

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF ALTON RAMBLERS GROUP

Monday 25 October 2021 at 7.30pm

Present: AJ Barlow, Chairman
Trevor Plumbley, Treasurer
Jenny Thompson, Secretary
Louise Fletcher, Membership Secretary
John Jones, Programme Secretary/Website Officer
Sue Rogers, Footpath Secretary

Plus 19 members of Alton Ramblers and 1 potential member

1. Apologies for absence

Bob and Maxine Dalton, Chester and Carol Whapshare, Barbara Trickett, Diana Samuel, Graham Titterington, Roger Baker, Patric and Sarah Hinde. Val Woods, Stuart Tuttlebury

2. Acceptance of the Minutes of the meeting held on 26 October 2020

Roy Kirby proposed the Minutes be accepted, Louise Fletcher seconded, accepted unanimously.

3. Matters Arising from the Minutes

None.

4. Chairman's Report

Welcome all of you.

2021 has proved to be another tricky year, but we are now back doing walks and without needing to book ahead. We also introduced a shorter notice period for leaders to submit walks, to make their lives easier. However, we are still desperately short of leaders and walks and it is unfair to expect the same few people to submit walks for all to enjoy. We fully understand if group walking and leading is still something some members are cautious about, but please try to support our activities. At the end of this AGM I will be talking a little about self-training as a leader, and if you fancy having a go at leading, this is one place to start learning what is involved.

We were unable to participate in the Alton Walking Festival this year, due to complications about knowing Ramblers' rules about opening up after the pandemic in time for us to submit walks. For 2022, we have already submitted walks to the Festival in May 2022. More are required!

We have seen a number of personnel changes in the Committee this year, as you will see later. We thank all those resigning for their service to Alton Ramblers. We have miraculously found replacements for all these roles with the exception of Social Secretary. Anyone interested should contact any of us on the Committee. We are hoping to restart some social events starting in the New Year.

In July we organized a walk for Alton Lions to participate in as a sponsorship event for them. Sadly only a few people turned up, but nevertheless over £600 was raised for the local Homestart charity.

Our local involvement in footpaths and bridleways continues. Our volunteer workforce led by Sue Rogers steadfastly maintains and surveys all 376 footpaths in our area. We made a small contribution from funds to an improved bridleway in Binsted, largely paid for by Tarmac Ltd who own the land. In addition, Chester Whapshare more or less single-handedly took on the massive bureaucratic barriers to get HCC to fund a bridleway 701 in Medstead, with a beautiful new surface.

We had let publicity lapse during the lockdowns etc, but now is the time to reignite our efforts. To improve our public profile in Alton, we will be having a stall at the Alton Christmas Fayre on 20 November, so please come along and support us, crowd the stall and draw in a load of new interested walkers. New members are always welcome, and indeed vital to our survival, as a substantial proportion of our roughly 210 members do leave us each year. In relation to other Ramblers groups within the Hampshire Area, we are keeping up our membership numbers pretty well. Walk Alton is aiming to be a hub for all walking in the area. They have a monthly entry in *The Herald* which will list all our walks.

Specially, I personally want to recognise and thank the members of the Committee for their hard work and support to get us going again after all the restrictions. It means a lot to me to be working with such great people!

Finally, thank you to all of you as members. Without your support, leading and joining walks, volunteering on footpath work and so on, we could not survive. Best wishes, we look forward to seeing you out and about soon!

Roy Kirby proposed the Chairman's report be accepted, Anthony Collins seconded.

5. Treasurer's Report and Adoption of Accounts

This report covers the 12 months to 30 September 2021.

The accounts are completed on a "receipts and payment" basis (as dictated by The Ramblers Assn.) and not on an "accruals" basis, i.e. the accounts are a snapshot at the close of business on 30 Sep 2021 only.

The Profit and Loss Account, Balance Sheet and the Statement of Assets are presented.

Main - Income

Our three main sources of income are from the Central Office allowance, Ramblers Holidays and book sales. The income from the books still provides a major contribution. Ramblers Holidays income is understandably limited this year since holidays were not taken owing to the pandemic. The other major income was from a donation of maps, the sale of which has raised £233.46.

Main – Expenditure

Our normal regular expenses of printing and posting of Walk Programmes/Newsletter have been negated this year as we did not publish any, again due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Our volunteer workforce has also been suspended for some of the year and hence expenses have been less than we were predicting.

Self-Funded Activities

All of our self-funded activities (the enjoyable social events) during the year were cancelled owing to the pandemic.

It is also again noted that income from Ramblers Walking Holidays in respect of holidays booked by group members can now be used for social activities and hence is entered under Self-funded.

Having accumulated money from previous years in our social funds, as previously reported, we do need to adopt a more liberal approach to social funding in the coming years as this pot of money needs to be reduced ! The alternative is to donate some of this money to the Main Fund.

Restricted Funds

The resurfacing work on Medstead Bridleway 701 has been funded, through our account, by a HCC CIL grant for reasons of expediency in that the grant money has to be paid to an organisation and not to an individual. We have to thank Chester Whapshare for organising this work to be done.

Other

- a) In order to reduce our Reserves Ratio (money we have in the bank divided by our annual expenditure) to an acceptable level for continued allocations of funds from Central Office, money has been set aside for spending next year and is designated for volunteer workforce expenses (£800), the purchase of tools for the volunteer workforce (£500), the purchase and installation of a park bench (£350) and operator training for our brush cutter (£300) – totalling £2000.
- b) The accounts have been submitted to The Ramblers Area Treasurer in the required Ramblers Association spreadsheet format.
- c) The accounts were examined and approved by Steve Ditcham on 16 October 2021.
- d) A separate Asset Register is kept of items owned by the Alton Group and is available to members.

Graeme Parkin proposed the Treasurer's report be accepted, Steve Thompson seconded.

6. Appointment of Independent Examiner for 2021-22

Steve Ditcham was proposed and accepted unanimously.

7. 2021 AGM Reports by:

7.1 Programme Secretary

Unfortunately the number of leaders has declined significantly from the number before the Covid pandemic. 18 months ago we had 35, now there are only 21 left of whom 14 are currently active. This puts a great strain on the active leaders to achieve a varied programme. However, in recent weeks, new walk leaders have emerged and numbers of walks seem to be increasing again – for Sundays at least.

I have asked leaders to confirm if they still want to lead so I can gauge the extent of the problem.

The new template style allowing any length of walk on any day of the week has had little effect so far, with leaders keeping to the traditional midweek days and Sundays, but midweek and short walks seem to be in short supply. The evening and pub walk by Louise was well attended. We just need some other novel ideas for walks, such as walks with themes, or with pub stops midway or at the end, and maybe even walks with quizzes (not quite I-spy).

We have returned to car sharing and various e-mails have been sent out about this. Meeting Places for car sharing can be added to walks as in the past, and entering the information in Ramblers Walks Manager is now simpler. I have added two Sunday meeting car share car parks on the website list, Vicarage Hill and Roger's Court, as they are free on Sundays: note that Manor is not free.

7.2 Website Officer

Little has changed. Photographs and routes have been added as has an advert for the October ATC Walking Festival organised with Walk Alton. Also added more recently is some information about the proposed changes at Bentley station and forestry work at Ludshott Common which will see it closed for several winter months.

Gerry Moon proposed the Programme Secretary and Website Officer reports be accepted, Jenny Thompson seconded.

7.3 Membership Secretary

I am pleased to report that our membership numbers have remained fairly stable throughout this challenging year for group activities. We have had a very good number of new members joining us but a similar number of our existing members leaving. 65 members, 30% of our membership, have joined at least one of our walks. I would like to see this participation rate increase and would welcome feedback (email louise.fletcher@keme.co.uk) from members who have not joined us on a walk to let us know what we could offer to tempt you to join us. All our walks are led by volunteers from our membership and we would welcome more members who could lead and share their favourite walks with us.

Membership Figures

	ALTON			HAMPSHIRE			NATIONAL		
	30 Sept 2019	30 Sept 2020	30 Sept 2021	30 Sept 2019	30 Sept 2020	30 Sept 2021	30 Sept 2019	30 Sept 2020	30 Sept 2021
Membership	200	211	214	4,038	3,937	3962	102,038	98,717	101,130
New Members	18	19	31						
Leavers	29	6	28						
Membership Change	-8	+11	+3						
Membership Change %		5.5%	1.4%		-2.5%	0.6%		-3.3%	2.4%

Walk Statistics 30 Sept 2020 – 30 Sept 2021

Our walk programme has been significantly reduced again this year because of Covid 19. We have had a period of all activities being cancelled and then used a pre booking system with numbers limited to 6 initially, increasing to 12 as restrictions eased. Thanks must go to our Programme Secretary John Jones, supported by Lynn Frances for taking on this onerous booking system and getting us back walking as soon as restrictions permitted. This has obviously had an impact on both

the number of walks offered and our walker numbers per walk. However, despite this we have offered 58 walks totalling 488 miles with a cumulative total of 3,275 miles walked by Alton and District Ramblers. 65 local group members have attended at least one of our walks and we have welcomed 25 visitor walkers.

Thank you walk leaders for continuing to offer and varied walk programme and for sending me your lists of walkers

	Mid-Week Short *1	Mid-Week Medium	Mid-Week Long	Evening	Sunday	Total
Walks offered	9 (10) *2	12 (10)	6 (9)	1 (0)	30 (37)	58 (66)
Walkers	61 (127)	61 (8)	35 (51)	11 (0)	221 (379)	389 (644)
Average	6.8 (12.7)	5.1 (8.7)	5.8 (5.7)	11 (0)	7.4 (10.2)	6.7 (9.8)

NOTES

*1 Walk lengths

Short = Up to 5.9 miles

Medium = 6 – 7.9 miles

Long = 8 + miles

Sunday = 10 + miles

*2 Figures in () are figure for 2019 – 20

Our most active local members 2020/21 are:

1. Lynn Frances, 37 walks, 340 miles
2. Diana Samuel, 24 walks 238 miles
3. John Jones, 24 walks, 220 miles

Roy Kirby proposed the Membership Secretary's report be accepted, Janet Parkin seconded.

7.4 Footpath Secretary

We have had a busy year with footpath clearing catching up after the Covid restrictions.

Hampshire Countryside (part of HCC) were not able to work during much of the lockdown therefore the footpaths due to be cut by them had twice as much vegetation to clear this year.

Our volunteer group has been busy helping them with many footpaths both clearing vegetation and repairing kissing gates, steps and putting scalplings down on paths. If there are any others who would like to join our working parties please contact me.

We have bought another Husqvarna hedge cutter to help in the clearing of footpaths. We now have a good selection of powered and non-powered tools to help with the clearing.

We have done about 560 hours of voluntary work this year.

This year we have surveyed Worldham and half of Binsted which was divided due to the number of footpaths. We are due to survey the other half in November.

We have wardens in all parishes except for Selborne (North and East) and Newton Valence. If there is anyone who is interested in becoming a warden for these parishes, I would be pleased to discuss it with them.

Hampshire Countryside has an annual cutting list made up by the various parishes and I am now trying to influence this by asking the wardens which footpaths they think should be on the list. I have so far had successes in four parishes who are taking into account our suggestions. I would like to hear more wardens' suggestions so I can liaise with more parishes. It would also be good to hear how the wardens are doing: some give me a monthly report, which gives me an idea how the footpaths are looking and whether further action is necessary. I also keep a log of hours they take to do clearing on their own. I would like to hear from anyone who has done this to keep my log up to date.

I would like to thank all those volunteers either in the working parties or as Wardens who have given their time to helping with the footpaths. They all do invaluable work on behalf of Hampshire County Council, the parishes and the Ramblers.

We have succeeded in getting the bridleway in Medstead resurfaced, thanks to the hard work of organising done by Chester. He managed to get a grant from EHDC, filled in a mass of paperwork and liaised with everyone to get the job done!

Over last winter, we collectively put in seven rights of way requests (DMMOs) and helped with a number of others collecting information for them. These are paths that are on the older maps but have been forgotten. We need to put in many more requests before the cut-off date of January 2026. If anyone likes old maps, doesn't mind investigating on the computer and would like to join us, please let us know. We can give you further information.

I have enjoyed working with you all this last year and I look forward to working with you over the next 12 months.

Peter Fletcher proposed the Footpath Officer's report be accepted, Louise Fletcher seconded.

7.5 Publicity Officer

Position not filled this year.

7.6 Walking Environment Officer

In July, Rob Hannah relinquished this role after several years, as well as being Footpath Secretary before that. I thought my feet were big enough to fill those boots! So far, so OK.

We remain vigilant for any local building or planning applications that affect the local footpath network and consulting where action to protect these paths is needed. It is worth reminding everyone that Alton Ramblers comment on the footpath impact issues only, not on other aspects. Among several projects in the Alton area that are impacting paths are:

- Bentley Station: Network Rail proposes a new footbridge/lift to replace two level crossings for paths in Alice Holt forest on safety grounds. We were consulted, and reviewed the plans. We notified that we were neutral on the proposal on the grounds that the footpaths will still be accessible, and provided for.
- Broadview Farm, Blacknest: after much objection to previous plans to build houses over the footpath in the past, the land owners have now proposed a scaled-back 'glamping' site, with the path sympathetically screened and routed safely and fairly. Our position was to request the footpath remain open and safe at all time, even during construction.
- Solar Farm, Worldham. There is an early stage proposal to convert more fields south of Alton to solar farms, which will impact a footpath crossing the land.

If any members do hear of, or know about, places where footpaths are being impinged upon, please let me know and I will look into it.

Penny Varnam proposed the Walking Environment Officer's report be accepted, Jenny Thompson seconded.

7.7 Social Secretary

There have been no social events this year.

8. Election of Officers:

The Chairman suggested that Committee members willing to stand again should be re-elected en bloc. The following were re-elected unanimously:

Chairman	AJ Barlow
Deputy Chairman	John Jones
Secretary	Jenny Thompson
Programme Secretary	John Jones
Website Officer	John Jones
Membership Secretary	Louise Fletcher
Footpath Secretary	Sue Rogers
Walking Environment Officer	A J Barlow

Treasurer	Linda Naish was proposed by Louise Fletcher, seconded by Sue Rogers, and was elected unanimously
Publicity Officer	Ann McKee was proposed by Penny Varnam, seconded by Roy Kirby, and was elected unanimously
Social Secretary	Nobody came forward

9. Awards to retiring Committee members

We had already given Rob Hannah (Footpath Secretary, then Walking Environment Officer) some new loppers that he needed during the summer. He has contributed so much to the group and was presented with a voucher and a couple of plaques to put on gates. Rob thanked all the members for allowing him to be Footpath Secretary and he is pleased that it is continuing so strongly.

Trevor Plumbly (Treasurer) was rewarded with a gift of drink and a voucher for all his work.

The Chairman wanted to acknowledge the work done by the leaders. Pippa Cunningham was selected to pick a leader's name out of a bag. Robin Hamilton's name was drawn out but he turned it down. On a second draw done later, Diana Samuel's name was drawn.

10. Any other business

- a. Roy asked about putting walks on the site. It is still done through the Ramblers website.
- b. Penny asked how many people are on mid-week walks. They have averaged 6.8 walkers. There have only been 6 mid-week long walks this year.

The meeting closed at 9.00

Following the meeting, the Chairman gave a short introduction to the walk leaders training material on the 'Assemble' website, followed by drinks/nibbles, organised by Jenny Thompson.

MINUTES APPROVED

Chairman**Date**.....

Secretary.....**Date**.....

Appendix I

ALTON RAMBLERS PROFIT AND LOSS ACCOUNT 1 Oct 2020 to 30 SEP 2021

	MAIN £	RESTRICTED £	SELF-FUNDED £	TOTAL	Prior year
INCOME					
Funding from Ramblers CO	301.04				295.97
Donations: Ramblers' Holidays			20.00		90.00
Other Donations	233.46				0.00
Deposit Interest	0.00				0.00
Publications / Books sales	360.00				487.00
HCC Grant for practical work		9636.00			578.82
Other					
Socials	0.00				974.00
Total	894.50	9636.00	20.00	10550.50	
EXPENDITURE					
Walks Programmes/Newsletter	0.00				94.96
Walks related	0.00				
Walk Leader training	0.00				37.50
Publicity	0.00				59.03
Meetings incl. AGM	98.76				143.13
Practical work	335.32	9636.00			1421.44
Publications/goods costs	0.00				
Admin.	0.00				30.98
Campaign/Casework	400.00				0.00
Other (bank charges)	0.00				3.00
Socials / Gifts	0.00		43.82		931.68
Total	834.08	9636.00	43.82	10513.90	
NET INCOME/(LOSS)	60.42	0.00	-23.82	36.60	

- Notes:
1. The above accounts are completed on a "receipts and payment" basis (as dictated by The Ramblers Ass.) and not on an "accruals" basis, i.e. the accounts are a snapshot at the close of business on 30 Sep 2021 only.
 2. The Profit and Loss Account above is under 3 headings which are summed as we only hold a single bank account. "Main" refers to income and expenditure with respect to the charitable aims of The Ramblers (our normal business), "Restricted" refers to funds donated to our group for a specific purpose and spent accordingly, and "Self-Funded" refers to income and expenditure for our social activities which should generally break even over the year.

Appendix I

BALANCE SHEET 30 Sep 2021

Date	01-Oct-20	30-Sep-21
Bank balance	3270.31	3306.91
Cash	2.28	2.28
Net profit/loss for year ending 30th September 2021 (from Profit and Loss Account above)	36.60	
	<u>3309.19</u>	<u>3309.19</u>

STATEMENT OF ASSETS AT 30 SEPTEMBER 2021

			Prior year
Main Fund		3375.83	3353.01
Social Fund		-66.64	-42.82
Stock *	579 x 1.01	<u>584.79</u>	<u>665.59</u>
Total		3893.98	3975.78

* Notes

1) "Stock" refers to The Ramblers' "Walks from Alton" books. These are valued for stock at their cost price, not their selling price. The number is the number of books held by Alton Ramblers. Note that 40 books sold to Waterstones have been invoiced but payment received on 1 Oct 2021 so is not included in the year end accounts above.

2) Stock does not include tools for practical work as these are not to be re-sold. Separate Asset List applies.