

Minutes of Warwickshire Area Council Meeting
held on Saturday 29th November 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 and WMWG) and Janet Lockett (Secretary and Coventry)

Group Representatives : Sheila Lyons, Suraiya Kidia and Pat Bird (City of Birmingham aka COBRA), David Threlkeld (Castle Bromwich), Gordon Smith and Richard Clarke (Southam), David and Ratree Shaw (Rugby), Jill Fitzmaurice (Mid Warwickshire), Les Harrison (Independent Member), Val Gibbons and Sue Hands (Solihull), Barbara Twort (Sutton Coldfield), Derek Smith (WMWG), Tony and Eileen Denman (South Birmingham), Janet Gee (Independent Member)

Groups not represented : WM40+

1. **Welcome** : Dr Peter welcomed everyone to the meeting, and everyone introduced themselves.
2. **Apologies:** Ann Hebden (Treasurer) and Richard Bright (and all Stratford group)
3. **Minutes of the last meeting**
The minutes were accepted as correct, with no objections.

4. **Matters arising from the minutes**

Andy said the new law he had mentioned about dogs attacking livestock (including llamas) was about to come into force.

Les asked if there had been any progress on producing some navigation training. Janet had a message from Sam Passmore in October saying he was still working on it. She will ask him again.

Peter said the two walks and picnic at Warwick to celebrate 90 years of Ramblers were very successful, with 40 members there, representing every Group except one. At the picnic Barry Durman (Millennium Way Chair) presented Peter with his badge following his completion of the 44 Millennium Way circular walks. Peter recommended the Millennium Way as the walks are all well recce'd and easy to follow from instructions on their website (and waymarkers).

5. **Area Treasurer's Report**

Ann's report had been circulated before the meeting. Janet read out her comments.

1. Apologies if I do not get to Meriden. I flew home from Malaysia overnight and am probably now asleep!
2. First quarter CO funding was received this month and distributed to the Groups. I made a mistake on the Area budget request (known only to 2 other people!). This has since been corrected and additional funding received.
3. Other expenditure covered the venue for the 90th birthday celebration and this meeting.
4. Annual Returns have been received from all Groups and forwarded to CO. It's hard to know whether they have been studied in any detail by CO. One Return did not balance with the Unity bank details provided by CO by a very small amount. Whilst I have had a response to my own query, CO have not (yet) made any comments.
5. General comments
 - a. Groups that arrange coach rambles are tending to keep relatively high reserves in their social accounts due to increasing coach costs, uncertainty about numbers attending and appropriate pricing. More than one Group Treasurer has declared that they do not intend to stay

within the CO guidelines about reserves. As a previous Treasurer of COBRA, where coach costs are significant, I have some sympathy with this matter.

- b. The Area independent examiner has commented that last year's AGM costs were high. Area has approved that this year's will be higher still. CO has indicated approval of Area budget where AGM costs are clearly stated.
- c. Several Groups have spent money on Walk Leader training, some of which is identified as First Aid training. Given CO provision of mandatory walk leader training, will some of this spending be necessary in the future? [Probably into January, maybe not after that -JL.]

Derek said WMWG had had their AGM on 22nd November and they are organising some WL training.

Val said she had received a new finance form from CO (possibly only sent to a sample of Groups) and that Ramblers has a new auditor.

6. Area Footpath & Countryside Secretary's Report

Michael said 30th November was the 25th anniversary of a rally held in Shropshire in 2000 to mark the passing of the CROW act. It replaced the Countryside and National Parks Act and protected mountain/moor/heath and foreshore. He had tried to claim some downland in Warwickshire, but as most of it is not pure limestone this was rejected.

Michael mentioned an email several of us had received from Jack Cornish (Director of England at Ramblers), asking us to contact our MP to ask the Government to make public Access to Nature a priority. Andy said he thought the message was rather vague, and that Ramblers weren't campaigning as effectively as groups like the CPRE.

Michael then discussed the following items from his report which had been circulated before the meeting.

1096 Solar farm at Lentons Lane: Coventry City Council's application had been refused by Coventry's planning department! This has gone to appeal, so is likely to be agreed. In mitigation we have asked for a permissive footpath to become an official right of way, and that our claim CAP 255 for a public footpath should be determined.

1098 HS2 contractors' extension of Kenilworth Greenway near Berkswell station. This will be constructed round the south side of the station car park, above the floodplain, so avoiding the frequently flooded footpath M196.

1103 Symmetry Park, Rugby Phase 2: Part of the SW Rugby Urban Extension which covers 3 grid squares of the OS map. Area had experienced many footpath problems with Phase 1, due mainly to the developers ignorance of footpath law!

1105 Shipston-on-Stour: Two Long Distance paths, the Centenary Way and Shakespeare's Way could be degraded if the proposed housing application goes ahead (on land that floods). Shakespeare's Way (to London) has been walked by Stratford-upon-Avon Group.

1107 Wasperton Farm: Proposed quarry, on land owned by St John's College, Oxford. Developers offering a new permissive bridleway around the site, Area have asked for a public bridleway!

Updates to previous cases

854 Frankton: The trail riders association had claims in to WCC for two bridleways to be upgraded to Byways Open to All Traffic. They have now however been upgraded to restricted byways, which motorised traffic cannot use.

1046 Burton Dassett: An old E road joined a cul-de-sac public bridleway head on. The E-road has now been stopped up and the bridleway extended on a different route right up to the Burton Dassett Hills.

7. Area Membership Secretary's report

Nick reported that membership now stood at 3034, a small decrease from 3068 in September, but reassuringly still above 3000.

Group Membership Secretaries welcome new members and Nick welcomes any not assigned to a particular group. There are still a fair number leaving within a year or two – we are not sure why – someone suggested they might have received membership as a gift.

Central Office used to contact members who did not renew – we're not sure if that still happens. The feedback previously had been that groups were not providing enough short walks, but several groups now do. Some people want to take their dogs on walks, but not all of our walks across farmland are suitable (and some groups do not welcome dogs).

Nick is aware of 17 affiliated groups in our area, and several non-affiliated walking groups, so the public have plenty of opportunities to walk. Janet Gee will check with CO whether they do contact members who leave.

8. Area Publicity Secretary's report

Andy reported that we now have 1033 Facebook followers, and 85 on BlueSky.

He thought the email from Jack Cornish was unclear about what recipients were asked to do. Lobbying MPs ...

Andy pointed out that CPRE's recent campaign to get solar panels installed more widely (the Sunshine bill) had been clear in its objectives and successful. Generally he is disappointed in Ramblers campaigns, they are not focussed enough. He would like to know how many unprocessed DMMOs there are nationally. The figures being used from the Don't Lose Your Path (DLYW) campaign are not correct, as they include old paths across airports, etc. DLYW shows over a thousand miles of unclaimed paths in our area, but Stephen Walsgrove barely found 100 miles of paths to claim. Most of the paths DLYW are claiming are lost paths are not credible cases.

Ramblers wants to promote access for all, but often people need to get out of the city to benefit. Nice areas like Meriden have plenty of footpaths, but an inner-city area cannot have similar access. Gordon asked if we need to contact CO about this.

South Birmingham's Facebook page is bringing them new members. Janet L said Coventry group seemed unwilling to make more use of Facebook, which could affect the group adversely.

9 Ramblers Conference 6th December

This was originally planned as an EGM, so we will be represented by our General Council members Dr Peter and Chafika (Cobra), as well as Janet Gee (trustee). [Update after the meeting – Chafika was unable to attend as she was not well.]

Peter said two main issues were Areas and Groups, where some boundaries/functions might need changing, and increasing diversity on the Board of Trustees (proposal is for one member, one vote (OMOV) – Andy is definitely against this).

Janet G then explained that the suggestion is to have a Board of 12 trustees, 4 will be elected by members across the UK (unless we restrict that to England), plus 1 from Wales and 1 from Scotland. The board will elect a Chair and Treasurer. Up to 4 others could be appointed depending on their skills.

They have suggested there should be several Gatherings instead of one General Council meeting each year, 4 across England, 1 in Wales and 1 in Scotland. Janet L said she thought the Midlands was likely to be with the East of England, in line with our Cluster. The AGM will be held online and will be more business-like without all the Motions to discuss.

Andy queried which ordinary members care about who is on the board, and said there had been no demand for OMOV in other charities, like the YHA, which had introduced it. Gordon thought England should definitely be represented on the board. Andy pointed out that with the current General Council delegates can talk to each other if they have any concerns about how the organisation is being run, but if there was OMOV no-one would know how to mobilise any support, if there was any disagreement. Peter concluded we are in favour of the status quo, rather than the proposed changes. He [and Chafika] will take our views to the conference.

10 AGM plans for 2026

Val (Solihull) 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; there will be a choice of walks after lunch. The notice of the AGM is in the Area report. Janet will send an electronic copy of the annual report to each group, once WMWG's report is received. She will also send the AGM invitation to each group to circulate to their members and will collect in numbers for catering purposes.

11 First Aid training updates

Janet had let groups know about a couple of First Aid providers.

Gordon said Southam had 2 people who wanted to be trained, but that was not enough for them to arrange their own course. He asked if any other groups were organising courses and might have a couple of places spare. Peter said Area could organise a training in the spring for members from any group. Janet L can get a venue close to Coventry railway station, which should be suitable. Peter queried whether Ann has budgeted for us to run a course.

12 Walk Leader training progress

David Shaw started the discussion. He thought being a trained walk leader (WL) showed a duty of care to the walk participants. Some of Rugby's WLs had renewed their status online, others have led more than 12 walks, and some have been deleted because they have become too frail or moved away, so now 14 of 39 WLs are qualified to continue. Some of Rugby's WLs had joined a course organised by Leicestershire and Rutland at Sapcote (with about 50 attendees). He had mixed feedback, some thought it was useful to hear other people's thoughts but others thought it wasn't as thorough as the online training done individually. David expects more walk leaders to qualify/upgrade over the next few weeks/months as needs become clearer.

Peter said he'd done the online training and found it useful, even though he considers himself an experienced walk leader. This is a common view, but persuading all walk leaders that they should look at the training continues to be a problem.

Val wondered if 14 walk leaders was sufficient for Rugby to run their walks programme. Rugby's 'A' group walks 15 miles at fortnightly intervals and have their programme planned for the next 6 months, so it seems they do have enough WLs.

Nick was aware of an experienced WL having an unsatisfactory response from CO and resigning from Ramblers. He wants to know why there is going to be a guillotine at the end of the year and feels Ramblers are exceeding what the HSE would think proportionate.

Janet Gee said that many people lack the confidence to lead a walk and need a buddy when they first do so. She said serious accidents do sometimes happen – she knew of an incident where someone had fallen 50 feet down a cliff and the family wanted to sue Ramblers.

Suraiya pointed out it was the older WLs who don't want to do the training.

Gordon did the training 6 months ago and found it useful. He shared this with his walkers and some of them then did the course. Southam still buddy new WLs; some of their older ones have stopped leading.

Nick wants to know if Groups can be consulted on those who have not done the training by the end of the year, so we can say if they are competent before the guillotine. Nick and Janet L have a meeting planned with staff at CO to discuss this further.

Andy is not happy with how the requirement for all WLs to be trained has been presented. He thinks there is

a historical lack of trust between CO and experienced ramblers. Peter agreed the trust needs to be built back. Derek wonders what is coming in January, if CO are so adamant about needing to meet the end of December deadline.

Gordon said he has an email from CO with a list of his group's WLs and their training status – Janet later found this had gone to Group Chairs and Walk Programme Coordinators (and suggested the guillotine would now be at the end of January).

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

There was no time for this item.

Janet had failed to send out the last Cluster pack, as her email provider thought it was Spam if she sent it to more than one person at a time.

14. AOB.

Derek said that WMWG had often parked at Yew Tree Farm, Wootton Wawen, while doing a walk, but had now been asked not to, as it is a private car park. Peter said it was good practice to request permission to park at a pub or similar, when doing the recce.

Janet Lockett
Area Secretary
December 2025

Dates for meetings in the next 12 months

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
Area AGM :	27/2/27	organised by Sutton Coldfield group, venue booked