

Ramblers Association
Sussex Area
Annual Report 2008-2009

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This 2008-2009 Annual Report is for distribution at the Sussex Area AGM at Billingshurst Village Hall, Roman Way, Billingshurst RH14 9QW 2.30pm on Saturday 16 January 2010. A limited number will also be sent to each Sussex Group. It is available on the website www.sussex-ramblers.org.uk or by application with SAE to the address below.

Area Chairman's Report

1. I am writing this report on the afternoon of 11th November having observed with many others the 2 minutes silence this morning and thus an appropriate time for reflection over the past year(s). If I am to agree with some of our members it may be that 2009 will be remembered as the year that saw the end of the Ramblers as we know it. I am convinced this is not the case but the troubles experienced at Central Office (CO), exacerbated by the financial crisis, have led to many long-term campaigners questioning whether CO has lost direction and should revert to being an organisation to support people wishing to maintain and strengthen the existing RoW network. Conversely there is always a resistance to change and is it the case that an association that does not move forward with new ideas will gradually wither and die?

For me, the jury is still out and I look forward to attending soon a meeting at CO to hear their version of events and the comments raised by concerned members. I do believe however it does no harm to occasionally review and question the methods used by any organisation and the statement that "that's the way we've always done it" does not necessarily mean that alternatives are not better.

2. Coming back to local matters I believe it has been a good year overall for Sussex Area. A successful AGM, well hosted by Beachy Head Group and described as the best for some years; the successful submission of our first General Council Motion, originally proposed by Mid-Sussex Group, for some years; the introduction by Chris Smith of "Now Open", an e-mail newsletter giving up-to-date information on RoW's either recently reopened or reasons why they are not yet open; an improving relationship with our local authorities and, of course, the *piece de resistance* after many years of campaigning -the formation of the South Downs National Park.

We also are continuing to look at how we operate in times of budgets etc. and with "volunteer time" being at a premium and useful discussions have been held at Area Council on the way forward. There is still much work to be done and this will be my top priority in what will be, if re-elected at the 2010 AGM, my final year in post.

3. Sadly at that AGM we shall say farewell to three of our senior representatives. Firstly, we will finally lose the services of Nigel Sloan who has remained as Access Officer since he stood down as Area Secretary two years ago – a wealth of experience we shall miss greatly. Secondly Andy Vines, our Area Treasurer, recruited by Nigel in 2004, who has successfully steered all Groups on to Unity banking and budgeting and leaves the Area in a very healthy financial state. Lastly Derek Knight, West Sussex FPS, recruited (arm-twisted?) by Anne Parker and myself to fill a position left vacant for some time and who has given sterling service especially considering his personal circumstances throughout the time in office. At time of writing we have a nomination for Treasurer but not the other two posts and it is essential we fill them as soon as possible.

4. May I conclude by thanking all Area office holders and you the members for your continuing support through these trying times for Ramblers and giving my assurance that we will continue to attempt to give you the Sussex Area and Ramblers Association that you want and deserve.

Mike Charman

Area Secretary's Report

Much of my first year as Secretary seems to have been taken up with administration of Constitutions and Data Protection forms. I am delighted to say that Area and most Groups have now completed a new Constitution and almost all Committee members and Local Footpath Secretaries have completed a DP form. In addition to these requirements, we have also had the re-branding exercise, with the necessity for new stationery etc. Thank you to everybody who has co-operated so well, particularly the Group Secretaries.

One thing that has caused me concern, is that a few AC representatives have not been able to attend every meeting this past year and sometimes a substitute has not been found. There are always going to be other commitments and family responsibilities that crop up, but wherever possible please to try get somebody else to attend in your place. We only meet a few times a year, so if a meeting is missed then it is several months before there is the chance to be involved in the discussions and decisions.

On the matter of frequency of meetings, we have tried meeting just three times a year, but have found that it is very difficult to maintain momentum between meetings when there is a four-months gap. Area Council has decided to revert to four meetings a year; three meetings to be held on Saturday, with the summer meeting being held in the evening, as this year. We still intend to have a meeting of Area Executive a couple of weeks before each AC Meeting. This year it has been very helpful to have Officers' Reports before the AEC Meeting; thank you to all the Officers for producing these early.

Finally, thank you for all your support.

Anne Parker

Area Treasurer's Report - 2008/2009

We have reduced our General Fund to a fairly tight operating level and, since the year end, have used some of the designated funds supporting the Bayham Abbey appeal. Centre reduced the final funding payment but brought forward the first funding payment for 2009/10 so our position is slightly easier than it looks. Three groups have not requested funding for 2009/10.

As this is my final report, I would like to take the opportunity to thank the Group Treasurers who have coped with change and tighter deadlines with their usual efficiency. All the groups prepared budgets this year and all are either banking or about to bank with Unity. We managed one meeting which was enjoyed by those who could make it.

Thanks also to John le Pla, our auditor.

Cont'd

Treasurer's Report - 2008/2009

Abbreviated Accounts for the Year to 30th September 2009

<u>2008</u>		<u>2008/2009</u>		<u>2009 / 2010</u>
Actual		Actual	Budget	Budget
	Income			
13,000	From centre	13,000	15,000	11,500
490	Other	77	275	250
13,490	Total Income	13,077	15,275	11,750
	Expenditure			
10,049	Group Funding	9,624	9,224	7,000
	Walks leader training			
2,957	Newsletters / Publicity	3,171	3,570	3,160
550	Practical Work			
2,653	Campaigns / Casework	2,240	2,280	1,650
212	Meetings	622	400	375
893	Admin	843	755	1,255
	Other	50	275	75
17,314	Total Expenditure	16,550	16,504	13,515
	Area Funds			
(3,824)	Surplus/(Deficit) for year	(3,473)	(1,229)	(1,765)
18,423	Fund b/f	14,599		
14,599	Fund at 30th September	11,126		
	Represented by			
14,446	Cash or cash due	10,973		
153	Other	153		
14,599	Total	11,126		

Notes:

The £2,244 difference between budget and actual deficit is mainly the reduction in funding by centre.

The fund (£11,126) is made up of:

Wealdway improvements	3,000	The Area Council voted to give most of this to the Bayham Abbey appeal
Stiles @ Herstmonceaux	1,500	
Rusper stiles	500	
	<u>5,000</u>	
General Fund	6,126	
	11,126	

Andy Vines

East Sussex Footpath Secretary's Report

Another year passes, with lots to do as Area Footpath Secretary. Five public inquiries, membership of a national Rights of Way Sounding Board Committee at central Office, and delegate at General Council are just some of the tasks I have embroiled myself in during the year. I am also chairman of my local parish Rights of Way Sub-committee, a useful role for promotion of the Ramblers outside our normal sphere.

None of this could be achieved without the help of our band of local volunteers, who continue to work hard in their own patches throughout East Sussex. However, their ranks have been reduced as seven members have retired or moved away. After many years loyal service Ross Urquhart has hung up his boots and his pen to take a welcome rest. Ross was my predecessor as AFPS for nine years, and then continued as LFPS for three parishes after that. He also took part in the Heathfield Group's path maintenance team and in the composition and publication of their excellent book of Walks in the Weald. Most importantly for me, Ross has helped and supported me throughout my stint as AFPS.

We had no time for training this year, but our Annual Meeting at Chiddingly was well attended. As we have had so many public inquiries recently, volunteers have asked for guidance on how to deal with such events, so this will be a priority for 2010.

There have been positive improvements at East Sussex County Council's rights of way management. They have carried out a full survey of all 2000 miles of rights of way in the county, and myself and some other volunteers joined the surveyors for a day to see how it was done. The data will be stored in a database and used to create a digitalised version of the Definitive Map, with up-to-date background data instead of the completely inadequate paper map that the Council currently uses for all its rights of way work. As well as the survey, ESCC have been taking a more robust stance on enforcement work, prosecuting one path obstructor near Hailsham, and serving notices on others. Farmers who do not clear their paths of crops have also been pursued with more vigour than in the past, although there are still plenty more out there to be dealt with. Our Area Press Officer Chris Smith has been publishing 'Now Open', an online newsletter that reports the latest achievements of the county council, as well as the worst cases of neglect that continue to trouble us. The Rights of Way Team have continued to function despite continuing changes of management and personnel within the team. So far there have not been any official cuts, although two new Area Officers are currently required.

I stood down from the East Sussex Local Access Forum in the summer and local volunteer Jerry Kind now helps represent walkers' interests on the Forum instead, and I hope that a largely new membership, plus the appointment of a dedicated LAF Officer will help revitalise the Forum.

Once again I conclude with a big thank you to all the Local Footpath Secretaries, and with a plea for more Ramblers' members in East Sussex to come forward and do their bit to support the paths that we all enjoy. We have twenty four parishes in the county with no Ramblers volunteers looking after them, so if you think you might like to help look after the paths in your area, please call me on 01892 770606.

Malcolm McDonnell

West Sussex Footpath Secretary's Report

Local Footpath Secretaries

A meeting was arranged in April at Pulborough to update LFPS and to discuss issues of their concern. A total of 28 attended with a similar number offering apologies; unfortunately this left a number for whom no response was received.

Amongst the issues discussed were preparing a DMMO, awareness of planning applications affecting paths, fly tipping and motor cycle usage of paths. Members agreed that building up liaison with the Parish Council would help identify planning applications affecting paths.

Adrian Morris, Head of Walking Environment was able to provide expert advice on the issues and to provide assurance on the importance HQ attaches to the local representative in a parish.

During the year the number of LFPS unfortunately resigning, was greater than the very welcomed recruitment of new ones. In total there are vacancies in 21 of the 164 parishes.

Aldingbourne	Coldwaltham	Lodsworth
Amberley	East Grinstead	Lymminster
Angmering	Ebernoe	Poling
Ashurst	Harting	Rudgwick
Ashington	Kingston	Twineham
Ashurst Wood	Kirdford	Upwaltham
Climping	Littlehampton	Westbourne

In some of these parishes there has been no active presence of a LFPS for several years. Footpath problems can be developing which are not being highlighted to enable rectifying action to be instituted. Area Council has asked local Groups to assist with recruiting LFPS to fill the vacancies.

Pitshill

The year has been dominated by the continuing saga relating to the diversion of footpaths in the area of Pitshill House. The Secretary of State set up a second Public Inquiry, in June, to reconsider the first Orders made by Chichester District Council.

John Trevelyan, the co-author of the "Blue Book", was engaged to represent the Ramblers at the Inquiry. A considerable amount of work has been undertaken gathering new facts for inclusion in another Proof of Evidence. Thanks are due to the South West Sussex Group, Mid Sussex Group, a number of Groups in Surrey and the Holiday Fellowship for providing evidence of the walks organised in this area.

The Inspector ruled in favour of the landowner as the diversions were in the interests of the owner. He also concluded they were not substantially inconvenient to the public and would provide greater enjoyment of the Park. As the landowner had planted hedging the views of the Park would ultimately be blocked from the old line of the paths. The Inspector also agreed with the landowner's arguments that all four Orders should be considered as a package rather individually as the Ramblers had argued.

Denial of access

Requests for assistance have been received in relation to public being prevented from walking on paths which have been used on a regular basis. The LFPS have been asked to assist with collecting evidence of usage to enable a submission to be made to have the paths defined as public rights of way.

Volunteers

Members have asked about volunteering to carry out work on the network of paths in the county. West Sussex County Council Principal Rights of Way Officer is keen to accept offers of help from groups of volunteers with general maintenance such as the clearance of summer vegetation rather than any more major tasks. In the parish of Horsted Keynes a group has been successfully organised, initially by the Access Ranger, to clear vegetation. The aim is by training leaders in the required skills the group will become self-managed.

The County Council does not however have the resources to organise volunteers and have suggested the way forward would be for groups to be formed and then to

- a) decide who they are and what they want to do
- b) define their geographic area in which to operate e.g. a parish
- c) nominate one of their number to be the co-ordinator
- d) the co-ordinator to contact the Rights of Way department.

Unavailable Paths

The list of unavailable paths was reviewed with the County Council and a number removed where a route was available on the ground. The County Council agreed to provide resources to enable at least one to be re-opened on an annual basis. In 2009 footpath 1466/2 in Billingshurst has been re-opened.

Electronic reporting of path problems

A suggestion to acknowledge the receipt of path problems, reported electronically via the County Council web site, has been accepted as a possible improvement to be incorporated during a major change of software due in the summer of 2010.

Derek Knight

Area Membership Secretary's Report

Group	Total 2009	Total 2008	Change 2008/9	Change 2207/8
Arun-Adur	567	588	-21	- 13
Brighton & Hove	776	770	+6	+ 32
Heathfield & Distr	106	115	-9	0
Mid Sussex	543	523	+20	+ 13
Crawley & North Sx	203	191	+12	- 29
South West Sussex	520	516	+4	+ 1
Beachy Head	405	403	+2	- 10
Rother	373	388	-15	- 17
High Weald	311	307	+4	- 13
Horsham & Billingshurst	306	324	-18	- 1
Sussex Young Walkers	23	27	-4	+ 5
Unallocated	153	169	-16	- 18
Total	4286	4321	-35	- 50

There are twenty-five Affiliated Clubs.

Anne Parker reported last year that Central Office have been involved in the installation of a new computer system, which was taking longer than anticipated. The delay had caused problems for membership secretaries, particularly as notification of new members to them was delayed. These delays continued for the whole of 2008/9 and monthly updates have been difficult to interpret. Our loyal and supportive members have coped very well in spite of the difficulties. It is to be hoped that those in charge at the RA will understand the urgency of the situation before we lose further goodwill.

We are still attracting a steady stream of new members and initiatives by Central Office to keep members 'on board' for more than a year seem to be working.

All joint memberships have now been changed to record both parties, which has facilitated the registration of Area/group officials, walk leaders etc. on the system.

Monthly updates are still posted, but in line with current changes at Central Office I shall be looking at electronic alternatives. There are no plans at present for us to access the Membership records direct.

Celia Parrott

Report on Campaign for the South Downs National Park

Success at last – the South Downs National Park (SDNP) will shortly be established and the excellent news is the Western Weald, Ditchling and Lewes will be included within the boundary.

On the 31st March the Secretary of State confirmed the SDNP should be created but his 28 page decision letter included there would be a public consultation on the Inspector's proposal to add some areas of land within the SDNP boundary. This announcement was a very welcome 'spirit lifter' during an extraordinary period of history that covered the near melt-down of the international banking system and all the pain that followed.

The public consultation concluded with a public hearing on 18th August, when the Inspector considered objections/representations on the six potential additional areas and 2 queried areas (*Alice Holt Forest, near Farnham and areas at Plumpton; Roedean Crescent, Brighton; Patcham Recreation Ground; A27 embankment; Castle Goring and land east of Titnore Lane, West Durrington; Green Ridge, Brighton & Gote Farm, Ringmer*). Although the day hearing appeared to go well, there followed a nervous period with the Campaign holding its collective breath waiting for the Minister's decision.

Although it is after the report period to 30th September, I must share the **very good news** which followed on Thursday 12th November when I was privileged, with others from the Campaign, to meet the Secretary of State, the Rt Hon Hilary Benn, MP. We all squeezed into the Ditchling tearooms for a very informal gathering. After a chat and few warm words by the Secretary of State we witnessed him signing the legal Orders to confirm the Designation of the SDNP boundary (*including Alice Holt Forest and the other areas listed above*) and to revoke the South Downs and East Hampshire AONB's, both to take effect on 31st March 2010.

The final stage is an order to establish the new SDNP authority, to be laid before Parliament next spring, with the intention that the Authority will be brought into being on 1st April 2010 and that it will be operational from 1st April 2011.

The establishment of the SDNP is a fitting tribute to some 20 years of hard work by the Campaign, with Ramblers playing a key role. A big vote of thanks is due to all the Sussex Area groups and individual ramblers who have supported the Campaign over these years. Well done.

The Campaign will formally close early in 2010 but we cannot relax when the SDNP is established. The threats to the South Downs will surely continue to be a very real problem and it is vital that we ramblers continue to work with like-minded organisations to protect this very special area. But that's another story, best left for next year's report.

Brian Cheater

Access Report

Open Access Downland: during the year a campaign has been organised by others to draw attention to the continuance of about a dozen parcels of land designated as open access downland but where the landowners have refused to allow any physical means of public access. Unfortunately my frequent absences overseas (leading for Ramblers Holidays) prevented me from joining in this campaign, but my repeated questioning at the South Downs Access Forum eventually bore fruit in that the South Downs Joint Committee produced a detailed report on each of these sites with a recommended action plan.

The West Sussex Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP) was stalled by the lack of any resource at WSCC to appraise the projects put forward. At least now the SDJC have produced a model spreadsheet for listing and tracking proposed projects so it is hoped that progress will now be made by the regional sub-forums in deciding priorities for appraisal.

As requested at the last Sussex Area AGM, I put forward a **motion at General Council** in April calling for Ramblers nationally to campaign for the availability of some structure in the provision of **finance for ROWIP implementation** and for Local Authorities to be assessed on their performance in opening new routes on the ground. This was carried and since then Central Office has been working with the Institute of Public Rights of Way Officers to try to progress this, though as yet without much success.

Together with the British Horse Society and Sustrans, on behalf of the Countryside Access Forum for West Sussex, I have had some input into the planning process for the **large new housing developments** planned for West of Horsham and West of Crawley, calling for the provision of safe access routes from the new housing areas out into the countryside. Although the Planning Authorities have been sympathetic to our views, the playing field is far too skewed in favour of the Developers who seem able to use brinkmanship to coerce planning authorities into dropping most of their requirements even on such key policy areas such as provision of social housing. The struggle continues...

The **West Sussex Unavailable Paths List** has been pruned of the many paths which are walkable on the ground though not technically following the definitive line, in the hope that this will help WSCC concentrate on those paths which are physically blocked. Thanks to energetic campaigning by local resident George Tribe, one such path, Billingshurst 1466/2, has now been re-opened despite the opposition of two of the three landowners involved. WSCC is now aware of our priorities and hopes to tackle one path a year.

Next year will require some new challenges such as influencing at the local level the implementation of **Coastal Access** rights, the decennial **review of open access land**, and the **creation of the South Downs National Park Authority**. I hope that these tasks will appeal to someone out there to take forward on behalf of Ramblers following my retirement from the office.

Nigel Sloan

Press Officer's Report

During the year I have issued a number of press releases. These can be found on the area web site at <http://www.sussex-ramblers.org.uk/press.php> There has been a moderate to good response to these from local media. I have also appeared in Sussex Life magazine advocating walking as a pastime and the Ramblers in particular.

Perhaps the highlight of the year has been the launch of the e-newsletter "Now Open", which I edit and distribute to those inside and outside the Ramblers who wish to receive it. The newsletter goes to over 200 addresses, including RA members, parish councils, council members, walking clubs and others. It highlights paths that have recently been re-opened and those that are still obstructed as a way of promoting good practice amongst rights of way teams, raising the profile of the Ramblers and enabling and encouraging walk leaders to use the routes that have been re-opened instead of simply using familiar walks. The newsletter goes out monthly. Back issues can be seen on our web site at <http://www.sussex-ramblers.org.uk/nowopen.php>

If you are not on the email list and would like to be sent a copy then email me at chris.smith@hbhelp.co.uk I regret that I do not have the time or energy to send out printed copies as this is significantly more difficult, although if anyone would like to take this task on they would be welcome.

I am about to start work on a guide to wheelchair friendly ramblers, which will be uploaded to the website when I have a first draft.

Chris Smith

Publicity Officer's Report

Late autumn and early winter is when many groups and affiliated clubs hold their AGM. So, in November 2008, as with many previous years, I provided displays for both Rother Group and Battle Ramblers at their AGMs. This is an opportunity both to inform members and, in the case of the affiliated club, to encourage greater individual membership of the Ramblers.

Then, as is usual in January, I provided an informative display at our Area AGM at East Dean in East Sussex. As we eagerly awaited an announcement about a South Downs National Park, members were urged to use Campaign cards to register support for a National Park. This was followed, at the end of the month, with a display at the South Downs Campaign Conference and AGM at Lewes. Two months later we were greeted with the long-awaited good news.

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In February, I was invited to attend a training session at Central Office in London on the Ramblers' "new branding" which was launched in March. Change is usually controversial; some like the new logo, some don't, others are indifferent. However, it's more than just a new logo; it's about creating a new image to appeal to *everyone* who walks for pleasure or health reasons. We now just use the name "Ramblers" and the new slogan "at the heart of walking"; although we are still the same charity registered as "The Ramblers' Association".

I have often urged members to use opportunities to do a presentation at various clubs and societies, so am always pleased if anyone volunteers (without any chasing or arm-twisting) to help with publicity in this way. Mark Lemon (South-West Sussex Group) did just that when he spoke at the Parkinson's Society at Chichester in April.

Once again we had a display at the Spring Garden & Leisure Show at Ardingly for two days in May. It was a rather cold weekend; however, Tony Osmand and a team of volunteers from Mid-Sussex Group ably promoted the Ramblers to a steady trickle of visitors to our stand.

Rother Group celebrated its 20th anniversary on Get Walking Day (30 May) with a picnic and walk starting in Alexandra Park, Hastings. I put up a mini-display during the picnic; however, the strong wind meant that we were chasing more leaflets than we gave out in the park!

Rother Group's kite flying to promote our coastal access campaign, which was rained off in May, finally took place at Bexhill in July. While some of the party took the opportunity to dip their toes in the sea, others of us ascended Galley Hill. It was rather *too* windy for kite flying but we did manage to get two in the air just long enough for a video recording to be made! Greg Barker, MP for Bexhill and Battle, was unable to attend the kite flying, but met us briefly at the start of the walk for a chat and photo opportunity (which made the local press).

Lewes District Council invited us to have a display at "Isn't it Bonkers!", a climate change event at Newhaven in September. We welcomed many visitors to our stand (including Norman Baker, MP for Lewes) and gave out a lot of publicity material. Peter Seed (Footpath Secretary for Newhaven) volunteered to help and had several interesting conversations about local rights of way issues whilst poring over the Newhaven Definitive Maps on display.

New style "Share our love of walking" recruitment leaflets are now available, and more new publicity material will be at the Area AGM. Despite all the disappointments, difficulties and disagreements of the past year, let's celebrate the 75th anniversary of the Ramblers in 2010.

John Harmer

West Sussex Countryside Secretary's Report

The transition from Local Footpath Secretary responsible for two large parishes in Horsham District to Countryside Secretary (West Sussex) was not achieved without difficulty, largely on account of the fact that adequate channels of communication have yet to be established with the rest of the county, but that matter is in hand. Consequently my activities during 2009 have been confined to Horsham District but that will change in 2010.

My principal concern in 2009 was the issue of the Core Strategy Review Consultation Document by Horsham District Council. This matter is of considerable importance to Ramblers who use footpaths and bridleways in the north-east of the county because of huge pressures to concrete over much of our farmland, with the prospect that some footpaths would come to resemble certain of those in Billingshurst, where walkers have brick walls on either side of them to gaze on.

This controversial matter is likely to be a continuing struggle, complicated by the uncertainties associated with the forthcoming General Election. This burden will become more onerous in January because the Core Strategy for Mid-Sussex will be published then and will also have to be dealt with.

A victory was achieved in respect of PF1466/2, which was re-opened in November 2009 after being closed for 14 years. Thanks are due to all those who took part in the campaign to have it re-opened in the face of opposition from the landowner, whose developmental ambitions needed the path to be unused by the public.

The County Council also re-opened PF1919 this year that restored an important link between New Road, Billingshurst and the village itself. I sent a letter of thanks to Jon Perks on behalf of local residents.

I was involved with the British Horse Society over plans to divert Public Bridleway 1604, where there seemed to be no valid objection to what was proposed, but where the District Council make a serious mistake over the number of the RoW to be diverted. In consequence, I objected to the plans.

I was persuaded by colleagues not to pursue the issue of PF1920 in Billingshurst where the landowner had built a garage across it without planning permission. However, he has now submitted a planning application to convert the garage to living accommodation, which I described to Jon Perks as "a bridge too far" and I have submitted an objection to the proposed development.

The Application to develop a landfill site as Thakeham submitted by Cory's has been delayed due to a technicality but will have to be dealt with shortly. The implications for Ramblers are unpleasant, where the locality will be contaminated by stench and the unwary may be mown down by juggernauts loaded with waste from London.

George Tribe

Report on Website Matters

There is not a great deal for me to report this year, as I have mainly been engaged in keeping the content on the Sussex Area website up to date.

I think it would be useful to outline the information that I maintain on the site, and how often it is updated.

First, there are the contact details for the Area Officers and Area Groups. These are modified occasionally as the personal details of people change, or the person in a particular role changes.

Second, there are the lists of footpath secretaries. The list of vacancies changes as people drop out or are recruited.

Third, there are the press releases. These are issued on an irregular basis by Chris Smith and placed on the site ASAP by yours truly.

Fourth, there is the new "Now Open" magazine. Copies of this are placed on the site as soon as they are issues.

Fifth, there are the special news items, such as the announcement of the AGM, which are placed on the main page.

James Mansson

The Ramblers' Association, Sussex Area
Minutes of the 33rd Annual General Meeting
Held at East Dean Village Hall at 2.30pm on 17 January 2009

1. **Mike Charman, as Chairman**, welcomed seventy-six Area members, and Keith Roberts, Director of Campaigns at Central Office.

Officers present: Mike Charman, Nigel Sloan, Andy Vines, Malcolm McDonnell, Derek Knight, John Harmer, Anne Parker, Brian Cheater, Chris Smith, James Mansson, Les Campbell.

The Chairman thanked Tim Baker, Jackie Ferguson and the Beachy Head Group for hosting the Meeting, and Murray Wiggins for leading the walk.

2. **Approval of the Minutes of the 32nd Annual General Meeting, held on 19 January 2008**

Proposed by Peter Seed and seconded by Sharon Knight, The Minutes were approved unanimously.

There were no matters arising.

3. **Approval of Area Annual Report & Accounts for year ending 30/09/2008**

The Treasurer had nothing to add to the report, and invited questions; there were none.

Proposed by Celia Parrott and seconded by Brian Carr, the Accounts and Report were accepted unanimously.

4. **Election of Honorary Chairman**

Nigel Sloan advised the Meeting that only one nomination for this post had been received, Mike Charman, proposed by Brian Cheater and seconded by Anne Parker. Unanimously accepted.

Nigel took the opportunity to mention the item on the back page of the Annual Report "Time for some arm-twisting?" about getting new people for Area Council. He reminded that Meeting that several officers would be retiring in the next year or two, and replacements would be needed.

5. **Election of Honorary Area Officers**

Les Campbell had stood down from his position as Vice Chairman, and the Chairman thanked him for all he had done for the Area.

The Chairman also thanked the officers and Council members for their work this year.

There were no volunteers for the vacancies for East Sussex and West Sussex Countryside Secretaries, Membership Secretary or Minutes Secretary. Members were asked to go back to their groups and ask for volunteers.

Nominations had been received as follows:-

Post	Candidate	Proposer	Seconded
Secretary	Anne Parker	Mike Charman	Nigel Sloan
Treasurer	Andy Vines	Nigel Sloan	Mike Charman
East Sussex AFPS	Malcolm McDonnell	Tim Baker	Clive Grummett
West Sussex AFPS	Derek Knight	Anne Parker	Lindsay Deans
Publicity Sec	John Harmer	Brian Cheater	Andy Vines
Access Officer	Nigel Sloan	Andy Vines	Brian Cheater
Press Officer	Chris Smith	Malcolm McDonnell	Murray Figgins
SDC Rep	Brian Cheater	Nigel Sloan	John Harmer
Webmaster	James Mansson	Mike Charman	Brian Cheater

The Chairman proposed that all officers, proposed and seconded, be voted for “en bloc”; this was accepted by the Meeting unanimously.

6. Election of Individual Members of Area Council

There were no nominations.

7. Nomination by Affiliated Clubs of Representatives on Area Council

There were no nominations.

8. Appointment of Honorary Independent Examiner, John Le Pla

Proposed by Andy Vines, seconded by Malcolm McDonnell and accepted unanimously.

9. Adoption of revised version of Sussex Area Constitution, following acceptance by Area Council and approval by RA Board of Trustees

A copy of the Constitution had been put on display.

The Chairman explained that he had received an apology from Kate Ashbrook, as the Board of Trustees had not had an opportunity to approve the revised Constitution. The Chairman suggested that the Meeting accept the constitution, subject to approval by the Board of Trustees*.

The changes were pointed out, from old to new constitution, and from model constitution.

The Chairman proposed that the new Constitution, accepted by Area Council 01/11/08, and to be approved by the Board of Trustees, be accepted; seconded by Cathy Brown. Agreed unanimously.

* The amended Constitution was approved by the Board of Trustees

It was explained that this will now lead to new constitutions being prepared for all groups, to be approved by Area Council (delegated to Executive Committee). Hopefully, all groups should adopt the new constitution by their AGM 2009, and submit to Area.

10. **RA General Council 2009: Motion(s) for submission and nomination of Area delegates**

General Council 3 and 4 April - Newport, Shropshire

The Chairman pointed out that as there was a February deadline for motions, and the next Area Council was to be held on 1 March, approval was sought for the Area Executive to arrange final wording of motion and nomination of representation at General Council. This approval was proposed by Richard Mercer, seconded by Brian Cheater, and accepted unanimously.

A motion had been received from the Mid Sussex Group, proposed by Sue Berry as follows: This motion was borne out of a concern that, although Local Authorities have a duty to prepare and publish their Rights of Way Improvement Plans by November 2007 and to review them every ten years, there is no duty for them to actually implement the plans and no additional funding provided for them to carry out the desired improvement work to the network. We (Mid Sussex Ramblers) feel that the RA is in a good position to put pressure on the Government to enable local authorities to implement their plans and to monitor their progress rather than to allow all the good work that has gone into the preparation of these documents to go to waste. I therefore propose that Sussex Area should adopt the motion and take it forward to General Council. Seconded by Richard Mercer:

“That this meeting instruct Sussex Area Executive to submit a motion to 2009 General Council substantially in the following terms: in view of the general lack of progress in the implementation of the Rights of Way Improvement Plans (RoWIPs) in England, this council calls upon the Board of Trustees to authorise a major campaign to persuade DEFRA to remedy this situation through the provision of structured funding for actions plans, incentives for landowner cooperation and a system of appraising progress on the opening of new routes on the ground.”

Accepted unanimously by the Meeting, and to be acted upon by Area Executive.

Formal business closed at 3.20pm.

At this point Guest Speaker, Keith Roberts, new Director of Campaigns at RA Central Office, was welcomed. Keith explained about the reorganisation of the department, and took questions from the floor.

Excellent refreshments were served by members of the Beachy Head Group.