

IVW Chairman's Report

The year started cautiously with the walking programme offering many walks where booking was essential to limit numbers on walks depending on the leaders discretion. Covid had not disappeared but those hospitalised by it had fallen as the vaccine role out was made available to everyone eligible. There was an air of optimism as the spring programme evolved. The 1st holiday in April was to Hartington. It was limited to 30 people and offered to those who were not eligible on this year's 2nd holiday to Ambleside in May. That too was limited to 30 people and a rerun of last years holiday to Ambleside for those restricted by Covid rules obtaining accommodation. Both holidays had good dry weather considering their location (possibly a sign of the summer to come) and both received good reviews. Can I thank Bob & Celia Wallace for organising the Hartington holiday and Pauline Seddon for helping me again lead the Ambleside holiday. Both holidays were quickly followed by a coach trip to Virginia Water and Windsor. The trip proved to be very popular and a larger coach had to be ordered to accommodate them. I thank Roger McLeod for helping me organise and lead the walks.

Previous to these events, IVW had celebrated Christmas 2021 with a Mulled Wine Ramble at Wootton Village Hall and a walk led by Bob Wallace. Also, a Christmas Lunch was held at Stagsden Golf Club with a walk led by Colin Baker. I wish to thank Bob & Celia for organising the mulled wine ramble and Bernard & Mary Morse for organising the Christmas lunch. Attendance on both events was strong and I could see that group gatherings had begun a slow return to normal. If you recall last year's AGM in November was organised on Zoom and in May this year we were taking a full coach of walkers to Windsor.

The social events calendar for the spring and summer continued unabated. Starting in May with an evening at Peacocks auction house in Bedford - Secrets of the Auctioneer - 44 participating in the event. Followed then by a morning walk and afternoon pork roast in July - Yomp, Chomp and Roll-Up - at Langford Bowls Club which was well attended by at least 53 participants. Other events have been planned which fall outside of this report because they are occurring in late October and November. A coach trip to Chatsworth and 10-Pin bowling at Eaton Socon. May I thank Roger McCleod for organising the Social Events calendar and to Bernard & Mary Morse for arranging the summer barbecue at Langford Bowls Club.

The IVW long weekend to Bridlington attracted 40 members and was organised by our new holiday leader Kevin Barrett. Kevin approached the committee with the holiday in April and we agreed upon it being a day longer than normal, starting on Thursday instead of Friday to Monday. The fact that most of the 40 walkers arrived on the Thursday walk showed that we can be more flexible about holiday arrangements. The holiday was a great success and he showed organisational skills at booking a venue late in the day to celebrate. Next years holiday will be Melrose in the Scottish Borders running from Sunday 14th to Friday 19th May.

We continue to support the Ramblers Area initiatives in Training and Path Restoration. Training courses in use of Maps, Apps and Compass have continued through the year with one being held during the Bedfordshire Walking Festival. The RIPPLE activities too have continued through the year with many tasks completed by enthusiastic Ramblers members. I would like to thank Nick Markham and Barry Ingram for continuing to organise these

activities for the Ramblers. Also, Barry is retiring as organiser of the Beds Walking Festival and the position of Area Publicity Officer in November. The Area has a large task to drain Barry's mind and replace the irreplaceable. Our thanks go to Barry for his huge contribution in fulfilling these duties which form part of his overall estate. For example, he will remain in control of the RIPPLE activities.

The Committee will be losing five members and two sub-Committee members at this AGM. Gillian Wilkes, stepped down as General Secretary at the last AGM and not been replaced. Ruth McNally, is stepping down as Membership Secretary to explore the world – this would compromise data security of IVW members – logging in from overseas locations to email. Garry Wallace, is stepping down from the role of Treasurer to much surprise. Pauline Seddon, is stepping down as Web Master after four years – Pauline has managed the site and online programmes which walkers relied upon during the difficulties of Covid. Alan Roland, is stepping down as Programme Secretary after five years – which includes the role of Tuesday Walks Coordinator that he had acquired in the post. Sandra Axtell, is stepping down as Sunday Walks Coordinator after 5 years in the role. I would like to thank (Gillian), Ruth, Garry, Pauline & Alan for all their contributions on the committee for their continued stewardship in support of Ivel Valley Walkers. And to Sandra for helping coordinate the Sunday walks.

Please join me in giving all of the Committee members, a round of applause. Thank you.

As you can see above, we are losing key positions from the committee and it has become critical to find replacements for them. We are all volunteers and Ivel Valley Walkers cannot function without a working committee that can perform the roles of these key positions. It is incumbent upon me to find new officers and reach out to you all for help find volunteers to replace those that have served you well on the committee and are now stepping down. Please Volunteer your services to help Ivel Valley maintain it's wonderful walks programme.

Thank You

Roy Carter.....Chairman, Ivel Valley Walkers

IVW TREASURER'S REPORT FOR FINANCIAL YEAR 2021-22

The last three financial years have all been in some way impacted by the impact of the Covid pandemic.

As far as the **Administration account** is concerned, the onset of Covid led to the immediate suspension of many IVW activities and related expenditures which resulted in a net surplus of £559.10 in 2019-20. In the following year the account was stable with a nominal deficit of £14.73. The net assets in the Administration account at the end of the 2020-21 financial year stood at £1,516.56. As a consequence, the Committee waived its entitlement to a portion of Area funding for 2021-22 and this resulted in a planned deficit which ended up at £222.26 for the 2021-22 year. At the end of the year the Administration account recorded a positive **cash balance of £902.39** and **net assets of £1,294.30**. This is considered to represent a sound financial position since annual outgoings in a "normal" financial year are around £1,000.

As far as the **Social account** is concerned, Covid has affected the volume of activity but the principle of achieving break even on social activities over the course of a financial year as a whole has been preserved. In 2021-22 the Social account generated a small surplus of £109.00, details of which can be seen in the official accounts, At the end of the 2021-22 year the Social account recorded a positive **cash balance of £1,384.91** and **net assets of £1,197.61**. Again, this is considered to be a sound financial position.

After three years as Treasurer, I am not seeking re-election for a further period in office but would like to offer some thoughts as to opportunities for improvement.

- It is clear that IVW is facing some considerable difficulties in attracting new candidates to the committee, especially in the Officer positions that generally involve a heavier workload. It is my opinion that more needs to be done to simplify committee activities and minimise the workload and time demand (and also reduce cost to IVW) in the following areas:
 - The Ramblers need to simplify their budgeting and reporting requirements which are overbearing considering the relatively small sums of money involved. They also need to select a banking partner that embraces 21st century methods in place of Unity Trust which is extremely old fashioned and user unfriendly.
 - Email needs to be adopted as the universal means of communication with IVW members. Most members have cooperated by providing an email address but there is still non value added activity and cost in copying and posting hard copy information to a minority of IVW members. *[I understand another group in our area is actively considering eliminating mailings to members.]*
 - Bank transfer needs to be adopted as the universal means of subscribing to IVW social events. Again, most members have supported this approach. The minority of members who do not have internet access or do not want to use electronic banking can contact their banks to make such transfers.
 - Committee meetings need to resume being conducted in Zoom format. During the Covid period Zoom was adopted, saving travel time and cost to participants and meeting room rental charges for IVW. These are business meetings and need to be

conducted efficiently. There are some committee members who want to treat these meetings as social events and hold them as face-to-face events, but IVW promotes hundreds of walks and many dedicated social events each year to support the social side of rambling. Committee meetings need to be devoted strictly to business matters

- Members should be aware that financial decisions are routinely made by IVW committee members without referring them for prior review by the Treasurer or the committee. In particular, the pricing of social events is undertaken in this manner. Also, supplier payments are from time to time requested without any source documentation from the supplier to support the expense. Whilst these shortcomings in governance have so far had no adverse effect on the financial stability of IVW, there is always a risk that weak controls will lead to questionable transactions and avoidable costs to the group. It is therefore **recommended** that IVW members formally instruct the committee that my successor as Treasurer will have the right of prior approval of all financial transactions.
- I have attended almost all committee meetings during my three-year committee tenure. I was however unable to attend the meeting on 26 July 2022. Nevertheless I submitted a written report which included the statement: *"From a Treasurer's standpoint I can confirm that both the Admin and Social accounts are both solidly in credit and no liquidity issues are foreseen in the coming months."* Several weeks later I discovered from the draft minutes which were published on 13 August that at the meeting committee members discussed, in my absence, the subject of financial reporting to the committee. The draft minutes also stated that a committee member "insisted" on the committee receiving "financial statements" at each meeting, without defining exactly what that meant. This topic was not on the agenda and was not an "emergency" that may have been raised under AOB. The etiquette of conducting such a discussion in the absence of the Treasurer is considered completely inappropriate. It is **recommended** that subjects involving Officers of the committee are only discussed with prior written notice and in their presence.
[Note: it was subsequently admitted that "financial statements" in the accounting sense were not actually what was needed, but no definition of the requirement has yet been proposed.]

I regret not being able to attend the AGM in person since the meeting coincides exactly with the date of our golden wedding anniversary, which we will be celebrating abroad. I hope that members will agree that this is a reasonable justification for my absence.

Garry Wallace
IVW Treasurer
16 October 2022

IVW Footpaths Officer Report October 2022

I took over this role as IVW Footpaths Officer from Derreck Turner about a year ago, Derreck had served for several years and made a significant contribution, not least being instrumental in promoting the creation of a new footpath at Northhill which now saves pedestrians a long walk along a dangerous section of highway.

Ramblers responsibility for rights of way matters in the IVW area is something of a group effort as much of our area of interest is also covered by two other groups. The whole of the Central Bedfordshire Authority area is covered by the Lea and Icknield group, four IVW members who living in that area function as local representatives and contribute directly to the County Footpaths Officer. The North Bedfordshire Ramblers group then cover the entire Bedford Borough area.

I liaise with Ramblers Nationally on central issues and with National transport Authorities, E-W Rail, National Rail and Highways England (A1) re footpath matters.

(I could add something Re E-W Rail, E Coast Mainline and A428 Black Cat to Cambourne improvement but think this would be too wordy for an annual report as I've made no significant contribution to these to date.)

On the National front I have been involved in the Ramblers "Don't Lose Your Way" project to identify and pursue lost rights of way. This project was quite urgent with a deadline of 2024, but the Government made a dramatic change earlier this year and cancelled the deadline which has removed the pressure to complete submissions, although the project is still ongoing

Another national project that I am contributing to is the trial of a scheme which Ramblers are working on in conjunction with Natural England, if it works the system will record the condition and status of the rights of way network nationally. At present we are involved in testing a very sophisticated App to see if it is fit to be rolled out to members. This project if rolled out would supersede the Ramblers "Pathwatch" reporting process which has recently been terminated.

"Pathwatch" was a national online system by which Ramblers and members of the public could report rights of way issues direct to the Ramblers Nationally who would pass them on to the appropriate local authorities, it was not a great success.

In the absence of "Pathwatch" and to help our IVW members who find a problem with particular right of way we have recently issued advice (on the website) giving details of how to contact the appropriate highway authorities in our area, or alternatively allowing them to contact me directly if they would prefer to go through the group as we have a working relationship with the rights of way officers in the relevant local authorities. This has already worked successfully regarding a waymarking issue at Sandy.

John Clark, Footpaths Officer IVW

October 2022

IVW Membership Secretary Report

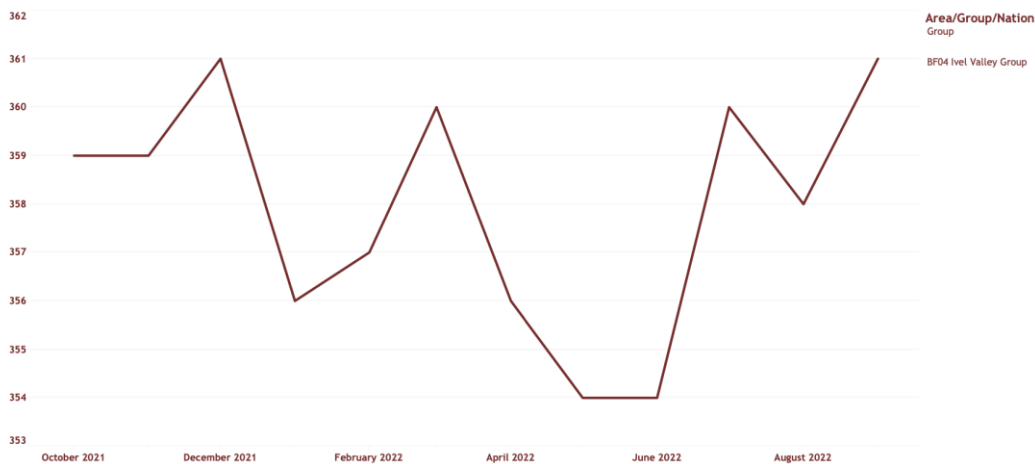
Ruth McNally, October 16th 2022

IVW member changes over the past 12 months

Member Changes in the last 12 months - Members

Graph Choice
Members

Figure from December 2021 to February 2022 may be high or lower than we would normally expect, this is due to The Ramblers changing supporter databases in this period which meant some membership function took a few months to resume normal operations



The graph above charts the change in total membership of IVW from October 2021 to September 2022 inclusive. Note that whilst the upward and downward curves look steep, the actual numbers involved are small - e.g. the rise from August - September is due to a net growth of just 3 additional members.

Also note that the total number of members in September 2022 (361) is the same as for December 2021. Indeed, the net difference over the entire 12 month period is a gain of just two members, hence, IVW membership has been pretty much a 'steady state'.

However, there's a more 'churn' in our membership than is evident from the graph. By delving into the Ramblers database I find that, to date, 30 members have joined IVW since 1 October 2021. Knowing this, what the graph clearly shows is that the number of members joining is pretty much cancelled out by the number of members leaving. This is illustrated by zooming in on the data for September 2022 (see Table below), in which there were 9 incomers but 6 leavers so the net gain was just 3 additional members.

September 2022	
Active & Payment Pending Members	361

Active Members	354
Payment Pending Members	7
Net Growth	3
New Members	7
Rejoiners	1
Transfers In	1
Leavers	-6
Transfers Out	0

However, beneath the ‘churn’, as it were, the majority of our members have stayed with IVW, which could suggest a level of satisfaction with what we (and Beds Area Ramblers and the Ramblers Association) are doing.

Social media: should IVW use it, and if so, what and how?

On the suggestion of Beds Area Ramblers, I initiated a discussion within the Committee on the future use of social media, for example, Facebook. IVW Chairman is going to add this to the agenda for the AGM. So here’s a bit of background.

The Ramblers Association recommends that every Ramblers Groups set up a Facebook Page, and that they may choose to have a Facebook Group in addition. But it doesn’t have to be this way, as other Beds Area Ramblers Groups illustrate.

In the past 12 months, North Beds Ramblers group has formed a Facebook Group through which the administrators and other members can share photos and information about future and forthcoming walks and events, and other information which may be of interest to their members. N. Beds Ramblers created their Facebook Group during Covid as a way of keeping in touch with, and maintaining a sense of community among, their members. Their postings are not public; only members of the Facebook Group can view the posts and respond to them. It is a way of interacting with existing members rather than a means of recruiting new ones.

A Facebook Group like this is similar to emails in that its content is only shared with ‘insiders’ - with members of the group - rather than broadcast to the public at large. However, it is less ‘top down’ than emails in that members can make their voice heard by initiating postings and responding to the postings of others. A

Facebook Group is a way of having a Group discussion, and (for better or worse!) of getting direct feedback from members.

Leighton Buzzard Ramblers have opted for a Facebook Page rather than a Facebook Group. Like a website, anything posted on their Facebook Page is visible to the public at large. But, it is less top down than a website in that viewers can respond to the postings. Leighton Buzzard Ramblers use their Facebook Page for posting walks and other activities and news. They say that non-members have joined their walks as a result of them being publicised on the Facebook Page. So their Facebook Page is also a publicity tool.

Having a social media account is like having a house pet - it needs care and attention, possibly on an almost daily basis. Safeguards need to be in place against unsuitable content; some postings need responses; content needs to be added on a regular basis.

- *Does IVW need a social media presence, and if so, why? What would be its purpose?*
 - *Does IVW need to grow its membership, and if so, why?*
 - *Does IVW need to be more in touch with its membership, and if so, why?*
- *Do we have the volunteer capacity to do this?*
- *If we go down this route, what social media platform would be best for IVW?*

Giving consent to be contacted by email

A bit of background. The Ramblers Association and IVW take protecting the personal data of members very seriously. We only use your personal data in accordance with the consents you have given. Your personal data is stored centrally in a Ramblers Association database which is updated daily. Membership Secretaries do not keep lists of members. Instead, for each mail out we download the relevant contact list from the database, use it and then destroy all traces of it.

At present, the majority of members have given their consent for us to contact them by email. Thank you if this includes you because it not only saves money and resources, it also save time - for our Chairman Roy Carter who generally prints out what needs to be posted, and Committee Member Jan Wolfarth who prints out the labels, sticks them on envelopes, stuffs them and posts them.

If you would like to amend your consent so you can be contacted by email, you can contact the Ramblers Association directly, or ask me / the Membership Secretary to assist you.

Membership Secretary vacancy

After two years I am stepping down from the role of IVW Membership Secretary. The reason is that my future travel plans will take me to places where the internet is not secure. Hence, I cannot guarantee the security of your personal data. I shall miss doing this job. In my opinion it's the best role on the Committee. I get a great deal of personal satisfaction from doing it. If you are interested, please contact me to find out more. I will give my full and ongoing support to the new post holder.

Webmaster's Report 2022

During the past year I have continued to maintain the IVW Website on a regular basis to keep members informed about group activities including our walks programme. The content on the website is mostly produced in conjunction with one or more committee members or group members. I have also redesigned the way that we collect and process walks details to make the process easier for all involved. This had some hiccups in the early days for walks coordinators, but these were rectified for future programmes. We are now in a much better position for any future changes that Ramblers impose – there is to be another change soon which is currently being tested by a few groups prior to general release which will inevitably require further changes. I have fully supported the Programme Secretary in the production of the three group walks programmes produced in the last year and supported leaders by updating the online programme where needed, often working with the Membership Secretary to inform our walkers. I have also provided IT support to members of the committee when requested.

As reported by our Treasurer, the Website license and hosting was renewed for a further 3 years in June 2022. The next renewal also coincides with the need to renew the domain name (ivelvalleywalkers.co.uk).

All the above have been enjoyable activities. I am sad to be leaving the role after 4 years, but the current committee's values and priorities no longer align to my own.

Pauline Seddon

Programme Secretary Report 2022 AGM

Over the last 12 months we have hosted a total of 196 walks which accounts for some 1,535 miles which I think is an achievement to be proud of.

The programme offers a varied range of walks across Bedfordshire, into North Hertfordshire and Cambridgeshire all of which have been thoroughly enjoyed by our members.

This year has been a little easier than the year before as we are recovering from Covid, and my thanks go to all the leaders for stepping up and offering such a good range of walks throughout the year.

Leaders still have a choice to limit numbers if they wish to do so, and therefore booking on these walks will still be required. We ask that everyone still supports bookable walks if leaders feel more comfortable by restricting numbers.

The aim for the committee is to try to promote more members into becoming leaders which will ease the pressure on our current volunteers so I urge anybody thinking about becoming a leader to **please have a go** as there will always be someone there to give help and training and you will enjoy the experience.

I am standing down after serving 5 years in the role of Programme Secretary and so I would like to say a big thank you to all of the Coordinator's and Leaders who have helped me to produce the walk programmes for IVW and especially Pauline our Webmaster who has worked extremely hard to improve our systems and processes for the website and printable programme.

It's been a pleasure to have worked on the committee and I hope to see you on our walks sometime in the future.

Alan Rowland