



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 2022 - 30th September 2023

**Annual General Meeting: 2.00 pm on 3rd February 2024 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 hear from the Ramblers Director of People and Digital, with an opportunity for questions.

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 has indicated that he does not wish to continue in this role (which could be sub-divided) and 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 20th April 2024; 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 pay and display car park adjacent to the hall and calling at the station for those coming by train: an 8 mile route starting at 10am and a 6 mile route starting at 10.35am. 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 3rd February 2024

1. Apologies for absence
2. Minutes of the AGM held on 4th February 2023 (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) Vice-Chairman's Report (c) Acting Secretary's Report (d) Treasurer's Report and Accounts (e) Footpath Secretary's Report (f) Membership Secretary's Report (g) North Bucks rRIPPLE Report (h) Access Officer's Report	- p6 - p6 - p6-7 - p7-9 - p10-11 - p8 - p11-12 - p12-13	(i) Press Officer's Report (j) News Editor (k) Publicity (l) Web Master's Report (l) Member and ALO Reps (m) Countryside Secretary (n) Local Group Reports	- p13 - p13 - p13 - p14 - p14 - p14 - p15-19
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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 27th January 2024)
6. Election of Officers:

(a) *Chairman (b) *Vice-Chairman (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>)
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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 2024 General Council AGM
10. Any other business
11. Ramblers Director of People and Digital, followed by questions and discussion
12. Quiz

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held at 2.00 pm on Saturday, 4th February 2023 at the Wades Centre, Princes Risborough

[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.]

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 two members.

2. **Minutes** of the AGM held on Saturday 5th February 2022 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:**

The Chairman drew particular attention to the achievements of NB rRIPPLE and to continuing problems with HS2 construction.

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

The Acting Secretary mentioned the continuing absence of a full response from the Board of Trustees on risk assessment.

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

The meeting was asked to approve the accounts. Duly proposed and seconded and carried nem con.

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

The Footpath Secretary thanked group footpath secretaries and path checkers, particularly a former member who remains very active, though no longer resident locally. She expressed concern about possible legislation to give landowners greater powers concerning diversions. Volunteers were needed to take forward work on the Don't Lose Your Way project. A member commented that Ramblers should do more to publicise footpath successes.

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

Various members commented on the slow progress of redistributing members following the closure of North West London Group. There was discussion of activities to recruit new members.

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

A representative said that the group had now installed 310 gates since 2015, about half being supported by donations.

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

The Access Officer said that more walker representation is needed on the Local Access Forum, which has a new Chair. Central Office is still seeking volunteers for work on claiming lost paths and on the campaign for increased access rights.

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

The Press Officer would welcome stories to publicise in local media.

(i) **News Editor:**

Contributions for the Area's page in *South East Walker* had been sparse with group contributions generally going to other pages. There was some discussion on the type of material that would be suitable.

(j) **Publicity and Area Website:**

Ideas were sought for content for the website. A member is willing to assist.

(k) Individual Member Representative and Affiliated Local Organisation reports

Nothing to add to written report.

(l) Planning and countryside

Nothing to add to written report.

(m) Local Group Reports.

Various groups commented on the impact of younger groups (and external organisations) on membership of traditional geographically based groups, some of which are moving to rolling programmes following covid. Ideas discussed included introductory walks for new members and ways to encourage new leaders.

The report was approved: duly proposed and seconded and 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 28th January 2023).

No motions had been received:

6. Election of Officers

Although the Chairman had previously indicated that he did not wish to continue in that capacity he was now willing to serve one further year, to avoid the Area going into abeyance. In the absence of nominations for Secretary, the Acting Secretary was willing to continue, but asked that priority should be given to finding a replacement.

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

The former selection of walk descriptions on the Area website had been removed as outdated. It was therefore agreed that the post of Walks Editor should be discontinued: duly proposed and seconded and carried nem con.

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

(a) Representatives of Individual Members

One member was elected.

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

8. Appointment of Independent Examiner

The incumbent, having indicated that he wished to relinquish the post, was thanked for his work over many years. The Independent Examiner for Wycombe District Group, had indicated his willingness to take on the additional role, and was duly proposed, seconded and appointed.

9. Appointment of two Council Members to serve from the 2023 General Council AGM

Duly proposed, seconded and agreed by those present that two named members be appointed.

10. Any Other Business

There was no other business.

Formal business was concluded at 3.30pm followed by a break for refreshments and a team quiz.

Speaker and discussion

A Ramblers' Trustee gave a brief summary of significant developments and concerns at national level. She mentioned the appointment of our new Chief Executive Officer and stressed the need to improve public perception of the role of Ramblers. She mentioned threats to access in Dartmoor and in Scotland. Membership remains steady or gradually building. She stressed the importance of volunteers and praised the work of NB rRIPPLE. After questions were invited there was discussion on topics including risk assessment for led walks, the difficulty of finding volunteers and the development of the new Walks Manager system, for which Amersham and District Group had taken part in trials.

Area Annual Report 1st October 2022 - 30th September 2023

Chairman's Report

Without you all the Ramblers couldn't exist. I'd also like to thank the other Area Officers and the Executive Committee for their work.

It is with great sadness that we heard of the death of a former Vice-Chairman and Access Officer, shortly after the end of this Ramblers' year. He played a considerable role in preserving rights of way and expanding access across the Area. He helped to ensure that Beacon Hill, above Ellesborough and overlooking the Chequers Estate, was designated as access land after the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. He was the first Chair of the Buckinghamshire Local Access Forum and continued as a LAF member until about a year before his death. He worked on the impact of HS2 on the rights of way network, finding good diversions to those paths impacted by the line. I will always remember the updates on the issue of access to Grays Lane Bank near Ibstone. It was the final piece of land to be added to the CRoW access maps, in 2009, and despite being alongside a bridleway there is no legal access.

Groups have continued to offer a variety of walks. Our annual path check keeps a watchful eye on the state of the paths in the Area and North Bucks rRIPPLE has had yet another successful year, installing 30 gates. Our biggest opportunity is to make more people aware of what we do. Thank you to everyone for everything you do: please keep doing it!

Vice Chairman's Report

This has been my first year on the committee and I have tried to get out on walks with most groups. I also attended three group AGMs. In general, membership seems fairly static; it is apparent that groups mainly seem to advertise their walks just to their membership and do not advertise much to the general public. If we look at the total population, Ramblers has a very small presence: a possible matter of concern.

In our Area, health walks come under the jurisdiction of Buckinghamshire Council's Simply Walks programme and are not part of the Ramblers' Wellbeing Walks scheme.

A common issue for groups seems to be getting new walk leaders and retaining existing leaders. Most groups have a reasonable walk programme but some are finding it difficult to fill their walk calendar. One group has stopped walking on specific days and accepts whatever their leaders put forward.

As a newcomer to the Area I have been interested in listening to other walkers' experiences of Ramblers, their likes and dislikes. It will be interesting to see how the new ten year vision is integrated over the coming years.

I hope that all have been coping with the very wet period rounding out 2023 and early 2024. Hopefully no one has been badly affected by the flooding: let's hope we will soon be walking in drier conditions. I hope to see many of you at the AGM.

Acting Secretary's Report

Having served as Acting Area Secretary in addition to Area Treasurer for almost eleven years since we failed to fill the post of Secretary at the 2013 AGM, and reluctantly agreeing to continue after the 2023

AGM, I am disappointed that nobody else has come forward for a role that could potentially be shared; we again appealed for volunteers in the December issue of *South East Walker*. We are by no means unique in having difficulty filling officer roles.

Following the condemnation of so-called risk assessments for group walks at the 2022 meeting of General Council, progress has been slower than many would have wished in replacing them. However, at the time of writing there appeared to be some hope that a more sensible approach might be adopted from early 2024.

Arrangements for meetings of the Area Executive Committee have been disrupted by the delayed closure for refurbishment of our usual venue, the meeting room at Wendover Library. We met twice there, and once by Zoom. I, together with the Chairman and Vice-Chairman, have attended various meetings of the South East Cluster, including one to introduce the new Ramblers' strategy before its discussion and approval at an Extraordinary General Meeting of General Council in November.

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 2022 to September 2023. Thus, for example, gift aid on this year's eligible donations to our Donate-a-Gate fund, £462.77 received in October 2023, will be included in next year's accounts, whilst the gift aid of £1100.14, 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. Donations (inevitably unpredictable), and purchases of gates have been significantly lower this year.

For the first time, the Area has acquired fixed assets, in the form of tools purchased for the use of the NB rRIPPLE team following the theft of similar tools from the Co-ordinator's Land Rover. The total purchase cost, paid in October 2022, was £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.

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*.

Our budget request for funding this year was for £5500 and, unlike in previous years, we took the full amount, building up reserves in the expectation of increasing future expenditure. Several groups took less than the funding they initially requested, for which we are very grateful. While some group reserves fall outside the recommended range, these figures do not take full account of all relevant factors.

I would like to thank all the group treasurers for notifying me of funding requirements (and, in many 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	1263		0		320		0		240		1343	559	327
Aylesbury	669		268		130		187		154		726	200	154
Chiltern YW	844		254		0		0		0		1098	546	∞
Chilterns WW	22		410		150		84		307		191	0	49
Hillingdon	782		332		0		0		129		985	1050	-50
Milton Keynes	365		346		450		0		655		506	0	77
Wycombe	239		124		0		40		162		161	0	80

John Esslemont

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 2023 and at 30 September 2022 for comparison. Following the closure of the North West London group, members continued to be allocated to this group until the end of the year. Those members were moved by Central Office at the beginning of the current year.

	2023	2022	Difference	% Difference	Gains	Losses
<u>Ramblers</u>	101,842	102,356	-514	-1%		
<u>Area</u>	2,239	2,257	-18	-1%		
<u>Groups</u>						
Amersham & District	337	340	-3	-1%	42	45
Aylesbury & District	239	259	-20	-8%	33	53
Hillingdon	312	315	-3	-1%	53	56
Milton Keynes & District	219	224	-5	-2%	40	45
North West London	207	207	0	0%	65	65
Wycombe District	296	290	6	2%	53	47
Chilterns Weekend Walkers	298	304	-6	-2%	32	38
Hike MK	43	51	-8	-16%	8	16
Chiltern Young Walkers	140	137	3	2%	43	40
	2,091	2,127	-36	-2%	369	405
<u>Individuals</u>						
Area Membership	148	130	18	14%		
<u>Affiliated Clubs</u>	4	5	-1	-20%		

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

John Wainwright

INCOME & EXPENDITURE ACCOUNT FOR THE YEAR ENDED**30th September 2023**

	Year ended	30/9/23	30/9/22
INCOME:			
Funding from Central Office		5500.00	4125.00
Refund of deposit and unused booking fee		177.00	75.00
Transfer of funds from closed group accounts		0.00	672.41
Donations to restricted (Donate a Gate) fund		5750.00	9216.00
Gift Aid on donations		<u>1100.14</u>	<u>437.54</u>
Total income		12527.14	14525.95
EXPENDITURE:			
Funding to Groups		1734.65	1196.50
Promoting Walking (<i>South East Walker</i>)		1393.03	1200.14
Rights of Way: main fund		1094.88	1023.13
purchase of tools		971.79	0.00
restricted fund (gate installation)		4848.99	9188.51
Governance: Area committee meetings		32.50	54.00
Area AGMs		182.30	88.12
Postage		0.00	56.00
Bank charges		<u>0.30</u>	<u>1.20</u>
Total expenditure		10258.44	12807.60
SURPLUS / DEFICIT for year:			
main fund		267.55	1253.32
restricted (Donate a Gate) fund		<u>2001.15</u>	<u>465.03</u>
Total		2268.70	1718.35
Funds brought forward from previous year		5786.09	4067.74
Funds carried forward to next year		8054.79	5786.09

BALANCE SHEET

Assets:	Main fund balance in bank at 30 th September	3676.15	2155.28
	Restricted fund balance in bank at 30 th September	<u>4378.64</u>	<u>2377.49</u>
	Total assets	8054.79	5786.09
Liabilities:		<u>0.00</u>	<u>0.00</u>
	Total liabilities	0.00	0.00
NET ASSETS		<u>£ 8054.79</u>	<u>£ 5786.09</u>

Treasurer

11th October 2023**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 2023.

Independent Examiner

11th October 2023

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.

Path checking

Former Aylesbury Vale District: we checked 22 out of 113 parishes. Out of 2,189 paths, 432 (19.7 per cent) were walked and our volunteers reported 70 problems, spending more than 300 hours on the work. The most common issues were gates, stiles, bridges, and overgrowth. The group is keen to find more path checkers as our coverage is only about one quarter of the former District.

Former Chiltern District: path checks were completed fully or partially for 14 out of 18 parishes (15 last year). The Amersham and District Group has lost some volunteers and is planning a recruitment drive early in 2024 as currently it has names against only 12 parishes. In total, 180 problems were identified and (mainly) reported to Buckinghamshire Council or rectified by the volunteers, such as clipping near gates and stiles, installing waymarks, and removing small trees fallen on paths. The main problems were similar to previous years: undergrowth, waymarks, and signposts; while stiles and gates showed improvement. The group had training meetings in April for most of its volunteers and helpers, to provide feedback from 2022 and share issues that people face; this helps with motivation. It held a path checking day in August, covering about half of the paths in The Lee, which the parish council looks after. The turnout was better than last year with four teams of checkers, and 13 issues were identified and reported.

Former South Bucks District: part or all of ten parishes were checked and 14 problems were reported, the most common being overgrowth, surface, fallen trees, and stiles. One checker spent 24 hours on this work. We still need a coordinator here.

Former Wycombe District: we received returns for 20 out of 28 parishes; 70 per cent of the paths in those parishes were checked and 49 problems were reported. Volunteers spent about 299 hours checking paths and reporting problems.

Milton Keynes: 332 paths in 16 of the 48 parishes were checked, and 84 problems were reported. Volunteers spent more than 137 hours checking and reporting. The most common problems were missing waymarks and signposts, cropping, overgrowth, and poor gates and stiles.

Path changes and planning

There were 16 path change proposals during the year and we objected to one of them. We also objected to one planning application which would have an adverse effect on public enjoyment of paths: at Marsh Lane, Taplow. An application for a manège at Kimble Farm, Turville, to which we had objected, was rejected on appeal. We supported an application for a replacement for Reeds Bridge, Iver, for which a path checker had led a campaign over many years.

Last year we objected to the diversion of Chalfont St Peter footpath 14, and Buckinghamshire Council decided not to proceed. Following a pre-action protocol letter from the applicant, the council reversed its decision and we await notification from the Planning Inspectorate of how it will be determined.

Just after the year's end we objected to the order for the diversion of Waddesdon footpath 7A, after a consultation with much correspondence with the promoters; the plan is to move the footpath onto the line of the Waddesdon greenway, forcing walkers to share with other users on a less direct route.

Filming closures

We reported to Buckinghamshire Council the temporary closure of various rights of way for filming, in High Wycombe, West Wycombe, and Lane End. We said that we did not believe the council, as traffic authority, had complied with the requirements to publish notices other than on site; the maps were inadequate, and we were not convinced that the council took sufficient measures to satisfy itself that all closures were required. We never received a substantive response.

Meeting with MP

Members of Milton Keynes and District Group arranged a meeting with the Conservative MP for Milton Keynes North, in February, which I attended. We discussed Milton Keynes development issues and environmental land management schemes (ELMS) and the government's failings regarding public access. As a result, he tabled a parliamentary question on ELMS, although sadly the reply was of little help.

Ridgeway National Trail 50th anniversary

I attended this wonderful event on Coombe Hill at the end of September, the site of the opening of the Ridgeway.

Thanks

I should like to thank, in particular, the group footpath secretaries for all their help in analysing path check, corresponding with path checkers, checking their own parishes, and generally giving me welcome support and assistance. We are indebted to all our path checkers for their vigilance on paths in their patch and for their advice on path changes.

Footpath improvement by North Bucks rRIPPLE

(ramblers Repairing & Improving Public Paths for Leisure & Exercise)

We have been out as frequently as possible, and at times weekly, although we have tended to limit ourselves to a single gate installation per outing with double gate installations a rarity. Between October 2022 and September 2023 we have installed gates 301 through 330: i.e. 30 gates. Our Donate-a-Gate charges remain at £350 for a pedestrian gate installation and £500 for a kissing gate. Following ongoing problems with the D loops breaking off the Centrewire gates Buckinghamshire Council is procuring gates for us to install from Secure-a-Field instead of Centrewire.

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. Details, including before and after photos, of installed gates are listed in our quarterly activity reports that are on our web page. A new development within the activity reports is a section at the end entitled: 'Currently outstanding, potential and planned work with Donate-a-Gate opportunities available'. This is not only useful for readers but also for us to try 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 spent negotiating stile-to-gate and stile-to-kissing-gate conversions with landowners and parish councils.

Another development this year is that the stainless-steel plaques on our gates now feature a QR code that can take ramblers straight to our web site.

We have been delighted to host work experience visits from two new starters within Buckinghamshire Council's rights of way department from whom we continue to get enormous support: after all we are a tremendously valuable resource for them. We have also hosted a work experience visit from a South Bank Ramblers member and then a visit from their committee who sponsored a gate in Cuddington.

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

Our quarterly Activity Reports, detailing 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 donations, £5750, and our payments of £2500 to Buckinghamshire Council to purchase more gates.

North Bucks rRIPPLE Co-ordinator

Access Officer's Report

Buckinghamshire Local Access Forum (LAF)

In addition to my role of Area Access Officer I represent the interests of walkers generally on the Buckinghamshire LAF. I have attended all three LAF meetings during 2023 and have submitted reports on them to the Area Executive Committee. Topics discussed have included the following:

Buckinghamshire Council's budgeted staffing level for rights of way remains at 7.5 full time equivalents; however there are currently two vacancies, replacements for which are being sought. Hot weather in 2022-23 resulted again in abnormally high growth and the need for a second cut. Latest best value performance indicators rated 75 per cent of paths and 94 per cent of structures easy to use, with 94 per cent of paths signed from the road. There are 46 definitive map modifications currently in progress, eight of which are now under investigation.

HS2 continues to close many paths and apply for planning permission under the HS2 Act. Applications under schedule 4 will divert rights of way including new cycleway sections. Buckinghamshire Council has agreed a new standard for public rights of way closures, coming on line soon, with a small-scale map alongside a QR code which if scanned will bring up the latest map showing its diversion. This is being worked on by their website. The HS2 mitigation fund has paid for landscape and biodiversity connectivity (£500,000); Ridgeway Riding Route (£136,000); Wendover Canal Towpath Route (£671,500) and the Misbourne Greenway (£330,000).

East West Rail construction is still largely continuing to plan with 16 rights of way to be diverted and one to be permanently stopped up; eight new bridges to be built, with two currently under construction. There is huge and widespread pressure, from Buckinghamshire Council and others, 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 is 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 its vision statement based on local, regional, and green spaces and 26 transport schemes covering all forms of transport.

Other access issues

Definitive Statement: many other highway authorities (including neighbouring Oxfordshire) have theirs online; Buckinghamshire is investigating how to make its statement available.

Long distance routes: a relaunch of the Bernwood Jubilee Way was paused following the death of Her Majesty and rebranding is in progress. I have attended, with other interested parties, a meeting with Jon Deas of HS2 to discuss road closures in the Wendover area which block 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.

Rights of Way Improvement Plan: the year ten review had been delayed due to covid but definitive map modification orders, when confirmed, are added to the definitive map online on a weekly basis. The speed at which the website can be updated is limited by available staff, funding, and time.

Countryside and Rights of Way Act review: the government has delayed this until 2031 latest, and Ramblers is working out how to approach this review.

The Wider Access Initiative: A member of the Ramblers' campaign team contacted me for my views on this and I wait to hear further. If, as is most likely, we do not achieve the Scottish model of open access the task of identifying and defining which riversides, woodlands, and downland to claim is not easy, and would require new mapping.

Don't Lose Your Way Initiative: There has been an exchange of views and ideas within the Bucks Group that was set up. This is making slow process and is constrained by the 2031 deadline for claims of historic routes. The number of claims investigated by Buckinghamshire Council each year is very low.

Closures of Network Rail at-grade crossing points: I have been contacted by the Ramblers' head of paths, for details of crossing closures over the last five years and have provided them, so I presume that there is going to be another Ramblers' campaign coming soon.

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

This post was not filled at the 2023 AGM. The Acting Secretary has endeavoured to ensure that sufficient material has been forthcoming for our Area's page in *South East Walker*.

Publicity

The post of Publicity Officer was not filled at the 2023 AGM. Any publicity effort in our Area is, therefore, coming from our groups.

Web Master's Report

The Area website was updated in the Spring to follow the new Ramblers branding guidelines. This included new logos, fonts and colour palette. After this upgrade had been completed the content of the website was revised to make it more user friendly, with a clearer layout and additional pages to explain what Area does. Finally, in the Autumn, the website was upgraded to a major new release of the operating software (Joomla3 to Joomla4). A regular flow of new content, from throughout our Area, will help keep the website fresh and relevant.

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 the main contact 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 another successful year of Group walks. The Group has a new chair, Mark Jorgensen. Our thanks go to Mark for his hard work in his first year. The 2022 AGM was held at Coleshill Village Hall on the 23rd November. The 2023 AGM was held on the 22nd November at the same venue.

A comprehensive walks programme continued to be offered, with thanks to our dedicated walks leaders and programme coordinator. The Committee continues to encourage new leaders to come forward to lead walks. Walks leaders have been successfully uploading their walks on the new Ramblers Walks Manager website for approval, supported by the day walks leaders and the Programme Coordinator. A number of pages on the Group website (www.amershamramblers.org.uk) have been revised to give a more standardised look and feel. This includes a revised 'News' page.

Footpath checking continued to be well supported by members in 2023. The Footpath Secretary organised a footpath checking day and training sessions for members. Two footpath checking meetings were held in April 2023, with the majority of footpath checking volunteers, to discuss the results of last year's checking activities and exchange ideas. Footpath checking was completed in August 2023. During 2022-23 there were vacancies for footpath checkers in a few parishes and we expect this to continue into 2023-24.

The summer social event was a walk and quiz at Coleshill Village Hall on 12th August. Our thanks go to the excellent cake makers, and the quiz provider. An away day coach trip to Eastbourne took place on the 20th August 2023. The Group's annual walking holiday was held this year at HF Harrington House, Bourton on the Water from the 10th to 14th October 2022. Over 30 members attended and enjoyed the walks and evening entertainment. The Group's Christmas lunch was held at Chartridge Golf Club on the 7th December 2022. On behalf of Amersham Ramblers, a big thank you to the members who organised the above events.

Secretaries

Aylesbury and District Group

The group AGM was held at St Marys Hall Wendover on 2nd December 2022 and was a great opportunity for members to be updated on all current group initiatives as well as socialising with friends and fellow walkers. A member (who has played a vital role in representing the group on the advisory committee) presented the latest situation with Walks Manager, which received positive feedback.

The group had another opportunity to get together and socialise at our Winter meal at the end of January, held at a new venue for us: Chiltern Forest Golf Club. The new venue was a great success with superb views, food and company. In August we held a summer BBQ, which had to be rearranged from July due to adverse weather conditions; luckily the sun shone on the new date and everyone had a great time.

The implementation of the new Walks Manager system went relatively smoothly (with plenty support from our Webmaster and another member). All Walk leaders are now using it and it does offer significantly more flexibility and additional features than the old system.

Our goal of celebrating ten years of the Outer Aylesbury Ring by walking all of it during the year was achieved thanks to great support from the members, and an article was published in *South East Walker* at the end of July 2023 to record it officially.

Walk numbers have stabilised and we are generally able to offer walks every Thursday and Sunday with a shorter walk on alternate Tuesdays but, in some instances, we have been unable to fill gaps in the programme. We rely heavily on a small number of dedicated walk leaders putting multiple walks in the programme and it would be desirable to widen our walk leader base. We do offer training support and buddying to help ease in new leaders but obviously we cannot pressure anyone into becoming a leader.

Our membership base is not shrinking but we do now have a significant number of fee-paying members who are not walking at all.

There is a Group holiday in Malham planned for mid-October, so fingers crossed for good weather.

Chair

Chiltern Young Walkers

2023 was a very successful year for the group. This year we have achieved a great amount, with a variety of different walks including joint walks, weekends away, multi-day long distance challenges, eight introductory walks and evening walks along with, of course, our regular weekend day walks. We held a total of 82 walks, an increase on the previous year's 73 and our membership number stood at 145, up three from last year, so a modest increase, though we hope to improve that next year.

One particular achievement was completing the Ridgeway in celebration of its fiftieth Anniversary in 2023. We broke it down into seven parts and the group completed all 87 miles. This was so popular that we decided to do a similar challenge in 2024 and will be walking Shakespeare's Way across 11 sections from February to September.

We ran 12 evening walks which were a great success and offered even more walking opportunities to the group for a chance to walk and socialise. Our weekends away in the Lake District and North Yorks Moors proved popular, and one is already being planned for next year in the Brecon Beacons.

We have an active committee and recently welcomed two new committee members, a new Secretary and general member, to our midst. We had seen a fall in walk leaders over the past few years, so that it was starting to get a little challenging to put on a weekly walk, but have managed to recruit four new ones, with a few others expressing interest once they have got to know the group a little better, so we are hopeful that 2024 will have more variety of walk leaders and, in doing so, some new walks!

Chair

Chilterns Weekend Walkers

2023 has been a positive and enjoyable year for CWW with continued growth in the number, difficulty, range, and diversity of walks with a full calendar throughout the year and quite a few trips away also. In particular, the number of middle-length walks (i.e. 8-10 miles), has increased. We are a walking group, primarily, and have brought our focus quite clearly back to this. CWW hardly ever has weekend days without walks (certainly not on Sundays). People come forward with walks two to five weeks beforehand when they see gaps, without needing prompting as in previous years, and this allows people joining walks to check their own calendars and plan ahead: thanks to all people coming forward with walks, including those at short notice.

Whilst the number of walks has remained steady (at 140), the number of different leaders offering walks (39) has fallen from what it was a year ago (54). Although we are far from being in a concerning situation, we do need to bear in mind the need to retain a fresh pool of leaders in case others stand down for various reasons. For this reason, encouraging new members, or people who have enjoyed our walks, to step up to offering walks for CWW remains high on our agenda. We are very grateful to a member who has annually provided us with his excellent Navigation Training Day.

Also noteworthy is the emergence of various themed groups of walks. Brand new for 2023 are the “boots, banter and beer” walk series, with its great social element. The Chiltern Society walks remain popular as shorter walks, with lots of interesting information provided, whilst there are many walks known for offering delicious church teas and “fish and chip suppers”, as well as our brisk and strenuous ones. The group has also enjoyed a range of non-walking events such as comedy festivals, a quiz on a steam train quiz, and a “mince pie meander”!

The past year has seen the re-emergence of lots of fun and enterprising trips away. The first of these was in South Wales over Easter, one of our perennial favourites, followed by the New Forest in July. There were two separate weekend trips to Shaldon in Devon. In late October 2023, a trip is taking place at the HF House in Alnmouth, Northumberland. Our flagship CWW Festival of Walks took place on Sunday 17th September at Penn Street. Five walks throughout the day were offered, all of which centred around a lunchtime picnic on the village green at Penn Street, where members partook of Prosecco and cakes; it was CWW’s 17th Birthday! As per a year ago, when this was first organised, around 50 people attended!

2023 also saw successes on the footpaths front, in particular where new owners of the Turnip End estate within our Lacey Green parish diverted paths going through their land unofficially and in a less than considerate way, encroaching on neighbouring land and blocking paths with gates. It was thanks to the work of our footpaths officers past and present, along with the Area Footpath Secretary, that owners of the estate subsequently reverted all of their paths to how they should be. On the IT front, CWW launched its new-look CWW Website, bringing it up to date and making it much easier on the eye and for us to keep up to date with relevant and important information and, also, our membership and e-mail system was upgraded.

At this point, I hand over to CWW’s newly-elected Chair, to build on this momentum, and express my gratitude to the Committee and all of our members for their ongoing hard work and support.

Retiring Chair

Hike MK

The group continues to rely on a very small number of walk leaders, and as such has struggled to put on a full programme of weekend walks. The group's revival under the enthusiasm of one member in 2022 has slowed followed his departure for Southampton. Having said that, we have had a regular programme of Monday evening walks throughout the year, and some well-attended weekend trips to Shropshire, Peak District, Lake District and the Brecon Beacons. We have also had a number of social events throughout the year, including pub nights, meals, kayaking, BBQs and fireworks. Membership is fairly low, but also fairly stable. We get a lot of interest on Facebook, though often people just join the Facebook page but don't come along to the walks.

We organised 13 Saturday or Sunday walks, 49 evening walks: 4 weekends away and 12 socials.

Main Contact

Hillingdon and District Group

Thanks to our four walks organisers and our dedicated walk leaders Hillingdon continues to provide a wide range of walks throughout the year. One of our walk leaders celebrated his 100th walk as leader this year while another passed the 200 milestone and is now well on her way to her third century. We are also fortunate in having an active group who fill essential committee roles as well as all those other functions that make for a successful Ramblers' group. We have enjoyed a number of short walking breaks: in the Marlborough area, the New Forest and the Clent Hills. A number of Hillingdon members took part in a holiday in West Wales where, perhaps uncharacteristically, the sun shone for much of the week. One of our members has taken on the role of coordinating the growing number of walking breaks and holidays. The group also enjoyed a fine Christmas lunch at a local golf club.

Unfortunately, we do seem to be relying on a diminishing number of walk leaders. We are hopeful that the review of the risk assessment process and the development of a new Ramblers' handbook and other resources to support leaders will help us to recruit new leaders.

We are generally pleased with the new Walks Manager. Some leaders are entering details of their walks and including descriptions and photographs. This helps to publicise the group and its walks programme.

Acting Chairman

Milton Keynes and District Group

We held 53 walks throughout the year including seven evening walks in the summer. The programme has not been as full as previous years and we are working on encouraging more people to volunteer to lead walks. We trialled a walking workshop.

For the second time we had the opportunity to have a stand at an Over 55's Fair put on by our local MPs and some interest was taken.

Our membership currently stands at 225 including 35 new members in the last year. About 40 of those members are actively involved in the group. We intend to conduct a survey in the new year to gauge the views of our members on our walking programme.

Encouragingly six new people have recently volunteered to check footpaths. We currently have seven vacant parishes requiring footpath checking and a vacancy for a Group Footpath Secretary. We were pleased to work with Milton Keynes City Council to provide a gate in North Crawley.

I thank my predecessor, who has chaired the group for the last seven years.

Chairman

Wycombe District Group

We have enjoyed a good year of walking with a good level of regular attendance on Wednesdays. Members walking at the weekend have been fewer and there have been almost no long weekend walks due to lack of leaders and interest from walkers. We have become increasingly dependent on a small number of walk leaders to enable our programme to proceed, and the need to increase our numbers of walk leaders is now critical.

Wycombe Ramblers committee has convened five times since the last AGM, an increase on the previous year for two reasons: an increasing need to discuss changes coming from national Ramblers and a wish to contribute our views on proposed motions at the annual General Council. In relation to General Council we provided our views on the motions to our Area and, in the main, General Council subsequently voted in accordance with our expressed opinions.

The national changes in Walks Manager involved our walks programme manager in significant work this year, but as a result of her wonderful efforts we have succeeded in retaining our simple way of organising our walks, whilst enabling the walks all to be uploaded to the new system. It was critical to our way of thinking to make things as straightforward as possible for walk leaders, in the light of our dwindling numbers of leaders.

Two issues raised at our last year's AGM exercised the Committee, namely moving as far as possible to digitised information without disenfranchising members who are not so technically skilled, and how to spend our self-funded money to the benefit of members. As a result of a survey we have now moved to emailing our newsletter and walks programme to all but six members, thereby decreasing costs and distribution efforts. In relation to the self-funded money, various suggestions were explored, but in the end the decision was taken to purchase a gate through the Chiltern Society's Donate-a-Gate Scheme. This improves the walking experience and is therefore of benefit to us all.

Socially, two events were organised: a festive meal in December and a weekend away to Church Stretton in April. Whilst the walking was thoroughly enjoyed in April, sadly some building work at the venue rather detracted from the event. Our events organiser has, after many years service to the group, decided to move on and we are looking for a replacement.

We added an additional page to our website, Recent Walks, this year. This provides a short description of the walk and pictures. It has proved very popular and can give new members a flavour of our walks.

Whilst our membership is healthy with numbers around the 300 mark, the number of regular walkers is considerably fewer and we only have about 15 regular walk leaders. Similarly, our Committee is currently carrying a number of vacancies. Our best efforts to recruit more volunteers, both as walk leaders and committee members have been unsuccessful and there are grave concerns that unless more members come forward Wycombe Group is at risk of folding at some point in the future.

Secretary

Elected Members of the Area Executive Committee October 2022 - September 2023

Chairman	
Vice-Chairman	
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>
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	https://sites.google.com/view/chilternsweekendwalkers/home
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/

The Ramblers' Association is a company limited by guarantee, registered in England and Wales. Company registration number: 4458492.
Registered Charity in England and Wales number: 1093577, registered charity in Scotland, number: SC039799.
Registered office: The Ramblers, First Floor, 10 Queen Street Place, London EC4R 1BE.