



Minutes of Somerset Area 51st Annual General Meeting

The Area AGM was held on Sunday 16th February 2025 at Winscombe Community Centre Starting at 1400

There were 31 members present

1. Apologies were received from Tony Dyson (Treasurer) David Thompson and John Perry
2. The minutes of the 2024 AGM were agreed with the amendment of 3 typos.
Proposed Anthony Smith Seconded Mary Perry
3. Chairman's Review is appended below.
4. The audited accounts are presented below.
Robin Downton asked if the accounts had been passed to HQ and being assured that the correct procedure was followed agreed to propose their acceptance. Seconded by Anthony Smith.
5. Footpath Officer's report. The report is appended below. A short presentation was given on 'Don't lose your way project, and it was agreed that this project alone justified the existence of the Area as it gives a direct input to the County Council.
6. Election of Honorary Officers
 - a. Chair Anthony Smith agreed to stand as chairman and was unopposed.
Proposed Gerald Swayne Seconded Sandy Swayne
 - b. The following agreed to stand again
 - i. Secretary Mike Plaskitt
 - ii. Treasurer Tony Dyson
 - iii. Footpath Secretary Les Stather
 - iv. Membership Secretary Les StatherThere being no other candidates they were elected unopposed Proposed Barbara Chorley Seconded Leslie Chir
7. Independent Examiner Tony Dyson to advise

8. Anthony Smith and Brenda Prentice were nominated as the Somerset delegates to General Council
9. After some discussion it was agreed that the delegates were free to vote on the issues presented, but that the voting for the board members at General Council, as at present, was the preferred system
10. The meeting closed at 1500 and was followed by an interesting presentation on Steep Holm.

Mike Plaskitt

Secretary Somerset Area Ramblers.

Chairman's Review for 2024

As the majority of members here at the AGM for the first time I think I need to explain fairly recent changes to how the Area Committee operates. The Area committee some years ago met four times each year to receive reports from groups, tackle any Somerset issues and represent Somerset at the General Council. The committee even published a regular newsletter.

In more recent years Groups have failed to attend these meetings or even send a report of Group activities. This lack of support for the Area plus a failure of members to replace the Area Posts of Chair, Secretary, Treasurer, Footpath or Membership Secretary has meant that just a few existing members in these posts volunteered to continue in these positions. We have for the past three years shared the post of Area Chair between the Groups Chairs so that Groups have the opportunity to become more involved.

The position of Chair passed to me from the Taunton Chair last year and today the Woodspring Chair Tony Smith has volunteered to take on the position of Area Chair this coming year. Other than to Chair last year's AGM and attend the General Council meeting on your behalf, I have done very little this year but the work of Area has continued thanks to Treasurer, Tony Dyson, Secretary Mike Plaskitt and especially Les Stather who has managed both Membership and Footpath Secretary very well.

The Area committee may not have run as it previously functioned but with very little support from the Groups more than the minimum has been achieved. Groups have received payments from the treasurer, and thanks to Les, Groups queries over membership have been answered and the Footpath Officers report clearly shows that the vital work of footpath protection has been effectively carried out in all of the Group areas.

Mike, Tony and Les have all volunteered to continue in these posts and to act on your behalf for another year. It would be good if we have members here today who would step up to replace them in a years' time and perhaps follow what is being done this year so that they can confidently take over next year. Over to you.

Somerset Ramblers Statement of Accounts as at 31/09/2024

Opening balance 01/10/2023

Restricted Funds	£451.28	Don't Lose Your Way	£451.28
Self-Funded	£2,601.74	Holiday payments	£2,601.74
General Funds	£595.92		
Total	£3,648.94		

Income

Central Office Funding	£2,000.00
Holidays	£0.00
Total Receipts	£2,000.00

Expenditure

Funding to Groups	£1,917.34
Don't Lose Your Way	£54.00
Meeting/AGM Costs	£217.15
Campaigns/Casework	£33.30
Admin	£0.00
Holidays	£656.00
Total Expenditure	£906.45

Funds as at 31/09/2024

Restricted Funds	£397.28	Don't Lose Your Way	£397.28
Self Funded	£1,945.74	Holiday payments	£1,945.74
General Funds	£428.13		
Total Funds	£2,771.15		

At bank	£2,771.15		
To bank	£0.00		
Awaiting presentation	£0.00		
Total	£2,771.15	£0.00	

Somerset Ramblers Area Footpath Officer Report for AGM 2025

I would like to thank all the group footpath officers for their work dealing with footpath issues and diversions in their area.

As Area Footpath Officer, I have focused on working with the ramblers, Somerset Council and other users of the public right of way network such as The British Horse Society (BHS) and Trails Trust.

I have become a member of the Local Access Forum, who advise decision making organisations (such as local authorities) about making improvements to public access for outdoor recreation and sustainable travel.

Working with the BHS, we have forced Somerset Council to open T 2/11 in Bickenhall that has been closed for over 20 years. We had to threaten Somerset Council with legal action unless they opened it and they had to use the police in order to get access on to the land clear the obstructions.

Working with Brian Lucas, The Somerset Ramblers Don't Lose Your Way Coordinator, we have made significant progress with identifying rights of way that failed to get included on the definitive map and collecting the evidence required to submit an application to get them added. We are tackling this on a parish by parish basis. Thanks the work done by Ed Levy of Sedgemoor Ramblers and a ramblers volunteer, Susan Jones, we have identified all the paths on the 1910 map that are not on the current map. For each path we have identified the evidence we require and this is on order for copying from volunteers working at the National Archives in Kew. Once this has been received for a parish we will be able to identify the paths for which we have sufficient evidence. We will then share this with the parish council and ramblers members living in the parish to see if they know of any local evidence or if they can identify any paths that are not on the definitive map that are currently walked. This project was started because of the threat of a cut-off date in either 2026 or 2031. The government have recently announced their intention of abolishing the cut-off date. However an act of parliament needs to be passed to do this. I am producing a communication, to be sent to all Somerset MPs, explaining why they should support the government's intention to abolish the cut-off date.

Somerset Ramblers Membership Secretary Report

The number of members reported in December for last four years can be seen in the table below

Group	Number of Paid Members December			
	2024	2023	2022	2021
Mendip	336	337	350	365
Sedgemoor	106	114	129	132
South Somerset	216	216	216	233
West Somerset	123	139	160	177
Taunton Dean	259	261	257	257
Woodspring	220	228	218	223
Not Affiliated to a group	110	98	73	77
Somerset Area	1370	1393	1403	1464
Avon	2105	2105	2022	2079

Some observations over the last 4 years

1. Somerset's membership has reduced by 94 (6%). This compares to a growth of 26 (1%) in Avon
2. Those members not affiliated to a group have increased by 33 (43%). These are usually people who either do not walk in a group or do not want to be assigned to fixed group
3. No other group has increased its membership over this period
4. West Somerset's have had the steepest decline in members, reducing by 54 (31%). Sedgemoor's membership fell by 26 (20%), Mendip 29 (8%) and South Somerset 17 (7%)
5. The decline in membership in Mendip and South Somerset looks to have levelled off over the last year but West Somerset and Sedgemoor are still losing members.