



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

Annual Report

1 October 2017 - 30 September 2018

Annual General Meeting: 2.00 pm on 2nd February 2019 in St. Anne's Hall, Aylesbury Road, Wendover, HP22 6JG

The hall is opposite the end of Wharf Road and less than 10 minutes walk from the 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. When this residential road turns right take a footpath ahead leading to Aylesbury Road. Turn left to reach the hall entrance, on the left at a mini-roundabout. Before the meeting there will be a walk of about six miles from Wendover railway station starting at about 10.00am. If you require further information please contact the Acting Area Secretary.

If coming by car, do not use the hall car park in the morning, as there is another booking. It should be possible to find unrestricted roadside parking reasonably close to either the station or the hall. The earlier hall booking finishes, and ours starts, at 1.30pm, so there will probably be about an hour to make your own lunch arrangements between the end of the walk and access to the hall being available. At the time of writing train times were not available, but we shall make reasonable allowance for late running trains before starting the walk.

Notice is hereby given that the following motion, previously approved by the Board of Trustees, will be proposed: "That clause 3 of the Area constitution be amended by deleting ' Ealing,' , replacing the comma after 'Harrow' by ' and', and deleting ' and Hounslow'." This has the effect of adjusting the Area's territory following the transfer of West London Group and its boroughs of Ealing and Hounslow to Inner London Area.

After the formal business there will be opportunity for questions and discussion. This is your chance to make your views known on how Ramblers operates, whether locally or nationally. Please come along and exercise your democratic rights. Following a break, with light refreshments available, there will be a talk on the work of NB rIPPLE, replacing stiles by gates in northern Buckinghamshire, and we shall hear from a trustee about recent developments at national level.

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.

Note that, for data protection reasons, personal 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.

The Ramblers' Association is a company limited by guarantee, registered in England and Wales.
Company registration number: 4458492. Registered Charity in England and Wales number: 1093577.
Registered office: 2nd floor, Camelford House, 87-90 Albert Embankment, London SE1 7TW.

**Agenda for the Annual General Meeting
at 2.00 pm on Saturday 2nd February 2019
in St. Anne's Hall, Wendover**

1. Apologies for absence
2. Minutes of the AGM held on 3rd February 2018 (incorporated in the Annual Report, pages 3-5)
3. Matters arising from the minutes
4. To receive the Annual Report and Accounts:

(a) Chairman	p6	(i) News Editor	p12
(b) Acting Secretary's Report	p6	(j) Publicity Officer	p12
(c) Treasurer's Report and Accounts	p6	(k) Area Web Site	p12
(d) Footpath Secretary's Report	p9	(l) Walks Editor	p12
(e) North Bucks rRIPPLE Report	p10	(m) Member and ALO Reps	p12
(f) Membership Secretary's Report	p11	(n) Greater London	p12
(g) Access Officer's Report	p11	(o) Planning and countryside	p12
(h) Press Officer's Report	p12	(p) Local Group Reports	p13
5. To consider any motions of which due notice has been received (in writing, by the Acting Area Secretary, not less than 7 days before the meeting, i.e. by Saturday 26th January 2019), including:
"That clause 3 of the Area constitution be amended by deleting ' Ealing,' replacing the comma after 'Harrow' by ' and', and deleting ' and Hounslow'."
6. Election of Officers:

(a) *Chairman	(h) Press Officer
(b) *Vice-Chairman	(i) Access Officer
(c) *Secretary (<i>vacant</i>)	(j) News Editor (<i>vacant</i>)
(d) *Treasurer	(k) Countryside Secretary (<i>vacant</i>)
(e) *Footpath Secretary	(l) Publicity Officer (<i>vacant</i>)
(f) Membership Secretary	(m) Walks Editor (<i>vacant</i>)
(g) North Bucks rRIPPLE Coordinator	

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 Ramblers
 (In recent years none of the places in the latter category have been filled)
8. Appointment of Independent Examiner
9. Appointment of two Council Members to serve from the 2019 General Council AGM
10. Any other business
11. Speakers and discussion

**Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held at 2.00 pm on Saturday, 3rd February 2018
in Holy Trinity Church Hall, Perivale**

[Note that, for data protection reasons, personal names have been omitted from this version of the minutes, whilst they are retained in the file copy to be signed at the meeting. The relevant names can be revealed at the meeting on request.]

33 members of the Area and three visitors added their names to the attendance list.
The Chairman introduced the Annual General Meeting and welcomed those present.

1. **Apologies for absence** were received from 6 members.
2. **Minutes** of the AGM held on Saturday 4th February 2017 were signed as a correct record.
3. **Matters arising** from the minutes. Temporary path closures for HS2 construction had commenced.

4. Annual Report and Accounts

The Chairman drew attention to the printed copies of the Annual Report which contained reports from Area Officers. Additional comments made during the meeting included the following:

(a) Chairman:

Nothing to report.

(b) Acting Secretary's Report:

Nothing to add to written report.

(c) Treasurer's Report and Accounts:

Nothing to add to written report.

The meeting was asked to approve the accounts (duly proposed and seconded). Carried nem con.

(d) Footpath Secretary's Report:

The Footpath Secretary thanked Path Checkers, and those who had undertaken work in connection with East-West Rail and HS2. She reminded the meeting of the list of vacancies and highlighted the successful conclusion of the public inquiry on path diversions at Harrow School. She welcomed the return of rights of way work to Buckinghamshire County Council from Ringway Jacobs, whilst regretting the loss of a post; continued lobbying of councillors with respect to budget will be needed.

(e) North Bucks rRIPPLE Report:

The Chairman congratulated the NB rRIPPLE team on a good year's work. The Treasurer announced that £1000 gift aid had recently been received to assist in future work.

(f) Membership Secretary's Report:

The last monthly report showed Area membership to have fallen below 3000.

(g) Access Officer:

The Access Officer mentioned that money had been found by Buckinghamshire County Council for repairs to bridges. The proportion of paths in the county considered easy to use has reduced to 69%, while 86% of parishes have now taken responsibility for path maintenance. He commented on the slow timescale for DMMOs, improvements to the problem reporting system and the need to comment on local plans, now approaching their final stages.

(h) Press Officer's Report:

Nothing to add to written report.

(i) News Editor:

Nothing to add to written report..

(j) Publicity Officer:

Nothing to add to written report.

(k) Area Web Site:

Nothing to add to written report.

(l) Walks Editor:

The Acting Secretary commented on the possibility of website information becoming outdated. It was suggested that groups could be invited to check and comment.

(m) Member and ALO reports

The role of representatives of individual members was discussed.

(n) London Forum Report:

The Greater London Forum had been wound up at the end of January. Discussions would continue on how best to handle matters affecting London as a whole. The meeting paid tribute to the past work of the forum.

(o) Planning and countryside

Nothing to add to written report.

(p) Local Group Reports.

Nothing to add to written reports.

The Chairman asked the meeting to approve the Annual Report, (duly proposed and seconded). Carried nem con. The Acting Secretary was thanked for his work in editing the report.

5. Motions: 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 27th January 2017):

"This AGM approves West London Group's request to transfer to the Inner London Area, and the consequent removal of the London Boroughs of Ealing and Hounslow from the Area's territory, and instructs the Area Officers and/or the Area Executive Committee to take such steps as are necessary to facilitate the transfer, including by seeking approval from Inner London Area and the Board of Trustees." (Duly proposed and seconded, and carried nem con.)

6. Election of Officers

	<i>Elected</i>	<i>Proposed by</i>	<i>Seconded by</i>
Chairman		All duly proposed	All duly seconded
Vice-Chairman			
Secretary	<i>vacant</i>		
Treasurer			
Footpath Secretary			
Membership Secretary			
Press Officer			
Area Access Officer			
Walks Editor	<i>vacant</i>		
NB rRIPPLE Coordinator			
Area News Editor	<i>vacant</i>		
Countryside Secretary	<i>vacant</i>		
Publicity Officer	<i>vacant</i>		

In the absence of nominations for the post of Secretary, the Treasurer agreed to continue as Acting Secretary until a replacement could be found.

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

(a) Representatives of Individual Members

Two existing representatives (duly proposed and seconded) were elected.

(b) There were no nominations for representatives of Affiliated Local Organisations.

8. Appointment of Independent Examiner

The previous year's appointee, having indicated that he was willing to continue in post, was appointed: duly proposed and seconded.

9. Appointment of two Council Members to serve from the 2018 General Council AGM

Two appointments were proposed, seconded and agreed by those present.

10. Any Other Business

The Footpath Secretary thanked a retiring member for his work on the Area Executive Committee in various capacities over 33 years. He responded with his recollections of his lifetime experiences as a walker and with the Ramblers. The Chairman thanked him for leading the morning's walk and West London Group for hosting the meeting and providing refreshments. The Wycombe Group Chair had been investigating a possible link-up between the Ramblers' WalkAbout Festival and the Chilterns Walking Festival.

This ended the formal business of the meeting.

11. Speakers

Our first speaker has, since joining Ramblers staff, had two main areas of responsibility:

1) policy on shared use of footpaths by cyclists; he has been developing and consulting on an advice note for local volunteers in the light of campaigning by the cycling lobby, advising on factors to take into account when faced with proposals for upgrading footpaths to bridleways or cycle tracks; Ramblers has also been contributing to a government cycling safety review; discussion focussed on concerns for safety of walkers;

2) possible impacts of Brexit for walkers, in particular with respect to public benefit in exchange for agricultural payments; a minister had recently referred to public access in this context; an improved cross compliance regime and improvements to the footpath network were desired objectives; a forthcoming agricultural white paper and bill would present lobbying opportunities.

The Chairman, speaking as a Trustee, outlined recent successes, including: an excellent first year for our new Chief Executive; five new trustees and an effective new President; funding for walking festivals from the People's Postcode Lottery; progress on the English coast path; settlement of pension deficit; development of a system for path claims prior to 2026. Future work would include a reassessment of what Ramblers membership means.

Area Annual Report 1 October 2017 - 30 September 2018

Chairman's Report

2017 to 2018 has seen our groups in Buckinghamshire, Milton Keynes and West Middlesex Area continue their work to get people walking and to protect and expand the areas we walk in. The year saw the first of what will be many temporary closures to footpaths for the preparation and building of the HS2 railway line. 2019 will see the start of more closures and further work to understand the impact of the Oxford to Cambridge Expressway.

Another year has seen our successful Donate-a-Gate scheme continue to contribute to the wonderful efforts of North Bucks rRIPPLE, with the addition of Gift Aid. The year saw this work highlighted at Ramblers General Council in Bangor as something to be copied in other parts of the country

Two of our groups saw a growth in membership as did those members who choose not to become a member of a specific group and to join the Area. In the coming year we should all look at how we can replicate the success of the growing groups. It was sad to see the West London group move to the Inner London Area at the end of the Ramblers' year and we wish them success in their new Area.

Acting Secretary's Report

It is sad, but not untypical of the difficulty in finding volunteers for many posts within Ramblers, that almost six years after failing to fill the post of Area Secretary at the 2013 AGM, we have still not found anybody willing to take the job on. It need not be excessively onerous or time consuming, and job sharing would be possible. Other posts left unfilled at the 2018 AGM have also failed to attract volunteers.

I see the Secretary's job as being to do what nobody else does, and I thank our other officers for all their work. As last year, the Area Executive Committee met three times; one meeting was timed to allow discussion of the motions submitted for consideration by General Council. Part of an Area's task is to keep informed of the activities of our Groups. Communication is patchy, and I am grateful to those Groups which do let us know what they are doing.

It has been Area policy that we are willing to pay for up to two visitors to attend the Ramblers' General Council meeting in addition to the two Council Members we elect at our AGM who can speak and vote on formal business (and those that attend in other capacities). We did not send any visitors in 2018, but would welcome expressions of interest in attending in 2019.

We have co-operated with West London Group over its wish to transfer to Inner London Area, a process completed at the end of September 2018. We are, of course, sorry to lose the group, but understand the feeling of their members that they have more in common with the other Inner London groups. As it was our largest group in terms of number of members we are almost 17% smaller in the new accounting year.

Treasurer's Report

The accounts are prepared on a receipts and payments basis, in line with Central Office recommendations. Thus gift aid of £781.42 on this year's eligible donations, not received until October, will be included in next year's accounts, whilst the gift aid of £1033.56, shown in this year's accounts, was for donations made in previous years.

Up to date accounts are circulated to committee members prior to each meeting of the Area Executive Committee for scrutiny and subsequent approval at the meeting. Two signatories are required to make any withdrawals by cheque or internet banking from the Area's bank account. Current cheque signatories are the Chairman, Vice-Chairman and Treasurer while, in addition to those, the Membership Secretary is authorised for internet banking.

Ramblers' accounts are required to show expenditure under headings relating to our charitable objects. The fact that we had no expenditure under two such headings ("Countryside" and "Access") should not be taken as meaning we were inactive; rather this, and the low level of governance expenditure, reflect the negligible cost of email communication and the generosity of officers and other volunteers in not claiming expenses to which they may be entitled.

Our expenditure under the "Rights of Way" heading has again increased, thanks to the excellent practical work being undertaken by the NB rRIPPLE team, working in north Buckinghamshire; much of the expenditure has been offset by our "Donate-a-Gate" scheme, with donations mainly from individuals and parish councils. We are also registered to claim gift aid on eligible donations and received the first such payment this year. Donations (inevitably unpredictable, and somewhat lower this year) are treated as restricted funds, to be used only for replacement of stiles by gates.

Our other main expenditure is on funding to groups and for our share of the costs of *South East Walker*. Both figures are similar to last year's. We held an extra meeting to discuss the impact of the new General Data Protection Regulations on groups, but had a saving compared to last year because nobody came forward to go to the General Council meeting as a visitor.

Unlike last year, our budgeted request for funding from Central Office was met in full; as a result, the year end main fund reserves have risen to a healthy 75% of annual expenditure, whereas at the start of the year they were below the minimum recommended level of 40%.

I would like to thank all the Group Treasurers for their hard work in notifying me of funding requirements for the year to September 2019 and completing their end of year accounts and annual returns. Also, I thank the Area Independent Examiner for scrutinising and checking the Area accounts, and group Independent Examiners for similar work at group level.

The following table gives a brief summary of group main fund income and expenditure. Self funded activities such as socials and coach trips are not included. Columns are (A) main fund balance at start of year + (B) funding via Area + (C) other main fund income – (D) walks related expenditure including programmes – (E) other main fund expenditure = (F) main fund balance at end of year. (G) is any funds designated for particular use in future years and (H) is reserves (F-G as a percentage of D+E).

	A	+	B	+	C	-	D	-	E	=	F	G	H
Amersham	954		533		69		407		345		804	69	98%
Aylesbury	253		592		310		137		555		463	60	58%
Chiltern YW	328		194		0		0		274		248	0	91%
Chilterns WW	600		496		130		129		399		698	250	85%
Hike MK	54		32		0		0		44		42	0	95%
Hillingdon	1629		316		645		603		986		1001	0	63%
Milton Keynes	324		336		0		147		366		147	0	29%
NW London	358		300		110		148		137		483	0	169%
W London	842		940		405		866		493		828	0	61%
Wycombe	861		163		190		130		246		838	490	93%

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 September 2018**

	Year ended	30/9/18	30/9/17
INCOME:			
Funding from Central Office		7000.00	5200.00
Donations to restricted (Donate a Gate) fund		5970.00	7949.48
Gift Aid on donations		<u>1033.56</u>	<u>0.00</u>
Total income		14003.56	13149.48
EXPENDITURE:			
Funding to Groups		3902.50	4032.25
Promoting Walking (South East Walker)		1270.34	1264.95
Rights of Way: main fund		627.39	579.12
restricted fund (gate installation)		7983.71	6303.36
Governance: Area committee meetings		71.25	71.25
Area AGM		80.00	65.00
GDPR meeting		23.62	0.00
Visitor(s) to General Council		0.00	360.00
Annual Report		<u>7.00</u>	<u>7.00</u>
Total expenditure		13965.81	12682.93
SURPLUS / DEFICIT for year:			
main fund		1017.90	-1179.57
restricted (Donate a Gate) fund		<u>-980.15</u>	<u>1646.12</u>
Total		37.75	466.55
Funds brought forward from previous year		3092.95	2626.40
Funds carried forward to next year		3130.70	3092.95

BALANCE SHEET

Assets:	Main fund balance in bank at 30 September	1557.61	539.71
	Restricted fund balance in bank at 30 September	<u>1573.09</u>	<u>2553.24</u>
	Total assets	3130.70	3092.95
Liabilities:		<u>0.00</u>	<u>0.00</u>
	Total liabilities	0.00	0.00
NET ASSETS		<u>£ 3130.70</u>	<u>£ 3092.95</u>

Treasurer

22nd October 2018**INDEPENDENT EXAMINER'S STATEMENT:**

Having carried out procedures in accordance with the Area and Group independent examination guidelines, I consider the Buckinghamshire, Milton Keynes and West Middlesex Area accounts to give a fair representation of the Area's/Group's financial activities for the year to 30 September 2018.

Independent Examiner

22nd October 2018

Footpath Secretary's Report

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 are invited to discuss what is involved with me, or with their group footpath secretary.

During the year our 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.

In Aylesbury Vale District we checked 54 out of 111 parishes and 1,007 out of 2,183 paths, walking 798 kms and reporting 270 problems. This took at least 760 volunteer hours, where time estimates were given. The most common problems were poor or missing stiles or gates, overgrowth, cropping, and missing waymarks.

In Chiltern District only eight of 18 parishes were checked, some partially. Approximately 250 kms were walked in checking 209 of 385 paths. Seventy four problems were found, the most common being waymarks (31%), over or undergrowth (18%), and signposts (11%). There were only three ploughing problems, and three fallen trees, although one of these had been reported several times previously, as had one badly overgrown path.

In Wycombe District we received returns for 21 out of 28 parishes; 75 per cent of the paths in those parishes were checked and 137 problems were reported (of which 77 were in Longwick-cum-Ilmer). Volunteers spent about 338 hours checking paths and reporting problems.

In South Bucks parts of some parishes were checked and problems were reported, such as overgrowth and missing signposts.

In Milton Keynes 707 paths of the total of 776 in the 48 parishes were checked and 449 problems were found. Volunteers walked 542 km and spent more than 240 hours checking and reporting. The most common problems were missing waymarks, overgrowth, missing signposts, poor gates and stiles, and cropping.

There were 20 path-change proposals during the year and we objected to three of them. One was a long-standing package of diversions at Chicheley, Emberton and Sherington in Milton Keynes; after a site visit we agreed not to object to some minor diversions in exchange for the package being dropped. We also opposed a landowner's plan to move a path in Stokenchurch parish, Bucks, to the field edge and were pleased that this was abandoned. We were dismayed when Wycombe District Council made a public spaces protection order on grounds of alleged crime and anti-social behaviour, banning public use of High Wycombe footpath 80, despite widespread objections.

We walked the routes affected by the Waddesdon greenway proposals in mid-Bucks; this is a walking and cycling route between Aylesbury Parkway train station and Waddesdon Manor. This involves diversion of some paths, and we have agreed not to object to most of it provided that the larger diversions are omitted, while protesting that we were not consulted before planning permission was obtained for the project.

We continue to be worried about the shortage of rights-of-way staff in all our local authorities. We met Buckinghamshire County Council's cabinet member for planning and the environment to discuss our concerns. We are glad that Bucks has taken the rights-of-way work back in-house from Ringway Jacobs and has at last filled all the vacant posts in the rights-of-way team.

During the summer we met the staff working on rights of way at Milton Keynes Council and were pleased to learn that they plan a definitive map review of the whole area to be completed by 2026, with a full inspection of the paths over the next five years in which the Ramblers will assist. We are already helping with the erection of waymarks there.

I should like to thank, in particular, those who helped 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.

Footpath improvement by North Bucks rRIPPLE (ramblers Repairing & Improving Public Paths for Leisure & Exercise)

Our team of regular enthusiasts has increased to seven this year, with a couple of guest appearances by interested parties, including the Aylesbury Group's path checker for North Marston and Oving, who has met with the Oving Paths Action Group (OPAG) and has put forward to North Marston parish council a one page A4 document explaining the benefits of the Donate-a-Gate scheme and reasons for the parish council to get involved. A Bierton resident contacted Buckinghamshire County Council (BCC) rights of way staff about improving stiles in Bierton and they pointed him in our direction; he too wants to get involved with his parish council.

In the four years we've been operating we have worked in 30 of the 100 parishes in North Buckinghamshire. There are, we believe, numerous parishes that have never heard of us. As long as we have a full order book, and parishes that require more work from us, we are not chasing them. By putting the odd photograph and news item in the Bucks Herald we keep our activities and capabilities to the fore.

We continue to average one gate installation per week; we installed gate 97 in January and gate 144 at the end of December. Of the 47 gates installed this year, 20 have been funded by donations. The primary objective is to have a day out in the fresh air, visit places we don't know, meet farmers and landowners, get some physical exercise, have a good chat and end up in the pub for a well earned pint, and in the process the footpath network benefits considerably from our activities.

We seem to be spending an ever increasing amount of time on administration. To carry out an installation per our BCC Job Sheets we need to liaise with at least one and potentially several landowners for access. We need to confirm the type of gate. More and more requests are for Centrewire's Woodstock kissing gates which are more expensive, more time consuming, and less user friendly than their Marlow pedestrian gates. We therefore try to steer landowners away from kissing gates wherever we can.

Our relationship with OPAG is flourishing and five of us plus wives enjoyed a splendid autumn lunch. We have liaised with one farmer to obtain and lay a couple of loads of road planings/scalpings in gateways that are perennially mud baths in the winter.

This autumn we have started what we hope will be a long term relationship with Ludgershall, and have installed three kissing gates. One of the stiles we replaced had a single step that was 60 cm high on one side and 80 cm high on the other side with no hand post. The British Standard is for two steps at 25 and 50 cm. It had been very difficult to use for more than 30 years: one of our volunteers lived in Ludgershall for 30 years. We look forward to establishing a Ludgershall Paths Action Group in 2019 similar to OPAG. We already have two very interested residents. One is on the parish council and the other, who has already paid to donate a gate, has surveyed and recorded the state of all the stiles in the parish.

Within the Ramblers we remain one of very few totally self-sufficient footpath maintenance groups with our own 4x4 vehicle, trailer and full complement of hand and power tools. For £200 per annum we have a storage site at Chinnor Rugby Football Club for gates, posts and tamping-in stones.

Contributions to our Donate-a-Gate scheme have slowed down this year, 2017-18, at around £6000 compared to £8000 for 2016-17. We have given BCC £5000 this year towards the purchase of gates. By January 2019 we will have installed our 145th gate. Further to income and expenditure, our group treasurer has been efficient in following up on Gift Aid on donations. This year we have received just over £1000 as Gift Aid on previous years' donations.

Our quarterly Activity Reports, timed to coincide with our report published in *South East Walker*, have before and after photos of all our installations and can be viewed on the Area web site at www.bucks-wmiddx-ramblers.org.uk/donate-a-gate.

At the end of the day we have to ask ourselves if it's all worth it and if we're doing the right thing. If we weren't doing this, no one else would be. BCC's rights of way department simply doesn't have the resources to keep the footpath network fully open and accessible. Our input is helping. If more members of the public go out and actually find their walk is a success in that they don't have to turn around half way due to an impassable collapsed stile, then they'll try other walks and tell their friends.

I'd like to thank the team members, who are affiliated to the Ramblers as members of Haddenham RIPPLE, including a new recruit. A particular big thank you to one volunteer who has taken on a large part of the administration.

Membership Secretary's Report

The table below shows the total membership of the Ramblers, our Area and its constituents at 30 September 2018 and at 30 September 2017 for comparison. Area Membership relates to those members who have joined the Area in recent years and opted not to be allocated to a group. Non Group Members are those members who joined prior to the 1990s when members were not allocated to a group by default and who did not opt to join a group.

	2018	2017	Difference	% Difference
<u>Ramblers</u>	102,818	104,694	-1,876	-2%
<u>Area</u>	2,882	3,031	-149	-5%
<u>Groups</u>				
Amersham and District	409	447	-38	-9%
Aylesbury and District	282	277	5	2%
Hillingdon and District	314	324	-10	-3%
Milton Keynes and District	229	247	-18	-7%
North West London	208	213	-5	-2%
West London	476	496	-20	-4%
Wycombe District	310	329	-19	-6%
Chilterns Weekend Walkers	343	398	-55	-14%
Hike MK	42	51	-9	-18%
Chiltern Young Walkers	116	107	9	8%
	2,729	2,889	-160	-6%
<u>Individuals</u>				
Area Membership	56	44	12	27%
Awaiting Allocation	1	1	0	0%
Non Group Members	91	96	-5	-5%
	148	141	7	5%
<u>Affiliated Clubs</u>	5	4	1	25%

The rate of decline of Ramblers membership increased to 2% in the last financial year. The rate of decline of Area membership increased to 5% in the same period. Some groups in the Area did better than others.

Following the decision taken at the last Area Annual General Meeting and confirmed at West London Group's own Special General Meeting, the group moved to the Inner London Area at the beginning of the 2018-19 financial year.

Access Officer's Report

Coastal path progress: further incremental sections of the path have been added, and Natural England still hope to complete the project in 2020.

Buckinghamshire Local Access Forum

Rights of way staffing: The final vacancy has been filled, so that, apart from sickness, the section is up to strength.

Bridges: During the year the planned inspection of bridges had been scaled back to 300 per year. However, the aim now is to complete at least 500 inspections this year. There are now 78 bridge repairs/replacements outstanding.

Capital expenditure: An increase in capital allotment will enable delayed works to be completed, and it is hoped to make money available to renew signage of Open Access areas, many signs being broken or missing.

CAMS Web: The project has been delayed again, and it is not clear when or whether it will now be completed.

Maintenance Summary, April 2017 - March 2018: This shows reduced performance in virtually all categories but, oddly, shows an increase in the number of paths rated easy to use from 66 to 76%.

Review of Rights of Way Improvement Plan (RoWiP) 2008-2018: The 2008 RoWiP was considered at the July meeting and the survey completed in November. In many areas the aims of the plan have been met, but there is one which has not. This is the delay in handling Definitive Map Modification Orders. The aim established in the 2008 plan was that these should be determined in 12 months, but at present it can take up to five or six years. It was agreed that the 2008 aim should be reaffirmed, and the reasons for present delays fully explored.

Navigation apps: There are a number of apps for navigating walking, riding and cycling in the countryside. Unfortunately, few of them have any regard to legality, or suitability, and include any sort of way, legal or not. This probably reinforces the view of many cyclists that riding on footpaths is acceptable.

HS2/EW rail: A short section where the two lines run in parallel has given problems, since each project has its own solution to bridge design etc. They have now agreed to a joint approach, and a green bridge over both lines is being considered.

Heathrow Third Runway: Early plans show that rights of way in Iver are likely to be affected.

Local Government Reorganisation: The secretary of state has said that Bucks would be best served by creating a Unitary Authority, and this is likely to go ahead.

Press Officer's Report

We issued a press release to mark North Bucks rRIPPLE's one hundredth gate and our opposition to the public spaces protection order for High Wycombe footpath 80 was also publicised.

News Editor

This post was not filled at the 2018 AGM. The Acting Secretary has endeavoured to ensure that sufficient material has been forthcoming for our Area's page in *South East Walker*.

Publicity, Area Web Site and Walk Descriptions

The posts of Publicity Officer and Walks Editor were not filled at the 2018 AGM. Any publicity effort in our Area is, therefore, coming from our groups. Our Area Webmaster remains willing to advise groups on publicity matters. Walk descriptions and associated information on our website are likely to become increasingly outdated.

Representatives of Individual Members and of Affiliated Local Organisations

The inclusion of such representatives on the Area Executive Committee is specified not just in our own constitution but also in the Model Area Constitution approved as part of Ramblers' constitutional documents. In recent years none of our local organisations have appointed representatives. There is no formal definition of the role of "representative of individual members" and we have used it as a means of adding useful additional individuals to the Area Executive Committee, either by election or by co-option.

Countryside Secretary

This post was not filled at the 2018 AGM. The Footpath Secretary has made representations, where appropriate, on planning applications directly affecting rights of way. Broader issues are handled on an ad-hoc basis, or by our groups.

Greater London

The Ramblers Greater London Forum was wound up in January 2018. The Chair of Inner London Area has taken the lead, in consultation with outer London groups, in establishing a London Volunteer Network to co-ordinate Ramblers' campaigning activities in London.

Reports from Groups

Amersham and District Group

Amersham and District Group has enjoyed another successful year with a packed programme offering over 250 walks to approximately 100 active walkers from our group and an increased number of walkers from surrounding groups. Last October our annual group holiday to Derwent Bank in the Lake District was a great success despite the weather and an article was published in *South East Walker*. Our annual social events, the Christmas lunch and summer barbecue, were both well attended. In June we celebrated having a 'Top 100 Favourite Walk' in our area with a 6 mile linear walk from Wendover to Great Missenden, resulting in another article being published in *South East Walker*. The staged walk of the 102 mile Cotswold Way continued and is almost complete. The year was only marred by Ramblers' handling of the new General Data Protection Regulations, which caused confusion, frustration, wasted a considerable amount of time and resulted in us no longer being able to send programmes to those who did not tick email due to the large number involved: approximately two thirds of our group's members.

Aylesbury and District Group

The Aylesbury Group have again had a successful year with walks held weekly on Sundays and Thursdays and fortnightly on Tuesdays. Bad weather during the year did however involve the cancellation of 4 walks this year. The Group also had two walking holidays during the year: one in the Cotswolds and the other in Exmoor. In addition the Group had two social occasions: a Winter Meal and a summer barbecue. Regular path clearing activities were carried out on a monthly basis. Group membership averaged 285 during the year.

Chiltern Young Walkers

The Chiltern Young Walkers continue to thrive after the successful relaunch in the summer of 2017. Our membership continues to gain strength, this year standing at 117 (Sept-18) compared to the start of 2017 where membership had dropped to below 100. We have had a total of 82 walks of which 9 were evening walks; although this is a decline in the number of walks compared to previous years we have successfully held a walk every weekend.

The group held a fantastic weekend away to Rutland Water in March 2018 which was only complemented by the snow. We have another weekend away planned for October 2018 in the New Forest, that the group are looking forward to. Our socials this year were impacted by the resignation of the social coordinator early 2018; however we successfully held our annual summer get-together that included sports day themed games, such as The Egg & Spoon race, Three Legged Race and of course the Sack Race!

Overall despite the challenges the CYW faces, the committee remain optimistic for the future of the group which continues to be a fun and friendly young Ramblers walking group.

Chilterns Weekend Walkers

Despite a very muddy (and occasionally snowy) winter followed by the joint hottest summer on record we managed to put on 146 walks, a similar number to previous years and led by 55 different walk leaders. Walker numbers remained much in line with previous years too, despite a decline in overall membership. The membership decline appears to be primarily non walkers but we are concerned about falling numbers of new members. Weekends and trips away covered a varied range of UK destinations for both the longer distance and more leisurely walkers within our group. We held a very successful beginners navigation course which has resulted in several new walk leaders.

We are working hard on redeveloping our website, updating the look and feel etc so that it serves us better in recruiting new members and keeping everyone better informed of group activities. We are fully compliant with Ramblers guidance on the implementation of GDPR.

We checked 100% of the paths within Lacey Green parish and cleared litter from the majority of them. Although without a Social Secretary, there have been a wide range of social activities during the year including various pub nights, a Christmas lunch and a post Christmas party.

Hike MK

No contribution had been received from the group by the time the report was finalised.

Hillingdon and District Group

Although there has been a small drop in our membership, the group continues to provide a comprehensive programme of walks, many of which are very well attended. The Wednesday programme of longer walks regularly attracts twenty or more members, most of whom are also willing to lead walks. The shorter walks on Saturdays are also very popular. Our Sunday programme of longer walks is supported by a small but dedicated group. Our Tuesday group is tackling the Pilgrims Way as a major project. Members have enjoyed holidays in the Malverns and Exmoor as well as social events such as a walking treasure hunt followed by an excellent lunch, and a well attended Christmas lunch.

The group was able to finance a first aid course for members and has contributed funds to the Chiltern Society for the purchase of three gates.

The group is keen to publicise its activities in the hope that we can halt any further decline in membership. This year we attended the Ickenham Festival, where our stall attracted a number of visitors, and we are involved in the Colne Valley Trust.

As with many Groups we struggle to recruit enough members to fill all vacancies on our committee. This year the work of the committee, and, in particular, that of the membership secretary, has been increased significantly by the need to introduce the requirements of the GDPR legislation.

Milton Keynes and District Group

As with the national picture our membership has fallen by 17 to 229. 20 new members have been welcomed into the group. We continue to publicise the group, ensuring our programmes are in the outdoor shop and libraries, and that details are supplied to the local press and *South East Walker*.

Our Publicity Secretary has decided to retire, therefore I would like to record our thanks for doing this role as long as I can remember. I know he will continue to be a keen member of the group.

We held another successful coach trip, this year to Matlock, and this once again is now a fixture on our programme.

We completed some long distance paths this year: the Palladian Way and the Greensand Way though Surrey and Kent. Our annual Easter walking continued with the Wales Coast Path, as it will do for a few more years yet.

We did manage one evening get together, and plan to do another in the new year.

We also sponsored some new waymark posts, a report appeared in *South East Walker*.

North West London Group

No report has been received and, shortly after the end of the reporting year, the Chair and Secretary resigned, leaving the continuing viability of the group in doubt.

West London Group

The most significant event of the last year was the move of West London Group from the Buckinghamshire, Milton Keynes and West Middlesex Area to the Inner London Area. This followed from a mandate from the 2016 AGM and was finally given constitutional approval at a special general meeting in May this year. The move took effect on 1st October 2018 following approval by both areas and the national trustees.

The West London Group has had a busy year of planning walks, walking and path checking. We have continued with a full programme of walks both at the weekend and during the week, both rural and urban. A great thanks to all our leaders including the new recruits to the team of leaders.

To support the Ramblers' objective of encouraging use of the path network the group is organising a series of walks along our national trails. Following completion of the North Downs Way in the autumn of 2017 this year saw the start of walking the Greensand Way in Surrey. The walk will continue with the Kent section of the way in 2019. Nearer to home the Capital Ring and the London Loop continue to be a feature of the walks programme. These walks have proved to be popular and hence other trails are being added to the programme. Also this year the group contributed two walks to the London Mayor's National City Park programme which aimed to publicise London's green spaces.

The organized holiday to the south of the Lake District was much appreciated by those who went on it and gave members a chance to explore the path network and enjoy the scenery in another part of the country.

The group's work of checking paths in South Bucks and the London Boroughs of Ealing and Hounslow continued, but there is still a need for more volunteers to help with this work. A reorganisation of work in South Bucks is anticipated for 2019 following the move of the group to Inner London Area. Again the group had a publicity stall at events in west London and there was some success in generating interest in Ramblers.

Finally, we would like to thank Bucks area officers for their help in navigating the bureaucratic stages required to implement the group's move from Bucks area to Inner London Area.

Wycombe District Group

We have had another excellent walking year with short walks on Wednesday, Saturday and most Sunday mornings plus longer ones of 12 miles or so most Sundays. The Wednesday morning walks are the most popular - generating new leaders too. The long Sunday ones increasingly are shared with Henley and Goring, with some Oxford, Hillingdon and Thame and Wheatley members joining us, as they, like us, are struggling more to fill all the dates.

Membership is down from 344 last year to 317 this but is not affecting the walking. We have had a good social year too with a festive meal in January, a long weekend away in Sidmouth in April led by a former member and an excellent barbecue in June, all well supported. We have had another gate installed (courtesy of Ramblers Holidays funds and the Chiltern Society) this time recognising a member's contribution to the group's activities over many years.

Elected Members of the Area Executive Committee October 2017 - September 2018

Chairman
Vice-Chairman
Secretary <i>vacant: the Treasurer has continued as Acting Secretary</i>
Treasurer
Footpath Secretary
Membership Secretary
North Bucks rRIPPLE
Countryside Secretary <i>vacant</i>
News Editor <i>vacant</i>
Publicity Officer <i>vacant</i>
Walks Editor <i>vacant</i>
Press Officer
Access Officer
Representatives of Individual Members
Two representatives
Representatives of Affiliated Local Organisations
<i>vacant</i>
Group Representatives
Each of our groups is entitled to appoint two members of the Area Executive Committee, and substitutes are welcome to attend meetings of the committee.

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

Groups

Walks and other activities within our Area are organised by our nine groups:

Amersham and District Group
Aylesbury and District Group
Chiltern Young Walkers
Chilterns Weekend Walkers
Hike MK
Hillingdon and District Group
Milton Keynes and District Group
North West London Group
Wycombe District Group

West London Group was part of our Area until September, but has now transferred to Inner London Area.

Basic information about the Area and its groups including, where available, links to individual web sites, can be found on the main Ramblers' web site, <https://www.ramblers.org.uk>. Click on “Find your local group”, then click on the “Groups” tab. Then *either* page through the list to reach our Area and its groups *or* enter the name of the group of interest in the “Enter location” box, choose from the list generated and click on “Search”. Clicking on the group name then leads to further information including, where available, details of forthcoming walks.