



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

Annual Report

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.

1st October 2019 - 30th September 2020

Annual General Meeting: 2.00 pm on 6th February 2021 by video-conference

Join us for our Area AGM to find out what Ramblers is doing for *all* walkers!

This is your opportunity to exercise your democratic rights and make your views known on matters of concern to you. After the formal business of the meeting, as per the agenda on page 2, we will hear from a Ramblers Trustee and there will be an opportunity for friendly questions and discussion.

We have a number of vacancies for Area Officers, including for the Area Secretary. As Area Secretary you would work with the Area Chair to arrange meetings of the Area committee and the AGM; this includes preparing agendas, booking rooms and sending out invitations. Other duties include taking and circulating accurate minutes of meetings and ensuring Area records are kept up to date and safe. Keeping in touch with announcements from the Ramblers' office and sharing news (including of key organisational policies) with the Area committee and groups is an important part of the job, with the opportunity to learn more about new aspects of the Ramblers' work. Any offers of help, or enquiries about what is involved, are welcome; please contact the Acting Area Secretary.

At the Area AGM we elect our two members of Ramblers General Council, who are entitled to speak and vote at the Annual General Council meeting, provisionally to be held at the NEC, Birmingham on 17th April 2021; expenses are paid by Central Office. Areas are encouraged to seek candidates from all parts of the membership, in line with our values of being inclusive to all and welcoming people from diverse backgrounds. If you wish to put your name forward or to find out more about what is involved, please contact the Acting Area Secretary.

**Agenda for the Annual General Meeting
at 2.00 pm on Saturday 6th February 2021**

1. Apologies for absence
 2. Minutes of the AGM held on 1st February 2019 (incorporated in the Annual Report, pages 3-5)
 3. Matters arising from the minutes
 4. To receive the Annual Report and Accounts:

(a) Chairman's Report	p6	(i) News Editor	p11
(b) Acting Secretary's Report	p6	(j) Publicity Officer	p11
(c) Treasurer's Report and Accounts	p7-8	(k) Area Web Site	p11
(d) Footpath Secretary's Report	p9	(l) Walk Descriptions	p11
(e) North Bucks rRIPPLE Report	p10	(m) Member and ALO Reps	p11
(f) Membership Secretary's Report	p10-11	(n) Countryside Secretary	p11
(g) Access Officer	p11	(o) Local Group Reports	p12-15
(h) Press Officer's Report	p11		
 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 30th January 2021)
 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 2021 General Council AGM
 10. Any other business
 11. Speaker
 12. Questions and discussion

**Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held at 2.00 pm on Saturday, 1st February 2020
in Great Missenden Memorial Centre**

[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. The relevant names can be revealed at the meeting on request.]

32 members added their names to the attendance list.

The Chairman introduced the Annual General Meeting and welcomed those present; leaders of the morning's walks were thanked.

1. **Apologies for absence** were received from two members.

2. **Minutes** of the AGM held on Saturday 2nd February 2019 were signed as a correct record.

3. **Matters arising** from the minutes. There were no matters arising not considered elsewhere on the agenda.

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's Report:

The Chairman commented on the mixed fortunes of groups with respect to membership and on the successes of North Bucks rRIPPLE.

(b) Acting Secretary's Report:

Nothing to add to written report.

(c) Treasurer's Report and Accounts:

In response to a question the Treasurer explained the drop in funding from Central Office in terms of the Area's requirements, in particular following the loss of West London Group. The meeting was asked to approve the accounts (duly proposed and seconded). Carried nem con.

(d) Footpath Secretary's Report:

The Footpath Secretary expressed concern about the possible impact on rights of way of Buckinghamshire becoming a unitary authority; lobbying of councillors may be needed. She also commented on the replacement footbridge at Fawley Court.

(e) North Bucks ramblers Repairing & Improving Public Paths for Leisure & Exercise (NB rRIPPLE) Report:

The Co-ordinator reported that the group's 208th gate would be installed the following week. He invited ideas on how to convince sceptical and reluctant farmers who are concerned about attacks by dogs on sheep to replace stiles with gates that make access for both walkers and dog walkers easier.

(f) Membership Secretary's Report:

The Membership Secretary commented on national efforts to increase membership and on information available from the insight hub. It was requested that future reports should show numbers of new and lapsed members for each group rather than just differences.

(g) Access Officer's Report:

The Access Officer outlined data from Buckinghamshire County Council on ease of use of paths and problems reported, showing worrying declines and increases respectively. A member reported on unsuccessful efforts to get Milton Keynes to improve their reporting system. Another member said that, except for HS2-related problems, the situation in Hillingdon was satisfactory.

(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) Walk Descriptions:

Nothing to add to written report.

(m) Individual Member Representative and Affiliated Local Organisation reports

Nothing to add to written report.

(n) Planning and countryside

Nothing to add to written report.

(o) Local Group Reports.

Amersham's footpath checking day had led to new volunteers. Chiltern Young Walkers had recently celebrated their 20th anniversary. Hillingdon would shortly be celebrating their 50th anniversary. Milton Keynes were concerned that an article in a local paper on the Festival of Winter Walks had made no reference to the group. North West London seems stable after the previous year's crisis. Wycombe noted with sadness the recent deaths of two active members.

The Chairman asked the meeting to approve the Annual Report (duly proposed and seconded). Carried nem con. The editor of the report was thanked.

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 25th January 2020):
None had been received.

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 Acting Secretary agreed to continue until a replacement could be found. There was an offer of assistance with the role.

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

(a) Representatives of Individual Members

One member (duly proposed and seconded) was elected.

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

8. Appointment of Independent Examiner

The incumbent, 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 2020 General Council AGM

It was proposed, seconded and agreed by those present that one member be appointed, together with whichever of two others was agreed between themselves, the other being invited to attend the meeting as a visitor at Area expense.

10. Any Other Business

Hillingdon and North West London Groups were asked to consider participating in a request from Inner London Area to take candidates for the Greater London Authority elections on walks. By invitation, a member of Oxfordshire Area addressed the meeting on the likely impact on countryside and footpaths of the proposed Oxford-Cambridge Expressway and associated housing development. Five candidates had been nominated for the Area's Volunteer of the Year Award 2019; following a ballot it was announced that the winner was the candidate nominated by Amersham and District Group.

The formal business of the meeting concluded at 3.15pm.

11. Speaker

A Ramblers' trustee explained the role of trustees and stressed the need to be forward looking, with particular reference to the Don't Lose Your Way campaign and the future of health walks. Membership growth remained a priority, with the need for a full spread of ages; research was being undertaken on membership loyalty and non-members' reasons for not joining. Another priority was to future-proof IT systems; errors were inevitable, but lessons would be learned to avoid repeating them. As a matter of local interest she mentioned recent Ramblers collaboration with other organisations on the environmental impact of HS2. The speaker answered questions on a variety of topics, including: the recent resignation of the Chief Executive; walk leader training and recognition: the value of Areas as part of the Ramblers' hierarchy; Ramblers' lack of family orientation by comparison with other organisations.

The Chairman thanked the speaker, those who had contributed to the organisation of the meeting, and all our volunteers.

Area Annual Report 1 October 2019 - 30 September 2020

Chairman's Report

Last year's area AGM introduced a new feature to celebrate the volunteers within the area. After hearing and reading about those nominated by the groups the AGM attendees voted for their preferred candidates. A few weeks later, all face to face work of our volunteers, like all Ramblers volunteers, came to an enforced halt as the Coronavirus pandemic swept across the world. Without a doubt the last six months of the Ramblers 2019-2020 year has been one of considerable change and one which the area and its groups have adapted to. The Area committee met online for the first time in May and again in August and will probably continue to do so for a little while longer. The summer led to a small resumption of activities. NB rRipple completed socially distant gate installations and groups successfully restarted activities, with many changes in place.

As we look to the year ahead and lockdowns continue into 2021 with indoor activities closed, the public have been exploring the countryside; one positive change over the last year has been the increased number of people out walking. Many more have discovered the countryside on their doorsteps for the first time. They have also discovered the impact of preparation work for HS2 construction which has continued and paths have been closed without notice. The addition of many thousands of regular walkers has made its own impact on the rights of way network with more visible erosion on the Chilterns chalk escarpment especially at popular viewpoints such as Ivinghoe Beacon. Elsewhere, as we head into winter, many more paths bear closer resemblance to mud baths. If only there were more paths to take the load!

During the last year the Ramblers Don't Lose You Way campaign to find unrecorded paths kicked off in earnest with volunteers around the country identifying historic rights of way from old maps. With the details now available there are in Buckinghamshire 407, Milton Keynes 135, Harrow 19 and Hillingdon 27 miles of paths that could be lost forever if we don't claim them, although 10 ancient paths would now cross the runways at Heathrow. Looking at the map many of these provide missing links which will enable circular walks. The next step, to confirm the details and find the records required to make a claim, will be work for the next few years.

Acting Secretary's Report

Having served as Acting Area Secretary in addition to Area Treasurer for almost eight years since we failed to fill the post of Secretary at the 2013 AGM, I remain keen to find somebody willing to take over from me; we appealed for volunteers in the December issue of *South East Walker*.

Covid-19 restrictions meant that the only meeting of the Area Executive Committee in the reporting year that was able to take place as normal was in November 2019. In March issues of urgency were agreed by email. The May and August meetings took place by video-conference; at the time I did not have facilities to participate, so thank the Chairman and another member for arranging the meetings and providing minutes.

A motion passed by the 2019 General Council meeting called for greater diversity of council membership, and we appealed in the December issue of *South East Walker* for members to consider putting their names forward for election at the forthcoming AGM as members with speaking and voting rights.

Treasurer's Report

The accounts are prepared on a receipts and payments basis, in line with Central Office recommendations, showing actual receipts and actual payments during the accounting year, October 2019 to September 2020. Thus gift aid on this year's eligible donations, £406.27 received in October 2020, will be included in next year's accounts, whilst the gift aid of £576.78, shown in this year's accounts, was for donations made in the previous year. An invoice for our share of printing costs for the September 2019 issue of *South East Walker* was not been received until this year, so the payments of £1253.96 covered five issues. Due to covid-19 restrictions it was not possible to hold physical committee meetings during 2020, so the payment of £105 for room hire will, hopefully, roll over to cover meetings in 2021 or future 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 decreased, because practical work being undertaken by the NB rRIPPLE team had to cease during covid-19 lockdown; income under the "Donate-a-Gate" scheme has also decreased, as fund raising efforts were also reduced during that period. Donations 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*.

Our budget request for funding this year was for £5200 but, as anticipated expenditure by the Area and some of its groups was reduced because of the pandemic, we were able to tell Central Office that we did not require the final quarter's funding payment. Even so, our main fund reserves at 30th September 2020 stood at 119% of annual expenditure excluding payments to groups, above the recommended range of 40-100%. Reserves percentages this year, at both Area and group level, are likely to be misleading because of the effects of the pandemic on expenditure.

I would like to thank all the group treasurers for notifying me of funding requirements (and, in some cases, agreeing to reductions) and for 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	1038		360		454		39		178		1635	679	440
Aylesbury	357		355		190		41		158		703	190	257
Chiltern YW	354		217		124		0		0		695	0	∞
Chilterns WW	433		224		335		67		485		440	0	80
Hike MK	31		32		0		0		0		63	0	∞
Hillingdon	1035		304		110		0		684		765	700	10
Milton Keynes	206		324		0		134		151		245	0	86
NW London	65		600		100		190		60		515	0	206
Wycombe	339		398		0		176		373		188	0	34

Note: The accounts, as approved by the Independent Examiner, are reproduced on the following page.

INCOME & EXPENDITURE ACCOUNT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30th September 2020

	Year ended	30/9/20	30/9/19
INCOME:			
Funding from Central Office		3900.00	5000.00
Refund of deposit for AGM hall booking		150.00	0.00
Donations to restricted (Donate a Gate) fund		5830.00	7732.05
Gift Aid on donations		<u>576.78</u>	<u>781.42</u>
Total income		10456.78	13513.47
EXPENDITURE:			
Funding to Groups		2815.50	2606.35
Promoting Walking (South East Walker)		1253.96	751.57
Rights of Way: main fund		68.70	928.47
restricted fund (gate installation)		4015.47	9304.14
Governance: Area committee meetings		105.00	105.00
Area AGMs		0.00	95.00
Refundable deposit for 2020 AGM		0.00	150.00
Annual Report		8.00	6.00
Bank charges		<u>3.00</u>	<u>2.40</u>
Total expenditure		8269.63	13948.93
SURPLUS / DEFICIT for year:			
main fund		-204.16	355.21
restricted (Donate a Gate) fund		<u>2391.31</u>	<u>-790.67</u>
Total		2187.15	-435.46
Funds brought forward from previous year		2695.24	3130.70
Funds carried forward to next year		4882.39	2695.24

BALANCE SHEET

Assets:	Main fund balance in bank at 30 th September	1708.66	1912.82
	Restricted fund balance in bank at 30 th September	<u>3173.73</u>	<u>782.42</u>
	Total assets	4882.39	2695.24
Liabilities:		<u>0.00</u>	<u>0.00</u>
	Total liabilities	0.00	0.00
NET ASSETS		<u>£ 4882.39</u>	<u>£ 2695.24</u>

NOTE: To avoid giving a distorted view of the current year's figures by comparison with those for the previous year the sum of £55000 accidentally transferred to our bank account by Oxfordshire County Council and later repaid to them has been omitted from both income and expenditure above.

Treasurer

16th October 2020

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 30th September 2020.

Independent Examiner

16th October 2020

Note: signed copy available for inspection on request.

Footpath Secretary's Report

The lockdown has demonstrated more than ever the value of good-quality public paths close to people's homes, and I believe the Ramblers should take some credit for that. We check a significant number of paths in our territory and report problems to the highway authorities. We should be proud of what we do.

We ask our path checkers 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.

Naturally the pandemic restricted our activity somewhat. Even so, 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 of our groups. On 1 April Buckinghamshire Council went unitary, but we continue to record our path-check results against the former districts.

In Aylesbury Vale District we checked 47 out of 111 parishes, which include five parishes checked by the group's Path Check and Maintenance Walks. Out of 2,185 paths, 748 (34.2 per cent) were checked and our volunteers walked 699 kilometres and reported 182 problems. This took at least 607 volunteer hours, where time estimates were given. The most common problems were poor stiles and gates, missing waymarks, and ploughing and cropping. We now have 18 checkers, and are eager to find more.

In Chiltern District eight of 18 parishes were checked, some partially. 102 problems were found, the most common being waymarks (50 per cent), signposts (20 per cent) and over or undergrowth (20 per cent). There were no reported fallen trees, or ploughing problems. These figures are almost identical to recent years, suggesting that the lockdown may not have further reduced the, admittedly low, past coverage of parishes.

In South Bucks part or all of eight parishes were checked and a variety of problems were reported. We urgently need a new co-ordinator, as the current co-ordinator is retiring after many years' service.

In Wycombe District we received returns for 21 out of 28 parishes; 83 per cent of the paths in those parishes were checked and 86 problems were reported. Volunteers spent about 380 hours checking paths and reporting problems.

In Milton Keynes, impressively, all 776 paths in the 48 parishes were checked and 403 problems were found. Volunteers walked 542 kilometres and spent more than 341 hours checking and reporting. The most common problems were missing signposts and waymarks, poor gates and stiles, and overgrowth.

There were 28 path-change proposals during the year and we objected to three of them. We withdrew one objection, at Newport Pagnell, after an assurance that the existing route would still be available when the pub in St John Street was open. We objected to the diversion of part of Waddesdon footpath 7A from cross field to headland, to accommodate the Waddesdon Greenway. We also opposed the renewal of the closure (by public spaces protection order) of High Wycombe footpath 80 which we consider unnecessary and inconvenient for walkers who will be forced onto other roads in the neighbourhood.

Buckinghamshire County Council held one rights-of-way liaison group meeting in January, its last before it became the unitary Buckinghamshire Council. Unfortunately the summer meeting had to be cancelled because of the pandemic. We met (virtually) the Chiltern Society and British Horse Society to discuss how we can cooperate to share our volunteer resources, lobby Buckinghamshire Council to put more resources into rights of way, and protect paths from closure due to the construction of HS2.

I should like to thank, in particular, the co-ordinators 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. We are especially grateful to everyone who walked their paths during this strange and worrying year, and are entirely sympathetic with those who felt unable to do so.

Footpath improvement by North Bucks rRIPPLE

(ramblers Repairing & Improving Public Paths for Leisure & Exercise)

Last winter was so wet that we were unable to access sites due to water-logged fields. Then in March everything stopped for the pandemic. As a result we've installed far fewer gates this year than in previous years. We restarted installing gates at the end of July, adhering to The Ramblers Covid 19 risk assessment protocols. Our backlog of gates to install built up to well over 30. People and parish councils remain as keen as ever to improve their local networks and get rid of some of the numerous difficult stiles that continue to plague the county, restricting access to the countryside for the less able.

Very sadly the co-ordinator's wife of 42 years succumbed to pancreatic cancer in June. On September 16th we installed a gate in her memory in Dinton on the route from Haddenham to the Seven Stars pub. The team and some wives, in two socially distanced groups of six, gathered at the pub for a fish and chips lunch to commemorate the gate installation.

Within the Ramblers we remain one of very few totally self-sufficient footpath maintenance groups. With ten team members we can install two gates simultaneously if they are in the same field. We have our own Land Rover Discovery 1 4x4 vehicle, trailer, power tools and two full sets of hand tools. For £200/annum we have a storage site at Chinnor RFC in Thame, for gates, posts and tamping-in stones.

Our quarterly Activity Reports, detailing each and every stile to gate conversion, can be found on our web page: www.bucks-wmiddx-ramblers.org.uk/donate-a-gate.

Membership Secretary's Report

The table below shows the total membership of the Ramblers, our Area and its constituents at 30 September 2020 and at 30 September 2019 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.

	2020	2019	Difference	% Difference	Gains	Losses
Ramblers	98,717	102,038	-3,321	-3%		
Area	2,239	2,348	-109	-5%		
Groups						
Amersham & District	374	397	-23	-6%	32	55
Aylesbury & District	235	262	-27	-10%	17	44
Hillingdon	318	289	29	10%	45	16
Milton Keynes & District	231	225	6	3%	23	17
North West London	199	208	-9	-4%	25	34
Wycombe District	279	297	-18	-6%	21	39
Chilterns Weekend Walkers	312	349	-37	-11%	28	65
Hike MK	50	44	6	14%	15	9
Chiltern Young Walkers	115	127	-12	-9%	17	29
	2,113	2,198	-85	-4%	223	308
Individuals						
Area Membership	50	61	-11	-18%		
Awaiting Allocation	1	1	0	0%		
Non Group Members	75	80	-5	-6%		
	126	142	-16	-11%		
Affiliated Clubs	5	3	2	67%		

Following the outbreak of Covid-19, the number of people joining the Ramblers plummeted. Recruitment improved towards the end of the year but there has inevitably been a decline in membership for the year as a whole. However, it is good to see that three of the groups in the Area went against the trend and increased their membership.

Access Officer's Report

No report had been received by the time of publication.

Press Officer's Report

I have nothing to report for the year but would remind members that I am always ready to publicise Ramblers' issues throughout our territory.

News Editor

This post was not filled at the 2019 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 2019 AGM. Any publicity effort in our Area is, therefore, coming from our groups. The member who has continued as Area Webmaster in the absence of other volunteers remains willing to advise groups on publicity matters. Walk descriptions and associated information formerly available on our website are no longer available, as they were becoming 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 2019 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.

Reports from Groups

Amersham and District Group

The 2019 October holiday was held in the Derbyshire Dales at the HF house in Thorpe and was enjoyed by 31 members, despite the inclement weather, which caused the Dovedale stepping stones to be under water! 50 members had a jolly, festive time at the Christmas lunch held at Chartridge Golf Club: just as well we made the most of it as this year's looks like being, well, a turkey! We were pleased to congratulate one of our members on being voted Area Volunteer of the Year at the Area AGM in January. Donations received from Ramblers Holidays funded two new gates, one in South Heath and one in Swan Bottom, although installation was delayed due to Covid. Several members worked or volunteered during the lockdown including NHS volunteers, PPE sewing and frontline work in a hospital ICU. We restarted self-organised walks in small groups of up to 6 and have recently successfully trialled larger group walks with 12/15 people.

Aylesbury and District Group

What a difference a year makes

Back in October 2019 we were busy delivering our Autumn/ Winter Walk programme with an almost full programme of 8 Tuesday, 17 Thursday and 17 Sunday walks. All of these were well attended (in fact on occasions there were over 30 walkers).

In January we held a successful Winter Meal at The Bell Hotel, Winslow where we were well looked after, and a good time enjoyed by all.

In February we sadly lost a long-standing member of the group who had been active on the Committee in a variety of roles. She will be missed by many.

Having prepared the February to May programme we were suddenly hit by Covid-19 and then the lockdown. Undaunted in July we launched a Small Group Walks programme allowing members to prebook on walks for a maximum of 6 people and at the end of August this was increased to 10.

Our Webmaster was busy during lockdown sending out regular communications to members and also managed to develop new versions of the Aylesbury Outer Ring website and the public group website, in addition to launching a new mobile friendly members section on our website.

Unfortunately, two holidays and a summer social had to be cancelled but we remain optimistic for next year.

Despite the lack of group walking opportunities many members have kept in touch and organised informal walks with small groups of friends.

Chiltern Young Walkers

The 2019-2020 year started off well with a fantastic Christmas Social in Aylesbury with a lovely meal and fun quiz. 2020 marked the Group's 20th Birthday! On the 11th January the group retraced the inaugural steps of the groups first walk from Amersham to Great Missenden with 30 people in attendance; the walk was rounded off with a Social at The Metro in Amersham.

At last year's AGM we set ourselves the challenge of having a walk every Saturday & Sunday in January and February, the group smashed the challenge and continued it until the middle of March! Thank you to all the walk leaders who enabled us to achieve this challenge.

We held a great weekend away on the 13th-15th March at High Weald, East Grinstead with a great turn out despite the wet weather.

March 23rd saw the country enter lockdown and group walks stopped; group walks were then restarted on the 24th July with Socials still prohibited, which has meant the continuation of the CYW 20th birthday celebrations are postponed. During lockdown our Socials Coordinator hosted a Young Ramblers virtual lockdown quiz with the Hants 20-30s group every week; it has been a great opportunity to meet fellow Young Ramblers.

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 the 4 month hiatus from early March, during the past year we managed to put on almost 100 walks from 42 walk leaders (163 in the prior year from 53 leaders). Very creditably 47 of those walks have been post lockdown and our walk leaders adapted very quickly to the new rules, submitting walks almost immediately after the restart.

Although membership continues its gradual decline, prior to lockdown average walker numbers were up on recent years. Rebuilding the momentum we have now lost is going to be a very difficult task until it is safe to lift the restrictions on numbers.

Weekends, trips away and our plans to complete the long distance trails that cross the Chilterns were sadly decimated but there were two trips in the early part of the year and the week in Ambleside has gone ahead from the 10th October.

The Beginner's Navigation Course was another Covid casualty so hopefully we will revisit during 2021, assuming that there is sufficient demand and that larger groups are allowed back indoors.

We have postponed further development of our website until current developments with the Ramblers website are complete. Path checking was impacted too and only 50% of the paths within the Lacey Green parish were covered. 5 Issues have been reported to Buckinghamshire Council.

There were over 30 social events during the year but current rules mean that any further activity has been halted for the foreseeable future.

Hike MK

The group has been finding it difficult to recruit officers and committee members and has applied to re-establish itself as a flexigroup.

Hillingdon and District Group

The year 2020 marked our Golden Jubilee and we had organised a number of events – walking and social – to celebrate that milestone. On 22nd February we held a commemorative walk culminating in a welcome lunch provided by our catering committee and a cake which was cut by our longest serving member and eagerly devoured by all those present. And then Covid 19 arrived and unfortunately, the rest of our celebratory plans had to be put on hold.

Although lockdown stopped us walking for a number of months, we were able to restart our programme once restrictions were lifted. We have a wide programme of walks on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and over the weekends, and latterly our walk leaders decided how many participants to allow on each walk so as to ensure social distancing and safety. However, we had to cancel the walking holidays we had planned in Shropshire in the Spring and Llangollen in the Autumn and could not participate in local charity publicity events in Ickenham and Pinner. Nevertheless we are ready to resurrect participation in these events as soon as conditions and Government regulations permit.

During the year we decided to discontinue our own website and only use our allocated page on the Ramblers Association website. This has become the means by which we advertise our activities and has been a successful medium for attracting new members. The use of Walkfinder has been a great success in advertising our walks programme and our thanks go to those of our members who keep these two sites continually up to date.

We are always on the look-out for members to join our committee. We do not have an appointed Chairman, but that role has been successfully managed by members of the Committee in turn taking on the role.

Milton Keynes and District Group

This year saw the full effect of the pandemic on our group activities. Along with other groups our walks were limited to when we were allowed.

Our planned walks in other parts of the country were curtailed or cancelled. We did manage to squeeze in some more of the Saxon Shore Way in Kent. The MK Parks Trust walking festival was cancelled too. We have managed to grow our membership, despite limited walks.

This year our Footpath Secretary stepped down. He has always been a supporter of protecting and maintaining the rights of way. Each year he reminds all the path checkers of the submission deadlines and encourages a full return, which we achieve each year. He also organised path checking and maintenance walks during the spring. I would like to record our thanks to him for all the hard work. We were unable to fill this position at the AGM.

Despite the restrictions our path checking results were complete and submitted on time. Our committee meetings are now via Zoom as was the AGM. At the AGM a new member joined the committee and volunteered to act as Area rep. The other remaining members agreed to continue.

North West London Group

The same committee was voted in again. The Group are restarting their walks via Eventbrite. Some of the walks are being run in conjunction with Hampstead and District Ramblers.

Wycombe District Group

This last year has been an unusual year for our members due to the coronavirus outbreak and the change in all our lives at the present time. The beginning of the year started with an enjoyable late Christmas meal at the Hit or Miss at Penn Street and at that time none of us knew what was to follow. Nationally all Ramblers' walks came to a halt at the end of March and were gradually starting up again under the Covid-19 safe regime with a couple of our walk leaders taking walks of up to 10 people. To include as many members as possible one walk leader ran the same walk on several consecutive weeks until walks ceased again in November.

The planned weekend away to Selworthy in Somerset was postponed to next Spring, which was disappointing and we can all hope that this will take place on time this year. Although our committee have met in person only twice this year and by Zoom on one occasion, our Newsletter, 'Pathway', has been issued on a regular basis with varied and interesting articles and is a popular means of communication with our membership. Once things return to normal we are confident our active group will continue with our programme of walks on Wednesdays, Saturdays and a long and a short walk on Sunday. Several new members have joined during the past year and perhaps this is not surprising as there is a keenness for people to keep fit and active in the current circumstances.

In the past year we have funded the installation of two gates in recognition of long standing committee members. These were funded by income from Ramblers Holidays where members of the group had booked trips and commission is passed to our group finances.

This year's AGM went ahead in the usual month of November, by Zoom, and was attended by 23 members. Our Chairperson stood down after the AGM after 5 years although she will continue to represent the Wycombe Group as our representative to the Area Committee. At present we do not have a chairperson and efforts will be made to fill the role. I think all our members would like to thank her for the hard work she has put in over the last 5 years and wish her well for the future.

Elected Members of the Area Executive Committee October 2019 - September 2020

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	
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	https://www.amershamramblers.org.uk/
Aylesbury and District Group	http://www.aylesbury-ramblers.org.uk/
Chiltern Young Walkers	https://www.chilterns2030s.org.uk/
Chilterns Weekend Walkers	https://www.chilternswalkers.co.uk/
Hike MK	https://www.hikemk.org.uk/
Hillingdon and District Group	https://www.hillingdonramblers.org.uk/
Milton Keynes and District Group	http://www.mkrampblers.org.uk/
North West London Group	https://www.ramblers.org.uk/north-west-london
Wycombe District Group	https://www.wycomberampblers.org.uk/