

# Annual General Meeting of the South Cotswold Ramblers held at Frampton Mansell Village Hall on Saturday 24th November 2024

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Everyone was welcomed by the Chairman, Ann Adams.

## 1. Present

Andrew Hawkins, Ann Adams, Sally Davis, Keith Eyles, Brian Witcombe, Sheelagh Witcombe, Susan Jones, Peter Jones, Colin Boosey, Olivia Gunn, Tina Draper, Janet Hale, Ray Floater, Michele Holden, Bernard Gill, Mike Garner, Heather Garner, Richard Davis, Di Davis, Steve Priddey, Rosemary Burne, Brian Ruther, Anne Ruther, Lenneke Jansens, Margaret Turner, Janet Williams, Mary Hall, Helen Patrick, Loren Holgate, Mike Brown, Elaine Brown, Penny Fernando.

## 2. Apologies

Patrick Marks, Angela Marks, Jill Stuart, Trevor Stuart, Sue Clark, Ros Burnip, Ron Burnip, Karen D'Amico, Alex Llewellynn.

## 3. Agreement of the Minutes of 2023 AGM

The minutes were approved as accurate and signed by the Chairman, Ann Adams.

**Proposed: Brian Ruther      Seconded: Sally Davis**

## 4. Matters Arising

There were no Matters arising from the previous meeting.

## 5. Annual Reports

### 5a Chairman's Report

- Ann read her report out which is as follows:
- I was going to say that we had survived another year but in fact we have done much better than that. We have continued to maintain our membership numbers and have also managed to run a full walks programme although we have made some changes. Our Monday shorter and leisurely paced walks continue to attract large numbers of walkers so we decided we would do a weekly walk and so far have managed to get enough walk leaders to do this. We also recognised that some of our members preferred to do longer faster walks so we have introduced one a month to run alongside our normal Saturday moderately paced walks and there seems to be sufficient numbers and walk leaders to continue this.

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- There have also been other changes that we have been grappling with that have come from head office the main one being that new walk leaders now have to do on line training and that you have to be registered as a volunteer to lead a walk not a member. This is still an ongoing issue which area has also been involved with as no one was sure if the insurance would be valid if the person leading the walk was not a volunteer. Area have in fact taken out an extra insurance policy for the year for the walks until this issue is resolved. There are also other plans afoot that we don't yet know about re walk leader training and changes from being a member to a supporter of the Ramblers Association.
- We again in the summer held a picnic walk social event which was very popular. We had a slightly shorter Saturday walk followed by a buffet lunch which was also attended by some of our members who no longer do the walks but enjoyed catching up with everyone.
- Another big issue has been the weather with a number of walks being cancelled or re-routed because of flooding and I know a few walkers got wet feet.
- I'd like to thank all my fellow committee members, walk leaders and others who do work for the group for their continued support.
- Ann then read out a report produced by Ros Burnip, our Membership Secretary, who was unable to be at the meeting:
- There are currently 346 plus 2 affiliated members of the group. The number has fluctuated around that number throughout the year. Janet Williams, valued and active Assistant Membership Secretary and myself now use the Ramblers membership list to send out e mail notifications and information re the walks programme etc. I would note that it is the responsibility of each member to ensure that the e mail held by central Ramblers is correct and up to date. With such a large membership we cannot chase people whose e mails bounce back whether because they are incorrect (as some are) or the in box is full. We still send out by post to 14 people who apparently have no internet access. We have asked several times to check that this is still the case as this cost over £30 in postage and copying. Of course, where a member genuinely has no internet access, we ensure they get the information. Currently there are two in this group.
- I do send out a welcome e mail to new members from the list supplied by Ramblers. It is usually behind times but I feel it is important to do this for each person. Thanks are due to Janet and the committee for their support.

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### 5b Footpath Secretary's Report

- Although we do not have a Footpath Secretary, Michele Holden as Walking Environment Officer, read out her report:
  - Introduction. Co-opted as WEO at the January meeting as there was a vacancy, having just completed a 4 year term as Area WEO. This role tries to protect the walking environment keeping walkers on historic routes, close to nature wherever possible and reviews developments that are in planning with Stroud District Council. This contrasts with footpath specific work which is handled through GCC.
  - There are many local housing and industrial developments that can impact our green space and footpaths. We campaign for footpaths to be retained preferably along their current alignment, within green public open spaces, with suitable width for passing and natural accessible surfaces.
  - Most of the work this year has been on developments around J13, where projects in planning include a Missing Mile canal, Ecopark, Football stadium and multiple housing developments at Great Oldbury. (Gt. Oldbury has now grown to the point where Rights of Way there have their own identity starting with the trinome EGO, replacing some former Eastington routes EEA).
  - We have also had to respond to several applications by landowners trying to move RoW out of their gardens or away from their homes. Defra guidance to Local Authorities requires GCC to make these orders when requested. However, there are specific tests that must be met for this to succeed, such as the path is not needed for public use, the new route must be no less convenient than the current route and there cannot be a loss of public enjoyment. However, if there are no objections the applications can be confirmed as unopposed, so we have to remain alert to these and respond to cases where the tests are not met.

A few examples:

- 1) The missing mile canal project at J13 and the A419 near Stonehouse is now progressing, however the Ecopark and Football Stadium are still awaiting decision by Stroud District Council due to limited capacity of the M5 junctions.
- 2) An objection was issued to a plan by Stonehouse Town Council at Standish to convert a sports pitch to allotments without suitable accessibility for users with wheelchairs/mobility scooters. The plans had sparse details about path surfaces too and missed an opportunity to create a new RoW which would have avoided walking along a road verge. SDC refused the application.

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- 3) At a development in Gt. Oldbury we met with the developer Robert Hitchens and retained a footpath in a green corridor rather than it moving on to the estate road.
- 4) We have also responded to an application for a small development at Nupend to ensure that an existing field path does not get intercepted by a tarmac vehicle turning area which could conflict with walkers using the path.
- 5) We lodged an objection to housing plans at Leonard Stanley to try and retain an historic path on its existing alignment with adequate width and grassy surface. The proposed plans take the path around the back of some houses where views of the escarpment and May Hill may be restricted and some connectivity would be lost for residents from the development.
- 6) At Tresham we are campaigning to prevent the extinguishment of two footpaths that form part of a promoted Ramblers Route. The existing paths cross a field and stone stile, go alongside some woods and then turn through a green channel which is shielded from some new houses. Instead the proposal would move walkers on to a less convenient and less interesting route along a road.

It has been a pleasure working on these campaigns and getting to explore some more of the large South Cotswold territory and I hope to be elected to continue in this role in the coming year.

Bernard Gill, as Area Secretary, then gave his report on Area matters:

- The Gloucestershire Area has seven Groups covering all the parishes in the county, and a 20-30 sub-Group. This year we continued work to defend footpaths, correct the Rights of Way map, and to protect the walking environment in towns and countryside. Group and Area reps speak out for walkers at consultations and meet with organisations such as GCC, National Highways, National Grid and with Developers such as Robert Hitchens, Bloor Homes, Taylor Wimpey, Kier and Persimmon to try to protect and retain Rights of Way.

In Gloucestershire, key campaigns worked on this year include:

- 1) The A417 Missing Link which has begun construction. Ramblers continues to check on access and footpaths within the scheme. A widened footway has now been

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installed along the east side of Leckhampton Hill Road to link Ullenwood Manor Road with the A436 crossings as suggested in our responses.

- 2) Consultations for a new junction on the M5 to relieve pressure on the A46 at Ashchurch have recently begun and we are reviewing various proposals.
- 3) At Hempstead near Gloucester, works were completed to improve drainage at a waterlogged path on the Glevum Way at the Gloucester Nature Park. This was funded by some generous legacies received.
- 4) Last year, we partnered with Open Spaces and Trail Riders Fellowship and took a case to court where GCC had applied on behalf of a landowner to extinguish a green lane at Redmarley. We won the case but soon after, GCC made a new proposal to divert the lane around a barn which had been built across it and was obstructing the route. Ramblers objected to this proposal which was then withdrawn. Unfortunately, cases do need to be monitored carefully after judgements are made to ensure that they are properly delivered. This can take a lot of time, often months or years before the route is reopened.
- 5) At Barrow Wake the A417 contractor managed to damage the SSSI and has had to make repairs. Barrow Wake is now part of the A417 scheme (having previously been outside it) and drainage tanks are being installed there which is why it is closed.
- 6) A national Don't Lose Your Way programme to reinstate lost footpaths on the definitive map is progressing. A team of researchers meet regularly and some claims have now been filed with the County Council. The closing date for claims is currently 01/01/2031.
- 7) The report would not be complete this year without respectful mention of Gerry Stewart, a long time defender of paths and author of several popular promoted routes such as the Gloucestershire Way, Wysis Way and Three Choirs Way. We will do our best to continue Gerry's good works.
- 8) This year's Area's AGM is on 18 January at Kings Stanley hosted by this group, S. Cotswold with a walk before. Hope to see you there.
- 9) Finally, we look forward to the 2025 Walking Together event at Witcombe on 10 May for walkers around Gloucestershire and hope this group will offer a walk there.

If you have any concerns about paths or developments please get in touch.

### 5c Treasurer's Report

- Brian distributed the accounts at the meeting.

His report is as follows:

- **Holiday/ Social Fund:** Last year the Coaley Picnic made a profit of £54 and this year the picnic made a profit of £40 so we now have a balance in the Holiday Fund of **£335.02**. It is prudent to have about two hundred pounds in this fund for advance deposits and other contingences but we can afford to make a subsidy of at least £100 to the next social event.

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- General Fund:** Our central funding from the Ramblers this year was £444 and we also received £100 from Ramblers Worldwide Holidays after members had booked holidays with them and remembered to let RWH know of their membership of this group. We also received £140 from the sale of advertising space and £34.50 for cake sales at the AGM. This together with £64 in financial adjustments resulted in total receipts of **£782.50**. This exceeded our costs of **£711.29** (Room Hire: £30; Administration: £173.19; Newsletter and Web page: £416; Subscription to Cotswold Way Association: £50. Sundry fees: £42.10.) When this surplus of £71.21 is added to our balance at the beginning of the year (£1040.52), we have a total in the general account of **£1111.73**. The Charities Commission like us to maintain a balance of no more than our annual expenditure so we can afford to spend a few hundred pounds on pathway improvements in the next year.
- Conclusion:** Our finances are in good order and we can afford to subsidise the next social event by about £100 from the Holiday Fund. The balance in our General Fund suggests we could also afford to fund local pathway improvements with perhaps £300-£400, so we should seek out such projects.

**Proposed: Andrew Hawkins    Seconded: Mike Brown**

### 6. Election of Officers and Committee Members

Officer	Nomination	Proposed	Seconded
Group Chairman	Ann Adams )		
Vice Chairman	Sally Davis )	Block Vote	
Hon Secretary	Andrew Hawkins )		
Hon Treasurer	Brian Witcombe )	Brian Ruther	Rosemary Burne
Membership Secretary	Ros Burnip )		
Dep Membership Secretary	Janet Williams)		
Newsletter Editor	Sally Davis )	Olivia Gunn	Sue Jones
Website Editor	Sally Davis )		
Deputy Website Editor	Janet Williams)		
Walks Programme Coordinator	Karen D'Amico) Ann Adams )	Colin Boosey	Sally Davis
Publicity Officer	Vacant )		
Environment Officer	Michele Holden)	Sally Davis	Andrew Hawkins

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Committee Members	Richard Davis ) Karen D'Amico) Loren Holgate ) Tina Draper )	Sally Davis	Mike Garner
<u>Footpath Support Group</u>			
Footpath Chairman	Vacant )		
Footpath Secretary	Vacant )		
Footpath Vice Chairman	Vacant )		
Footpath Minutes Secretary	Vacant )		
Committee Members	Penny Fernando) Michele Holden)	Andrew Hawkins	Margaret Turner
Area Council Rep's	Ann Adams )	Sally Davis	Mike Brown

7. **Appointment of Hon Independent Examiner (Auditor)**

- Steve Priddey agreed to continue as the Auditor.

**Proposed: Olivia Gunn      Seconded: Andrew Hawkins**

8. **Motions Received by the Due Date**

There were no Motions.

9. **Any Other Business**

- Dual Walks – After a discussion, we will trial for the April to June 2025 Walks Programme, the possibility of dual walks on every Saturday. There will be an extra box on the submitting walks form, for people to tick if their walk will be a longer/faster walk. It was highlighted that longer walks are not necessarily faster walks.

There being no other business the Chairman closed the meeting at 13:45.