

Report of Area AGM held on Saturday 23 January 2010

The Area's 35th AGM was held at the Woodlands Social Club, Calne, hosted by Chippenham Group. Pat Crabb, chairman, thanked the 35 members present for supporting the meeting and acknowledging the existence of 'Area' in the structure of the Ramblers. It has a role to play in translating ideas and aims from Central Office and the Trustees, putting them into practice and encouraging Groups to play their part.

The Area Footpath Secretary, Alan Roberts, reported on the concerns that Ramblers have about paths obstructed by crops and the lack of action by the highway authority even though the rights of way manager had agreed to make this problem a focus of attention in the last two years. Alan had agreed a compromise with the ROW manager that crop obstructions should be given a low priority where an alternative route was available because there had been a freeze on staff recruitment and WC had three unfilled vacancies. One member suggested that offending landowners should be reported to the Rural Payments Agency; Alan explained that the RPA would be required to conduct a complete audit of the farm, not just investigate ROW problems. Some members expressed their disapproval of the compromise but, on a vote, a small majority supported it.

Alan also reported on the 'Big Hit Campaign' team, formed from a concerned member of each Group led by a member of staff from Central Office, which had worked to influence Wiltshire Councillors and the Rights of Way Manager to improve the funding and effectiveness of maintenance of the rights of way network. The campaign had run for three years with only limited success and the meeting debated whether the campaign should continue. A large majority voted to discontinue it.

Another topic discussed was the proposed motion to be submitted to General Council (the Ramblers annual, national meeting) relating to the election of the organisation's trustees. The present system is for the trustees to be elected by the representatives of Areas at General Council. The proposal, put forward by West Wilts Group, was for all members to be able to vote. The proposal was carried with only three people against.

The posts of chairman, footpath secretary, treasurer, countryside secretary, membership secretary and media contact were all filled but those of secretary and access officer were not.