

Minutes of the Somerset Area Council meeting held on the 16th February 2020

1300 @ Henton Village Hall

Members Present

Les Stather	Chair
Phil Bisatt	Secretary
Robin Downton	Treasurer
Mavis Monahan	Somerset Rambler Editor
Carl Earl	Area Footpath Secretary
Gerald Swayne	West Somerset
Maggie Thompson	Woodspring

Apologies

Ed Levy	Sedgemoor
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Matters Arising

Revised arrangements for Area Committee meetings – Groups had been advised.

Complaints Procedure – had been circulated

Still need to know from HQ what the Somerset Young Ramblers budget was.

Donate a Gate scheme – suggested that this could be taken up with Martin Cooper, Jake Taylor's replacement at SCC.

Item for Area website on powers of parish councils - done.

Carl seeking advice from HQ about requesting local planning authorities to consult Ramblers.

Digitising SCC archive documents - no volunteers had come forward in response to the note in the Area newsletter.

General Council

Carl proposed that Somerset Area put forward a motion to this year's General Council in Bristol as follows:

“That Ramblers seek to ensure that when a right of way is diverted to a field edge or fenced for the landowner’s benefit that the landowner be responsible for keeping the route clear at all times.”

It was agreed that the proposed motion was a good idea. It would highlight the need for clarification on the Highway Authority’s continuing responsibilities when a path was diverted. There were currently issues around how maintenance responsibilities could be enforced. Landowner responsibility was seen as a reasonable quid pro quo when the path had been diverted or fenced for the landowner’s benefit. What seemed to be sometimes happening that paths were moved to field edges and subsequently becoming overgrown, leaving the highway authority or Ramblers to clear it.

Phil mentioned that Taunton Deane Group were about to undertake path clearance in partnership with the County Council at a location on private land where a path along a field edge had been fenced, and subsequently had become overgrown.

Agreed that Carl Earl and Les Stather would be the 2 Somerset Area delegates to General Council. Phil to forward the motion to Head Office for consideration by the Agenda Committee of General Council.

Treasurer’s Report

Finance Office had queried why Area expenditure in 2019 appeared to be over £29,000. Robin explained that this was purely because of the year in which bills fell within the self-funded account, and not because of high expenditure.

General Fund stood at £1519.20. Self-funded element stood at £4015.44

The accounts for the year 2019 were approved for forwarding to the AGM.

Wessex Wanderers – Les explained that this group organised walks from the Bristol – Weymouth railway line, usually 2 or 3 walks per week during the summer. They had decided to improve publicity during 2020 to celebrate 25 years of their activities. To fund this, they felt they needed to ask for a higher contribution from the 4 Ramblers Area along the route of the railway (£250 – in previous years it had been £100). This seemed to raise a potential issue of the Charities Act. However, following correspondence with Head Office, it had been established that Wessex Wanderers have an ‘agreed status’ with Ramblers and are funded by each area within which the railway passes. Les said that we should say that we are willing to pay once we have authority to do so from the Area Support Officer. It was felt that Areas should not really be making this decision as to whether to pay money to Wessex Wanderers and that funding should come direct from Ramblers centrally.

Other Reports

Area Footpath Secretary

The 'Lost Paths' app had just been launched by Ramblers and seemed to work quite well. The intention is that Ramblers will seek volunteers at Area or Group level to look at all the paths that are highlighted as a result of this initiative. There was concern that this could involve a lot of time and effort.

The Bridleways Association in Somerset were very active and had put in 250 claims to SCC for potential rights of way. This left only those routes to consider which were merely footpaths and not bridleways. Proving the status of footpaths can be difficult. Historic information, such as sales documents, would have to be used, but the chances of finding evidence of a public path are very low.

The feeling was that Ramblers will use the data obtained from this exercise to seek to extend the 2026 cut-off date. In the process it would also generate publicity for Ramblers and increase membership.

Nothing had been heard from SCC regarding issues that had previously been raised with them. Les had met with Martin Cooper and had asked that we cease being 'fobbed off' by SCC. Carl said that there was no real point in having another meeting with SCC unless they were committed to making tangible progress. The prevailing attitude wasn't 'how can we solve this problem' but 'how can we avoid doing anything about it'.

Les agreed to contact Peter Hobley asking for an update before we met the County Council again.

Any Other Business

Walk Leadership Workshops – it was noted that Ramblers nationally were proposing to hold workshops in Taunton and Wells. Les agreed to advise of dates and venues when known. Carl suggested that a workshop could also be usefully held in the Yeovil area.

The meeting closed at 1345.

Action	By
Contact Area Support Officer regarding payment to Wessex Wanderers	LS
Forward General Council motion to Head Office	PB
Advise Groups of dates of Walk Leadership Workshops	LS
Raise Donate a Gate scheme with Martin Cooper	CE
Contact Peter Hobley for update on issues raised previously with SCC	LS

Philip Bisatt
Area Secretary