

MINUTES OF
BRISTOL RAMBLERS GROUP COMMITTEE MEETING
23rd AUGUST 2023, BRADBURY HALL, HENLEAZE

0 ATTENDEES

Heather Toyne (Chair), Peter Budden, Tony Parsons, Geoff Daniels, Keith Budd, Ceiswyn Blake, Carew Reynell, Sarah Marshall, Bob Gibson, Sue Fox.

1 APOLOGIES AND WELCOME

HT welcomed everyone to the meeting, in particular guest Bob Gibson. There were no apologies for absence.

2 APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The minutes (Draft 3) of the last meeting, held on 31st May 2023, were accepted as an accurate record of that meeting.

3. ACTIONS FROM THE LAST MEETING

HT noted that all actions from the last meeting were either complete or covered under agenda items.

4. WALK/MEMBERSHIP NUMBERS AND ISSUES

The number of Bristol Ramblers members reduced slightly from 686 to 659 between July 2022 and July 2023.

SF reported on Wednesday and Saturday walks held between 31st May and 19th August. Wednesday walks were generally well attended if held locally, but otherwise numbers were low, with walks held on 6 out of 12 Wednesdays. Average attendance had increased to 12 - 13. For Saturdays, SF noted that 8 of 12 recent walks had been led by Aubrey Newport (AN) and only 4 by other leaders so that the programme is maintained largely by his efforts. The average attendance on Saturdays was 8 with walks held on each Saturday.

ACTION HT to contact AN and thank him for continuing to support the Saturday programme given the significant challenges.

Paula Cannings had reported that the average number attending B walks has been 15, with a maximum of 22, and with a range of leaders.

BG noted that the average attendance on A walks has reduced slightly from 12 to 11, with the corresponding ranges changing from 9 -17 to 3 – 17. There is a range of leaders, with some gains and some losses. Generally, the programme is proceeding satisfactorily.

5. MEETUP REVIEW

BG summarised his review of the trial use of MeetUp for arranging attendance on A walks; see Attachment 1. BG recommended that the trial of MeetUp should be stopped but then reviewed in two or three years. This recommendation was endorsed by the Committee.

DECISION The trial use of MeetUp for organising A walks should be stopped and reviewed in 2 or 3 years.

There followed some discussion on introducing 'Introductory A Walks' to encourage new A walkers. These might be of slightly shorter length, say 12 miles, on a Saturday, in the Bristol area, starting say at 10:00 (compared with 08:00 for the usual Sunday A walks), on a one- or two-month rolling basis. This could be trialled for a year and then reviewed. The trial could be commenced in November, with a further such walk in January 2024, and then reviewed by the Committee in Autumn of 2024. This idea was endorsed by the Committee.

DECISION A trial of Saturday A walks was agreed by the Committee with a review in Autumn 2024.

6. FACEBOOK REVIEW

The use of Facebook by Bristol Ramblers was discussed; see the report in Attachment 2. The report raised two questions for consideration by the Committee.

With respect to Question 1, the current approach of removing posted content which did not relate solely to promoting Bristol Ramblers walks was discussed. It was agreed that whilst this principle was broadly endorsed, Administrators could use their discretion.

HT also highlighted the 'wordy' introduction on our Facebook page, and agreed to review it. CB volunteered to be the Group's Facebook Administrator together with HT, and HT agreed to add CB as Administrator.

ACTION HT to review the introductory wording on the Group's Facebook page.

ACTION HT to add CB as Administrator to Facebook.

For Question 2, it was considered that the use of Facebook to actively promote forthcoming walks was up to individual leaders should they wish to engage with Facebook. The possible use of Facebook for promoting introductory walks was agreed and BG and CB would ensure relevant information was posted on Facebook.

ACTION BG and CB to add content to Facebook to promote individual 'introductory' A walks.

7. NATIONAL WALK MANAGER CHANGES

TP described the situation with respect to recent changes to Walk Manager after about two months operation. Its functioning is currently not perfect but any issues are expected to be fixed. Three out of four Walk Coordinators (Paula Cannings, Aubrey Newport, BG) are using the system. TP offered to explain how this can be done to Margaret Ruse (MR) and will contact her.

ACTION TP to contact MR to support her to use Walk Manager.

The need for the continued use of a parallel system of recording walks on a spreadsheet as well as Walk Manager was discussed, with respect to ensuring those who wished to could print off the Walks Programme. It was agreed that TP would no longer need to produce a parallel system of spreadsheets provided any requirements of members to be able to print the programme could be tested and addressed. He would continue to periodically download our walks programme from Walk Manager to provide a historic record. Numbers on walks would continue to be recorded either by TP or by Walk Coordinators.

DECISION The parallel system of spreadsheets to capture the Walks Programme would be stopped provided any requirements of members to be able to print the programme could be tested and addressed.

TP asked for clarification on whether the old GDPR process was relevant, now that individual leaders set their own permissions in Walk Manager. It was agreed by the Committee that the new process in

Walk Manager addressed GDPR and that the historic process instigated by TP and Wendy Britton was no longer necessary or relevant.

DECISION The old GDPR process was no longer required as this was superseded by the permissions process in Walk Manager.

8. WEBSITE

SM and TP have done a lot of work on the Group's website and explained some of the updates; for example, updating and consolidating information on specific subjects including new walkers, benefits for members, and sustainability, as well as simplifying the update notifications. HT and SM agreed to discuss further changes, for example, photographs.

ACTION HT & SM to discuss further changes to website in particular the use of photographs.

The policy for archiving past records was discussed. It was considered that these should include old walk programmes, copies of eBoot, AGM minutes and Committee meeting minutes, the last with restricted access. CR agreed to consider the retention policy and report back to the Committee.

ACTION CR to advise on document retention policy at the first 2024 Committee meeting.

9. TRACKLOG LIBRARY

There was some discussion on the Tracklog library. It was agreed to be a good idea in principle but needs a person to be dedicated to its upkeep. There have been no volunteers to act as its curator. HT therefore suggested that the initiative cannot continue but asked for any comments. Following discussion, it was agreed not to continue with the Tracklog library. KB will pass this message on to MR.

ACTION KB to mention to MR the Committee decision to not maintain the Tracklog library.

10. WALK FEST UPDATE

See Attachment 3 for a report on the 2023 Walk Fest. The recommendations arising include the need to start planning early and to carefully check the online programme for errors, noting that such errors have previously occurred.

CR agreed to check if Walk Fest 2024 has been confirmed and whether Eileen Bartlett will be continuing as the main contact.

ACTION CR to check on the status of Walk Fest for 2024 and whether Eileen Bartlett will remain the main point of contact.

11. AGM 19th OCTOBER

The talk to be given at the AGM in Redland Green Bowls Club on 19th October by KB and CR was raised. The subject will be the Alta Via in the Dolomites. The projector has been arranged and the talk is expected to last about 45 minutes. CB will liaise with the speakers concerning a mention in eBoot. HT will send round a request for Committee members to offer to bring food and drink, as per last year, to be reimbursed through the Treasurer.

ACTION HT to email Committee members for offers to bring food and drink to the AGM.

ACTION CB to liaise with KB and CR for an eBoot article on their talk at the forthcoming AGM.

HT will ask for contributions to the Group's Annual Report prior to the AGM and SM will then put the completed report on the Group's website two weeks prior to the AGM. KB will email the report and agenda.

12. BRISTOL RAMBLERS TREASURER POSITION 2023/4

There had been no volunteers for the position of Group Treasurer as a result of the Call in a recent edition of eBoot. However, BG has since offered to act as Treasurer and his offer was gratefully accepted by the Committee.

13. TREASURER'S REPORT

GD reported that there were adequate funds in the Group's bank account. The current balance of funds was £4263, £2457 of which is categorised as 'Restricted'. It was noted that the £1000 sponsorship of Walk Fest in 2024 would come from the 'Restricted' funds.

In the light of GD resigning his position as Group Treasurer following the forthcoming AGM (see agenda item 12), HT thanked GD for his services to the Group on behalf of the Committee.

14. AREA COUNCIL UPDATE

CR reported that the Area Council (AC) had discussed its role. It acts as a single point of contact for the 9 area Groups, funds initiatives and supports working teams. Jeff Rowlands is on the AC and provides a valuable source of information. There was no other particular feedback. The AC is now meeting less often than previously, with virtual attendance possible, and has its own website.

15. NATIONAL RA UPDATE

There was nothing to report.

16. FUTURE MEETINGS

The dates for future Committee meetings were arranged by Doodle poll subsequent to this meeting as 7th November 2023 and 10th January 2024.

17. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The issue of possible future coach trips was raised by BG. CR noted that coach trips had been stopped for financial reasons as they had lost money. It was queried whether there was sufficient interest within Bristol Ramblers or other Groups in the Area to make future coach trips viable. BG agreed to do some research and report back to the Committee at its next meeting.

ACTION BG to investigate the level of interest for possible future coach trips.

HT then closed the meeting and thanked everyone for their attendance.

Peter Budden

25th October 2023 (Draft 3, Reviewed by Committee)

LIST OF DECISIONS

- DECISION** The trial use of MeetUp for organising A walks should be stopped and reviewed in 2 or 3 years.
- DECISION** A trial of Saturday A walks was agreed by the Committee with a review in Autumn 2024.
- DECISION** The parallel system of spreadsheets to capture the Walks Programme would be stopped provided any requirements of members to be able to print the programme could be tested and addressed.
- DECISION** The old GDPR process was no longer required as this was superseded by the permissions process in Walk Manager.

LIST OF ACTIONS

- ACTION** HT to contact AN and thank him for continuing to support the Saturday programme given the significant challenges.
- ACTION** HT to review the introductory wording on the Group's Facebook page
- ACTION** HT to add CB as Administrator to Facebook.
- ACTION** BG and CB to add content to Facebook to promote individual 'introductory' A walks.
- ACTION** TP to contact MR to support her to use Walk Manager.
- ACTION** HT & SM to discuss further changes to website in particular the use of photographs.
- ACTION** CR to advise on document retention policy at the first 2024 Committee meeting.
- ACTION** KB to mention to MR the Committee decision to not maintain the Tracklog library.
- ACTION** CR to check on the status of Walk Fest for 2024 and whether Eileen Bartlett will remain the main point of contact.
- ACTION** HT to email Committee members for offers to bring food and drink to the AGM.
- ACTION** CB to liaise with KB and CR for an eBoot article on their talk at the forthcoming AGM.
- ACTION** BG to investigate the level of interest for possible future coach trips.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1: Review of Bristol Ramblers' Trial of MeetUp

Trial Background:

Concern was raised during summer 2022 that Sunday A walk attendance numbers were low.

The Avon Area was offering to fund a pilot of any local groups wanting to trial Meetup to attract new members.

Bristol Ramblers agreed to do this, and Carew activated the 'Bristol Hill Walkers' Meetup account in March 2023.

The current cost is around £14 per month, although can be shared threeways to bring it down to nearly £5 per month.

The aim was to attract new members to join the Ramblers and walk with Bristol's Sunday A group.

Meetup (MU) background:

MU was founded in the US in 2002. In 2020 it was sold by its [now bankrupt] owners to a Venture Capitalist that injected money to increase marketing globally, doubling global membership to 60 million, and raising subscription fees to fund this. The UK has the 7th highest penetration of countries where MU operates (US is #1). London, Edinburgh & Manchester are in the list of top 50 cities outside the US for MU penetration. Bristol is not. It has been calculated that about **1.4%** (confidence bounds: 1% to 2%) of **people** in the **greater Bristol** area **have a MU account**. Meanwhile, the growth of MU, and discontent with its pricing, has led to a number of copycat competitors springing up.

Trial Results:

- 16 Bristol Ramblers joined MU to 'seed' the group. There have been 142 other applicants (averaging between 1 and 2 per day). 5 were rejected and 7 have since left.
- 17 rambles have been advertised on MU.
- **The MU platform has persuaded 11 people who were not already members of ramblers to walk with us, 9 of them from Bristol, 5 of whom have been on 2 or more walks, 2 of which have now joined Bristol Ramblers.**
- In addition we had a number of current ramblers from other groups (LDWA in particular) join us on walks.
- During the same period we also had 3 non-ramblers attend those walks who did not come via MU.
- On average 50% of non-ramblers who initially RSVP as 'going' to one of our events on MU subsequently change their status to 'not going' or don't turn up. This varies between 0% to 100% for any given walk.
- MU generates an average of 1.9 queries per walk, mostly asking about dogs or lifts (or both).
- 78% of non-ramblers who join us via MU at Priory Road do not have their own car.
- Some walk leaders have expressed mild concerns about the variability of potential MU attendees.

The 'Competition':

Bob has been out walking with a number of other MU groups to get a feel for what else is out there, talking to other group organisers in particular.

Walks on MU are typically (but not always) shorter, often between 3 miles to 10 miles, outside of LDWA groups. Walks are often oversubscribed with people on 'waitlists'. The key constraint is the ratio of walk leaders to walkers. There is very little evidence of car sharing, unlike Bristol Ramblers. Each individual MU group usually has a small loyal core of members, with a large number of 'others' who don't always know which group they're walking with at any given time. The 'others' often change their minds about attending or don't turn up, especially if precipitation is forecast.

The largest walking group in our area is over 10 years old, has more than 6,500 members, the large **majority of whom have never been on a single one of the group's events**. It still attracts 1 to 2 new joiners to the group each day.

Conclusion:

MU is popular in London, but not sufficiently so in Bristol at the moment for it to be an efficient Marketing tool in this trial. Continuing will likely only generate a very small number of people to join Bristol Ramblers at current penetration levels.

Pro's: The group's presence on MU may lead to a few more non-Bristol ramblers (especially LDWA) attending rambles.

Con's: There is a potential risk of new MU attendees swamping the number of car drivers on walks occasionally, and some negative impact on some current walk leaders.

Options:

1) Continue with the trial as is, to see if MU penetration in Bristol increases, and with it Bristol Ramblers joiners. NB

Ramblers nationally are promoting the use of MU as one of several strands to help branches grow membership.

2) Continue with a modified trial, putting only some rambles on MU, and explicitly labelling them as introductory events',

with leaders who are keen on MU attendees.

3) Investigate other similar platforms instead of MU (eg OddCircle).

4) Concentrate on other forms of building membership instead.

Attachment 2: Use of Facebook by Bristol Ramblers**Current situation**

Bristol Ramblers currently has a Facebook page which is mainly used to post pictures of walks by a small number of regular walkers. The Bristol Ramblers Facebook site is public, meaning anyone can post content, whether or not they are a regular walker or member of the Bristol Ramblers.

Role of the Administrators

There are currently two Administrators, Paula Cannings and Heather Toyne. They have two main roles. *Firstly* to remove content deemed inappropriate. Inappropriate content which has been removed in the last year by the Administrators includes:

- Advertising (for example Walking Wellingtons and holidays)
- Promotion of other groups (such as Nordik Walking)
- Promotion of non-walking events – including those being supported by members of Bristol Ramblers
- Inappropriate photos – a notable example included partially clad sunbathing ladies

Secondly, because there are few leaders checking Facebook regularly, the Administrators also ensure that anyone posting comments/questions are responded to appropriately. Such posts in the last year included:

- Where is the walk on Saturday/Sunday starting from?
- How can I share lifts, how does that work?
- Are your walks public transport accessible or do I need a car?
- Please can you send me a track log of the walk on Sunday (which resulted in 9 emails trying to locate a tracklog).
- Do I need to join Ramblers to go on a walk
- Is there any Footpath work going on at the moment, how do I get involved with this?

Responding to posts can be time consuming, because email cannot be used – only Facebook Messenger which not everyone uses or checks.

Extending the potential use of Facebook

Given the decline in membership and numbers on walks, there is an option to use Facebook, both our own Facebook page, and that of local community Facebook group. This would require a dedicated person(s) to do the following:

- Pasting the content about the forthcoming walks
- Checking for comments/questions regularly and responding if there are questions about forthcoming walks - which is likely to significantly increase if we were using Facebook proactively.

Any further increase in the use of the Bristol Ramblers Facebook page is not likely to be manageable by the two current Administrators.

Questions for the committee:

1. Do you agree that Administrators should continue to remove content for 4 reasons listed above – in particular, to ensure Bristol Ramblers Facebook page is not used to promote anything other than Bristol Ramblers walks?
2. Should we extend our use of Facebook to actively promote forthcoming walks and if so, how could we expand our ability/capacity to support this for example:
 - a. Social media officer so we can use Facebook proactively to promote forthcoming walks?
 - b. Extending the number of people responding to comments – for example, leaders or other committee members so we could use Facebook proactively to promote forthcoming walks

Attachment 3: WalkFest 2023 Review and Lessons Learned

Lessons for the WalkFest office

It all worked pretty well: the systems that have been developed over the years generally worked.

The online programme is still not very satisfactory, so people should be directed to the downloadable programme.

There have been a total of 278 participants in the 2023 Walk Fest on walks organised by the BR Group. Of these, 149 were not members of the Ramblers. This attendance compares favourably with the 2022 numbers of 216 and 106, respectively

Lessons for Bristol Ramblers

We learned that the information for the WalkFest online walks programme has to be entered manually. There were a couple of errors, so we should check it more carefully in future. It may not be wise to use CR's phone number as the default contact point - he missed a couple of calls.

Walk descriptions are important - some walks could be made to appear more appealing.

We could provide photos for walks on the online programme.

We had disappointingly few new walks this year. We should do more to encourage members to contribute walks.

We should do more to encourage our members to take advantage of the other walks on offer (Keith to provide an eBoot article).

Evening walks outside of Bristol generally didn't attract large numbers.