

Minutes of Warwickshire Area Council Meeting
held on Saturday 1st March 2025
at Meriden Village Hall, chaired by Dr Peter Rookes

Present: Executive Committee : Dr Peter Rookes (Chair), Michael Bird (Footpaths & Countryside Secretary), Nick Hillier (Membership Secretary & Solihull), Andy Page (Publicity Secretary & West Midlands Walking Group (WMWG)) and Janet Lockett (Secretary & Coventry).

Group Representatives : Sheila Lyons and Suraiya Kidia (City of Birmingham aka COBRA), Duncan Barker and David Threlkeld (Castle Bromwich), Jeff Round (Southam), Les Harrison and Sue Hands (Solihull), David and Ratree Shaw (Rugby), Barbara Twort (Sutton Coldfield), Aileen Hathaway, Diane Smith and Richard Bright (Stratford), Julianne Negro and Derek Smith (WMWG), Colin Rock (webmaster), Alice Sin and Bill Burton (Mid-Warwickshire), Kim Gilmour and Sam Passmore (WM 40+), and Janet Gee (Independent – Kenilworth).

Groups not represented : South Birmingham

1. **Welcome** : Dr Peter welcomed everyone to the meeting, especially the new members, and everyone introduced themselves. He thanked Southam group for organising such a successful AGM last month.
2. **Apologies** had been received from Ann Hebden (Treasurer), Richard Clarke and Gordon Smith (Southam), Graham Bevan (Rugby), Val Gibbons (Solihull) and Tony Denman (South Birmingham).

3. **Minutes of the last meeting**

The minutes were accepted as correct, with no objections.

4. **Matters arising from the minutes**

None

5. **Area Treasurer's Report**

Ann's report had been circulated with the agenda. She had let Janet know that she was pleased that we had spent some money! Ann had sent a message asking Michael if he thought the DLYW volunteers were achieving anything, or if they were just enjoying their research. Michael thought Darrell was not making much progress with Birmingham City Council.

6. **Area Footpath & Countryside Secretary's Report**

Michael started with some good news. The government has now lifted the 2031 time limit for claiming footpaths that are not yet on the definitive map. He is not expecting many new path claims in our area, due to the extensive work Steven Wallsgrove had done.

The other good news is that Michael now has the claims for Rights of Way to be added to the Definitive Map in Coventry, that were taken by the Open Spaces society for many years. Again, Coventry City Council has not done much to get these claims processed.

The bad news is that the government don't seem to understand the countryside, and support solar farms, wind turbines, and ambitious targets for more housing.

Because of the devolution proposals and the suggestion to have large unitary authorities, we might lose our consultancy status on changes. CPRE (Council for the Protection of Rural England) is 'the countryside charity'. Michael is our representative with them and a trustee. Everyone is happy for him to continue.

Michael's Planning report had been circulated before the meeting. He highlighted several items :

1038 Wilmcote The proposal is to build an extension over the footpath between a bungalow and its garage. The application is for a "Certificate of Lawful Development", which has been granted, but the footpath must

be diverted or extinguished first. Some of the locals are not happy, but the applicant is the Chair of Wilmcote Parish Council.

1046 Burton Dassett This concerns demolition of a conservatory and construction of several extensions. It had been thought that a bridleway went through the property, but it appears to be an E-road, though it is a cul-de-sac. WCC agreed to change the classification from an E-road to a bridleway through the garden. The application was then withdrawn because a bat survey was required, but they have now reapplied for planning permission. The applicant thanked Ramblers for their contribution to the discussions.

1045 Hurley Application for another solar farm, next to a rifle range. The footpath there regularly gets ploughed out, so walkers use different routes across the land. It is good quality farmland, so converting it to a solar farm isn't sensible. Because the footpath is hard to find a diversion would be useful. The proposal to combine the footpath with a cycle track wouldn't lead anywhere.

1054 Wellesbourne The British Horse Society (BHS) had asked us to seek a direction from the Secretary of State to determine our DMMO claim (from June 2005) for a byway between a cul-de-sac and a track in Wellesbourne. Ramblers CO said they would do the necessary paperwork – but they passed it back to the BHS. Now there is a planning application to build 300 houses. The prior claim for the bridleway should be actioned first.

Michael said it had been a tiring 3 months. Dr Peter thanked Michael for his diligent work.

7. Area Membership Secretary's report

Nick reported that we currently have 3017 members, which compares with 2983 last time. 157 new members joined, but we lost 123 (the system says we have lost 154 but the arithmetic doesn't work for that). As usual Nick queried why some members leave so soon after joining – he quoted a recent instance of a lady who joined Solihull group but left after only a week.

Janet had mentioned the rapid turnover of new members to Lucy Robinson, who thought that it was good if we retain as many as 10% of them. We know some people may receive gift membership, which may not come at the right time in their lives, but may sow a seed for later. Peter said we need to know if a member leaves after a bad experience.

8. Area Publicity Secretary's report

Andy reported that we now have 1012 followers on Facebook and 60 followers on BlueSky. Andy had shared the photo of Janet L with Tom Heap at our AGM, on both Facebook and BlueSky.

He said Twitter use is dropping off. He recommended Tom Heap's book, which discusses solar panels.

Andy was impressed by the CPRE campaign backing the New Homes (Solar Generation) Bill (aka the Sunshine Bill – a good name). He had watched the parliamentary debate on it, which was adjourned until July. The standards for new build properties will include insulation. The Sunshine Bill aims to make solar panels standard in all new homes, potentially requiring solar PV systems to cover at least 40% of a new home's ground floor area. CPRE had contacted over 90% of MPs about it before the debate. Andy hopes Ramblers Central Office learn something from this approach (which contrasts with Ramblers reaction to the Access to Nature bill).

Andy explained that solar panels need connections to the National Grid. This is straightforward if there is a nearby substation with available bays, but there could be lengthy delays if a new substation is required. At present connections are made in the order in which applications have been received, but the priorities are changing. The lower Trent valley, where there were lots of power stations, so lots of connections to the grid, is likely to get clobbered. It is unlikely Warwickshire will be affected in the same way.

Electricity storage from solar arrays also requires batteries. These need to be near water and Tom Heap's book

recommends putting solar panels on reservoirs, or down railway tracks. Solar panels made of perovskite are more flexible than silicon ones.

9. AGM feedback

Excellent – very well organised by Southam group. It might have been better if Lucy Robinson had spoken before Tom Heap. There were almost 100 attendees (including the speakers and caterer).

Tom sold about 30 copies of his book, so should have been pleased with that. David Shaw said he had received very good feedback from the Rugby members who attended. They commented that Southam group had all worked very hard.

Peter had attended a webinar with Lucy Robinson about the imminent restructuring of Ramblers. They are also looking at whether we can get a more diverse range of trustees. The board does not have a blueprint to push so there will be a long period of consultation.

10. General Council motions

Peter and Chafika are our General Council members this year. The motions for the meeting on 5th April have been published on the website.

1 Resolution to update the Standing Orders for gender neutrality

2 Updating Ramblers Articles of Association for full gender neutrality

3 Ramblers GB 90th anniversary – best wishes from Scotland to mark this anniversary

4 Preventing the loss of footpaths by adding Cycle Tracks to the definitive maps.

We consider this could mean upgrading footpaths to bridleways, if they are wide enough. However, we don't want cycles on all paths, particularly as they don't tend to use their bells. Would this include e-bikes? No!

Michael commented that we should consider the farmers' point of view – cycles can do more damage than walkers. Janet Gee said that cyclists might need to lift their bikes over stiles. Generally paths would need to be considered on a case by case basis.

5 Overcoming barriers to access

Gates needed to replace stiles. We sometimes see gates or stiles with no adjacent fencing, so the cost of the gate has not been justified.

6 Climate emergency action – the motion seems to fit with our charitable aims.

7 Email system for Area and Group officers to contact members

This would be useful on occasion, e.g. to promote an AGM. Michael says he regrets using his personal email address for Ramblers business, but it is too late to change now. Colin pointed out he can set up @warwickshireramblers addresses if they are required.

8 Compliance with Council members' motions

There has been some tension between General Council and the Board of Trustees, who sometimes seem not to do what was requested

9 Information for prospective new walk leaders. The motion

- Notes the lack of clarity in the available information on the requirements for becoming and being a Ramblers' Walk Leader, and the deleterious effect it appears to be having on the recruitment of new Ramblers' Walk Leaders.
- Therefore instructs the Trustees to issue to all Ramblers' Areas and Ramblers' Groups a clear consolidated written statement of the official requirements for being a Ramblers' Walk Leader, together with a full explanation of the reasons for these requirements, and to make this statement

available to all Ramblers' Areas and Groups no later than 31st May 2025.

11 Using and updating Walks Manager

Nick said that as his comments were mainly aimed at South Birmingham group, who were taking action but not present at this meeting, he would defer the subject until next time.

12 Navigation Training

Derek Jones has retired from delivering the courses that many members have done over many years. Sam Passmore asked what was required and suggested people could use OpenStreetMap on their phones, which shows most paths. Derek's course did not include the use of technology but concentrated on map-reading, leading to the National Navigation Award Scheme bronze and silver awards. Les will give Peter Derek's address, in case he has any suggestions for a successor (he doesn't). Sam offered to provide trainings (I think).

13 First Aid training

Peter thought we had agreed that each group should try to source some First Aid training. Janet has a contact from Girlguiding who can deliver First Response training. She is in the process of organising dates for this, and will offer any spare places to Area if Coventry group do not take up all 12 places per session (Saturdays 9am – 4pm, near Coventry station).

Andy had just done a 2-day intensive training, run by BASP (the British Association of Ski Patrollers), and suggested they may be able to do a simpler, one day, outdoor course.

Jeff reported that Gordon and Richard were doing a half-day course, offered to Southam residents and funded by HS2, after the disruption in their area.

15 Area website

Colin (webmaster) asked for suggestions for more web pages and some photographs. Janet had spotted a few typos that she passed to Colin after the meeting.

14. Cluster meetings

COBRA Their coach walks are going well.

Southam They have big problems finding enough walk leaders; several key people have stopped leading recently. Their success was getting a big team of people to help organise the Area AGM.

WM40+ The group is ticking along, but their membership has decreased. They tried offering shorter walks, of about 6 miles, but had very few people attending.

Mid Warwickshire They have enough walk leaders but have a big challenge in persuading people to join their committee. Ideally Alice would like to step down from being Chair.

WMWG They have offered some 'pick and mix' sessions where a 5-6 mile walk is followed by a drink together and then a meal. Different people have opted for different combination of these. They haven't had any problems booking for a group at a curry house around 6pm on a Sunday.

Sutton Coldfield They have had a lot of people on their walks, but don't have enough walk leaders to offer a choice of long and shorter walks. They have delivered their own navigation training and do buddying/co-leading with their new walk leaders, but not many have come forward.

Rugby Also need more walk leaders. David thanked Kay Pinks from his group who leads a lot of walks. He said most people do not seem to want to make the commitment to attend committee meetings or to lead walks. Peter said that Warwickshire is one of the best in the country for AGMs.

Stratford They successfully completed walking the Geopark Way last year, and are now starting on the Shakespeare Way, with about 21 participants. They have split the route into 12 sections of 11-12 miles and

have a different walk leader for each one. The group now has the experience to take on other long distance footpaths.

Solihull They are still arranging 3 walks each week, for about 40 walkers on their two Tuesday walks (one short, one long), and another 20 on their shorter Saturday walks.

Castle Bromwich Membership of the group had plummeted but has now increased a little. They are managing to organise walks and weekends away. Their 5-6 mile walk followed by a pub meal on the first Sunday of the new year is always a success.

Coventry They are struggling to find enough walk leaders to fill their Sunday walks programme, but successfully had a Tuesday public transport walk (with a new coordinator who is advertising the walks through Walks Manager, instead of restricting them to a select group).

14 AOB

We will put governance and recruitment on the next agenda.

There being no further items to discuss, the meeting closed at 4.10 p.m.

Janet Lockett
Area Secretary
March 2025

Dates for meetings in the next 12 months

Area Quarterly Meeting: 7/6/25	Meriden Village Hall (Refreshments by Southam group)
Area Quarterly Meeting: 6/9/25	Meriden Village Hall
Area Quarterly Meeting: 29/11/25	Meriden Village Hall
Area AGM : Feb 2026	to be organised by Solihull group, date tba
Area Quarterly Meeting: 7/3/26	Meriden Village Hall