE team. These were purchased in October 2022 for £971.79. Ramblers' accounting rules do not require fixed assets valued at under £5000 to be recorded in the balance sheet. The team's work is facilitated by the provision of gates by Buckinghamshire Council to supplement those funded by donations. Higher spending on purchase of gates this year has reduced the restricted fund balance.

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. Apart from rights-of-way work, our other main expenditure is on funding to groups and for our share of the costs of *South East Walker*.

Main fund reserves are somewhat higher than recommended levels (as a percentage of expenditure), in the expectation of increasing future expenditure. Some groups took less than the funding they initially requested, for which we are very grateful. While some group reserves fall outside the recommended range, this can give a misleading picture as this does not take full account of all relevant factors: for example, if they have had unusually low expenditure the reserves percentage will be unrealistically high.

I should like to thank all the group treasurers for notifying me of funding requirements (and, in some 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 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	1343		0		310		0		136		1517	984	392
Aylesbury	726		344		40		8		436		666	40	141
Chiltern YW	1098		241		0		131		593		615	0	85
Chilterns WW	191		397		150		0		275		463	0	168
Hillingdon	985		300		0		37		130		1118	1250	-79
Milton Keynes	506		450		200		0		282		874	500	133
Wycombe	161		340		0		191		84		226	0	82

John Esslemont

Note: The accounts, as approved by the Independent Examiner, are reproduced on page 7.

INCOME & EXPENDITURE ACCOUNT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30 September 2024

	Year ended	30/9/24	30/9/23
INCOME:			
Funding from Central Office		5500.00	5500.00
Refund of deposit (<i>and unused booking fee</i>)		150.00	177.00
Donations to restricted (Donate a Gate) fund		6250.00	5750.00
Gift aid on donations		<u>462.77</u>	<u>1100.14</u>
Total income		12362.77	12527.14
EXPENDITURE:			
Funding to Groups		2072.00	1734.65
Promoting Walking (<i>South East Walker</i>)		1381.80	1393.03
Rights of Way: main fund		1278.23	1094.88
purchase of tools		0.00	971.79
restricted fund (gate installation)		9874.18	4848.99
Governance: Area committee meetings		230.00	32.50
Area AGMs		46.00	182.30
Bank charges		<u>0.60</u>	<u>0.30</u>
Total expenditure		14882.81	10258.44
SURPLUS / DEFICIT for year:			
main fund		641.37	267.55
restricted (Donate a Gate) fund		<u>-3161.41</u>	<u>2001.15</u>
Total		-2520.04	2268.70
Funds brought forward from previous year		8054.79	5786.09
Funds carried forward to next year		5534.75	8054.79

BALANCE SHEET

Assets:	Main fund balance in bank at 30 September	4317.52	3676.15
	Restricted fund balance in bank at 30 September	<u>1217.23</u>	<u>4378.64</u>
	Total assets	5534.75	8054.79
Liabilities:		<u>0.00</u>	<u>0.00</u>
	Total liabilities	0.00	0.00
NET ASSETS		<u>£ 5534.75</u>	<u>£ 8054.79</u>

John Esslemont, Treasurer

21 October 2024

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 30 September 2024.

Independent Examiner

21 October 2024

Note: signed copy available for inspection on request.

Membership Secretary's report

The table below shows the total membership of the Ramblers, our Area, and its constituents at 30 September 2024 and at 30 September 2023 for comparison. Following the closure of the North West London group, members allocated to the group were moved out of the group by central office.

	2024	2023	Difference	% Difference	Gains	Losses
<u>Ramblers</u>	103,876	101,842	2,034	2%		
<u>Area</u>	2,055	2,239	-184	-8%		
<u>Groups</u>						
Amersham & District	340	337	3	1%	62	59
Aylesbury & District	218	239	-21	-9%	25	46
Hillingdon	340	312	28	9%	71	43
Milton Keynes & District	212	219	-7	-3%	35	42
North West London	0	207	-207	-100%		
Wycombe District	283	296	-13	-4%	36	49
Chilterns Weekend Walkers	315	298	17	6%	47	30
Hike MK	43	43	0	0%	12	12
Chiltern Young Walkers	161	140	21	15%	50	29
	1,912	2,091	-179	-9%	338	310
<u>Individuals</u>						
Area Membership	142	148	-6	-4%		
<u>Affiliated Clubs</u>	5	4	1	25%		

While the Rambler's membership grew, the Area membership fell substantially following the reallocation of the members of the North West London Group. Some groups did better than others.

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.

Path checking

Former Aylesbury Vale district: the table below shows the comparative results for the last 4 years.

	2024	2023	2022	2021
No parishes checked	19	23	22	39
No problems reported	30	70	70	182
% paths checked	11.7	20.3	20.3	33.5
Total hours	112	274	274	607

The top three problems continue to be gates/stiles, bridges and ploughing/cropping. Weather and availability have been major contributors to the reduced level of coverage. The group has lost three checkers and no one new has come forward.

At the end of the year there were 11 checkers covering up to 19 of the 113 Aylesbury Vale parishes in the group's remit. The group is looking at ways in which members can do path checking in a less formal way.

It is also contacting the Bicester and Kidlington Group in Oxfordshire Area as some of its members live in Bucks, and the Chiltern Society, to see if we can work together to get more coverage.

It is investigating an easier approach to problem reporting by walk leaders to see if more can be reported.

Former Chiltern district: path checks have been fully or partially completed for 12 out of 18 parishes versus 14 last year, however, the overall amount of checking was down for a number of reasons.

We had a training meeting in April for our volunteers and helpers where we discussed how we did in 2023, including examples of issues faced and an update from our Chesham ‘Walkers are Welcome’ representative.

There was a path-checking day in August covering about 30% of Great Missenden paths. We had three teams of checkers versus four last year and ten issues were identified and reported. In total, 137 problems were identified and reported to Buckinghamshire Council or rectified by our volunteers, mainly cutting back near gates and stiles and installing waymarks discs. The main problems were similar to previous years—overgrowth, waymarks and signposts, stiles and gates and several fallen trees. Fewer surface problems were identified.

Former South Bucks district: We have no group here, but three members did some useful checking. One checked paths which he previously reported, and found that Denham continues to be the worst parish. The other two checked Wrexham and Iver respectively.

Former Wycombe district: 16 out of 28 parishes were wholly or partly checked, 74 problems were reported, and 111 hours spent on this.

Milton Keynes: 209 paths in eight of the 48 parishes were checked, and 147 problems were reported. Volunteers spent more than 106 hours checking and reporting. The most common problems were missing waymarks, overgrowth, missing signposts, cropping, and poor gates and stiles.

Path changes and planning

There were 27 path-change proposals during the year and we objected to three of them: Oakley footpath 16 diversion, Stokenchurch bridleway 59 and Ibstone bridleway 16 diversion, and Hollow Hill Lane, Iver, stopping up. We also objected to one planning application which would have an adverse effect on public enjoyment of paths—for a padel court at Kimble Farm, Turville.

We appeared as an objector at the public inquiry into the diversion of Chalfont St Peter footpath 14. Unfortunately, the inspector confirmed the order.

Thanks

I should like to thank, in particular, the group footpath secretaires 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 and Improving public Paths for Leisure and Exercise)

We continue to go out two to three times a month, although we had an extended period of inactivity around August to October due to our co-ordinator needing to undergo a medical procedure. Between October 2023 and September 2024 we have installed gate numbers 331 through 353 ie 22 gates. Full details of these installations, complete with before and after photos, can be viewed in our quarterly activity reports on the website below. Also listed are currently outstanding, potential, and planned work with Donate-a-Gate (DaG) opportunities available. Our DaG charges remain at £350 for a pedestrian-gate installation and £500 for a kissing-gate. The milestone of our 350th gate was a splendid, timber kissing-gate and extensive fencing repair at a site on the south side of Cuddington on probably the hottest day of the year.

Various people and some parish councils remain as keen as ever to improve their local footpath networks and get rid of some of the numerous difficult stiles that continue to plague the county, restricting access to the countryside for the less able. We continue to encourage an individual in specific parishes, often affiliated to the parish council, to become our ‘local champion’. Their remit is to identify potential stiles that could be converted to gates and to identify landowners and gain their agreement. I have written to

Buckinghamshire Council rights-of-way department suggesting that it takes more of a lead with developing 'Parish Path Wardens' similar to Oxfordshire's initiative.

This report is not only useful for readers but also for us to keep tabs on the work in progress that can sometimes take months if not years to come to fruition. Half of the time we spend running NB rRIPPLE is negotiating stile-to-gate conversions with landowners and parish councils.

Within the Ramblers we remain one of very few totally self-sufficient footpath-maintenance groups. We have our own Land Rover Discovery 1 4x4 vehicle, trailer, power tools, and two full sets of hand tools. For £200/annum we have a storage site at Chinnor RFC in Thame, for gates, posts, and tamping-in stones.

Our quarterly activity reports, detailing each and every stile-to gate-conversion, as well as other improvement work carried out, can be found on our web page: www.bucks-wmiddx-ramblers.org.uk/donate-a-gate. We remain grateful to the Area Treasurer for keeping the books in order with regards to this year's Donate-a-Gate income of £6250, plus £462.77 gift aid, and our payments of £8,000 to Buckinghamshire Council to purchase more gates.

Access Officer's report

In the last year I have reviewed a number of planning applications, of which four involved HS2 diversions which had previously been agreed, and six involved acceptable path-diversions. One of these was the Rosedale solar farm (the largest so far in the UK) on the Claydon estate which will involve two path diversions and an additional permissive route.

In addition to my role of Area Access Officer I represent the interests of walkers generally on the Buckinghamshire local access forum (LAF). I have attended all three LAF meetings during 2023 and have submitted reports on them to the Area Executive Committee. The agendas and minutes can be seen [here](https://tinyurl.com/53r6se86) (<https://tinyurl.com/53r6se86>).

We had a visit to the Centre for Outdoor Accessibility Training at Aston Rowant, with a demonstration of facilities for disabled access. Topics discussed have included the creation of rights of way on council-owned land, including at Wapseys Wood, Beaconsfield; Long Spinney, Wing; Duck Alley, Chesham; and Rogers Wood, Amersham. We also received updates on HS2, East-West Rail (which is nearing competition, but the council is still pressing for the link to Aylesbury town centre though this looks unlikely to happen). All the paths in Black Park country park have been video-recorded on Google Street View. Paths in the county have suffered from abnormal growth during the summer, and then flood damage which has resulted in some paths being temporarily closed, and the council has postponed its Best Value Performance Indicator Review. Capital projects continue to proceed well, and work for 2024-25 is currently under review. I have raised concern that some paths may never be reopened but have been assured that they will be. There are 58 definitive-map modifications in progress, of which 21 are under investigation, 21 are awaiting investigation, and 19 are based on historic evidence. Forty applications for public paths orders have been made, with four awaiting investigation, and one order waiting to be determined by the Planning Inspectorate.

The current Buckinghamshire Council staff structure allows for 8.5 full-time equivalent staff on rights of way: one team leader, three area officers, three assistant officers and 1.5 bridge structure inspectors.

Press Officer's report

I have nothing to report this year. Please remember that I am always ready to publicise Ramblers' issues throughout our territory.

News Editor's report

There have been some excellent and interesting articles coming through from groups and, as far as I am aware, *South East Walker* has not been struggling to fill space reserved for our groups this year. I am always open to suggestions of other ways to drum up content and make sure *SEW* is filled with news of your adventures.

Publicity

The post of Publicity Officer was not filled at the 2024 AGM. Any publicity effort in our Area is, therefore, coming from our groups.

Web Master's Report

We have had a couple of major operating-system upgrades to the website during the year; all went well. The only regular updates to the website have been the quarterly donate-a-gate reports. Website usage ('hits') is low considering the number of members in our Area. This is probably due to the lack of new content on the website. Perhaps the Area should rethink the purpose of the website.

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 has 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 its 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 2024 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. A volunteer would be most welcome.

Reports from Groups

Amersham and District Group

The group has had another successful year of group walks and social events. The 2023 AGM was held at Coleshill Village Hall on the 22 November. The 2024 AGM will be held on the 14 November 2024 at the Large Barn, Amersham Community Centre.

Walks

A comprehensive walks programme continued to be offered, with thanks to our dedicated walks leaders and programme coordinators. The committee continued to encourage new leaders to come forward to lead walks. Walks leaders had been successfully uploading their walks on the new Ramblers Walks Manager website for approval supported by the day walks leaders and the Programme Coordinator.

Footpaths

Footpath checking continued to be well supported by members in 2024. The Footpath Secretary organised a footpath-checking day and training sessions for members. A footpath-checking meeting was held on 25 April 2024 with the majority of footpath checking volunteers to discuss the results of last year's checking activities and to exchange ideas. Footpath checking was completed in August 2024. During 2023-24 there were vacancies for footpath checkers in a few parishes and we expect this to continue into 2024-25.

Events

The summer social event was a walk and lunch at The Cock Inn, Sarratt on 12 August. An away day coach trip to the South Downs took place on the 20 August 2023. The group's annual walking holiday was at HF Thorns Hall, Sedbergh from the 9 to 13 October 2023. Over 30 members attended and enjoyed the walks and evening entertainment. The group's Christmas lunch was held at The Ivy House on the 14 December 2023.

On behalf of the committee, our thanks go to all those members whose many efforts have contributed to another successful year.

Aylesbury and District Group

There were no major changes to the group's activities during this year, with the usual programme of walks and social activities being delivered for our members.

As in many other groups our membership levels are experiencing a slow decline. This is not impacting on the number of people walking with us, in fact we would struggle to cope if numbers on walks increased significantly, but it is something we need to keep a watching brief on. The general feeling is that members are lapsing due to ageing or inability to walk anymore.

We are still struggling to recruit new walk leaders which puts increasing pressure on our core walk-leader team. All walk leaders are using the Walk Manager system, and this has delivered more flexibility in committing to leading a walk which has proved quite popular.

We held our AGM at St Marys Hall Wendover in December 2023 where a very long-serving member of the group and committee resigned from part of his brief. He is now Countryside Secretary while another member has kindly taken on the role of Footpath Secretary. Our current Treasurer is standing down at the 2024 AGM and we are hoping that a replacement is found at that meeting for us to continue as a group.

I have indicated that I plan to stand down as Chair at the 2025 AGM.

There were several social events during the year, including a new-year meal and a summer BBQ. A group enjoyed a walking holiday at the HF house at Malham in October 2023 and another is planned for HF Coniston in 2024.

Chiltern Young Walkers

We've had another excellent year, filled with great hikes both local and further away. We've welcomed five new walk leaders to the fold, started up a new regular social that's proved very popular, and tackled a new long-distance footpath in its entirety (Shakespeare's Way). I'm particularly proud of the walks put on to recognise Mental Health Awareness week and the benefits that social walking offers to people. We had a strong membership increase (11%) and managed to increase our number of walks, walk attendance, and total mileage covered over the year. In addition, we had two great weekends away, the former in Bannau Brycheiniog National Park, and the latter in the Yorkshire Dales, both very well attended.

Next year will mark our 25th Anniversary, so we shall be sure to recognise that, including hosting the same first walk that the group did all those years ago. We plan to start walking The Chiltern Way in its entirety, as walking long-distance footpaths over the year has proved popular among our members. We've reserved accommodation for a weekend away in the Peak District as well for September.

Chilterns Weekend Walkers

2024 has been a positive and enjoyable year for CWW with an 8.4% growth in membership to 323 and an increase in walks from 179 in 2024 compared to 142 in 2023.

There have also been a considerable number of midweek evening walks as well as socials, plus walking trips away to Alnmouth, South Wales, Shaldon, the New Forest and Coniston. At the beginning of October, we introduced Friday walks, which have proved very popular.

The number of walks offered has increased in all categories: leisurely, moderate, and strenuous, while the number of leaders is about the same as last year. One member has set what must be a group record by leading 30 walks in a year. The top four leaders have all exceeded any reasonable expectations.

During the year, existing walk leaders have needed to take on board the new walk leader guidance and can now refer to the CWW group risk assessment for the grade of walk they are leading, rather than complete a separate risk assessment form for each walk. The recce is still where the risks are assessed and route adjustments are made to minimise risks. We reported four incidents to Ramblers: an attack by red kites, horse bites and two separate trippings. I am pleased to say the recoveries from the injuries were quick.

Two new walk leaders completed the Ramblers online training and led their first walks in November and December.

This year we have seen more series of themed walks. Our Alphabet Walks must be the longest series to date as well as the most ambitious. We have also had the shorter Mobilise to Socialise walks and Sunset and Social walks, Natter and Trot, with walks through National Trust land. A staycation—Chair's 4 Legs walks on New Year's Day and the three preceding days. There were 13 church tea walks, including 'Le Grand Gâteau Double', which offered two tea-stops on the same walk.

The third annual walks festival took place in September. Previously the walks had been from Penn Street on a single day. This year we arranged seven walks over Saturday and Sunday in Lane End and Wendover respectively. Each day there was a picnic lunch. Over 500 miles were walked in total.

While we didn't have a social secretary until our AGM in October, there were a good number of socials provided by members, as well as post-walk get-togethers in pubs or cafes.

We filled all our committee positions at our AGM in October including a Social Secretary who has hit the ground running, reinstating a monthly pub-night as well as organising a good number of other events for members. The main social event of the year was the Christmas party weekend in the Cotswolds. 31 members enjoyed a meal, a live band and disco together with led walks on Saturday and Sunday.

On the IT front our website has been developed, adding news pages which are of interest to existing and prospective members alike. This has also generated stories for *South East Walker* including: Memorial Walk for Elaine Lagdon, South Devon Trip 2023, Boots, Banter and Breweries, The Brain Train, and 500 Miles of Smiles—the story of our biggest walks festival so far.

This year saw the introduction of CWW's first photo competition. Photos were submitted for winter, spring and summer, with members voting for their favourite three in each period. The top three in each season went forward to the final round of voting, and the winner was announced live at the AGM.

Lacey Green is the parish where CWW is responsible for checking footpaths. All paths were checked and faults reported to Buckinghamshire Council with Ramblers' Wycombe Group informed of progress.

Facebook continues to be used by members, and leaders to share photos and information. We regularly receive requests to join.

This year has been my first as Chair and I am extremely grateful to my committee, the other volunteers, and all of our members for their hard work and support. It is much appreciated.

Hike MK

During 2024, Hike MK has enjoyed walks in the local Milton Keynes area, as well as trips away to the Cotswolds, Peak District, and Dorset coast. We have also had a number of social events, including pub quizzes, a treasure hunt, and meals out. The group has welcomed a few new faces in 2024 and a few new walk leaders. The mid-week evening walks have been popular and well attended; however, the group is still lacking enough walk leaders to put on a full programme of weekend walks. We organised 47 evening walks, nine weekend walks, and two weekends away.

Hillingdon and District Group

Our walks organisers have been successful in maintaining a good range of walks throughout the year. The Wednesday programme of longer walks continues to be very popular. Our Tuesday and Saturday programmes are also well supported. During this year we have made a determined effort to revive our programme of longer Sunday walks with some success and we are grateful to our new Sunday walks organiser for her efforts. Our new venture this year has been to institute a programme of walks twice a month starting from the same point, one of our local libraries. The walks are easy pace and no longer than 4 miles. They always end with the chance to have a chat over a cup of coffee or tea in the library. These walks are proving popular with those members who no longer wish to join our longer walks and we are also hoping that we will attract some new members.

Two of our walk leaders have passed significant milestones this year. One completed his 100th walk as leader on one fine summer's day in west Wycombe while one of our past chairmen completed her 200th walk as leader in the spring. While celebrating these achievements we are aware that we do need to recruit new leaders. On a positive note, two members have recently completed the new training programme for walk leaders which they both found useful. We hope that others will follow suit.

Our holiday coordinator has arranged a number of holidays this year including in the Elan Valley and Yorkshire. In addition she has worked with one of our members who led walks for us in the Salisbury area, along the Clarendon Way and in the New Forest. We have also held a quiz and fish supper evening which proved popular with many members.

We are grateful to all those members who volunteer for roles whether on or off the committee and we thank our loyal band of walk leaders without whom there would be no programme.

Milton Keynes and District Group

We have had a successful year with an increasing number of new local members, others trying out walks for the time, and visiting Ramblers from other areas. We have put on 54 walks since 1 January this year, including 11 evening walks in the summer months. Average attendance varies from 5 to 29 but mainly is in the teens.

We successfully relaunched the Milton Keynes Ramblers' Facebook page with regular photos uploaded from recent walks. We hope to develop this further next year.

This has been a busy year for the committee especially following the national organisation's updating of its website, introducing Walks Manager and re-organising how new walks leader can be appointed.

We should like to thank the walk leaders who put on the walks this year. We successfully assisted one of our younger members to complete the walk leader's course and plan to help others in the coming year.

We are sorry that our Secretary is retiring and we would like to thank her for a job well done. Another member has kindly volunteered to replace her.

Financially we have had a slight increase in funds this year and we propose to invest some of this in footpath projects suggested by Milton Keynes Council.

Our membership numbers have reduced by five despite adding 35 new members. The majority of the 220 members are long-term ramblers and we probably have 40 active walkers. Our fear is that increasing membership fees and digitalisation of *Walk* magazine will reduce the membership numbers further.

As a committee we look forward to plenty of healthy walks next year.

Wycombe District Group

Our Wednesday walks continue to be very popular with up to 20 attendees on many occasions. Our weekend walks have never recovered to pre Covid levels, but there is usually at least one walk on either a Saturday or Sunday. Our walks programme is about 80% full. We no longer offer long walks, as there has been little call for them and all our walks are between five and eight miles. We have the same number of walk leaders as last year at 15 and are always keen to recruit new leaders. Membership of the group has remained steady at about 300, but a far smaller number of members walk regularly with the group.

The committee convened four times this year. Among the usual matters, some time was spent in considering the question of first-aid training. However, in the end it was decided that the training being considered was not right for us and was too expensive. The committee also considered in depth the new walks-leader guidance from Ramblers central office.

Socially, we enjoyed two meals together in January, one a lunch following a walk, and the other an evening event. A weekend away in Derwent was deemed to be a success despite the poor weather and long distance. Weather sadly affected the BBQ in July, although the food was much enjoyed indoors. Two Christmas meals have been organised for December and a few days away on the South Downs in April next year.

The group website continues to evolve. The page which features photos and information about our recent walks has been successful and it is hoped that there will soon be a new section for members to share photos and comments about their walking holidays. As no member has so far come forward to replace the editor of our newsletter, *Pathway*, it is hoped that expansion of the website will cover much of what was in *Pathway*.

We have again used our self-funded money to install a gate to replace an unsafe stile. This year the plaque expressed our thanks to two members who have contributed much over a long period of time.

The important task of path checking is hidden to most members, but vital to their enjoyment of walking. There was a slight increase this year in the number of parishes that had at least some paths checked by members of the group.

The committee continues to function without a Chairperson and publicity officer. The current Secretary is resigning for personal reasons at the AGM on 9 November 2024. We have had one offer to replace her, so hopefully that crucial role will be well covered. The members of Wycombe Group thoroughly enjoy walking and socialising together and long may that continue!

Elected Members of the Area Executive Committee October 2023 - September 2024

Chairman	
Vice-Chairman	
Secretary	<i>vacant</i>
Treasurer	
Footpath Secretary	
Membership Secretary	
North Bucks rRIPPLE	
Countryside Secretary	<i>vacant</i>
News Editor	
Publicity Officer	<i>vacant</i>
Press Officer	
Access Officer	
Representatives of Individual Members	
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	chilternsw.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/

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