



OPENING THE WAY OUR STRATEGIC AMBITION FOR THE NEXT DECADE

Dear friends,

The Board of Trustees is pleased to share the draft strategic plan which sets out the refreshed ambitions of the Ramblers as a charity over the next decade. We are deliberately using the word 'refreshed' because the strategic plan does not represent an entirely new direction of travel; rather it seeks to continue the excellent work we already do collectively as staff, members, volunteers, and with partners, and it places a stronger emphasis on those aspects of our work that create the most positive impact for those people and communities who face the least access and most barriers to walking outdoors in nature.

This cover note explains the journey that the Ramblers has been on to develop the refreshed strategic plan, the rationale for what is being proposed and what this might mean in practice. The trustees are grateful for the time and energy that General Council members have already put into providing comments and helping to shape the refreshed ambitions.

We hope that you will join us in endorsing the refreshed strategic plan at the Extraordinary General Meeting in Manchester on Saturday 25 November. Of course, there will be plenty of time for further discussion, comments and questions and we look forward to seeing you all there. A note on the process is included as an appendix to this cover note.

(Please note that the refreshed strategic plan is currently a draft document and, once considered by the General Council, we intend to have it properly designed to produce a more visually appealing, public-facing version which will incorporate pictures, photographs, and graphics.)

Rebecca Dawson
Chair, board of trustees

Background to the refreshed strategic plan

Why a refreshed strategic plan?

The Ramblers' current 10-year strategy began in 2014 and is nearing the end of its lifecycle. Over the past nine years the world has changed around us, particularly since the start of the pandemic, and the Board of Trustees agreed in June 2022 to undertake a strategic review. This review, supported by Trust Impact, a specialist partner in this area, comprised extensive research and engagement over an 18-month period. This was to ensure that the Ramblers' future ambitions were founded on evidence and reflected a wide range of voices from within and outside the charity.

Perception and relevance challenge

The strategic review highlighted that the Ramblers faces a perception and relevance challenge, specifically a lack of clarity about the difference we want to make and for whom. We see this confusion reflected in the fact that although walking in England, Scotland and Wales is growing in popularity, fewer people want to engage with us as members and volunteers. Member feedback has repeatedly mentioned the challenges in recruiting new members and volunteers. We know, therefore, that we must evolve the charity if we are to attract more supporters and continue to deliver for our members and the public. The trustees believe this means sharpening the focus on the Ramblers' charitable purpose and demonstrating the charity's wider public benefit.

Responding to socio-economic challenges

One of the main ways we can do this is by responding to some of the most significant social and economic pressures that we are all experiencing to greater or lesser degrees, not least the aftermath of the pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis. As a charity rooted in local communities, we are well-placed to help strengthen community cohesion, bridge divides, and build unity, with a highly accessible low cost offer that research shows is highly beneficial for people's health and wellbeing.

On the political agenda and in the context of squeezed local authority budgets, the Ramblers is also well-positioned to keep highlighting the benefits of walking and access to nature. As a charity, we need to find new ways of making the case for investment in the walking infrastructure from central and local government. The recent research carried out by the New Economics Foundation¹ illustrates the magnitude of the financial and wellbeing benefit that investment in paths and walking has the potential to provide. The Ramblers can also play an important part in preventative methods to reduce the burden on the NHS now, and in the future, by helping people maintain healthy lifestyles through walking.

Addressing inequity of access to the outdoors

The strategic review showed that one of the most impactful ways we could respond to these challenges is by helping to address the inequities to walking outdoors in nature. Research shows that people living in less affluent areas and people with particular protected characteristics (as defined by the Equality Act 2010) have less access, and face more barriers to walking, than others. The historical context of the Ramblers' work is access for all and, consistent with our founding ethos, there remains a clear role for us in removing barriers to walking for people and communities where we know the need is greatest. Our research and

¹ 'Who has a public right of way? An analysis of provision and inequity in England and Wales', New Economics Foundation, September 2023

engagement phase confirmed that other organisations in the outdoor sector want the Ramblers to do this work and will support us in delivering it.

Impact and public benefit

The strategic review is a key moment in time to reinforce our focus on the path network and the places we walk, and it is a chance to be more purposeful in who we help benefit from walking, and how. Evolution is the only option. Charities today must demonstrate impact and public benefit and unless we evolve, we will not be here to support future generations of walkers.

How the views of members and volunteers have helped shape the strategic plan

The strategic review over the past 18 months has been a highly collaborative process involving a wide range of stakeholders including members, volunteers, trustees, staff, outdoor sector partners, funders, and individuals who were not members of the Ramblers. A working group of trustees, members, and staff did some intensive work between August 2022 and March 2023 to inform and respond to the research phase of the review, and helped agree the ‘foundations for impact’ which underpin the refreshed strategic plan.

The member survey over the summer of 2023 attracted 7,758 responses, a high response rate for surveys of this nature, which illustrates the level of interest and engagement in our proposed strategic plan. Members were asked to rate a series of impact statements on a scale of 1 to 10. Overall, support for the impact statements was high, with all statements averaging over 8 out of 10. 27% of respondents answered 10 out of 10 to all statements, reflecting full support for the proposed impact areas.

Over 200 members and volunteers from Areas and Groups, including some General Council members and members of the Ramblers Scotland Strategic Committee and Ramblers Cymru Steering Group, attended one of the online strategy sessions that took place during September and October 2023. These were hosted by trustees, our chief executive, and other members of the Ramblers’ staff team.

Trustees heard loud and clear the matters that are particularly important to members and volunteers, and that members and volunteers wanted the charity to continue to prioritise improved provision, quality, and information, on access, paths, and rights of way. A continuing commitment to this foundational aspect of the Ramblers’ work is reflected in the refreshed strategic plan.

Members and volunteers also talked about those things that make it trickier on a day-to-day basis, particularly recruiting and retaining walk leaders, attracting younger people, and the tools provided to support activities. This frustration that some members and volunteers experience is recognised, and staff are working hard to alleviate this and will continue to do so.

Trustees and staff were inspired by the examples shared by many members and volunteers, where walking opportunities for new communities are being created, particularly for those with the least access and the most barriers to walking outdoors.

What this means in practice

Members and volunteers should keep doing what they do so brilliantly (campaigning, delivering led walks, keeping rights of way open, maintaining footpaths). At the same time, the Ramblers will focus a greater proportion of its resources and activities on people and communities who will benefit most, broadening the charity’s relevance to society so that more people will support its charitable cause.

Examples of what we might do include:

- engaging directly with communities in areas of need, to improve local paths and give them the skills and confidence to go walking
- supporting volunteers to champion access and improve local paths so that they are more accessible to people with a range of needs
- making our walk leader advice and training more relevant and more easily accessible to communities across England, Scotland and Wales, to support them go walking
- extending programmes like Ramblers Wellbeing Walks (for people with health conditions) and the Out There Award (for young adults in urban areas) to enable them to enjoy the benefits of walking
- working in partnership with other organisations to advocate at a national and local level for investment in paths and changes in policy and legislation to remove barriers to walking.

The Ramblers delivers its activities through a mixed delivery model including members, volunteers, staff, and funded programmes (usually delivered with partner organisations). We are one charity working together to build and maintain relationships with local communities. It is important to highlight that this mixed model will continue; there is no expectation that members and volunteers will do more or different things. However, the charity will particularly want to support where volunteers are already undertaking activities aligned with the refreshed strategic direction, or where there is an appetite to try some of these activities.

Overview of the strategic plan

The accompanying draft refreshed strategic plan sets out a 10-year ambition and is focused on a set of four desired outcomes. Each of the four outcomes is described in the strategic plan and illustrated with a real-life case study as an example of what they could mean in practice.

The outcomes are underpinned by six strategic enablers. These will guide the Ramblers' use of resources and determine the activities we'll do as a charity to drive the delivery of our strategic outcomes through our approach to finance, income generation, advocacy, operations, data and digital, people, and governance.

Alongside the strategic plan, the Ramblers is developing an impact measurement framework. Our partner Trust Impact is supporting this and working with staff on a plan for the short, medium and long-term to build our capability to measure impact in a meaningful way. This means keeping it simple in year one with a focus on defining a small set of impact measures, introducing consistent definitions and data collection systems, and gathering baseline data. In the strategic plan, we have identified a single impact measure for each outcome as the starting point.

How we'll deliver the strategic plan

The draft refreshed strategic plan is intentionally high level and focused on our 'north star' ambition for the next decade. The detailed financial and operational delivery plans that will enable the achievement of our ambitions are overseen by the Board of Trustees. The Board has recently approved a three-year financial plan and an annual business plan for 2023-24.

Once the strategic plan has been agreed with the General Council, we will move to a cycle of producing two-year business plans, starting with 2024-26 which will align with the remaining two years of the current

three-year financial plan. This plan is focused on sustainable income and investment, enabling the Ramblers to live within its means and maintain its long-term financial resilience.

Moving to this planning cycle will help ensure that the Ramblers is focusing its resources to make tangible progress over medium-term time horizons, recognising that one-year cycles are often too reactive and non-strategic, while still giving the charity the flexibility to respond to new opportunities, emerging risks, and external changes within the lifetime of the strategic plan.

The Board of Trustees will oversee the delivery of the strategic plan and monitor progress.

Conclusion and the ask of General Council members

The draft refreshed strategic plan is rooted in the Ramblers' historical origins. We want to continue to prioritise the protection of paths and access rights for all, and go further by helping those who face the most barriers to walking outdoors in nature. In so doing, we will demonstrate that the Ramblers is more than a walking club: it is a charity that delivers public benefit, is highly relevant to today's society, and is a key player in tackling some of its greatest challenges.

The Board of Trustees recommends this refreshed strategic plan to General Council members and asks you to join us in endorsing its ambitions.

Appendix: Process for Extraordinary General Meeting on 25 November 2023

Under powers set out at Standing Order A26, the Board of Trustees has called an Extraordinary General Meeting (EGM) on 25 November 2023 to ask Council to agree a refreshed strategy, which will be the only item of business at the meeting. The intention to call an EGM for this purpose was announced at the Annual General Meeting (AGM) at Birmingham in April 2023. Under Article 23.4, implementation of any strategic plan for the Ramblers is a specific matter which requires approval of Council members at a meeting of the General Council. Under Article 19.4(f), Council is being asked to exercise “its powers in respect of specific matters required by the articles of association” at the meeting, but not in the form of a Council member motion, under Article 19.4(c).

The quorum for any general meeting, as set out in Standing Order A35, is one third of Council members entitled to vote upon the business to be discussed and being present in person or by proxy. As of 1 November 2023 there are 129 Council members so the quorum is 44. Approval of the strategy requires a simple majority (i.e. over 50%) of members present at the EGM in person or by proxy. As with all Council meetings, each Council member will have one vote, and a person who is also acting as proxy for another Council member(s) will have additional vote(s). The decision will be taken by a show of hands unless a poll (using a voting form) is demanded by the chair or at least two Council members who are present. If the vote is level, the chair does not have a casting vote.

Article 19.4 (c) & (f)	The <i>general council</i> may exercise the following powers either at an annual or extraordinary general meeting of the <i>general council</i> (c) to consider and, if thought fit, pass any council members' motions; (f) any powers in respect of specific matters required by the articles of association to be exercised by the general council.
Article 21.1	At any meeting of the general council a resolution put to the vote of the meeting is decided by a simple majority (unless a higher majority is required by the act or the articles of association) on a show of hands unless a poll is demanded (before or after the result of the show of hands is declared). A poll can be demanded by the chair or at least two council members who are present. A demand by a person as a proxy for a council member will be the same as a demand by that council member
Article 22.1	Every council member (including the chair), present in person or by proxy, has one vote on a show of hands or on a poll, except that a person who is also acting as proxy for other council member(s) is entitled to exercise additional vote(s) on behalf of those council member(s). If the votes are level, the chair does not have a casting vote.
Article 23.4	In preparing any major strategic plans for the work and future development of Ramblers, the board of trustees must consult widely within Ramblers and will not implement any strategic plan without prior approval of the council members at a meeting of the general council EXCEPT THAT the board of trustees may implement the plan without approval where in the reasonable opinion of the board of trustees, failure to implement the plan would not be in the best interests of Ramblers, or would be likely to result in a breach of statute or other law, contract, trust or duty of care owed by Ramblers or any members of the board of trustees, or in damage to the reputation of Ramblers, or in a legal claim against Ramblers.
Standing Order A26	An extraordinary general meeting of the general council may be called at any time by the board of trustees or on the demand of not less than 5% of the council members. In either case the purpose of the meeting must be specified in the notice of the meeting. Only business for which the meeting is called and any other business of which proper notice has been given may be discussed at the extraordinary general meeting.
Standing Order A35	No business can be discussed at any meeting of the general council unless a quorum of council members is present. One third of the council members entitled to vote upon the business to be discussed and being present in person or by proxy will be a quorum