

CHAIR'S REPORT TO ECR AGM 2021

First and foremost I would like to welcome everybody to what I am hoping will be an in person AGM. But who knows in these strange times, please keep accessing your emails and the website for any last minute changes.

Obviously in most cases the reason people are members of ECR is to go walking and that has been anything but easy, at different times, during the last 12 months. Hopefully things have now settled down and the walks programme is up and running. It was good to hear that many people had managed to organise informal groups of 6 to go walking.

The minutes of the committee meetings go on to the website and contain my reports. Hence I am not planning on repeating all of that information.

The programme was slow to get started with many of the coordinators leading the first few walks, but now we have a full programme up until Christmas and obviously many of the coordinators will be working on the next programme. What has traditionally been a six month programme is now left up to individual coordinators to decide the period of time which is best for them and the leaders who lead their particular level of walk.

Another couple of changes which affects all leaders is that a register is no longer required but is recommended. We do have to complete a risk assessment, a copy of which is on the website, and this has to be kept for three years. Please do not be put off by this it is a very simple tick list and since we all receive our walks it is really of no consequence. Head Office say that the 3 years is a requirement of our insurance company; there is a copy of the most recent one on the website. Please also ensure that you are registered via assemble as a walk leader. I have ensured that all long-standing walk leaders are registered.

We carried out a walk leader questionnaire and received 43 respondents most of whom were walk leaders. There was not a huge demand for additional training but then maybe that's because most people were walk leaders; there was a request for training using walking apps. Several people did volunteer to help with organising social events.

There were very positive reasons for leading walks, the predominant view being that people wanted to support the programme and to give something back to members. Reasons for not leading were several which included health, age, residual Covid concern, and a certain loss of confidence following Covid lockdowns. Hardly anybody identified the increased bureaucracy as a reason for not leading.

As a result of this questionnaire the following suggestions were made:

- We should introduce a walk leaders "walk and talk" walk.
- Consider how we can increase car sharing opportunities.
- Provide more walks with themes.
- Provide walks to highlight the improvement work of the footpath Committee.
- Attempt to finish a walk with refreshments.
- Provide some tech training courses on walking apps.

It would be great if walk leaders could bear in mind some of the above suggestions when planning their walks for next year and let me know if they are picking up one of these themes.

A meeting with the walk coordinators was organised for the end of September. I felt that this was a very successful meeting and stressed what an amazing group we are. We actually put on between six and eight walks a week which appears to be far more than any other groups.

As a result of that meeting the programme has been amended from January. There will be a medium walk on a Monday as well as a Thursday. Andy will be the coordinator. The short and

long midweek walks will be on different days each week but still alternate. The website has been amended to show the correct walk lengths for each category and the printable calendar has been started up again. All of these hopefully will make life easier for everybody. I have also sent out an appeal to the full membership for help with leading walks.

I have been asked about how to cancel a walk at the last minute. Post "walk cancelled" on the notice board and Roger will put it onto the website. Obviously there are occasions when walks have to be cancelled at the last minute and so I would encourage everybody to check the website on the day prior to setting off to join a walk.

Several people seem to think that leaders need to hold a first aid certificate. This is not true. A basic first-aid pack can be helpful. In my experience, there is always somebody on a walk who has a vast knowledge of first-aid.

Sadly, we have had several deaths during the year, these are mentioned in the membership report. Long walkers wished to commemorate Alan Catherall's life and felt that some sort of improvement to a footpath would be perfect since he had been a lifelong advocate of footpath improvements. I do have to thank Neil Collie, John Goodman and Brian Richardson for suggestions about appropriate positioning of a plaque, and for sharing their wealth of knowledge about our footpath network amongst other things. Obviously much discussion went on with Lynda, Alan's wife, and the final decision is close to Bramhall and easy to access, so ideal for her. The total cost was covered by donations from the long walkers.

Cheshire East submitted a motion to conference, which was via zoom, and set a precedent since the vote was a draw. This meant the motion fell. I have to thank Dave Barraclough for all the work time and effort and energy that he put into preparing this motion and speaking on it at conference. The motion title was "Approval of new footpath applications by Local Committees". There is more information on this in the report on Lost Ways.

Finally and most importantly I want to thank some people. Just let me say that these are in no particular order!

First thanks to Dave Barraclough who has been on the footpath committee for at least 11 years, six of which he has been the Chairman. As Chair he has regularly attended the main committee meetings and this has enlightened us all of the work of the footpath committee and been a massive bonus. Dave has worked extremely hard and tirelessly challenging Head Office on some of their decisions and I'm hoping that in spite of him leaving the committee he will continue with this work!

I want to thank Sue Thersby who has been the weekend long walk coordinator for over 10 years. I'm totally impressed by the fact that she goes on virtually every weekend long walk. I'm sure there are no other walk coordinators who can say that. She has done an amazing job in a quiet calm manner. I've always been kept completely informed about her walks programme and how well it is going or not as the case may be. So a massive thank you Sue. For those of you who are wondering, John Galligan has offered to take over this role, so thanks John.

Kathryn Carty has decided to move a considerable distance away to avoid being secretary!! But she hadn't counted on zoom. Seriously Kathryn thank you so much for the work you have done in such a pleasant manner. It could not have been easy attending meetings via zoom when the rest of us were there in person but you were always calm and accommodating. I am hoping that Nigel Hersee is prepared to stand as secretary.

As many of you will remember Colin Park our publicity officer left last year. Jennefer Mellor, along with Michael Murphy and Maggie Swindells, has stepped forward and we are trying to make Facebook our main method of communication. Jennefer is prepared to join the committee so that is great news.

Obviously I need to thank all of the committee, the footpath committee, the project team especially Brian Richardson, the footpath inspectors, the walk coordinators and the walk leaders. Without all of you we would not be the amazing group that we are. So long may it last.

We are looking for somebody who is prepared to be Vice Chair this year as I plan to do one more year in the role of Chair. Obviously it would be brilliant to have somebody shadowing me through the next 12 months.

Looking forward to a pleasant social AGM at the tennis club. Refreshments would be welcome.

There is a short walk prior to the AGM with the tennis club and bar open after the walk so participants can eat their packed lunches and get a drink.

Keeping my fingers crossed that this is possible.

Jane