

Crook and Weardale Ramblers

Minutes of Annual General Meeting

Held on 15 February 2021 by Zoom

Attendees: Steve Musgrove (Chair) Mike Knipe (Secretary) Kath Wright (Treasurer)

Alison Musgrove, Chris Ebdon, Dennis Ebdon, David Jackson, Elena Cross, Jeff Foster, Olive Foster, Debbie King, Trevor King, Grahame Rose, Ann Waters, Keith Waters Liz Walton, Ellen Beaumont

Apologies: Peter Johnson

Matters arising:

Planning matters at Hunwick

Footpath Working Group – Grahame reported that this was currently in abeyance due to Covid 19 restrictions but would be revived whenever it was possible to do so. It was reported that the Group currently holds equipment loaned by Durham County Council for litter-picking activities and that further support could be expected from Durham County Council.

Don't Lose your Way App : This is covered in the pre-submitted report.

Jungle Drums: It was considered that Jungle Drums did not provide value for money and, therefore the matter has been dropped.

Committee Members reports: Note that written reports were submitted prior to the meeting in view of the lack of time available on the Zoom session.

Matters Arising:

Chairman asked Footpaths Officer for an update on the planning application at Hunwick. Grahame reported He had not objected to the granting of planning permission for 25 No. new houses on agricultural land at Quarry End Farm, Hunwick as C&WRAMS Footpaths Officer. This was because it had nothing to do with the Ramblers Org. *per se*. However, I had formally brought it to the attention of the PROW that a footpath through the site would be affected by the proposed construction of a new swale for drainage and the swale would be very difficult to cross without a footbridge being provided and that a footbridge was not included in the proposal. The PROW thanked me for this as they had not been consulted by the Planning Department and that they would ensure that they would stipulate that a footbridge would be made a requirement of granting planning permission.

However, the main problem with the whole proposal revolved around there being inadequate vehicle access to the site, especially since it is already congested at the local school drop-off and pick-up times; Also there is proof of an ancient hedgerow which was to be erased to accommodate the development. So, the application was formerly refused by the DCC on 28th July 2020. - case closed.

Chairman asked Membership Officer for an update on the proposal to spend £150 recurring on advertising via Jungle Drums. of Jungle Drums for publicity. Denis reported that Jungle Drums was not considered competitive and that the issue had been dropped.

Chairman's Report:

It's a very different AGM this year with the ongoing Coronavirus pandemic forcing us to hold a ZOOM AGM instead of our usual socially friendly meeting at the Park Head hotel over pie and pea supper
Once again as Chairman I would like to thank all those who have helped keep the Crook and Weardale Ramblers running and up to date albeit remotely during this extremely stressful time, especially our Officers and residing committee:

Secretary - Mike

Treasurer - Kath

Footpaths Officer – Grahame

Walks Coordinator – David

Membership Secretary - Dennis

Fundraiser and finance signatory – Alison

Fundraiser / committee - Liz

Committee / bus trips – Chris

Website – Debbie

Photo Gallery - Rob

Although we produced a spring 2020 walks program, we only managed three walks on 16th Feb, 1st March and last one on 15th March around Durham City after which there were many varying degrees of Covid-19 restrictions and controls / lockdowns from government and Ramblers central on what was allowed and what was not. We did however where possible and following all the necessary guidelines continued to produce weekly walks whilst strictly adhering to walk numbers, where we walked and social distancing and although not ideal we still managed to see many of our group attend and thanks go to the walk leaders for supporting this throughout the year

Then just as we thought things couldn't get any worse David Balmer had his heart attack in Bishop Auckland in late June and thankfully, he has now recovered sufficiently enough to attend some of the "lockdown" restricted shorter walks and well on the way to full recovery and has taken back on board his walks planning duties from whenever we get back up and running with a full program

2020 has also seen many new initiatives to try to keep everyone in the loop on the ever-changing rules surrounding covid-19 and a big thankyou to Mike for producing regular newsletters and updates and Grahame for circulating them. Our Whatsapp group which has 18 members and has had 1,715 postings since we set it up, continues to also keep the group up to date with regular postings of pictures and walk details as well as other bits and bobs to keep us all entertained through these troubled times and we also have a new social media Twitter page which Mike set up and maintains with Ramblers news

Grahame did some excellent work on the regional footpaths working closely with the local council and had some great results when walkers reported damages to stiles etc as well as updating the group on footpath closures

Dennis did a spot on the local Bishop FM radio in March just before lockdown which gave C&W ramblers a great plug and Kath prepared a full budget request to Ramblers HO which successfully brought in more available funds this year for projects such as advertising and printing etc which may not be used this year if restrictions continue well into the year

Sadly, our scheduled bus trips were all cancelled in 2020 as well as the walking trip to Loch Lomond and our annual Christmas lunch at the Park Head Hotel in December

Sorry if I've missed anything of note for the past year and please keep walking in 2021, whether with a walking group or social-distancing in small groups of friends when allowed and restrictions are eased and remember you can still currently walk with one person from a different household locally so maybe think about those living on their own and give them a call to see if they want to get out when the weather breaks and spring arrives and I look forward to a time when we can return as a group to some form of normality.

Secretary's Report:

Up to 23 March 2020, the Group's activities had been as per normal with fortnightly walks and planning for

a member recruitment campaign taking place. All this ended quite suddenly and no activities took place until July when weekly Sunday walks and monthly Wednesday walks re-started.

We did manage a socially-distanced outdoors committee meeting in June where a budget bid , mainly for Member recruitment was assembled. This was subsequently submitted and, to some surprise and delight, was approved. Covid 19 restrictions have interfered with the spending of this money, however. The Membership Officer's report contains more detailed information about this.

Walks continued through to mid-September when they were stopped again , mainly due to uncertainty as to their legality when County Durham was “promoted” into Tier 3. Ramblers subsequently advised that we could continue walking in groups of up to 30 so weekly Sunday walks restarted in October and continued until lockdown on 5 November and have not restarted since then. We also managed a litter-pick in Kitty's Wood in August.

In September, I “attended” General Council which was held via Zoom. A précis of the General Council motions was distributed to members via a newsletter for comments and two comments were received. There was a subsequent National meeting of General Council by Zoom in November. General Council for 2021 will also be held via Zoom and a précis of papers for this will be distributed via Newsletter.

In October, in response to the death of a walker by cattle at Richmond I met with the Stephensons who farm cattle at Bradley Burn and we jointly produced some advice on safety around cattle. During December there was also some concern in the North Yorks and South Durham Area around the Ramblers response to a proposal from farmers to be allowed to temporarily divert rights of way from fields containing animals which might be perceived as being a risk to health and safety. Local Group Chairmen's view was that, subject to specific controls that Ramblers ought to be more supportive and take a more pragmatic view. In the end the proposal was not accepted by the Government and did not enter legislation. It was pointed out, however, that farmers in England could create permissive diversions around fields which contained, for example, suckler cattle with new calves.

Our use of “Tech” has developed slowly and we now regularly use emailed Newsletters to communicate with members, there are 29 members of the facebook group (not all are Ramblers members but this is seen as a way to enhance the profile of Crook and Weardale Ramblers. There are 215 followers of Crook and Weardale Ramblers Twitter feed, providing approximately 50,000 impressions between February 2020 and January 2021.

Finally, as soon as we're allowed to mount a programme of walks, David Balmer, our Walks Co-Ordinator will resume his role which was interrupted by illness. In a text message, in lieu of a walks con-ordinator report, David has asked to pass on his gratitude to all members who supported him during his illness.

We're all hoping that we'll soon be able to gather together in groups once again for walks and bus trips and litter-picks and so-on

Treasurer's Report

Unity Trust Account for Financial Year 2019/20

Date		£	Date	Cheque		£
1.10.19	Opening Balance	17.35	2.3.20	300011	Linton Printers (Printing of Walk Programme	55.00
20.1.20	1st Quarterly Payment	43.38				

20.1.20	2nd Quarterly Payment	42.18				
					D King for payment to Heart Internet: Web Hosting £57.46 pa and Domain renewal for the next 2 years	
20.4.20	3rd Quarterly Payment	42.18	29.5.20	300012	£31.18	88.64
20.7.20	4th Quarterly Payment	42.18	30.9.20		Closing Balance	43.63
		£ 187.27				£ 187.27

Unity Trust Account for Financial Year 2020/21 as at 6.2.21

Date		£	Date	Cheque		£
1.10.20	Opening Balance	43.63				
20.10.20	1st Quarterly Payment	162.80	28.11.20	13	D. J. Ebdon (Car Stickers promotion)	100.00
20.1.21	2nd Quarterly Payment	162.80				
20.4.21	3rd Quarterly Payment					
20.4.21	4th Quarterly Payment		1.10.20		Closing Balance	269.23
		£ 369.23				£ 369.23

We were successful in obtaining an increase from our basic annual budget of £167.72 to £651.20 to cover:

1	Promotion	£250
2	Printing of Programmes	£165
3	Web	£63.21
4	General Expenses	£172.99

Footpath Officer's Report

Well I've completed my first term as the groups footpaths secretary, most of it during unusually 'strange times'.

However, in the main, I consider it having been a successful one dealing with many reports of problems with public rights of way in our patch (and some not in our patch) which have been reported to me by our group members and also some non-members. The most serious report of the year was that of two well known members being cornered by dangerous dogs that resulted in the owner being interviewed and receiving a caution from the police and County Durham Public Rights of Way officer (PROW). I have worked towards forming a good two way working relationship with the Durham County Council PROW officers and I now feel it is established. This two way relationship regularly involves my referring problem cases to them and also them requesting my input (on behalf of the Ramblers) over various issues such as proposed changes to public rights of way and alterations to the National Definitive Map for our area.

I also successfully sought and obtained a comprehensive report from the head of the PROW department

giving his own view and recommendations on how best the Ramblers Organisation can work and assist them in their role, this was passed onto and welcomed by our HQ Local Advocacy Team.

The Ramblers HQ footpaths team send me regular monthly reports of any problems registered on their national database for our area. Some of these problems are logged by members of other ramblers groups visiting our area as well as non-members. Although some of these reports are a little vague in detail I do follow them up and some may require action by our PROW officers but sometimes they may only require a little pruning by myself (and our secretary on some occasions).

Another task more of a preventative nature than a reactive nature is to review the weekly published Durham Council Planning Application List for any planning applications in our area which may have an impact on our PROW. This initiative has resulted in a number of cases being identified which were not known to our PROW officers. There seems to be a 'disconnect' between our county council planning office and their PROW department. This failing appears to be a common countryside issue which I learned through recent contact with the other footpaths officers and our Ramblers HQ Advocacy Team!

During the last year I was invited to join a working party to review our local access resources. This was an initiative by our Ramblers HQ Advocacy and Projects Office to construct an online guide for members seeking help and advice about tackling problems with our rights of way. The project is still ongoing having now produced the required guides and documents in draft format ready for final upload to the Ramblers Website. A spin-off from being a member of this national team is that I have now worked with and benefitted from some of our more experienced and knowledgeable national footpaths team, albeit this has had to be done online in virtual meetings as any planned face to face meetings had to be dismissed!

I was also invited to join a team to test drive a prototype version of the website that became the very successful tool for the Ramblers national 'Don't Lose Your Way' project. The project has been a great success with all of the OS maps tiles being examined for lost rights of way and have found 49,000 miles of lost paths that will be actioned before the 2025 deadline for these to be added to definitive maps. See the full status by following the link

https://dontloseyourway.ramblers.org.uk/?mc_cid=136d0e3793&mc_eid=21f6422868

There is still lots to do and one of my outstanding tasks, which had to be 'put on hold' this year, is to establish a footpaths working party in our group. Although progressing this task has had to be stalled until after the Covid 19 pandemic is over it is still an ongoing priority of mine that I shall report on next year.

Membership Secretary's Report

Over the previous 12 months we have seen a slight shift in membership. This has gone from previous 2020 numbers reported (77) to this current year of 74. There are also 2 lapsed memberships which maybe late in renewal and we may see these come back into the numbers.

We have had 3 new members join recently:

1 on 25/12/2020 (Xmas present possibly)

2 in January.

The club is as follows on members:

Active Members - 72

Life Members - 2

Joint Members - 32

Individual Member's – 42

With the uncertainty of the current situation, I have rolled over some of last year's comments as we have not had the opportunity to deliver the plans in place due to current restrictions. This presumes we can move from the current situation.

As membership secretary my suggestion going forward to increase / promote the Crook and Weardale Ramblers would be in the new year (2nd quarter), as we are moving into spring and I would suggest it is the time to promote where practical the Crook and Weardale Ramblers. People will be looking at getting out, if the current restrictions are lifted.

We have publicity materials from the Ramblers, but this is generic and as a group I would suggest we need to keep our identity.

1. We use this material and enhance this with our own Logo - self-adhesive labels would suffice. (I will source these once there is a clear understanding of lockdown removal. Unless someone in the group has contact for this – suggestion)

2. As I believe has happened over previous years we leaflet / poster prominent places -

:- Doctors

:- Library's

:- Supermarkets

:- Council Offices etc.

At this point in time, I see no benefit from this until people have the opportunity to take advantage of being part of the Crook Ramblers through membership. We still will have the option for people to join the walks to see if it's for them prior joining, I see this as a positive to promoting the group. With, hopefully a new walks programme published.

I hope we can receive the support from The Ramblers at head office to promote the membership at a local level. We need to lobby them to spend time and money on promotion at our level with TV / Radio campaigns. You can only do so much at a local level with the resources and funds available.

3. We look to promote the group at shows such as Stanhope / Woosingham / Hunwich? / Crook and make a stall up with maybe raffle etc to raise awareness and promote the club and raise some funds. This will need a little planning so could I suggest some support for this or other ideas. This was a suggestion from last year. So, if we feel this is appropriate / option then we need to decide if this would be something the group would like to pursue.

4. We spoke last year of a promotion; Bishop FM was suggested. I propose we plan our timing for this around the removal of restriction on walking in groups to gain the best from and advertising of the group and membership advantages.

5. Last year there was an initiative in County Durham to improve Cycling and Walking and to promote the

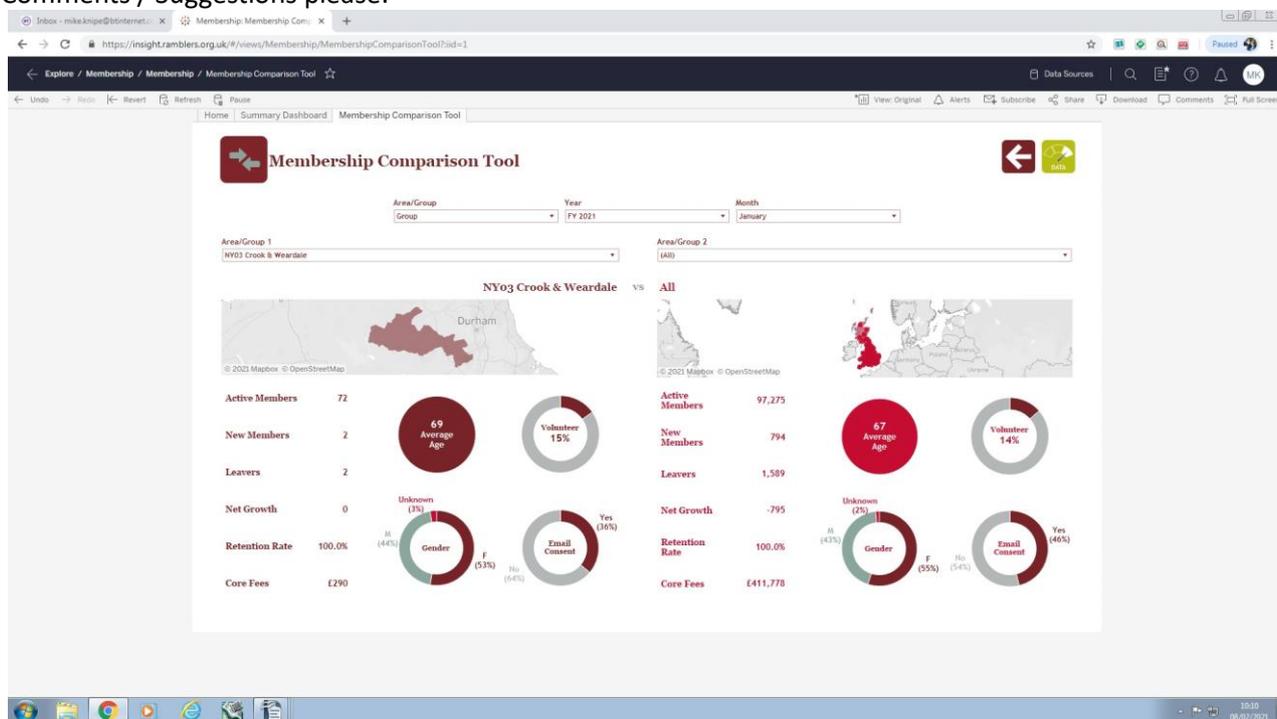
health benefits. I think some of the group were contacted with information on this. I followed this up and contacted them and explained the club would be interested in being part of this and received a note back acknowledging this. (I perused this on several occasions with no real support. I don't know if this was eventually promoted.)

I have not received any further information. I will try again for this with the intention of putting forward Crook and Weardale Ramblers as a sign post for any interest. (Mike have you any contacts in this area?) So, from a positive point of view we are attracting new members (Also losing some, but we are maintaining membership, albeit not on a great scale.) and the view should be to engage our current Crook and Weardale membership as we have done so positively in the previous year. With the walks programme and bus trips and when possible take advantage to promote the group through the above initiatives.

We will always have the challenge of age profile, as we need to try and tap into the Ramblers association for better promotion coverage in our area. We need more visibility for our group via the Ramblers to engage in a balanced age profile.

I have attached a couple of graphs that show the UK and our local group. The numbers on our info are showing 72, I believe this is because the life members are not shown in this. We do have 74 members. The Ramblers database shows different totals in different reports but a headcount of a download of the database which includes 2 life members rivals 74.

Comments / Suggestions please.



Walks Programme Co-ordinator's Report

David wished to express his gratitude for all the support he received from members during his illness in 2020.

Webmaster's report

Debbie reported that no significant developments had occurred during the year. Previous committee minutes were lost with the forum but AGM papers and future minutes etc were to be recorded on the

website under the "Membership" tab.

Crook and Weardale latest tweets are also appearing on the website.

Election of Officers

All committee members had confirmed that they were willing to maintain their roles during the following year and no alternative nominations had been received, so the committee was re-elected. Proposed by Dave Jackson and seconded by Ann Waters.

No other business...

Meeting ended at 21:30.