

# **LODDON VALLEY RAMBLERS**

**Minutes of Annual General Meeting held on 4th November 2009 at St Mary's Church Hall in Twyford, starting at 7.30pm.**

## **1 PRESENTATION BY RAMBLERS WORLDWIDE HOLIDAY**

A presentation on the various types of holiday offered by Ramblers Worldwide Holidays (RWH) was given by Tony Maniscalco. RWH is a charitable trust which offers four types of holiday: Worldwide Holidays, UK Holidays, Cruise and Walks Holidays and Family Holidays. They welcome block bookings for walking groups and would tailor their holidays to meet the requirements of a group.

## **2 APOLOGIES**

The meeting was attended by 28 people including John Moules who is the current Chairman of Berkshire Area committee. Apologies were received from Chris King, Jane King, Pat Perridge, Chris Robson, Richard Kenton, Mary Price, Vlad Peksa, Blanka Peksa and Lynn Bennett.

## **3 MINUTES OF MEETING**

(i) The minutes of the last AGM held on 12th November 2008 were adopted.

Proposed by John Kingdom.

Seconded by Mary Walker.

The meeting approved the minutes.

ii) There were no matters arising.

## **4 REPORTS**

### **Chairman**

Firstly, I would like to thank Barbara Curtis for organising the refreshments for this evening.

David Turner gave the following report:

Thank you all for coming this evening. I hope you all found Tony Maniscalco's talk interesting. Since the last AGM the following have been available to the membership:

### **Walking**

Thanks to Graham Smith and the walks leaders, we have continued to provide a full programme of both long and short walks on Sunday and shared walks on Thursday with Mid Berks.

From the start of next year we will no longer share Thursday walks with Mid Berks due to the large numbers that have been going on these walks. We will arrange our own Thursday walks in future.

During the summer three evening walks were organised and in September, Chris Robson and Liz Turkington organised a Treasure Hunt around Binfield which I certainly enjoyed although I confess that my team struggled with some of the difficult clues.

### **Holidays**

We have also continued to offer weekends away with:

- The Rye weekend in April.
- The Sidmouth weekend organised by John Kingdom in October.
- At the end of May, Barbara Curtis organised a week's walking holiday staying in Bellevaux near Lake Geneva supported by Richard Kenton who arranged the transport to and from Geneva.

We intend to continue offering walking holidays to members of our group and next year we have arranged the following:

- A walking weekend in Dartmoor has been arranged by Ian Murray for the end of April.
- Graham Smith is organising a walking weekend in the Mendips for the end of October staying at the Best Western, Webbington Hotel & Spa, Loxton, Axbridge, Somerset.
- Following the success of this year's French holiday we are arranging two European holidays in 2010.
- In June, Barbara Curtis is trying to arrange a week's walking holiday back in Bellevaux. As part of the group that enjoyed this year's holiday in Bellevaux, I strongly recommend this holiday. The hotel is good and the scenery on the walks is stunning and there was a day's sightseeing around Lake Geneva. If you are interested, Barbara is still accepting applications for places, so please speak to her after the meeting.
- In September, Nick Price is arranging a week's walking holiday in the Pyrenees, staying in Andorra.

### **Social events**

On the social side, Lynn Bennett organised a skittles evening at the Jack O'Newbury, Binfield in February and in July she organised a summer supper evening at the Hurst Cricket Club. Both events were well attended and great fun.

Also, on Friday 15th January next year, Lynn has organised a dinner at the Great House in Sonning to celebrate 15 years since the Loddon Valley group was formed. If anyone has not applied and is considering going please see me after the meeting as there are still some spare places.

Since the last AGM, Lynn Bennett has resigned as our Social Secretary due to her moving home to Chippenham. Lynn has served on the Committee since November 1998 and has been our Social Secretary since 2000. On behalf of us all I would like to thank Lynn for her hard work arranging our social events for the last nine years and wish her all the best for her new life in Chippenham.

The aim of your committee has been to provide the membership with a full range of walking experiences and social events and do what we can to ensure that the footpaths in this area are kept in good order. I would like to thank the committee for their support and for their hard work over the past year. If anyone has any new ideas that will keep our programme fresh and interesting, please come and speak to me or any member of the Committee.

### **Other**

As reminder the Berkshire Area AGM will take place on Saturday 28th November at Knowl Hill Village Hall with a 4¾ mile walk starting at 10:45 am and the meeting starting at 2:00pm.

At this point John Moules was invited to talk about the Berkshire Area Committee. John said that the committee urgently needs volunteers if it is to continue. If a viable committee cannot be formed, then it is possible that Berkshire would come under a neighbouring county.

We have a publicity stall at Wokingham Winter Carnival on Sunday 29th November and Daphne Perridge made a request for members to come and support the stall.

As part of the Ramblers Association's 75th Anniversary celebrations, Berkshire Area has produced a booklet of walks in the county with the objective of encouraging more people to walk in the county.

Two of the walks are to be led by Loddon Valley. A booklet will be sent to all Ramblers members in Berkshire.

### **Footpaths, Countryside and Access**

Ray Sharp gave the following report:

A whole year has rolled by since my last report and I hope you all had an enjoyable time walking. I have learned so much more about the Footpath Secretaries role and whilst it is mostly rewarding, there have been some less pleasant aspects which I will talk about in a few minutes.

#### **Rights of Way:**

Taken as a whole the 143 miles of public rights of way in Wokingham Borough Council are quite good. Over the past year there have been 38 individual path defects reported to Wokingham Borough Council through our Footpath Officers, me and not least you our fellow members. This is an improvement on last year when 41 faults were reported over a three month shorter period. The true scale of the improvement is best summed up by saying that our fault register peaked at 56 but we now have just 18 outstanding. I would like to think our diligence and persistent lobbying of the Countryside Service has brought about this improvement but we should acknowledge the part they played in this.

You would not want me to bore you with a lot of fairly meaningless information but I would just like to mention three highlights. John Ginty, our warden for Wokingham Without scored a big success in getting a footbridge with handrails erected over a stretch of footpath 16 near Gray's farm that was nearly always under water.

Derek Johnson, our warden for Swallowfield was able to get footpath 4 near the river Blackwater reopened where it had been obstructed with a fence.

Finally, regarding Shinfield footpath 5, I pestered the life out of WBC until they erected a stile where metal railings were causing an obstruction leading onto a footbridge.

These are just three wins but all the footpath officers played their part but the successes were less spectacular. None the less my thanks go out to all of them for all the little bits they do which we do not hear about.

Wokingham Borough Council's latest BVPI (Best Value Performance Indicator) survey claims a pass rate of 98% in May 2008 and 90% in November 2008 giving an overall of 94% in 2008. Bearing in mind this may have been selective routes I would not wish to discount the figures and as previously mentioned the network is quite good. There will be no more BVPI surveys undertaken as it is not now a requirement for Local Authorities. WBC has said however that they intend to carry out annual inspections with the view to cover the whole network over a two year period. Our membership can play its part in this by reporting any problems to the footpath officer for the location or directly to me so that we can (a) report the problems to WBC and (b) chase the issues up.

There were two issues that were a bit sour. There is a long standing proposal to divert part of Hurst footpath 20 where it runs across a field that is used by the primary school for sport and play. The LVR committee voted not to oppose the proposal in 2006 but this year I was asked by the Open Spaces Society to try and recover the situation. I soon found out this was quite a hot topic so took all the issues back to our committee and by a majority vote a decision was taken again not to oppose the diversion. Our decision was not well received by the principal objectors to the diversion but it is how democracy works.

The second issue concerned the Henley Regatta firework display. The Henley Regatta management decided not to hold the display this year due to drunken rowdiness and a Belgian rower being stabbed at last years event. In a last ditch attempt to hold the event this year, Dr Ray Crockett offered his land at Sham Hill for the event to take place. James Brennan the organiser believed he had clearance from WBC to hold the event. I was approached and asked if I had been given any footpath closure notices because Remenham footpath 8 was going to be involved when the display went ahead. Because I had not, I sent

an innocent e-mail to WBC and asked what safety procedures were being put in place to make sure any walkers on the footpath were a safe distance from the fireworks. Without any discussion with me, WBC simply told the organiser that the event could not go ahead. The Henley Standard got hold of this and wanted to blame the ramblers and me in particular for objecting to the path being closed for the event. They eventually did print a story that blamed me and after two nasty e-mails from members of the public I threatened the Henley Standard with court action unless they put right the injustice because at no time did I object to the path being closed. They did print a further story that exonerated me and the ramblers.

#### **Planning Applications:**

I received 5 applications that I did not oppose. These were:

**F/2008/2550 Remenham Barn, Remenham.** This had no effect on the footpath but I did write to the planning department and suggest it was a pity the landowner intended to raise the height of his garden wall to 1.8 metres as this would take away the wider view of the river Thames when approached from footpath 14. The application was refused.

**F/2009/1750 Remenham Barn, Remenham.** This submission replaced F/2008/2550 and this time made no reference to raising the height of the wall so I offered no objection.

**RM/2009/0727 Land at Three Mile Cross.** This was a Reserved Matters document in relation to planning application O/2007/2268 which is already approved. I wrote to the planning department to the effect that I neither supported nor opposed the development and that my primary concern is for the integrity of Shinfield footpath 26 which will run right through the proposed estate.

**F/2009/0822 Bulmershe Gymnastics Club, Woodley.** This has no effect on the footpath.

**F/2009/1305 Culham Court, Remenham.** This has no effect on the footpaths. Remenham Parish Council is opposing the application and I believe are a bit disappointed that I did not. I have explained to them that my role is footpaths and since they were not affected I could not object.

#### **Legal Issues in Progress:**

I caused a slight delay in the permitted paths at Bottom Bowles Wood becoming Definitive paths. I was asked to challenge Wokingham Borough Council's decision to show a derelict stile as a limitation on the map and statement. I was not successful and the Modification Order has now been confirmed with the paths to be called Wargrave 55 and 55A. I have asked Rebecca Walkley why the signage had not been completed and she said it would be done within four weeks. This will be a fitting end to David Bounds efforts as it was he who played a big part in campaigning for these paths in late seventies.

The claim that I submitted for a path over Henley Regatta land in Lion Meadow has now been with Wokingham Borough Council for 12 months. They now have to confirm if they have made a decision or not so that I can progress through the Secretary of State.

I was asked to comment on the proposal to redevelop Earley footpath 15. This is currently not on its true line but the developer wishes to create a wider path to take pedestrians and cyclists. I have advised WBC that our committee agree in principle and although a width of 2.5 metres has been offered we would prefer 3 metres.

I received informal approaches from WBC asking my preferences for diversions to footpath Arborfield 20 and Wargrave 25. I took these to our committee with the recommendation to reject all the options. This was agreed and WBC has been advised of our opinion.

#### **Meetings:**

I have had two meetings this year with my Footpath Officer colleagues and this has proved to be valuable and something we expect to continue.

#### **Working Parties:**

I did receive some volunteers to set up working parties but when we looked into the insurance aspects it was decided by our committee I could drop the idea. The insurance requirements are now a bit intrusive.

#### **Local Access Forum.**

I was asked if I would consider applying to join the LAF as a footpath representative for Wokingham. Entry is not guaranteed but I have applied as I feel it will be of benefit to the Berkshire groups. So if I get into this and am lucky enough to be re-elected as your footpath secretary I will continue to campaign for our footpaths.

#### **Treasurer**

Kath Parker gave the following report:

Our financial year ended on 30th September 2009.

#### **Income**

Our main source of income is from Head Office, based on the number of members in the group, and has been £825 for the last two years.

Total income for 2008-2009 was £1115

#### **Expenditure**

Our main expenditure is for printing and distributing the newsletter, £803.

Total expenditure for 2008-2009 was £1304

This produced a deficit for the year of £189

#### **Extraordinary Expenditure**

In 2007-2008 we paid for Wokingham Borough Council to replace wooden styles and gates on footpaths 17 and 18 in Arborfield with metal gates. In 2008-2009 we paid for plaques to be put on these gates. We also purchased a display board and carry case, for use at AGMs and at the summer and winter fairs, for £503.

This produced a total deficit for 2008-2009 of £692

#### **Balance Sheet**

This shows a cash balance at the bank of £1453 at the end of the financial year. After deducting £660 which was held for The Sidmouth Weekend our net assets were £793 to carry forward to the 2009 -2010 financial year as compared with £1485 at the end of 2007-2008

Head Office has suggested an allocation to the group of £354 for the 2009-2010 financial year, significantly lower than last year. This would not cover our basic expenses. We therefore submitted a budget based on last years expenditure and expect this to be approved.

The Chairman thanked Kath for producing the accounts for this year and Pam Hall for her scrutiny before audit. There were no questions from the floor.

Adoption of accounts was

Proposed by Graham Smith.

Seconded by Derek Smith.

The meeting approved the accounts for the year ending 30th September 2009.

## **5 ELECTION OF COMMITTEE**

Chris Robson had agreed to stand as Social Secretary provided no other candidates offered themselves at the meeting. As there were no other volunteers Chris was elected as Social Secretary.

Proposed by David Turner.  
Seconded by Ray Sharp.

All other members of the committee had expressed their willingness to stand for re-election and, there being no other nominations, the committee was duly re-elected en bloc.

Proposed by Jenny Smith.  
Seconded by Mary Walker.

The meeting approved the reappointment of the committee.

## **6 ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

Kath Parker suggested that it might be possible to include some long walks on Thursdays in addition to the usual shorter ones. Graham Smith replied that he would be happy to include longer walks in the programme if leaders came forward.

John Kingdom proposed a vote of thanks to David Turner for his leadership as Chairman of the group which was wholeheartedly supported by the meeting.

There being no further business the meeting closed at approximately 9.20 pm.