



Kent Area

Minutes of Annual General Meeting held on 4 February 2017 at St Edith Hall, High Street, Kemsing, TN15 6NA

Present

Alison Hargreaves (Chairman), Margaret Lubbock (Vice Chairman), Neville Machin (Vice Chairman), Ray Lawrence (Treasurer), Robert Peel (Secretary) and about 100 members

Welcome and Introduction

Alison Hargreaves welcomed everyone to the AGM.

Welcome from the Hosting Group

Jenny Charles, Sevenoaks Group Chair, welcomed members to Kemsing in fine countryside close to the Darent Valley. She noted that the valuing of volunteers was one of the meetings themes and promised that Sevenoaks volunteers had been busy baking cakes for everyone to enjoy later.

Apologies for Absence

Stuart Booth, Glynis Clifton, Bob Tolson, Ez Daly, Jennifer O'Sullivan and Lawrie Smith

Minutes of AGM held on 6 February 2016

The minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on 6 February 2016 in at Snodland Community Centre were agreed to be a true record. No one wished to raise any matters arising from the minutes.

Annual Report

Alison Hargreaves noted that the Annual Review again included reports from most Groups (Tunbridge Wells was the exception) along with articles and walking routes compiled as usual by Robert.

Alison went on to remind the audience that at the 2016 AGM she had been feeling somewhat disheartened and disillusioned and somewhat victimised by the Ramblers' Chair and Chief Executive for expressing Kent Area's views in response to the Governance Review. Things had changed and Alison was feeling much more positive and happier about the way that things were going. At a very successful General Council last year there had been huge support for Kent's motion to get the governance review thrown out. This had been a boost for Alison personally and for Kent Area in deciding to put that motion forward. There had also been a change of Chief Executive. Then there was the Pathwatch report in November which, despite some concerns about the methodology, has been well-received and is a good starting point for further work. There were other signs that Central Office had started listening – dates for future walking

festivals had been announced in good time and a survey on support for Areas and Groups had a deadline of 31 March which allowed a reasonable time for consultation and response (and the questions could be read in advance so that the context is clear). The new Chief Executive, Vanessa Griffiths, in her latest newsletter had said that we should focus on what unites us and be kind to each other – Alison hoped that she could achieve that from the top down as we do it well in Kent and we look forward to seeing it in place throughout the organisation.

It had been a hugely positive year in Kent as well. The section of Coast Path from Camber to Ramsgate had opened in July accompanied by a guide written by Robert Peel and Peter Smith which could be purchased at the meeting. Thanks to Ian Wild, Kent's volunteer Coastal Access Officer, the route was the best achievable for walkers. Our relationship with Kent County Council gets better and better thanks to Averil and her team. They have trained more people in the use of strimmers and other heavy tools for tackling vegetation clearance work and teams are out across Kent almost every weekend improving the footpath network for all walkers. We helped to achieve the temporary closure of some BOATs (Byways Open to All Traffic) preventing the ground being churned up by off-road vehicles during the wet winter months. This had a huge impact on sections of the North Downs Way.

Then there had been three very successful walking festivals across the county – the Canterbury Festival, the Kent Messenger Charity Walk and of course the White Cliffs Walking Festival which just goes from strength to strength. There's been collaboration in Elham to produce a dog-walking guide, bringing us to the attention of a whole new audience.

All of this has been made possible by the tireless work of our bands of volunteers. Then there are all the weekly walks and social events – every Group has produced a highly successful walking programme and as always there has been a variety of walking holidays and weekends away.

Finally, Alison had been particularly impressed by two revelations in the Annual Review. There was the Medway member who gave as his reason for walking with the Group “just to show the duvet who's boss” and Bromley had researched the meaning of the word “volunteer” to come up with “a plant that has not been deliberately planted”. While it might be that some of our volunteers are in fact cultivated, all our volunteers are vital to the work we do and Alison (using her glass of water) drank a toast to them all.

The meeting received and agreed the Annual Report.

Annual Accounts and Treasurer's Report

Ray said that there was little to add to his published report. The main thing was that the money not spent as planned in the year on the Coast Path Guide had been spent soon afterwards – around £4200. Sales of around 800 books so far had netted about half the cost of printing so by the time we have sold 2000 or so we will have recovered our costs and all the rest will be profit.

The meeting agreed the accounts.

2017 AGM: Proposed amendment to Kent Area Constitution

The following motion, proposed by the Officers, was introduced by Robert Peel.

Delete subparagraph (iii) of Clause 13 (Finance) and substitute the following:

“(iii) All accounts in the name of the Area shall be opened at such Bank as the Board of Trustees shall approve. All monies received shall be paid into the Bank and all payments, other than petty cash payments, shall be made

by cheque or appropriate form of electronic transmission subject to appropriate controls. Cheques shall be signed by the Honorary Treasurer and/or other officers as decided by the Area Council. To enable petty cash expenses to be paid, an advance shall be made to the Honorary Treasurer when necessary.”

The above change shall come into force immediately upon approval by the Board of Trustees.

Explanation

The terms of the current Clause 13(iii) of the Area Constitution requires expenses other than petty cash payments to be made by cheque. We have long since stopped making payments by cheque other than in the most exceptional cases and instead almost all payments are made by electronic transmission into the payees’ bank accounts. This amendment, which adopts the exact wording provided for in the Model Constitution for Areas published by the Board of Trustees, regularises current practice.

Area Council has already decided that all cheques require the signatures of two of the four Officers who are bank signatories and all payments by electronic transmission also have to be authorised by two signatories. Amending the constitution does not change these controls and there are no plans for change.

Coming into Effect

The Area Constitution cannot be amended without the approval of the Board of Trustees and hence the provision about coming into effect only following such approval.

The motion was approved unanimously by the meeting.

Election of Honorary Officers

Alison Hargreaves was elected Chairman

Margaret Lubbock and Neville Machin were elected Vice Chairmen

Robert Peel was elected Secretary

Ray Lawrence was elected Treasurer

There were no nominations to serve as Area Council Representatives for Affiliated Clubs

Les Preston, Peter Skipp, John Charles and Ken Neville were elected Area Council Representatives for Individual Members

Appointment of Delegates to General Council

The meeting agreed to send up to two visitors as well as two delegates to General Council to be held in Southampton on 1 & 2 April 2017. Alison will be one delegate while Les Preston and Averil Brice will take the other delegate place and one of the visitor places (which takes which to be agreed between them). Alison said she knew of someone who might be interested in the second visitor place.

Appointment of Auditor

D Williamson was unanimously reappointed.

Public Rights of Way Work

Averil Brice, Kent’s volunteer Public Rights of Way Manager, spoke on a variety of issues.

Richard Wilkes spoke on the role of a Local Footpath Officer which he had been doing for 24 years. He described the role as that of a guardian of the footpath network, dealing with all the things that go wrong – checking diversions, waymarks, bridges, crossings, stiles, surfaces, animals and obstructions and reporting to the rights of way managers at Kent County Council who are very, very helpful. Richard always tried to compromise with landowners to get a better outcome for walkers such as suggesting better diversions than the ones landowners propose. He has always found the job enjoyable and an opportunity to meet local people.

Terry Coen spoke on the work of a Parish Footpath Warden. He explained that at its simplest it's just going for a walk to make sure that the paths in the parish are walked once a year. He reports any problems such as broken stiles or overgrown vegetation. He fixes simple problems such as cutting back brambles around a stile. And that's about it!

Neville Machin spoke on "Lost Ways" – a project to ensure that any rights of way not currently on the definitive map but which existed before 1949 are claimed before they are extinguished on 1 January 2026. For further information please read the article on the subject in the 2016 Annual Review.

Open Forum

Members raised various issues of interest.

A member sought evidence from fellow members for use of two paths he is claiming in Swale.

Another member sought evidence from fellow member for use of a path at Heaverham.

Peter Whitestone drew attention to the annual 100 mile walks organised by the Long Distance Walkers' Association. Their 2018 event will be in Kent and will be called the "Cinque Ports 100" – it will start at Hastings and visit all the Cinque Ports. It will be held across the May bank holiday weekend.

Les Preston noted that Area Secretary Robert Peel had recently resigned from the Ramblers' Board of Trustees and asked if Robert would like to say a few words about that. Robert explained that he was elected last March having previously done a term as Honorary Treasurer and two years as a Board member but this time around it had not been a pleasurable experience and with General Council coming up he had decided he didn't want to continue for another two years. Life was too short to spend doing something one really doesn't enjoy at all so on Thursday he had announced his resignation as had another Trustee who was not enjoying the role. Robert would now devote his energies in Kent Area where his time would be better spent.

Sue Mott spoke about a project she had been pursuing in White Cliffs Group to organise walks for people with disabilities and their carers. The plan was that the Group would run a walk on the last Friday of every month from March to October. They would choose somewhere flat with lots of choices – sometimes in the grounds of a stately home, sometimes along the seafront and always finishing in a lovely café where refreshments are served. Sue has run two pilots which have been enormously successful – the feedback was just fantastic from both carers and walkers. Excitingly Sport England have become interested and might be putting in a bit of funding. All being well there will be a big launch this year and if successful the scheme will be extended to other parts of the country. Sue asked for those interested in helping to collect contact details from her.

Ramblers' Walking Holidays

Members were invited to enter a draw for T-shirts or a short break at RWH's house at Hassness in the Lake District.



Next Annual General Meeting

The next AGM will be hosted by Canterbury Group – on 3 February 2018 in Littlebourne.

