

SYNED Ramblers Area AGM – Saturday January 17th 2026 in Rotherham - an edited summary

Quick recap

Following the acceptance of the SYNED Groups Annual Reports and Financial Statements, the meeting focused on the proposed Ramblers' organizational and governance changes, with Mark Lavenstein (ML), a trustee, explaining the proposed shifts in how the organization operates, including changes to General Council meetings and the introduction of regional forums for policy discussions.

Concerns were raised about the potential loss of member involvement and decision-making power under the new structure, with some members expressing worry about the reduction in the number of trustees and the impact on policy-making.

The discussion highlighted the need for clearer communication about the proposed changes and the importance of maintaining member engagement in the organization's future direction.

Next steps

- **Area Secretary:** Add information about the Clarion Ramblers' plaque event at Sheffield Station to the website to confirm details for Sunday 25th.
- **Interested members:** Contact Martin Evans (ME) (via email address to be distributed) if interested in helping with the organisation of a revived Sheffield Walking Festival.
- **Area Secretary:** Distribute ME's contact email address to area chairs and group secretaries for those interested in forming a new Sheffield Walking Festival committee.
- **All group/area representatives:** Review the latest governance proposal document (from December meeting) and provide group/area views or feedback to representatives (SW & LS) attending General Council, especially regarding potential changes to governance and forums.
- **Sara Whitby and Liz Sharp:** Take any views/feedback from members and groups to the General Council meeting (April 2026).
- **Area Secretary:** Share the post-December meeting governance proposal document with all members/groups to ensure everyone is informed before the General Council vote.
- **Area Secretary:** Update the website with information about the Sheffield Walking Festival planning and how to get involved, once details are available.
- **Interested members:** Form a committee to organize the Sheffield Walking Festival for 2026, aiming to hold at least one or more walks, with heritage and walking events, and consider involving other walking and Ramblers Groups in and around Sheffield.
- **Area Sec** to update the Area AGM running order template for future meetings.

Summary

SYNED Ramblers Area AGM

Area Secretary (MD) opened the SYNED Ramblers Area AGM and welcomed everyone who was in attendance. He then asked SW to chair the Meeting in the absence of Jeff Kenyon, who was ill.

The meeting remembered several members who had passed away, including Gordon Hayward, Cliff Johnson, Jim Tomkin, and Ernest Wright.

Area Sec (MD) explained that the area report had had to be rushed due to printing logistics and his learning of a new desktop publishing program to produce it.

This had resulted in some spelling & typing errors and some visible text frames.

The minutes from the 2025 AGM were then approved without any comments.

Annual Report and Leadership Review

The meeting focused on reviewing and accepting the Area Annual Report and financial statements, noting that Paul Peters of the C&NED Group had audited the Accounts rather than Lorraine Watson as was shown in the Report.

SW outlined various leadership positions that needed to be filled, including Area Chair, Vice Chair, and other roles, and proposed that current office holders continue in their roles, although this meant that the Area Vice Chair, Area Footpath Sec and Webmaster positions remained vacant.

The Meeting discussed the need for two additional members to represent the area members on the Area Council, as well as representatives of the five affiliated walking groups.

They also confirmed that the Area would continue to affiliate, CPRE, PNFS, Peak District Green Lanes Alliance and the Open Spaces Society.

Ramblers Delegate and Anniversary Plans

SW discussed the selection of area delegates to the General Council, with herself and Liz Sharp potentially continuing in their roles. She explained the proposals would allow all Ramblers members to vote for trustees, rather than just those attending General Council meetings.

The group also discussed the 75th anniversary of the founding of the Peak District National Park and what events would be held to celebrate this. It was also reported that there would be an event at Sheffield Station on Sunday 25th celebrating the erection of a plaque to commemorate the Clarion Ramblers' first walk 100 years ago.

Sheffield Walking Festival Planning Discussion

AR (Sheff Chair) discussed the potential reinstatement of the Sheffield Walking Festival, which had not been organized last year. He proposed forming a committee to plan the festival, which would likely take place in September, and encouraged members to express interest. ME had offered to coordinate the committee.

Ramblers Organization Restructuring Plan

Following a short break, our guest speaker, Mark Lavenstein provided an overview of proposed changes to the governance structure of the Ramblers organization, including modifications to trustee elections and the introduction of appointed trustees to address skill gaps. He explained that these changes aimed to increase member engagement and

streamline decision-making processes.

ML discussed these changes to the Ramblers organization, emphasizing the importance of sharing best practices between groups and holding management accountable. He explained that the new system will allow for feedback from forums and local groups, which will be reflected in General Council.

ML clarified that trustees did not run the organization but rather hold the management to account, ensuring the organization meets its objectives while maintaining financial security and managing risks. He highlighted the balance between volunteer work and professional staff, emphasizing the need to assess and improve volunteer engagement.

Process for Major Changes

ML explained the process for major changes to requirements or operations, which involves a committee meeting and approval by trustees before reaching the main board. He discussed the implementation of consistent training for walk leaders to ensure insurance coverage and maintain quality standards. He acknowledged that the organization had not always effectively communicated the reasoning behind initiatives, and he expressed hope for a more collaborative discussion on organizational structure in the future.

Ramblers' Governance Structure Debate

ML continued to lead the meeting's discussion about proposed changes to the Ramblers' governance structure, expressing concerns about the reduction in board size and the separation of policy discussions from the Annual General Meeting (AGM) and General Council.

He emphasized the importance of maintaining a bottom-up, volunteer-led organization and questioned whether the proposed changes would adequately represent member voices. The meeting discussed the potential for policy motions at the AGM and the need for clear mechanisms allowing members to influence trustee decisions.

ML encouraged attendees to consider the implications of the proposed changes and to provide feedback before the April vote.

Meeting closed

SW then closed the meeting, thanking the Rotherham Metro Ramblers Group for hosting us and providing us with refreshments and a rather muddy morning walk.

She thanked the speaker, Mark Lavenstein, for coming all the way from Kent and providing us with an interesting and honest discussion about the role of a Trustee and the proposed changes to how it was intended the Ramblers to be run in future.

She wished ML and everybody attending a safe journey home and closed the meeting.