

MINUTES OF THE THIRTY SECOND ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE SHROPSHIRE AREA OF THE RAMBLERS HELD ON SATURDAY 13TH FEBRUARY 2016 AT THE GATEWAY CENTRE, SHREWSBURY

PRESENT: Thirty members and officers of Shropshire Area including Graham Evans (Staffordshire Area Secretary), Gerald Moss (North Wales Area Representative) and speaker Kate Ashbrook President of the Ramblers Association as list held by the Secretary.

APOLOGIES: Peter Greeve, Darren Hall (Chair of South Shropshire Group), Joy Nisbet, Colin Chandler, Anne Suffolk (Chair of Telford and East Shropshire Group) and Maxine Jennings.

Peter Carr Chairman welcomed members to the 32nd AGM of the Shropshire Ramblers, and especially Kate Ashbrook (speaker), Graham Evans (Staffordshire Area Secretary) and Gerald Moss (North Wales Area Representative)

Marion Law mentioned the death of Muriel Grindley aged 97 years. She was Area Treasurer in the 1990's and was instrumental in taking charge of the Treasury side related to walking the Shropshire Way for the Ramblers 60th Anniversary. This was no mean feat as the internet was not available to most people.

1. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING ON 14th February 2015

Sue Jones proposed and Peter James seconded that the minutes be accepted as a true record. All in favour.

2. Matters arising: (P4) Peter James asked about the motion submitted to General Council that all bicycles have a bell. Peter Carr said the motion was remitted and he believed the Trustees decided not to pursue it but he would check if this was right.

3. CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Peter said the notable event of the past year was Trevor completing his massive project to attempt to walk every Right of Way in Shropshire. This was completed last March. The last path ended at a pub where a celebration pint was partaken of. Trevor's achievement was recognised by our Chairman of Trustees at last year's

General Council and by Shropshire Council where he was awarded "Volunteer of the Year". Peter on behalf of Shropshire Ramblers formally congratulated and thanked Trevor.

The Big Pathwatch: In Shropshire Peter commented (slightly tongue in cheek) that it was Trevor's project that inspired this. Peter was pleased to say a comparatively small number of volunteers managed to walk the paths in 53% of our overall area in the 6 months of the Big Pathwatch. This included Telford and Wrekin where all the paths were walked. The Ramblers had designated 200 target squares in each council area that they wanted checked as a priority; we managed to complete all 400 squares, with Trevor again walking the last target square on Dec 31st. Peter congratulated and thanked all who took part. Peter said we all know the financial pressures faced by Shropshire Council, but the ROW staff will survive more or less at their current, if inadequate level, at least for the next couple of years. Shropshire Ramblers work closely with the ROW staff and try to help where they can. Peter said he would be asking volunteers in the North of the county to undertake a structured and directed ploughing and cropping inspection of a number of paths and to report the findings back to the Council.

Peter said the communication from Central Office is appalling. Policies change, there is no consultation and we find out by accident. Things disappear from the Web Site (our main avenue for information) and there is no explanation. When phoning Central Office to enquire he is told "Oh we are revising that and have deleted it for the time being" or there is a new policy on this and you now have to do There is no follow through, so having raised something, you are very lucky if the promised reply appears. Peter finds Rambler-Net (a parallel information source – definitely not approved of by Central Office) much more useful for finding out what is going on and for exchanging ideas and for getting guidance. Peter felt that increasingly we the volunteers are here to serve the whims and wishes of Central Office, not Central Office supporting the volunteers. He asked Kate to convey this back to the Trustees.

Peter said as an Area we are not alone in our misgivings about the Governance proposals. He emailed all members who are on email about the action we were proposing, the few replies he had from our members were all supportive of our stance.

At last year's AGM Peter announced his intention to stand down as Chair when he is 70. He is 69 this year and asked again that someone with the drive and enthusiasm would volunteer to take over. It is not a job to just step into so whoever it is will need to shadow him for a period before taking on the role. Peter said he has found the job interesting, challenging, fulfilling and at times frustrating but would take it on knowing what he knows now.

Marion Law

Peter said Marion, when she announced her intention to step down as secretary said she did not want a big fuss. Marion has been secretary for more years than any would care to admit to; as Caroline Wheeler in Benedict's office said, Marion is spoken of in awe, she is an institution. There have been times when asking Central Office for advice they have commented, why ask us, Marion knows more than we ever will.

Peter said we were at a loss on how to mark Marion's contribution to the Ramblers, we also wanted to keep Marion closely involved without her having the burden of an executive officer role. Marion is an ambassador for the Ramblers both in Shropshire and nationally and so it was proposed that Marion be appointed as Honorary Life President of Shropshire Ramblers.

One of Marion's other great interests is her garden and as a very small token of appreciation Peter presented Marion with a gift of garden centre vouchers.

4. **AONB:** Sue Jones reported that the AONB were not able to support the Castle Connect shuttle bus service as Natural England had pulled its funding. However, the Stiperstones shuttle service will continue. Bob

Kimber proposed and Phil Barnes seconded that the reports be adopted. All in favour.

5. APPOINTMENT OF AN INDEPENDENT EXAMINER

Ken Dunning proposed and Peter James seconded that Mike Hill be appointed Independent Examiner. All in favour.

6. REPORTS FROM GROUPS AND AFFILIATED GROUPS: no additional information was given.

Jeff Vaughan said it would be nice to see the Group Reports in the abridged version which was seconded by Pam Day or could the full report be emailed to all the members. It was also stated that the Agenda and Minutes for the Area AGM should be put on the main website or to bring it to the attention of all the members, perhaps copies could be emailed to everyone. Peter Carr noted this was obviously a communication problem.

7. APPOINTMENT OF MARION LAW AS HONORARY LIFE PRESIDENT OF THE SHROPSHIRE AREA RAMBLERS.

Peter Carr proposed and Peter James seconded the appointment. All were in favour. Peter Carr presented Marion with Garden Vouchers for her long service as Area Secretary.

Marion thanked everyone and said how much she had enjoyed being involved as Area Secretary and that she had made many friends.

8. NOMINATION AND ELECTION OF AREA EXECUTIVE OFFICERS

Ken Dunning proposed Gill Steed as Area Secretary and Peter James seconded. All were in favour.

Peter Carr asked for volunteers to fill the three vacant positions of Campaign Officer, Countryside Secretary and Exhibitions Officer. Marion Law said there were vacancies for individual members and co-opted members who were not responsible for any office but could take part in the meetings at Area. Bill Hodges said he thought there was no need for a campaign or countryside officer but an exhibition one was important.

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Telford and East Shropshire said they have their own Exhibition Stands. Peter Carr asked for the groups to ask if anyone would be willing to fill

the vacancies. Paula asked for a brief synopsis of what was involved. Peter Carr said it could be found on the Ramblers website.

9. APPOINTMENT OF AFFILIATED GROUPS' REPRESENTATIVES

These are listed on the agenda, all appointed by their own groups: Bridgnorth Walking Club Ina Roberts, Wem Walkers Tony Eccleston, Whitchurch Walkers Neil Moore

10. APPOINTMENT OF INDIVIDUAL MEMBERS

These are listed in the agenda. Darren Hall as the Chair of South Shropshire Group is no longer an individual member but a Representative. Joy Nisbet remains as a member and Sheila Keenan will be asked if she wishes to continue as an individual member. There are vacancies for 4 co-opted members and 1 individual member.

11. GENERAL COUNCIL 2016

It was proposed by Sue Jones and seconded by Jeff Vaughan that Peter Carr and Trevor Allison be appointed delegates to the General Council 2016. All in favour. Sue Jones said she would be interested in attending the General Council and will check her diary. Forms to enable Trevor and Sue to attend will be sent to them.

Motion about Cross Compliance

Peter Carr received an email (attached) from Des Garrahan (Chair of the Ramblers Board of Trustees) about Cross Compliance. The Board has agreed to take some action. Peter Carr proposed that we wait to see what they achieve and if there is no action by the next AAGM the motion will be resurrected. All were in favour.

Peter Carr asked Graham Evans to thank Staffordshire Area for agreeing to second this motion had it gone to General Council. Peter James said it might take two years for anything to happen and the delay would result in paths being lost through lack of maintenance. Kate Ashbrook said a motion to General Council is not always quicker. The trustees are now aware and she will make sure it remains on the agenda.

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Ken Dunning said as a matter of record we should recognise and thank Peter Carr for all the work and effort he has done in respect of Cross Compliance.

12.a. **S130 notices** (see attached motion from Sussex Area) Sussex Area asked Shropshire Area to second the motion about the need for more staff to protect ROW. Jeff Vaughan fully supported the motion and Peter Carr seconded it.

Kate Ashbrook said there was a 10 year plan for staffing which needed flexibility and to look at outcomes and different ways of doing things.

13. Any Other Business

a. **S130 notices** The Chairman invited Peter James to speak about this. Peter James said that he and Peter Carr had proposed, seconded and agreed at Area ROW meetings that action be taken on several occasions under the legislation to get Shropshire Council to seek the removal of obstructions on public rights of way, but these proposals were not taken forward. Peter J. referred to DEFRA's 'Notes to accompany Statutory Instrument 2004 No.370', where, in the Introduction, it states:

- "These provisions provide a formal means for any person to draw to the authority's attention ways which are obstructed and to take court action where the authority fails to act without good reason. The provisions are intended to encourage authorities to be more proactive in keeping rights of way free from obstructions, leading to greater use and enjoyment of rights of way".

Peter J. said that he had used these provisions successfully on three occasions to get obstructed footpaths open. Such steps are subject to a statutory timescale and involved serving Form 1 under s.130A HA 1980. This requested Shropshire Council 'to secure the removal of an obstruction'. Form 2 is then served by the authority on those who appear to be responsible for the obstruction seeking its removal, Form 3 confirms to the person who served notice under Form 1 the action taken, while Form 4 gives notice to the authority

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of the complainant's 'intention to apply to a Magistrates' Court' for the obstruction's removal, if not previously removed. Form 5 is the Court's

Notice requiring the authority to take steps for the removal of the obstruction.

Peter J. said that as Shropshire Council had been slow to respond to his first complaint, leading to its appearance at the Magistrates Court, they responded more quickly to the second, removing the obstructions prior to him receiving advice from Central Office not to proceed to the Court! Peter contended that the principle should be established that Area Council should follow this procedure, to 'encourage' Shropshire Council, even if Area did not proceed to the issuing of Form 4 and an appeal at the Magistrates' Court.

A discussion followed in which Kate Ashbrook said that proceeding to court had been expensive for the Ramblers and they would prefer to settle disputes on obstructions out of court. She agreed that the Central Office guidance on s130 was none too clear and should be reviewed. She would bring this to the attention of the Trustees.

- 14. **DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS:** Area AGM February 2017 to be confirmed
- Executive Meeting Saturday 12th March 2016
- Area Council Meeting Saturday 9th April 2016

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Kate Ashbrook, President of the Ramblers' Association, addressed the meeting. Kate said that she had come particularly to mark Marion's retirement and to acknowledge all she had done for the Ramblers over the past 19 years. She also thanked Trevor Allison, Jeff Vaughan, Peter Carr and other volunteers for all their work. She said it was lovely to be back in Shropshire and to see old friends. Shropshire was a wonderful

county for walking, with a number of Walkers Are Welcome Towns which were testament to the value of walking to the local economy. The Ramblers were the guardians of Shropshire paths and access land.

The Ramblers were formed 80 years ago from a number of rambling federations and we had much to be proud of. For instance, we claimed the paths for the definitive maps in the early 1950s, no mean feat when few people had their own cars. There is now a membership of 107,000, with 25,000 volunteers. Walking for Health was a new major project for the Ramblers and was working well. It is funded by the Macmillan Cancer Support Charity and in some areas healthy walkers were moving on to become Ramblers.

Kate said Ramblers' Central Office recognizes and values the volunteers and aspires to treat them well. There are many Volunteer Development Days which are well attended.

She said public-path work is crucial and the Ramblers were the only organisation that does it effectively and comprehensively and that the Ramblers were very committed to continuing this work. Kate noted that the Big Path Watch had been controversial with some volunteers but she praised the Shropshire Area for completing many of their squares. She said the Path Watch had been valuable in creating a base line that showed the state of the footpath network. It also encouraged non-ramblers by getting them interested and making them realise that someone has to maintain and fight for the foot paths. Lastly it got people to recognise the value of the Ramblers as 66% of those taking part were new to Ramblers and may in the future become members and volunteers. Kate explained that, as a result of the survey, the Ramblers are able to talk to local authorities and work with them over ROW. The Ramblers recognise the difficulties the local authorities have with the continued budget cuts but it was important to emphasise that walking is good for health and the economy.

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Kate said she was pleased about Shropshire Area's cropping campaign and the debate about using s130A of the Highways Act 1980, and she felt that Ramblers' Central Office needed a better process for authorising our path workers to use section 130A and she will press for this.

The good news for Ramblers is that the Government is continuing to fund the coastal access work and national parks and AONBs such as the Shropshire Hills.

Kate said the Ramblers' memorandum and articles of association have been re-written in plain English for the General Council to approve this year. Next year the trustees intended to propose a change to the Area and Groups arrangement following consultation. She considered that the governance needs to achieve an organization that acts as one, with flexibility locally and a light touch of control. The board of trustees need to implement the mission and in order to do this effectively they need a supportive structure as well as good communication. Although it is not the case in Shropshire, in other Areas many posts remain vacant. She hoped that we could make the jobs more interesting and encourage volunteers to take them on. Any changes have to be agreed at the General Council.

Kate finished by saying that the staff in the Ramblers' three offices are professional and hard working. The organisation depends on its national staff and local volunteers working together, making a strong team.

Sue Jones asked if it was the key posts which were difficult to find recruits for. Kate replied yes.

Pam Day stated that most people joining the Ramblers were people entering retirement. The Telford Group has tried to encourage

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younger members but this is not happening. Pam asked what could we do to encourage people in their forties?

Peter Carr said he was talking to the 40-60 age group and they say Ramblers is what our parents do, not what we do.

Ken Dunning said he did not think age should be a negative thing as they have 10 over 80 years of age still walking.

Phil Barnes said we should not alienate workers by holding meetings during the day. At the moment the timetable of meetings suits retired people.

Peter Carr asked for more information about the proposed Walking Festival and at least six months lead to get it into our programmes.

Tim Day asked about the Areas. Kate said there are 50 Areas and an Area Support Officer has been set up to support the Areas. She went on to explain the structure of the Ramblers.

Bill Hodges raised the matter of gated urban developments, Kate said the Ramblers were consulted through Public Protection and Safety Orders.

Peter Carr thanked Kate for her address and everyone for coming. Meeting closed at 1606 hrs.