

Ramblers - Surrey Area - Sutton & Wandle Valley Group

Minutes from the Annual General Meeting 2025

Held on Sunday 23 November 2025 at 2.30pm in the Robin Hood Pub, Sutton SM1 1SH

The River Wandle

A film about the River Wandle was shown before the start of the formal meeting. The film was introduced by Bobby Dean, MP for Carshalton and Wallington, who lives close to the Wandle which is one of only 200 chalk streams in the world. Communities along the river date back to the Roman era and Saxons. The river was fast flowing making it suitable for powering mills, and a Snuff Mill was recorded in the Domesday Book. There were also corn mills, paper, William Morris textiles and tobacco, some 60 mills in total. As a result of this industrialisation, the river suffered from severe pollution and by the mid-1960s was declared ecologically dead.

Since then, there has been a considerable effort to clean up the river with the Council and local groups working together. Enormous amounts of litter ranging from plastic bags and bottles to old bikes and parts of mopeds have been removed. As a result, fish, including trout, can be seen in the river as well as insects, water fowl, herons and egrets in the surrounding habitat.

Some parts of the river are still not clean – sewage can be a major problem during periods of heavy rain when drains can't cope. Water companies can legally discharge sewage into the river. There are ongoing projects to reduce the flood risk. The spillage of diesel from a bus garage earlier this year had a massive impact on water birds and wildlife. This incident received a lot of coverage, and the Environment Agency had been involved in investigating the cause and tackling the pollution. Bobby Dean is fighting to get the river back to its best.

In answer to questions raised:

- The monthly clean-ups by volunteers, which stopped during Covid, have not restarted. Health & Safety issues need to be resolved especially the risks associated with going in the river. Bobby would look into it.
- The investigation into the diesel spillage being undertaken by the Environment Agency had been going on for months. This was frustrating but there were legal issues around ownership to be resolved. Any funds for restoration work were being delayed (although the bus company had paid for the initial response).
- Some advice had suggested that the oil from the spill would stay on the surface and be washed into the Thames. This was not the case and a lot of it sank into the riverbed.
- Options are being explored to deal with the sewage issue. Some downstream defenders were in place.

Present: Chair plus 38 members (members and committee)

Introductory remarks and welcome by Chair: BP welcomed everyone to the AGM.

Apologies for Absence – 9 members had sent their apologies

Minutes from AGM held 17th November 2024 – approved with no amendments.

Matters arising from the Minutes: BP spoke briefly about the Walk Leader training and the work that JC had been doing as Membership Secretary. Both would be discussed in more detail later in the meeting.

Annual Report from the Chair: BP thanked committee members for their contributions to the annual report for the year ending 30 September 2025. The report had been made available to members in advance. She would not go through it in detail, but this meeting was an opportunity for discussion.

BP highlighted the Group celebrations to mark its 30th anniversary. These had been enjoyed and well supported by members, many of whom had participated in the successful series of walks totalling 30 miles around the borough, followed by a wonderful party.

The only downside during the year had been the Ramblers requirement for walk leaders to undertake online training and, separately, the demise of the printed programme. BP recognised that losing the printed programme had been a disappointment to many members and the decision had not been taken lightly. The reasons were increased costs (both printing and postage) and losing PB as our Webmaster. Without PB's knowledge and skills, it was no longer possible to operate our own Walks Submission system which had enabled us to download the walks information in a form to create the programme. We had now made the move to using Ramblers Walks Manager.

BP commented that both walk leaders and members would need to adopt new ways of working. She was pleased that leaders had embraced Walks Manager and most were using it. There was no longer a 4-month cycle of submitting walks so that discipline had been lost. Instead walks could be submitted at any time and BP recommended that walks are uploaded as early as possible so as to give members plenty of notice. LT would be sending reminders to walk leaders to submit walks. For members, they would need to check the website rather than their printed programme but the advantage would be that it would always provide up-to-date information. Anyone without internet access was invited to contact BP or another member if they needed information about the walks. A summary list of walks could be printed from Walks Manager.

Walk Leader training – BP asked whether leaders had done the training or alternatively signed a declaration that they had led 12 walks over the last 3 years. There was a good show of hands confirming this. Anyone who still needed to complete the training must do so by the end of December to avoid being removed from Ramblers list of walk leaders.

BP moved on to the report from the Membership Secretary (JC) who was unable to attend

the meeting. Overall membership numbers were holding steady (428 at the end of September) but there was a lot of churn which we don't understand. We had 89 new members but within months many have left – JC had been trying to investigate the reasons. We had 74 leavers in total last year so a net rise in membership of 15. JC had also done a lot of work on ensuring that the list of members and their contact details were complete and correct and that they matched the Mailchimp list. This was an essential, time-consuming piece of work to ensure that we could continue to contact members.

BP moved on to report on the walks programme which had been good over the last year. There were slightly more walks in 2024/5 than the previous year but on average they were slightly shorter. BP emphasised the need for more walk leaders.

On the social side, there were two successful coach trips (thanks to the leaders) and there will be two in the coming year. MF and team had organised the Anniversary party, JP had led several short holidays, JK had organized visits to places of interest, JRT continued to host the monthly coffee mornings and DF organized the monthly Raves. All these volunteers were thanked. The Raves had used 3 different venues over the year but now seemed to have found a home at The Old Bank pub. The destinations for next year's coach trips were to be decided but leaders had volunteered for the three walks on the April trip.

BP then thanked the committee members who were stepping down – PB for his 7 years' service as Webmaster and CH for his 3 years as Treasurer. Both much appreciated.

Questions/comments on Annual report

- MF asked about the recent decision that walk leaders should take a register of everyone on their walk including a phone number. It was clarified that the phone number should be the walker's mobile number – the idea is that they could be contacted if they became detached from the group for some reason. Walkers should also carry an ICE (In Case of Emergency) card with them that gives a phone number for friend or relative to be contacted in case of illness or accident.
- SB commented that she was very impressed by the report. There had been a lot of hard work by BP, committee and other walk leaders – they were the people who kept the organisation going. She thanked everyone involved. BP thanked SB and said that the Group had a good committee who did a lot of work behind the scenes.

The Annual Report was approved by a show of hands

Approval of Accounts for year ending 30th September 2025: CH reported that the finances were in good shape. The Main balance had reduced by about £300 over the year but was still just under £600. The Self-funded account (for coach trip, socials etc) had a closing balance of just over £400. CH commented that the people who spent money on behalf of the Group kept costs down and got VFM. He appreciated this and thanked them.

Approval of the Accounts was proposed by RD, seconded by JD and approved by a show of hands.

Independent Examiner: PR was thanked for his work as Independent Examiner. His re-

appointment was proposed by AD, seconded by MF and approved by a show of hands.

Election of Officers: BP explained that some Officers had a 3-year limit on their roles. In addition, no-one could serve more than 6 consecutive years on the committee. All committee members are (re)elected each year. One nomination had been received for each post except Webmaster; there were no further nominations from the floor.

BP named the 8 Committee members who were standing for re-election in the same posts. These were: Chair – BP, Membership – JC, Secretary – LT, Social – JD, Member Liaison – JK, Member – AD, Member – JRT, Footpaths – SD. They were proposed en bloc by PP, seconded by JD. All re-elected by a show of hands.

Second, two Committee members who were being elected new to post were proposed together: Treasurer – IH and Publicity – MW. Proposed by AD, seconded by JW and elected by a show of hands. New members IH and MW were thanked for volunteering to join the committee.

BP thanked PB and CH (who were leaving the committee) for their service and presented them with gift cards.

AOB:

BP asked how people felt about using Walks Manager, was it OK? There was an encouraging show of hands. There was a brief discussion on the new way of working – no longer a need to plan 3 months ahead but walk leaders should be encouraged to give sufficient notice of their walks. If not, members who would have gone on the walk might have arranged something else. LT commented that walks can be published at any time and a number of walks for February and March (and beyond) were already published. LT would send reminders to walk leaders.

LT commented that there was still a need to collect walk numbers to produce the analysis in the Annual Report. This was less straightforward with Walks Manager and she would continue to investigate alternative ways of doing it. Walk leaders should continue to report numbers to BP.

PR highlighted that, although walks disappeared off the website when the date had passed, it was possible on Walks Manager to find the details of old walks. Need to access the Table view, filter by the required date range and it would show all the details of the walk except the contact details (phone number/email). Details can then be copied if the leader wants to submit the walk in future.

There was discussion of possible venues for the 2026 coach trips. The following were suggested: Rye, Banbury, Battle, Hambledon, Cambridge, Henley and Eastbourne. There was agreement on Henley for April, possibly Eastbourne in the autumn.

Date and Venue of 2026 AGM: Those present agreed on returning to the Robin Hood pub on a Sunday.

2025 AGM 23/11/25

(Post meeting comment – date will be either Sunday 22 November 2026 or Sunday 29 November 2026)

The meeting closed at 3.40pm.