

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF ALTON RAMBLERS GROUP

Monday 28 October 2024 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

Plus 18 members of Alton Ramblers and 3 visitors

The meeting started with a talk by Catharine Gale of Hampshire Swifts.

1. Apologies for absence

AJ Barlow, Jane Richards, Peter and Cei Conlan, Penny Cushing, Tony Green, Joanna Prescott, Rob Hannah, Cathy Turton, Dave Mackenzie, Felicity Parrott, Rosemary Cornick, Alf West, Don Hammond, Jennifer Rigby, Claudia Glyn, Jim Armitage, Fin Gordon, Frankie Simms

2. Acceptance of the Minutes of the meeting held on 30 October 2023

John Jones proposed the Minutes be accepted, Louise Fletcher seconded, accepted unanimously.

3. Matters Arising from the Minutes

None.

4. Chairman's Report

I would like to thank all the Committee for their hard work this year. It has been a successful year with regular walks, great social functions, two walking holidays and an active Footpath maintenance team. See Officer reports.

A big thank you to Sue for her sterling work over the last few years with her volunteers maintaining and improving the footpaths in our area. Sue has led a dedicated team of volunteers. Sue is stepping down from her role and we have keen interest in the role from one of our fellow members.

A big thank you also to Jenny, group secretary and Lynn, minute-taker for their hard work and dedication over the years. Jenny and Lynn are both stepping down from their roles this evening. Jenny has also been arranging the bookings of the Community Centre for our committee meetings and The Alton Maltings for our AGM and then the nibbles and drinks after. We have a member interested in taking over as group secretary which is great news.

5. Treasurer's Report and Adoption of Accounts

The bank and cash balance as at 30th September 2024 was £1,194.42 of which £50.00 is held as a cash float. A summary of the activity for the period 1st October 2023 to 30th September 2024 is as follows:

Main

Income received in the year included book sales, the Ramblers subscription allocation and donations.

We sold 75 books in the year to Waterstones, Outdoor Scene, Goldfinch Bookshop and a few books ourselves. The reduction in sales is partly due to the timing of cash receipts from Waterstones.

The subscription allocation that we receive from Ramblers HO is slightly down due to a small reduction of members in our group.

Donations from Ramblers Worldwide has reduced from last year due to less holidays being taken or members not updating their Ramblers profile to allocate commission to our group.

Expenditure for the year supported the group's activities relating to practical work and meetings.

Funds spent on practical work relate to mileage, servicing, fuel and small tool purchase. This is an increase on last year's expenditure.

Meeting expenditure relates to committee meeting room hire, last year's AGM room hire, refreshments and speaker costs.

The closing balance was £898.24.

Restricted

We received a grant during the year from HCC in the sum of £290.97 for a drill set and accessories. This was fully expensed during the year.

Self-funded

Expenditure related to some successful and well attended events during the year.

Table gifts for an evening meal at the Flowerpots Inn £12.60.

The quiz night in May has a small shortfall of £25.14.

The barbecue in August was fully self-funded in respect of food, but expenditure for the hire of the room and bar staff was £143.40 and paid for by the group, as agreed by the committee last year. This is to reduce the amount of funds held.

We close the year with a comfortable balance of £296.18.

Next financial year budget

Income

All available funds in our main account are used to keep our footpath maintenance team operational and previously this has been funded with HCC grants, sales of our walking book, Ramble Worldwide holiday commission and the Ramblers membership allowance.

HCC is fully dependant on volunteers like our footpath maintenance team to keep footpaths open for all to use. Our team looks after 20 parishes around Alton, so it is vital we keep our team going with training and equipment. Ideally, we should aim to raise or receive funding of approximately £1000 each year.

We are looking at potential funding opportunities as HCC do not have any funding available to the group this year, but we have not secured anything at this stage. Please let any of us know if you hear of any funding opportunities that we may be able to apply for.

Ramblers HO have agreed to increase the annual allowance this year to enable us to be able to pay for the two training courses mentioned below.

We are hopeful that we will continue to make book sales next year and £300 has been allowed. The production of a new walk book is also being considered. Please let us know if you would be interested in getting involved in this project.

There is an amount of £40 for the potential receipt of holiday commission.

Expenditure

The budgeted expenditure for Practical Work relating to the next financial year includes £460 for 2 brush-cutter training courses, equipment servicing £100 and new bags £289. The bags will enable team members to transport the brush cutters and hedge trimmers safely.

We have set up an account with East Hampshire Community Lottery. We receive 50% of our ticket sales and supporters get a chance to win prizes with the top prize of £25,000. There is no budgeted income for this until we know what the take up will be. Please support this if you can and also promote it on behalf of our group. It will be posted on our Facebook and Instagram accounts regularly and is on our website too. The link is <https://www.easthantslottery.co.uk/support/alton-ramblers-footpath-maintenance-team>.

Louise proposed the accounts be adopted and Gerry seconded, accepted unanimously.

6. Appointment of Independent Examiner for 2023-24

Steve Ditcham, who has done it for many years, is standing down. Linda asked if someone would volunteer to do it. It is thought to be a half-day job.

7. 2023 AGM Reports by:

7.1 Programme Secretary

We have had a good year of 80 walks which is summarised in Louise's excellent Membership report. The variety of walks has been greater with the inclusion of dedicated short walks every second Thursday of the month and the resurrection of evening walks organised by Paul Naish. A number of our leaders have organised a number of Alton Walking Festival Walks and that has

generated some new members. In August we joined forces with our French Twins, Mille-Pattes, from Pertuis for a walking holiday in Dovedale. It was very enjoyable and well organised by Tim Warren. This was reported on our website and can still be viewed using the link in News & Events.

As usual at the AGM I will issue my plea for more leaders. We now have 15 leaders on my active leaders list, but only 9 lead frequently. It is unfair to put the burden on so few, so, if you enjoy walking, please consider becoming a leader. The existing leaders would be pleased to help and show you the way! Contact me if you would consider being a leader and I will give you a contact.

7.2 Website Officer

The website has undergone a number of technical updates none of which should be obvious to a viewer, hopefully.

Currently the website shows our, to be, new Footpath Secretary, Paul Naish, and our appeal for assistance with footpath maintenance. If you follow the link at the bottom of the article you can see our appeal for funds for path maintenance using the EHDC Community Lottery.

Remember to look at our Gallery of walks and walking rogues, some of whom you might recognise, and at our Routes Library to give you inspiration for your own walks.

Ramblers Website/Systems

Ramblers had a website for organising volunteers called Assemble. After much debate this website has been discontinued. Now the information/documentation for volunteering is available from the main Ramblers website. If you find the Ramblers website difficult and you want to know more about volunteering, for Leading refer to Patrick Giles or John Jones, and for Path maintenance refer to Paul Naish.

7.3 Membership Secretary

Membership Data

Alton Ramblers membership has declined throughout the past year and is currently 185 (including 4 payment-pending members who we are likely to lose). Both nationally and at county level Ramblers membership has increased. We have seen 34 members leave and have welcomed 22 new members. Almost all the leavers were non-active members, or very sadly left due to poor health or were deceased. The number of active members joining us on at least one walk, holiday, social event or work party has increased to 41% of our membership. It is very encouraging seeing more members getting involved and enjoying activities with Alton Ramblers but we would always like to see this participation rate increase. We 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 and activities.

Membership Figures

	ALTON (Active + payment pending)			HAMPSHIRE (Active)			NATIONAL (Active)		
	30 Sep 2022	30 Sep 2023	30 Sep 2024	30 Sep 2022	30 Sep 2023	30 Sep 2024	30 Sep 2022	30 Sep 2023	30 Sep 2024
Membership	197	197	185	3927	3877	3920	102,356	101,500	103,465
New Members	28	27	22						
Leavers	45	27	34						
Membership Change	-17	0	-12						
Membership Change %	-7.9%	0%	-6.1%	-0.9%	-1.3%	1.1%	1.2%	-0.8%	1.9%

Walk Statistics 01 October 2023 – 30 Sept 2024

The number of walks we have offered has increased this year and we continue to offer a wide variety of walks both locally and as days out to the South Downs, North Downs, New Forest, Isle of

Wight and London. The programme is still over reliant on a very small handful of walk leaders. All our walks are led by volunteers from our membership and we would always welcome more members who could lead and share their favourite walks with us. There appears to be a demand for more shorter walks if anyone is willing to lead them.

This year we have offered 80 walks totalling 741 miles and walked a cumulative total of over 5,800 miles. All our walks remain popular, averaging over 9 walkers per walk over all locations, distances and weather (we have only cancelled one walk due to bad weather). In addition to the 68 local group members who have walked with us we have also welcomed 139 visitor walkers, 26 from other Ramblers groups, 93 on our Alton Walking Festival walks and 20 non-members on our regular walks, 7 of whom have joined and are now active members.

Thank you walk leaders for continuing to offer a varied walk programme and for sending me your lists of walkers so that I can compile the following data.

Number of	Mid-Week Short *1	Mid-Week Medium	Mid-Week Long *4	Evening Short	Weekend Short	Weekend Medium	Weekend Long *3	Total
Walks offered	19 (12) *2	6 (11)	5 (9)	5 (3)	3 (1)	6 (1)	36 (35)	80 (72)
Walkers	194 (161)	67 (106)	33 (97)	62 (47)	31 (8)	65 (4)	289 (312)	741 (735)
Average	10.2 (13.4)	11.2 (9.6)	6.6 (10.8)	12.4 (15.7)	10.3 (8)	10.8 (4)	8.0 (8.9)	9.3 (10.2)

NOTES

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

*2 Figures in () are for 2022–23

*3 Previously Sunday walks

*4 Mostly AWF walks

Linda Naish is the person who has done most walks this year with 46, she has walked 358 miles and led 16. Second in terms of number of walks is Lynn Frances with 33 (260 miles) and has led 13, but Louise Fletcher has done 32 walks with 284 miles covered and led 11.

7.4 Footpath Secretary

The handover of the Footpath Secretary to Paul Naish has been going well. Paul has been running the everyday volunteer work since August and has been finding his own way of organising the work.

This year we have worked 559 hours mainly vegetation cutting. We also have repaired steps, handrails put in posts etc. Our volunteers have continued to work on the footpaths and Paul has recruited a few more which is good news.

We still have a couple of parishes that need a warden but we have filled another couple over the year. I am taking on East Tisted and West Tisted.

Paul has decided to split the surveying from the general volunteering work. I have agreed to take this on for the moment. There are a few of the volunteers who have expressed an interest in helping. We surveyed Bentworth in May and we will be surveying Farringdon in November. After Farringdon has been surveyed all 20 parishes have been surveyed over my and Rob's time as Footpath Secretary.

We have decided that Paul will do a report for the AGM meeting. I am delighted that Paul has taken over the Footpath Secretary position and wish him all the best.

7.5 Publicity Officer

In a town like Alton, where walking is such a popular pastime, it is inevitable that there will be a number of walking groups catering to different needs. However, we continue to hold our own as

the oldest walking group in town, that leads the most walks and we try to attract new members on the basis of our inclusiveness and the variety of our walks.

Our social media profile continues to attract new followers, and this is helping to attract new potential members. Pictures of walks, recces and footpath maintenance work are a good way to raise our profile. Please follow us and share your own pictures etc. but word of mouth still is the best way to publicise the Ramblers.

We have had a presence on stalls during the year alongside Walk Alton, promoting the benefits of walking. At the ATC Spring Fayre in the public gardens on 11th May, a total of 61 people stopped to talk about walking opportunities in Alton. At the women's health event we were able to direct people to the Wellbeing Walks in particular.

Our publicity campaign to recruit volunteers for our Footpath Maintenance Team and Footpath Warden team is ongoing both on social media, and conventional media and has resulted in some new recruits. Our page on the EHDC Lottery website is live and it is hoped will raise some much-needed additional funding for the Footpath Maintenance Team.

Alton's Walking Festival in May, and the autumn one that has just finished, featured walks led by several Ramblers and gave us the opportunity to talk up the advantages of joining us. The festival goes from strength to strength and attracts several hundred people – it is an effective means of advertising ourselves.

We are working in close conjunction with Walk Alton, whose new re-branded website will be up and running before the end of this year. The Walking Forum is a good way of collaborating with other groups, and our own chairman, Patrick, has just led a walk from the Three Horseshoes in East Worldham which he volunteered to do at the last Forum meeting to showcase the links between local businesses and the walking community.

7.6 Walking Environment Officer

We regularly monitor all local building or planning applications for things that affect the local footpath network and consulting where action to protect these paths are 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 proposes a new footbridge/lift to replace two level crossings for paths in Alice Holt forest on safety grounds. We were consulted in 2022, and reviewed the plans. An ongoing saga; nothing much has happened in 2024, but it is likely the smaller BucksHorn Oak crossing will be closed (footpath 55) on safety grounds initially. Alton Ramblers support this on safety grounds alone. The larger changes to the crossing by the station platform are yet to be finalised and consulted upon.
- Copse Close 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 path change order some years ago. No change of position – referred to Sec of State. Dmno # 1167. I notice the entry point at the southern end from B3006 road is nearly blocked up. Hence no one will use it, which is the basis of landowners defence for not opening it up. Can someone organise a group walk or two along it?? Take photos, record the event, send to WEO (AJ Barlow). We need this path to allow walkers to safely cross A31 from Alton to get to Hanger's Way and Neatham Down, rather than use the hazardous surface crossings of the A31.
- Paths over and around Noar Hill are subject to closures until end of November for Ash dieback clearance of trees in the area.

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, or report it directly on the Hampshire CC CAMS system.

With support from Chairman and Membership Secretary, Alton Ramblers submitted a firm response to the recent Government consultation on the proposed new National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), otherwise known as the "planning" changes proposed. The comments were mostly in relation to footpaths and countryside loss, etc. The full text is available from AJ (good bed-time reading).

We also submitted a detailed response to the spring consultation on the Draft Local Plan from EHDC, particularly in relation to the impact on footpaths by possible housing developments on Windmill Hill and Neatham Down. The new Government's plans will change the local situation, but we will remain vigilant on whatever proposals do come forward.

7.7 Social Secretary

Firstly, I would like to thank our members for the support they have given to the social events throughout this last year, thank you.

February 14th St Valentine. We started the year off with an evening meal at The Flower Pots pub, Cheriton, with good food and excellent company of 33 members.

May 21st Quiz Night at the Royal British Legion, Alton, with a supper of Fish & Chips or Pizza. A very successful evening with 25 members joining in the fun. Many thanks go to Roy Kirby for compiling the questions which I do appreciate is time consuming.

August 29th we had a BBQ at the Alton Rugby Club. With 35 members participating, it was a fun and most enjoyable evening. Our thanks go to our Chairman, for securing the venue, and the staff; but a special thank you goes to Esther Kereti, our chef for the evening, for the excellent food.

Thoughts for socials in 2025

Lunch at the French Horn, Alton, on a Saturday possibly or alternatively an evening dinner in the middle of January 2025.

The Royal British Legion, Alton, has a Skittle Alley (mobile) which is good fun with a Chinese supper for a change.

Also, at The Royal British Legion, a quiz evening with a Fish & Chip or Pizza supper. I have approached Roy who is thinking about being the Quiz Master once again.

The BBQ being a great success, would the members have any thoughts where we might hold it next year? The Rugby Club is a very good and convenient venue however, it is also expensive to hire.

There is also thought of having a breakfast social. There are a number of venues i.e. The White Hart, Holybourne, The Angel Hotel, Privett on the A32. Both of these venues have the car parking plus a good starting point for a walk.

I have thought about afternoon tea. However, this could be expensive.

How about a ride out to the Theatre? Perhaps local, Basingstoke, Woking or the Mayflower in Southampton; though parking may be an issue with the latter two.

Please give the ideas some thought and give me some feedback.

8. Election of Officers:

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

Chairman	Patrick Giles
Deputy Chairman	John Jones
Treasurer	Linda Naish
Programme Secretary	John Jones
Website Officer	John Jones
Membership Secretary	Louise Fletcher
Walking Environment Officer	A J Barlow
Publicity Officer	Ann McKee
Social Secretary	Maxine Dalton

All were prepared to stand again. Paul Naish proposed they be elected, Roy Kirby seconded and they were voted in unanimously.

Paul Naish was proposed as Footpath Secretary by Louise, seconded Penny, accepted unanimously.

Alison was proposed as Secretary by Louise seconded by Linda, accepted unanimously.

9. Any other business

Paul outlined what he intended to do as Footpath Secretary as follows:

The team has been very successful under Sue's leadership and, in taking up the reigns, I hope to build on that success. Looking forward to the next 5 years, we held a meeting with the Footpath Wardens and Maintenance

Team on the 4 September to discuss how we would like to develop the team for its future success and resilience.

The meeting resulted in information packs being issued to the Footpath Wardens and Maintenance Team explaining their roles and a feedback questionnaire. The results of this suggest that we like to volunteer for 3-4 hours a week. The most popular days are Wednesday and Thursday with most team members wishing to contribute to one session a month to carry out surveys, construction projects and path clearance work.

We work closely with the Hampshire Countryside Rangers who advise there is a lot of work that we can do all year round and we have committed to 300 hours in the next six-month period. There is also a wish to undertake larger projects to benefit the communities in which we live and to take an active role in identifying those projects and work with our local Parishes and, where possible, to provide financial support to open up opportunities to create a wider variety of tasks for the team.

To assist me in my role and to increase the opportunities for volunteering, I am looking for Team Leaders who are able to work with me to deliver the projects and / or jobs. Our new recruit, Matt Flood, will be assisting me in the management of the work which will create more volunteering opportunities. Anyone interested in getting more involved with managing the work, please let me know.

You will also have seen the recent adverts in the local media and on our website This has, in the short time we have run this campaign, attracted a number of new members to the Footpath Warden and Footpath Maintenance Team. We still have vacancies and anyone who would like to support the Group in maintaining your local footpaths please do not hesitate to contact us.

The meeting closed at 9.25

After the meeting, Patrick thanked Patric Hinde for all his work on the book, both in production and marketing and presented him with a gift.

Patrick also presented Sue, Jenny and Lynn with gifts on their retirement from the committee in recognition of the work they have done.

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

MINUTES APPROVED

Chairman**Date**.....

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

ALTON RAMBLERS**Receipts and Payments Account for the year from 01/10/2023 to 30/09/2024****Receipts and payments**

	2023/24 Main £	2023/24 Restricted £	2023/24 Self-funded £	2023/24 Total funds £	Last Year Total funds £
<u>Receipts</u>					
Publications (book sales)	341.00	0.00	0.00	341.00	587.00
Membership subscriptions	284.88	0.00	0.00	284.88	304.08
Donations	100.00	0.00	0.00	100.00	160.00
Transfers between Bank and Cash	42.50	0.00	0.00	42.50	20.00
Grant	0.00	290.97	0.00	290.97	0.00
Self-funded events	0.00	0.00	1,042.75	1,042.75	702.25
Total Gross Income / Total receipts	768.38	290.97	1,042.75	2,102.10	1,773.33
<u>Payments</u>					
Practical Work	437.45	0.00	0.00	437.45	347.42
Meetings including AGM	335.56	0.00	0.00	335.56	235.42
Campaigns / Casework	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	210.80
Publicity / newsletters	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	27.00
Transfers between Bank and Cash	42.50	0.00	0.00	42.50	20.00
Admin	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	3.10
Socials / Gifts	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Grants paid out	0.00	290.97	0.00	290.97	600.00
Self-funded events	0.00	0.00	1,223.89	1,223.89	1,000.39
Total Gross Expenditure / Total Payments	815.51	290.97	1,223.89	2,330.37	2,444.13
Net of receipts/(payments)	(47.13)	0.00	(181.14)	(228.27)	(670.80)
Cash funds last year end	945.37	0.00	477.32	1,422.69	2,093.49
Cash funds this year end	898.24	0.00	296.18	1,194.42	1,422.69

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 £290.97 for purchase of a drill set was received and 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

	30/09/2024 Main £	30/09/2024 Restricted £	30/09/2024 Self-funded £	30/09/2024 Total funds £	Last Year Total funds £
<u>Cash funds</u>					
Bank current account	848.24	0.00	296.18	1,144.42	1,372.69
Cash/Floats	50.00	0.00	0.00	50.00	50.00
Total cash funds (Agrees with R&P Account)	898.24	0.00	296.18	1,194.42	1,422.69
<u>Stock</u>					
	287.85	0.00	0.00	287.85	362.59
Total	287.85	0.00	0.00	287.85	362.59

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 30/09/2024 is 285 at cost price £1.01 = £287.85
2. Stock does not include tools for practical work as they are not to be re-sold.