



Kent Area AGM 2010: Motion for Submission to the 2010 Annual Meeting of the General Council of the Ramblers' Association

Background

Members who attended the 2009 AGM will recall the passing of a motion, with one abstention and no votes against, calling on the Area Officers to raise certain concerns about the running and direction of the Ramblers' Association with Central Office.

The Officers duly attended a meeting with the Central Office Senior Management Team and the Chairman of the Board of Trustees in March and presented Kent Area's concerns. We did not receive a satisfactory response to those concerns to bring back to this year's AGM.

Subsequently it emerged that the Association was facing a severe financial crisis and insolvency was averted only by massive cost-cutting including staff redundancies, abandoning most paper communications to volunteers and reducing Area and Group funding.

Two delegates and two observers from Kent attended General Council in April 2009. This is in effect our national AGM and is the constitutional forum for holding the Board of Trustees to account for the running of the Association and its strategic direction. Since the deterioration in the financial position was not known to General Council at the April meeting, although that deterioration was by then well advanced, neither it nor the resulting actions have yet been debated within the Associations established democratic process, namely by delegates to General Council.

We called for General Council to be reconvened in autumn 2009 so that these important issues could be discussed. The Board of Trustees decided against this and accordingly General Council 2010 is the first opportunity to call the Board of Trustees to account for the failings of the past 18 months.

The issues can be debated only if suitable motions are put forward to General Council and only an Area can propose a motion. Kent Area Council offers the attached motion as one suitable for ensuring that General Council can debate the key issues of financial and administrative competence, effective communication and democratic accountability. We hope you will agree that this debate must take place and that the motion should go forward. We hope that a constructive discussion at General Council will focus proper attention on the problems facing the Association and provide a positive means for moving forward.

Motion

This General Council expresses concern over the financial management and general running of the Ramblers Association in the last two years. Without prejudice to the generality of its concerns, General Council specifically regrets:

- The failure of the Board of Trustees and Senior Management Team to be aware in early 2009 of a developing financial crisis so severe that by May 2009 they would be announcing a significant programme of redundancies and the closure of offices in Scotland and Wales, and the failure to ensure the General Council was properly notified of the financial situation;
- The mismanagement of the introduction of a new membership system, the inordinate time it has taken to remedy problems and the substantial cost to the organisation in terms of both cash and the goodwill of members and volunteers;
- The untimely communication between the Board of Trustees and Central Office on the one hand, and members in Areas, Groups, and General Council on the other, including slow, confused, and limited explanations of the many problems that have faced the Association;
- The failure of the Board of Trustees to honour Article 17.3 of the Articles of Association by including in Fresh Air Firm Ground only vague aspirations and relegating almost all specific objectives to a business plan on which there was no consultation.

The Board of Trustees are asked to produce a report on how these issues are to be remedied and circulate it to Areas no later than 31 July 2010.

