



## **MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL MEETING OF GENERAL COUNCIL HELD AT THE CONCORDE SUITE, NEC BIRMINGHAM ON 9 APRIL 2022**

### **1 Welcome and introduction**

Rebecca Dawson, chair of the board of trustees, welcomed members of General Council to the NEC. She thanked everyone for attending and said it was wonderful to be meeting in person after such a difficult two years. This was an opportunity to look back on achievements but also to look forward with optimism. The last two years had provided a space to look at what the organisation does, and we were now well placed to grasp the opportunities for encouraging walking which the pandemic had revealed. The Ramblers needed to show its relevance and to inspire a new generation of walkers. We could do this and would thrive in this new environment.

Rebecca thanked all Ramblers volunteers for their commitment and hard work. She also thanked Simon Kellas, the Governance Manager, for his on-going support which she appreciated as a first-time chair, and Tanya Curry, out-going chief executive. Tanya had done a tremendous job in difficult circumstances, having arrived shortly before the first lock-down, but she had successfully introduced changes which paved the way for a sustainable future for the organisation. Rebecca said that the new chief executive, Ross Maloney, would be taking up his post in the summer and that she looked forward to working with him on delivering the Ramblers objectives and plans for the future.

### **2 Review of the year, including financial report**

The chair invited the chief executive, Tanya Curry, and the senior leadership team to address council.

Tanya Curry said that she joined the Ramblers in February 2020 for what was intended to be an interim appointment lasting only three to six months. In the end it had proved to be a two-and half-year hectic adventure during which the senior leadership structure had been reorganised to suit the challenges and opportunities that were faced now, and would be faced in the coming years. The pandemic had been a great challenge for all charities; it hadn't been easy, and we hadn't got everything right but with a great team of staff and volunteers we were now able to look forward on a safe footing, introducing future generations to walking. Key partners, the People's Postcode Lottery (PPL) and Sport England recognised the challenge of getting more people walking and so were continuing with their support.

Tanya said that she was sad to be leaving but that she was looking forward to watching the organisation's progress from afar. She finished by thanking the board of trustees for their support during her period of office.

Tom Platt, director of operations and advocacy, paid tribute to Ramblers volunteers, especially walk leaders, now supported by new resources, including e-learning opportunities. Once restrictions started to be removed, the majority of our 485 local groups were able to restart and provide close to a full programme of group walks – with over 17,000 led walks happening over the last 6 months of the year. Together with Sport

England and local partners the long-term future of Ramblers Wellbeing Walks in England had been secured and, with our partners, over 20,000 walking for health walks had been delivered. In Scotland, walks to encourage excluded groups were being developed and, in Wales, 90 new routes aimed at children were being created. A new Paths Team had been established to bring together all support for the public rights of way network including maintenance, legal casework, the Don't Lose Your Way project, advice, and volunteer support. In Scotland, the Mapping Scotland's paths initiative was continuing and, in Wales, the Paths to Wellbeing project was overseeing the development of walks in 18 communities. Campaigns included lobbying the government to repeal the 2026 deadline for recording historic paths (which government had recently announced they would be doing), and access to nature for everyone. In Wales, there had been campaigning for access improvement grants for Welsh local authorities, and in Scotland we successfully engaged a younger audience with a new social media campaign focused on responsible access and wild camping. Internally, new means of collaborating were being developed: regional clusters and special interest groups (SIGs) which were bringing staff and volunteers together. The priorities for the future were improving communication and collaboration, walk leader recruitment, improving diversity (introducing excluded individuals and communities to walking), and better paths and access for all.

Clive Sanders, director of income and marketing, discussed several key opportunities. He said that supporter care was evolving from membership services to be a single point of contact for the whole organisation. Ensuring all our supporters and partners, however they support us get the level of help and experience they require and expect. The Ramblers' brand had been updated to be more vibrant and modern, which would help to appeal to new audiences and to grow income. Membership was growing again in the wake of Covid but there was a need to diversify sources of income: this included the introduction of a 'patron' scheme which offered partners the possibility of differing levels of financial involvement.

Glen Walker, director of people and organisational development, stressed the importance of identifying the different needs of all parts of the organisation - employees, volunteers, and members - because there was a danger of individuals being taken for granted. This disconnection would be addressed through engagement. Diversity and inclusion would be at the forefront of this work to ensure that the Ramblers remained relevant.

Suzy Russell, director of finance, performance and impact, said that there were two digital transformation schemes in hand: the CRM and the new website. Progress hadn't been as swift as anticipated and communication about this could have been better, but it was appreciated that accessible data reporting was essential. The beta phase of the Ramblers website had been launched in February.

Michael Penny, honorary treasurer, introduced the financial review and annual accounts which had been examined and been given a clean audit opinion by the auditor. He said that the Ramblers was in a good financial position but needed to remain mindful of the challenges. Total income in the last financial year had dropped to £9.7m from £12m in 2019/20. The £2.3m decrease was largely driven by the phasing of the income from the People's Postcode Lottery (PPL) and lower legacy income. Funding from PPL had continued and amounted to £2.5m per annum.

Donations and legacies income, which comprises membership income, gift aid, legacies, and donations, remained the charity's largest income sources with an overall increase of £0.6m to £6.5m (2020 £5.9m). Membership income had been impacted by the national restrictions on group walking and events during the first half of the financial year, but the second half of the year saw continued membership growth, and total membership income of £3m remained in line with the previous year. At the end of the financial year membership stood at 101,000 and had now returned to pre-pandemic levels. Legacy income was unreliable in comparison to membership income and the policy for managing the legacy pipeline had been refined. Because of delays between the granting of probate and the distribution of money it had been decided to

recognise a legacy only when the final estate accounts were received. The sums involved varied greatly from £50 to £0.5m and Michael gave thanks to everyone who remembered the Ramblers in their wills.

The board of trustees had examined the charity's reserves requirements, considering the main risks facing the organisation and taking into consideration the Charity Commission guidance and agreed that the Ramblers should seek to maintain a level of general funds (free reserves) of between three to six-months establishment and core staff costs. This equated to a range of £2.1m - £4.2m. General reserves stood at £3.6m, a level compliant with Charity Commission requirements.

Michael gave thanks to the board of trustees, Area and Group treasurers, the SLT, and finance team for their support, and another successful year.

### Questions on the annual report and accounts

Charlie Morris (Gloucestershire Area) asked why the membership system was described used the acronym CRM, where 'C' stood for customer as in 'Customer Relationship Manager'. The chair said that this was the usual name for these systems and it had no wider implications.

John Esslemont noted that page 9 of the annual report indicated a 30% reduction in led walks. He asked how many insurance claims relating to led walks had been made in the past five years and when the last such claim was made. Suzy Russell said that she did not have this information immediately available.

Charlie Bigley (Staffordshire Area) asked what the total expenditure on IT developments had been in the last year and what were the relative costs of the CRM, the website and Assemble. Suzy Russell said that the annual report showed this expenditure as an "asset under construction" and included development costs, consultants and external developers' fees. The total cost of £700,000 would be spread over five years.

Roy Hunt (East Yorkshire and Derwent Area) asked if efforts were being made to deal with the possibility of losing PPL funding after 2024. Michael Penny said that this was a possibility and that efforts were being made to mitigate any loss of funding from that source.

David Harmer (Suffolk Area) asked if the Ramblers was making a financial contribution towards the creation of the England Coast Path, which was supposed to be finished in 2020. Tom Platt said that Ramblers' contribution was through the work of its volunteers, supported by the Senior Policy Officer. There was no financial contribution. It was now hoped that the route would be approaching completion by the end of 2022.

### **3. Approval of the minutes of General Council 2021**

Council approved the minutes of General Council 2021.

### **4. Appointment of auditor**

The appointment of the firm of Crowe UK LLP was proposed by Richard May (board of trustees), seconded by Helen Tranter (board of trustees), and approved by Council.

## **5. Appointment of president and vice presidents**

Stuart Maconie, the current president, had been nominated for a sixth annual term. No other nominations were received. Mr Maconie's presidency was proposed by the chair, seconded by Ronnie Forbes (board of trustees) and he was elected *nem con*.

No new nominations for the position of vice president had been received. The following current elected vice presidents were proposed for re-election *en bloc* by Alison Mitchell (board of trustees) and Alan Austin (board of trustees): Sir Richard Lloyd Jones, Jonathan Kipling, Cath MacKay, Alan Mattingly, Dave Morris, Malcolm Petyt, Brian Reader, Paddy Tipping and Keith Wadd. All vice presidents were elected *nem con*.

The following past presidents automatically remain as vice presidents: Kate Ashbrook, Andrew Bennett, Julia Bradbury, Chris Hall, Mike Harding, Chris Smith and Janet Street-Porter.

## **6. Election of trustees**

There were seven candidates for three vacancies (each for a three-year term). These were Bola Anike, Lucy Armitage, Bekah Cork, Clive Hinton, Peter Rookes, Sarah Whitby and Anne Whitehead. As a result of the ballot the following were elected: Bola Anike, Lucy Armitage and Bekah Cork. The election result was independently scrutinised by Paddy Tipping (vice president) and Janet Davis (volunteer). The results were: Bola Anike 56, Bekah Cork 54, Lucy Armitage 46, Peter Rookes 45, Sara Whitby 43, Clive Hilton 37 and Anne Whitehead 28

## **7. Election of motions review committee members**

There were five candidates for five vacancies so no ballot was required. The motions review committee for 2022/23 therefore comprises the following Council members: Sophie Clissold-Lesser, John Esslemont, Gwyn Lewis, Holly Matthews, and John Wainwright.

## **8. Open motions: review of actions from previous years**

Council noted the report of this review.

The chair spoke in detail on motion 2019[7] (Diverse and representative General Council). She said the board had committed to collecting demographic data from General Council 2022 and that 59% of Council members had responded so far. This had shown 89% of GC members to be white British, 6.9% had said they had a disability, 80% were heterosexual and 27% were female. This latter figure was declining and was the lowest female participation since 2018 and raised the question of why fewer women were attending. Clare Wadd (Inner London area) said that her area (which was entitled to three GC members) had a policy of encouraging one new Council member and one female Council member each year. Roy Hunt (East Yorkshire and Derwent area) said this area encouraged members to attend as a visitor in the first instance but said that it was difficult to get people to attend at all without specifying the gender of Council members. John Ireland (Great Manchester and High Peak area) said that his area had no difficulty in finding Council members but that they did try to encourage new Council members or people who hadn't attended for a few years. Chris Hodgson (Ceredigion Area) said that he actively encouraged people to attend both the meetings of General Council and Welsh Council.

Lucy Robinson (board of trustees) gave feedback on the related matter of building a more diverse and democratic organisation which had been the subject of a member discussion session. This had raised several

important issues: the governance structure was felt to be outdated and opaque; it was unclear how people were 'selected' to be members of GC; there was a need for greater engagement with members using modern technology as well as face-to-face meetings; there was concern about the representativeness of GC. A review of board membership indicated that the current system which had been in existence for decades didn't guarantee a board with the range and depth of skills now needed. Good practice in the charity sector recommends that vacancies are advertised widely and then trustees selected using objective criteria informed by a skills audit. However, there remained a need to ensure that any new system was underpinned by democratic principles. The board considered that there was now an opportunity to modernise and improve engagement with members and the selection of trustees and proposed to establish a small task and finish group, comprising both trustees and members, to look actively at these issues, consult, and report back, both to General Council and the wider membership.

John Ireland (Greater Manchester and High Peak area) said that it was important to consider regional diversity, as well as gender and ethnicity.

Des Garrahan (Inner London area) welcomed this initiative and said that it was important that the organisation of General Council was examined. In particular, there needed to be more stringent criteria controlling the type of motions to be debated. It was notable that this year's motions were all on operational rather than policy matters.

Joanna Slattery (North Wales area) welcomed the proposal for a task and finish group and said that the co-option of non-members to the board should be considered.

Charlie Morris (Gloucestershire area) expressed concerns about the level of legal support available from staff and said that trustees with legal experience would be useful.

Zac Kipling (Berkshire Area) commented that it would be helpful to make it understood amongst members that it wasn't necessary to be active at area level to be active at national level.

#### Questions and comments on other open motions

Brian Reader (vice president and Surrey area) expressed concern that motion 2021[2] (action needed to increase the Ramblers membership and influence) was being closed. The chair said that this initiative was on-going 'business as usual' and would be covered in successive annual reports.

Charlie Bigley (Staffordshire area) said that he considered that only two of the four issues in motion 2021[4] (prioritise IT development for supporting, encouraging and retaining volunteers) had been dealt with: email lists were still inadequate and website support was needed. The chair said that this motion was being left open and acknowledged that it had been a difficult two years in which progress had been slower than expected.

John Ireland (Greater Manchester and High Peak area), noting that motion 2019[4] (developing links with schools, young people and their communities) was being closed, said that there was no mention in the report of packs or resources for schools. Glenda Brindle (North East Lancashire area) also expressed disappointment that this motion was being closed and said that it was vital to understand how the Ramblers work fitted into the national curriculum if this initiative was to be viable. The chair said that understanding the needs of young people and encouraging their interest in walking and the Ramblers wasn't being abandoned: it would remain an integral part of our work but would take time.

## **9. Report of the motions review committee**

Council noted the report of the motions review committee on 2022 motions. The committee was thanked for its work.

## **10. Motions submitted to General Council 2022**

### **[1] SIMPLIFICATION OF RISK ASSESSMENTS (applies to GB)**

The following motion was proposed by Steve Gillions (Berkshire Area) and seconded by Maggie Hems (Merseyside and West Cheshire area):

This General Council believes that the imposed requirement for written risk assessments in the format prescribed is unnecessary, serves no useful purpose and notes it has led to walk leaders standing down. Council urges the Board of Trustees to identify and implement a simpler and less burdensome approach to documented risk assessments for organised walks as a matter of priority.

Council further calls upon the Board to undertake urgent research and produce robust evidence into how any risks associated with Ramblers walks can best be identified and managed by walk leaders with a minimum of bureaucracy. This work should draw upon the skills and expertise of, and have direct input from, existing Group members. Progress and findings should be shared openly with all Areas and Groups on an ongoing basis.

Note: This motion was prepared by the Motions Review Committee as a combination of the motions submitted by Berkshire Area and Merseyside and West Cheshire Area

The following amendment was proposed by John Esslemont, and seconded by Sylvia Popham (both of the motions review committee)

Delete the final paragraph.

The amendment was not accepted by the proposers but, after debate, it was carried.

The substantive motion read:

This General Council believes that the imposed requirement for written risk assessments in the format prescribed is unnecessary, serves no useful purpose and notes it has led to walk leaders standing down. Council urges the Board of Trustees to identify and implement a simpler and less burdensome approach to documented risk assessments for organised walks as a matter of priority.

The amended motion was carried overwhelmingly

### **[2] WALK LEADERSHIP REQUIREMENTS (applies to GB)**

The following motion was proposed by John Esslemont (motions review committee and Buckinghamshire, Milton Keynes and W. Middlesex area) and seconded by Joanna Slattery (North Wales Area):

This General Council is gravely concerned that perceptions of bureaucracy are deterring leaders and potential leaders of group walks from offering their services. Council calls upon the Board of Trustees to ensure that, except as required by any current legislation or in the event of an incident that seems likely to lead to an insurance claim, leaders are placed under no obligation to make or keep any written or electronic records relating to their walk, either before, during or after the event. Council therefore calls upon the board to remove the requirement for written risk assessments of

group walks and, in doing so, to ensure that the absence of such records will not adversely affect the insurance cover provided for walk leaders.

**Note:** This motion has been prepared by the Motions Review Committee as a combination of two motions submitted by North Wales Area and Buckinghamshire, Milton Keynes and West Middlesex Area.

The motion was carried (48 for, 42 against, 6 abstentions)

**[3] IMPROVING COMMUNICATION AND CONSULTATION** (applies to GB)

The following motion was proposed by Colin Sefton (Kent Area) and seconded by Charlie Shepherd (Lake District area):

This General Council believes that the effectiveness of the Ramblers is being significantly diminished by poor communication, failure of meaningful consultation on nationally driven initiatives and lack of openness in debate on these initiatives. It therefore calls upon the Board of Trustees to:

- bring about substantial improvements in these areas;
- set up a process to ensure that all stakeholders, including those in Areas and Groups, are given adequate notice of planned initiatives and are fully and meaningfully consulted before decisions are made; and
- draw up and publish measures for monitoring its success in doing so and to share the results with Areas and Groups.

The motion was carried.

**[4] STRENGTHENING RAMBLERS' ROLE IN PROTECTING PATHS**

The following motion was proposed by David Radford (Essex Area) and seconded by Colin Sefton (Kent Area):

This General Council is concerned that the culture of Ramblers' staff seems to be increasingly divorced from the genuine needs of members. There appears to be a disconnect, perhaps as a result of the use of short-term contract staff and high labour turnover, leading to neglect of, or reduced capacity to support, the Ramblers' charitable object of protecting footpaths and other ways over which the public have a right of way or access on foot. Council calls upon the Board of Trustees to produce a report of actions to rectify this to be submitted to the 2023 AGM.

The following amendment was proposed by Brian Reader (vice president and Surrey Area) and seconded by Holly Matthews:

Delete first two sentences and replace with:

'This General Council is concerned that the Ramblers' charitable object of "the provision and protection of footpaths and other ways over which the public have a right of way or access on foot, including the prevention of obstruction of public rights of way" is receiving insufficient attention and resources when compared with our other charitable objects.'

This amendment was not accepted by the proposers.

After debate, the amendment was carried.

A second amendment had been proposed by the motions review committee:

In second sentence, delete from "perhaps" to "turnover".

As the Surrey area amendment was carried, this second amendment was rendered unnecessary and was not debated.

The substantive motion read:

This General Council is concerned that the Ramblers' charitable object of "the provision and protection of footpaths and other ways over which the public have a right of way or access on foot, including the prevention of obstruction of public rights of way" is receiving insufficient attention and resources when compared with our other charitable objects. Council calls upon the Board of Trustees to produce a report of actions to rectify this to be submitted to the 2023 AGM.

The substantive motion was carried.

**The following motions, which had not been put to a vote by the time specified on the agenda were, in accordance with Standing Order A12, remitted to the board of trustees for consideration:**

**[5] RETURN TO MEMBER ACTIVITIES ALONGSIDE VOLUNTEER ACTIVITIES** (Submitted by Gloucestershire Area (applies to GB))

This General Council calls upon the Board of Trustees to:

- return to member activities alongside volunteer activities;
- make information for both accessible on the website; and
- remove 'volunteer' from member role descriptions where it is not required.

An amendment had been proposed by the motions review committee

Replace "return to" by "support".

**[6] GENERAL COUNCIL MEETING FORMAT** (Submitted by Norfolk Area (applies to GB))

This General Council accepts the necessity of the changes to the format of the annual Council event caused by the Covid pandemic. Council urges the Board of Trustees to revert to the two-day format as soon as it is safe and legal to do so.

**[7] 50 YEARS ANNIVERSARY OF THE CORNWALL COAST PATH** (Submitted by Cornwall Area (applies to GB))

May 2023 marks the 50 years anniversary of the Cornwall Coast Path. Cornwall Ramblers will be celebrating that milestone during the weekend of the 20th/21st May 2023. This General Council urges members of the Ramblers to support and join Cornwall Area in celebrating the anniversary.

**[8] WALK MAGAZINE & COMMUNICATION WITH THE WIDER MEMBERSHIP** (Submitted by Leicestershire & Rutland Area (applies to GB))

This General Council requests the Board of Trustees to arrange for Walk magazine to include a section to allow Areas to communicate with members and to inform them about items of local interest.

## **11. Closing remarks**

Rebecca Dawson welcomed the three newly elected members of the board of trustees and extended her thanks to Sophie Clissold-Lesser and Kate Ashbrook who were retiring from the board. Special thanks were given to Kate Ashbrook who had been a member of the board, its predecessor the executive committee, or in



another governance role, for 40 years and hadn't missed a single board meeting. She invited Kate to address Council.

Kate said that 2022 was a significant year for walkers in many ways. It was the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the mass trespass on Kinder, the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Wolds Way, the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Cornwall Coast Path, the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Scottish Land Reform Act and the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Welsh Coast Path. Much had been achieved and there was much to celebrate but the Ramblers still needed to stand up for what it believed. Kate thanked the board, volunteers, members, and staff for their support and gave particular thanks to Tanya Curry for her leadership in difficult circumstances. Kate finished by saying that she wasn't going anywhere: she offered her future services to the organisation and said that she would carry on speaking for walkers everywhere. The chair presented Kate with a bouquet.

In drawing the meeting to a close, Rebecca thanked Council for their kindness during her first meeting as chair. She said that there was no doubt that the organisation needed to work on diversity issues to ensure that it was able to represent and inspire the wider walking community. Improving communication was vital: the board and staff also needed to listen to volunteers and members, everyone needed to enjoy their experience with Ramblers.

She thanked everyone for making the journey to Birmingham for the AGM, and board members and staff for their contributions to the meeting. She assured the meeting that in the summer the board would review arrangements for the next AGM. The meeting was formally closed at 5pm.