

Minutes of Warwickshire Area Council Meeting
held on Saturday 21st March 2026
at Meriden Village Hall, chaired by Dr Peter Rookes

Present: Executive Committee : Dr Peter Rookes (Chair), Michael Bird (Footpaths & Countryside Secretary), and Janet Lockett (Secretary and Coventry)

Group Representatives : Sheila Lyons and Suraiya Kidia (City of Birmingham aka COBRA), David Threlkeld (Castle Bromwich), Gordon Smith (Southam), David and Ratree Shaw (Rugby), Les Harrison (Independent Member), Val Gibbons and Sue Hands (Solihull), Derek Smith (WMWG), Richard Bright (Stratford)

Groups not represented : WM40+, Mid Warwickshire, South Birmingham

1. **Welcome** : Dr Peter welcomed everyone to the meeting.
2. **Apologies:** Ann Hebden (retiring Treasurer) and Nick Hillier (Membership Secretary & Solihull), Andy Page (Publicity and WMWG), Barbara Twort (Sutton Coldfield)

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**

Ann Hebden has now resigned as our Treasurer, but had sent her report which was circulated before the meeting. Ann had commented that the AGM cost less than expected, as attendance was lower than anticipated, but it was still more expensive than last year.

Les Harrison has identified a potential new Area Treasurer, who unfortunately was not able to attend this meeting. Kevin Kane has an accountancy background, is retiring at the end of March, and is willing to be involved. Les thought he should meet with Dr Peter and Janet, but Peter said Les' recommendation was sufficient. Janet will put him in touch with Ann for a handover. Paul Drake has said he is willing to assist if the handover leaves any gaps.

The meeting agreed that Kevin Kane should be added as a signatory on the Unity bank account, and that Ann Hebden, Sandra Sutton and Paul Drake should be removed. Janet Lockett and Nick Hillier will remain as signatories.

Michael said there will be a need to pay more expenses to the DLYW volunteers, as we need someone to go to the public records office to copy lots of documents. We agreed that would be approved expenditure.

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

Michael started with the good news that the King Charles III England Coastal Path has just been opened, and that parts of the path would be replaced if they were washed away.

We are still waiting for more details of the local government reform and whether Warwickshire will be represented by one or two unitary authorities. The Warwick District plan is still not ready. It is likely there will be more housing at Hatton, Wilmcote and Shipston-on-Stour (where there is little employment, so presumably the new residents will commute to places like Coventry). The government has plans for 1.5 million new houses this parliament, but it is unclear if sufficient materials will be available. 2 million acres could be used for re-wilding. The outlook for the countryside is poor.

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

1120 SCOPE/00045 relates to an outline planning application for 450 houses and other structures outside the Southam bypass. It is similar to SCOPE/000043, but with 3 fields removed, so our response is the same.

1130 at Hockley Heath - comes under Warwick District council, but is close to Solihull. Proposal for 330 houses, on Green Belt land, with two public footpaths, which the developers have assumed can be used for cycling. Area has objected.

1134 Shipston on Stour. Planning application for 110 houses. A bridleway outside the edge of the site is also outside a neighbouring development, so Area asked who will be responsible for maintaining the bridleway.

1139 Public consultation on transporting water from Minsworth to the South-east, via the Coventry, Oxford and Grand Union canals. Canal towpaths are not generally public rights of way, but some sections are. Area is concerned that there may be lengthy path closures in North Warwickshire during the construction (21 PROWs will be cut).

Further developments on previous cases

919 Fillongley solar farm – ticks all the wrong boxes – it is on Green Belt, on good agricultural land, and 40 years is not really ‘temporary’. It was refused by North Warwickshire council on 10/7/24, but allowed on appeal 11/12/25.

1046 Burton Dassett extension to house. A cul-de-sac bridleway will be diverted around the house and extended to the hills

1077 Wellesbourne. The British Horse Society had asked Ramblers to appeal to the Secretary of State to determine our claim for a byway (which is 40 feet wide). This could now come to a public enquiry, so Michael needs a DLYW volunteer to get documents from the council.

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 is worried about what is happening to farming in England. Peter said this could be discussed at General Council if there are any relevant motions.

7. Area Membership Secretary's report

Nick had sent his report via Les, which he read out.

Nick reported that membership now stood at 3023, a small decrease from 3034 in December, but reassuringly still above 3000. We actually had 157 new members since we last met, but unfortunately we lost 168 members.

I know that I have mentioned this before, but what always surprises me is the number of people who join then resign. Here we are three months into the year and we have 10 resignations of people who only joined in January of this year. It does appear to be a question of buyer's remorse. Is there a problem of how the Ramblers is marketed or is it that people don't think this through before paying their money. I field email enquiries that come into Solihull Group's website, and for some people, it is clear from the questions they ask that we won't be providing what they want.

At the last meeting Janet Gee had said she will check with CO whether they do contact members who leave. Their reply [added after the meeting] is that they do, but apparently mainly to persuade them to stay, rather than establishing the reason they've left.

When a member resigns/cancels DD:

- If their DD is not taken they will immediately get an automated email (admin) to let them know, and to ask them if they would like to set up a new DD or pay by another alternative method.
- If they resign by phone we'll have a conversation about options open to them, and if they don't want to be a member now but stay in touch, we capture consent for future contact
- If they resign in another way we follow up with a cancellation survey and an email follow-up. We personally follow up dependent on cancellation survey response
- We have a reactivation email journey to encourage re-signing up to rejoin us

When a member lapses:

- Our renewal journey for cash members includes 2 letters, 2 emails and potentially a call too (if don't pay at each stage)
- When someone lapses fully, we then send them the cancellation survey and email follow up, and then they go on reactivation email journey later on

About 2,000 members rejoin us each year.

We will also be testing reactivation calling this year (to lapsed members), and also be reviewing how we stay in touch with our members who have left us - as many want to still be somewhat engaged in the work - 50% of members who leave us also say they would be interested in rejoining at another time.

8. Area Publicity Secretary's report

Andy has been in hospital this week and had not sent a report.

9 AGM Feedback

Val (Solihull) said everything went well from her point of view. Janet Gee (local Ramblers trustee) and Rick Thompson (author) were the speakers and were both very interesting. Solihull group managed to put on a walk after lunch, despite local flooding, which was enjoyed by those who did it.

Peter said he thought the expense was well worth it for such a well-attended AGM, with a great venue and good food, and two good talks. Ramblers is still discussing the future of Areas and Groups, so it is uncertain how many AGMs we will hold in future.

Janet confirmed that since the AGM Paul Drake has agreed to continue as auditor of the accounts.

10 General Council

Our delegates will be Dr Peter and Fiona Webster. The motions and papers will be published on 27th March. Janet will circulate the motions and we can organise a virtual discussion if enough people want to comment.

11 First Aid training updates

Janet had tried to contact a First Aid provider, but had not yet had a response. Gordon will try to follow this up.

COBRA had a half-day training, which was a good refresher, but not geared to outdoor conditions. Solihull are planning a refresher course from the First Responders who trained them 3 years ago.

Nationally Ramblers is holding a "conversation" on First Aid on Group walks, on Thursday 21st May (from a past event that probably discusses what training might be appropriate, rather than actually providing any specific training). Book via Eventbrite, see [First Aid on Group Walks Tickets, Thursday, May 21, 2026 from 6 pm to 7:15 pm GMT+1 | Eventbrite](#).

12 Walk Leader training progress

- a) Lists have now been updated.
- b) Navigation training

Sam Passmore has put together a training session on GPS navigation. He demonstrated it to 5 people from Coventry and Stratford groups by Zoom in February. It was interesting but mostly about using phone apps, not OS maps, and assumed ramblers can already read maps. It is possibly not quite what we want, but Janet will put anyone who is interested in it in touch with Sam.

At the AGM, Sue Humpage (South Birmingham) had asked if we had any replacements for the courses Derek Jones used to provide. She later offered to run some navigation courses, but asked if they should be to the NNAS Bronze and Silver levels, or whether a simpler non-assessed course might be more appropriate. Janet will ask Claire Watkins to find out what other Areas in our Cluster do. She will also ask Sue whether there will be a charge, and when and where she thinks she could offer trainings. Training at a weekend would probably be best.

Richard said he thought using a phone is adequate for leading a walk in our area, but he does use OS maps on it. If his phone should fail, someone else in the group would have one that could be used.

13. CPRE Warwickshire affiliation

Michael said Warwickshire Ramblers have been affiliated to CPRE Warwickshire for a number of years. He is a member and trustee. The meeting agreed there was no reason not to continue with our affiliation (we paid £80 last year).

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

Peter will report to the Cluster meeting on 23rd March.

WMWG They have about 250 members, of whom 36 are walk leaders. They still attract new people through MeetUp, not all of whom subsequently join Ramblers

Solihull Organising the Area AGM was one of their main successes. They are organising group walks to cover the Millennium Way circular walks, and have done 5 so far. They expect to complete them all over 2 years. About 15 people have completed the Walk leader training. On 1st April they are holding a session to discuss the basics of leading a walk. In January they led some short 'walk and talk' walks – the response was not very good (probably because of the weather), so they will try again.

COBRA Many of their Sunday coach walks are overbooked. Several newcomers have joined the group. They have put on in house map-reading training for new walk leaders.

Castle Bromwich They have 62 members and 14 walk leaders. They have some gaps in their programme, and have 22 people going on a group holiday soon.

Rugby Their successes include their residential weekends away. They are going to HF Selworthy next week, and Paignton in September (with 36-38 members). They have 26 walk leaders and are expecting to get more. Their programme is a bit thin, but their long walks are planned until May. They will hold Wednesday evening walks from the end of April.

Southam Last year they had 6 walk leaders, now they have 14, who are all enthusiastic. Their fortnightly walks are planned until September. They will have 3 mile Thursday evening walks from May to July.

Stratford Last year they organised 200 walks – about 3 per week. They have 69 walk leaders so are confident they can continue with their programme. They have two stages of the Shakespeare Way in London to complete in July. They are also walking the Heart of England Way. They need a Sunday walks coordinator. They have a good social media profile and their membership is increasing.

Coventry Still have gaps in the programme.

Peter asked if any groups had used the Rail Trails. David T said Castle Bromwich had used some, as linear walks. They found some in Worcestershire hard to follow. Peter suggested feeding that back.

15. AOB.

None.

The meeting closed at 4pm.

Janet Lockett
Area Secretary
March 2026

Dates for meetings in the next 12 months

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
Area Quarterly Meeting: March '27 tbc	Meriden Village Hall