

Ramblers' Association – North West Essex Group

Minutes of the 31st Annual General Meeting held at the Maurice Rowson Hall, Gosfield on Saturday 3rd November 2018 at 11am

1. Welcome

There were 15 members present at the AGM.

2. Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from the following members: Lynda Millen and Gwen Worrall.

3. Minutes of last meeting

The minutes of the 30th AGM were read and approved.

4. Matters Arising

All matters arising are dealt with under the following agenda items

5. Annual Report

This past year we have again managed to run a full programme of walks with the aim of putting on at least one walk each weekend, with some additional mid-week and evening walks in the summer. We also have introduced a programme of shorter walks on Tuesdays for those members who do not wish to participate in a full day ramble. We have walked in Essex, Suffolk, Hertfordshire and London and group members have this year been on walking holidays in Yorkshire, Cumbria and Norfolk.

With regard to social events we held our post Christmas lunch in January at Bocking Village Club, the event being well attended, and in March some 17 members joined a coach party to the Royal Albert Hall and enjoyed a classical spectacular concert. In April the group held a successful barn dance in this hall with 50 members, family and friends dancing to music provided by the DJ Sibby & Co.

After being postponed from 2017 the Public Inquiry into the proposed blanket closure by Network Rail of pedestrian rail crossings in Essex resumed in September and at the time of writing is drawing to a close. The Ramblers, along with some landowners and various local authorities, have objected to the closure of some of these crossings and our footpath secretaries have been heavily involved in producing evidence for the inquiry and acting as witnesses. We await the results of this inquiry with interest although it may be many months, if not years, before these are published.

Following a meeting with the localism officer from Essex County Council and a joint footpath working party our group is now able to undertake footpath clearance and maintenance work on the county's footpath network under the Parish Paths Partnership (P3) scheme. This means that our group, along with other groups in Essex, will be able to support the local highway authority in maintaining the footpath network when budgets are under severe pressure. Please refer to our programme for future working parties.

Finally it remains for me to thank all those who have led or participated in walks over the past year, and to those members who have helped organise social events or group holidays, and I look forward to your support in the coming year.

6. Treasurer's Report

Maureen Davis drew attention to the note prepared by Gordon Bird on the difficulties facing group treasurers. The group had submitted a budget of £400 for the financial year 2018/2019 and a formal allocation was now awaited.

For the main account as at 30 September 2018 the cash in bank totalled £176.36 and petty cash stood at £3.32. The corresponding figures for the self-funded account were £342.67 and £35.91. The balance had been helped by a successful barn dance.

7. *Membership Secretary's Report*

Membership numbers as at 31st October 2018 stood at 101 members, 8 fewer than last year. We have had some new members joining the group but they do not seem to come out on group walks and difficult to replace members who left.

8. *Footpath and Countryside Secretary's Report*

See attached Katherine and Paul Evan's report below.

9. *Publicity Officer's Report*

Our walks are regularly submitted to the Braintree & Witham Times (BWT) and the East Anglian Daily Times (EADT) for their online events section, and they are published sporadically in the hard copy of these papers depending upon the space. We have sent our printed programme to the libraries in Braintree, Witham, Halstead and Earls Colne, and are still maintaining posters at Rayne Station and Great Notley Discovery Centre where we have also left some membership leaflets. Our walks are now on the Ramblers Walk Finder thanks to the help of Brenda, and we receive occasional visits from members from other groups on our walks.

Traffic to the group website has remained fairly constant over the past year with 2,363 page views and 1,159 unique visitors. Members attention is also drawn to the Essex Area website which contains useful information about current events including all walks put on by Essex groups. Our facebook page has now been running for three and a half years and has gradually increased its support base to over 80 followers. It is used for posting event details, together with photos and comments about recent walks and holidays. Members are encouraged to submit any feedback via our facebook page.

10. *Election of Officers*

POST	Nomination	Proposed	Seconded
Chairperson	Geoff Farrow	Ann Bennett	Janet Bugler
Secretary	Position vacant – no nominations		
Treasurer	Maureen Davis	Ann Bennett	Geoff Farrow
Membership Secretary	Janet Bugler	Maureen Davis	Clive Collins
Publicity Officer	Geoff Farrow	Janet Bugler	Fran Starnes
Ramblers Walk Finder	Brenda Brightwell*		
Ramblers Secretary (Joint)	Ann Bennett & Gwen Worrall*	Geoff Farrow	Janet Bugler
Area Committee Representative	Geoff Farrow, Gwen Worrall*		
Committee elected en bloc	Clive Collins, Ronnie Davis and Fran Starnes nominated and Geoff Farrow Val Broadbent		

11. Appointment of Independent Examiner

Paul Evans agreed to continue with this task for the coming year. Proposed by Maureen Davis and seconded by Fran Starnes. Authorised signatories for bank account to be Maureen Davis, Ann Bennett and Geoff Farrow.

12. Any Other Business

Teresa stated that the bus number from Great Dunmow for her walk on 17 November was 42A and not as stated in the published programme. Teresa also stated that the bus times were incorrect but post meeting confirmed that the original published times should stand.

Geoff thanked members for attending the meeting and for providing the refreshments. The meeting closed at 12.15pm

Geoff Farrow – Chairman

*Notes: nominated in absentia and agreed to stand post meeting.

Living in Feering, railway crossing closures and the proposals for the A12 & A120 are high on my radar both from a Ramblers point of view and as a Feering Parish Councillor. Planning is also an issue with Feering being a "strategic growth location" and the adjacent Colchester/ Braintree borders garden community proposals.

1. Network Rail's Transport and Works Act (Essex and Others Level Crossing Reduction) Order

The public inquiry into Network Rail's proposals to close 50+ non-vehicular level crossings throughout Ramblers Essex Area & east Hertfordshire started up again on 25 September. It was adjourned after only 3 days on 20 October last year as several land owners had not been contacted. The Essex etc. inquiry was initially scheduled to take 7 weeks - which I thought was wildly optimistic. The current timetable now extends to Thursday 6 December, which is 10 weeks. The Network Rail document count now stands at NR 146!! It was up to NR32 when the Inquiry adjourned last October. For timetable updates visit.. <http://essex-level-crossings.persona-pi.com>

10 weeks of barrister time is a phenomenal cost to the Ramblers- and that is just for the Essex etc Public Inquiry which follows on from the Cambridgeshire and Suffolk Inquiries where the Inspectors' reports are still awaited. Although the crossing closures that the Ramblers are opposing are not scheduled every day, the Ramblers barrister, Merrow Golden, has to stay on the scene as the timetable keeps changing. The Ramblers footpath secretaries giving evidence - Gordon Bird, Alan Goffee, David Naylor, Mags Hobby, Jeff Coe, myself & Paul from Essex and David Glass from East Hertfordshire - are all becoming far too familiar with the insides of the inquiry venues as we turn up on the appointed day only to find that we have to return the next day and the next day... We hope that it is all worth it in the end - both in terms of stopping the closure of foot crossings where the proposed alternative routes mean walking on roads - rural roads have some of the worst accident records - and in terms of encouraging Network Rail to listen and not just aim to railroad closures through. The whole process is costing loads on money on all sides.

The reasons why "safe" crossings on single track branch lines, like the Braintree- Witham line and the Sudbury line, with good sight lines and no record on accidents / incidents, were on Network Rail's closure list have now been made clear. Network Rail have said that crossings in the order have been selected because there is a nearby - in terms of up or down the railway line - non-at grade crossing (or sometimes a road level crossing with lights, sound, etc, warnings) that is available for use. The Ramblers objections are that the Network Rail's proposed routes to these alternative crossings are neither safe nor convenient. The rationale for closing crossings is the operational efficiency of the railway, including cost savings by not having to maintain these crossings and progress towards the end aim of closing all at grade crossings as the only safe at-grade crossing is a closed one.

The Ramblers case objecting to the closures of E35 Cranes No.1 at the golf course has been heard. The inspector, who is tall, commented that he had to stoop all the way through the golf underpass. The case for E37 Essex Way (not) was heard yesterday (Friday 2 November) with the Ramblers & the main landowner objecting. Both the Ramblers and the main landowner wish the current legal line over the safe level crossing to remain. The Ramblers object to the length and loss of views on the proposed diversion that includes two wet sections at the underbridge (ponding) and along the river Brain (boggy / wet/ flood plain). The Sudbury line crossings are due to be heard next Thursday & Friday.

Four mainline PRoW crossings in Braintree District all near the A12 are also on NR's closure list. The proposals for E21 Hill House 1 and E22 Great Domsey in Feering are in order. The Ramblers have objected to the proposals for E20 Snivellers (Kelvedon) - truncation of the NW-SE route. The case for E19 Potters at Rivenhall End was heard on Thursday & Friday. The current route to and over the crossing is the dry, direct, well re-instated cross field footpath Rivenhall 43. The Ramblers are objecting as NR's alternative route uses Oak Road underbridge, which has a narrow pavement & self-determined one-way working, and also the bogginess of footpath 48 alongside the watercourse, which is supposedly on ECC's once a year vegetation cutting programme but which spends most of its time overgrown and impassable. Local people use alternative routes but these are not legal PRoWs.

2. PLEASE continue to report faults using the many and varied icons on the Essex highways website <http://www.essexhighways.org/transport-and-roads/tell-us/problem-check.aspx>

Please make a copy of your report BEFORE you press the submit button and note the reference number. The specific box to include an email address for feedback is back again - triumph of sense over data protection.

Andy Hilsdon of Essex Highways has promised improvements in the fault messages so that they are more PROW specific. Also, that there is greater consistency between the PROW Inspectors in how reported faults are dealt with. At present faults often/ generally disappear from public view after 28 days but I am assured that they are still on the Essex Highways system and are not forgotten. The most efficient way of ensuring that faults that persist are not re-reported is of course for Essex Highways to deal with them. **Faults have been reported / exist on many footpaths.**

Patch 4 which includes Finchingfield and other nearby Parishes, has been without a PROW Inspector for several years. Nicky Coleman, whose patch 5 covered the east & south of Braintree District, has moved to patch 11 which is south of the river Crouch. Nick Leeson is still in post covering the eastern Parishes. Jim Bartley, PROW Highways Engineer North & East, is covering.

Before leading a walk, do please check the Essex highways interactive maps for PROW changes - this IS the most up-to-date information on the legal definitive routes - tick the assets tabs to show PROWs (pink), tick the programme tab to show which paths are on the once/year cutting programme

<http://www.essexhighways.org/Transport-and-Roads/Interactive-Maps-and-Live-Travel-Information/Highways-Information-Map/Highways-Information-Map-Portal.aspx>

A great acknowledgement to NW Essex Chairman, Geoff Farrow, for persisting over many years and finally achieving the establishment of a NW Essex Ramblers PROW working party. Please do support Geoff & his fellow Committee members by volunteering to help. Don't pay to go to a gym - help keep footpaths clear and walk them instead. Ask Geoff for further details.

3. A12 widening, A120 link to A12 and road crossings

Information on the alignment of a widened A12 between Boreham and Marks Tey continues to be delayed as Highways England await a decision regarding whether & at what size there will be a garden community around the A12/A120 junction at Marks Tey. The project has now been deferred to RIS2 which runs from 2020-2025.

ECC's preferred route option for the new A120 from Braintree to the A12, was published in the June 2018. The preferred location for an A120 / A12 junction is just west/ SW of Kelvedon. This will affect Snivellers railway crossings, whose closure the Ramblers are opposing, partly to ensure that the crossing & PROW are still there to be taken into account in the road schemes. ECC's aim is to get this road improvement scheme included in Highways England RIS2 investment programme.

If you are able to help with surveying paths along route option D of the proposed new A120, from Braintree - A12 west of Kelvedon please contact me. We must interact with this proposal to make our voice heard regarding how PROWs are changed - we don't want corridors along the new road which people won't use.

4. Highways Act PROW Orders / issues

Finchingfield 28, Robjohns Farm: the path through Robjohns Farm has been confirmed as being legally and correctly on the Definitive Map. Please USE this path but preferably not on your own... CM7 4LJ, grid ref (6)88, (3)13.

Lord Rayleighs Farms: The 22 pages of diversion plans first proposed in February 2016 on land belonging to Lord Rayleighs Farms based in Terling have been working their way through the system. The last few diversions of Terling footpath 11 by the river and of footpaths 14, 15 & 17 around Oakfield Lane & Mill Lane at Gamble's Green have been agreed. **Please would people who have walked Oakfield Lane Terling contact me** again.

Sible Hedingham 49 & 87 (was 48) – Clifton House / Harrow Cross bodyworks. The footpath changes across this land, now a car breakers / scrap yard, were confirmed. The issue now is footpath 87 along the approach drive which is narrow and gets very overgrown.

Footpaths Shalford 64, Wethersfield 28 & 36 at Valley Farm, Rivenhall 59 through the golf course are being consulted on. Braintree & Bocking footpath 60 and the development off Rayne Road should have been resolved but there are now issues with the Order. There are issues with contacting / the agreement of one of the landowners associated with the scheme of diversions at Toppesfield. There has been correspondence regarding the long-standing issue of the missing bridge at Pentlow Mill on the Essex/ Suffolk borders.

Diversions have been confirmed of Bradwell footpaths 56 & 57 (part of the Essex Way) by the haul road at Bradwell Quarry. Also of Great Bardfield 25 (PINS written exchange). The Made Order is due to be confirmed for Bradwell 21 from the church (Rambler's suggested route)

Just over the border in Uttlesford, the footbridge in-front of Felsted Mill CM6 3HQ has been temporarily closed on safety grounds [grid ref (5)671 (2)196] so there is no way across the river Chelmer between Felsted/ Little Dunmow in the north and Absol Bridge in the south. The paths can still be walked from either end - just not across this middle section. There seems to be no mechanism for objecting to temporary closures. As all the diversions at Absol Park have been confirmed, the east-west creation by the landowner of Great Waltham footpath 120 from Bridleway 14 at North End in the west to footpath 8 along the river Chelmer in the east [grid ref (5)677-3 (2)183-5]] has taken place.

5. Planning, Major Development sites & BDC Local Plan

The Braintree District Council publication draft Local Plan has been submitted to the Planning Inspectorate for examination. The Local Plans for Colchester & Tendring were submitted at the same time. The common strategic Part 1 of the plans includes the building of three garden communities - Colchester/Braintree borders, Andrewsfield/ Saling airfield west of Rayne, and Colchester/ Tendring borders near the university. The Inspector has requested further evidence & information regarding the proposed garden communities as at present Part 1 would be "unsound".

Braintree District therefore has no up-to-date Local Plan and as the housing supply is less than 5 years, many housing developments are being pushed through primarily around the main towns & villages - Braintree, Halstead, Witham, Kelvedon/Feering & Hatfield Peverel - as these are "sustainable locations". However there are also proposals in areas where public transport, roads and pavements are arguably not "fit for purpose" like Cressing, Silver End & Stebbing/ Saling. Please try and keep an eye on what's happening in your area so that we can try and make sure that PRowWs are not forgotten, and there may even be scope for improvements in the network.

There is still an issue with ordinary planning applications where PRowWs are often not shown / acknowledged in the application. Please be vigilant in your areas. Thanks to those of you who assist by walking paths and providing me with feedback and pictures. Elections to be Parish Councillors are being held in May next year. PLEASE consider standing - it is another opportunity to keep PRowWs on the map and potentially to gain improvements & maintenance.

6. Lost Ways & the 2026 cut-off date

Paul and I have been part of a volunteer consultative working party helping to draft proposals as to how Ramblers Central Office will fund and support volunteers' efforts to research public ways that existed before 1949 but that did not get included on the first definitive map. Information should start to come from Central Office in the new year with a launch at next year's Ramblers General Council meeting in April.