

Waveney Ramblers' 2019 Annual Reports

Chair – Alex McPherson

The main event in 2019 was GDPR. However, I have left it out of the report as I have covered the subject in the Newsletter and will speak about it at the AGM (So what else has happened?).

In chronological order: The first event would be our 'No Dogs' policy. This item came up at last year's AGM. After the meeting Our Programme Secretary (Roger Moore), via email, asked the Walk Leaders for their individual opinions on the matter. The collective answer was a resounding No Dogs with the exception of 'registered assistance dogs', with the proviso to contact the leader to discuss any difficulties with the route in advance of the walk. However, I would add that if a member wanted to organise a specific dog walk they are welcome to do so and it will be promoted in the Programme.

For me the good thing about this new policy is that it takes the decision away from the walk leader on the day. Some leaders felt uncomfortable about turning a person away who turned up unannounced with an unregistered dog.

The Tea Party was held in May and thanks to the efforts of David Harmer and Roger Moore, who organised the event, it was an enjoyable afternoon with just short of 60 people. Thank you also to the members who catered for the event and members who worked in and around the kitchen on the day.

There were two holidays in the calendar year: one in April, organised by Diana Covey; and one in late September, organised by Jean Carter. Because of deadlines, I am writing this before the September event. However, I am sure that both events were enjoyed by those who went on them: thank you Diana and Jean.

Chris Sharp and Susie Dunham organised another successful Coach Walk in July: thank you both for your time and effort.

At the Committee Meeting in August, it was agreed that a new position that of Facebook/Social Representative should be created. A very important move, as almost all new Group members come via Social Media. The 'Closed' Facebook Page increased in numbers from 15 to 36. This was achieved in part by opening the site up to Ramblers from neighbouring groups who walk with Waveney and as such are known to many of us. There are 6 members who have joined via that route. The highest entry (9) has been new members to Waveney joining the Facebook Page. We would like to see more (existing) Waveney members signing up to the Facebook Page. There were 6 members from that category who did sign up this year. Hopefully, we can get the overall figure up to around 50 in the next 12 months.

A change moving forward: I conducted an exercise on the make-up of the Waveney Committee between 2000 and 2019. Primarily, because I felt that there were too many inactive members on the Committee. The findings were: over the 19-year time period, we have had 8 appointed post holders in position on the Committee throughout, supplemented by non-office (general) committee members. Over the years the general members have fluctuated between 1 and 7. The purpose of a general committee was to get an insight into Committee Affairs with the purpose of either taking up a designated role or dropping off if they did not fancy becoming an office holder. For the record, 20 people have served on the general committee since 2000. Half that number moved on to a Committee Role and the other half dropped off. Also sticking with the numbers 14 members joined the Committee without serving any time on the general committee. The purpose of general committee members is to encourage interested parties to get a feel for committee work; before

taking up a specific role or dropping off the committee, having decided committee work was not for them. And this policy will not change. If a member comes forward expressing an interest in volunteering for the Committee. They will be invited onto the Committee, on the understanding that they would eventually take on a specific role or leave after 2 years.

Some of you may think that it is a strange thing to state that I think that we have too many people on the Committee, when I along with previous Chairs keep asking for volunteers to serve on the Committee, as is the case at this point in time. The answer to the question is very straightforward. Take this year as an example: at the start of the year we had 12 Committee members, we now have 9 but we have 3 positions vacant on the Committee. This is not an ideal situation. There are some committee members doubling-up to cover specific roles and other general members not picking up the outstanding vacancies.

At the Committee Meeting in August the decision was made to reduce the committee to 8 members. With the following posts: Chair; Branch Secretary; Branch Treasurer; Membership Secretary; Footpath Secretary; Facebook & Social Media Representative; and Area Representatives (2), with the second representative coming from one of the other roles. Hopefully, we will be able to fill the 8 roles. If not, we will do what has been done this year, we will double-up where appropriate. This is not ideal but it is better than having dormant general committee members. Finally, in doing the exercise, there was one name that was consistent over the time period who was never out of post, that was Michael Farrow. The Committee unanimously made Michael an Honorary Committee Member. Thank you for your service to Waveney Ramblers Michael.

In conclusion, I had the misfortune to have had my on-line account hacked and my email address was 'spoofed.' This led to rogue e-mails being sent to Committee members purporting to have been sent by me. There is a link I would like to share with you which some of you might find useful: <https://blog.ironbastion.com.au/five-ways-to-detect-phishing-emails/> This gives information for the things to look out for so as to keep your email addresses safe. The link was given to me by a Project Manager at Ramblers Head Office. As part of the help and advice I was given by the Ramblers to resolve the issue.

Membership Secretary – Alex

In April, Susie Dunham resigned from the post of Membership Secretary and I took over as acting Membership Secretary up to the AGM when, hopefully, the outstanding vacancy will be filled. The role has changed over the last couple of years. It is more Website orientated via the INSIGHT HUB and is updated on a monthly basis. Obviously, there is more information available for the Membership Secretary to perform the role. I can advise you that the Waveney figures are that the gender figure is 47% male 53% female. With only 6% volunteers (walk leaders and/or Committee members). Only 32% signed up to receive the Newsletter by e-mail - 82% Retention Rate. One rather obvious figure is that 70% of us are over 60 years of age. Our actual membership figure is as it was last year, at around 230.

Treasurer – Alex

In August Zuhail Tobin left the post of Treasurer and I took over as acting Treasurer up to the AGM. With temporary permission from Suffolk Area as, under the Ramblers' Constitution, the Chair cannot double as Treasurer. The major event within the Treasury this year is that I arranged to open a second Bank Account, so as to separate Ramblers' money and Waveney Self-Funding money. This finally happened in May when £1500 was transferred over to the new Self-Funding Account. At the time it left £713.34 in the Ramblers account. I have discussed the Xmas lunch with Tony Langford

and we would like to try and encourage those who wish to do so to pay via BACS into the account as opposed to presenting a cheque. It has also been established that all future social events and holidays will be processed via the Ramblers Bank Account, so as to qualify for the benefits offered by the Ramblers Association.

I am pleased to report that Mike Jeffery has offered his services to us for the post of Group Treasurer. He has been co-opted onto the Committee and will be standing for nomination as Treasurer at the AGM.

I would comment that, by standing in as Membership Secretary and Treasurer, it gave me the opportunity to gain an insight into both positions, which I personally found very useful. However, whilst it was sustainable over a short period, the ideal position has to be in-line with what is in place going forward: i.e. eight designated Committee roles and, hopefully, eight volunteer post-holders serving on the Committee. This is surely something that is possible with a membership of circa 230 members.

Footpath Secretary – Robert Newell

An interesting year walking-wise, the hot dry summer resulted in near perfect walking conditions. However, this did reveal a few issues on our extensive network in the Waveney Valley. Suffolk County Council (SCC) have released a draft of the Suffolk Green Strategy paper, which gives commitment to the network being maintained, with better access such as removing stiles in favour of gates. This paper will be further discussed with SCC in January 2020. The main points for 2019 were:

Angles Way, Earsham – Finally, Norfolk County Council have relented and the bridge at Earsham will be replaced. After much hard work, especially from David Harmer and Suffolk Ramblers in engaging Waveney MP Peter Aldous, the landowner of Stow Fen and SCC/NCC, plus the pressure from the Environment Agency in regard to flood risk, a provisional reopening date has been given as autumn 2020. The metal bridge on the Suffolk side will be replaced also.

Westhall FP14 – The appeal to the planning inspectorate went in favour of Prof Higgins, Westhall PCC and the Ramblers who fought for the mapping anomaly to be rectified. The amended route will see FP14 amended to a new route through the woodland to join up with the Bridleway missing link added. Thanks have been given to Prof Higgins from Suffolk Ramblers. This should now be open to walkers, with signage being placed imminently.

SCC Footpath Surveys – To assist SCC, I have been assisting with footpath surveys for them. These have been in Ellough, Barnby, Somerleyton, Kessingland, Reydon, Wingfield, Peasenhall, Sibton, Cookley and Metfield. The experience has been really valuable, as it has shown me exactly what SCC is looking for in a survey and the likelihood of issues being fixed.

SCC Footpath Secretaries Meeting, January 2019 – The Suffolk Footpath Secretaries attended a meeting with Suffolk County Council in Ipswich, in January. The meeting was very constructive with various major issues across the county being discussed. For Waveney, the key points were the Bridge on the Angles Way at Earsham, ROW reporting and ongoing footpath issues.

DMMO's (Definitive Map Modification Orders) – After guidance received from Ramblers HQ, Pat Harrington and I now to focus in on targets for submission soon. The missing section at Reydon FP5 is already underway, currently awaiting witness reports.

Overall, please continue to send reports of footpath issues to SCC, especially via their online portal and the Ramblers Pathwatch app. SCC have been engaging towards us, considering the various issues they have faced in regards to budget concerns and staffing issues. However, we need to keep sending in the reports and keep the pressure on them to ensure the difficult issues can be resolved. Next year could produce some further big challenges, as we risk losing more paths on the Blyth and the difficulty in getting any bridges replaced on our marshland network.

Programme Secretary – Roger Moore

With grateful thanks to our walk leaders, without whom the consistently full Programmes that we all enjoy would not appear, I can report that we have had a total of 155 walks on the three Programmes of the last year. We have, unfortunately, needed to cancel a number of these, due mainly to injuries to leaders and adverse weather conditions. Not much we can do about the weather but with the injuries in mind, I would like to encourage any member who has thought of maybe putting on a walk to get in touch and we will give you all the help you need to get started.

I would also like to thank: Chris for organising the Coach Walk, which several of us attended and enjoyed, especially for dealing with the last-minute changes that became necessary; and Neil, Diana & Barry, and Jean for putting on the holidays which many of us enjoyed – long may they continue. Also, Neil's Waveney Way walks have proved a regular attraction, with some very good walks amongst them. Not to forget Tony, our editor, who is in constant need of articles and photos for the Newsletter.

Finally, without adequate and safe footpaths, we would not be able to put on the variety of walks that we all are used to, so thanks to David and Robert for all the time and effort that they have both given up for Waveney Ramblers. With some farmers and landowners trying to shut off access to paths and car parks, such as Hoist Covert, we need to be on our guard.

Area Representative – David Harmer

At the last area meeting and, also, the last Committee meeting, I updated people re the situation regarding the fallen bridge at Earsham, which constitutes a part of the Angles Way.

Following a meeting [on-site] with Waveney MP Peter Aldous, the dairy farmer who's land the path runs over and representatives from both Norfolk and Suffolk County Councils, I am happy to inform the following: the fallen bridge will be replaced with a new wooden one, as will the currently standing metal one.

The original stretch of the Angles Way will therefore be retained. Work is scheduled to be completed by **September 2020**. It is to be hoped that this promise is not like pie crusts, i.e. easily broken. Time will tell.