

Minutes of Warwickshire Area Council Meeting
held on Saturday 6th September 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), Ann Hebden (Treasurer & Solihull), Andy Page (Publicity and WMWG) and Janet Lockett (Secretary and Coventry)

Group Representatives : Sheila Lyons and Suraiya Kidia (City of Birmingham aka COBRA), Duncan Barker and David Threlkeld (Castle Bromwich), Richard Clarke (Southam), Hilary Prince (Rugby), Richard Bright (Stratford), Les Harrison (Independent Member) Val Gibbons and Sue Hands (Solihull), Barbara Twort (Sutton Coldfield), Derek Smith (WMWG), Colin Rock (webmaster), Alice Sin and Bill Burton (Mid-Warwickshire), John McGeough, Tony and Eileen Denman (South Birmingham)

Groups not represented : WM40+

1. **Welcome** : Dr Peter welcomed everyone to the meeting, and said he had now completed all 44 of the Millennium Way circular walks. Everyone introduced themselves.

2. **Apologies:** David Shaw and Graham Bevan (Rugby) and Janet Gee (Independent Member)

3. **Minutes of the last meeting**

The minutes were accepted as correct, with no objections. Thanks to Nick for taking the minutes, in Janet's absence.

4. **Matters arising from the minutes**

4.1 Celebrating 90 years of Ramblers – Walk and picnic on Saturday 27th September 2025.

Peter, Nick and Janet had held a planning meeting by Zoom.

Although some groups (including Solihull and COBRA) will not be able to attend, due to being away that weekend, and WMWG having a walk from Ledbury, we decided there was probably enough support to go ahead.

Peter will lead a 5-mile walk towards Leamington, using the Millennium Way circular route, and Janet will lead a 7-mile walk in the countryside towards Hatton. Both walks will aim to be back at the Friends Meeting House in Warwick by 1.30pm, for a self-provided picnic in the garden (or indoors if wet), with cake and hot drinks provided.

Janet asked all groups to advertise the walks and picnic to their members.

There are no events on at the racecourse that day, so we can use the racecourse car park. It doesn't look as if there are any other events on in Warwick that will make it particularly busy. Alice pointed out that there is free parking on Saturdays at the Registration Office.

5. **Area Treasurer's Report**

Ann's report had been circulated before the meeting. She added

1. Thanks to all group treasurers for submitting budget requests early, as I requested. To clarify, I need a budget form from groups that request more funding than is in the group allocation. This year, because we knew the group allocation figures to be wrong (because memberships were being incorrectly allocated), I did not share group allocation details. Even if your group doesn't require any funding from CO, I still need to know this.
2. I did get a small amount of feedback from CO, and can provisionally presume that the budget requests will be approved as requested.
3. It is year end at the end of September. Please try not to have any financial transactions in progress over year end, as it makes year end reconciliations more complicated.

4. I would expect to get year end packs early in October. Returns are due back to me by the end of October i.e before the next Area meeting. If you foresee any problems in achieving this, please let me know.

Area will pay the Friends Meeting House in October.

6. Area Footpath & Countryside Secretary's Report

Michael's report had been circulated before the meeting. He said it had been a successful 3 months (for once). He drew particular attention to the following items.

1077 Outline planning application for the east of Wellesbourne. There were some 500 objections to the original plan, which was resubmitted. As 20 years have passed since our claim for a Byway the Inspectorate has given Warwickshire County Council (WCC) 6 months to determine it.

1078 HS2 Lower Radbourne viaduct. An old E road will become a bridleway and go under the viaduct, allowing it to join up with other nearby bridleways.

1079 Stratford Marina. Two diverted paths are not in the right places, according to the plans. The developer is seeking a variation order. Area is not happy with the surfacing of the paths and considers them unfinished.

1080, 1081 and 1084 Plans for a total of 2870 houses near Dunchurch. They are in the local plan. Area has only objected to 1084, because the bridleways are described as paths with parallel bridleways and we need to be sure we won't lose PROWs.

1086 Plans for 3 sites for a solar farm near Bickenhill. This is Green Belt land that the developer claims is Grey Belt. There is not much information about the footpaths, nor whether they are inside or outside the site.

Updates on earlier cases

760 Concerns a footpath to be diverted near the M45/A45 roundabout, which will now wind round the new estate. There were problems with the map references provided by the developer – originally they quoted 18 figures (all in the wrong places) but they have now put them out again with 12 figures (we usually use 6- or 8-figure references for sufficient accuracy).

973 Ansty – large development that affects 3 neglected footpaths, the proposals should improve footpath connectivity. Approved with 110 conditions.

1000 Ash Tree Solar Farm, Princethorpe. Area objected on both agricultural and Green Belt grounds, but permission has been granted.

1045 Hurley – one of the worst footpaths in Warwickshire as the footpath is never reinstated after the field has been ploughed so walkers choose their own route across it. The developer wanted to divert the path round the site, following the road, and include an informal cycle track (close to a rifle range and small nature reserve). The cycle track has now been removed. The result should be an improvement to the PROW and Heart of England Way in this area.

6.1 Devolution of local councils

Michael explained that our Ramblers Area is covered by three Unitary Authorities, Birmingham City Council, Coventry City Council, and Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council, who are all both Planning and Highway Authorities (responsible for PROWS).

Warwickshire County Council is a Highway Authority (responsible for PROWS), but most Planning is the

responsibility of the local District and Borough Councils within Warwickshire. These are North Warwickshire BC, Nuneaton and Bedworth BC, Rugby BC, Stratford-on-Avon DC, and Warwick DC. The Government wishes to change to unitary authorities by 2028 and remove this second local layer of planning authorities; so after 2028 we could end up with either Warwickshire CC as the Unitary Authority responsible for all Planning and Highways (PROWS) in the County, or a County split into two separate Unitary Authorities, North Warwickshire and South Warwickshire.

Birmingham CC and Coventry CC already consult us on path orders and usually consult us on planning applications affecting PROWS as well. Solihull MBC consults on path orders but do not consult on planning applications affecting PROWS. Whatever happens to Warwickshire CC, to retain our voice on footpath work we need to retain consultation rights with any new Unitary Authorities. Ramblers Central Office say they are working on this. Michael is also worried about new Unitary Authorities being responsible for our outstanding lost Path claims, though most of our claims for the north of the Area have already been resolved.

Andy Page asked about the definitive map. Michael says it can be split in two.

Richard Clarke said he doesn't mind whether we have 1 or 2 councils to deal with, as long as we are still consulted. He said some footpath issues he had reported in 2022 are now showing as resolved, although no work has been done. Michael said the RoW team are busy with HS2 work, so not doing other stuff.

After the meeting Richard C reported that he now knows why footpath issues have been closed in error on the County Council's database. Some cases were closed automatically as part of the migration to a new database. This hasn't happened in all cases; some that he had logged remain open, but the four he queried were closed and had to be re-logged. It would be worthwhile for all groups to check that every case that they expect to be open still is. A feature of the new system appears to be that only the person who logged a case can search to check for progress on it. This is obviously unsatisfactory when members of a group need to follow up on something logged by another member. Richard has asked Kathleen of the PROW team whether there is any way round this, and will relay any help she may be able to offer.

7. Area Membership Secretary's report

Nick reported that membership now stood at 3068, a small increase from 3059 in June, so there is clearly an upward trend.

Nick recommends that groups remove Walk Leaders (WLs) from the database if they aren't leading walks any more (walks coordinators should have received instructions on how to view the database). This will improve the percentage of WLs who have updated their details. Several groups (including Solihull, South Birmingham and Coventry) are planning local group training sessions for their WLs, so they don't need to do the on-line training individually.

The training is valid for 3 years, but after that WLs will probably have to complete a simple quiz, rather than redo the whole training. Nick had been asked by Ramblers Central Office (C.O.) if he wanted to be involved in preparing this with CO. He had said that he would.

Alice said Mid-Warwickshire would do a group return.

David T asked if new members are still being assigned to Area rather than their nearest group. Nick said they were in some cases. Although he was assured by Ramblers Central Office (C.O.) that they try to avoid this.

8. Area Publicity Secretary's report

Andy reported that we now have 1035 Facebook followers, and 78 on BlueSky. He is pleased there have been a lot of posts on South Birmingham's, Sutton Coldfield's and COBRA's Facebook pages.

There have been posts on other sites about solar farms and CPRE. A new solar farm near Gaydon (that we didn't object to) has now opened. The campaigns by CPRE to get more solar panels on schools, hospitals, etc, seem to be winning. The next one will target car parks.

The world's first osmotic power (renewable energy) site went live in Japan.

A change to dog laws is coming. The 1953 law did not apply to llamas, or sheep moving along lanes. At present farmers can shoot dogs on their land.

9 Ramblers Governance Review

Ramblers Board have proposed a possible new governance model for the Ramblers, which would put more emphasis on Groups and remove formal Areas (which could continue as informal Networks). Peter and Janet were invited to contribute to a consultation, but Peter did not become aware of it until shortly before the end of the consultation period (and Janet failed to notice the response was to be on behalf of the Area). Peter contacted the members of the Exec and submitted a response on behalf of our Area after the consultation closing date – by arrangement with CO (circulated to groups after this meeting).

The proposals also suggest that all members would be entitled to vote at the AGM, but we are not in favour of one member one vote.

Areas vary a lot around the country, and many don't work as well as ours. We are concerned that our dealings with the local councils about planning matters would not happen so smoothly if the responsibility lay with the groups. Reorganisation of the local authorities could also have an adverse effect. Janet Gee (Ramblers trustee and local Rambler) is aware of Warwickshire's views.

Note – since our meeting Ramblers have changed their proposals and plan that General Council members will discuss them at an EGM on 6th December.

10 AGM plans for 2026

Solihull Group said Fentham Hall, Hampton-in-Arden has been booked for 28th February 2026. Janet Gee (local Ramblers trustee) and Rick Thompson (author) will be the speakers. All the arrangements are in hand.

11 Using and updating Walks Manager

Nick reported that the issue we had previously had with South Birmingham walk changes not being updated on Walks Manager has now been resolved.

12 Navigation Training/ First Aid training updates

Janet will check with Sam Passmore to find out how he is getting on with preparing some on-line navigation training.

Janet has contacts for a couple of First Aid providers and will circulate details to the groups, so they can arrange their own courses. Please can groups let us know if they want Area to set up a Saturday training session.

13. Group successes to report to Cluster (Midlands and East of England)

COBRA – Finding walk leaders is still an issue. Coach walks are doing well, they regularly have more than 47 ramblers, so have a waiting list.

Solihull – have some new walk leaders, found coaxing people does work

Southam – finding new walk leaders is a challenge. A recent success was walking the Harry Green Way in 4 stages, with an average of 20 walkers on each one. They reinstated their evening walks, rebranded as 'paths and pubs' – these attracted an average of 11 walkers and resulted in 4 happy publicans.

WMWG – they have some new walk leaders who were enthusiastic to do the WL training and lead their first

walks. Of about 250 members, 40 or 50 are registered as walk leaders, which is great. Their weekend breaks continue to be very popular. Suggested we should report some of Michael's successes regarding HS2 to Cluster. 57 PROWs have been cut, with all but 1 being diverted to the nearest bridge. Near Berkswell there will be 3 bridges within 1 mile! Michael said that it is the subcontractors who are causing problems, not the HS2 organisation itself.

Mid-Warwickshire – Alice reported they have now recruited 2 new committee members

Stratford – they have organised 203 walks in the last year. 40% of their Walk leaders have taken action regarding the training.

Rugby – Hilary hadn't been asked to report anything in particular, but said their short walks were well-attended.

Castle Bromwich – increased numbers are attending their Sunday walks, but they have struggled with their evening walks. There has been some interest in the WL training and they are planning a group session. Their twice-yearly walking weekends are well supported.

South Birmingham – they organise 4-6 walks per week, and are having a trip to HF Whitby soon. They have a day in Abergavenny planned, and will go to HF Malham next year. They are struggling to get new walk leaders.

Sutton Coldfield – they have a good number of walks, including evening walks. They have a holiday soon at Mumbles, and a small group of their members walked from Siena to Rome in June. There has not been much take up of the walk leader training, so they are planning a group session.

Coventry – still struggling for walk leaders and to fill the walks programme. Failed to organise any evening walks this year.

14. AOB.

Barbara asked what the date for the 2027 AGM should be. Janet suggested any Saturday in February, but avoiding half-term if possible.

Janet Lockett
Area Secretary
September 2025

Dates for meetings in the next 12 months

Area Quarterly Meeting: 29/11/25	Meriden Village Hall
Area AGM : 28/2/26	organised by Solihull group, Fentham Hall, Hampton-in-Arden
Area Quarterly Meeting: 28/3/26	Meriden Village Hall [Note revised date]
Area Quarterly Meeting: 6/6/26	Meriden Village Hall
Area Quarterly Meeting: 5/9/26	Meriden Village Hall
Area Quarterly Meeting: 5/12/26	Meriden Village Hall