



Kent

Minutes of Annual General Meeting held on 10 February 2024 at St Mary's Church Hall, Manor Road, Bexley, Kent, DA5 3LX

Present

Colin Sefton (Chairman), Tony Bristow (Vice Chairman), Mark Lavenstein (Vice Chairman), (Hilary Adams (Treasurer), Robert Peel (Secretary) and 75 other members.

Welcomes and Introduction

Colin Sefton welcomed everyone to the AGM, noting that this year marked the Area's 40th anniversary and promising that we would be thinking about a celebratory event such as a series of walks. He noted that four of those who attended the Area's inaugural meeting in April 1984 were present today. He gave thanks to the volunteers from North West Kent Group for organising the day's event and welcomed Rebecca Dawson, Chair of the Board of Trustees.

Stuart Booth, Chairman of North West Kent Group, also welcomed everyone to the AGM and was delighted to see so many people venturing to the ancient village of Bexley on the periphery of Kent. It was the 40th anniversary of the Group becoming known by its current name. Stuart finished by proposing a vote of thanks to the Area officers for all their hard work during the year.

Minutes of AGM held on 4 February 2023

The minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on 4 February 2023, were agreed to be a true record. No one wished to raise any matters arising from the minutes.

Annual Report

Colin Sefton presented some highlights from the Annual Report. He noted that the Area was generally in a good position although more volunteers would be welcome. We have good relations with the Kent County Council public rights of way team. Bromley's handling of public rights of way matters was not so good and a member working on the Lost Ways project had made a formal complaint. We have contact with other Areas through quarterly online "cluster" meetings and can raise issues with Central Office through our Regional Engagement Officer.

Annual Accounts and Treasurer's Report

The meeting approved the accounts and report.

Election of Honorary Officers

Colin Sefton was elected Chairman

Tony Bristow and Mark Lavenstein were elected Vice Chairmen

Robert Peel was elected Secretary

Hilary Adams was elected Treasurer

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

There were no nominations to serve as Area Council Representatives for Individual Members

Appointment of Delegates to General Council

The meeting agreed to send Colin Sefton and Robert Peel as its delegates to the 2024 General Council which would be held in Birmingham and authorised the Officers to appoint substitutes should either become unable to attend.

Appointment of Auditor

Faye Clarke was unanimously appointed.

Topical Presentations

Public Rights of Way Work

Robert Peel stressed the importance of our volunteers by whom all our achievements are delivered. He focused on footpath volunteers explaining the different roles and presenting maps showing where there are vacancies. He appealed to those present, if not able to fill the roles themselves, to take time on walks to alert others to the importance of our footpath work and the need for more people to help out. The individual roles are not onerous but when posts are vacant a heavy load can fall on those leading the Area's efforts.

Robert wanted to specifically mention two footpath volunteers who had recently retired after many years of service. Jim Fergusson had retired due to ill-health after more than 50 years as a Local Footpath Officer or equivalent and had been present at the Area's inaugural meeting in 1984. Dave Wetton had very reluctantly retired due to failing eyesight after 40 years as Local Footpath Office and had sent a message to the meeting stressing how fulfilling the work is. Robert suggested that the best way we could thank Jim and Dave was to make sure that their work continues and that their parishes are not neglected through lack of volunteers.

Named Walks Project

Robert reminded members that this project sought to promote Kent's fine long-distance and other named walks through the publication of guides and the provision of information by means such as information boards. The project is funded by profits from sales of guides which now exceed £15,000. Last year we installed information boards at Tonbridge Castle and in the car park at Groombridge. We were now proposing to widen the project to include replacement of some of the 130 parish footpath maps across Kent, many of which are in dreadful condition. He invited members who spotted these maps while out walking to send him photographs indicating their location and condition and if possible to provide their measurements.



Address by Rebecca Dawson

Rebecca offered a review of the Ramblers' achievements in 2023, particularly the adoption of a new strategy, and assured members that the strategy would bring opportunities but not obligations.

A wide-ranging discussion then took place, topics including:

- Concern about the political implications of an emphasis on EDI (equality, diversity and inclusion)
- The merits of celebrating the 100th anniversary of the Kinder mass trespass in 2032
- The possibility of producing briefing for local authorities on the economic benefits of walking
- The benefits of including more than a minimum of information in walks programmes to make them more welcoming
- Engagement with younger people who do not necessarily see membership as their preferred relationship with organisations
- New guidance for walk leaders – when will it be available – maybe by the end of March
- Retention of members
- Solar farms
- Right to Roam – what is Ramblers' policy on the campaign being run by an organisation of that name?

Next Annual General Meeting

The next AGM will be hosted by White Cliffs Group in Wye Village Hall on 1 February 2025.

