

ramblers
at the heart of walking

GREATER MANCHESTER AND HIGH PEAK AREA

ANNUAL REPORT

2017

RAMBLERS
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Membership Secretary

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Entrust Representative

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Joyce Tyldesley

Alan Manning

Janet Cuff

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CHAIR'S REPORT 2017- 2018

We have had another busy year. All the activities we are involved in are only possible due to the hard work of all the Area and Group officers and committee members. I'd particularly like to thank the other area officers and this year especially Mike Lyons for all his years as treasurer, as he is stepping down. We wish Mike and Sheila all the best for their move to Scotland and happy walking there.

As ever there has been a lot of work on ensuring our rights of way remain open and cleared. We continue to work with LAs but the response from them varies dramatically from borough to borough, not necessarily dependent on their funding situation. Luckily Edgar Ernstbrunner and his team of footpath officers are very persistent.

We still have a few Area Officers positions vacant and though not crucial it will be good if we can get an Access Officer and a Publicity and Information Officer. We have now agreed that the Area Chair will not have a limit on their term of office, in line with the other officers. We do however recognise the need to review officer's terms of office from time to time.

We now have most of the groups involved at the EC. A few groups struggled to attend but most do or are aiming to come. Most of the group problems in getting key officers seem to be resolved for now but all groups need to have succession planning constantly in mind.

Some highlights across the Area during the year have been:

The path track alongside the Guided bus way to Leigh and Atherton has enormously enhanced walking in that area and the Wigan Group have been able to publicise themselves at various associated events.

The Salford Trail was launched in May after many years hard work by a small team of our members mainly from Salford. This is enabling new walking routes for our Groups and is already generating more walking opportunities for local people. Partly as a result of our work in creating the Trail Salford Council, who gave some invaluable help, were given the National Transport Award for Walking and Cycling.

Manchester Green Corridor which M&S Ramblers created along with Manchester City Council 10 years ago is now being revamped, by our members, with updated routes and new leaflets which TfGM are going to fund.

Transport for Greater Manchester (TfGM) and work with the Mayor's office - Salle Dare is liaising with TfGM and working with them on The Green Corridor

Mags Metcalf has been the main link on the Walking Festivals and several groups have participated. The May and October Festivals went well and another is planned for February.

Alan Manning has been the key EC member working to get the Ramblers involved in the work with the Mayor and Chris Boardman, The Walking and Cycling Commissioner. There will be an update on what progress has been made at the AGM. We are pursuing with Ramblers Central Office on what support they can give us, and explaining why we need paid regional staff.

We have had some good support from Diane Simcoe and Richard Sharp, the regional and national area support officers, but their role is to support Areas not represent the Ramblers at devolved authorities.

City of Trees, previously Red Rose Forest, want to do joint work to improve walking routes and green spaces.

Walk with MPs –the two Salford MPs Barbara Keeley and Rebecca Long Bailey were at the Salford Trail launches. Angela Rayner, MP for Ashton-under-Lyne and Shadow Education Minister joined Tameside Ramblers for a four-mile walk in her constituency. She was accompanied by members of her constituency team. New Mills Group are aiming to get a walk with the new High Peak MP Ruth George.

Communications - John and I have been ‘cascading’ the monthly letters from Vanessa Griffiths, our CEO, but now they should be going direct to all active members/volunteers so improving communications between The Ramblers nationally and the Area and Groups.

Health walks - Nationally we are waiting to see who will fund the work Ramblers is doing. Locally most GM authorities have fairly comprehensive Health Walks programmes. Unfortunately Manchester at the moment has hardly any official Health Walks though there are a lot of informal and volunteer organised and led walks.

Our Area is organising the Kinder Anniversary 2018 event with an afternoon event on Saturday 21st April. We have been chosen to host General Council in 2019, which will be hard work and involve a large number of our members as volunteers. It will be a great opportunity for us all to get a better picture of how The Ramblers work nationally and in other areas, as well as to illustrate how we work here.

Margaret Manning

GENERAL SECRETARY’S REPORT

There has been a range of work for the General Secretary this year - we've revised the constitution to allow area chairs to serve longer than two years, a change to the constitution that came in after an Extraordinary General Meeting in August, which was well attended. The changes were subsequently ratified by the Board of Trustees in time for the November meeting, with the changes coming into effect soon after.

John Ireland

MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY REPORT

	2016 Annual Report	2017 Annual Report	Difference (% age of 2016 figure)
Area(MR)	3420	3490	70 (+2.0%)
Non-group(MR96)	94	127	+33 (+35.1%)
Bolton(MR01)	317	303	-14 (-4.4%)
Bury(MR02)	228	217	-11 (-4.8%)
Rochdale(MR03)	203	212	+9 (+4.4%)
New Mills(MR04)	267	258	-9 (-3.4%)
Oldham(MR05)	301	297	-4 (-1.3%)
Stockport(MR06)	513	514	+1 (+0.2%)
Wigan & District(MR07)	154	146	-8 (-5.2%)
Manchester & Salford(MR10)	351	357	+6 (+1.7%)
Trafford(MR11)	229	234	+5 (+2.2%)
Tameside(MR12)	202	218	+16 (+7.9%)
Weekend Walkers(MR40)	155	141	-14 (-9.0%)
MAD Walkers(MR50)	325	380	+55 (+17.0%)
Coach Rambles(MR70)	62	67	+5 (+8.1%)
Others: international members, Awaiting Allocation etc.	19	19	+0 (+0.0%)

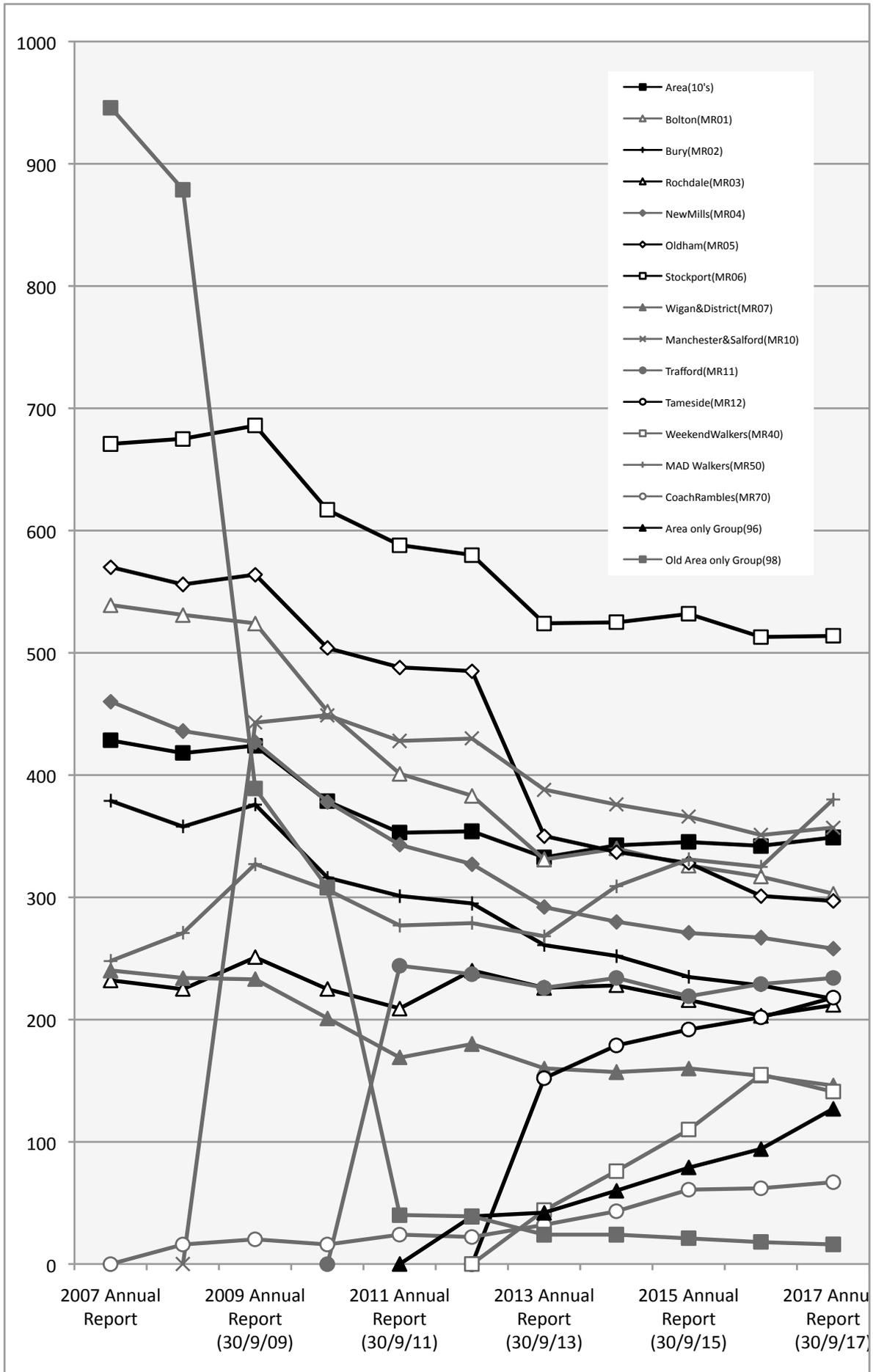
The total Area membership at 30th Sep 2017 is 3490; total Ramblers' membership is 104,694, a decrease of 1.2% from last year's 105,990. The Area is the sixth largest Area as at 1st October 2017.

Membership has had a good increase of 70 this year, which contrasts with the Ramblers' nationally who dropped again. The MAD Walkers have had an impressive increase, whilst there are also many new members who are choosing not to be associated with any local group.

The Area has 25 affiliated clubs, an increase of 2.

There are 1705 members recorded with phone numbers on the membership list (about 48% of the total); for email addresses, there are 1998 on record, or about 56%.

Gavin Poulton
Area Membership Secretary



FOOTPATH CO-ORDINATOR'S REPORT

PATHWATCH

The “Big Pathwatch” of 2015 (which we decided not to subscribe to as an Area) was relaunched as just “Pathwatch” in 2016. As such it continues, but without formal involvement by any of our Groups. Reports are still distributed fortnightly by RACO for each Highway Authority. However, Greater Manchester authorities generally consider these as being of little value.

Instead we should continue to focus on inspecting Public Rights of Way on the basis of each authority's Definitive Map & Statement. Ideally this should be done in the context of a comprehensive survey. That does of course represent a considerable organisational challenge – but Oldham Group, Rochdale Group and Stockport Group have managed it in the past, and in Bury we're well underway. Trafford Group do a complete inspection at least once a year.

Of course, the next problem then is to persuade our Highways Authorities to act on these reports, i.e. resolve the numerous problems uncovered. As we know all too well, resources available for Public Rights of Way keep shrinking. Whilst as a last resort we could use the Highways Act to force authorities to address obstructed or out-of-repair paths, we should in the first instance attempt to work with them – either by means of work parties (vegetation clearance is already being done by a number of Groups) or financial assistance with capital projects (our “Bridges & Stiles” facility).

The point, however, is that such schemes really need to be based on a comprehensive overview: With the problems being so numerous, we (and the Authorities) need to prioritise – and that can meaningfully only be done with a more or less complete data set.

So here we have the main challenge for 2018 (and no doubt a year or two beyond.) For a start, it does require someone to be willing to act as coordinator who allocated paths to volunteers and receives the results, collating them in a suitable format. Recruiting volunteer surveyors / inspectors is the next step. Actually, large numbers are not necessarily required, as we are not working to a deadline here, and the coordinator would find it easier to work with a dozen volunteers than with fifty. Could we have the Groups thinking about this, please?

DEFINITIVE MAPS ONLINE

For all of Greater Manchester we still have the Map produced by David Moore (a Derbyshire RA volunteer):

<http://cnedramblers.altervista.org/GMPROWbing.htm>

<http://cnedramblers.altervista.org/GMPROWaugmentedOS.htm>

Thus, these maps are an excellent basis for accurate footpath work over all our Area, the High Peak being covered by David's Derbyshire maps

<http://cnedramblers.altervista.org/DerbyshireROWos.htm>

<http://cnedramblers.altervista.org/DerbyshireROWbing.htm>

Most Greater Manchester Authorities also have their own online Definitive Maps, although some of these are better than others.

STATUTORY REGISTERS

All Highway Authorities are required to maintain on-line registers of:

- a) Gating Orders
- b) DMMOs (i.e. Claims) – also referred to as S.53 register (e.g. in Stockport)
- c) S.31A declarations (declarations of intent not to dedicate)

This remains a significant issue as currently only Tameside, Oldham, Bolton and Bury are fully compliant. Some others are making progress, but elsewhere nothing at all seems to be happening. Groups in those authorities should keep pressing for the statutory requirements to be complied with.

As in 2016, the **Bridges & Stiles project** budget has not been fully spent, owing to a shortage of applications. It is to be hoped that as a result of Pathwatch (see above) more issues deserving our financial support will be identified in 2017.

LOST WAYS

We will all be aware of the 2026 cut-off date after which Rights of Way will not be claimable on historic evidence. Unearthing such evidence is a laborious job that may yield only meagre returns. One relatively easy option suggested a while ago in RA discussions was to use the Local Street Gazetteer (LSG) maintained by all Highway Authorities. Some authorities' LSG includes "white roads", i.e. unadopted routes that may be crucial in filling gaps in the existing PROW network. We have asked several authorities for access to their LSG, but so far have been refused, on the grounds of licensing regulations. This will have to be pursued further (in coordination with RACO)

GATING ORDERS / PUBLIC SPACES PROTECTION ORDERS (PSPOS)

All Gating Orders are being converted to PSPOs, which will have to be reviewed at least every three years. The review process, however, will not provide us (RA) with an in any way significant opportunity to influence the process – just as our objections to Gating Orders could be ignored by the authorities. Thus the Definitive paths with access restricted "at all times" (i.e. closed 24/7) in Stockport, Rochdale, Tameside and Oldham will remain so for the foreseeable future.

The **Footpath Committee** comprising all the Group FP Secretaries still meets four times a year. Over the coming year will again to focus on Pathwatch and its ancillary aspects – as well as the Statutory Registers, of course.

INDIVIDUAL AUTHORITY SUMMARIES

As last year, each Group was given the opportunity to provide its own view on the position within its respective Authority. All but one Group have availed themselves of this.

BOLTON (Report by Jackie Roberts)

The year has been dominated by planning applications for substantial housing developments, all of which have met with much local opposition.

- In January a scheme for **300** houses at **Chequerbent** was rejected by the Planning Committee and went to Appeal. Persimmon Homes have now been given permission for the development.
- In September the Planning Inspector overturned a Planning Committee decision and allowed **129** houses to be built at **Bowlands Hey**.
- A scheme for **98** houses at the **Last Drop** was approved in the face of local opposition.
- The **Creams Mill** application for **95** houses (a complex one on difficult land) was recently approved.
- There was a first mention in December 2016 of a grand scheme to restore the historic landscape gardens at **Hulton Hall** and build a golf course and hotel, all to be funded by the building of **over 1,000** houses on what is described as the 'western agricultural area'. This is a particularly controversial application and local opposition is strong. Nearly 500 documents on line made a formidable study but after much consideration I came to the conclusion that the scheme does have some merits. The footpaths in the 'western agricultural area' will be protected and screened, the disused railway line will become a PROW, some paths through the woods in Hulton Park will become part of the Hulton Trail, and if this latter scheme could be included in the proposals there would be created an interesting circular route taking in paths north of the A6 and M61 and paths in Cutacre Country Park. The Trail would be linked to railway stations at places like Daisy Hill and to local bus routes.

The Chequerbent Appeal has been allowed despite the fact that housing demand over the next five years is being reassessed in view of Manchester Mayor Andy Burnham's request for a 'radical rewrite of the Greater Manchester Spatial Framework' and the recent application for 1000+ houses at Hulton Park. There is some evidence that demand for housing has been exaggerated but it is also felt that Bolton Council has not made sufficient provision in the last few years.

Other smaller schemes have been decided on their merits, with some refusals on grounds of inappropriate development or narrow local roads (**Hartley's Farm 58** houses). We objected to the latest of several planning applications at Hole Hill Farm on the edge of the moors on the grounds that the style of the buildings was totally inappropriate and that footpaths HOR 44, 45, and 46 were being ignored. The latest application for more suitably designed houses has been approved with strict conditions such as protection for the paths.

This year Bolton council has allocated **no funds for capital spending** so we are pleased that we have been able to help improve at least two paths on the network. Some badly needed steps on **Horwich 59, costing £1,500**, were partly funded by £500 from Armstrong Aggregates and £250 from our own funds, the balance of £750 coming from Area Funds. Half the cost of stone steps on an important but very muddy path (**Horwich 80**) has been funded by Horwich Local Council, with the balance again from our own funds.

It is a great relief that Ron Thatcher has taken over the organising of the monthly footpath clearing and the scheme is being well supported after an appeal for volunteers in our programme and good work is being done on neglected paths.

Another manpower crisis was averted by a similar appeal for members of the Committee and we now have a new Chairman and a Publicity Officer. We had a stall at an event organised by the Lancashire Wildlife Trust at Moses Gate Country Park on Saturday, September 9th and are exploring other ways to recruit members. Support for our Saturday and Sunday coach rambles has declined unexpectedly steeply, with numbers only just sufficient to cover the costs, and we are struggling to find walk leaders for Saturday Rambles. Support for local walks on Thursdays has increased, however.

We were concerned to learn that at **Robin Hood and Wilton Quarries**, on Scout Road north of Bolton, access by a route along the top of the quarries (not a PROW) would be denied on 4 days a week when members of Bolton Gun Club are using the quarries. Although there are at all times nearby available routes onto the moors nearby, we were relieved to have it confirmed that there is no intention to remove the stile leading to the restricted route, which is one of the most popular ways onto the moors. A nearby route via Bryans Hey is very wet and difficult but BMBC have no money to improve it at the moment.

In the light of Bolton Council's financial difficulties it is not surprising that they are unable to allocate money for the updating of the Definitive Map and the Bolton Group Committee feels unable to contemplate taking charge of what will be a very onerous task. There are over 1,100 PROWs and just keeping abreast of damage caused by floods, or by wear and tear or occasional vandalism is as much as we can hope for. Work on bridges, steps and stiles is ongoing.

At our Quarterly Footpath Liaison Group meetings we are impressed by the amount of work covered by our solitary Footpath Officer, and know that these days there is full consultation by planning officers, developers or bodies such as Network Rail on issues that affect our paths. This was not always the case.

BURY (Report by Edgar Ernstbrunner, Bury LAF Chair, on behalf of Bury Ramblers)

Bury remains one of the more effective and helpful Highway Authorities in Greater Manchester: In that respect, little has changed from last year.

- We have a very good working relationship with the Rights of Way section, Bury being one of only five GM authorities to retain a full-time Rights of Way Officer (two authorities having reinstated such posts since last year)
- Bury, unlike any other GM authority, has never made a Gating Order or Public Spaces Protection Order
- Claims for new Rights of Way are processed expeditiously

Having an effective Bury Local Access Forum (meeting 4 times a year, currently one of only three active LAFs in Greater Manchester) has again been most helpful in all this. It remains very well attended, by members covering a wide range of backgrounds. Current issues under discussion include the Definitive Map & Statement review (see below) and the Bridleway Strategy to expand the bridleway network (Bury, like most Highway Authorities, having recorded as Footpaths many routes that rightly should have been designated as bridleways when the original Definitive Maps were compiled). Multiuser routes have become a major issue, sparking a lively debate within the Ramblers' Association over the last few months. There is an ongoing consultation for the next Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP) defining the Council's strategy for the next 10 years.

Definitive Map & Statement (DM&S) Consolidation:

The Bury Definitive Map, inherited from GMC, is over 30 years out of date. The Authority does maintain a Working Copy, reflecting the changes (creations, diversions, extinguishments, upgrades) that have taken place since then, but that Working Copy has no legal status, and the Authority is under a duty to keep the DM&S up to date. Consolidating the DM&S in practice means legalising the Working Copy, but that involves, as the most challenging task, carrying out a complete survey of what's on the ground, i.e. a survey of the entire network – in terms both of condition and assets/furniture (signage, gates/stiles, bridges etc.).

Last year we started that survey, based on the Authority's Working Copy of the DM&S, **not** the OS maps (which are out of date and inaccurate in terms of Rights of Way). The Working Copy can be found under <http://www.bury.gov.uk/index.aspx?articleid=11777> (Statements – relatively detailed descriptions of each route) and <http://www.bury.gov.uk/index.aspx?articleid=11359> (Map). A Survey Form and Survey Notes have been produced to standardise the survey format. Links to these documents can be found on the Bury Ramblers website (<http://www.buryramblers.com/footpaths.htm>).

During 2017 considerable progress has been made with the aid of volunteers from Bury Ramblers and LAF members. A recent article in the Bury Times about our survey prompted half a dozen responses from members of the public, although so far none have come back after having been informed of the relatively rigorous survey protocol.

The current position is that **Bury (i.e. the old County Borough) and Prestwich are complete**. Whitefield and Tottington are well underway. Ramsbottom is 75% complete, but there has been little movement over the last 6 months. The main issue, however, is Radcliffe, where nothing has happened since April, and some 120 paths remain to be done. Do get in touch if you are interested!

Rights of Way resources

Here we do have a problem. The survey being conducted to facilitate Definite Map & Statement consolidation has revealed numerous problems, some quite severe, that we had previously been unaware of. Resolving them will be quite expensive – yet the Authority currently has a total ROW budget (capital + revenue) of £24K. Given the severity of the problems and the wholly inadequate current resources, it was agreed in that meeting that the only way forward would be to

1. Attempt to quantify the cost (at least as an estimate) of each ROW problem found
2. Prioritise defective routes
3. Draw up an action plan identifying available and potential funding

We did stress that we weren't expecting the network to be fault-free within a year or even two; but we would wish to see positive a credible declaration of intent. Time will tell. We should, of course, do what we can to assist an essentially helpful Authority, either by voluntary work (e.g. vegetation clearance) or financially (funding or part-funding capital projects such as installation of bridges or replacing stiles with gates) via the Greater Manchester & High Peak Area's annual "Bridges & Stiles" budget.

HIGH PEAK (Report by John Biggins)

The New Mills 'patch' has been understood to be the whole of the land overseen by High Peak Borough Council. This extends from Black Hill (N) to Earl Sterndale (S) and from New Mills to Cutthroat Bridge (E). This is a very large tract of land and is not surveyed systematically by the Group because of lack of both people and time.

However, owing to the sterling efforts of the PNFS Parish Inspectors, ably co-ordinated by John Harker, and the work of the New Mills Welcomes Walkers group many of the problems / faults that arise in our 'patch' are spotted and are reported to DCC. It remains the case, however, that very few of these 'faults' are reported to me directly by walkers as a result of their findings during walks. Are walkers who are not in the Ramblers, PNFS etc. aware that problems with paths can be reported via these organisations?

During the past year the All-Derbyshire Ramblers Co-ordinating Committee has been in discussion with DCC about (a) how might Ramblers Groups best help the Council with its work of maintaining the PROW network and (b) what are the Council's plans for dealing with the very substantial number of unresolved problems with the PROWs that have been reported to it in recent years.

In October 2017 these discussions seemed to have reached a kind of impasse. For whatever reason the Council seems, at present, unable (unwilling?) to offer the sort of practical support that Groups need to do other than the simplest kinds of path maintenance work. This is a clear retreat from the position only a few years ago. Also, no convincing answer has been forthcoming so far as point (b) above is concerned.

Overall, the situation is such as to cause the Co-ordinating Committee to wonder if its long-held position that 'partnership' should be the key word to describe the way in which it worked with the Council was still valid. Perhaps it is time to consider a move towards a more 'legalistic' approach to getting PROW faults remedied. During 2017 evidence has started to appear that initial moves by PNFS foreshadowing potential Magistrates Court action requiring the County Council to fulfil its legal obligations may be starting to pay dividends.

CITY OF MANCHESTER (Report by Salle Dare)

In Manchester the Picture is different from Salford. We have the same system of a team checking footpaths led by Richard Cleverley and Maggie Walker and a second team clearing footpaths, led by Barry Windle. Barry's team has undertaken some footpath clearing and made a significant difference where our volunteers have been active. Similarly, some inspections have been undertaken and recorded, but not as systematically as we would have liked. This is something we will address in the New Year.

For a variety of reasons, the meetings with Manchester City Council have not taken place this year. Part of the responsibility lies with the group and part with the Council. Again, this is something we plan to tackle in the New Year.

Much of 2018 will be devoted to re-establishing the Green Corridor route in Manchester which links parks and green spaces. The work is being supported by Transport for Greater Manchester and we will be working in partnership with City of Trees (formerly Red Rose Forest) and Manchester City Council.

OLDHAM (Report by John Walton)

Foxdenton – Sadly, work started in May with the construction of the spine road from A663 Broadway to Foxdenton Lane. 5 footpaths will be temporarily closed for up to 74 weeks. 2 other footpaths were closed during the summer months to allow a 600mm diameter sewer pipe to be constructed across the Fields. During the last 2 months these 2 latter footpaths have been a mud bath and a lake with surface water up to 300mm deep. Initially I had been slagging off the Foxdenton contractor when the damage was done by United Utilities. The latter has now agreed to make good the path when conditions are OK.

Sealing of Oldham definitive map and statements – After I carried out an evaluation of the sealing of the 800 or so paths in Oldham, I had a meeting with the ROW Officer and Legal. I estimate that 85% (737) of paths could be sealed with minimal legal orders. The remainder will have to be put on a list to be investigated in due course. It was decided the progress the 29 paths in Lees to see what legal and practical obstacles have to be crossed and then move onto Chadderton (79), Crompton (98), Failsworth (57), Oldham Central (252, some missing), Royton (96) and finally Saddleworth (292) in due course. If at all!

Oldham Group Footpath team – We now have a fresh face on the team – Anne Broadbent will be looking after the paths in Lees (29) and Oldham Central (252). She has already made comments on a planning application in Oldham. Tony Jackson is doing a good job looking after the paths in all the above districts except Saddleworth, who I will monitor, plus any long term land issues where footpaths are affected.

ROW Officer (s) – Steve Palk who had been in the chair for about 3 years has now retired for the 2nd time. We have a new Officer Angus Macrae (whom at the time of writing we have not met). He appears to be making reasonable progress in the past few months. Another officer, Nathan Bell, has recently been appointed and hopefully between them make progress on solving the many ROW issues here in Oldham.

Two new footpath signs – The group has paid £200 towards the erection of 2 footpath signs on path 126 at the side of Plumpton Clough near Oldham Athletics ground. At the time of writing the signs are pointing in the wrong direction. I have emailed Angus many times but as yet they have not been moved. 2 stainless steel plaques, to say the Oldham Group has funded the signs, will be affixed to the black posts when the weather improves.

Footpath Clearance – 10/12 volunteers cleared over 30 paths from April to the end of October using mainly secateurs and loppers etc. Mike brought his own brush cutter and he made a big difference in reducing the overall time in cutting back the paths surface. There are 60 on my insurance list (around 50 have not ventured out) and I will be writing to them to say I will be removing from my list for the 2018 season. I will be also standing down as taking part in the practical work but will be sending out the path numbers and information each month. I will risk assess and go out periodically to check on progress with the other 10/12 volunteers.

ROCHDALE (Report by Roy Thorniley)

2017

The most significant developments in Rochdale during 2017 were the appointment of a Dedicated Rights of Way Officer, the progress made with the Definitive Map review, the Secretary of State's decision on the Scout Moor Wind Farm expansion plan, and the substantial number of improvements made to the Rights of Way Network.

Over the past 12 months the Group have worked closely with the Rochdale Councils Environmental Management, Planning, and Legal teams and our partner agencies, particularly the Rochdale CHA Rambling Club and the Peak and Northern Footpaths Society as well as local Bridleway groups. We have been represented at all of the quarterly Councils Rights of Way Forums.

RMBC

The Council went through further restructuring in 2017 with changes to the role of some of the enforcement officers. On the 22nd May 2017 the Council appointed Julie Simpson as the dedicated Rights of Way officer. Julie had previously been the ROW officer when the post was lost in 2011 and was very experienced.

During 2017 at least 80 improvements have been made to the ROW network, many as a result of some of the 37 reports submitted by our group. We continued throughout 2017 assisting the Definitive Map review team whenever possible. The team have identified about 120 orders which need to be resolved by the legal team and it is possible that we may see a new Definitive map sometime in 2018.

Other Matters

During 2017 we took an active part in the protests against some of the proposals in the Greater Manchester Spatial Framework document and supported local protests against building on green belt land in Bamford. The group also exhibited at the annual Rooley Moor Neighbourhood Forum event on the 13th August to promote walking and access to the countryside.

Outside Enquiries

We have responded to a significant number of requests from members of the public over ROW issues either by telephone, e-mail or via Central Office. The Pathwatch system produced only a handful of negative reports most of which were already being actioned by the group.

Planning Applications

We continued to monitor on a weekly basis the planning applications submitted to RMBC particularly those affecting ROW and submitted objections where appropriate.

The Scout Moor Expansion Plan Public Inquiry was held in October 2016, and on the 6th July 2017 the Secretary of State refused permission to build 14 turbines in Rossendale but approved the 2 which were to be erected within the boundary of the existing Scout Moor Wind Farm in Rochdale. Peel did not appeal the decision and at this stage we do not know if the two further turbines in Rochdale will go ahead, but otherwise a good result.

Gating Orders/Closures

We have also dealt with around 20 requests from the Council involving alley gating, path closures and diversions.

Objectives for 2018

To continue in our efforts to improve the ROW network and work with our partners and the Council to that end. Particular attention will be given to targeting long-standing land owner obstructions.

CITY OF SALFORD (Report by Salle Dare)

Most of the efforts of Manchester and Salford Ramblers work in Salford have been focused on developing the Salford Trail, a new long-distance path that has been approved for the Ordnance Survey map. This involved some major improvements carried out by members including erecting two stiles and constructing steps and a barrier to keep horses away from the path. The Salford Trail was opened by Stuart Maconie, Ramblers President, in May 2017.

Other work in Salford has included path clearing. Up to the end of September 2017 the Salford footpath clearing team has put in 51 man-hours. This contrasts with the 80 hrs we worked last year. Most of the work has been on sections of the Salford Trail to ensure it was walkable along its full length. There is plenty of path work that needed, and still needs, doing but we have been limited in our operation by two factors: Firstly, there was a change of footpath officer at Salford City Council. We weren't informed about this and it was some time before we found out who the new officer was. He had no idea we existed! Without official sanction we were unable to operate. Eventually we had a meeting and things are now working on a good basis. In fact, the new officer is very helpful and has recently asked us to clear a path. Fortunately, we were able to oblige and do this.

The second factor is a severe shortage of volunteers. Last year we put out a maximum team of 6 on one occasion but this year the most we had was 4. Holidays and the long-term incapacity of a regular team member meant on several occasions we couldn't do any clearing. Frequently we operate with only two people. A few more pairs of hands would make a big difference to our operations. However, we continue to do what we can, and it is clear we are making a difference. For the future, we will continue to build the team of path clearers.

The group has been without a footpath officer, who would monitor footpaths and report to the council for about three years although Rob Dean has maintained some links with Salford City Council in his role as leader of the footpath clearing team. We now have a member who is willing to take on path inspections and monitor the condition of the footpaths in Salford. This, together with the new Footpath Officer at the Council and the work already underway means that the picture is looking better for the future.

STOCKPORT (Report by Phil Featherstone and Edgar Ernstbrunner)

Stockport LAF

The relaunch took much longer than seemed reasonable. This was being blamed on recruitment problems. This issue was raised at a ROW Forum meeting, only to find out that hardly any of the Forum attendees even knew about the LAF. So, everybody was exhorted to apply. The same happened at the Cycle User Group.

After a first meeting in February, the next meeting took place in September. There, a number of issues were identified relating to SMBC exercising undue control over the Forum (which is supposed to be an autonomous Statutory Body). Several meetings between EE and Council Officers did manage to resolve the issues to mutual satisfaction, and the Forum appears to be set for a constructive and effective role. This was confirmed at the November meeting.

Gating Orders/Public Spaces Protection Orders

This remains unsatisfactory. Our attempts to interact with the review process only established that there is none – not even a nominal one. The Council's assertion that the review was based on representations received proved false: We submitted two representations (Bilson Drive and Seal Rd), but they were not even acknowledged. This matter will be pursued at LAF meetings.

PROW Survey

This survey (based on the Definitive Map) was completed last year. It resulted in a priority problem list submitted to the Council. Some of the issues have been dealt with, but many more remain.

The Definitive Map, whilst relatively up to date (2013) still contains a number of anomalies, and there have already been additional changes. Moreover, the Definitive Statement (descriptions of each Right of Way) was not, in most cases, updated along with the Definitive Map. It contains quite a few errors and furthermore generally lacks detail such as furniture (gates, stiles, bridges). It therefore needs a lot of work to bring it up to date. The intention is to conduct a more detailed survey, focusing on

- a) specifying furniture, taking note of location and condition,
- b) checking the Statement in terms of accuracy and detail (the aim being to end up with a complete up-to-date copy of the document which will benefit both the RA and the Council),
- c) whether the line on the ground matches the line on the Map and is unobstructed.

We will again need a few volunteers to achieve this in a reasonable time (no more than two years). To recruit these we could follow the example of Bury Ramblers who put a notice on their website with a link to the Definitive Map

Lost Ways

We requested access to the Local Street Gazetteer (see above), but have not had a final response. The Rights of Way Officer is in discussion with SMBC GIS team to display the Gazetteer as an on-line map separate from the Definitive Map. Once this is published in an accessible form, work will start on trying to identify potential ROW which are not on the current Definitive Map.

Ladybrook Valley

The proposal to convert sections of footpath into bridleway (to establish a strategic off-road route) was controversial but after consultation with local residents and other interested parties the Phase 1 planning application was approved. The existing Ladybrook Valley route will be resurfaced (we had opposed that) as a bridleway. To mitigate this, we have investigated a route on the other side of the brook and we will claim that as an alternative pedestrian route bypassing part of the new bridleway, thus mitigating the disbenefit to walkers.

Overall position

Generally, cooperation (particularly communication) between the Group and SMBC ROW section had until recently been very patchy. Over the last month or so there seems to have been significant improvements. Along with other groups and organisations we do recognise the difficulties faced by Local Government. Stockport Group should therefore consider resuming voluntary work on Rights of Way. Such a move is likely to be welcomed by the Council.

TRAFFORD (Report by June Mabon)

The joint exercise in Trafford between our RA members and Peak and Northern Footpaths Society is developing very well. The aim is to produce a record of known changes that have been made to the Definitive Map (DM) since 1984 but have not been incorporated in an updated DM. The project has been helped by an RA Derbyshire member who has incorporated our "update" information as an overlay to an electronic version of the DM. This will make it much easier to distribute our work to as many interested and influential bodies as we can identify. A pilot demonstration is planned for early in the 2017/18 year.

Our Team of FP Inspectors continues to make an annual check on all Definitive ROWs and an additional interim inspection on "known winter offenders". Trafford Highways department achieves around an 80% score for satisfactory condition of paths but getting that remaining 20% of problems sorted is not easy. Some problems will be addressed when an updated DM reflects changes due to paths being built over and changes due to motorway side road orders. Two special projects are addressing missing signage and obstructed paths.

The Team which carries out minor maintenance on Definitive ROWs, met a hiccup at the start of 2017 when One Trafford (the Trafford Council/Amey partnership) delayed granting permission for us to continue our voluntary work. We enlisted the help of local Councillors to persuade One Trafford to allow us to continue. This moved things along quite quickly and we were back up and maintaining again by early April.

We continue to actively support the progress of four claims for new ROWs in our borough. Two cases have reached the stage where the Secretary of State for the Environment has been asked to direct Trafford Council to make a decision and two are fast approaching that stage. Our active support has included bringing together busy Evidence of Use providers and representatives of the Council for an evidence verification meeting and photographing potential sites for notices to unidentified landowners of the claim for a ROW on their land.

WIGAN (Report by Phil Bullen)

Wigan LAF had four meetings in the year, with an average attendance of six. The equestrians have four representatives, the walkers two and disabled one. We also have visits from Lancashire Wildlife and the Council Planning Department.

Subjects discussed include,

- Housing developments affecting R O W
- Upgrading of paths to Bridleways
- Temporary path closures.
- Path clearance and signage
- Promoting walking adjacent to the Leigh guided busway
- Damage to paths caused by 4x4 type vehicles.

I have also been co-opted onto the steering committee for the Bickershaw North development. The council is producing a leaflet for general circulation outlining the LAF

Footpath Report

Standish 19/20 (former golf club): Consultation is on-going, we have made recommendations for suitable diversions.

Standish 34 (Preston Rd to Almond Brook): The diversion has been confirmed, the new path will also be a bridleway.

Abram 16 (Near Smiths Lane Bickershaw): The proposed diversion will eliminate an overgrown path.

Leigh 54 (Near Retail Park): Diversion confirmed-new paths and bridges to be installed.

Golborne 31(Near high school): The builders have been informed that this path has to be kept open.

Tyldesley 148/150 (Garret Hall): Still in the early planning stage.

Tyldesley 51 (Cutacre Tip): Diversion confirmed.

Aspull 11: New bridge installed.

Billinge 78 (Chain Wood): Fallen trees have been removed.

Ince 2A/Hindley 2A (Hemfield Rd to Highfield Rd): Path to be upgraded to Bridleway.

Borsdane Wood: Path re-opened after landslip

Lowton 34/35/37 (off Slag Lane): Proposed diversion delayed due to the possibility they are on the route of HS2

Ashton 27 (Edge Green Farm): A proposal for a diversion has been submitted on behalf of the owner, We have suggested a suitable alternative.

Aspull 22 (Southern Fold): Path blocked by wall and fence.-passed to Wigan Council.

Worthington 03 (Platt Lane): Overgrown -passed to Wigan Council.

Ramblers Pathwatch Report.

We have only received a handful of reports this year.

IN CONCLUSION

Whilst our Highway Authorities are continuing, mostly, to do their best to maintain the network on ever-shrinking resources, the optimal strategy from our point of view seems to be to identify as comprehensively as possible the existing network problems. Once we have these on a database (in whatever format), we are in a much stronger position in terms of

- a) presenting a credible overall picture (rather than mere isolated issues) to each Authority
- b) negotiating a way forward, ideally involving contributions from us (financially and/or volunteers' efforts)

As explained earlier, such a systematic survey will also assist our Highway Authorities in consolidating (or reconsolidating) their Definitive Maps and Statements – a task they may otherwise, under present circumstances, find too daunting, yet one that is become more pressing with each year, as current Maps become ever more obsolete.

Edgar Ernstbrunner
Footpath Co-ordinator

GREATER MANCHESTER AND HIGH PEAK AREA TREASURER'S REPORT YEAR TO 30TH SEPTEMBER 2017

This year has again been active from a financial point of view. The annual budget of £15,723 represented a small decrease over the previous year (£16,558) and was met in full by head office. The budget for next year represents another decrease at £14,659 and this has also been approved. The changes are caused largely by fluctuations in self funded activities, which are periodically utilised to subsidise normal activities.

During the year we received one donation of £30.

All groups are to be commended on their efforts to keep costs to a minimum and the decrease in the budget for next year indicates the success of these efforts, whilst practical work being undertaken by the groups continues. The unrestricted bank funds were £9,009 (2016 £6,331) at the year end, and your committee will try to keep the funds at a similar level next year. There was a surplus on the main budget during the year and this explains the increase in the unrestricted balance. The unrestricted balance remains well within the recommended range set by Head Office.

During the year there were two major contributions made from restricted funds. These being £1,300 paid to Stockport Council as a contribution towards the construction of a new footbridge on footpath 211M, and £1,657 paid to Salford Council for the design and production of waymarkers and fixings for the new Salford Trail that opened during the year.

The result was to leave a balance of £22,592 (2016 £22,589) in the bank at the year end, of which £9,009 (2016 £6,331) was unrestricted.

Despite the stock market uncertainties, and the continued low interest rates, there are still considerable restricted funds available for funding footpath improvement programmes. We continue to actively seek to support worthwhile projects in the Area, and I would remind all groups that if they identify a scheme that they want to support they can get this added to the agenda at any area committee meeting by notifying the Area Secretary.

Finally, there have been a number of changes in the past twelve months, and I would especially like to thank all the group treasurers, new and old, who have worked so hard to meet the budget and accounting deadlines set by head office. As I will not be standing for re-election at the AGM I would also like to thank all the Area officers that I have worked with over the years for their generous support.

Mike Lyons
Area Treasurer

**Greater Manchester & High Peak Ramblers
Income and Expenditure Account
Year ended 30 September 2017**

Restricted

Receipts	2016	2017	Payments	2016	2017
Internal transfer					
Donations	30	30			
Project Funding Bollin Valley	3,150	0	Project Spend Bollin	8,150	0
Investment income	241	252	Practical Work	1,239	2,957
Interest	19	0			
Total receipts	<u>3,440</u>	<u>282</u>	Total payments	<u>9,389</u>	<u>2,957</u>
Surplus/(deficit)	-5,949	-2,675			

Main

Receipts	2016	2017	Payments	2016	2017
From CO (funding)	16,558	15,724	To Group (funding)	10,322	9,088
			To Group (other)	0	0
			Walks programmes	2,059	1,547
			Walks related	0	0
			Newsletters/publicity	1,576	1,084
			Publication/goods costs	25	0
			Campaigns/casework	116	123
			Practical work	0	0
Other	5	5	Meetings (inc. AGM)	1,162	703
			Other	19	139
Total receipts	<u>16,563</u>	<u>15,729</u>	Admin	256	367
Surplus/(deficit)	1,028	2,678	Total payments	<u>15,535</u>	<u>13,051</u>

Summary

Receipts	2016	2017	Payments	2016	2017
Restricted	3,440	282	Restricted	9,389	2,957
Main	<u>16,563</u>	<u>15,729</u>	Main	<u>15,535</u>	<u>13,051</u>
Total receipts	<u>20,003</u>	<u>16,011</u>	Total payments	<u>24,924</u>	<u>16,008</u>
Surplus/(- deficit)	-4,921	3			

**Greater Manchester & High Peak Ramblers
Balance Sheet
At 30 September 2017**

Assets	Restricted	Unrestricted	Total 2017	Total 2016	Annual Movement
Investments					
M&G Charifund	5,545	0	5,545	5,231	314
National Savings	63,402	0	63,402	63,023	379
	68,947	0	68,947	68,254	693
Bank Account					
Unity Trust Bank	12,583	9,009	21,592	21,589	
Total	81,530	9,009	90,539	89,843	

Notes on the Balance Sheet

Investments:

The change in value of the M&G Charifund account reflected movements in the stock market.

The increase in value of National Savings represents interest credited to the account annually on the 1st January.

Mike Lyons

Area Treasurer

3 November 2017

**Greater Manchester and High Peak Area
Independent Examiner's Report
Accounts to 30 September 2017**

Having carried out procedures in accordance with the Area and Group independent examiner guidelines, I consider that the Greater Manchester and High Peak Area Accounts have been properly prepared and give a true and fair view of the Area's finances for the year ended on 30 September 2017.

Signed: *Siobhan Cresswell*

Dated: 1 January 2018

Siobhan Cresswell

Copthorne Walk

Tottington

ENTRUST – THE ENVIRONMENTAL TRUST REGULATORY BODY

Ramblers Greater Manchester and High Peak Area continues to be registered with ENTRUST (Area paid an initial, non-recurring registration fee), and is an Environmental Body (EB) in ENTRUST terms. This allows Area or any Group within Area, to apply for grants which are available from a range of environmental organisations. Landfill operators is one example of grant providers and is the only one a Group has, to date, made an application to. It was successful.

While our Area is able to offer funding for many projects, if a project falls outside Area's criteria or requires greater funding than Area can offer, then an approach to one or more of the environmental organisations could offer a way forward. I am willing to advise Area or any Group if it decides to apply for an environmental organisation grant.

June Mabon,
Area ENTRUST representative

WEDNESDAY WALKERS/SHORT LONG WALKS

Once again, a very busy year and we have quite a number of members choosing from both programmes. We continue to enjoy the great variety of local transport to take us both into the countryside and into our towns for a number of inner city walks. Increasingly we are learning a great deal about our industrial and post-industrial heritage!

Our attendance has remained very steady, most days we put out 45-50 over both walks and remain very grateful to our panel of leaders who are so willing to share their time, expertise and local knowledge. We have also seen a welcome number of new walkers, who are always astonished at the variety of walks we offer. They have even been known to return!

Despite the weather it has been a very satisfactory year due in no small way to our leaders' imaginative walks. It makes each walk a voyage of discovery! Our thanks to them.

Gordon Campbell, Sue Daber

GROUP REPORTS

BOLTON

You will no doubt recall that this time last year Bolton Ramblers Group was struggling to find enough people to cover all the posts on the committee. Following an appeal for volunteers to take on various roles, we were fortunate that a number of people came forward to offer their services. Jeanne Lauder took over the role of General Secretary from Lynne Morgan, who gave it up through ill health, and Jeanne is often forwarding emails at eight o'clock in the morning.

Judith Heale became our new Publicity and Information Officer, and is regularly sending walk details to the local press (where it is actually printed!) She and I were recently interviewed on Bolton FM radio station where we were able to extol the virtues of the Ramblers. Whilst this has not resulted in a flood of new members, in the long term, this can only be of benefit to the group.

Because Jackie Roberts was unable to get out to survey footpaths that need attention, Ron Thatcher has taken the responsibility (with David Clift) of inspecting footpaths, and contacting the volunteer helpers with their locations. He also liaises with Central Office to advise them of what has been done. Keith Bridle agreed to take the role of co-ordinator for the 4th Weekend Walks. These only started in October 2017, and unfortunately the first one was cancelled owing to Hurricane Brian blowing a gale.

In addition to these members, we are indebted to the work done by the stalwarts of the committee, Jackie Roberts who does a terrific job scrutinizing all planning applications in the borough, to determine any effect they may have on footpaths, Sue Stephenson and Frank Jones who organize the destinations for the coach rambles, and David Smethurst as our Treasurer and Minute Secretary.

Malcolm Deaville,
Chair

BURY

The group has 217 members, and runs a Sunday walk programme, with walks on almost every Sunday of the year, often there is a choice of a shorter and a longer walk. The short walks include welcome walks aimed at non-members. In the summer months, the group puts on Wednesday evening walks which are popular with new and occasional walkers, as well as with existing members, although numbers declined on these walks this year. This year we ran two coach trips (to Morecambe and to North Yorkshire).

Average number of Sunday walkers is 18. Some walks are local, especially those in the dark winter months. These can be accessed entirely by using public transport. However, many Sunday walks, especially those on the long summer days, necessitate a car journey to the walk start location. On these walks, car sharing is encouraged, and there is a meeting point in Bury. Some walking groups have eliminated meeting points, but we believe that for our group, these are important feature to attract and retain non-drivers.

Publicity to attract new members is mainly through our group website www.buryramblers.com and the Ramblers "Walkfinder" and also the area website, but also by leaflets, and by our local newspaper, the "Bury Times". Pictures from our walks are important to encourage new members. The continuing issue for the group is the reluctance of members to serve on the committee. Our major issue last year was to find a replacement Treasurer. However, the problem of finding essential committee members is not resolved, and continues to be a significant concern. Sadly, during the year, we lost another member, Diane Brough, who died in November.

Ed Husband,
Chair

MANCHESTER AND DISTRICT

As we come to the end of another year in MAD walkers we can reflect on another great year for the group. 2017 marked the thirteenth year of MAD Walkers and its popularity continues with almost four hundred members enjoying all the activities on offer through the group.

I would like to thank all this year's Committee members. Our walks co-ordinator, Steve Rawlins has worked really hard to ensure that we have had a very strong walks calendar throughout the year, with typically three to four walks on most weekend and many weekday evenings in the summer with many walks have near record turnouts. The walks have covered a great range of length, difficulty and location which provides a great level of choice to cater for most tastes. The group also participated in the Greater Manchester Walking festival by putting a number of walks on for the festival throughout the period.

The group has continued to use Meetup, Facebook and the website, and now Instagram and Twitter to promote our walks and Aimee, as Communications Officer, promoted the walks programme to great effect every week. We continue to split the cost of this with our sister group Manchester Weekend Walkers and it remains a good way to inform people of what we do and attract new members. Mike in his second year as web master has done an excellent job. Several automations have been implemented making posting events a lot easier across our various social media sites. In addition, the MAD website now has versions for different devices tablets, phones, etc.

In terms of socials, Kate, in her second year as Socials co-ordinator has co-ordinated an excellent calendar of socials throughout the year with events such as the Christmas party, ice skating and several beer festivals to name but a few. The monthly Knott bar meet ups have proved popular with an average of 30-40 members and new members attending. Our weekends officer, Owain Roberts, has co-ordinated eight weekends this year and around the UK and a trip to France for New Year. Due to a lack of uptake by members it has been decided to cancel the New Year weekend for 2017.

At short notice, Niall MacLennan stepped into the role as Secretary and has been an excellent support to the group and committee in this role. Volker has continued in the role of Treasurer ensuring the group finances remain strong. Siobhan joined the committee this year as Membership secretary a role which does involve a lot of work and has ensured all the various duties of the Membership secretary have been completed throughout the year.

Due to work and personal commitments, I will be stepping down from the committee as Chairman after serving as Chairman for 1 year and on the committee in three different positions prior to becoming Chairman. I have thoroughly enjoyed my time in the role and on the committee and I have welcomed the chance to give something back to the group that I have been part of for 13 years.

Finally, I would like to say thank you to all the volunteers in the group. Without the volunteers whether leading walks, backmarking, organising socials or arranging weekends we would not have a group.

**Jon Buckland,
Chair**

MANCHESTER AND SALFORD

What a great year! The most significant event for us this year was the opening of the Salford Trail a 50 mile route entirely within Salford. It was originally mapped out by Ramblers member Roy Bullock, but turned into a wonderful route accessible to local people by a small group including Mags Metcalf, David and Veronica Yates, Rob Dean, Mags Metcalf and Maggie Smith with some help from Peter Matthews who helped David and Rob build a couple of stiles on land owned by Peel Holdings. We were very grateful to the support we received from Transport for Greater Manchester and Salford City Council. A small group got together to refine the route; to break it up into 10 shorter walks to make it accessible to Salford residents; write the leaflets; design and place waymarkers; put up signposts, and design a plaque for the start of the trail – which you can see on the railings behind Salford Quays Metro Stop. We met over 4 years about once every 6-8 weeks. Thanks to all the members who worked so hard to get this off the ground and to Greater Manchester Area for funding the signage and to M&S Ramblers for funding the Plaque at the start of the trail. The route was opened on 30th May by Stuart Maconie, Ramblers President and keen walker, and was well attended by members, local councillors, TFGM and local MPs, as was the inaugural walk on 2 June. It has now been passed to Ordnance Survey to be put on OS maps. So now we can walk it.

We are working with TFGM to try and get the Manchester Green Corridor up and running again. It was originally developed by the Ramblers and Manchester City Council but the council have not been able to keep it up. We want to take it over and manage it. Members are checking the route and TFGM are willing to redesign the leaflets. When we have new leaflets, we will host them on our website and keep the route up to date. That is an ongoing piece of work.

Mags Metcalf has organised many opportunities for us to promote the Ramblers at events run by the NHS and by HMRC and other voluntary organisations. David Yates has helped develop our links with the NHS and Salford University, with whom we hope to undertake some research on walking. We have met with City of Trees (formerly Red Rose Forest) and hope to do some work with them on developing walks focussed on trees in the spring. We have had a great programme of walks and our regular weekends away and have taken part in the Walking Festivals organised by TFGM.

The group is sustained by all the work of the various members all of whom deserve thanks for their time and expertise.

- Maggie Smith has organised a great programme of walks and has a great team of walk leaders who enable us to run the variety of walks
- Chris Quinn has organised a wide range of stimulating and fascinating visits and talks.
- Kevin Murphy organises our weekends away
- Rob Dean and his team who clear footpaths in Salford
- Barry Windle and his team who clear footpaths in Manchester
- Richard Cleverley, Kate Wilson and Maggie Walker who help on inspecting footpaths in Manchester, although we haven't done as much this year as we would have liked
- Geoff Jones who is our webmaster
- Margaret Manning our newsletter editor
- Mike Lyons our treasurer but sadly he is leaving so we welcome a new treasurer for 2018, Sean Dunne
- Mags Metcalf who is our secretary and basically keeps the group running

I am personally grateful to this team and to all the members who support us by joining our walks and helping in our campaigning work. We're looking forward to an exciting 2018.

**Salle Dare,
Chair**

MANCHESTER WEEKEND WALKERS

Our walks in the last 12 months have been plentiful (58 in total) and covered a wide area from Arnside in the north, Buxton in the south, Frodsham in the west and Ikley Moor in the east. We've had joint walks with the Coach Ramblers, been joined by Teddy Bears on a picnic, enjoyed Phil's historic walks, and enjoyed a number of Then and Now Walks with the series acknowledged in the Ramblers Magazine. We recognise our new walk leaders Patra and Tony and thank them for volunteering. Also we thank our group stalwarts – Phil Machen went beyond the call of duty leading 11 walks, followed by Martin with 6, John Lupton with 5, and Max and John & Ev with 4. We thank all our walk leaders and in particular the people who have delivered their first walk for the group, we will continue to encourage and assist you all in any way we can. We thank Dave, Hayley and Gavin for the work they have undertaken on behalf of the group and committee and I'm sure we are all sorry that they are stepping down from their respective roles.

After a year on year increase to membership since the group's formation we note the first decline in membership numbers. At the 2016 AGM we acknowledge 165 members, we now stand at 150 members with 28 new members since January. There is no obvious answer as to why the group has experienced this decline, it could be a fluctuation (it happens!), it might be that the group has already reached out to those within the catchment of people in the middle of their careers or it could be partially explained by people relocating and transferring their membership to other groups.

A great deal of work has been done by the existing members spreading the word to others and we continue to promote ourselves through Meetup and Facebook, thanks to Andy and Debbie for managing Meetup and Facebook. We thank all members for making newcomers to the group feel welcome and continue our philosophy of openness and accessibility. Thanks to John for answering all the membership queries!

We've had many weekends away including: New Year in Castleton (Debbie), January the group was in Saltaire (Hayley & Lorna), Easter it was Brizzle, Barth & Wookey (Andy, Hayley & Lorna), in June the Navigation course at Northern college took place (Kevin) and August we were in the European City of Culture, Hull (Andy). Cathryn McGarvey took a number of the group earlier in November to Donegal, Ireland and Debbie is working on the New Year trip to Llanberis. In 2018 we are planning a brewery visit at the end of January, Northumberland at Easter, Grasmere in May and New Year 2018 is already booked!

The committee thanks all volunteers who have helped with the planning and delivery of the weekends including walk leaders, cooks, drivers and people who cleaned or washed up as well as organised the purchase and delivery of the food. In particular we thank Debbie Watson our Weekends Coordinator for her hard work in delivering these very enjoyable and successful weekends. It's been another busy year in the social calendar and the weekend walks have firmly developed in to an after walk social scene of their own. The more formal socials include: Scrooged at Home, in January we again visited the Saltaire Brewery and some members sampled the Sheffield ale trail after the New Year break in Castleton. Andy started the Cask social evenings again in January, February, March and April with visits to The Britons Protection in June The Wharf and Duttons in July. In August the socials went back to Cask and in September the Crown and Kettle. Other socials have included Chesterfields and other bands at Gullivers, 2020 cricket at Old Trafford and cinema and theatre pop-ups arranged via the Facebook Forum. We thank Andy and Hayley for organising and delivering the majority of the socials.

The website has continued to be adjusted to meet our needs, the finances managed and of course regular committee meetings have taken place, thanks to Martin and Gavin as well as Andy and Jude respectively. Also Debbie for including all walk and social updates on Facebook. Support and encouragement is still being received from the local Ramblers Executive Committee and we thank all that took time out to attend the Area EGM earlier in the year.

We thank all of our volunteers that have inputted into the group over the last 12 months but I would like to finally thank my fellow committee members as a whole who have helped to steer the progress of the group since 2016: Debbie, Jude, Hayley, John, Martin, Dave, Andy and Gavin. I've had an immensely enjoyable time as chair and to work with the committees over the years has been a privilege and a pleasure.

Brendan Keely,
Chair

NEW MILLS AND DISTRICT

2017 has been a mixed year for the New Mills Group.

On a positive note, we have migrated our website to the Ramblers-webs system. (We were already uploading our walks to the Group walks & events manager.) The whole process, which also embraced a review of communications with our members, has been challenging. Our intention in part was to reduce paper and postal costs. We have been fortunate in having an IT professional amongst our members, who has done a large amount of work on the project. We are very grateful for her contribution. However, training and advice on the system from the Ramblers would be appreciated.

Our walks programme has now settled into a pattern of longer weekly walks on Sundays and shorter fortnightly Wednesday walks. We have found that Saturday walks did not attract sufficient interest to be included in our current programme. We have gained some new regular walkers both on Sundays and Wednesdays. We receive visitors from other groups quite regularly and from potential members. We do, however, face stiff competition from the many alternative local walking groups whose membership costs are a fraction of ours.

We've enjoyed two excellent short breaks; in the Spring at the Hand Hotel in Llangollen, where we enjoyed excellent weather and in the Autumn at Glaramara. Glaramara has modernised its accommodation and most of the rooms are now of a high standard. The food is also excellent. However, the weather in Borrowdale lived up to its reputation as one of England's wettest places.

Our summer coach trip to Clapham, with walks around the area and up to Ingleborough was a wonderful day out. We have, however, been finding it increasingly difficult to fill the coach. Providing an option for those who do not wish to walk, like combining Betws Y Coed and Bodnant Gardens, is not always feasible.

Our well established social programme continues over the winter, drawing upon the world-wide travels of our members and their photographic expertise.

Sadly we have lost a longstanding member and several others have been seriously ill. The Committee has also had to deal with a complaint against us via the Ramblers Complaint Procedure. The initial adjudication, which was mostly in our favour, has been followed by an appeal which is still ongoing and has been time consuming.

This being my first year as chair of the New Mills Group, I should acknowledge the support and contribution of our committee to the running of our group. Notwithstanding some negative points about the year, we continue to focus on organising enjoyable and sociable walks and events in a wonderful part of the country.

David Jones,
Chair

OLDHAM

Oldham ramblers have had a good year. We began the year with a spring weekend at HF holidays house in Sedbergh. In the summer we enjoyed coach trips to Llanfairfechan and Pateley Bridge along with YHA weekends at Patterdale and Grasmere.

All our regular walks have been well attended with the easy 5 milers proving very popular. We introduced short summer evening walks and an afternoon tea walk again very well attended. Our short walk followed by Christmas lunch attracted over 80 members.

We have a very active footpath clearance team organised by John Walton and with dedicated volunteers participating regularly they managed to clear 30 footpaths within the Oldham boundary of vegetation and rubbish.

We are looking forward to another active and enjoyable year in 2018.

Oldham Ramblers group

ROCHDALE

The past year has seen Rochdale Ramblers continue its tradition of organising and leading a variety of walks both in and out of our area. The hard work of delivering the walk programmes has been completed by the programme co-ordinators David and Gill Hollas and Dave Kay and Maureen Rush and the walk reports have highlighted the consistent participation and on some dates, increasing walk numbers.

We again entered walks in the Greater Manchester Walking Festival and the South Pennine Walk and Ride Festival and as usual our walks were well received and attended by members and guest walkers from across the region. Many thanks to the walk leaders Jim, Mick, David, John and Andrew for their time and participation in these events.

Jim Hargreaves organised his usual mid summer 2 day walking break to the Trough of Bowland. Good weather and healthy numbers on both walk days made the mid-week break a really enjoyable experience and our thanks goes to Jim for all his hard work and for Joan Barkers welcome support.

The annual coach trip in September headed for Richmond in North Yorkshire. Maureen and David Butterworth and Gill and David Hollas led two walks and nearly 50 members had a fantastic day in a beautiful part of the Dales. A big thanks to our walk leaders and to Joan Barker for her usual help in this venture.

The membership have been looking at different walking options and with this in mind a historical walk in Manchester City Centre took place in early October. The walk was titled 'Politics and Poverty' and a city Guide, John Alker, led 36 members and guests on a fascinating and well informed 2 hours tour in the city. Feedback was excellent and there may be an appetite for more city walks in future programmes.

Membership continues to be around the 220 mark and as well as our listed walks we continue to have social events throughout the year. The theatre group has not really taken off as yet, partly due to my recent illness, but I will give some more energy to the project next year.

I have written to our two local Members of Parliament, Tony Lloyd and Liz McInnes inviting them on a local ramblers walk. This is part of a Ramblers National Initiative and we look forward to sharing some of our concerns and aspirations with them. I have had a recent response from Tony Lloyd who would be pleased to join us in the New Year.

I managed to secure funding from Central Office to deliver First Aid Training to walk leaders. The training took place in May/June this year and 29 walk leaders received first aid training from the British Red Cross. The feedback from members was excellent and the training gave walk leaders more confidence and expertise in the event of an injury sustained on a walk.

I would again like to place on record my gratitude to all the Committee for their massive contributions throughout the year and for the support from the Area Committee. The newsletter and website continue to be outstanding companions to our walking calendar (special thanks to Roy and Paul) and our local meetings are always well attended and stimulating.

I am sure that 2018 will have a full and interesting programme of walks and all entries in local walking festivals will continue to be well received. I will strive to increase our variety of social activities and there may be an opportunity to organise more overnight trips out of area.

**Richard Gibbons,
Chair**

STOCKPORT

Once again, Stockport Group has had a full programme of walks and events throughout the year. Thanks to our Walks Team and Leaders, we have had been able to provide walks for nearly every Tuesday, Saturday and Sunday.

This year's weekends away were held at Chipping Campden, Whitby and the Elan Valley and also, for the first time, we had a week abroad at Maerhofen, Austria, which was booked up very quickly and thoroughly enjoyed by all those who went. It was so successful that Mike and Kay Pell have organised another week abroad in 2018 at Selva in Italy and this was booked up immediately it was advertised. We have stopped using Youth Hostels for our UK weekends as we were not managing to fill the group bookings and our members mostly seem to prefer to pay a bit more for comfort and their own bathroom.

The summer and winter "hotpot walks" and social evenings have also been well supported.

Footpath work is a priority. We are still asking our members to advise us of any problems with blocked access or overgrowth they may come across on their walks and we investigate these as soon as possible and deal with as necessary.

Sue Daber led a Memorial Walk for Sue Tarr, one of our members who sadly died of cancer. There was a very good turnout for this. Despite being a large group, we are quite close-knit.

Taking us into 2018, we have had one resignation from our committee (Mike Offord, Social Events) but have gained two new committee members (Sarah Hubbard and Alan Jerrold) who will both help with Social Events. I would like to thank all our committee members and also Area EC for their continued help and support.

**Dave Sidgwick,
Chair**

TAMESIDE

Tameside Ramblers is now entering its sixth year, since our formation in early 2013 and since then we have held walks each Wednesday and Saturday throughout the year, with very few exceptions. Our membership has grown slowly each year and in 2017 our numbers were given a boost when we had seven new members join as a direct result of our participation in the Greater Manchester Walking Festival In May 2017, when all of our May walks were included in their brochure.

During the year we had two weekends away, with walks on both the Saturday and Sunday: the first was at Ambleside in the Lake District in March with excellent weather and the other was at Hartington in the Peak District in October. We stayed at Youth Hostels on both occasions. We have introduced regular shorter walks into our programme which have been successful in attracting people unable to complete the longer, harder walks and we have had several social events throughout the year.

In July, we participated in the Ramblers initiative of walking with an MP and Angela Rayner, MP for Ashton-under-Lyne and Shadow Education Minister joined us for a four-mile walk in her constituency. She was accompanied by members of her constituency team. The conversation was varied and included Angela relating tales of life at Westminster whilst our members engaged her in such subjects as building on the green belt, the benefits to health of walking and the local economy and the possible opportunities of a post-Brexit revised agricultural policy offering walkers better access across farm land. It was a lovely, warm day and everyone enjoyed the experience, so much so that Angela and her staff expressed a wish to join us on another walk in the future.

Following a short walk, we held our fifth AGM in October 2017, this time in Stalybridge, continuing our policy of holding our AGMs in different areas of Tameside each year. The majority of the existing committee was re-elected, with just a change of Treasurer and Webmaster. In November, our walk leaders attended a First Aid course which was specifically designed to meet the needs of walkers in remote places.

Stewart Ramsden,
Chair

TRAFFORD

We continue to offer weekly walks on Thursdays of moderate grade and distance (7 to 11 miles), and stroller walks on alternate Saturdays with distances of between 4 and 5 miles. The Saturday walks are very well attended and I'm pleased to report that in recent weeks, the numbers for our Thursday walks have increased. I would like to thank members of the committee for their contributions and also our walk leaders. It would be very helpful if we could recruit more leaders for the Thursday walks as at present we rely mainly on four leaders with occasional walks led by two other members. Our Saturday strolls are usually organised by two leaders.

This year we have again been involved with other groups by providing led walks and publicity. In particular RTG has taken part in two Transport for Greater Manchester Walking Festivals. We provided led walks in 2017 for both the May walking month, and the October walking week. On each occasion new walkers attended and were very positive about the walks and the group. In July, our leaders repeated their annual walk on behalf of the Kindling Trust visiting their FARMSTART site at High Legh followed by tea and cakes at Abbey Leys Farm.

Angela Hilton,
Chair

WIGAN AND DISTRICT

This year we have enjoyed some lovely walks with both coach and local footpath rambles. Our membership numbers remain constant.

We have had the usual social events, the annual weekend away and the Christmas lunch, which were both well attended.

The finances are in good order. The general fund which enables the group to operate continues to be funded by London/Manchester and we are working within budget.

Our footpath officer works well with Wigan Council both to ensure the footpaths are maintained and with the local access committee.

The treasurer is stepping down this year and we need to fill the very important role.

The website continues to be well accessed.

The running of the group is in the hands of a great committee who work very hard. As ever, we are always in need of more members to join the committee which meets on the last Wednesday of the month.

Peter Wilson,
Chair

COACH RAMBLERS GROUP

Once again, we had a successful year with an increased number of people joining our excursions. In all, we had 24 excursions with 73 led walks. We visited a wide range of places, including Ulverston in South Lakeland, Ruthin and Loggerheads in Wales. On the Ruthin/Loggerheads excursion we were joined by members of the Weekend Walkers, who also provided leaders for the day. Overall, the arrangement worked very well, with virtually no spare seats on the coach following what were initially quite low ticket sales.

Overall, the number of people joining us on our trips has increased and they have been better supported than the last year or so. We have had almost full capacity on several occasions. However, this may not have been reflected in our membership numbers, as we are frequently joined by existing members from other local groups. Once again we were able to provide three led walks on each occasion, the length of walks varying between 7 miles and 13 miles and in addition one A (strenuous) walk which was well supported. We continue to meet at Chorlton Street Manchester (opposite the bus station) on alternate Sundays at 8.50 am., and pick up and drop off at various points depending on the route taken to our destination, leaving our destination for our return journey normally at 6.00pm (summer) 5.30pm (winter).

Sadly, we lost one of our members this year, Alfred Young, who was a pleasant and popular member and who is sadly missed.

Although our coach trips have been better supported overall, we are still short of leaders in common with other groups. So far this year we have been able to provide three led walks on each excursion (with four led walks at Loggerheads) but so far have been unable to recruit enough leaders for two of our trips this year. We have also been unable to recruit a footpath officer.

David Bancroft,
Coach Organiser