



Kent Area

Minutes of Annual General Meeting held on 3 February 2018 at Littlebourne Village Hall, 56 High Street, Littlebourne, Canterbury, CT3 1ST

Present

Alison Hargreaves (Chairman), Margaret Lubbock (Vice Chairman), Ray Lawrence (Treasurer), Robert Peel (Secretary) and about 100 members

Welcome and Introduction

Alison Hargreaves welcomed everyone to the AGM.

Welcome from the Hosting Group

Rosemary Rathbone, Canterbury Group Chair, welcomed members to Littlebourne.

Apologies for Absence

Stuart Booth, Glynis Clifton, Peter Skipp, Neville Machin and Terry Clarke

Minutes of AGM held on 4 February 2017

The minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on 4 February 2017 at St Edith's Hall, Kemsing were agreed to be a true record. No one wished to raise any matters arising from the minutes.

Annual Report

Alison Hargreaves observed that while in the main she preferred to look forwards, particularly to spring, it was also useful to review the achievements of the past year. Her own personal achievement had been to climb Mam Tor in August having had knee surgery in June.

Kent Area could be proud of its success with vegetation clearance, the Lost Ways project, sales of the coast path guide, walks for carers and the finalisation of the coast path route from Ramsgate to Whitstable in readiness for opening this year. All groups have been successful in what they do, particularly led walks, holidays and vegetation clearance. Ashford Group was now offering two walks a week and West Kent had achieved a 97% increase in membership. Tonbridge & Malling has a Facebook page and North West Kent a new web site. Bromley's contribution to the Annual Review celebrated the individual achievement of a walk leader while Maidstone has a member who walked 733 miles on Group walks last year.

Partnership is key to much of our work with Canterbury contributing to the Canterbury Festival and Maidstone being recognised for its contribution to Kent Messenger charity work. There was of course the usual White Cliffs Walking Festival and thanks to Averil there were now eleven active vegetation clearance teams.

Alison finished her review of the year by reciting the poem contributed by Medway Group as its contribution to the Annual Review.

The meeting received and agreed the Annual Report.

Annual Accounts and Treasurer's Report

Ray had nothing to add to his published report. In response to a question from the audience, he reported that we had received around £14,000 from Sport England to fund the Carers' Walks and around £4000 was left unspent which we hoped to be able to carry forward to fund this year's programme of walks pending agreement of a new grant.

The meeting agreed the accounts.

Election of Honorary Officers

Alison Hargreaves was elected Chairman

Margaret Lubbock and Neville Machin were elected Vice Chairmen

Robert Peel was elected Secretary

Ray Lawrence was elected Treasurer

There were no nominations to serve as Area Council Representatives for Affiliated Clubs

Les Preston, Peter Skipp and Ken Neville were elected Area Council Representatives for Individual Members

Appointment of Delegates to General Council

The meeting agreed to send Alison Hargreaves, Brian Rowland and Zoe Day to General Council 2018 in Bangor. Alison would be a delegate. Brian and Zoe should decide between them who should be the second delegate (with speaking and voting rights) and who should be a visitor.

Appointment of Auditor

D Williamson was unanimously reappointed.

Topical Presentations

Footpath Successes

Averil Brice reported on the successes of the past year in relation to public rights of way work. Her role was being split into two posts – Area Footpath Secretary and Path Maintenance Officer. Averil would take on the latter post and would be reporting later about a candidate to fill the former post. However, she would not be walking away from the work and would always be there for support. Averil was delighted that groups were coming better to appreciate the work of the Ramblers other than led walks.

Lost Ways

Robert, on behalf of Neville who was unable to attend the meeting, gave an update on the Lost Ways project. Introduced in the 2016 Annual Review and at the 2017 AGM, the project had attracted a pleasing number of volunteers. Robert reminded members that the reason for the project was that many paths were missed of the definitive maps when originally drawn up and those in existence before 1949 would be extinguished in 2026 if not claimed by then. Neville had adopted a methodical approach, ploughing through all the Kent definitive maps to identify around 200 candidates for investigation. He had devised IT support for data collection, had held a meeting of volunteers in September and

had issued each willing volunteer with a candidate path to investigate on order to test the ability of the IT support to accommodate the evidence collected. This had been successful but further progress had been delayed while Neville undertook another task for Ramblers' Central Office. Now this was completed the next phase of the project would be underway in the spring.

Footpath Volunteer Recruitment

Averil addressed issues of volunteer recruitment for public rights of way work. She displayed a map showing the distribution of members in Kent. She then referred to the pink flyer that had been posted out to every member with the Annual Review and which had prompted a steady flow of new volunteers. Very few of these members ever walked with their groups. It was clear to Averil that attempting to recruit volunteers from those members in regular contact with their groups was targeting the wrong people and missing out on the majority of members who belong to support our work rather than to go on led walks. Averil then showed some maps identifying the remaining vacancies for Parish Footpath Observers and Local Footpath Officers and announced that Mike Hayley, a member of White Cliffs Group, had come forward to take on the Area Footpath Officer role, subject to the formality of appointment by Area Council at its next meeting.

Carers' Walks

Robert reminded members that the Carers' Walks programme had been announced by Sue Mott at the previous AGM. Rather than attempt himself to articulate the huge benefits these walks bring to hard-pressed carers and those they care for, he was going to show a film that had been made during the August walk that was part of the White Cliffs Walking Festival. After the film, Sue Mott reported that she was in dialogue with Sport England and very much hoped that funding would be forthcoming not just for another programme in Kent but also for shorter programmes in other Ramblers' areas.

Coastal Access

Ian Wild gave an update on coastal access in Kent. The stretch from Ramsgate to Whitstable would be opening this year once a new section of path at Kingsgate was created, proposals for the Whitstable to Iwade section had been published and proposals for the rest around Sheppey and on to Woolwich should be published in the summer. Ian was optimistic that the whole route would open in 2019 as planned. Ian also reported on a public inquiry that had taken place in January concerning a proposal by Kent County Council to create a new right of way alongside Faversham Creek.

Replacement of Officers

Alison observed that several of the Area Officers had been in post for many years and obviously they could not go on for ever. Ray advised that this was his last year and he was keen to work alongside a potential successor to ensure a smooth handover. Alison explained that she had a full-time job as well as heavy commitments to her home, horses, friends and family – if she could manage the job then anyone could and she urged candidates to come forward. Now was the time for members to consider what they could do to help.

Membership Recruitment

Robert gave a short presentation of some research he had been doing into membership. Members are vital to the success of the Ramblers but numbers have been declining both nationally and in Kent for many years. Presenting various maps and graphs he sought to make two points in the short time available. Firstly membership levels are not uniform across Kent – in some electoral wards we have over 60 members for every ten thousand residents and in some we have none. Clearly there are segments of the Kent population that we are not reaching which presents both a huge opportunity and a huge challenge. Secondly, while most Kent groups have seen their membership fall in recent years, some

have produced significant increases. The large increases in White Cliffs, West Kent and East Kent showed what could be achieved and Robert challenged other groups to follow their lead. Central Office had recently appointed a new Director of Membership and Fundraising Sarah Marfleet who, as a member of Kent Ramblers, was present in the audience and stepped forward to introduce herself. Sarah was optimistic about reversing membership decline but said that it would be “a marathon, not a sprint”.

Annual Review Competition

Robert said that sixteen people had submitted correct answers to the competition to find the number of books sold at the county ferret show, namely 34 books. The winner of the Paramo clothing was Barbara Mead and the three runners up who had one copies of the Kent Ramblers Guide to the Kent Coast Path were Dudley Gore, Lindsay Smith and Bill Ripper.

Open Forum

Richard Knox-Johnston, a vice-president of Kent CPRE, expressed concern that the Ramblers was not always as supportive as he would have wished of objections to planning proposals that would damage the countryside. He acknowledged that sometimes the Ramblers' representations were very supportive and he stressed that CPRE did not, as sometimes thought, object to every planning application but he had been very surprised that the Ramblers had not objected to a recent proposal for the building of 240 houses on a greenfield site at Charing. Alison said she was well aware of the correspondence that had taken place but the Ramblers too would not object to every proposed development. While noting Richard's point that the Ramblers could object on “aesthetic grounds” she reaffirmed that in this particular case the impact on footpaths was not seen as sufficiently detrimental to justify objection. She stressed that not objecting was not at all the same as supporting a proposal. The criteria for objecting to planning applications had been raised at a meeting for footpath volunteers in Lenham in November at which the Ramblers' Chief Executive had been present and she had been supportive of Kent's approach.

Next Annual General Meeting

The next AGM will be hosted by Tunbridge Wells Group – on 2 February 2019 in Paddock Wood.

