



**The Ramblers' Association
Buckinghamshire, Milton Keynes and West Middlesex Area**

Annual Report

1 October 2009 - 30 September 2010

Annual General Meeting: 2.00pm on 5 February 2011 at Wendover Memorial Hall, HP22 6HF

In the morning, before the meeting, there will be a circular walk of about 5 miles via the canal, Halton and Wendover Woods starting at 10.00am from outside the hall in Wharf Road (Explorer 181, grid reference SP870082). There is a small car park at the hall and further parking should be possible in front of the adjacent John Colet Secondary School, or in adjacent streets. For further details contact Dan Sullivan (07931 512726).

The hall is approximately 10 minutes walk from Wendover railway station. Cross the forecourt and take a path from the corner of the car park to Forest Close. Continue ahead, turn right into Dobbins Lane and then left into Vine Trees. Where this residential road turns right take a footpath ahead leading to Aylesbury Road. Turn left and then right at a mini roundabout into Wharf Road.

Please come to the meeting: this is your opportunity to participate in the Association's democratic processes and to discuss any matters that concern you.

**For a selection of the best walks in our Area accessible by public transport visit the Area website:
www.bucks-wmiddx-ramblers.org.uk**

**Agenda for the Annual General Meeting
at 2.00 pm on Saturday 5 February 2011
in the Memorial Hall, Wendover**

1. Apologies for absence
 2. Minutes of the AGM held on Saturday 13 February 2010 (incorporated in the Annual Report)
 3. Matters arising from the minutes
 4. To receive the Annual Report and Accounts:
 - (a) Chairman's Report
 - (b) Vice Chairman's Report
 - (c) Secretary's Report
 - (d) Treasurer's Report and Accounts
 - (e) Membership Secretary's Report
 - (f) Footpath Secretary's Report
 - (g) Area Access Officer's Report
 - (h) Press Officer's Report
 - (i) News Editor's Report
 - (j) Walks Editor's Report
 - (k) London Forum Report
 - (l) Local Group Reports
 5. To consider any motions of which due notice has been received (in writing, by the Area Secretary, not less than 7 days before the meeting, i.e. by Saturday 29 January 2011)
 6. Election of Officers:
 - (a) *Chairman
 - (b) *Vice-Chairman
 - (c) *Secretary
 - (d) *Treasurer
 - (e) *Footpath Secretary
 - (f) Membership Secretary
 - (g) Press Officer
 - (h) Area Access Officer
 - (i) Area News Editor
 - (j) Countryside Secretary (*vacant*)
 - (k) Publicity Officer (*vacant*)
 - (l) Walks Editor
- Nominations are invited for all posts
Only those marked * are required by the constitution to be elected at the AGM
7. Election of Executive Committee Members not appointed by Local Groups:
 - (a) Not more than 5 representatives of Individual Members
 - (b) Not more than 5 representatives of Local Organisations affiliated to the RA
(In recent years very few of the places in the latter category have been filled)
 8. Appointment of Independent Examiner
 9. Appointment of Area representatives to General Council 2011
 10. Any other business
 11. Speaker: Eleanor Harris, Member of Ramblers' Association Board of Trustees

Ramblers' Association, Buckinghamshire, Milton Keynes and West Middlesex Area
Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held at 2.00 pm on Saturday 13 February 2010
in the Community Centre, Princes Risborough, Buckinghamshire

John Esslemont in the chair and 46 members signed the attendance list.

John Esslemont introduced the Annual General Meeting and welcomed those present including the guest speaker – Len Banister (RA Trustee, Chair London Forum). John introduced the current Area officers and asked that the meeting note with sadness that a former member of the Area Executive – Keith Potter – had recently died.

Copies of the Area annual report and information on 'motions received' were made available to all present. The Chairman reminded the meeting of the functions of RA General Council and of Trustee vacancies.

The meeting was asked to note that there were currently 3 vacancies for RA Trustees.

1. Apologies for absence were received from John Frankland and Brenda Mothersole.

2. The Minutes of the AGM held on Saturday 14th February 2009 were signed as a correct record with one correction: 4e Treasurer's Report and Accounts (line four/five). Amend as follows – delete entire line including within brackets and replace with – 'John noted that after receipt of the correct invoice we had paid BCC for Donate-a-Gate'.

3. Matters arising from the minutes. Resulting from the responses to the questionnaire mentioned in section 4(a) of the minutes the decision was made to distribute the annual report at the AGM and to others on request. To date 3 paper copies had been requested and no email copies; there had been 116 'hits' on the version included in the Area website.

4. The Annual Report and Accounts

(a) Chairman's Report

The Chairman thanked all contributors to the Annual Report. He reported that he was checking access land in the north of the county.

(b) Vice-Chairman's Report

John Elfes reported on a meeting - which he had attended in a personal capacity rather than on behalf of the Area - with some of the RA Trustees to discuss matters raised by 'concerned ramblers' and also discussed at recent Area meetings. He reported that the Trustees did have an interest in the matters raised and in seeing concerns addressed. The motions circulated today would be discussed later but he stressed that these were important and deserved due consideration as 'accountability does not exist as far as members are concerned and needs to be put back in'.

(c) Secretary's Report

Tom Berry reported that he believed that better communication was needed. He was asked to explain the comment in his report 'that the RA has some work to do to be truly representative of our society today'. He said that last year's RA General Council appeared mainly to consist of members who might be said to be 'white and middle class'. He was concerned that we must do more as an Area to make our Area and Groups more welcoming to all communities.

(d) Treasurer's Report and Accounts

John Esslemont introduced the accounts in the absence of John Frankland.

He thanked John Frankland for the abnormally large amount of work required of him this year and commented on the skilful and fair way that, despite personal reservations, he had accommodated the RA's request to reduce the Area and Group funding needs by 25%. He thanked Keith Yates for his work as Independent Examiner. He went on to thank all the Group treasurers for their input during the past year.

The meeting was asked to accept the accounts. (*Proposed: Tom Berry, Seconded by Hugh Westacott*). Accepted by all present.

(e) Membership Secretary's Report

John Wainwright noted that the latest membership information was now out and had been circulated. It was more accurate and now only current paid up members were listed. Some work remained to be done

but all should be complete fairly soon. Area figures had been revised down by some 500. A comment was made (Colin Kennedy) that it was depressing for all concerned with membership that the situation had taken so long to resolve.

John and the group membership secretaries were thanked for their work.

(f) Footpath Secretary's Report

Kate Ashbrook thanked Group Footpath secretaries and Path Checkers. She drew the attention of members to the list of vacant parishes in the back of the annual report. They were mostly in the more 'remote' areas of Bucks.

(g) Area Access Officer's report

John Elfes updated the meeting on the current position with regard to the access land at Grays Lane Bank. He also reported that the Forestry Commission was considering charging horse riders for riding on their land. He noted that heavy cuts – some 35% - were proposed to BCC Rights of Way budget for 2010/11. A decision would be made this Thursday. Kate commented that members could still state their concerns at this drastic reduction to their councillors before the meeting.

Donald MacCallum reported that Milton Keynes Access Forum had made slow progress (inadequate funding/not enough volunteers) but the RoW Improvement Plan was under way. Also, RoW funding for the coming year had not been cut so far.

(h) Press Officer's Report

Kate commented that she had put out occasional press releases.

(i) News Editors Report

Brenda was thanked for all her work.

(j) Walks Editor's Report

David reported how much he enjoyed walking over the routes and drew attention to the need to consider continuing the work in the future. He appealed for volunteers to get in touch with him.

(k) London Forum Report

Charles reported that the Forum now had a more realistic approach to its work. Plans were in place to celebrate the RA's 75th anniversary with walks along the London Loop.

(l) Local Group Reports.

John Esslemont reported that the North West London Group had decided against winding up at their recent AGM.

John Esslemont moved the adoption of the Annual Report. Proposed: Hugh Westacott. Seconded: Martin Harris.

John was thanked by Kate and all present for his work on the report.

5. To consider any motions of which due notice has been received (in writing, by the Area Secretary, not less than 7 days before the meeting, i.e. by Saturday, 6 February 2010). Two motions had been received.

(i) This AGM of the Buckinghamshire, Milton Keynes and West Middlesex Area of the Ramblers deplores Buckinghamshire County Council's proposed significant cuts to the rights-of-way budget for 2010-11, which will result in a deterioration in the condition of the public paths — highways in law — in the county. We call on the council, in recognition of the excellent value for money which public paths provide, and their significant contribution to people's health and to the county's economy, to reconsider the proposal and to ensure that any reduction in the rights-of-way budget is kept to a minimum.

(ii) This Annual General Meeting instructs the Area Secretary to submit the following motion for consideration by General Council 2010:

"This General Council acknowledges that Ramblers would be a poorer organisation without the valuable contribution made by its groups and asks the Board of Trustees to ensure that in future years groups are adequately funded to promote Ramblers' charitable objects in their territories, particularly in organising and distributing to all their members programmes of walks and other relevant activities.'

Kate Ashbrook introduced the first motion (Prop: Kate Ashbrook. Sec: John Elfes) and explained why it was important that members backed it. After discussion the motion was put to the vote: For – all present with none against and no abstentions.

John Esslemont introduced the second motion (Prop: Colin Kennedy. Sec: Liam Dineen) and stressed how important it was for Groups to be properly funded. After discussion the motion was put to the vote: For – all with one abstention and none against.

6. Election of Officers:

	<i>Elected</i>	<i>Proposed by</i>	<i>Seconded by</i>
Chairman	John Esslemont	Tom Berry	Colin Kennedy
Vice-Chairman	John Elfes	Madeleine Moody	Mike Roe
Secretary	Tom Berry	Donald MacCallum	Hugh Westacott
Treasurer	John Frankland	David Barnard	Kate Ashbrook
Footpath Secretary	Kate Ashbrook	Tom Berry	Martin Harris
Membership Sec.	John Wainwright	Paul Rhodes	Roy Johnson
Press Officer	Kate Ashbrook	Hugh Westacott	Madeleine Moody
Area Access Officer	John Elfes	Martin Harris	Hugh Westacott
Area News Editor	Brenda Mothersole	Oliver Statham	Jean Bamford
Countryside Secretary	<i>(vacant)</i>		
Publicity Officer	<i>(vacant)</i>		
Walks Editor	David Bradnack	John Esslemont	Colin Kennedy

7. Election of Executive Committee Members not appointed by Local Groups:

(a) Representatives of Individual Members

Mike Roe, David Barnard, Hugh Westacott, and Oliver Statham (*Proposed: John Elfes Secoded: Donald MacCallum*) were elected.

(b) There were no nominations for representatives of Local Organisations affiliated to the RA.

8. Appointment of Independent Examiner.

Keith Yates (*Prop: Donald MacCallum, Sec: Kate Ashbrook*) was elected Independent Examiner.

9. Appointment of representatives to the RA General Council 2010.

John Esslemont gave a brief explanation. Area is entitled to send two official representatives, entitled to speak and vote during formal GC sessions. It has also been Area policy to send up to two visitors at Area expense. Kate Ashbrook and John Esslemont are members of General Council in other capacities.

Proposed: Charles Pickett, Secoded: Mike Roe and agreed by those present at the AGM that the two representatives would be as follows: John Wainwright and John Elfes. It was noted that the committee had agreed that Chas Pickett and Paul Rhodes should attend as visitors.

10. Any other business

The Chairman drew the attention of the meeting to the other motions on the circulated sheets. These were motions coming forward to RA General Council including those resulting from the concerns raised at a meeting of ‘concerned ramblers’ held in Leeds last September. John went through the motions inviting comment on each one. The meeting generally appeared to echo some of the concerns and apparently welcomed the fact that they would be debated at RA General Council.

There were no other items under AOB.

11. After the interval Kate Ashbrook introduced the guest speaker, Len Banister – RA Trustee and Chair of the RA London Forum, who gave a very good talk outlining the issues facing the Ramblers at this time. Len stressed the background to his own work within the Ramblers. He compared the dedication of Freddy Matthews who became active on rights of way in Essex in his 50’s and was responsible for a lot of improved paths and new initiatives with that of another Essex resident – Benny Rothman – who whilst in his early 20’s took part in the Kinder trespass. Len spent some time – with good humour – criticising the work of the ‘concerned ramblers’. He said that they were too ready to blame RA staff and were never seen to praise staff for all the hard work they had done in difficult circumstances. He had little sympathy with their ‘cause’ although he admitted that things were not perfect. It was not the fault of the staff for the situation the RA had found itself in – if anything such ‘vitriol’ should be directed at the Trustees.

Len covered a lot of ground in his talk based on his experience in Essex where lots of ideas have been put into practice. He mentioned: Friends Walking Groups for those who only want to walk up to 4.5 miles; walking with Asian ladies; getting groups to raise money to cover their expenses; trying to attract younger members to established groups. He commented on communication and said that whilst ‘Walk’ magazine was a publishing success well liked by its readers it was not an ideal forum – at present - for telling members about the work of the Ramblers. It was to be the subject of discussion at a Trustees meeting.

John Esslemont thanked Len Banister for his talk, Colin Kennedy for organising the hall and leading the walk, and Joy Payne and Rosemary Weston for the refreshments.

Area Annual Report 1 October 2009 - 30 September 2010

Chairman's Report

In October 2009 we celebrated the Area's 25th Anniversary with group walks converging on Beacon Hill, access land following one of Ramblers' greatest successes, the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. In 2010 we celebrated the 75th Anniversary of the foundation of the Ramblers' Association. However, amid the celebrations there is plenty of cause for concern.

Our Beacon Hill event was attended by three County Councillors, Richard Pushman, Val Letheren and Bill Lidgate, all sympathetic to Ramblers' aims. However that has not prevented the Council's footpath team feeling the squeeze of economic pressure and we fear that, despite our campaigning efforts, there will be further cuts in its budget leading, almost inevitably, to deterioration of the footpath network.

Within Ramblers, too, financial stringency bites, though the situation seems to have improved over the last year. Though lack of time prevented the motion from our last AGM being debated at General Council, the Board of Trustees has taken on board our message that adequate funding of groups is important to the Association's wellbeing.

As the Vice Chairman reports, below, some members still have concerns about developments within the Association. While I do not share all of these, I do feel there is room for improvement in communications and consultation between Central Office and our volunteers. We could not function as we do without our dedicated walks leaders, path checkers and Group and Area officers and committee members. I thank those who give us their time and help in whatever capacity. As last year, internal changes and problems make it appropriate to pay particular tribute to our treasurers and membership secretaries. I would also like to thank, for their past work, four of our group secretaries who stood down between the year end and publication of this report: Jim Cornwell, Cathy Casey, Vivien Kermath and Tom Berry.

We were sorry to hear that, during the course of the year, one of my predecessors as Area Chairman, Barry Totterdell, had died. Amongst his other achievements, Barry edited the book of walks that has since become the basis of the walks available on our website.

John Esslemont

Vice Chairman's Report

General Council 2010, April 10th and 11th at Royal Holloway College, Egham.

John Wainwright and I attended as Area representatives. In general, the sessions were good tempered and even the more controversial motions were debated without acrimony. Discussion was certainly very lively at this Council, and the Board did not have things all their own way, which is healthy. Throughout the sessions the Chairman continually reassured Council that decisions would be taken seriously, but it remains to be seen whether the wishes of General Council carry any more weight with the Board than they have done in the last few years.

The proceedings were as follows: Saturday morning consisted of parallel seminars/workshops. It was not possible to attend all of them, but an official report may be available from Central Office later. Council proper started with a presentation of the current position and a Q&A session with the Chairman, Treasurer and Chief Executive taking the questions. Most of the questions were about the financial situation, and the problems of the preceding year. A "housekeeping" session followed with approval of minutes, Annual report and Accounts, and election of officers, including that of Julia Bradbury, who was unable to be present, as President.

Debate on motions filled the remaining three sessions of Council, and the results were:

Motion 1: An amendment to the Memorandum and Articles of the Association intended to strengthen the requirement that the Board reports to GC on action taken on motions carried at the previous GC was **carried**. **Motion 2:** An amendment to the Memorandum and Articles of the Association to increase the period of membership required for eligibility to stand for election to the Board from 12 to twenty four months was **Lost**. **Motion 3:** was highly critical of the performance of the Board and management over the past year, but was not couched as a vote of no confidence. After vigorous debate the motion was **lost** by 1 vote The Chairman conceded that such a close vote meant that all the views expressed must and would be taken into account by the Board. **Motion 4:** to ensure adequate funds for legal action on Rights of Way was amended and **carried**. **Motion 5:** A call for a campaign to open up access to woodland and riversides was **carried** after minor amendment. **Motion 6:** Setting up a working party to review the options for recreating separate organisations for Ramblers in Scotland and Wales was **carried**. **Motion 7:** on charitable status was heavily amended to leave only an internal review of the interpretation of the Charity Commissioners requirements, which was **carried**. **Motion 8:** on methods of increasing membership was **carried** after an amendment. **Motion 9:** calling for a review of Rights of Way policy, and an increase in the resources allocated to Rights of Way matters was **carried**. **Motion 10** calling upon Highway Authorities to consult on their method of prioritising Rights of Way problems was amended and **Carried**. **Motion 11** seeking to reverse Ramblers' policy on wind turbines to one more in support of them was **remitted** to the Board as time had expired. **All other motions**, including our own on Group Funding were also remitted.

Elections to the Board There were three vacancies, all of which were filled by new members, including two from the Concerned Ramblers Steering Group. Two sitting members failed to be re-elected – Len Banister, who attended our Area AGM, and Tom Fisher, who was Vice Chairman of the Board (and briefly a member of our Area Executive some years ago).

Concerned Ramblers

The Steering group appointed at the Leeds meeting considered that the decisions taken at the Leeds meeting could best be delivered as motions to General Council 2010. Since the Steering Group could not put up motions itself, Areas sympathetic to the Concerned Ramblers' aims were asked to adopt them. Wording of the motions was developed together with the Area concerned.

At General Council the bulk of these policy motions were agreed, and two of the three candidates publicly supported by CR were elected to the Board. Although this outcome was satisfactory, the Steering Group decided that there was still a lot to be done to build on what had been achieved. I was appointed Chairman of the Steering Group following Keith Wadd's election to the Board.

Since General Council, all CR policies have been reviewed. Rights of Way and Access, Democratic Governance, Accountability/Transparency and the issues surrounding Charitable Status were confirmed as the main concerns, while items of current specific concern included the future financing of Groups, increasingly prescriptive "advice" from Central Office, the ongoing lack of proper consultation, and the attempts to micro-manage volunteering. These were all endorsed at a General meeting in Birmingham on 2nd October. Additionally, the Steering Group was authorised to initiate direct discussions with the Board of Trustees.

The Steering Group notes that there were signs of improvement in the past year: the revised Board priorities are acceptable, and a little more readiness to listen is apparent. The Concerned Ramblers will continue to monitor events until certain that any improvements are real and permanent.

John Elfes

Secretary's Report

All correspondence has been dealt with. My grateful thanks to all members of the Area Committee and to those in our local groups who have cheerfully supplied information when asked.

Tom Berry

Treasurer's Report

The accounts are set out to show the amounts spent on the four main charitable objectives of the RA, namely promoting walking, promoting the integrity of the footpath network, securing greater access on foot to the countryside and protecting the outdoor environment.

The accounts and annual return of the Area to Central Office (CO) have been prepared on an accruals basis. Under accruals accounting income and expenditure are recorded in the period in which they relate. Accruals accounting is used to avoid distorting accounts and masking the true asset level.

Area was funded from CO via the budgeting system. The budgeted sum of £6,274 was requested and drawn from CO, which was 25% lower than then the previous year, as requested by CO because of the financial crisis being experienced. Area ended this year with reserves of £3475 which is about £700 above target primary because South East Walker, meetings and governance costs were lower than expected (there was probably some restraint in claims).

Groups were provided £3,854 of funding by Area; their aggregated end of year reserves stands at £4420 which is £570 higher than the previous year, which demonstrates considerable effort was made by Groups to reign in expenditure. One Group does have very low reserves which possibly mean they may require extra funding this next year despite the budget set. The CO Finance Team will conduct a review of Area and Group reserves during January/February 2011.

The shadow cast by the financial crisis the RA during 2008/09 is long and still affecting Area and Groups because the restraint on funding is being maintained by CO.

Area received 6 shares in Ramblers' Association Services Ltd in lieu of interest; making a total holding of 273 shares, valued at £1 each.

Up to date accounts are circulated to Committee Members prior to each Committee Meeting for scrutiny and subsequent approval at the Committee Meeting. Two signatories are required to make any withdrawals by cheque or bank draft from the Area's bank account. Current signatories are David Bradnack, John Elfes, John Esslemont and John Frankland.

I like to thank all the Group Treasurers and their Independent Examiners for their hard work in getting their end of year accounts and annual returns completed so duteously. I would also like thank those Group Treasurers that submitted budgets for the next financial year to 30 September 2011.

Finally I thank Keith Yates, our Independent Examiner, for all his invaluable help in scrutinising our accounts once again.

John Frankland

Note: the accounts, as approved by the Independent Examiner, are reproduced on the following page. The signed copy may be viewed on request.

INCOME & EXPENDITURE ACCOUNT FOR THE YEAR ENDED**30-Sep-10**

	<u>Year ended</u>	<u>30-Sep-2010</u>	<u>30-Sep-2009</u>
INCOME:			
Funding from Central Office		6,274	7,280
Advertising in Annual Report		0	0
Bank Interest		4	35
Interest in Shares in R.A. Services		6	11
Donation		0	0
Total Income		6,284	7,326
EXPENDITURE:			
Funding to Groups		3,854	4,376
Funds returned to Central Office		0	0
Rights of Way		0	92
Countryside Protection		0	0
Access		0	0
Promoting Walking			
- South East Walker		1,662	3,115
- Recruitment & Publicity		40	59
Governance			
- Area Committee Meetings		66	78
- Area AGM & National Meetings		383	272
- Annual Report		14	589
- Committee Members' Expenses		37	52
- Miscellaneous		0	0
Total Expenditure		6,055	8,632
SURPLUS / DEFICIT for year		229	-1,307
Funds Brought Forward from previous year		3,245	4,552
Funds Carried Forward to next year		3,475	3,245

BALANCE SHEET

Assets:			
Shares in R.A. Services Ltd		273	267
		0	0
Balance in Bank		3,998	3,087
Total Assets		4,271	3,354
Liabilities:			0
Uncleared cheques		190	
Wendover Memorial Hall - AGM 2011		100	
Creditors - Expenditure incurred before year end		507	109
Total Liabilities		797	109
NET ASSETS		£ 3,475	£ 3,245

SIGNED and DATED 10 December 2010

John D. Frankland, Hon. Treasurer

Date

INDEPENDENT EXAMINER'S STATEMENT:

Having carried out procedures in accordance with the Area and Group independent examination Guidelines, I consider the RA Buckinghamshire, Milton Keynes and West Middlesex Area accounts to have been properly prepared and give a true and fair view of the Area's finances for the year ending 30 September 2010

SIGNED and DATED 10 December 2010

Keith Yates, Hon. Independent Examiner

Date

Membership Secretary's Report

Membership figures at 30 September 2010

Area	Life 105	TOTAL 3725
	Single 2077	
	Joint 1543	
	Clubs 10	

Group Membership Figures (Last year's figures are shown to indicate level of change.)

	2010	2009	% Increase/Decrease
Amersham	573	637	-10
Aylesbury	332	368	-9.8
Hillingdon	461	551	-16.3
Milton Keynes	363	451	-19.5
North-West London	299	373	-19.8
West London	600	659	-9
Wycombe	511	572	-10.7
Chilterns 20s & 30s	169	191	-11.5
Hike MK	35	37	-5.4
Chilterns Weekend Walkers	221	134	64.9

There has been a substantial decrease in membership in the Area. This is partly due to a change in the way the membership is counted. Now, only people who have a current paid subscription are included in the membership count. Previously, people who had not renewed their membership continued to be included in the membership count for three months following the date they were due to renew. It is also partly due to the correction of an error in the CRM system relating to joint memberships. Previously, when a joint membership lapsed, only the member paying the subscription moved to a lapsed status and the secondary member remained active. This resulted in membership numbers being inflated as only the primary member would become lapsed and removed from the membership count, the secondary member would remain active and in the membership count.

Contrary to the Area trend, there has been a huge growth in membership in the Chilterns Weekend Walkers. The group has a website geared towards recruiting new members; they communicate with members and prospective members electronically with regular, friendly e-mails and they proactively encourage prospective members to join the Ramblers. This has led to them being the second fastest growing group in the Ramblers.

Membership secretaries started to receive new and improved monthly membership reports and full membership lists during the year. This addressed most of the concerns about the CRM system. Central office is continuing to develop the system to make further use of the system potential.

John Wainwright

Footpath Secretary's Report

The year was dominated by our concerns about budget cuts. At the start, we knew that the Bucks rights-of-way budget was seriously threatened, and despite strenuous lobbying and a unanimous resolution at our AGM deploring this, we learnt early in 2010 that the council was facing a cut of about 25 per cent for its works on the ground. In the autumn it initiated the Bucks Debate, in which many of our members took part via the website and meetings to press for the rights-of-way service to be protected, arguing paths are an investment. At the end of November 2010 we await the outcome with deep concern.

Our volunteer path checkers walked many miles, checking the paths in their parishes and reporting problems to the highway authorities. The results were collated by the path check coordinator for each district and borough

The results show that for Aylesbury Vale District we checked 57 out of 111 parishes and 1104 out of 2181 paths, walking 827 km and reporting 254 problems. This took at least 694 volunteer hours, where time estimates were given. The most common problems were poor or missing stiles or gates, overgrowth, cropping and missing signposts and waymarking. In Chiltern District 13 parishes and 738 paths were checked, taking 218 hours, and 139 problems were found in 442 kms of paths walked. In South Bucks District eight of the 12 parishes were checked and four problems reported with another four in Iver parish being pursued. In Wycombe District we received returns for 27 parishes, although not all the paths were checked; there were 24 problems.

In Milton Keynes, 24 of 47 parishes (322 paths) were checked, and 173 problems were found. The most common ones were missing waymarks, poor gates and stiles, overgrowth and cropping.

In Harrow, Graham Wright checked 83 paths, finding 46 problems, again mostly missing signposts. He pressed the council to allocate funds to review and update the borough's definitive map. In Brent, John Mann checked about one third of the paths, finding a few better maintained than before with less rubbish and intrusive foliage, but most were unchanged.

There were 35 path-change proposals during the year. We objected to 11 and did not object to 24. We were able to amend some to make them acceptable to us and one application was withdrawn following our objections. We did not comment on most applications to alter the status of routes because we had no evidence to offer. The Area footpath secretary and David Bradnack, who was familiar with these paths, spent some time assisting Westbury Parish Council in fighting an application from Beachborough School to close paths across the school grounds. The definitive routes end at the Oxfordshire boundary and thus the continuations must be claimed for the map. At the end of the year we were preparing for a public inquiry into the contentious plan to close a path across Pipers Corner school grounds, Hughenden.

Bucks County Council's rights-of-way liaison groups for the north and south met twice during the year and we were represented at the four meetings.

I should like to thank, in particular, Roy Johnson, Donald MacCallum, John Elfes, Martin Harris, Mike Roe, Jeff Smith, John Mann and Graham Wright for all their help in analysing path check, corresponding with path checkers, checking their own parishes, and generally giving me welcome support and assistance. We are indebted to all our path checkers for their vigilance on paths in their patch and for their advice on path changes. But we still have vacancies, so please look at the list of vacant parishes in this report and volunteer if you can (perhaps on a one-off basis first). If someone is occupying your chosen parish please let us know, as there is always scope for job-sharing.

Please see page 18 of this report for vacancies.

Kate Ashbrook

Access Officer's Report

At the time of writing, Open Access and Rights of Way are amongst the subjects that the coalition government has not pronounced upon. This leaves a good deal of uncertainty about the decadal review, where we had hoped to resolve some of the inconsistencies of the original Act, including the definition of downland.

Open Access:

Grays Lane Banks: The stalemate continues: the land is on the map, but access is denied.

Coastal Access: this appears to be going ahead, but extremely slowly. At least one local authority has refused to commit any money to it, and others may follow.

Local Access Forums:

General: I reported last year on some progress towards the establishment of an England Access Forum (EAF), and a Regional structure, which would provide a means of liaison between Forums, and with Natural England and government. Progress remains very slow.

Buckinghamshire: There have again been no applications for long term *closures* in the last twelve months. ***Bucks County Council (BCC)*** budgets have been squeezed yet again, the Rights of Way budget being reduced by a further 35%, and a freeze on filling vacancies has hit the RoW department very hard. Sadly, BCC can no longer match-fund the ***Donate-a-Gate*** scheme. ***Bucks Rights of Way Improvement Plan:*** Some bridleway improvements were completed during the year, but the cuts have stopped any further progress. There is continued interest in the creation of new ***Village Greens*** on the periphery of villages, mainly in the hope of preventing future development. ***Cattle on public Rights of Way:*** Farming representatives felt that recent high profile incidents were clouding the issue, and that the public were being worried unnecessarily. "Beware of the Bull" notices were a generic warning, and did not imply that the farmer knew a specific bull to be dangerous.

Milton Keynes: The forum has met four times this year, but financial cuts mean that there is now only one officer covering Rights of Way and Access for the whole area.

John Elfes

Press Officer's Report

We publicised our 25th anniversary event on Beacon Hill, the royal assent of the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009, our AGM resolution on the threat to the Bucks paths budget, and the subsequent threat of further cuts.

Kate Ashbrook

News Editor's Report

I thank the groups that regularly provide material for inclusion in the Bucks page of South East Walker, particularly Milton Keynes, Aylesbury and Wycombe. I would welcome more from other groups. I scan the Chiltern Society magazine for relevant snippets, for example on the 'donate a gate' scheme. I think the long time gap between collecting material and publication may deter some, whereas other groups appear to have no budding reporters within their membership.

Brenda Mothersole

Walks Editor's Report

For much of the year I was hindered by a persistent sore heel, but with help from a number of volunteers the checking of the routes was almost up to schedule. Some embarrassing errors were corrected and a number of useful improvements made. Many thanks to all.

For both the months for which I have statistics, several of the DIY walks continued to be popular. Of the described routes, those from Leighton Buzzard, Northwood, West Drayton, Beaconsfield, Monks Risborough, Oving and West Wycombe were popular, as was the map-reading exercise.

Total *visits* to the site have decreased somewhat, but not seriously. However, the extent to which the walks may have actually been *used* is indicated by the number of *downloads*, and these were less than a third of what we had last year, so it looks as if the time is ripe for some sort of relaunch, or else to wind down our commitment. Winding down need not imply closing down the walks descriptions completely, just deleting any that have been found to be seriously misleading.

However, that will be someone else's decision, as I have not really recovered a reasonable level of fitness, and I am minded to stand down.

My thanks as always to Howard Cave for his patience and technical support.

David Bradnack

Ramblers' Greater London Forum

During the year the Forum published its first statement of intent, 'A new voice for walking in London', producing little or no response from the London Boroughs, Mayor's Office or other local authorities.

The Forum's Association 75th anniversary event took place in October - a walking of the London Loop - 150 miles in approximately 10 mile sectors. Hillingdon and West London Groups organised two of the sectors.

In July Sustrans provided a presentation to the Forum on their London Greenways project - now proceeding subject to budgetary restraints. They have had remarkable success in obtaining Lottery support - £50m; to the extent they are currently carrying out capital works and employ professional traffic engineers directly in support of their campaigning. From a membership of 40,000 they muster a high percentage of volunteer participation.

Charles Pickett

Reports from Local Groups

Amersham and District Group

With 219 walks, the Group had a varied and interesting year of walking. Current members enjoyed the opportunity to meet potential new members through the Festival of Winter Walks and Get Walking Day and we are grateful to our leaders for supporting these initiatives.

The Shakespeare Way was completed during the winter ending with some lively walking in London dodging the street entertainers on the way to the Globe theatre. We also commenced the Colne Valley path in April walking through attractive villages in Essex and we completed it on our awayday in August. The Group was delighted that Chesham achieved Walkers are Welcome status. Members assisted on the publicity stall in September and with a Ramblers' member on the Chesham WaW steering group we will continue to support this project.

Madeleine Moody, Secretary

Aylesbury and District Group

Aylesbury and District continues to be a thriving and active Group with an exciting programme of walks, social activities and other events. Much has been done to recruit new members (including a well publicised and successful Get Walking Day) and to encourage and support new leaders (a well attended Walk Leaders' Meeting and an outdoor Map Reading afternoon).

Members of Aylesbury Group have been very active in the campaign to oppose plans for HS2 (the high speed rail network that would cause appalling damage to the Chilterns and beyond) including the huge amount of work done by Oliver Statham to organise the forthcoming HS2 protest walk with which the Area will be commemorating Ramblers' 75 years of successful campaigning for walkers and the countryside.

Footpath and Countryside Secretary Mike Roe works tirelessly for District and Area, monitoring and contributing to footpath and environmental issues, as well as regular articles published in SE Walker of a highly researched and informative nature.

And finally our varied walks programme has been enhanced this year by the addition of shorter, less demanding walks or 'ambles' on Tuesdays – now running at two per month and proving very popular.

Dan Sullivan, Chairman

Chilterns 20s – 30s Walking Group

We have run more walks this year compared to the last couple of years and more of those walks have been with other groups. More people led a walk and in total our walks covered over 100 miles further than last year. Having tried using our own social network website last year, we have now moved to using a facebook group page to enable social interaction between members.

We surveyed our membership in July. Most people said they walk with our group to improve or maintain fitness, meet new people or meet up with people they've met in the group. The survey suggested the members would like more walks of around 10 miles, more walks in the west of the Chilterns Area, more walks later in the afternoon/evening in the summer and more walks with an informal meal afterwards. Now we need to persuade the same members to lead walks with those features.

Paul Rhodes, Chair

Chilterns Weekend Walkers

Chilterns Weekend Walkers (CWW) has had an excellent year with an 80% increase in membership from 120 to 214, helped by the launch of our new website in January 2010 which generates 20-30 membership enquiries per month. Weekly emails to members, a Google Calendar on the website, with links to maps, and a CWW Facebook Group have all proved popular.

Tom Franklin, Chief Executive, told us at our 4th AGM in October 2010 that we are the 2nd fastest growing group in the country.

Walks have taken place every weekend with a total of 150 walks in this year's programme, a 15% increase from last year. There have been 11 weekends away, including 4 abroad and our first National Trail, The Ridgeway, over several weekends.

We tried a new innovation in the summer - a "Petal Walk" which offered 6 circular walks from a common start point in West Wycombe. This attracted our biggest ever turnout in a single day, with 91 walkers recorded (not all different people as several did multiple walks) and a combined 471 miles walked.

We organised a walk on "Get Walking Day" in May 2010 for the second year in a row which generated 17 new members for CWW.

Lucia Contrino, Secretary

Hike MK

The group slowly but surely continues to grow. Quite a strong group of walk leaders now with walks mostly every weekend. Weekends away have included Cotswolds, Norfolk and a whole week in Yorkshire for the Nid way. Railway walks have proved popular, even the longer distance Leighton Buzzard back to Milton Keynes walk. Also themed walks for Halloween and Bonfire night and mid week evening walks during the summer.

Hike MK's Facebook page has proved popular both as a communications medium for the group and for generating public interest.

The committee has also effectively grown by 3, giving the group greater stability.

Looking ahead, the Christmas party is imminent and next year we are looking forward to a week in Austria.

Simon Breen, Secretary

Hillingdon and District Group

The group continues to provide a varied walk programme - approximately two hundred this year. The Saturday morning three to four mile introductory walks, aimed at attracting public interest and new members, continue to flourish. We distribute quarterly programmes through local libraries detailing these walks.

This year we have instituted a recruitment campaign involving manned displays at local libraries and formal presentations at four local out-door events (eg; Ickenham Duckpond Market)

We foresee a shortage of walk-leaders so have started map-reading tutorials to bolster interest, hoping to assure the continuity of our walk programme.

All posts on the Group Committee, except footpath secretary, are filled for next year; Moira Parry and Viv Kermath (walks programme editor and group secretary) standing down.

The group celebrated its fortieth anniversary in February with walks and picnic lunch in Ruislip Woods.

The group walked the Uxbridge - Moor Park sector of the London Loop in October - a baton walk celebrating the seventy-fifth anniversary of the founding of the Ramblers movement. The opportunity was taken to promote publicity for group and movement in a commencement event attended by the Mayor of Hillingdon.

We have made dramatic savings in the cost of producing and conveying our programmes / newsletters by persuading more members to accept email copy, programme format changes transferred to the website and savings at the printers. These changes are reflected in our budget costs.

Charles Pickett , Chairman

Milton Keynes and District Group

A meeting of local Path Checkers was held in April and was well attended. Andy Burton, MK Council, came along and talked about his role as the Council's Rights of Way Manager. We continue to make every effort to recover lost rights of way but negotiations can be slow. Currently, this is not helped by local authority cut backs but we are optimistic that one or two cases look likely to succeed.

This year we teamed up with Milton Keynes Park Trust who put on the first Festival of Walks in Milton Keynes. Four of our members led walks which gave us an opportunity to publicise MK Ramblers. The Chairman was interviewed on 3 Counties radio at the end of 2009 about the merits of walking versus the gym!

During the year six Long Distance Paths have been walked. We have also had weekends away to the Peak District and Leominster in Herefordshire. The summer coach trip was to Castleton, Derbyshire with an almost full coach. Our regular Saturday/ Sunday and summer evening walks have been well attended with lengths from 5 to 15 miles.

Unfortunately, due to problems with the CRM, our membership records have been somewhat distorted this year but we hope to have more accurate figures for next year.

Penny Jamieson, Chairman

North West London Group

No report was received from the Group, but Area Secretary Tom Berry, who attended the Group's AGM, has supplied the following note:

The Group has continued to have a full programme of well supported Sunday walks with more recently a monthly short walk. The Group AGM was held in November at Sudbury Hill and a lively meeting was followed by a mystery walk over Horsenden Hill. The same committee was appointed and a volunteer who is willing to contribute news of the Group to South East Walker. An analysis had been done on people attending the Group's walks and the results show that all were RA members and mainly NW Group members but, partly due to the Walks Finder, other walkers had been attracted to the Group's walks.

West London Group

Out and about with Ealing and Hounslow walkers and others from wherever! So far this year we have produced 3 programmes of walks to entertain members and friends. The weather has been ideal for rambling and the Committee invited all and sundry, members and friends, to give every support to this side of our activities. If any member required information or help with our walks this was readily available from our walks organiser – Neil Marsland.

To our friends who join us who may not be members of the Ramblers we point out that the object of the Group is to provide a local meeting place and a programme of walks and maybe other activities where members can meet with each other to share a common interest. As such, all prospective members who have completed 3 walks with us must become paid-up members of the RA.

I appeal to all West London Group members – this is your group, give it all the support you can to make it a success.

Finally, by the time you read this I will have retired as Group Secretary a position I have held for 10 years. I wish my successor all the very best.

Tom Berry, Secretary

Wycombe District Group

The severe winter meant the cancellation of 5 walks, not because it was impossible to walk: rather because it was impossible to get to the start!! Despite these first cancellations in living memory and the further attrition in membership it was nonetheless a successful year in many ways with a full and varied walking programme, increased social activities, holidays, etc.

With the HQ membership system still struggling, for example in its treatment of overdues, it is difficult to get an accurate membership picture, however whichever numbers are used the trend is still sadly downwards. Our Group records indicate a net fall of 32 during the year from 569 to 537, (a loss of 97 members whilst gaining 65 new ones).

This year's 25th Group anniversary walk might best be described as "The Big One" – a 25 mile circumnavigation of High Wycombe organised and led by John Esslemont. 24 walkers completed the whole walk whilst a further 22 joined for sections of between 5 and 7 miles. Attendance at the 200 plus regular weekend, mid-week and evening walks organised by the Group during the year remained more or less constant compared with the previous year with just slight differences in the averages.

Our holidays continue to be fully subscribed successes with a week in Minorca, and a long weekend in Sidmouth, the rest home for retired Wycombe Group ramblers: three of our ex-members now living in the area organised a great hotel and walking programme. On a more social note, after the successful experiment last year, we have had a few away days outside the normal programme, Kirtlington, Hailes Abbey, etc., which look set to become a regular feature for the Group.

Again more personal milestones this year – 2 members reaching 500 walks, 1 reaching 250 and 6 reaching 100 – all fantastic achievements.

John Shipley, Secretary

Path Checkers and Co-ordinators

In earlier years we included in the Annual Report a complete list, by parish, of our Path Checkers. Partly because changes are frequent, and partly for data protection reasons we have decided, this year, to omit the list. If you wish to discuss path problems please contact us using the links on the website.

Path checkers are asked to walk all the paths in their parishes at least once a year and to report problems. They will also be consulted about any proposals for path changes. New volunteers are always welcome and should discuss what is involved with one of the people listed below. A list of vacant parishes in early December 2010 follows but if you are interested in a particular parish which is not listed please get in touch: the current Checker may be happy to share, or change, responsibilities.

Vacant parishes

Aylesbury Vale District: Akeley, Barton Hartshorn, Biddlesden, Boarstall, Calvert Green, Charndon, Chetwode, Creslow, East Claydon, Edgcott, Foscott, Gawcott with Lenborough, Granborough, Great Brickhill, Grendon Underwood, Hardwick, Hillesden, Hoggston, Hogshaw, Kingswood, Leckhampstead, Lillingstone Dayrell with Luffield Abbey, Lillingstone Lovell, Little Horwood, Ludgershall, Marsh Gibbon, Middle Claydon, Nash, Oakley, Padbury, Pitchcott, Poundon, Preston Bissett, Quainton, Radclive cum Chackmore, Shalstone, Soulbury, Steeple Claydon, Stewkley, Stoke Hammond, Stowe, Swanbourne, Thornton, Tingewick, Turweston, Twyford, Waddesdon, Water Stratford, Westbury, Westcott, Whaddon, Whitchurch, Winslow, Woodham, Worminghall, Wotton Underwood

Chiltern District: Chalfont St Giles, Great Missenden west of by-pass, Little Chalfont

Milton Keynes: Great Linford, Lathbury, Newport Pagnell

London Borough of Hounslow

Group Secretaries

Amersham & District Group	Madeleine Moody
Aylesbury & District Group	Jim Robinson
Chilterns 20s-30s Walking Group	Kate Boulter
Chilterns Weekend Walkers	Lucia Contrino
Hike MK	Simon Breen
Hillingdon & District Group	Linda Etherington
Milton Keynes & District Group	Brian Baldwin
North West London Group	Carole Swithern
West London Group	<i>Contact Area Secretary, Tom Berry</i>
Wycombe District Group	John Shipley

Group Web Sites

Chilterns 20-30s Walking Group	www.chilterns2030s.co.uk
Chilterns Weekend Walkers	www.chilternswalkers.co.uk
Hike MK	www.mk-northbucks2030s.org.uk
Hillingdon & District Group	www.hillingdonramblers.org.uk
Milton Keynes & District Group	www.mkramblers.org.uk
West London Group	www.btinternet.com/~westlondongroup

Additionally, some of the Area's Groups publicise details of some or all of their walks on the Walks Finder database on the Ramblers' Association central web site. These can be found by following appropriate links to the detailed search page of Walks Finder from the main Ramblers' Association web site, www.ramblers.org.uk; alternatively, the following address will go directly to forthcoming walks for a particular Group:

www.ramblers.co.uk/walksfinder/search.php?advanced=1&group=BUnn&zoomLevel=1

substituting	01 for <i>nn</i> for	Amersham & District Group
	02 for <i>nn</i> for	Chilterns Weekend Walkers
	03 for <i>nn</i> for	Aylesbury & District Group
	04 for <i>nn</i> for	Hillingdon & District Group
	06 for <i>nn</i> for	North West London Group
	07 for <i>nn</i> for	West London Group
	09 for <i>nn</i> for	Wycombe District Group
	10 for <i>nn</i> for	Chilterns 20-30s Walking Group

Area Executive Committee October 2009 - September 2010

Chairman	John Esslemont
Vice-Chairman	John Elfes
Secretary	Tom Berry
Treasurer	John Frankland
Footpath Secretary	Kate Ashbrook
Membership Secretary	John Wainwright
Countryside Secretary	<i>vacant</i>
News Editor	Brenda Mothersole
Publicity Officer	<i>vacant</i>
Walks Editor	David Bradnack
Press Officer	Kate Ashbrook
Access Officer	John Elfes
Representatives of Individual Members	
	David Barnard
	Mike Roe
	Oliver Statham
	Hugh Westacott
Representatives of Affiliated Local Organisations	
	<i>vacant</i>
Group Representatives	
Amersham	Jean Bamford
Aylesbury	Jim Cornwell, Dan Sullivan
Chilterns 20s-30s	Ed Pritchard, Paul Rhodes
Chilterns Weekend	Sean Moore, Mick Hill
Hike MK	Simon Breen
Hillingdon	Chas Pickett
Milton Keynes	Sue Garrett, Brian Baldwin
North West London	Roger Southgate
West London	Martin Harris
Wycombe	Colin Kennedy, John Shipley

Area website: www.bucks-wmiddx-ramblers.org.uk

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