

LODDON VALLEY RAMBLERS

Minutes of Annual General Meeting held on 31st October 2018 at Barkham Village Hall starting at 7.30pm.

1 APOLOGIES

The meeting was attended by 54 people. Apologies were received from Mary Ede, Angus Ross, Christine Ross, Mary Walker, Alan Drabble, Nick Johnson, Stephen Smith and John Turner.

2 MINUTES OF MEETING

(i) The minutes of the last AGM held on 15th November 2017 were adopted.

Proposed by David Turner

Seconded by Daphne Perridge

The meeting approved the minutes.

ii) There were no matters arising.

3 REPORTS

Chairman (David Moffett)

Before I start, and in accordance with General Data Protection Regulations, I must ask if you are happy to have your name recorded in the Minutes. If not please chat with Derek Smith after the meeting. [There were no objections, so full names of people who were active in the meeting are used].

Secondly, I would like to thank Elaine Holloway and Shirley Chesterman, with the help of the Committee, for organising this evening.

This is my report to the Loddon Valley Ramblers Annual General Meeting.

Thank you all for coming this evening. My report is in two parts; a review of the current year and discussion on the forthcoming year. I would like to stress that this is your AGM and the chance to consider the direction of the group; if you want to change the type of walks we offer or social events, we have a healthy self-funded account, so if there is something you feel would benefit the group or improve the countryside, then please mention it. Under Any Other Business is probably the best forum.

We have a brilliant network of footpaths and the Ramblers objective is to keep those footpaths open, use them and improve them.

Earlier this year, I was pleased to welcome Steve Vale to the Committee as Footpath Officer. He will provide his report later, but I can already see his enthusiasm in resolving issues, walking out to check obstructions and driving meetings with our local Rights of Way Officer. Steve is well supported by his footpath wardens.

Another new member of the Committee was Nick Johnson as Walks Co-ordinator who has developed a wide programme of walks in our area. Unfortunately, Nick has been delayed in Cyprus, so is unable to join us. Richard Hatton will be read his report.

Finally, improving the footpath network and, in that regard, we have an experienced team of members clearing footpaths and installing gates under our excellent Project Manager, Ray Sharp. I think it is notable that when Ray asked for volunteers, he received 18 replies.

Also, it is not a boy job (as our Prime Minister described). We had several girls helping on recent gates in Hurst and it is one of those jobs that conveniently finishes in time for the pub. We still have three gates to install starting on Friday in Barkham, so we will keep those volunteers employed.

I believe, for a group to flourish we need to attract new members, for that we need a good social programme, obviously based on getting into the countryside. At last year's AGM, we asked for expressions of interest for a social evening and there was an overwhelming support for a Barn Dance. I was pleased at that same meeting that Mary Childs was sat next to me and said that she would be pleased to organise it.

So last March as the Beast from the East was driving snow across Berkshire, we were seriously considering cancelling, there was snow lying on the track to this hall in the morning. But we held our nerve and the dance was a great success and a great way of keeping fit to walk across fields and down footpaths. We have already booked a band, caller and hall for a Dance on Friday 15th March 2019 - a date for your diary. The flyer will be found in the next newsletter to be issued in December.

Our walking weekends continue to be well supported. Two years ago, I asked Gerry Cooper if he would organise a weekend at Abingworth last April and he agreed. With solid support from Richard Hatton and John Ledger, he provided an excellent weekend and perfect weather with a sweepstake win for Ellen Holmes.

In June, John Ginty organised a superb week in the Spanish Pyrenees for nearly 30 people. The weather was excellent, the scenery fantastic and the whole week was expertly led by Phil of Hike Pyrenees and his walk leaders.

In July Sue Gatenby, with her team, organised an excellent barbeque in the field behind this hall. At this point, sadly, I am reporting Sue's resignation from the Committee. She made a brilliant suggestion for Easy walks at a steadier pace with a coffee stop. These have proved very successful.

So, we were stood in the car park at Hambleden preparing for a walk and I just asked Grant Kelly and Carmel Hearn if they would think about putting together a walking weekend. They quickly came back with a proposal for a weekend in Lulworth Cove. Again, blessed with perfect weather and it was perfectly organised together with Richard Hatton. Now Carmel and Grant can't be with us tonight as they are in Australia and like good awards ceremony we have arranged a satellite link.....

So, let's look forward to next year. The Leaders' Dinner Dance is being organised by Martin Labram on 18th January 2019 and subsidised by the self-funded Account. This is in recognition of all the time our Leaders spend planning, pre-walking and leading walks in an extensive programme. Nick Johnson always needs more Leaders, so contact him if you want to lead walks and thereby become eligible for the Leaders' Dinner Dance. This year we will allow members to pay by bank transfer. This was prompted by our bank now charging for handling cheques and it obviously helps with postage and writing out cheques.

At last year's Leaders' Dinner Dance, I said we were looking for volunteers for a spring weekend in 2019. When I asked her for a dance; Ellen Holmes thought I was doing it for a bet, but it didn't take much persuading for her and David Bromley to propose a weekend in Dovedale from 5th – 8th April 2019 and our best supported yet with 68 signed up with a waiting list.

Then Barbara Curtis has put together a week in Bellevaux 12th - 19th June 2019, with 32 members signed up. Barbara is also our Membership Secretary, which has become more onerous with the new Data Protection Regulations, requiring us to keep personal details secure.

Bobbi Ginty is currently organising a Hog Roast, for 6th July in this hall and field. We decided we needed a change from the Barbeque and it will give the burger flippers a rest. Planning this is in addition to her normal duties as Publicity Secretary producing flyers for the libraries and leisure centres and the publication, Wokingham Word, as well as several parish magazines and running our stall at the May Fayre.

This brings me to our next autumn weekend, which Linda Ashwell is organising for 13th - 16th September 2019. Linda will give a short description of the Kingcombe Centre weekend before we have our buffet.

Looking even further ahead to 2020, Graham Smith is currently planning a walking weekend in April in the Yorkshire Dales and Ian and Marianne Murray are preparing a holiday in Madeira for September.

I am sometimes asked what does the Committee actually do? Well I consider they represent a cross section of the members, able to represent the views and opinions of the membership. As Ramblers, we are asked to comment on planning issues, footpath closures and diversions. The Committee also proposes and sometimes organises social events and give their time attending meetings.

So, can I quickly spend some time introducing your Committee?

I have already mentioned specifically the good work Barbara and Bobbi are doing next year.

Derek Smith, our Group Secretary, obviously records minutes of meetings and administers our link to the Ramblers Holiday scheme as well accident reports to Head Office. I like to consult Derek on all matters.

In no particular order, I'll continue with Richard Hatton who suggested longer walks on Tuesday and got the idea off the ground, a great success. He has helped on at least 4 weekends with carrying out recces and leading the longer walks and of course put the Longmynd weekend together plus, of course, he is an expert flipper of burgers.

Jo Fox looks after our website, more important now in keeping the walks programme up to date with weather cancellations and changes whilst overseeing our Facebook page.

Graham Croucher makes sure the Newsletter comes together and last year worked with Martin Labram to develop a system so Leaders can load their walk details directly into a spreadsheet for the Ramblers website Walks Finder and compatible with the newsletter and LVR website.

Finally, some of our members are leaving the Committee this year.

Graham Smith was Chairman for 3 years before me and before that Walks Coordinator; he has been project managing the Wokingham Way subcommittee with an annual series of walks along all sections to check the route is still up to date and that signage is in place. We feel the Way is now bedded in and could be checked bi-annually by a scratch team. So, after great service to the Group, Graham is standing down. Please join me in thanking Graham for giving us his time and advice.

David Turner was Chairman for 7 years before Graham and has been our Berkshire Area Representative at the bi-monthly meetings and initiating the First Aid Training scheme, an excellent idea protecting all walkers on walks. He will continue to run the scheme but is standing down from the Committee.

Finally, I think you all know that Kath Parker is stepping down from the position of Treasurer. I don't think anybody realises how much is involved with so many cheques coming in for weekends, funding social functions and arranging the purchase of gates. These often require countersignatures of cheques by other members or authorising bank transfers. Kath has fulfilled that role for 20 years, prepared accounts for Committee meetings and for this AGM as well preparing budgets with the committee for scrutiny by the Area Committee each June and submitting our accounts for audit by an external independent individual. I would like to give my personal thanks and ask for your support for her time, with a small gift from the Group.

And finally, my best mate and wife Kate, who checks my e-mails before I send them out, has more common sense than me and keeps me grounded by listening to member's views on walks. The power behind the throne.

So, I feel I can report we have a lively walking group.

Walks Organiser (Nick Johnson – report read out by Richard Hatton).

Walks from 5th November 2017 to 28th October 2018

We have been able to offer a full programme of walks for our members during this last year which have been mostly well attended.

Of particular note is the fact that we have been able to offer longer walks on most Tuesdays in the last two schedules, rather than on alternate Tuesdays which had previously been the norm. The "Easy" walks on a Thursday are also growing in popularity.

Based on the walk reports that have been submitted, over the last 12-month period, some 2,447 ramblers have walked 1,165 miles. That's the equivalent number of miles as walking to Reykjavik or Helsinki! I am going to take it as a personal objective to make sure that next year we have walked an equivalent number of miles to reach a sunnier, maybe even Mediterranean city! Personally, I like warmer climates!

We also had some different types of walks, such as the one Jo Fox led to the beer festival. Maybe we can think of some other innovative walks which can be incorporated into our programme. Just let me know if anyone has some ideas.

Walk Cancellation Procedure

Back in March and April we faced the "Beast from the East" winter chill. That seems a long time ago now, particularly after the wonderful summer we enjoyed. Nevertheless, the wintry conditions back then necessitated that we cancel a number of walks. Our walk cancellation procedure did not always work particularly well and walkers, some from other groups, turned up to the start point to discover no one from LVR was there to lead the walk.

As a Committee, we have agreed to improve our cancellation procedure. In the event of a cancellation we will communicate that fact via the following mechanisms:

Secretary (Derek Smith) will send out an e-mail to those members on the list informing them of change/cancellation.

Our "Web Master" (Jo Fox) will update the webpage and google calendar.

The Walks Co-ordinator (Nick Johnson) will update the Loddon Valley Ramblers Facebook page, thus creating an additional e-mail.

The Walks Co-ordinator (Nick Johnson) will also update the Walk-Finder on the Ramblers National website.

We will also arrange for someone to go to the start point of the changed/cancelled walk 15 minutes BEFORE the start-time of the walk and remain at the start point for 20 minutes in order to inform anyone who may turn up of such changes.

Please can all our members make sure they have requested that Derek include their e-mail addresses on our distribution list and keep an eye on our LVR website to ensure that our communication procedures work as best they can.

Walk Leaders

We are always looking out for new leaders. Some of the stalwarts who have led walks for many years are looking to step down, so we would be most grateful if members would step forward and volunteer to lead a walk every four months or so. That way we can continue to offer an ever-increasing variety of walks to our members.

Whilst on the topic of leaders, this seems a great opportunity to request a volunteer to lead a walk next Sunday, 4th November 2018. Poor Cathy O'Neil has injured her hip and feels unable to lead the walk. I am sure you will join me wishing Cathy a speedy recovery. Her published walk is a 10-mile Circular walk from Lane End across to West Wycombe through both grassy and wooded commons with extensive and varied views. Start: 10.15 SU807917 at Lane End car park on the B482 opposite the village hall near pedestrian lights (HP14 3ER). Bring packed lunch. Please call leader if meeting at the walk start. Meet: 09.30 SU807698 at Cantley Park (RG40 5QG) for car share.

Cathy can provide our volunteer leader with the route details of the walk.

[Graham Croucher advised the meeting that John Turner had offered to lead a similar walk from the same start point. This offer was gratefully accepted].

I'm sorry I can't be with you all this evening. I'll be thinking of you whilst I'm lying on my sun lounger. As I said earlier, I much prefer warmer climates!

Footpaths & Countryside (Steve Vale)

I took over as Footpath Officer in January of this year, and it is fair to say I inherited a healthy legacy.

First, because of the excellent work of my predecessor, Ray Sharp, who continued to work on footpath issues even after standing down, and still does so to this day, undertaking clearance work and leading gate installation projects.

Second because Wokingham Borough Council takes its rights of way responsibilities seriously and has retained a dedicated Rights of Way manager. Rebecca Walkley, who undertook the role for many years, retired at the end of August, but I am pleased to say that a full-time replacement for her has been recruited and will start work shortly.

The result is that, by and large (and with a few notable exceptions), the footpath network in Wokingham Borough is well signposted, in good condition and trouble-free.

My day to day role has been to follow up on the footpath issues as they have occurred: fallen trees, broken or missing signs, broken stiles, rotting footbridges and handrails, paths becoming overgrown and the like.

I have an excellent team of parish Footpath Wardens to support me – currently a full team of 13 of them, although there is need for a replacement warden in Swallowfield. They are assiduous in finding problems in their parish areas, and in reporting them.

Wokingham Borough Council's response is usually pretty good. Over 60% of the issues we have reported since the start of 2018 have been rectified – albeit with some chasing up by me.

There are however, some bigger issues that need to be addressed.

Starting with the successes, we have made major progress with the installation of gates to replace stiles and make access to the footpath network easier for all. Following on from previous installations in Shinfield, four new gates have been installed in Hurst and another three will be installed shortly on the footpath linking Barkham Church with Edney's Lane. The latter is a good example of how a longish and very well-used path can be made stile-free throughout its length.

Six more gates are planned for next year, and LVR is making a major contribution to Wokingham Borough Council's Rights of Way Improvement Plan, which envisages as many stiles as possible being converted to gates.

The credit for the work goes to our Chairman and to Ray Sharp, rather than me. Credit is also due to the LVR members who helped with the installations, the landowners for giving permission, and to Berkshire Area Ramblers, Wokingham Borough Council and Hurst and Barkham Parish Councils for helping fund the costs.

There is, of course, a huge amount of housing development in Wokingham Borough at the moment. LVR tries to remain neutral on whether such development should or should not take place, and to confine itself to ensuring that public rights of way are retained both during and after the developments, and, if possible, enhanced.

I feel that we are having some success with this aim, and that developers have got the message. To give two examples, routes have been maintained across the large Shinfield Meadows site whilst construction takes place, and the network will be better than it was, once the development is completed. And the planning application for houses on the land between Cutbush Lane and the Shinfield by-pass has included retention and enhancement of existing footpath routes from the outset.

New roads go hand in hand with housing developments and can have a major impact on rights of way, but, again, it is possible to identify successes preserving them. For example, the footpath from Winnersh to Sindlesham has been well restored, following the completion of Phase 1 of the Winnersh Relief Road. The plans for the Arborfield by-pass include the preservation of all the current footpath routes (thanks are due again to Ray Sharp).

However, we will need to remain vigilant as more major roads are in the pipeline – the northern and southern distribution roads in Wokingham and the East Reading Mass Transit scheme.

My role on roads and development is to make sure that we pick up on and respond in an appropriate and timely fashion to consultations, involving the Committee and the footpath wardens in preparing our response.

The most disappointing feature of 2018 has been the recurrence of persistent problems with farmers cropping footpaths, so that they become unusable. It is clear that farmers are not permitted to do this, but remedial action can be difficult and slow to implement. LVR is

determined to get Wokingham Borough Council to take a tougher line and quicker action with recalcitrant farmers in 2019, and this will be at the top of my agenda when I meet the new Rights of Way manager at Wokingham Borough Council later this year.

I would like to end by thanking both the Committee and the Footpath Wardens, who have helped me settle into the Footpath Officer role and (I hope) start to get to grips with what it entails.

4 ADOPTION OF ACCOUNTS (Kath Parker)

The Accounts for the year 1st October 2017 to 30th September 2018 were presented. There were no questions on the Accounts.

Approval of the Accounts

Proposed by Jenny Smith

Seconded by Ray Sharp

The meeting approved the Accounts which are given as an appendix to these minutes.

5 REVISED LVR GROUP CONSTITUTION (David Moffett)

The LVR Constitution has been revised and has been on the website for a few weeks.

Adoption of the revised Constitution

Proposed by Graham Smith

Seconded by David Moffett

The meeting approved the revised Constitution.

6 ELECTION OF COMMITTEE (Derek Smith)

The attendees were advised that any member may stand for election to any committee position - whether currently filled or vacant - provided they have a proposer and a seconder.

There were three vacancies – Treasurer, Ex-Officio Officer and Social Secretary.

Treasurer

Nomination – Alan Drabble

Proposed by David Turner

Seconded by Sue Gatenby

The meeting approved the election of Alan Drabble as Treasurer.

Ex-Officio Officer

Nomination – Mike Evans

Proposed by Graham Smith

Seconded by Graham Croucher

The meeting approved the election of Mike Evans as Ex-Officio Officer

There was no nomination or volunteer for Social Secretary and this remains open for members to offer their services.

All other committee members stood for re-election.

There were no other nominations for the committee, so the existing members were approved en bloc.

Proposed by Ray Sharp
Seconded by John Ginty

The meeting approved the re-election of the committee.

7 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Sue Hennell pointed out that three recent, consecutive Tuesday walks were between 14.5 and 15 miles which were a stretch too far for some Tuesday walkers. Sue was asking if the longer walks could be limited to (say) one Tuesday per month. Linda Ashwell suggested that a solution might be for someone leading a 15 mile walk to return to the start after 12 miles and then do a further 3-mile loop. Elaine Holloway suggested designating one week of each month to have a longer Tuesday walk.

Margaret Tyler pointed out that sometimes the two Thursday walks were both of around 4 miles. On Thursdays where two walks were put on the longer one should be 5 or 6 miles.

Action: Richard Hatton undertook to speak with Nick Johnson on these concerns.

Ian MacKenzie, a founder member of LVR who has just re-joined the group after living in Dorset for 16 years, told the meeting how impressed he was with the range of Walks and Social Events offered by the group and that he felt the group had grown from strength to strength since he left.

In response to the call for ideas for events, a River boat Shuffle had been suggested earlier in the year but was not proceeded with partly on value grounds and partly as the Summer Barbeque was already in hand. This may get reconsidered in the future, but the Hog Roast has now been earmarked for 2019.

Linda Ashwell suggested a walk from Henley to Marlow and getting a river boat back.

Nick Ballard suggested an Orienteering session and gave names of some clubs that would assist the visit of a group.

Action: The Committee to consider these ideas at the next Committee Meeting.

There being no further business the formal meeting closed at approximately 8.30pm.

8 PRESENTATION

Linda Ashwell is organising the Autumn 2019 weekend based at The Kingcombe Centre, Lower Kingcombe, Dorset DT2 0EQ. This will take place between 13th – 16th September 2019. Linda gave a slideshow presentation to provide the meeting with a flavour of the centre, the location and the weekend in general. There is accommodation for 27-28 people and there are various B&B's nearby to accommodate further people. There will be short walks on the Friday afternoon and Monday morning and both long and short walks on the Saturday and Sunday led by local Ramblers. The cost for three nights bed, breakfast and evening meal will be £175 per person.

Appendix 1 – Treasurer’s Report

Receipts & Payments

1st October 2017 – 30th September 2018

MAIN ACCOUNT

RECEIPTS	£	PAYMENTS	£
From Area	2282	Walks Program/Newsletter	961.11
Gates Project (Area)	827	Meetings-AGM Committee	546.75
“ “ (Hurst P.C)	331	Leader Training (First Aid)	105.00
“ “ (Wokingham)	931	Publicity	243.69
Advert Sales (Newsletter)	120	Practical Work	2924.55
Ramblers Worldwide Hols	240	Admin	25.10
Book Sales (May Fayre)	18	Other	112.50
Assoc Membership	3		
RECEIPTS	4752	PAYMENTS	4918.70
Surplus/Deficit	-166		

SELF FUNDED ACCOUNT

RECEIPTS	£	PAYMENTS	£
Day Walks	0	Day Walks	0.00
Holidays	46095	Holidays	45329.31
Socials	2687	Socials	3431.38
Other	0	Other	0.00
RECEIPTS	48782	PAYMENTS	48760.69
Surplus/Deficit	22		

Total Receipts	53535	Total Payments	53679.00
Surplus for Year	-144		

Bank Reconciliation

Opening Bank Balance	Main Account	1818.80	
@1st October 2017	S/F Account	1971.80	3790.60
Total Receipts for the year		53534.89	
Total Payments for the year		-53679.39	-144.50
Closing Bank Balance	Main Account	1652.54	
@30th September 2018	S/F Account	1993.56	3646.10