



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

Annual Report

1 October 2010 - 30 September 2011

Annual General Meeting: 2.00pm on 11 February 2012 at the Barn Hall, Amersham Community Centre, HP6 5AH

In the morning, before the meeting, there will be a circular walk of about 5½ miles via the Chess valley and Chesham Bois starting at 10.00am from the Chiltern District Council Offices car park (free and available to the general public at weekends) next to the Council Offices in King George V Road, Amersham, Bucks HP6 5AW and opposite the library and playing fields (Explorer 172, grid reference SU967982). This car park is a few minutes walk from the railway station and bus stops, and from the Barn Hall. The walk will be led by Malcolm and Linda Daniel (Tel: 01753 883171, Mob: 07958 525466).

The hall is on the north side of the pay and display car park off Chiltern Avenue. It is approximately five minutes walk from Amersham Station and nearby bus stops. Turn right from the station forecourt and follow the pavement, crossing two ends of King George V Road, to reach the car park entrance.

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**

Note that, for data protection reasons, personal contact information has been removed from this version of the report. Use the website email facility to send a message to the Area Secretary, who can forward it to the appropriate individual.

**Agenda for the Annual General Meeting
at 2.00 pm on Saturday 11 February 2012
in the Barn Hall, Amersham Community Centre**

1. Apologies for absence
 2. Minutes of the AGM held on Saturday 5 February 2011 (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 4 February 2012)
 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 none of the places in the latter category have been filled)
 8. Appointment of Independent Examiner
 9. Appointment of Area representatives to General Council 2012
 10. Any other business
 11. Speakers: Ken Austin and Andrew Clark of Chesham Walkers are Welcome

**Ramblers' Association, Buckinghamshire, Milton Keynes and West Middlesex Area
Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held at 2.00 pm on Saturday 5 February 2011
in the Memorial Hall, Wendover, Buckinghamshire**

John Esslemont in the chair and 35 members signed the attendance list.

John Esslemont introduced the Annual General Meeting and welcomed those present including the guest speaker – Phil Marson from the Metropolitan Walkers. John introduced the current Area officers. Copies of the Area annual report and information on 'motions received' were made available to all present. John apologised that the originally announced speaker, Eleanor Harris, had been unable to attend, and to members who had requested but not received print copies of the Annual Report, whose details had been lost.

1. **Apologies for absence** were received from John Frankland, Donald MacCallum, John Shipley, Roy Johnson, Kay Coleman.

2. The **Minutes** of the AGM held on Saturday 13th February 2010 were signed as a correct record.

3. **Matters arising** from the minutes. There were no matters arising.

4. **The Annual Report and Accounts.**

(a) **Chairman's Report:**

The Chairman thanked all contributors to the Annual Report.

(b) **Vice-Chairman's Report:**

John Elfes believed the greater detail about the Ramblers General Council given in his report was useful to members. He went on to give feedback about the current position of the 'Concerned Ramblers'.

(c) **Secretary's Report:**

Tom Berry said that despite best efforts he was still the West London Group secretary (the annual report mentioned his 'retirement' from that role!).

(d) **Treasurer's Report and Accounts:**

John Esslemont introduced the accounts in the absence of John Frankland who was thanked for his time and effort with the accounts over the past year. The meeting was asked to accept the accounts. (*Proposed:* Tom Berry, *Seconded* by Oliver Statham). Accepted by all present.

(e) **Membership Secretary's Report:**

John Wainwright noted that at the end of last year and 3 months into the current RA year figures showed a drop of 5000 on a year ago possibly due to bad weather and other factors. Kate Ashbrook said currently Ramblers membership was of great concern to the Ramblers Trustees and was a focus for Ramblers Central Office initiatives.

(f) **Footpath Secretary's Report:**

Kate Ashbrook thanked people who had lobbied BCC, gone to meetings, commented on-line, etc. Proposed cuts to path work this year were bad and likely to be worse next year. She 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 (Suggestion that the list of vacant parishes could appear in 'South EastWalker' with a request for volunteers). They were mostly in the more 'remote' areas of Bucks. The lack of attendance from ramblers in the south at BCC Rights of Way Liaison Group was commented on.

(g) **Area Access Officer's report:**

John Elfes said the Government had not so far mentioned open access or rights of way matters but their plans to sell Forestry Commission land had attracted a great deal of opposition. Other matters mentioned were the 'Donate a Gate' scheme, new village greens, problems with cattle/bulls in fields – notices, Milton Keynes forum. John was asked about the current Ramblers position on the sale of Forestry land. Kate said that the Ramblers had asked that current permitted public access be made permanent access whenever forestry land was sold. No satisfactory answer had been received from Government so the Ramblers current position was to oppose the sale.

(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 had enjoyed walking over the routes although he wondered how much some of the walks from the website were used. He announced that he would not be continuing and was thanked for all his work.

(k) London Forum Report:

Charles reported that the Forum now had become a more active body with the RA's 75th anniversary and the walk the Loop event. He was thanked for his work.

(l) Local Group Reports:

Noted.

John Esslemont asked the meeting to approve the Annual Report. Proposed: Jim Robinson Seconded: Colin Kennedy. Accepted by all present. John was thanked 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, 29 January 2011). Two motions had been received.

1. *This AGM calls upon the Area Secretary to submit the following motion for consideration by General Council 2011: This General Council is concerned that the complexity of the Walk Leaders Checklist (now under revision) may deter current and potential new walk leaders and, therefore, calls on the Board of Trustees to substitute a simplified version limited to basic essential recommendations, supplemented, where appropriate, by separate documents giving codes of best practice for particular situations, such as walks in remote or mountainous areas and walks designed for children or vulnerable adults.*

2. *This AGM calls upon the Area Secretary to submit the following motion for consideration by General Council 2011: This General Council believes that construction of the HS2 rail link would scar one of the most attractive areas of England, destroy a large number of rights of way and adversely affect many local communities with no corresponding benefit to them. It therefore calls upon the Board of Trustees to oppose outright the construction of HS2, and to seek out and join other like-minded bodies in opposing it.*

Charles Pickett introduced the first motion (Prop: Chas Pickett. Sec: Marjorie Fox) 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.

Jim Robinson introduced the second motion (Prop: Jim Robinson. Sec: Dan Sullivan) and stressed how important it was for Ramblers members to support it.

John Esslemont told the meeting that he had discussed the HS2 proposals with other affected Ramblers Areas and had arranged for Tom Franklin to seek clarification of the effects on footpaths. Oxfordshire Area were likely to vote against a motion totally opposing HS2.

Jim Copley proposed and Paul Rhodes seconded an amendment to remove the words "with no corresponding benefit to them". The amendment was carried.

Kate Ashbrook proposed and John Esslemont seconded a further amendment as follows: insert ", which " before "would scar", replace "one of the most" by "many", insert ", is premature" at end of first sentence and amend last sentence to read "It therefore calls upon the Board of Trustees to oppose outright the construction of HS2 until all the alternatives have been fully, publicly and independently costed and considered at a public inquiry, and to seek out and join other like-minded bodies in opposing it". The amendment was carried.

After further discussion the amended motion was put to the vote. For – all present apart from one abstention, none against.

John Esslemont explained that Ramblers' Standing Orders only permitted an Area to submit one motion for General Council and that it would, therefore, be necessary to choose between the two. He disclosed that Warwickshire Area's AGM had already agreed a motion opposing HS2, and explained that when two similar motions were submitted for General Council the Agenda Committee would produce a composite version.

After discussion 12 members voted to submit the motion on the Walk Leaders Checklist, while a larger number voted to submit the motion on HS2. Therefore the latter was agreed to be the Area motion going forward to RA General Council in April. **Action: Area Secretary**

Chas Pickett would investigate whether another Area would be willing to submit the other motion.

6. Election of Officers:

	<i>Elected</i>	<i>Proposed by</i>	<i>Seconded by</i>
Chairman	John Esslemont	Tom Berry	Kate Ashbrook
Vice-Chairman	John Elfes	Madeleine Moody	Oliver Statham
Secretary	Tom Berry	Kate Ashbrook	John Esslemont
Treasurer	John Frankland	Tom Berry	John Esslemont
Footpath Secretary	Kate Ashbrook	Colin Kennedy	Hugh Westacott
Membership Sec.	John Wainwright	Paul Rhodes	Liam Dineen
Press Officer	Kate Ashbrook	Hugh Westacott	Paul Rhodes
Area Access Officer	John Elfes	Jean Bamford	Oliver Statham
Area News Editor	Brenda Mothersole	John Esslemont	Julia Drummond
Countryside Secretary (vacant)			
Publicity Officer (vacant)			
Walks Editor	Hugh Westacott	Charles Pickett	Colin Kennedy

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

(a) **Representatives of Individual Members** David Barnard and Oliver Statham (*Proposed:* Dan Sullivan *Seconded:* Julia Drummond) were elected. Mike Roe was thanked for all his work over the years.

(b) There were no nominations for representatives of Local Organisations affiliated to the RA. This was commented on and it was agreed that John Wainwright would contact them and report back to an Area committee meeting. **Action: Area Membership Secretary.**

8. Appointment of Independent Examiner.

Keith Yates (*Proposed:* John Esslemont, *Seconded:* Tom Berry) was elected Independent Examiner.

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

John Esslemont gave a brief explanation. The Area is entitled to send two official Area 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: John Esslemont, *Seconded:* Charles Pickett and agreed by those present at the AGM that the two representatives would be as follows: John Wainwright and Paul Rhodes. It was noted that the committee had agreed that John Elfes attend as a visitor and that Chas Pickett was interested in attending.

Action: Area Secretary.

10. Any other business

The Chairman drew the attention of the meeting to next years Area AGM and the question of a speaker. Andrew Clark from Chesham 'Walkers are welcome' had offered to talk about the scheme. It was agreed to contact him and confirm details. There were no other items under AOB.

11. After the interval John Esslemont introduced the guest speaker, Phil Marson, who gave a very good talk on the success of the Metropolitan Walkers Group, its position now and how this was achieved giving details such as 100 leaders/5 or 6 walks each weekend/high turnover of members/Capital walkers/Saturday strollers for walkers who want to do 5 miles or less. He said every Ramblers Area is different. Inner London has no definitive map, no country path network, very good public transport system – best in the country. He joined the RA as a result of publicity surrounding Nicholas Van Hoogstraten and not because of walking with a group. He stressed that a successful recruitment campaign goes together with membership. More members mean new ideas and more 'weight'. He commented on age related groups saying they had their place and were very successful but he believed that traditional RA groups still had a place – lots of members, resource, However, he went on to say that they could be a focus of growth but needed to identify strengths and their market. Look at public transport, programme variety such as themed walks, heritage walks, nature walks. They could focus on something they do well and publicise it. Given comments on finding people to do voluntary work it was an important task to work on 'succession' to ensure the right people were attracted to ensure a successful group.

John Esslemont thanked Phil Marson for his talk, Oliver Statham for organising the hall, Dan Sullivan for leading the walk and Jim Robinson for back-marking, and Anne Statham and Julia Drummond for the refreshments.

Area Annual Report 1 October 2010 - 30 September 2011

Ramblers' 75th Anniversary

The anniversary (calendar) year was 2010. Our celebratory event took place in November, and hence within the current Ramblers' reporting year. Oliver Statham, with assistance from Martin Harris and others, organised a very successful day, and deserves our sincere thanks. His report follows.

Buckinghamshire, Milton Keynes and West Middlesex Area of the Ramblers chose to mark the 75th Anniversary of the founding of the Ramblers' Association by organising a Public Day of linked walks on Saturday 13th November 2010 to highlight the threat posed by the construction and operation of the proposed ultra-high-speed rail line, HS2, to the Rights of Way Network.

A 10 mile figure of eight circuit around Wendover was covered, with options to complete the full distance or only participate in either the morning or afternoon 5 mile loops. The specially selected route included both footpaths and bridleways which would either be obliterated, severed or made intolerable for recreational use by the proposed line of track. The walk route also embraced a number of vantage points where the likely adverse impact of the railway on the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty could clearly be demonstrated.

During the day over 300 walkers participated and those present at the outset were greeted with a short address by Sir John Johnson, retiring Chairman of the Chilterns Conservation Board. Additionally the Area Chairman read a message of support from Julia Bradbury, of TV's Wainwright Walks fame, President of the Ramblers' Association.

The organisers would like to thank the Aylesbury and District Ramblers Group for providing the 20+ walk leaders and associated back markers needed to conduct such large numbers of participants around the planned circuits.

Oliver Statham

Chairman's Report

In the absence of a Countryside Secretary I devoted considerable time during the year to matters that might otherwise have been his/her business. Foremost amongst these was HS2, which would cross our Area from end to end, despoiling part of the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and other currently tranquil areas. I made it my job to discuss with other affected Areas a form of words for a motion that would command an overwhelming majority at General Council, in which I was successful. I realise that many of our members (particularly in the Groups most affected: Aylesbury, Amersham and Hillingdon) are disappointed, even justifiably angry, that Ramblers has not adopted a more obviously robust anti-HS2 policy. Nevertheless, in common with other bodies that support the Campaign to Protect Rural England's *Right Lines Charter*, Ramblers is anti-HS2, unless the government can clearly demonstrate that HS2 is overwhelmingly the best option for the country's transport future which, in my opinion, can never happen. In addition to the anniversary event reported above we attempted to organise a further day of walks to highlight the matter later in the year. Unfortunately this was less successful, but I thank Martin Harris and the few other members of West London Group who participated.

On another countryside-related matter, I commented on, and contributed towards, Ramblers' response to the government's consultation on their draft National Planning Policy Framework, which has raised considerable concern in environmental organisations.

John Wainwright and Paul Rhodes were our Area's representatives at the Ramblers' General Council meeting at Oxford in April. John Elfes, Charles Pickett, Kate Ashbrook and I attended in other capacities. Declining membership was a major focus at this year's meeting, and remains the biggest problem

threatening our future. We heard from Derek Twine of the Scout Association how the scouts had faced, and turned round, a similar problem. Whether Ramblers can apply lessons learned by the scouts remains to be seen.

Other information relating to General Council can be found on the Ramblers' website. One motion potentially affecting our Area called for a reappraisal of Area structures in Greater London. At the time of writing it appears that major changes are unlikely in the foreseeable future. A motion on the walk leaders' checklist, similar to that carried at our AGM in February 2011, was unfortunately defeated.

As always, I am very conscious of the hard work done by our volunteers, both at Area and Group level. I would draw particular attention to David Bradnack, who stood down as Walks Editor for our website during the year, Brenda Mothersole, who stood down as News Editor for our page in *South East Walker* at about the end of the year, and Tom Berry, who has announced his intention not to stand for re-election as Area Secretary at the forthcoming AGM. To all of you, retiring, continuing or new in your volunteer roles, I offer sincere thanks.

John Esslemont

Vice Chairman's Report

I continue to support the Concerned Ramblers, and continue to chair its Steering Group. We were set up in 2009 in response to the Association's close encounter with bankruptcy that year, and a belief that side issues were diverting management attention from our core business of Rights of Way and Access. We identified the underlying causes of those failures as a lack of democracy, accountability and transparency in the governance of the Association, and we continue to look for ways to improve them. Communication is an essential part of all three, and, whilst there has been some improvement in the quantity, the quality leaves huge room for improvement. For example, news of the recent deal with HF Holidays was presented in such a clumsy way that it prompted a good deal of alarm and opposition. Eventually, when all the facts had been wrenched out of Central Office one by one like teeth and the contradictions sorted out, it seemed a lot better, although the treatment of Ramblers' Holidays Trust remained a disgraceful affront to the Ramblers' greatest benefactor.

We have made progress in restoring Rights of Way and Access as priorities, but improvements to democracy and accountability are proving intractable. Our representative system of democracy would be capable of good results (so long as members participate) except that, under our present arrangements, the decisions reached at General Council are not binding on the Trustees. This is said to be the direct result of our charitable status, but this remains unproven and was not answered by the review set up last year. The value of our charitable status is still questionable.

Concerned Ramblers will continue to work towards a system that is more responsive to members' wishes.

John Elfes

Secretary's Report

I have enjoyed my time in this post believing that we still have a valuable role to play in showing people the delights of walking whether in the wilder bits of our area or in enjoying a gentle stroll in the Chilterns. Our work will never be done! Personalities may come and go but so will brambles and nettles! We may not delight in trudging along the same paths checking for broken stiles and missing footbridges but it is that aspect of our work that will remain something that will always be needed. So keep up the good work and carry those secateurs!

And - the nuts and bolts of my job? All correspondence has been dealt with!

Treasurer's Report

The accounts are set out to show the amounts spent on the four main charitable objects 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.

Area is funded by Central Office via the budgeting system. The budgeted sum of £6,838 (£6274) was requested and drawn from CO, which was 9% higher than then the previous year, but was nevertheless 18% lower than 2008/09 when the RA was hit by the financial crisis. Area ended this year with reserves of £4244 (£3474) which is £770 above target.

Groups were provided with £3,873 (£3,854) of funding by Area; their aggregated end of year reserves stands at £5112 (£4420) which is £692 higher than the previous year, which again demonstrates considerable effort was made by Groups to rein in expenditure. One Group does again have very low reserves which possibly mean they may require extra funding this next year despite the allocation set by CO. The CO Finance Team will conduct a review of Area and Group reserves during January/February 2012.

Two Groups benefited from the 'March 2011 Recruitment Initiative' (Amersham by £21 & Chilterns WW by £231) whereby Groups would receive the first year's subscription where new members opted for payment by direct debit. These funds will be subjected to the 'backhand' of budget and reserves review if they are not designated to a project.

Following the restructuring of Ramblers' Association Services Ltd (RAS Ltd) the shares Area held were repurchased by RAS Ltd. Area received £281.07 for the 273 shares and interest accrued to March 2011. This concludes Area's position as a shareholder of RAS Ltd.

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, bank draft or Internet banking from the Area's bank account. Internet Banking entails the Treasurer setting up the payment and a second signatory checking and authorising the payment. Current signatories are John Elfes, John Esslemont and John Frankland.

I would 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 to thank those Group Treasurers that submitted budgets for the next financial year, to 30 September 2012.

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-11**

	<u>Year ended</u>	<u>30-Sep-2011</u>	<u>30-Sep-2010</u>
INCOME:			
Funding from Central Office		6,838	6,274
From CO - March 2011 Recruitment Initiative		252	0
Bank Interest		5	4
Repurchase of shares by RAS Ltd		-273	
Proceeds of repurchase of shares by RAS Ltd		281	6
Donation		0	0
Total Income		<u>7,103</u>	<u>6,284</u>
EXPENDITURE:			
Funding to Groups		3,873	3,854
To Groups - March 2011 Recruitment Initiative		252	0
Rights of Way		13	0
Countryside Protection		0	0
Access		0	0
Promoting Walking			
- South East Walker		1,650	1,662
- Recruitment & Publicity		41	40
Governance			
- Area Committee Meetings		105	66
- Area AGM & National Meetings		311	383
- Annual Report		34	14
- Committee Members' Expenses		21	37
- Miscellaneous		34	0
Total Expenditure		<u>6,333</u>	<u>6,055</u>
SURPLUS / DEFICIT for year		<u>770</u>	<u>229</u>
Funds Brought Forward from previous year		<u>3,475</u>	<u>3,245</u>
Funds Carried Forward to next year		<u>4,244</u>	<u>3,475</u>

BALANCE SHEET

Assets:			
Shares in R.A. Services Ltd		0	273
		0	0
Balance in Bank		4,316	3,998
Total Assets		<u>4,316</u>	<u>4,271</u>
Liabilities:			
Uncleared cheques		71.81	190
Wendover Memorial Hall - AGM 2011			100
Creditors - Expenditure incurred before year end			507
Total Liabilities		<u>72</u>	<u>797</u>
NET ASSETS		<u>£ 4,244</u>	<u>£ 3,475</u>

John D. Frankland, Hon. Treasurer

Date 13.12.11

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 2011

Keith Yates, Hon. Independent Examiner

Date 13.12.11

Membership Secretary's Report

The table below shows the total membership of the Ramblers, our Area and its constituent parts at 30 September 2011 and at 30 September 2010 for comparison.

	2011	2010	Difference	% Difference
<u>Ramblers</u>	114,707	121,498	-6,791	-6%
<u>Area</u>	3,568	3,725	-157	-4%
<u>Groups</u>				
Amersham & District	530	573	-43	-8%
Aylesbury & District	283	332	-49	-15%
Hillingdon	428	461	-33	-7%
Milton Keynes & District	349	363	-14	-4%
North West London	281	299	-18	-6%
West London	561	600	-39	-7%
Wycombe District	490	511	-21	-4%
Chilterns Weekend Walkers	317	221	96	+43%
Hike MK	36	35	1	+3%
Chilterns 20s-30s Walking	148	169	-21	-12%
	3,423	3,564	-141	-4%
<u>Individuals</u>				
Area Membership	1	0	1	-
Awaiting Allocation	1	0	1	-
Non Group Members	143	159	-16	-10%
	145	159	-14	-9%
<u>Affiliated Clubs</u>	11	10	1	10%

There is increasing concern within the Ramblers about the decline in membership over the last decade. If membership continues to decline, it is likely that financial resources, volunteer numbers and the strength of our campaigning voice will be reduced. This year the first priority in the Ramblers' business plan was to end the year with more members than we had at the start of the year. A number of new initiatives were tried by Central Office with varying success and Areas and Groups were asked to help to increase membership. It is disappointing that the Ramblers' membership continued to decline.

Our Area fared better than the Ramblers' average, mainly due to the continued strong growth of 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.

John Wainwright

Footpath Secretary's Report

We continue to be deeply concerned at the cuts to local authorities' rights-of-way budgets. While we were relieved that our lobbying at the end of last and early this year had some effect in saving the Bucks rights-of-way budget from really drastic cuts and we are grateful to councillors for giving paths priority, we now fear that this was just postponement of the inevitable and that this year there will be severe slashing of budgets. Bucks County Council's diligent rights-of-way staff give excellent value for money and it is, of course, a false economy to reduce their numbers or hours since good rights of way encourage visitors and therefore spending in the county. At the end of the year we were awaiting further news.

Our volunteer path checkers walked many miles, checking the paths in their parishes and reporting problems to the highway authorities. Our activity was greater than last year, with more paths checked and more problems reported. The results were collated by the path check coordinator for each district and borough.

In Aylesbury Vale District we checked 65 out of 111 parishes and 1204 out of 2180 paths, walking 1034 km and reporting 273 problems. This took at least 858 volunteer hours, where time estimates were given. The most common problems were overgrowth, cropping, poor or missing stiles or gates and missing signposts and waymarking. In Chiltern District 14 parishes and 589 paths were checked, taking 247 hours. 79 problems were found in the 361 km walked. In South Bucks six parishes were checked and 18 problems reported, the most common being overgrowth, missing signposts, cropping and poor stiles. In Wycombe District we received returns for all 28 parishes, although not all the paths were checked; there were 65 problems (one third of these reported in Great and Little Kimble parish). In Milton Keynes, 32 of 47 parishes (505 paths) were checked, and 268 problems were found. The most common ones were missing signposts and waymarks, poor gates and stiles, overgrowth and cropping. In Harrow, Graham Wright checked 83 paths, finding 44 problems, 37 of which he had reported in 2009 or 2010 and had not been resolved. The most common were missing signposts and poor gates and stiles. Graham communicated with Harrow School and the London Borough of Harrow over the illegally obstructed footpath 57 on the school playing-fields, threatening legal action if the path was not cleared.

There were 19 path-change proposals during the year: fewer than usual, perhaps reflecting the economic climate. We objected to three and were pleased that two were withdrawn (Granborough footpath 1 diversion and gating order for Magpie Lane at Flackwell Heath). We did not comment on most applications to alter the status of routes because we had no evidence to offer.

We were delighted that the order to divert the footpath through Piper's Corner School at Hughenden was rejected after a public inquiry at which our path checker, Bob Smith, represented us as an objector. The inspector considered that the school had not taken sufficient steps to improve its security, and that the alternative route was unsafe for walkers.

We managed to influence the decisions of Network Rail regarding paths crossing the Chiltern Line which is being upgraded. For instance we helped to persuade Network Rail to build a footbridge over the line at Birchland Wood between Seer Green and Gerrards Cross, rather than divert the path to cross the railway line at Potkilm Lane. And we achieved improvements for crossings in Chalfont St Peter and West Wycombe parishes.

At the end of the year we were preparing to appear at a public inquiry into proposed path closures at Princes Risborough in relation to an appeal against refusal of consent for housing development at Park Mill Farm. The threatened paths lead out into the countryside from the town and will be even more valuable should the development proceed.

There were two joint meetings of Bucks County Council's rights-of-way liaison groups during the year.

I should like to thank, in particular, John Elfes, Martin Harris, Roy Johnson, Donald MacCallum, John Mann, David Reed, Mike Roe, Jeff Smith, 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

Open Access

General: **Natural England** remains in being with a greatly reduced budget. There is money to continue the South East Access Forum for one year. There has been virtually no progress on **Coastal Access** or the **Decadal Review** of open access.

Restrictions: Two adjacent farms in Bledlow, **Chawley Manor Farm** and **Wayside Farm**, host shooting events, and have been allowed to restrict access accordingly. We objected to the renewal of the regime at Chawley Manor because it appeared that little actual shooting had taken place. We accept continuation of the existing exclusions at Wayside Farm, but have opposed any extension.

Local Access Forums

Buckinghamshire: Effect of budget cuts: The Rights of Way area offices in **Winslow** and **Wycombe** have been closed. Team leader posts in the Rights of Way Group have been reduced from 3 to 1. Money for **capital projects** and emergency works on Rights of Way has been maintained, but the loss of posts has slowed the rate at which it can be used. The **donate-a-gate** scheme continues, but match-funding is not guaranteed. The “**free of charge**” assistance to landowners is under review. The council has repaired or replaced structures which are the owners’ responsibility without charge. This has been done for many years, and has served to keep the network open despite uncooperative landowners. If it is closed there is bound to be deterioration of the network.

The LAF made a critical response to the draft **Natural England Countryside Code Review**, finding it overlong, and inferior to the existing code.

Applications for new **Village Greens** continue.

The Forum agreed to be involved in the groundwork for a possible bid for a **Local Nature Partnership** for Bucks and Milton Keynes. This could provide an extra source of funding for access and rights of way.

HS2 There was a majority vote in favour of opposing the preferred route as published, with emphasis on the lack of a formal environmental assessment, the effects on the Chilterns AONB and rights of way, and insisting on the full involvement of the LAF in mitigation measures, should the project go ahead.

Disabled access: 15 new gates have been installed at Ivinghoe, creating a 4km trail for mobility buggies.

BCC cabinet changes: Steven Adams has replaced Val Letheren as Cabinet member with responsibility for Rights of Way.

Milton Keynes: During the year the Forum has discussed a proposed new windfarm near Haversham, and found no reason to oppose the project, but refrained from comment. The Rights of Way Improvement Plan was approved and is in production, and further improvements to the Rights of Way network have been discussed. The work of the Forum has been hampered by difficulty in arranging meetings, and the loss of both the Rights of Way manager and one officer, leaving a single officer to hold the fort.

John Elfes

Press Officer's Report

We publicised our 75th anniversary protest event at Wendover, against the HS2 railway, in November 2010. We celebrated winning the new footbridge over the railway line at Birchland Wood between Gerrards Cross and Seer Green, saving the path through Pipers Corner School and preventing the gating of Magpie Lane, Flackwell Heath. We also broadcast our objection to the proposed renewal of access restrictions on open country at Chawley Manor Farm, West Wycombe.

Kate Ashbrook

News Editor's Report

Brenda Mothersole has been collating material for the Bucks Briefs page in South East Walker for eight years, initially as an assistant to David Bradnack. She has decided to relinquish the job, and we thank her for her work over the years. Here is her valedictory report.

I have been a member of the Ramblers' Association since the 1970s when my husband and I yearly went on walking holidays in Europe and once in the Canadian Rockies, including Vancouver Island. On becoming widowed in 1991, I joined the local Ramblers walking with both the Hillingdon and Amersham Groups. I especially enjoyed the camaraderie of Amersham's long distance walks over the winter months. These I now miss, my walking distance having been reduced to a distance of 6-7 miles. I still take an annual walking holiday with HF, as well as archeaology holidays with Andante Travels.

Over the years that I have been collecting material for the Area's page in South East Walker I have enjoyed the contact with the contributors and thank them for their willing cooperation.

Brenda Mothersole

Walks Editor's Report

During the past year, several of the walks have been revised by David Bradnack. Most of the revisions have been minor and generally involve reporting the replacement of stiles with gates and the closure of pubs. In some cases, it has been necessary to revise the public transport details as the financial cuts begin to bite.

One major obstruction, on the Winslow to Buckingham route, has been removed as a result of pressure on the landholder from the Walks Editor and the Chairman of Adstock Parish Council.

The Walks Editor has not been as active as he had hoped due to surgery on his shoulder, but during the winter months he hopes to check more routes.

Hugh Westacott

Ramblers' Greater London Forum

The Ramblers Greater London Forum met several times during the year discussing matters relevant to walking across the London region. The year culminated in a successful week of walking along the Capital Ring. Our grateful thanks go to those keen members who read the relevant background information, attend meetings, and help spread knowledge of how things are going within London.

Tom Berry

Reports from Local Groups

Amersham and District Group

With 216 walks of varying lengths during the year, there were ample opportunities for new walkers at all levels to try out walking with the Group. We all enjoyed seeing new faces particularly when they clearly enjoyed the walks as well.

The Serpent Trail snaking its way from Haslemere, Surrey to Petersfield, Hants was walked during the winter and provided some delightful sandy trails through heathland landscapes. Happily the local snakes were hibernating.

Walking holidays were enjoyed with HF at Brecon and Sedbergh during the year. Bluebell walks, a snowdrop walk, summer evening walks and the annual glow worm walk expanded the programme and proved attractive to members.

Madeleine Moody, Secretary

Aylesbury and District Group

We continue to be a strong, active group with an impressive and very varied walks programme as well as training activities, social events, publicity campaigns and walking holidays. This year's trip to Dorset, organised by Julia Drummond, was hugely successful, and the exciting new website created by our recently-appointed webmaster Maurice Crump is another achievement we can be truly proud of.

With a strong and dedicated committee, a dependable army of walk leaders, path checkers and other volunteers, and serious issues of declining membership, environmental damage and footpath protection to tackle, this group remains determined to serve our membership and the wider community by protecting the countryside we love and use, from every threat.

The group has remained active in the widespread protest over the proposal to cut a high speed rail link (HS2) through the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, causing massive and irreversible damage, pollution and noise to a landscape already much diminished by road building and urban sprawl. The Ramblers Association's reluctance, both at Area and National level, to support us in opposing this scheme outright, has been a cause of considerable annoyance and disillusionment for much of our membership.

Dan Sullivan, Chairman

Chilterns 20s – 30s Walking Group

The Chilterns 20-30s walking group has run more walks this year compared to the last couple of years and more of those walks have been jointly with other groups. More people have led walks and in total our walks covered 1 mile further than last year, although I suspect some were slightly shorter than advertised and others were longer, so overall it was probably about the same.

Like all my predecessors I am standing down after 3 years as Chair, leaving the group in the hands of a very capable committee with many of the key roles on the committee staying on and Adam Young as Chair. With a few new people also joining for the coming year with bright ideas, the future looks bright and I expect the group to continue to flourish.

Paul Rhodes, Chair

Chilterns Weekend Walkers

Chilterns Weekend Walkers (CWW) has grown this year to 337 members. We are still one of the fastest growing groups in the country.

Following our participation in the national membership recruitment initiative in March, we received an additional £231 payment from Ramblers. This helped us purchase a gate from the Chiltern Society under their "Donate a Gate" scheme.

A walks survey among members had an excellent response rate (over a third). As a result, we have launched a new walk buddy programme to replace our traditional walk leader training day. We shall also be introducing an online walks library to encourage new volunteer leaders.

The CWW website now includes a slideshow of group photos to give visitors a better idea of what we are like. We have also added a mailing list sign-up feature on the home page to make it easier for people to receive our weekly email update.

Walks can be added to our programme at short notice by emailing a generic "lead-a-walk" email address which is monitored by three committee members,

A new venture has been long distance walks. Earlier this year, half of the Ridgeway was walked in one day. A small group is training to complete a 100 mile walk next year.

Sean Moore, Chairman

Hike MK

The group remains quite active with walks almost every weekend and being well attended given our limited membership which is roughly 36. Walks have been in Clifton Reynes, Winslow, Ampthill, Old Warden, Cranfield, Woburn, Harold-Odell, Waddesdon, Tring, Milbrook, Stockgrove, Caldecotte, Shenley Wood, etc, etc, on Saturday, Sunday and mid week evenings.

There was a day trip to London (parks, museums and restaurant), weekends away in the Peak District, New Forest, Malvern Hills (incl Worcester beer fest) and a week in Scotland including Isle of Mull. We introduced themed walks, with a photography walk in Buckingham. Joint walks also with Chilterns and MK ramblers.

A good year for the website. Re-vamped and much better looking. Content revised. We have added a list of upcoming events to the home page, a calendar view and RSS feed and an auto uplink to ramblers walks finder is now available.

Socially we've had 6 monthly meals since May this year - between 5 and 10 people usually attend. There have also been regular comedy nights at the Snow Bar in CMK, and a few Whose Turn? comedy nights at Wolverton. We have also had a couple of one-off events - a bowling night in February and a very successful Wine Tasting event at Stony Wine Emporium in May rounded up with a couple of live entertainment nights at Bistro Live!

Very recently there has been an influx of interest via the group facebook page following upgrading to the facebook new format.

Simon Breen, Secretary

Hillingdon and District Group

Membership continues to 'flatline' with a negative trend; however, we are pleased to report suitable numbers coming forward to replace walk leaders retiring or no longer available. A diverse programme of about two hundred walks per year is being maintained. Two recruitment presentations at local community events and our regular Saturday morning short walks for the public (advertised locally and on Group Walks Finder) gives us publicity and useful recruitment possibilities. Our Group website is kept current with frequent photo updates.

For several years we have operated a budgeted approach to our financial management - efforts to reduce costs in all areas. As a result we are confident in reducing our cash reserve and operating, in 2011-2012, at little cost to the Association.

The group celebrated and recorded two 200th walk leaders during the year, Bob Baker and Charles Pickett. Maureen Little will no longer lead (but still participate), having led 148 walks over the years.

Charles Pickett , Chairman

Milton Keynes and District Group

Based on figures to hand we estimate that our membership numbers have reduced by 10. 60 new ones and 70 leavers!

We were delighted to be joined by the Mayor of Milton Keynes, Councillor Debbie Brock, and Iain Stewart, MP for Milton Keynes South, on our 75th anniversary Baton Walk.

We've had 11 weekends away covering the Peak District, Wye Valley, Shropshire Way, Nene Way, York, Llangollen. We've also finished the South Downs Way and Clarendon Way. We had a full programme of walks at various times and of varying lengths. The well-attended annual coach trip was to Charnwell Forest, Leicestershire. Four members led walks for Milton Keynes Parks Trust second Festival of Walks. Unfortunately one of our members had a nasty fall, a car came along the track and the driver gave her a lift. The driver turned out to be none other than the Duchess of Bedford who took her to the First Aid tent at Woburn Abbey. Grateful thanks were conveyed to the Duchess and, thankfully, our member is now fully recovered.

Thanks must go to all the leaders who put in such a lot of time and effort planning trips away and local walks.

Penny Jamieson, Chairman

North West London Group

The group has continued to have a full programme of Sunday walks supplemented by some shorter, Saturday or mid-week walks in conjunction with the West London Group. Numbers attending walks continue to be better than the low point of two years ago, largely as a result of adding walks to the Ramblers website group walks finder. Group membership numbers continue to decline, albeit that the rate of decline has slowed, with almost 300 members currently. This compares to 520 members back in 2001.

The group AGM was held in November at Sudbury Hill and a good deal of discussion occurred. Fred Hill put himself forward as chairman and was duly elected. This is the first elected chairman for the group for a good number of years - the post either having been vacant or held by an acting chairman. Fred Hill's previous post of membership secretary was taken over by Stephen Bird (previously committee member without portfolio) with the remainder of the posts filled by the current committee.

The group footpath secretary reported that there were four obstructed rights of way in the borough of Harrow and that the Ramblers had sanctioned taking legal action against Harrow School in an attempt to have one footpath re-opened. It was noted that there had been some success as a result of our efforts in that Harrow council had obtained funding and had agreed to perform a review of the definitive map in the next two years. This will hopefully result in around 150 additional footpaths, which had previously been excluded from the map, being added.

Graham Wright

West London Group

The past year has been a full and active one with a great programme of walks, talks, and holidays. A website, newsletter, and placing our walks on the Walkfinder all help us to keep in touch and make it easy for members to contact us. Of course, we only see so many of our members during the year but we value all of you – active, retired from walking, those that joined us because you believe in what we are about (keeping rights of way open, campaigning for access to the countryside, keeping watch for ‘threats’ to those rights hard fought for by ramblers past and present, and so on.).

Keeping the Group activities interesting and exciting falls to a small band of dedicated people – committee, walk leaders, helpers – without whose voluntary work we could not continue. Our grateful thanks to all of you – even a little support such as the occasional walk, a talk, providing space for a committee meeting, preparing the programme, attending Area and other meetings, doing the newsletter, organising a holiday, a special event, etc. – greatly help; so please keep up the good work.

Remember ‘to take rambles through the country we must begin by walking down some country road or byway, and then get over the stile and cross a meadow or cornfield; and so we will suppose our rambles to commence in this way’. So began ‘Floral Rambles’ in 1915 but for many of us lots must happen now before such a simple start – know where we are going, maybe join a walking group, use public transport, have no fears of mud, midges, nettles, brambles, dogs, horses, cattle, like other people, and so on. Come with us next year and see for yourselves what lovely delights lie all around!

Tom Berry, Secretary

Wycombe District Group

Another year gone, and Wycombe Group is another year older! Our overall membership has, as it has for several years now, fallen; this time from 537 to 506 a net loss of 31, no worse than most other Groups in the Area. However, on an encouraging note, the last few months of the year has seen membership stabilising as the rate of decline slows. The net loss figure of 31 does, though, hide important detail. During the year the Group actually lost 90 members primarily from amongst those who do not walk with the Group, but set against this the Group gained new members at a rate of just over one a week – a total for the year of 59, many of whom do tend to walk with us. With other Groups in the Area devoted to younger ages our recruits tend to be from the more mature part of the age spectrum – hence the opening comment!

Nonetheless, or perhaps because of this situation, ie. a higher proportion of the membership walking with the Group, this has been a very successful walking year – a busy programme of well attended walks – four per week on average; many personal milestones with 3 certificates for 250 walks, and 7 for 100 walks. Again the foreign holiday and weekend at HF Selworthy were fully subscribed and much enjoyed, as was our Xmas dinner delayed by snow till January – a tradition we’ve decided to maintain as a way of brightening the after Xmas blues.

Finally a special note of thanks to Colin Kennedy, who has decided to step down as Chairman of the Wycombe Group. Much respected for steering the Group for the past 15 years, Colin has set a record that I doubt will be equalled, never mind exceeded. Colin, thank you.

Path Checkers and Co-ordinators

Until recently 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 decided to omit the list. If you wish to discuss path problems please contact one of the people listed below who can, if necessary, put you in touch with the appropriate person.

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 2011 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, Beachampton, Biddlesden, Boarstall, Calvert Green, Charndon, Chetwode, Creslow, East Claydon, Edgcott, Edlesborough Northall and Dagnall, Foscott, Granborough, Grendon Underwood, Hardwick, Hoggston, Hogshaw, Kingswood, Leckhampstead, Lillingstone Dayrell with Luffield Abbey, Little Horwood, Ludgershall, Marsh Gibbon, Middle Claydon, Nash, Oakley, 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, Weston Turville, Whaddon, Whitchurch, Wingrave with Rowsham, Winslow, Woodham, Worminghall, Wotton Underwood

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

London Borough of Hounslow

Contacts

Area Footpath Secretary: Kate Ashbrook

Aylesbury Vale District: Mike Roe *or* Roy Johnson,

Chiltern District: John Elfes

South Buckinghamshire District: Martin Harris

Wycombe District: Jeff Smith

Milton Keynes: Donald MacCallum

London Boroughs: contact Area Footpath Secretary in first instance

Group Secretaries

Amersham & District Group	Madeleine Moody
Aylesbury & District Group	Jim Robinson
Chilterns 20s-30s Walking Group	Victoria Radcliffe Cooke
Chilterns Weekend Walkers	Jane Knowles
Hike MK	Simon Breen
Hillingdon & District Group	Linda Etherington
Milton Keynes & District Group	Ros Ford
North West London Group	Carole Swithern
West London Group	Tom Berry
Wycombe District Group	Chris Wells

Group Web Sites

Amersham & District Group	<i>in preparation when report went to press</i>
Aylesbury & District Group	www.aylesbury-ramblers.org.uk/home
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
	03 for <i>nn</i> for	Aylesbury & District Group
	04 for <i>nn</i> for	Hillingdon & District Group
	05 for <i>nn</i> for	Milton Keynes & 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
	40 for <i>nn</i> for	Chilterns Weekend Walkers
	50 for <i>nn</i> for	Hike MK
	51 for <i>nn</i> for	Chilterns 20-30s Walking Group

Area Executive Committee October 2010 - September 2011

*note: this list does **not** include any appointments since the end of September*

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	Hugh Westacott <i>(from Feb 2011: previously David Bradnack)</i>
Press Officer	Kate Ashbrook
Access Officer	John Elfes
Representatives of Individual Members	
	David Barnard
<i>(coopted Feb 2011)</i>	Roy Johnson
<i>(coopted Feb 2011)</i>	Lucia Contrino
	Oliver Statham
<i>(Hugh Westacott and Mike Roe served in this capacity until February 2011)</i>	
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, Michele Arnal <i>(for part of year)</i>
Milton Keynes	Sue Garrett
North West London	Roger Southgate, Graham Wright <i>(for part of year)</i>
West London	Martin Harris, Ken Royce <i>(for part of year)</i>
Wycombe	Colin Kennedy, John Shipley

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

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