

Ramblers' Association – North West Essex Group

Minutes of the 32nd Annual General Meeting held at the Maurice Rowson Hall, Gosfield on Saturday 9th November 2019 at 11am

1. Welcome

There were 18 members present at the AGM.

2. Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from the following members: Tony Fraser and Tony Brightwell.

3. Minutes of last meeting

The minutes of the 31st 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 have continued our 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, Cambridgeshire, Suffolk, Hertfordshire and London and group members have this year been on walking holidays in Scotland and Yorkshire walking the West Highland Way and the Wolds Way respectively. This summer the group walked the H2S long distance trail and Olympic legacy walk from Hadleigh Country Park to Stratford. On all our long distance walks this year we were fortunate to encounter excellent weather and barely needed our waterproofs. In the autumn we participated in the Festival of Walks organised by Essex Area when all the Ramblers groups in Essex put on at least one walk loosely based on the theme of "water."

With regard to social events we held our post Christmas lunch in January at the Five Bells in Colne Engaine, the event being well attended, and in June we enjoyed a strawberry cream tea at the farm shop in Wickham St Paul. At these social events we have the opportunity to catch up with some of our long standing members who still support the group but do not regularly participate in group walks.

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 2018 and was concluded in February this year. The Ramblers were one of the principal objectors to the closures and we await the results of this inquiry with interest although the results are not expected until next year.

Following a meeting with the localism officer from Essex County Council our group is now a recognised organisation under the council's Parish Paths Partnership (P3) scheme. We have already carried out footpath maintenance in Halstead, Gosfield, Greenstead Green and along the John Ray Walk which runs from Braintree to Witham. Please refer to our programme for future working parties.

In May we were joined on our Finchingfield walk by a representative from livewell Essex at the start of the campaign promoting national walking week and achieved some useful coverage on livewell Essex social media.

6. Treasurer's Report

The report for financial year ending 30 September 2019 was tabled at the meeting. There was a balance in the main account of £170.72 bank deposits and £22.06 petty cash, with the self funded account showing a balance of £199.87. The largest expenses were a software upgrade to the group's computer and the cost of printing and distributing the group programme. A budget for next year had been prepared in the

sum of £436 and payments were expected in February and August.

7. *Membership Secretary's Report*

Group membership was fairly static at 102 members as at 31 October 2019 an increase of 1 over last year. The new Ramblers Insight Hub provided useful information on existing members but needed some familiarisation.

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 a poster at Rayne Station cafe where we have left some membership leaflets. Our walks are shown 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 increased slightly over the past year with 2,535 page views and 1,782 unique visitors. Our facebook page has now been running for four and a half years and has gradually increased its support base to 118 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. However it remains a challenge to our group, and to the Ramblers in general, to find the most appropriate form of advertising to attract new members.

10. *Election of Officers*

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

Committee
and elected en bloc by

Clive Collins, Ronnie Davis, Fran Starnes and Graham Lewsey
Geoff Farrow , Val Broadbent, Gwen Worrall & Ann Bennett

11. Appointment of Independent Examiner

Paul Evans agreed to continue with this task for the coming year. Proposed by Maureen Davis and seconded by Ann Bennett.

12. Any Other Business

The meeting closed at 11.55 am

Geoff Farrow – Chairman

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

Braintree District – Joint Footpath Secretary & Walking Environment (Countryside)

Officer's report (AGM 9 Nov 2019) Katherine & Paul Evans

Consultations on legal changes to PROWs in Braintree District cover the area from the Suffolk Border in the north to the A12 at Hatfield Peverel and Witham in the south. Many planning applications are received that are near PROWs - many do not have any effect, but some do affect the look & feel of the area around the PROWs. Particular thanks to Geoff, Gwen & Ann who have helped with photographs and feedback.

Paul and I will be standing down as Braintree District Joint Footpath Secretaries (appointed in 2005) and Walking Environment (Countryside) Officers as from the Area AGM in February. Please contact myself and / or Geoff Farrow if you are interested in volunteering for these posts.

I am also not seeking re-election as Ramblers Essex Area Footpath Secretary at the Area AGM. If you are interested and would like to know what the Area role will cover going forward, please contact the Area Chairman, Gordon Bird ... chair@essexarearamblers.co.uk

1) Path Orders in Braintree District - summary

PROW diversions are being consulted on in Bures and Alphamstone. Diversions have been confirmed for Shalford 64 at Nichols Farm, Wethersfield 28 & 36 at Valley Farm, Rivenhall 60 at Rivenhall Oaks Golf Centre and Ashen 11 & 13. Early in 2019, we were consulted as the Ramblers' representatives, on diversion proposals in Toppesfield and as a result PROWs 23, 24, 25, 26, 33 & 34 have been re- shuffled resulting in what we consider to be an improved network; FP 22 was extinguished & a new path has been created. An Order has been Made for the diversion of Halstead 19 (Bellway Homes development). The Made Order for the Diversion of Braintree & Bocking 141 has been objected to.

Temporary closure Orders seem to be becoming more prevalent, with some closures continuing for several years. This can be because of housing developments but also because bridges are out-of-repair. Whilst the Essex Highways PROW teams and Ramblers volunteers can deal with smaller footbridges, bridges over 8 metres have to be referred to the Essex Highways Structures team, where they end up in the same pot as road bridges like the Army & Navy bridge. At present, temporary closure do not show up on any maps. Essex Highways / ECC are seeing whether this can be achieved - a problem is develop an efficient system to cope with the varying time periods of the closure orders.

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 south end of Felsted footpath 59 has also been temporarily closed. Alan Goffee, Vice-Chair and Footpath Secretary for Uttlesford has written extensively about both these issues which he is pursuing.

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>

2) Fault reporting and long standing problems

Essex Area groups are asked to let Alan Goffee know of outstanding long term PROW problems. Long-standing

problems could be paths under reservoirs, flooded / badly rutted paths, missing finger posts, damaged bridges, overgrown & blocked paths, and any other issues that make walking difficult. Please make sure that these faults have been reported to Essex Highways using the fault reporting system. A record of the month/ year(s) and if possible the reference number would be helpful.

Please continue to report faults using the Essex highways website

<http://www.essexhighways.org/transport-and-roads/tell-us/problem-check.aspx>

Please make a copy of your report BEFORE submitting it and note the reference number. If you include your email address, the Essex Highways PROW inspector should keep you updated.

3) Lost Ways / Don't Lose Your Way & the 2026 cut-off date

Information & more in-depth support by Ramblers central office should hopefully be available before the Essex Area AGM in February. There is good basic information on the Ramblers website at.. <https://www.ramblers.org.uk/get-involved/campaign-with-us/dont-lose-your-way-2026.aspx>

Please email me on ramblers.ke@gmail.com if you are interested.

4) Planning & Development

Despite being the Ramblers Essex Area Council appointed Walking Environment / Countryside Officers for Braintree District, we were unaware that Alan Goffee, the Area Vice-Chairman had objected on behalf of Essex Area Ramblers to proposals to increase the period over which equestrian events could be held from 6 months to 8 months at Codham Hall in Wethersfield (Braintree District). The proposals do not directly affect any PROWs but will increase horse box, etc. traffic on country lanes.

Local Plan & development

Without a Local Plan in place & without a 5-year housing supply, Braintree District Council continues to receive planning applications for developments on land designated & not-designated in the draft Local Plan. Major developments are proposed, or already have planning permission, around Halstead, Braintree, Witham, Kelvedon & Hatfield Peverel. It is understood that the inquiry into the Common Strategic Part 1 of the Braintree, Colchester & Tendring Local Plans will resume in January 2020. Three Garden Communities - west of Braintree (13,500 homes Andrewsfield/Sailing), Colchester/Braintree borders (24,000 homes Marks Tey) & Tendring/Colchester borders (9,000 homes) - continue to be proposed.

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 ended in March 2019 with the final site visits by the Inspector. The Inspector estimated that his report would be submitted to the Secretary of State in November. There is no news to date nor of the earlier Cambridgeshire & Suffolk Inquiries.

Roads: A12 widening, A120 link to A12 and road crossings

At the Ramblers Essex Area AGM in February, Graham Reeve volunteered to be and was appointed Essex Area Walking Environment Officer - Roads & Minerals. Grahams' email address is..

areawalkingenvironmentofficer@essexarearamblers.co.uk

Proposals for the widening & junction improvements of the A12 between Boreham & Marks Tey have been delayed due to the on-going issue of whether or not there will be a garden community at Marks Tey, what size it would be and whether it would be on both sides of the current A12 (required if it reaches 24,000 new homes). Highways England are now consulting on their preferred route between Junction 19 (Boreham) & Junction 23 (Kelvedon South). At the same time Highways England are consulting on 4 new route options between Junction 23 (Kelvedon South) & Junction 25 (Marks Tey) in case the (large) Garden Community goes ahead. The consultations close on Sunday 1 December. See www.highwaysengland.co.uk/a12widening for information & public exhibition venues.

There is no news yet on what projects will be included in Highways England RIS2 2020-2025 investment programme. So there is no information on the new A120 route from Braintree to the A12.

Minerals & Quarrying & the proposed River Blackwater flood alleviation scheme

Paths in the area of the old Rivenhall airfield / Bradwell Quarry continue to be on diversion as the quarrying moves east towards Coggeshall. There is a joint Blackwater Aggregates & Environment Agency proposal for a River Blackwater flood relief scheme at the eastern end near Coggeshall. The Essex Way & some other footpaths at Coggeshall would need to be diverted. See..

<https://consult.environment-agency.gov.uk/east-anglia-c-e/coggeshall-flood-alleviation-information-page>

Katherine & Paul Evans

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