

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting of Taunton Deane Ramblers

held on Friday 26th November 2021 at 4.30pm via Zoom

Present:

Val Boswell Chair, Gill Lee Treasurer, Lynda Kearn Secretary,

Philip Bisatt, Jane Lewis, Richard Welch, Wendy M, Tim F, Ron R, Richard S, Liz H, Andy N, Val N, Mike L, Vicky R, Carol A, Shirley W, Sue C-B, Philippa K, Hazel P, Wendy H, Cath R, Tim K, Odile G-K, Rod F, Daphne H, (26 attendees in total)

1. Apologies for absence

Joy Williams, Colin Adams, Barbara C, Wendy C, Rachel C, Stephen W, Joyce L, Kathy R, Liz O, Yvonne H, Richard H, Mike W, Chris W, Jan F, Ruth F.

2. Chair's opening remarks

Val welcomed everybody to the Taunton Deane Ramblers AGM 2021. She thanked the Walk Programme co-ordinators for their work in keeping the walk programme up and running and for the volunteers who led the walks and those who attended. TDR have a substantial number of new members and Val hopes they will enjoy coming on the walks and pass on the message about how good these are. She is hoping that the annual coach trip will resume next year. Val wished everyone present a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

NB The Minutes of the 2020 AGM and all the Reports referred to below have been made available in advance on the Group's website. Voting at the 2021 AGM was done by a show of hands.

3. Minutes of the AGM held on 27 November 2020

The Minutes of the 2020 AGM were agreed by those members present.

4. Matters Arising

None

5. Annual Report

The Annual report was accepted by all present.

6. Treasurer's Report

Gill hoped that the Christmas meal will be able to go ahead next week. Two members are unable to attend but two others have filled those spaces so Gill has given a refund and there are now 24 attending. We will again be receiving the minimum amount of funding

from Area and will have the usual website expenses and we might be able to produce a paper copy of the Programme again at some point. Gill asked if anyone had any questions about the Treasurer's report but there were none.

Gill said we are looking for ideas for Rambler related items which would be of benefit for our members on which to spend some of our funds. Gill clarified that the annual coach trip is a social event so it is not allowable to use the funds to subsidise this, but members who recce the walks prior to the trip would be allowed to claim expenses. Mike L. then made a suggestion that TDR take out a group membership for the Ordnance Survey (OS) app which would allow all our walk leaders to use it. The cost would be £100 a year and this would allow unlimited use. It would allow you to carry it on your phone, to plot routes and to know where you are on the route or if you are moving away from it. Mike finds it very useful. There is a free version but the subscription version allows you to download the map and copy and share it. Tim and Odile have bought OS maps and downloaded the free version and used it to record walks but agreed there were limits imposed. Mike thought it might help to get members more engaged and give them confidence to lead some walks. Gill mentioned the two handheld GPS units which TDR had previously bought but said she personally had found them difficult to use. Liz H has a personal OS subscription and finds it very useful but asked how the group subscription would work. Mike replied that one person would be nominated to take out the subscription and then the membership code could be given out for members to use. Mike was unsure if there is a limit to how many people can use it but it is designed for charities and non profit making organisations so seems perfect for Ramblers groups to use. Mike had used it with a Meet up group he belongs to and it was offered to anyone who wanted to lead a walk. Gill said she will look into the OS group subscription and put it to the Committee at the next meeting as there was sufficient money to try it for a year. Gill also mentioned that the group hopes to be able to start doing some footpath maintenance again soon and there might be some equipment needed if that happens.

7. Committee Members' and Postholders' Reports

- **Membership Secretary**

Val N said that since the report of 1st November we have had 3 new members and 4 have left so just down one to 260 members. Val B asked if it was possible to know who has left. Gill commented that we have done well to keep our numbers at this level. Andy mentioned that he had heard yesterday that Ramblers membership is now more than 100,000. Mike said that it would be nice to see a lot more members out walking though. Gill replied that the numbers on Wednesday walks have grown and are holding up well but is hoping that perhaps in the Spring we will get more walkers on the other days but feels that we have to let people return at their own pace. Friday evening walks have now been replaced by Friday daytime walks, often followed by refreshments.

- **Area Representative**

Phil is standing down as Area representative as there will no longer be a need for a separate 'Area rep' on the Group Committee due to proposed changes to the future running of Area. If another representative is needed from our group then it should be possible to co-opt someone, which was how Phil first got involved. Andy asked if Phil was remaining as Area Chair but he is standing down at the next AGM. Originally the post was supposed to be held for one year but due to a lack of people coming forward he has been Chair for two years. The Area AGM will be held at Keinton Mandeville village hall on Sunday 13th February at 2pm with a walk at 10.30am, hosted by the South Somerset group. Les Stather will be talking about the

'Don't Lose your Way' initiative as it relates to 'lost paths' in Somerset which should be of interest to members. The hall will be open from 10am and there will be refreshments provided which are usually very nice.

Gill asked what will happen with the funding which comes to our group from Area when the proposed changes take place and Phil reassured her that there will still be an Area Treasurer to release the funds. Tim K asked where he could find out more information about the Somerset Area and Phil replied that it has its own website and confirmed that all TDR members are automatically members of the Somerset Area and are able to attend the AGM and can vote for the Area Officers. In 2023 it will be the turn of Taunton Deane to host the AGM.

- **Footpath Secretary**

As in 2020 there have been very few statutory consultations from Somerset County Council on rights of way diversions and there was no annual meeting of Group Footpath Secretaries in Somerset due to Covid restrictions, but hopefully there will be one in 2022. Les Stather is Area Footpath Secretary and is happy to continue in that role.

The major issue this year has been the Highways England proposal for the A358, which Phil doesn't feel are particularly good for walkers in the Taunton area. Les Stather has put together an Area response for the Ramblers as half the route is in the Taunton Deane group area and half in South Somerset. Several footpaths at the Taunton end are being stopped up without an alternative route provided. Phil spoke with the professional planning consultants involved with the non motorised routes. Highways England are not proposing to allow any pedestrians to cross the new A358 dual carriageway. The Area response to the current proposals is that there should be some way of crossing the dual carriageway, eg a footbridge, to allow the footpath to still be used. Phil cited examples: the footpath from Thornwater Farm at Thornfalcon which leads to Stoke St Mary and under the proposals this will be cut off and mean a long detour through Henlade to Stoke Road to reach Stoke St Mary, also the footpath at Bath House Farm near Huish Woods leading to Meare Green and Wrantage will be stopped up. The Ramblers' formal response has now been sent to Highways England and hopefully they will make some changes to the current proposal. The British Horse Society had also been involved in the discussions as they have a common interest. Phil had been to a couple of the Proposal meetings but the discussion was dominated by representatives of the local Parish and District Councils and there wasn't much chance for Ramblers as an interest group to have a say. Phil is happy at the way in which the Ramblers were consulted by Highways England but we will have to wait and see what notice is taken of what was said in our response. Tim K asked if the response suggested alternatives from an engineering point of view and Phil replied that suggestions such as footbridges or underpasses are included but obviously if the road is in a cutting then an underpass would not be feasible. In the locations of concern, they would have to either allow people to cross the road in two halves as pedestrians with a wait in the middle or provide a bridge. When the M5 was built in this area the only footbridge included was the one at Poundisford and other footpaths were cut off. Phil would not want this to happen again and had told the consultants that we need to do it better this time. Shirley commented that, at a time when walking is being encouraged by both the Government and the NHS, they shouldn't be cutting footpaths and she felt that if they can't afford a crossing then they can't afford the road! Phil agreed that this view would be supported by other groups such as cyclists as well as walkers. Phil hopes that the Ramblers response has emphasised this sufficiently to make the

point that cutting the footpath isn't good enough. Tim K asked about the legal position and Phil replied that the Ramblers are not a Statutory consultee but we do have some weight with 100,000 members, being a national organisation who are authoritative on Rights of Way issues and we have been in existence for some time. So it would be unwise from a PR prospective for Highways England if they ignored our response. Phil clarified that Somerset County Council are responsible for maintaining Rights of Way but Highways England are legally able to stop up a footpath. Wendy M mentioned that the Scout Association had raised concerns about the vehicular access to the Huish Woods site which is used by both local groups and by Scout groups and other Associated Youth groups from across the country, particularly in the summer months. There was no appreciation of the number of vehicles using the lane to the site at peak times. Wendy also expressed concern about the footpath from Bath House Farm to Wrantage mentioned previously, as the Scouts use this route regularly while out walking from the site and suggested the local Ramblers group could join up with the Scouts to object. Phil replied that the official consultation period has now ended but felt that the Ramblers' response had addressed this concern about the footpath mentioned and also that an alternative vehicular access route to Huish Woods has now been included in the proposal but this is not any help for those people on foot. Cath R also mentioned that one of our TDR members who lives at Henlade has been directly affected by the A358 proposal as part of her garden has been compulsorily purchased for the new road. Cath said that she doesn't personally agree with the road proposals. Phil made the point that as Ramblers we have to respond to the issues affecting our organisation such as footpaths, but it was possible to make a response as an individual to make your own views known.

Tim K then asked Phil about the Hillfarrance bridge mentioned in his report and also the bridge at Bradford on Tone which is currently closed because it is deemed unsafe. SCC are unable to give the bridge at Hillfarrance a high priority and there are many bridges needing repair. Shirley said that there are at least three bridges in the Trull area that are unable to be used. Phil mentioned that he had been notified today that the bridge at Sweethay has been repaired. Shirley said there is one at Angersleigh and another one between Trull Meadow and the Mill. Phil will look into both of these which have been closed by SCC. Cath raised the issue of Firepool bridge in Taunton which has been closed for at least five years and she thinks there is a notice saying it has been closed permanently. It appears as a ROW on the OS map but the next bridge, which is open, does not. Phil will investigate this one as well.

Phil then asked Tim F to talk about the blocked bridleway at Bickenhall which he mentioned in his report. The landowners wanted the path removed from the definitive map but the inspector at the inquiry ruled that it should not be deleted and this then went to an appeal in 2013 and again it was ruled that it should not be deleted. The bridleway has been redeveloped and the hedges have been allowed to grow across the route so it is completely obstructed. Despite repeated requests to the County Council and also to Neroche Parish Council, reopening the bridleway appears to be no further forward. Tim asked how many times can a landowner take action to prevent SCC from reopening a blocked ROW by lodging yet another appeal. Phil replied that ultimately the County Council can be directed by a court to take action under Section 130 of the Highways Act to reopen a ROW but all the stages have to be gone through and a record kept of what has been done, putting pressure on the local Authority. After receiving a response from SCC, Area would request a review meeting with SCC to look at outstanding issues. If no progress is

made then the next step would be Area talking with Ramblers Head Office to see if legal options should be pursued.

8. Election of Officers and Members of the Committee

No nominations have been received for members who wish to put themselves forward for Committee member posts. The existing Committee members have all agreed that they are happy to stand for re-election. Shirley W proposed that the existing Committee are elected en bloc and Carol A seconded this. A vote was then taken by the members present and the proposal was carried unanimously.

Chair	Val Boswell
Secretary	Lynda Kearn
Treasurer	Gill Lee
Committee member 1	Philip Bisatt
Committee member 2	Joy Williams
Committee member 3	Richard Welch
Committee member 4	Jane Lewis

9. Election to fill non-Committee posts

Again no nominations for these posts have been received and the postholders have all indicated that they are happy to stand for re-election. Gill proposed that these post holders are elected en bloc and Val B seconded this. Everyone present agreed and this proposal was carried.

Footpath Secretary	Philip Bisatt
Membership Secretary	Val Norris
Website Co-ordinator	Dave Patten
Programme Secretary	Joy Williams
Assistant Programme Secretaries:	
Short Sunday	Tim Knowles
All day Sunday	Colin Adams
Wednesday	Richard Welch
Friday	Mike Whitmore

10. Appointment of Accounts Examiner

Gill asked Richard Stone if he was happy to continue in this role for another year and he agreed. A vote was taken and Richard was appointed.

11. Sunday afternoon walks

Tim K had asked for this item to be added to the Agenda. He said that there seems to be an assumption that when Covid goes away there will be more short walks on a Sunday but there has only been four walk leaders so far this year so Tim feels this is over optimistic. He feels that the Sunday afternoon walks are important for working members and also where new members come to walk and perhaps younger people, so a much more varied type of walkers. Tim has been trying to engage with walkers when there is a walk, telling them that we do need new walk leaders and to try and get in touch with them. Tim mentioned that using old lists of names and telephone numbers is not recommended by the Ramblers. Instead we should be using the current contact details held by Head Office to contact our members; these can be given to other members if they will be used for a legitimate reason. A request for walk leaders is a legitimate reason if members have given

their permission to be contacted. Tim feels that to get more walk leaders it is necessary to contact members directly. Vicky R offered to lead walks; Sunday afternoons are best for her and she can think of lots of routes around Wellington, but said she finds it difficult to find the time to recce the walks and asked if it is possible for someone else to do this. Tim said as he also lives in Wellington they could get together. Andy said the problem of using old lists of names is that the people may no longer be members. The issue of giving out members' numbers and email addresses is not allowed and the only person who can send out emails is the Membership secretary, so emails asking for walk leaders can be sent out but it has to be done through Val. Tim argued that the information could be given to other members but Andy said there is the problem of ensuring that it is kept safe. Tim said that he does speak to people on walks but doesn't always know if they are members. Gill mentioned that we had sent out one Newsletter recently about the AGM to all our members and is hopeful that as walk offers increase we will again be able to send out a paper programme but she thinks that there are still members who are afraid to go out and join the walks because of Covid and this is having an impact. Lynda said that it is possible to contact the registered walk leaders for our group using the Assemble website but Andy said that any reply goes via Assemble too, the individual's email address is not visible. Tim said that quite a few people find leading a walk a big deal and need to be encouraged which requires personal contact. The list of names and contact numbers collected at the start of a walk should only be used for 'track and trace' unless that person has given permission to be contacted for another reason such as leading a walk. Mike commented that it's really difficult to get someone to offer to lead a walk if they have never done it before, you need to coach them and do it jointly; come up with the idea of a walk and walk it together. Gill commented that she is happy to go out on a recce with anyone who hasn't led a walk before. Carol suggested we make a list of members who are happy to accompany new walk leaders to encourage them and there was general agreement. Jane offered to accompany new walk leaders. Tim mentioned that he had spoken to Mike W and he is also concerned about the Friday walks, he feels the same as Tim. Gill and Carol both thought people will be more cautious about coming out on walks in the lead up to Christmas because of Covid, and wanting to see their families.

The date of the next AGM to be decided at January's Committee meeting.

Meeting closed at 5.59pm