

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF ALTON RAMBLERS GROUP

Monday 30 October 2023 at 7.30pm

Present: Patrick Giles, Chairman
Linda Naish, Treasurer
Jenny Thompson, Secretary
Louise Fletcher, Membership Secretary
John Jones, Programme Secretary/Website Officer
Sue Rogers, Footpath Secretary
Publicity Officer, Ann McKee
Social Secretary, Maxine Dalton
A J Barlow, Walking Environment Officer

Plus 23 members of Alton Ramblers

The meeting started with a talk by Anita Ebdon of Hampshire Hawk Walks accompanied by her Harris hawk, owl and kestrel.

1. Apologies for absence

Graeme and Janet Parkin, Helen Smith, Graham and Diane Titterington, Claudia Glyn, Lesley Barrett, Jackie Slack and Don Hammond

2. Acceptance of the Minutes of the meeting held on 17 October 2022

A J Barlow proposed the Minutes be accepted, Louise Fletcher seconded, accepted unanimously.

3. Matters Arising from the Minutes

None.

4. Chairman's Report

We have had a very successful year of Rambling!

We had an exchange trip to France, National Parc De Cevennes with the Pertuis Randonneurs which was a great success. Thanks to Cathy Turton for all the organising along with Jean Pierre from the Pertuis Randonneurs. We are arranging a return trip for the Pertuis Group next year in August, the destination is yet to be finalised. There is a Walking Trip to France planned for next Spring with the Pertuis Group for a long walking weekend.

We have had several very successful social events which have been great fun and well attended. A Bowling night, quiz night and Summer BBQ, thank you Maxine for organising and rallying troops!

We are fielding regular walks in the week and on the weekends and have steady attendance. However, we need more walk leaders as it is the same core leading week on week. At the last committee meeting in September, we discussed a Leaders Walk day to give would-be leaders an experience, a taste of what is involved in walk leading. This is work in progress.

In the Summer months we had a few evening walks starting from Pubs with a meal at the Pub on return. These all proved very popular with attendance around the 14-15 mark. So, I think this is something to build on next year. Also, Ann and I attended the Walk Alton Group meeting in September with Ian Fleming (5-10) and other Alton Walking groups. One of the things that came up was that short weekend walks maybe popular. It was mentioned that many people on the weekend do not have time to dedicate a day to walking but may be happy to spend a couple of hours out rambling. This is worth exploring. Possibly short walks on a Saturday morning 4-5 miles, two hours with a Coffee stop after.

Sue continues to do a great job with Volunteer Ramblers clearing bridleways and footpaths. This makes such a difference. Without Sue and her team of volunteers many of these routes would be inaccessible.

I would like to thank all the Committee for their sterling work and dedication to Alton Ramblers. You have all made my job so much easier, always willing to help and advise with your knowledge and experience. Thanks also to all our Members for your continued support, and to those leading, joining walks, volunteering with Sue. We would not be here without you!

5. Treasurer's Report and Adoption of Accounts

The Accounts are completed for the period 01/10/2022 to 30/09/2023 and have been submitted to The Ramblers Association Area Treasurer in the annual return spreadsheet.

The Income & Expenditure Statement (see Appendix 1) shows an overall excess of expenditure over income for the year. The main reasons for this relate to brush-cutter training, where the grant was received last year, and a planned shortfall in the self-funded account activities.

Main

Income received for the year included book sales to Waterstones, the Ramblers subscription allocation and donations.

The sales of 120 books to Waterstones is higher than normal due to prompt payment of their invoice. The books sales are an essential income to the group and thanks again to Patric Hinde for his management of the book sales and stock.

Donations from Ramblers Walking Holidays increased from last year, due to the group holiday last summer as well as a few other bookings.

Expenditure for the year supported the group's activities related to practical work, campaigns/casework, publicity and meetings.

Funds spent on practical work relates to mileage, servicing, fuel, nails etc., and is much reduced from last year when we increased our tool stock.

Meetings expenditure relates to the cost of the AGM room hire, food and drink as well as committee meeting room hire.

Campaigns and casework include a payment for £200 to The British Horse Society as a small contribution towards Bridleway 62. This work is now completed.

Publicity expenditure is made up of the cost of a stall at the Medstead Fete and a stock of small gate 'Alton Ramblers' sign plaques.

Restricted Funds

A grant of £600 from EHDC has now been fully utilised for brush-cutter training and a helmet for two members of the Footpath Maintenance Team.

Self-funded activities

There were four successful events this year where we planned to reduce the amount of funds held at 30/09/2022 in the sum of £775.46. The events all required members to make a contribution to attend.

December 2022 Skittles evening	£8.50 shortfall
March 2023 Quiz night	£34.55 shortfall
August 2023 Barbeque	£157.59 shortfall
September 2023 First Aid Course	£97.50 shortfall

We close the year with a balance of £477.32.

Notes

The accounts have been examined as being a fair representation of the group's financial activities by Steve Ditcham.

A separate Asset Register is kept of items owned by the group and is available to members.

Louise Fletcher proposed the accounts be accepted, seconded by Jenny Thompson and accepted unanimously.

6. Appointment of Independent Examiner for 2023-24

Steve Ditcham was proposed by AJ Barlow, seconded by John Jones and accepted unanimously.

7. 2023 AGM Reports by:

7.1 Programme Secretary

We are rambling along with a reasonable number of walks and the shorter midweek walks seem to be proving popular. We are still very short of leaders and I can only thank warmly those we have for all the leading they are doing.

That said, we struggle to fill the walks calendar ahead, so more offers of leadership would be even more warmly welcomed.

We have a new Walks Manager process which has been adopted with only a few grumbles although there are still wrinkles to iron out. If any leaders have concerns, please let me know so I can help you to work around the issue or put the problem back to the Centre.

One of the wrinkles is that if a leader has not given permissions for their phone numbers to be displayed or their e-mail to be used on their walk the default contact data results in messages going to programme@alton.org.uk and phone number 07754 061780, both of which I monitor. So far I have had no messages!

Concerning Events in Walks Manager, like the ATC Festival, there has been a reversal of process which has been disconcerting. Now walks are added to the Event, whereas before the Event was linked to the walk within the old GWEM. So, when a walk is part of the Event or Festival, please make sure the reference to the Festival is clearly in the title, so that when I publish the walk I can add it to the Event/Festival.

Also, we have found (Linda) that if you edit your walk after it has been published, you can just re-publish, and the edits will be saved. You do not have to come to me for the edit/re-publish.

7.2 Website Officer

I hope you will have found the HCC maps of path closures, on the Front Page and Walking Environment pages, useful, especially as the HCC have added ROW path names to the data maps.

Current ROW Closures

The following link takes you to HCC webpage showing current closures of ROWs

[Public notices | Hampshire County Council \(hants.gov.uk\)](https://www.hants.gov.uk/public-notices)

If you prefer, you can see a map of this data at,

[Hampshire Rights of Way online | Hantsweb](https://hantsweb.org.uk/hantsweb/row-closures)

The website is due for an upgrade. The current CMS (Content Management System – how things are displayed on the screen) is called Joomla 3 and this is evolving to Joomla 4. Some elements you see are not compatible with Joomla 4, so Support are working hard to upgrade the group website, but it will take some time. The current website will continue to operate as you see it for now.

7.3 Membership Secretary

Membership has stabilised throughout the past year and remains the same as at the start of the year at 197 (including 6 payment-pending members). We have seen 27 members leave and 27 new members. Almost all the leavers were non-active members, or very sadly deceased. The number of members joining us on at least one walk has also remained the same at 73 this year, 37% of our membership. I would still like to see this participation rate increase and would welcome feedback (email louise.fletcher@keme.co.uk) from any members to let us know what we could offer to tempt more of you to join us on our walks. 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 (Active + payment pending)			HAMPSHIRE (Active)			NATIONAL (Active)		
	30 Sept 2021	30 Sep 2022	30 Sep 2023	30 Sept 2021	30 Sep 2022	30 Sep 2023	30 Sept 2021	30 Sep 2022	30 Sep 2023
Membership	214	197	197	3962	3927	3877	101,130	102,356	101,500
New Members	31	28	27						
Leavers	28	45	27						
Membership Change	+3	-17	0						
Membership Change %	1.4%	-7.9%	0%	0.6%	-0.9%	-1.3%	2.4%	1.2%	-0.8%

Walk Statistics 30 Sept 2022 – 30 Sept 2023

The number of walks we have been able to offer has significantly declined this year and the programme is now over-reliant on a very small handful of walk leaders. Our walks remain popular, continuing to average 10 walkers per walk over all locations, distances and weather but we do not have enough leaders offering walks. We have still managed to offer 72 walks totalling 612 miles with a cumulative total of over 6,000 miles walked. In addition to the 73 local group members who have walked with us, we have also welcomed 106 visitor walkers, 67 on our Alton Walking Festival walks, 24 from other groups and 15 non-members, 2 of whom are now active members.

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

	Mid-Week Short * ¹	Mid-Week Medium	Mid-Week Long * ⁴	Evening	Weekend Short	Weekend Medium	Weekend Long * ³	Total
Number of Walks offered	12 (11) * ²	11 (18)	9 (4)	3 (3)	1 (4)	1 (4)	35 (37)	72 (81)
Walkers	161 (107)	106 (175)	97 (25)	47 (34)	8 (44)	4 (29)	312 (338)	735 (752)
Average	13.4 (9.7)	9.6 (9.7)	10.8 (6.3)	15.7 (11.3)	8 (11)	4 (7.3)	8.9 (9.1)	10.2 (9.3)

NOTES

*¹ Walk lengths Short = < 6 mile
Medium = 6 – 7.9 miles
Long = 8+ miles

*² Figures in () are figure for 2021–22

*³ Previously Sunday walks

*⁴ Mostly AWF walks

Louise announced the winners of the number of walks done. Until very recently, Alf was top but Lynn just pipped him at the post in the last week. Of the walk leaders, Lynn, Linda and Louise were joint top, all having led 11 walks. The winners were presented with a box of Roses chocolates.

7.4 Footpath Secretary

Since September 2022 Hampshire Countryside Access Team have reorganised their areas of management. They have divided Hampshire into 4 areas rather 3. We now have 13 parishes under the North-East Area with Gemma Clinch as our Community Engagement Ranger. The remaining 7 parishes are under the South-East Area with Megan Cledwyn as our Community Engagement Ranger. These two people are my link to Hampshire Countryside. Under them there are two Rights of Way officers and three rangers.

The Alton Ramblers footpath volunteers have been busy helping Hampshire Countryside clear the footpaths. Over the last year we have completed 490 hours of volunteer work. This breaks down to 206 hours of vegetation cutting, 166 hours of furniture work such as repairing steps and installing kissing gates, surveying and inspections. We work over the 20 parishes around Alton.

Amongst the general vegetation cutting we have helped Gemma and Beech Parish Council to install a long handrail and helped Ropley Parish Council install a wooden kissing gate. We have installed two metal kissing gates in Medstead and one in FourMarks/Ropley. More wooden kissing gates and metal gates are planned in Ropley.

We have 6 trained brush-cutter volunteers now which helps with clearing the paths. There are 15 regular volunteers on my list. If anyone would like to volunteer with us please let me know as we have plenty to do.

We are fairly well equipped with tools now. We have two brush cutters, two battery hedge cutters and a number of hand tools including digging equipment. We have also recently been given a grant for a drill and hex set to help with furniture installation.

We have Alton Ramblers wardens in 17 of the 20 parishes that we have under our remit. These wardens work hard walking their respective footpaths to let me or Hampshire Countryside know of

any problems that arise. There are vacancies for parish wardens in Worldham, East Tisted and West Tisted. Please let me know if you are interested in taking one of these on.

I would like to thank all the volunteers and the wardens for all their hard work keeping the footpaths open and fit for use by us all. We have some wonderful local paths as you all know and I believe our paths are some of the best maintained in Hampshire.

Lastly I have been in my job as Footpath Secretary for 4 years and feel it is time to stand down. I have enjoyed it immensely and will continue to volunteer. However I would like someone to take over gradually to ensure a smooth handover so am prepared to continue for a while longer whilst easing someone in to the position. If you would be interested in being Footpath Secretary either as a joint venture or as a single person please let us know.

7.5 Publicity Officer

We aim to spread the word about the joys of walking and the importance of continuing to maintain our footpaths and access points through a variety of means.

We have seen increased engagement on social media since its set-up last year: the number of our Facebook followers is now over 250, and we know that walkers have come along on walks that they have been alerted to on FB, then subsequently joined Ramblers. We continue to post content relating to walking, we share walk dates and post-walk photos. All of this is also liked and shared by Walk Alton and Alton News. Additionally, our Instagram page is now up and running – there's a link on our website – please follow us.

Thanks to collaboration with Walk Alton, we have continued to place articles in the *Alton Herald* – there has been one from Cathy Turton about the French holiday trip with our twin town already, and next month look out for one from Louise Fletcher and myself trying to challenge stereotypes about walkers and the Ramblers.

We were invited by the Ramblers HQ to submit a short piece to the national *Walk* magazine in the spring this year celebrating the work of Sue Rogers and her footpath maintenance team with emphasis on our half-centenary last year – perhaps some of you saw it?

Sometimes it is useful to promote ourselves in a more visible way and this year we have manned stalls at the Medstead fete in July, and at Alton Runners Chawton Park Challenge earlier this month. We encouraged a few potential members to think about joining us – sometimes seeds sown take a while to grow! We also publicised our role as volunteers alongside the Hampshire Countryside Rangers in maintaining public footpaths.

The two Alton Walking Festivals – May and October – have given leaders and members the opportunity spread the word as well as to hand out our info leaflets and offer the walk book for sale.

We continue to be promoted via the Walk Alton page in the *Herald*, on the Walk Alton website, on Active Alton, in the *Four Marks news*, and at outdoor events run by Alton Town Council.

We are thinking of having an Open Day next year to promote our walks and volunteer work during which we would offer at least one led walk from the town centre: any support, of any kind, would be warmly welcomed.

7.6 Walking Environment Officer

We regularly monitor all local building or planning applications for things that affect the local footpath network and consult 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. Projects in Alton area impacting paths at present are:

Bentley Station Network Rail propose 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. Nothing new has happened in 2023.

Solar Farm, Worldham Planning permission was granted in Spring, but due to the backlog of connection to the National Grid, work has apparently been postponed.

Proposed new Footpath linking Wilsom Road to Hangers' Way at Neatham Down Gill Plumbley submitted this for a path change order some years ago. The case went to the Planning Inspectorate, after the landowner objected, and a hearing will be held on 12 December in Alton. Alton Ramblers has submitted a 'statement of Case' to support this footpath, since it offers the only safe A31 crossing in close proximity to Alton town centre, for group walkers and individual pedestrians alike. Come to the hearing to lend support to the footpath being accepted.

We now have two easy links on the Alton Ramblers website to show a list of public footpath closures in East Hampshire, as well as a map showing these closures in red. Please refer to these when planning a walk – many of the closures are south of Alton and near Four Marks, due to the late-running Esso pipeline works.

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

7.7 Social Secretary

2022/23 has been a successful year with the support by members. We have had annual quiz and skittles evenings and the BBQ. Thanks to Roy and Clare Kirby and Chester and Carol Whapshare for doing the honours for the quiz and BBQ.

For 2024, I have booked the skittle alley at the Jolly Farmer, Blacknest for Tuesday 6th February 2024.

I am in the process of arranging a dinner evening at the Jolly Farmer which will be held in the Skittle Alley room with the alley boarded over and no charge for the room, to be held on 24th May.

I have not had the opportunity to speak with the management of the Royal British Legion, Alton for a quiz evening, once again with the choice of a Fish and Chip or Pizza supper.

Perhaps we may have an afternoon tea or BBQ (could have both) should someone volunteer to host.

It was suggested that the Flower Pots may be a good venue for the dinner.

8. Election of Officers:

Patrick Giles was co-opted to the Committee mid-term so had to be elected at this AGM. Jenny Thompson proposed him as Chairman, seconded by AJ Barlow and elected unanimously.

The Chairman suggested that Committee members willing to stand again should be re-elected en bloc. The current Committee consists of:

Deputy Chairman	John Jones
Secretary	Jenny Thompson
Treasurer	Linda Naish
Programme Secretary	John Jones
Website Officer	John Jones
Membership Secretary	Louise Fletcher
Footpath Secretary	Sue Rogers
Walking Environment Officer	A J Barlow
Footpath Secretary	Sue Rogers
Publicity Officer	Ann McKee
Social Secretary	Maxine Dalton

All were prepared to stand again. Stephen Thompson proposed they be elected, Penny Varnam seconded and they were voted in unanimously.

9. Any other business

- None

The meeting closed at 9.05

The meeting was followed by drinks/nibbles, organised by Jenny Thompson.

MINUTES APPROVED

ChairmanDate.....

Secretary.....Date.....

ALTON RAMBLERS**Receipts and Payments Account for the year from 01/10/2022 to 30/09/2023****Receipts and payments**

	2022/23 Main £	2022/23 Restricted £	2022/23 Self-funded £	2022/23 Total funds £	Last Year Total funds £
Receipts					
Publications (book sales)	587.00	0.00	0.00	587.00	527.00
Membership subscriptions	304.08	0.00	0.00	304.08	304.07
Donations	160.00	0.00	0.00	160.00	80.00
Transfers between Bank and Cash	20.00	0.00	0.00	20.00	52.28
Grant	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	790.80
Self-funded events	0.00	0.00	702.25	702.25	0.00
Total Gross Income / Total receipts	1,071.08	0.00	702.25	1,773.33	1,754.15
Payments					
Practical Work	347.42	0.00	0.00	347.42	2,098.16
Meetings including AGM	235.42	0.00	0.00	235.42	453.58
Campaigns / Casework	210.80	0.00	0.00	210.80	52.09
Publicity / newsletters	27.00	0.00	0.00	27.00	100.00
Transfers between Bank and Cash	20.00	0.00	0.00	20.00	52.28
Admin	3.10	0.00	0.00	3.10	22.94
Socials / Gifts	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Grants paid out	0.00	600.00	0.00	600.00	190.80
Self-funded events	0.00	0.00	1,000.39	1,000.39	0.00
Total Gross Expenditure / Total Payments	843.74	600.00	1,000.39	2,444.13	2,969.85
Net of receipts/(payments)	227.34	(600.00)	(298.14)	(670.80)	(1,215.70)
Cash funds last year end	718.03	600.00	775.46	2,093.49	3,309.19
Cash funds this year end	945.37	0.00	477.32	1,422.69	2,093.49

Notes

1. The Income & Expenditure Statement is prepared above as required by The Ramblers Association.
2. The Income & Expenditure statement shows three columns:
3. **Main** refers to the income and expenditure relating to the charitable aims of the Ramblers.
4. **Restricted** refers to funds donated to the group for a specific purpose.
5. The grant of £600 for brush cutter training was paid out in the current year.
8. **Self-funded** refers to income and expenditure for our social activities.

Statement of assets and liabilities at the end of the year

	30/09/2023 Main £	30/09/2023 Restricted £	30/09/2023 Self-funded £	30/09/2023 Total funds £	Last Year Total funds £
Cash funds					
Bank current account	895.37	0.00	477.32	1,372.69	2,043.49
Cash/Floats	50.00	0.00	0.00	50.00	50.00
Total cash funds (Agrees with R&P Account)	945.37	0.00	477.32	1,422.69	2,093.49
Stock	362.59	0.00	0.00	362.59	443.39
Total	362.59	0.00	0.00	362.59	443.39

Notes

1. Stock relates to The Ramblers 'Walks from Alton' books. These are valued for stock at cost price, not their selling price. The number of books held at 30/09/2023 is 359 at cost price £1.01 = £362.59
2. Stock does not include tools for practical work as they are not to be re-sold.