

Minutes of Warwickshire Area Council Meeting
held on Saturday 6th June 2026
at Meriden Village Hall, chaired by Dr Peter Rookes

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

Group Representatives : Sheila Lyons, Suraiya Kidia and Fiona Webster (City of Birmingham aka COBRA), David Threlkeld (Castle Bromwich), Gordon Smith and Richard Clarke (Southam), David and Ratree Shaw (Rugby), Les Harrison (Independent Member), Val Gibbons and Sue Hands (Solihull), Derek Smith (WMWG), Richard Bright (Stratford), Janet Gee (Ramblers trustee and Kenilworth), Alice Sin, Jill Fitzmaurice and Bill Burton (Mid-Warwickshire), Colin Rock (Webmaster)

Groups not represented : WM40+, South Birmingham, Sutton Coldfield

1. **Welcome** : Dr Peter welcomed everyone to the meeting, especially Janet Gee (who is a Ramblers trustee) and Fiona Webster (who is a member of General Council).
2. **Apologies:** Kevin Kane (Treasurer), Barbara Twort (Sutton Coldfield), Duncan Barker (Castle Bromwich), Tony Denman (South Birmingham)

3. **Minutes of the last meeting**

The minutes were accepted as a correct record, with no objections.

4. **Matters arising from the minutes**

None

5. **Area Treasurer's Report**

Kevin Kane (Solihull) is our new treasurer and has just become a signatory on the Unity bank account. Kevin had a successful handover from Ann Hebden in April. He was not able to attend this meeting, because of a holiday booked before he took on the role. His report shows that we have paid out £8.50 in expenses for Don't Lose Your Way (DLYW) work. Funds from Central Office arrived late on 1st May and were paid out to Groups on 5th May. Janet L said the hall rent for this meeting had also been paid.

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

As previously mentioned, our Area is currently governed by three unitary authorities (Birmingham, Coventry and Solihull), plus Warwickshire County Council itself. There is a plan to get rid of the 5 local councils in Warwickshire, and the County will then either become one council (as preferred by Warwickshire County Council) or split into two, with Nuneaton, North Warwickshire and Rugby grouped together in the North, and Stratford and Warwick in the South. The decision should be taken in the next 2 years.

The next local plan for Warwick and Stratford has been published. Michael said it is not all bad news for us. A proposed development to the east of Shipston has not been included, there will be a 3km buffer zone round the Cotswolds AONB, and a development at Hockley Heath near Solihull is not in the plan.

However, there are big sites near Stratford. Bidford is set to double in size. A big area north of Wellesbourne will be developed. Henley-in-Arden will double in size – on to Greenbelt land. A large site near Southam is still included, as is a site near Hatton.

Warwickshire Ramblers is a member of CPRE, and Michael is on their board. There have been protests against the plans at Stratford and Leamington.

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

1142 Bentley Heath This development would be on a narrow strip of greenbelt near Solihull. Fortunately Solihull council has declared Bentley Heath is part of a new town, with Dorridge and Knowle, so the greenbelt needs to be maintained between it and Solihull.

1143 Arrow valley Some 4 square miles of high quality agricultural land could be covered by an enormous solar farm. It is so large the decision on it will be made by the Planning Inspectorate, not local councils. The connection to the grid will be at Feckenham.

1145 Claverdon Plans for self builds – inconveniently at the corner of 4 definitive map sheets

1147 Budbrooke Planning application to increase the size of Hampton Magna – rather close to Hatton site.

Further developments on previous cases

1023 Monks Kirby The wording of the diversion order has been changed since it was agreed.

1077 Wellesbourne The British Horse Society had asked Ramblers to appeal to the Secretary of State to determine our claim for a byway within 3 months. This is now at Appeal for non-determination. There is likely to be a bridleway (rather than a Byway Open to All Traffic) at the side of the site.

1079 Stratford Marina The developer has been rather cavalier about this. The diversions to the public footpaths did not comply with the Confirmed Diversion order. Area complained about the surface finish as it was not appropriate for part of Shakespeare's Way.

Peter thanked Michael for his report and all the work he has done on these cases.

Gordon asked what we going to do about the government overriding current agreed rules on building on Green Belt land. Should Ramblers be approaching government, or demonstrating in parliament? Michael said Ramblers don't seem interested in countryside matters, though the British Horse Society might progress things. We decided to approach Central Office about this. Peter asked Gordon to write down his concerns, and send the document to Janet L. When the Exec have discussed the letter, she will send it to Ramblers Chief Executive and the Chair of the board of trustees.

7. Area Membership Secretary's report

Nick reported that membership now stood at 3045, a small increase from 3023 reported in March and 3034 in December, and consistently above 3000, demonstrating that there is still an interest in walking.

Nick still wonders why some members leave comparatively soon after joining Ramblers. It is likely that many join without understanding who we are, or without realising that walks are a sizeable time commitment. As well as our 12 groups we have 17 affiliated clubs.

Since the last meeting we had a response from Central Office (CO) telling us how they follow up on members who resign or cancel their payments. In addition to reminders to pay, the leavers receive a cancellation survey. The questions in it are mainly about whether they are sympathetic to the Ramblers aims and whether they can be contacted in the future, rather than the reasons they have left. The survey options for reasons for leaving are Change in circumstances, Health reasons, Dissatisfaction with their experience as a member, Financial reasons, No longer interested. There is not much scope for explaining the reasons for any dissatisfaction, for example whether the local group was not friendly or did not offer walks of right length or not on a convenient day or at a convenient right time. CO claim that 50% of members who leave Ramblers also say they would be interested in rejoining at another time – but is that necessarily their intention? 70% of leavers had not joined a group walk in the last year. Almost 20% of leavers had used a Ramblers Route in the last year. 30% were

neither satisfied nor dissatisfied by their membership, 12% were either dissatisfied or very dissatisfied.

Richard C asked whether there should be some feedback to groups. If there had been any friction with the group, or if the group didn't organise the walks they wanted, it might be possible for the group to make changes. Peter said this had been discussed at General Council. Would a central meeting point help people without their own transport? Janet L will draft a response to CO, with suggestions of some additional, more relevant questions.

8. Area Publicity Secretary's report

Andy reported that we now have 1053 followers on Facebook and 87 on BlueSky. He told us he is reading a book called 'Enshittification' by Corey Doctorow, which discusses why online platforms are decaying. He wonders whether the government's decision to ban under 16's from social media will affect us.

Andy thanked South Birmingham and Sutton Coldfield for continuing to post on Facebook about their walks. He shares these posts to the Warwickshire page. Andy is disappointed by the posts from Ramblers nationally – there never seems to be anything about campaigning. He also reposts items from CPRE.

Fiona commented that Ramblers had posted about Access Denied. Andy thought that campaign was rather bland. The Access to Nature bill aims for everyone to live within half a mile of a path – but is that achievable for people in poorer areas?

Fiona said the completion of the coastal path was not mentioned at General Council, and she thought it was an achievement that Ramblers should be publicising much more. It seems there is a disconnect between Central Office and Ramblers members, possibly due to the rapid turnover of staff. Dr Peter thought that was illustrated by the failure to make much of the 90th birthday of Ramblers last year. Andy thinks the situation with Central Office has got worse since Covid, as fewer staff members work together and don't have any water cooler moments where they can share ideas. Many of them do not have a walking background.

9 General Council Feedback

Fiona explained she is a fairly new member of Ramblers and is very new to the meetings like General Council.

Fiona's notes are attached to these minutes, and the minutes of General Council are available on the Ramblers website.

The governance motion was not passed (74 voted for, 28 voted against), but if 2 more people had voted in favour of it, it would have reached the 75% required. Peter thought members were swayed by the impassioned pleas from Kate Ashbrook and Lucy Robinson. There was a problem in that they had to vote on 5 or 6 points on an 'all or nothing' basis, with no opportunity to express reservations about some parts (eg the move to one member one vote (OMOV), and the removal of General Council (GC)). If GC was replaced by 4 separate regional meetings, these may not agree, so could be played off against each other.

Peter spoke to Simon Kellas (head of Governance at Ramblers) ...

Peter and Fiona had been sent a survey to be completed by General Council members (by 8th June). They were asked which of the items they agreed/disagreed with.

The board is trying to find

A more democratic and accessible system for electing trustees . Andy thought this was misleading, as the word 'more' was not in the original suggestion. Nick agreed that the evidence for OMOV doesn't support the view that there will be any improvement over the current system of having elected representatives at General Council.

A stronger and more effective Board Having fewer trustees, with more co-opted members may not achieve this

Better, more meaningful member engagement Will the proposed 4 regional councils achieve this, or just be talking shops? Derek asked if the views expressed at them will carry any weight. Andy asked if anyone had ever come across a member who was unhappy that their views were not being consulted.

A simpler, clearer governance model

10a First Aid training updates

Gordon has had no response from the trainer he used. Dr Peter said Ramblers now provide on-line training – Bill confirmed he had done some online (~ 6 hours) and received a certificate for completing it.

[post meeting comment] Janet L thinks the Ramblers online session was just a conversation about First Aid providers and recommendations for what to carry in a first aid kit. Bill's training could just have been the Managing Incidents module?

Ramblers recommends the free online videos the British Red Cross provides - as well as in-person training, the Red Cross host numerous training videos on their website:

Free online learning modules: <https://www.redcross.org.uk/first-aid/learn-first-aid>

Free First Aid videos: <https://www.redcross.org.uk/first-aid/learn-first-aid/videos>

Free British Red Cross YouTube Videos: A wide variety of videos giving advice for first aid emergencies from heart attacks, strokes, broken bones to hypothermia, bleeding and choking.

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLZqB1U2YzcaYKjcxHFWQ4ylwxRa-FvzEV>

10b Navigation training update

Sue Humpage (South Birmingham) had offered to run some navigation courses, like Derek Jones used to provide, but asked if they should be to the NNAS Bronze and Silver levels, or whether a simpler non-assessed course might be more appropriate. Sue contacted Central Office to see if they have a national recommendation for a standard of training. Their reply said that a lot of groups provide their own in-house training as it's easier to deliver in practical manner and allows walkers/walk leaders to practice navigation. The Ramblers website has some navigation pages which include step-by-step guidance and useful tutorial videos <https://www.ramblers.org.uk/go-walking-hub/navigation>

All groups seemed happy to provide their own navigation training to new walk leaders as required.

11 Planning for 2027 AGM.

There was no-one from Sutton Coldfield present to provide any update, but we believe it is all in hand.

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

There was no time to discuss this item.

13. AOB.

Peter asked if anyone would be prepared to take over from him as Chair next February, when his 3-year term will be completed. Gordon said he was willing to help, but as he spends several weeks abroad each year he would not always be around for our quarterly meetings. Derek suggested changing the constitution to allow Peter to do another year, but Peter thought that would just postpone the decision. Nick said that the Chair did not need to attend all the meetings, and that he (and other ex-Chairs) would be happy to help or to answer any questions about the role.

The meeting closed at 4.10pm.

Janet Lockett
Area Secretary
June 2026

Dates for meetings in the next 12 months

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
Area Quarterly Meeting: March '27 tbc	Meriden Village Hall
Area Quarterly Meeting: 5/6/27	Meriden Village Hall