

RAMBLERS' ASSOCIATION (NEW FOREST GROUP)
MINUTES OF ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
HELD ON SATURDAY 22ND NOVEMBER 2025
AT BOLDRE MEMORIAL HALL, PILLEY

1. Welcome

The chairman welcomed and thanked all 28 members that were present for coming to the meeting and for their support to the group over the past year.

2. Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from the Programme Secretary.

3. Approval of last AGM Minutes and Matters Arising

The minutes were signed by the Chairman as an accurate record.

There were no matters arising from the minutes not covered in the agenda.

4. Chairman's Report

The chairman's report contained a brief summary of the Committee's work: over the year, 35 actions have been logged with 26 completed and the remaining items being progressed or awaiting volunteers.

Committee Members

The Committee has been very active over the last 12 months, but with the former Chairman, Membership Secretary and Social Events Organiser standing down, membership is down to 9. The Chairman thanked the Committee members and invited anyone interested to attend a meeting (details on the website).

Walk Leaders

The chairman thanked current walk leaders. Over the last year, the Committee has organised a number of activities in an attempt to retain or boost walk leader numbers. This remains a priority for next year.

To show our appreciation of the current walk leaders, the Treasurer organised a 'Meet the Team' event on 9th May which started with a lovely walk around the Exbury area followed by a complimentary cream tea in Exbury Gardens' café.

The event was also an occasion for anyone thinking of becoming a walk leader to come along and meet current walk leaders. The event helped encourage a few members to undertake the online training, with two members going on to lead their first walks. A similar event will be organised in 2026 at the same location.

The Ramblers Association's database was used to track former walk leaders back to 2019, some had not led a walk for a year or more. The chair had been authorised to write to many of them highlighting the need for volunteers to lead walks. One has since led a walk, and three have completed the new training with a view to leading in the future. Potential new leaders have been offered support but the take-up has been low. Some of the reasons are known but we need to fix them all if we are to make someone who says they are interested in leading a walk into someone who does.

New Members

New walk leaders will be found from within providing we continue to attract new members to join the group: a diverse, well publicised walk programme with regular social events will assist that. The two 'Introductory/Taster Walks' attracted nineteen people in total, some of whom have now joined the group.

The New Forest Parks Authority Walking Festival provided a great opportunity to attract new members and potentially future new walk leaders, the walks this year attracting a good number of festival walkers and this annual event should be supported as much as possible.

Walk Leader Training

The Ramblers Association (RA) has sent out several emails to walk leaders outlining the new requirements for 2026. The chairman has also written to walk leaders explaining and encouraging the need to attain the said requirements. He has also sent out a reminder that included an offer of support and the differing ways help is available. To date, we have 29 authorised walk leaders with an additional 3 having completed some of the training modules.

Any walk leader who has not met the training or experience requirements by the deadline of Jan 2026 will be removed from the RA register of leaders and will no longer be insured to lead. Once removed, leaders need to re-register and then attain the new requirements before being authorised to lead again.

Car Park Charges

Forestry England is introducing car park charges in all 130 car parks in Spring 2026 with annual and 'pay as you go' options. For regular walkers in the New Forest the cheapest option will be the Forestry England membership (currently £94 pa), which will offer unlimited parking for all Forestry England car parks nationally.

The chairman has written to Forestry England asking if New Forest Ramblers walk leaders can be granted a concessionary parking rate and awaits a reply. The introduction of car park charges could potentially reduce the number of walk leaders. Car sharing will help alleviate some of the financial burden, but the committee is also introducing a local 'Expenses Claim Policy,' to reimburse walk leaders for the recces they carry out.

Details of any news from the Forestry Commission regarding charges will be put on the NF website.

5. Treasurer's and Auditor's Reports:

The accounts had been audited, signed off and forwarded to Ramblers HQ. In summary:

Funds were received from Ramblers Holidays and members were reminded to state their RA membership when booking a holiday so that the group could benefit. Income from selling the new walks books had been put into the 'restricted fund' and is thereby 'ring fenced'. The total assets are currently

In response to a question about why the amount received from Ramblers HQ was so low, the Treasurer replied that HQ takes into account the overall balance held by a group: as ours is relatively high, HQ viewed other groups as higher priority when allocating the annual grant. The group does not currently have a forward plan for expenditure e.g. for footpath maintenance.

A new Expenses policy (with guidance notes) will be considered at the next Committee meeting, the main aim being to avoid walk leaders being deterred from leading because of the expense of fuel.

6. Membership Secretary's Report: :

With 99 new members, this has been the most successful year of the last 11, possibly because of a big effort in local and national social media, posters, selling the new walks book in numerous retail organisations, our website and the

Tuesday and Friday walks and other initiatives. As of 1st November, the total membership is 404, with 10 Affiliate members. However, 83 members left. the Membership Secretary had taken the opportunity to phone a small sample of those who both joined and left during 2025, to enquire about any issues contributing to their decision so that the Committee could learn from their experiences. In all cases they were all very complimentary regarding the friendliness of the group but explained that their main reasons were either available time or financial (the latter being a new factor from when the Membership Secretary conducted a similar survey some years ago). Future cost increases such as parking charges, annual RA fees and members' age profile may exacerbate the problem.

He had also surveyed 4 other areas and groups in October 2025 to compare trends in membership, finding that we are amongst the two highest for new members but also the highest for leavers.

Re the age profile, ours (at 37.13%) is considerably higher for members aged 70 - 80+ than nationally (30.73%) although 45% do not disclose their age.

Membership Secretary was thanked by members for his informative report and the new membership secretary was introduced.

7. Programme and Website Secretary's Report:

Leaders were thanked for putting on so many walks but many more are still needed. 115 walks have been put on in the last year, an increase of 3 over the previous year. Leaders have put in a lot of work in meeting Central Office's new training requirements, 86% having completed the training and a further 5% are part way through. The adverse impact of the new requirements on the number of leaders has been less than feared.

The Gentle Pace Walks Organiser was thanked for organising the shorter Tuesday walks which had proved a big success with those unable to do the longer walks.

The NF Walking Festival was a success with all participants saying they enjoyed the walks and several expressed interest in joining the RA. Walks books were sold.

8. Footpath / Footpath Working Parties / Countryside Report:

- There has been 1 extinguishment this year - Woodfiddley Crossing. 2 under the railway bridges are imminent (all in the parish of Denny Lodge, Footpaths 2 and 11).
- The closure of the coastal path between Hordle Cliff and Tadiford gap continues. Two other long term footpath closures are in place, both involving bridge work. One is part of Bramshaw (4) and one is Burley (3). The long term closure for building development of Sopley (19) and Bransgore (732) are also still ongoing.
- Our objection to the rerouting of a footpath in Sway has been successful and the application was rejected.
- Our objection to the closure of Lymington and Pennington footpaths 82 and 83, associated with housing development, has now gone to appeal.
- The FPAWE Committee needs to consider (by the next FPAWE meeting) the possible impact of Local Government re-organisation: the government is expected to announce its decision on the boundaries for the 3 or 4 new unitary councils near the end of the year. In MB's view, Hampshire group boundaries should be adjusted to reflect the new unitary council boundaries. The NF ramblers will no longer be dealing

with the Countryside Services of Hampshire County Council, Southampton City Council and Portsmouth City Council as highway authorities but with a Mayor with responsibilities for Transport and 3 or 4 unitary councils responsible for implementation.

- The following parishes still need a footpath representative, volunteers are needed:
 - a) Exbury and Lepe (18 paths)
 - b) Sway (15 paths)
 - c) Copythorne (23 paths)
 - d) Boldre (38 paths - this would suit 2 people)
- There are 2 other parishes where the current footpath representative would like to retire.

Funds are available to help maintain footpaths but little work is currently undertaken because a volunteer is needed to project manage working parties to do the actual physical work. The Footpaths Secretary asked anyone interested to contact him so that he could explain the role: this can be done in conjunction with the parish councils as they also have a part in this area. This will be a future Committee item.

9. Access Report:

DEFRA has decided to approve the English Coastal Path from Highcliffe to Calshot in 5 sections:

- Hurst to Lymington (to be approved in early 2026 ie the sea wall)
- Lymington to Exbury (DEFRA intend to revisit the idea of having a ferry across the Beaulieu River at Gilbury rather than continue north to Beaulieu, despite there being no pontoons for a ferry and no ferry)
- Exbury to Calshot (to be approved early 2026: this involves walking along the 2.5 km of Stanswood Road from Lepe to Calshot)

The rest are with the Secretary of State.

10. Walks Book:

1000 new books have now been printed, with income received used to fund additional print runs and other Ramblers' events. The chairman thanked committee members for posting the 360 free copies to members and selling books (approx. 280 to date) to various outlets.

With inevitable changes to topography, the book has about 5 years before some of the routes' (written descriptions and maps) start to lose their accuracy. Any volunteers to help sell the books would be appreciated. FW is the contact for sale of the books.

The chairman is keen for the group to have a stand at the New Forest Show (28th- 30th July 2026). There will be free tickets for those willing to organise the stand. The aim is to sell books, recruit new members and particularly to recruit future walk leaders and committee members. Contact the Chairman to register an interest.

11. Social Events:

In addition to the details of events given in the Chairman's report, 'demo' walks will be set up for potential new leaders to consider what is involved in preparing and leading a successful walk.

As well as walk leaders, the other top priority over these last 12 months has been social events and will continue to be. Our social events have been limited to what individual walk leaders have organised. A big thank you to them for arranging a variety of different things totaling 23 events over the last 12 months.

Ideas for future events include a pub lunch (to also include non-walkers). Additional Committee members are needed to help put these ideas into practice, for example publicity, media and social events.

A 'WhatsApp' group has been set up for Committee members to enable quicker communication and a similar one could be set up for leaders if it was felt to be helpful.

With regard to the "Meet the Team" event, members of the audience commented that no feedback had so far been received from their ideas submitted: the Chairman promised that an analysis of the feedback would be sent out to all participating in the event.

- Action **19-2025-AGM**. The document that was produced after analysing the feedback from the 'Meet the Team' event is to be sent to all those who provided their feedback.

12. Election of Officers and Committee Members

The chairman was delighted to announce our new Social Secretary.

The Chairman requested further volunteers to serve on the Committee.

13. AOB

The 'walk maps librarian' had brought along hard copies of maps; interested walk leaders should contact her if they need ideas for future walks.

Presentations were given to the outgoing Membership Secretary and Social Events Organiser for their long and valued service on the Committee.

14. Date and venue for next AGM

21st November 2026 at 2pm. Boldre War Memorial Hall

The meeting closed at 3.30pm.