

Minutes of Cheshire East Area Annual General Meeting

Monday, 30th November, 2020 at 7:30pm

Held as an online meeting using the “Zoom” app.

(Please note any text in blue and in italics were points raised prior to the meeting and not at the meeting.)

Attending:

Jane Gay, Jeanette Clarke, Steve Butterfield, Liz Osborn, John Peck, Dave Barraclough, Sue Munslow, Susan Clarke, Colin Finlayson

1 Chairman’s welcome: Jane welcomed everyone to the meeting.

2 Minutes of Last Year’s AGM: the minutes of the 2019 AGM were agreed to be accurate.

With regard to the action points in the minutes; Jane and Steve had met in January of 2020 and agreed to discuss the action points at the General Council meeting in April.

However, General Council was postponed due to Covid so this discussion never took place.

It was agreed to discuss the action points now and see which ones need to be carried forward.

Action Point 1: *It was agreed that there should be liaison between the three groups and to run joint training events related to walk leadership.* We decided that this had been dealt with

Action point 2: *to hold a meeting of the website managers from the three groups to have a walk finder on the website of each group and to develop a library of walks that all members could search and use.* We felt that this was no longer relevant as all walks are widely available both on websites and on the Ramblers app.

Action Point 3: *It was agreed that we should agree and share the contents of a winter first aid kit between the three groups.*

We decided that each group had their own first aid kits and this was only relevant to those doing high level walks, so we felt it was best left to those leaders who led such walks and better developed within each group.

Action Point 4: *Ask Diane Simcoe to clarify the position relating to railway crossings and HS2 in Cheshire East.*

We felt that this had largely been covered with the recent contacts with network rail and the crossings on the Crewe to Kidsgrove line.

Action Point 5: *Peter Rookes to take back the message that there is a need for a leaflet which could be given to walkers laying out the advantages of walking with the ramblers as opposed to other affiliated groups.*

We decided not to proceed with this action point

Action Point 6: *Find out about the role of Trustees and circulate to all 3 groups.*

We concluded that this was something that individual members could find out should they wish to do so. Guidance on where to find the relevant information could be provided if needed

Action Point 7: *To look at the criteria of prioritising which lost ways would gain support and be taken forward and to look at how this is then fed back to those claiming for the lost ways. Would it be possible to arrange another meeting with either Dominic or Jack and the footpath secretaries to clarify how this prioritisation and how the costs will work in practice.*

This point will be discussed later in Any other business with the points that Dave Barraclough has raised.

For our discussion: *should there be an area footpath secretary to advise the groups on what is happening across the Cheshire East Area*

Dave Barraclough chairs the regular meetings of the area's footpath secretaries from the 3 groups.

3 Report of the work of Cheshire East Area since the last AGM.

There has been very little activity at an area level this year due to the COVID pandemic. Prior to the pandemic Jane and Steve met in January, however shortly afterwards all walking activities were suspended.

In order to access records on Assemble and to be able to contact members, Steve became area membership support. This role is not intended to undermine or replace any of the work that group membership secretaries do. The area role was to enable the secretary to be able to contact members of Cheshire East Area if needed.

There was discussion about the walks programmes of the 3 groups following the easing of restrictions. Both Congleton and East Cheshire have had extensive programmes of walks and reported having some visitors in addition to their own members.

4 Finance:

The end of year statement had been circulated prior to the meeting.

There was a discussion about the distribution of the funds to the 3 groups. East Cheshire reported that they had some definite projects that they needed their funds for: 1) Trial way marking signs. 2) Plastic stiles and finger posts. Some of this project work is being done in conjunction with Cheshire East Council. (For example; using 4 holes in the way marking signs to allow the use of cable ties).

Liz reported that the way marking on the new Market Town walk is only visible in one direction. Dave said that this walk had been developed by other organisations than Cheshire East Council, We wondered whether Ivor could look into this, so it was agreed to leave this for the Congleton group to explore.

5 Election of Officers

Chair: Jane Gay (East Cheshire)

Secretary: Steve Butterfield

Treasurer: Jeanette Clarke

Membership Support: Steve Butterfield

Auditor: Michael Dale: Congleton

Signatures for cheques: Phil Guest, Colin Finlayson and Jeanette Clarke.

6 Delegates for General Council

Jane Gay and Steve Butterfield

7 Any other Business

1: Congleton had looked at their group constitution

The meeting accepted the constitution that Congleton had decided upon. The template provided by Ramblers was used and the meeting agreed that this would be a good starting place for other groups and for the area, should they embark on developing similar constitutions.

2 Points that Dave Barraclough had asked to be included in the meeting

- 1. Is there any support from the Groups to discuss over the coming months a possible motion to General Council to restrict or reduce our membership fee in the light of competition with other walking groups? For example, ECR has this year received funding from Central Office that is below £3/member out of our subscription of £36. While the other work of Central Office is acknowledged, this must be seen in the context of local walking groups who are competing for membership where fees are generally between zero and £8/year.*

There was a discussion about this point and all the 9 members present expressed their views. It was clear that there was not a unanimous view but a range of views. Liz proposed that we ask Ramblers to reduce the cost of their head quarters - possibly by re-locating out of London.

John suggested that some research is needed to see whether membership costs are one of the main reasons for members leaving Ramblers.

Jane made the point that fees are to be / (or should be?) held until September 2021.

Dave reported that Ramblers thought that membership numbers are increasing.

It was agreed that:

- We urge Ramblers not to increase membership fees for the foreseeable future.
- Research be carried out to find the reasons for members leaving the Ramblers and to see whether membership fees for part of those reasons.

2. The Area AGM should note that the Group Footpath Secretaries are continuing their efforts to ensure that the 'Lost Ways' project is managed in order to avoid excessive claims or unintended adverse costs to both Ramblers and PROW.

There was an extensive discussion about this point. The meeting agreed that we should ask Ramblers to ensure that this is either a self funding programme or that there are not excessive costs and not using membership fees to fund it. There followed a discussion about footpaths in relation to DLYW and generally,

Liz made the point that some people join the ramblers with the sole purpose of safeguarding footpaths

John said that footpaths are mentioned in the new agricultural bill

Jane felt that the proposed ways found in DLYW should be put back to Areas and groups to prioritise. (Given that approximately 1/3 of the length of the current footpath network has been found as extra footpaths to be claimed for).

3. The Area AGM should note that on October 26th various Group representatives held a Zoom meeting with Network Rail to discuss possible changes to footpath crossings on the Crewe to Alsager line. This appeared to be a successful and co-operative meeting.

It was reported that this is ongoing project led by Sarah Williams at Network Rail. Also, Jenny Allen, regional officer for Peak and Northern footpath Society had submitted a report of their views of the proposals to Sarah Williams.

3: Video from Ramblers:

We have produced a video that explains Ramblers mission looking ahead and thanking all our volunteers and members. Please do share this with your groups so they can use it for their AGMS, and also to reach people who couldn't attend the AGMs. <https://youtu.be/AVhNOo7vA30>

As this note had been circulated prior to the meeting, all present had already watched the video so there was no need to repeat it at this meeting.

4: Charlie's motion:

It was agreed that this should be left until a meeting early next year.

Action Point:

Steve to contact Jane at the end of January 2021 to decide if and when a meeting should be held.

Meeting closed at 20:51

Subsequent to the meeting Dave has made the following points to follow up as possible motions for General Council. (Will need to be submitted by 6th March):

I felt that from our discussion of possible Motions:-

1. I was not certain that we got real agreement to challenge the Ramblers subscription level. Liz has consistently expressed a view that she is happy with what she pays. (That is not entirely my point – I believe the high level of fees must put off new members joining.) I suggest we drop this as a possible motion but we might speak in support any other motions at General Council that raise similar concerns. A Motion to ask Ramblers to limit their headquarters costs and possibly re-locate would be a better one, probably supported by many other Areas.
2. I remain keen to limit effort and expenditure on DLYW Project and am continuing to raise this with both the Project Team and the Treasurer. The recent publication of the details of all the possible 'Lost Ways' has confirmed that the majority of possible claims offer little or no benefit. There is a significant number of proposals that are now clearly impossible/ri-

diculous. For us, local examples of new paths to cross Errwood reservoir and cross Manchester Airport runways are examples!!! I think we might possibly put two Motions (or one combined Motion?) that asks:-

- All new claims for under the DLYW Project that are submitted in Ramblers name (and might incur ongoing legal costs) must be agreed as worthwhile by Area or Group Committees (or their Footpath Secretary) before submitting to a Local Authority PROW.
- Costs of the DLYW should remain ringfenced and shown in the Ramblers accounts. It is inevitable that a high proportion of claims will attract Public Enquiry and legal costs and these should not be borne by General Funds from membership fees.)