



RAMBLERS

Oxfordshire

OXFORDSHIRE RAMBLERS

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ANNUAL REPORT

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FOR THE YEAR 2024

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CHAIR

I have been honoured to serve as Chair of Oxfordshire Ramblers for the past year. As a Ramblers Area we perform the following functions:

- Consider planning applications that may impact on the walking environment;
- Comment on the many applications to change or amend the footpaths;
- Organise and train the Parish Path Wardens who monitor and report on the state of our footpaths;
- Fund the equipment for the Group path maintenance teams and the training of the team members;
- Organise First Aid courses for Walk Leaders and Path Maintenance Team members
- Co-ordinate the Oxfordshire Walks Programme
- Fund the replacement of stiles with kissing gates.



During the past year we have held four Area Council meetings by ZOOM, enjoyed a successful annual picnic at Holton Orchard (hosted by Thame & Wheatley Group), held a First Aid course in Nettlebed, and held a Parish Path Wardens Training course. Membership has increased by 2.7% to 2367, its highest ever level.

Firstly I would like to give a massive “thank you” all the Officers of the Area Council for their hard work and support during the past year.

Secondly I would like to thank all of the volunteers on the Group Committees, the Path Maintenance Teams, the Walks Leaders and the Parish Path Wardens. These hundreds of volunteers give up their time to ensure that we have a wonderful footpath network in Oxfordshire for all of our members to enjoy.

Finally I would like to thank all of you as members. Without your support we would not be able to carry out many of these tasks.

The following reports give information on the successes and challenges during the past year.

Of course there are always challenges and areas where we need to improve. For 2025 these include:

- the struggle to get volunteers for key roles on the Area and Group Committees;
- the need for more Walk Leaders so that we can maintain our excellent programme of led walks;
- the need to introduce an effective process for assessing and responding to Public Notices relating to Public Rights of Way (PRoW);
- The Botley West Solar Farm planning application. If the application is approved by the Government it would be the largest solar farm in Europe and have a major impact on the enjoyment of walking the footpaths in the area;
- the large reservoir near to Abingdon, proposed by Thames Water, which has a 10-year construction period.

Come and join us to continue our excellent work in maintaining and enjoying our PRoW, and ensuring that we obtain the best possible outcomes from the major planning applications in Oxfordshire.

Richard Birch

SECRETARY



This year I attended cluster groups via Central Office where problems which were encountered by Areas and Groups from attracting walk leaders and keeping. I also attended the 30th anniversary of the Bicester & Kidlington Group which was attended by both myself and Richard Birch.

Rosemary Williams

TREASURER

The Ramblers Association Oxfordshire Area Income & Expenditure for the year ended 30 September 2024

	2024	2023
	£	£
INCOME		
Funding from Ramblers	7000	7000
DLYW (Restricted)	0	0
Other	502	0
TOTAL INCOME	7502	7000
EXPENDITURE		
Group Funding	2745	1942
Walks – programmes / related / leader training	282	552
Newsletters/publicity – South East Walker	1818	1344
Campaigns/casework – PPW Workshop / Co-ordination	170	609
Practical work – Path maintenance tools / repairs	1831	1157
DLYW (Restricted)	0	0
Admin / Meetings / Other – ZOOM / Hall hire / Expenses	1012	397
TOTAL EXPENDITURE	7857	6001
SURPLUS/(DEFICIT)	-355	999
Opening bank balance	8249	7249
Closing bank balance	7894	8248
Designated funds (kissing gates)	1000	1900
Reserves (excluding designated)	6894	6348

The Area's income was from the allocation of funds from the Ramblers Association. A donation was received towards Ewelme Steps Project from Oxfordshire County Council.

The two kissing gates for Bicester & Kidlington Group, for which £900 was designated for the year, have not yet been completed and the money is carried forward into next financial year. In addition £100 was designated for additional wood for the Ewelme Steps project.

Included in Practical work total is contribution to Ewelme Steps project of £1,448.

Our Reserves (excluding designated funds) at the end of the financial year were £6,894 (Reserves Percentage 131%). The Ramblers guideline is that the reserves percentage should be within the range 40% to 100% so we will aim to reduce our reserves in the 2024-25 financial year.

The Independent Examiner for Oxfordshire Ramblers Accounts for the 2023 – 2024 financial year was Mr S A Kenner.

Dawn Pezzella

FOOTPATH SECRETARY

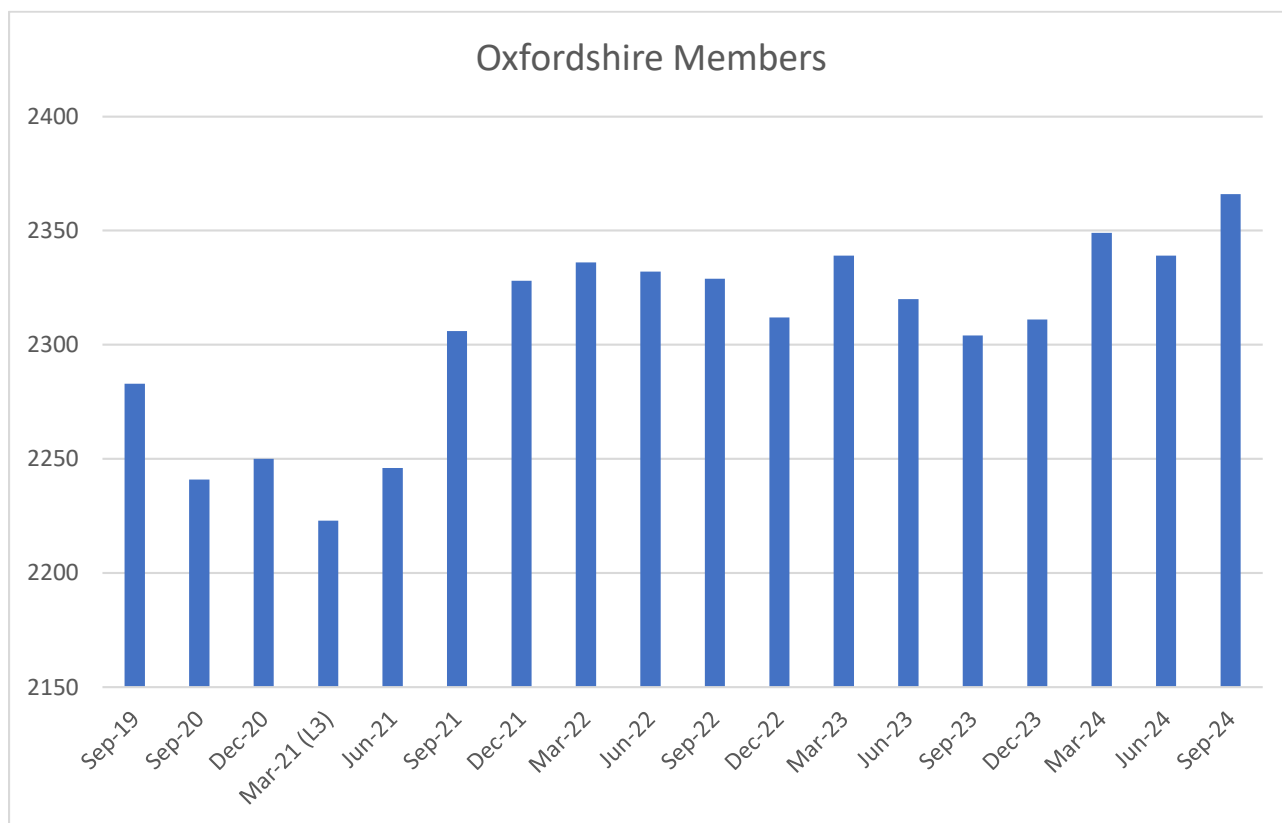
David Godfrey, our long-time Area Footpath Secretary, retired from the role one year ago. Recognising that it is a challenging role we split it into the Area Footpath (North) and Area Footpath (South). Terry Pollard volunteered to be the Area Footpath Secretary for the North but unfortunately we were unable to get a volunteer for the South.

During the year we have struggled to propose an efficient process to consider the Oxfordshire County Council Notices which consult on changes to Public Rights of Way (PRoW) in Oxfordshire. However, a proposal was put forward to our last Area Council Meeting for discussion. It was proposed that an index, giving the status of all the live OCC Notices, will be maintained on the Oxfordshire Ramblers website.

Group Footpath Secretaries and Parish Path Wardens will easily be able to see the OCC Notices for their area and feed back any concerns. The [Index of OCC PRoW Notices](#) can be found on the Oxfordshire Ramblers website under 'footpath protection'.

During 2024 there were 44 OCC Notices closed relating to PRoW in Oxfordshire. A further 12 orders have recently been confirmed and there are 8 OCC Notices currently under consultation. There are 4 opposed orders that have been submitted to the Planning Inspectorate for determination.

MEMBERSHIP



	Previous Years (on 30 September)					Current Year (ending 30 September 2024)				
	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	Joiners	Leavers	Members	Growth	Retention
B&NO	299	298	296	284	280	57	-47	290	3.6%	84%
B&K	183	192	189	204	199	35	-26	208	4.5%	90%
D&W	164	166	177	168	168	35	-49	154	-8.3%	78%
H&G	353	336	363	367	390	78	-55	413	5.9%	88%
HO	61	57	53	62	53	36	-17	72	35.8%	74%
Ox	290	279	286	283	273	48	-54	267	-2.2%	84%
OWW	136	139	147	151	147	28	-28	147	0.0%	84%
TW	181	183	192	199	196	40	-39	197	0.5%	82%
VoWH	317	308	317	321	301	33	-56	278	-7.6%	84%
WO	177	174	190	190	190	37	-33	194	2.1%	87%
Blitz & Klean	1	1	3	3	3	1	0	4		
Ox Strollers	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	3		
Unallocated	121	108	93	97	104	94	-58	140	34.6%	76%
Internal Transfers						-55	55			
Oxfordshire	2283	2241	2306	2329	2304	470	-407	2367	2.7%	84.3%

- Group numbers include internal transfers between Oxfordshire Groups.
- There was a large increase in members after the end of Covid restrictions in July 2021.

- Steady increase in members post pandemic is driven by excellent growth in HO, HG, BK, and BNO.
- There is a large rise in 'unallocated' members ie members not allocated to a Group. There is an initiative to encourage these members to transfer to a Group in order to improve communications.
- Our member retention rate is 84.3% which is comparable with the Ramblers national rate and other large charities eg National Trust (5.37 Million members 84.2% retention rate).

Pat Lonergan

PARISH PATH WARDEN NETWORK

The Parish Path Warden (PPW) scheme has continued to operate throughout the year.

With oversight from myself as Network Coordinator the team of Local Coordinators have supported local PPWs in parishes across the County and City area. During the year we have said goodbye to Tony Clark (Thame & Wheatley) and Rosemary Clegg (West Oxfordshire) as Local Coordinators – thank you both for your years of work in these roles – and have welcomed Alan Bonham to replace Tony. We are still without a Local Coordinator for West Oxon, so I am covering this for now.

In late April we ran a training day in Fringford (near Bicester) for Parish Path Wardens. A lovely location and the village hall hosted over 30 PPWs from across the County along with a number of Oxfordshire County Council staff who not only explained a range of legal and practical issues but also led the afternoon walks looking at practical issues.

We have continued to liaise closely with OCC Rights of Way staff to highlight locations where footpaths etc need some attention. PPWs have been encouraged to report issues and monitoring via the County's online reporting system [CAMSWeb](#) - this facility is open to all as a simple way to report matters of concern when you are out walking and I would strongly recommend its use by all Oxfordshire Ramblers.

In the last year we have had a good number of people (both Ramblers members and others) become PPWs alongside those who have decided it's time to cease being involved in this way. The current list of parishes with vacancies for PPWs is shown on the [website](#) so if you feel you can help in this way, do please get in touch via the website.

David Tole

WALKS CO-ORDINATOR

2024 Summary

During 2024 there have been 1184 led walks covering a total distance of 8467 miles. Distances varied from 1.5 miles up to 18 miles. To enable comparison with previous years the Oxfordshire Strollers walks have been included with the Oxford Group.

2024 Walks	BNO	BK	DW	HG	HO	Ox	OWW	TW	VoWH	WO	Total
Easy	6	1		10	2	1		3	5		28
Leisurely	80	144	26	55	8	56	6	25	53	12	465
Moderate	60	26	58	194	30	7	50	62	78	37	602
Strenuous	35			51	1		2				89
Grand Total	181	171	84	310	41	64	58	90	136	49	1184

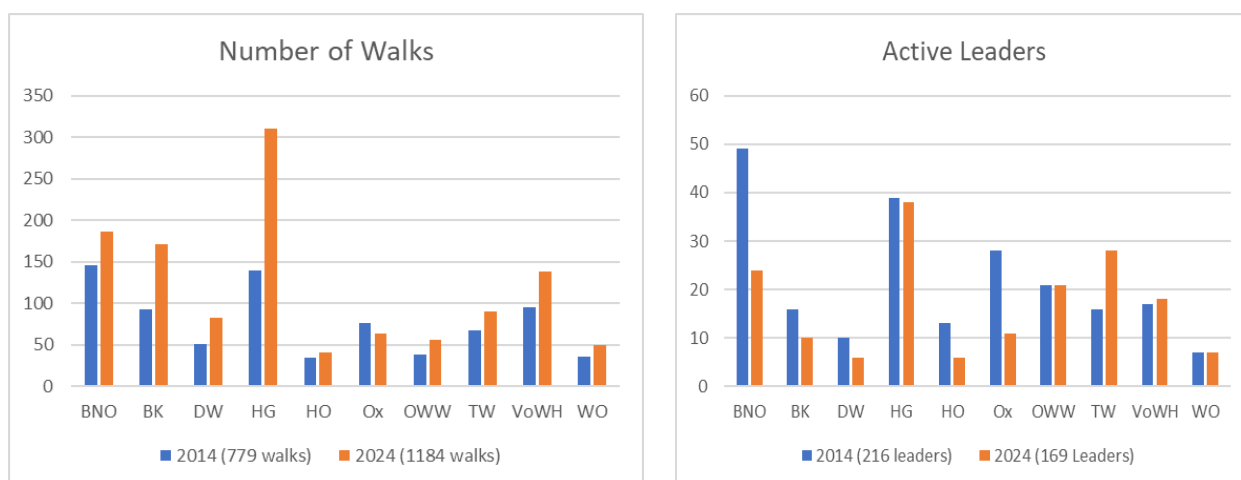
There were 169 different Walk Leaders – some led just one walk, whereas one Walk Leader led a staggering 80 walks during the year. In May we saw the introduction of the Walk Leaders Handbook with mandatory training for all new Leaders. We have had 37 new Leaders registered during the year with just 3 still to complete their training:

New Leaders	Training	BNO	BK	DW	HG	HO	Ox	OWW	TW	VoWH	WO	Total
Up to 14/5/24	Optional	2	0	0	2	0	0	1	11	1	3	20
After 14/5/24	Complete	1	2	0	4	2	0	1	3	0	1	14
After 14 May	Incomplete	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	3
New Leaders	Total	3	2	1	6	3	1	2	14	1	4	37

A huge thank you to all of the Group Walk Organisers and Walk Leaders that provide us with such an extensive and varied walks programme.

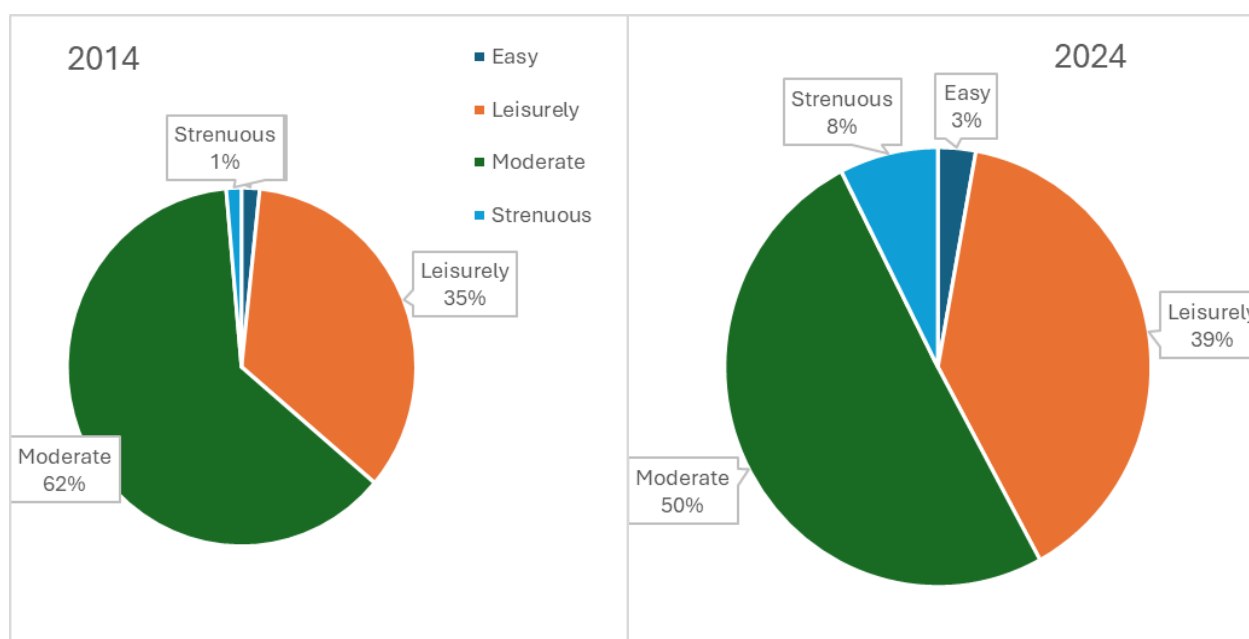
2014 to 2024

To better understand how the walks programme has progressed in recent years it is useful to compare the 2024 programme with that in 2014, 10 years ago.



In 2014 there was 779 walks led by 216 leaders compared to 1184 walks with 169 leaders in 2024. On average each walk leader is leading twice as many walks in 2024 compared to ten years ago.

Comparing the Grades of walks:



Since 2014 there has been a reduction in the percentage of Moderate walks (62% reducing to 50%) with a corresponding increase in Strenuous (1% to 8%) and Leisurely (35% to 39%) walks.

Conclusions

- Oxfordshire Ramblers is providing a more extensive, varied walks programme compared to ten years ago;
- The number of Walk Leaders has reduced, but we are providing many more walks – therefore we could do with a lot more walk leaders! Don't delay, volunteer today!

Richard Birch

WALKING ENVIRONMENT AND ACCESS OFFICER

There are two large-scale projects proposed for Oxfordshire – Botley West Solar Farm and the South East Reservoir Option (Abingdon Reservoir). Both are Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs) which are treated separately from normal local authority planning because of their size and importance to wider communities. NSIPs are approved by the appropriate Government Minister. Both projects will have a significant impact on our Public Rights of Way (PRoW).

Botley West Solar Farm

There is an application from Photovolt Development Partners (PVDP) to build Europe's largest solar farm on land mainly in West Oxfordshire. It would cover an area of 11 miles long by 4 miles wide with over 2 million solar panels. Oxfordshire Ramblers is very concerned that due to the size of the proposed solar farm there will be major adverse visual impact to users of some of the PRoWs throughout the period of the project ie for decades to come. We estimate that around sixty PRoWs cross the proposed solar farm with a total length of 17 miles. We therefore object to the application because we consider that the negative visual impact and associated adverse health effects outweigh the benefits of the project.

The application by PVDP was accepted by the Government on 13 December 2024. In January 2025 Oxfordshire Ramblers will submit an application to be an 'interested party' which will allow us to participate in the examination stage of the planning application. Judith Wardle, Chair of West Oxfordshire Group, is our expert on the solar farm and is actively involved with [Stop Botley West](#) the campaign group that is leading opposition to it.

Abingdon Reservoir

Thames Water is proposing to build a new reservoir on farmland approximately 5km south-west of Abingdon, between the villages of Steventon, East Hanney, and Drayton. The reservoir would take water from the River Thames during winter months, store it until it was needed during the summer, then pump it back into the Thames for use mainly in the South East.

In July 2024 Oxfordshire Ramblers attended a Thames Water workshop for stakeholders. All of the extensive information provided in the workshop is in the public domain and is available on [Thames Water](#) website.

The construction would take ten years to complete with the current timescale aiming to start construction in 2030 with completion in 2040. The final two years of this 10-year period involves filling the reservoir.

During the construction period the existing footpaths would be closed (for health and safety reasons) and diversions put in place. It was not clear whether this would be for the whole of the construction period or the route that the diversions would take.

Thames Water says that the reservoir would be open to the public. The facilities would include: car parking; water sports centre with sailing, kayaking, angling etc on the main reservoir; café; benches and toilets around the reservoir; wetlands; bird hides; public education facilities; a network of paths for walking /cycling/ wheeling/ horse-riding; floating islands for nesting birds.

The Government has approved Thames Water's 10-year plan which includes the Abingdon Reservoir. Like the Botley West project it would be a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project. Oxfordshire Ramblers will maintain a watching brief and participate in the formal consultation process once it starts.

Didcot and surrounding area infrastructure improvements

Following a Public Inquiry the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, Angela Raynor, has granted planning approval for the Didcot and surrounding area infrastructure improvements scheme. Details of the £332m scheme can be seen at [Didcot road improvement scheme](#). The scheme includes the following elements:

- A4130 widening
- Didcot Science Bridge
- Didcot to Culham River Crossing
- Clifton Hampden Bypass

Construction is expected to in early 2026 and last approximately two years. There will inevitably be some disruption to local PRowWs during the construction phase.

WEBSITE

No significant changes this year other than a few additional menu items.

Pat Lonergan

OXFORDSHIRE GROUP REPORTS

BANBURY & NORTH OXFORDSHIRE

We put on a full and varied walks programme of nearly 200 walks led by 28 leaders, despite some wet and difficult conditions. Several new walk leaders came onboard, and some returned; more leaders and/or organisers are welcome, as are ideas for new walks.

Walks were based around a weekly schedule of Wednesday afternoons (usually leisurely), Thursday evenings (summer only), Saturday mornings (strenuous) and Sunday mornings (moderate, some including optional lunch afterwards). In addition, we ran monthly easy Friday morning walks, with lunch. A few extras were included, especially the popular walks over Christmas and New Year.

We now have an active path maintenance team. We held four events and cleared seven paths. We have around a dozen volunteers and are seeking more. We are preparing a list of seasonal problems, and will add further projects. We have purchased a brush cutter, to add to tools brought by volunteers and Oxfordshire County Council. In connection with maintenance, we worked on recruitment and activity of Parish Path Wardens.

We held two social events, a Christmas meal and summer garden party.

We had an influx of new members, many joining after local publicity on Facebook; after departures, a net gain left us with 288 members.

Publishing walks became more time consuming, due to national IT changes. We continue to produce monthly printable listings.

We funded two metal field gates to improve access by replacing difficult or broken stiles. This expenditure was the main reason for a fall in the bank balance from £1,054 to £497.

In the current year we need help from members in the following areas: new committee members, especially someone to work on social events; attendance at publicity opportunities such as Banbury's Canal Weekend; to maintain the strength in depth of our walk leadership group.

Stuart Dyer

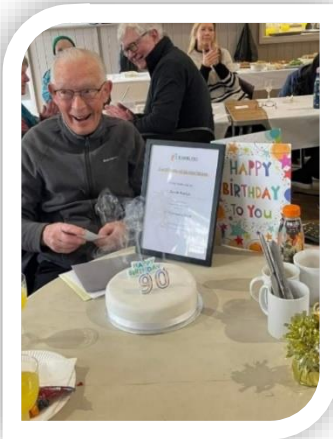
BICESTER & KIDLINGTON

We are pleased to report that we have achieved our highest membership number since the group was formed thirty years ago.

We celebrated our thirtieth birthday in September with a birthday lunch which was attended by the Mayor of Bicester, his Consort, and the Deputy Mayor. Following the lunch and cake cutting members took part in a variety of games and everyone received a free tombola prize.

Earlier in the year a 90th birthday party was organised for Derek Parish, our oldest member. Derek continues to walk weekly often joined by his daughter and son who are walk leaders.





Throughout the year we continued to promote B & K ramblers in several ways to help attract new members. The stall at Tesco in Bicester was successful as was the stall in Bicester market. It is difficult to monitor the results of these activities, however our membership continues to grow. We are planning to distribute leaflets around the new housing developments in Kidlington and Bicester in 2025. There is no doubt that our Facebook page is popular with over four hundred followers viewing our walks and festivities.

In May twenty-four members enjoyed a 3 Night Exmoor Self-Guided walking weekend in Selworthy. We had mixed weather, experiencing horizontal rain on the moor, needless to say we rushes back to a National Trust café where a large log fire, cakes and coffee was welcomed.



Our retention rate is strong, we believe that themed walks like the Easter Bonnett Walk, the Halloween Walk, the walk ending with cakes and refreshments and the London Christmas Lights Walk add to the social side of the group. The summer evening walks followed by an optional meal in a local pub were once again well attended and the addition of a monthly short two-mile walk ending in a cafe has attracted members who unable to walk longer distances.

Our AGM in November was attended by over thirty members. We had a talk and presentation by Chloe Bradford from Berks Bucks & Oxon Wildlife Trust. Our membership secretary post changed, and two new members were elected to our committee.

Russell Thompson

BLITZ & KLEAN

January 2024:- Work carried out at Piddington fp 321/13/20 and 321/13/10

February 2024:- No clearance work undertaken

March 2024:- Work carried out near Piddington 321/20/20 discussed with local farmer who offered to bring his tractor through when the ground had hardened and clear it. According to a local source the path had deteriorated into a mud bath after the local hunt had been through in December.

Received e mail from O.C.C. with positive comments from them and local individuals regarding the proactive work being undertaken by Blitz & Klean making a big difference to those that use the paths.

April 2024:- Completed the Ramblers path survey and won a 'Cotswold Outdoor' Vango path maintenance backpack.

May 2024:- Inspected foot paths at Ardley and Wendlebury for future work

June 2024:- Clearance work undertaken at Wendlebury fp 398/2/10 and was joined by the new Assistant Countryside Officer who introduced himself to the Team.

Work undertaken to improve access to fp 109/30/10 from the Ardley road.

July 2024:- No clearance work undertaken just trips out checking up on various footpaths.

August 2024:- Clearance work carried out on fp 229/4/30 at Kidlington and fp 416/21/10 near Wooton.

September 2024:- Clearance work undertaken on fp 351/10/10 at Souldern, fp 219/6/10 at Fritwell and Bridleway 14376 at Hardwick with Tusmore.

Two damaged bridges and a finger post were reported to O.C.C. who have since repaired/replaced successfully.

December 2024 Clearance work undertaken on fp 379/18/10 near Tackley. Cut back branches and brambles to clear a way through.

Ian Baldwin

DIDCOT & WALLINGFORD

The group has continued to offer several walks each month covering distances from 4 to 11 miles across the county though on some of these walks attendance has been low.

Two members from the group attended the Oxfordshire Area summer picnic

The Summer Evening BBQ in July was held again in Sue's garden in July and attracted a good number of members.

David Baker

HENLEY AND GORING



This year our group stood out as extremely popular and excelled with a large variety of activities. This is reflected in the membership numbers, now well over 400, as well as in our activities, which are mostly fully booked or have waiting lists. Walks have a good variety of lengths, with regular short walks on Wednesdays and strenuous walks on Thursdays plus many others of differing lengths.

- Walks had a good choice of distance from 1.5 miles to 16 miles
- Thursdays are very popular with long strenuous walks, and are really becoming one of the unique walks of our group
- The short Wednesdays walks continue to be popular, and well attended another unique feature, and Tuesday walks have become very popular too. The number of short walks was the highest, with 102 being less than 5.5 miles. The average number of participants was almost the same on all distances, between 10 and 12 participants
- We keep offering many walks on all days and the number of walks remains high, number of organised walks increased from 306 in 2023 to 317 in 2024, averaging 26.5 walks per month
- We provided "summer" evening pub walks from early April to middle of September

- We supplemented local walks with walking long distance paths, like the St James Way and John Bunyan Way.
- The total distance walked by all participants (walk distance times number participated) was 26265 miles, slightly higher than last year, and higher than the earth circumference (24900 miles)
- We provided 8 social activities, with the most popular ones being our annual AGM dinner in November and the BBQ in August, well attended by almost 80 people, and our May Bank holiday Get walking day, Chantry House Lecture, Christmas Carol Walk and Games evening.
- We organised 6 walking holidays, some self-catering, some UK hotel based and some abroad. We went to Arnside in Cumbria, Llangollen in Wales, Simonstone in Ribble Valley, Romania, and Mickleton in the Cotswolds and all were very enjoyable. Number of participants were between 19 and 39, and total number of members joining the trips were 92. Some members participated in 5 trips!

Alie Hagedoorn

HIKE OXFORDSHIRE

We have grown the Hike Oxfordshire membership from 53 up to 72 members. We have two new walk leaders and have managed to put on a walk most weekends.

OXFORD CITY

This year we had an increase in members, and we are continuing to submit walks at least once a month. Oxford Walk Leaders have managed to produce a varied and interesting calendar of walks throughout the year, with few cancellations. Walks have covered a range of distances and taking place both in the city and its surrounding towns, villages and countryside.

We had a very successful AGM, despite losing one of our committee members.

Our membership is 267 members - which is 2% up on this time last year and most members are now on the email circulation list.



Keith Holly bequest: The project to erect a Noticeboard in Warneford Meadow in memory of the work Keith Holly did to save the meadow has been shelved and we are considering contributing to fitting a boardwalk on part of the Jubilee way which gets particularly muddy.

A member of the Oxford Group, Tony Dale to celebrate his 80th birthday walked 80 miles from Cambridge to Oxford in 8 days.

The picture shows him together with friends at the finishing line.

Rosemary Williams

OXFORDSHIRE STROLLERS

The Oxfordshire Strollers aim to have a short leisurely walk each Wednesday, usually followed by lunch at a local pub or café. In 2024 we have had 46 led walks with distances between 3 and 5 miles.

THAME & WHEATLEY

We have had a very positive year in all regards. We have had some lovely walks and those that end in food of some sort seem to be especially popular. The Ramblers App tells us that at least 90 of our members have walked with us during 2024. We are pleased with this proportion of our membership.



We enjoyed good weather for our away day and fabulous weather in Southern Snowdonia where we went for our annual holiday.

We were pleased with our organisation of the Area picnic, particularly because it involved so many of our members in a

variety of roles

Whilst our prime activity is walking, we always have a summer social and this includes some kind of activity. As it was Olympic year in 2024 we went for our own version and it was great fun. The photo shows the teams lining up to support their competitors in the marathon!



Our footpath maintenance group have had a successful year and apart from slashing and cutting have also repaired some stiles and replaced 2 with gates. We have also donated a gate that Ripple

installed in our area

Mindful that we need to encourage more people to become walk leaders, we are developing a strategy to increase recruitment and better support leaders once they have volunteered, or when they are considering it. This seems to be paying off

This has all been possible because we have an energetic and reliable committee and also many other members who volunteer in lots of ways. Many thanks go to them all

Linda King

VALE OF WHITE HORSE

Peter Skuse and our volunteer walks leaders put together their usual enjoyable programme with walks almost every Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday. The number of leaders has dropped slightly so some are leading more walks to maintain the number. This puts us in a precarious position as losing a couple of prolific leaders would jeopardise our programme. If you could lead a walk or two for the group then please get in touch. We would give you lots of support and routes until you find your feet.



Our long distance path in 2024 was the 68 miles of Shakespeare's Way from Sandford, south of Oxford to Stratford-upon-Avon. The first couple of days were familiar but the paths were new as we headed north. We also took part in the second Abingdon Walking Festival leading a

number of walks from Abingdon Market Place. It is only when you get a walk full of the general public that you realise how well-behaved Ramblers actually are. Who knew?

As usual, our year ends with the annual Vale Mince Pie Walks. The weather has affected a couple but mince pies taste better when the going is tough Path Maintenance Team

The Vale Path Volunteers are working regularly twice a month on the first Monday and third Wednesday



of each month plus several additional ad hoc days to address particular problems. This year we got a grant from the Trust for Oxfordshire's Environment (TOE2) for a battery-operated hedge trimmer. Our petrol one was showing signs of age and the new one is greener too. Opening up paths for everyone to walk is fun. If you'd like to help, please get in touch. As well as this clearance work we have a team of Parish Path Wardens (like all the other groups) who monitor their local paths and report issues to the County Council and/or the VPV. Membership As you will see elsewhere our numbers have been dropping slowly for a couple of years. Despite that numbers actually walking

are still growing. Please tell all your friends about Ramblers and we might start to grow the group again. Our committee has grown though - we have gained a Secretary Jan Knight and a Footpath Secretary Chris Nelson. I'd like to thank all our volunteers: committee, walks leaders, VPV, PPWs and those researching lost paths. You are the backbone of the group but we appreciate the rest of you too. You make the Vale social walking experience special.

John Gordon

WEEKEND WALKERS

We have had another excellent year thanks to all our amazing volunteers and the enthusiasm of all our members. We regularly get 17-25 people on our Sunday walks and have managed a walk every Sunday. We also have some evening walks in the summer.

Over the year 22 people have lead a walk.

AGM: Our AGM was on Sunday November 24th at The Red Lion Eynsham. Who knew we had picked the same date as the Eynsham 10k? Plus, we had storm Bert to contend with ! Despite howling gales and torrential rain, we set off for our pre AGM walk/ paddle in the Eynsham area.

Our members are truly committed to walk on such conditions and we had an enthusiastic response to the AGM and when compiling our committee members with all posts willingly filled.

As a committee we have:

- Invested in key rings for our members to store their ICE details. We use the ICE cards supplied by Ramblers for our visitors and new walkers.
- Purchased some equipment including new seat mats to share with visiting walkers, secateurs, boot mud scrapers and tick removal tweezers.
- Organised two navigation training day courses.
- Encouraged new walk leaders and current walk leaders to watch the online training program from Ramblers.
- Started preparations for the Area AGM in January as it is our turn to host the next meeting which is on Saturday 25th January 2025 and will be at the Eynsham Village Hall. There will be a short walk in the morning, packed lunches eaten in the village hall, then the meeting in the afternoon with a guest speaker from Ramblers.

Socials

We have had a variety of events organised by our members from theatre trips to Christmas drinks, concerts and a beer festival.

Trips away.

The Oxon Weekend Walkers spent another glorious weekend at the Elan Valley. Their walk leader, Steve, led us on some fabulous walks, we enjoyed good food, plenty of wine and tested our nerves on the Jenga game . There was even a strange treasure hunt !

Many thanks to Ian for again arranging this brilliant trip.

In May, 28 of our members will be spending three nights in Dunster. It is a chance to explore Exmoor National Park and some coast path walking. I hope it is as successful as Ian's trips have been.

Nicola Copeman

WEST OXFORDSHIRE

In a sense the major event for West Oxfordshire Ramblers in 2024 was foreshadowed in 2023: in the November, Judith Wardle, group Chair, attended an event in Witney of the voluntary organisation called the Eco Forum. Speakers were from PhotoVOLT Development Partners. The first speaker told the audience that the 80% of the public who either strongly opposed or opposed the building of a solar farm, most of which would be in West Oxfordshire, that objecting was a waste of time because Grant Shapps (then environment secretary) would simply nod it through. (That speaker said his job was to negotiate a connection between the solar farm and the National Grid – didn't suggest he has any other qualifications.) There was no opportunity for members of the public to ask any questions. When the next speaker introduced himself as in charge of "Comms", Judith left the meeting in disgust.

Throughout 2024, much of the focus of West Oxfordshire Ramblers has been on collecting evidence to try to save the Public Rights of Way and the beautiful natural environment that will be totally undermined (in some cases literally by high-voltage cables under footpaths) if the project now known as the Botley Solar Farm gets nodded through at national level. (The part near Botley is a possible site for a sub-station, but the name is presumably used to distract attention from the fact the largest area of land concerned is owned by the Blenheim Estate (the business that builds housing estates in West Oxfordshire, not the heritage site at the Palace – though the two organisations do share a Chair and an office.) West Oxon Ramblers has been working with local residents who would suffer the worst impact, the Area Committee for Oxfordshire Ramblers – some of the impact would be on the Bicester-Kidlington and South & Vale groups - and the Oxfordshire branch of the Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE).

On a more positive note: WO was pleased to host the 2024 Area Annual General Meeting in Charlbury. Judith found a route for the morning walk to avoid any chance of it having to be cancelled because of flooding of the Evenlode river – an all too common occurrence. The walk was well-attended, and benefitted from information and small maps installed on part of the route by Ditchley Park. It would have been logical for that walk to be led by Alan Cobb, our walks organiser (as well as treasurer), but since he actually lives in Charlbury, we benefitted from his local contacts for ordering refreshments from a local co-operative café and caterer.

Unfortunately, the walks programme for WO this year was hit not only by cancellations caused by storms – as elsewhere in the county. And several of our walks leaders have suffered health problems. However, we have still managed to put on regular walks and even succeeded in getting 2 more leaders (for the joint programme with the Vale) registered before the May deadline, avoiding them having to go on an instruction course – both already had regular experience at sharing the lead. Membership of the Group remains stable, just short of 200 people.

The **43rd Annual General Meeting** of the group was successfully held in November in hybrid form – online and in person at Combe Reading Room. One section of the meeting was devoted to a discussion of the objections that the Group wished to contribute to the Area's submission about the Botley Solar Farm. This report, thus, comes full circle since January-February of 2025 will see Oxfordshire Ramblers putting in their submission to the Inspectorate in charge of considering the mega solar project – and having to decide how much of the over 250 online documents (some in megabytes) they need first to consider.

Judith Wardle

