Chair's Review of the Year 2025–26

1 October 2025 to 30 September 2026
Beds, Bucks & Northants LDWA
Annual General Meeting 2026

Thank You

As I look back over the past year, I am reminded that everything our group achieves is made possible by volunteers. Whether organising challenge events, leading walks, welcoming new members, maintaining the website, serving on checkpoints, preparing food, managing equipment or helping behind the scenes, your contribution keeps our group thriving. My sincere thanks go to every member who has given their time and enthusiasm during the year.

I would particularly like to thank Gill Bunker for her outstanding service as Secretary and the support, knowledge and continuity she has provided to both the committee and the wider membership.

The Committee

The committee has overseen another busy and successful year. Alongside myself as Chair, I have been supported by Jim Blakelock, Gill Bunker, Dee Brockway, Terry Brown, Roy Carter, Mike Hyland and Sara Waldron. I would also like to acknowledge the contribution of Chris Bent, who stepped down during the year. Behind the committee stands a wider team of walk leaders, checkpoint managers, marshals, event organisers, caterers and volunteers whose efforts deserve equal recognition.

Governance and Good Practice

Much of the committee's work this year focused on ensuring the long-term sustainability and resilience of the group. This included annual data protection compliance, strengthening incident reporting procedures, reviewing role descriptions, succession planning, and preparing for committee turnover. We also reviewed lessons learned early in the year and implemented improvements including greater use of BCC mailing lists and official group email accounts. The committee continued to engage actively with national LDWA developments, including the Digital Platform project and evaluation of the PACER event management system.

Membership and Volunteers

Membership continued to grow throughout the year, taking us beyond the milestone of 1,000 members and associates connected with the group. This is a tremendous achievement and reflects the strength of BBN's reputation.

However, growth also reinforces the importance of recruiting and supporting volunteers. I am pleased that several members have stepped forward to take on new committee responsibilities, helping secure the future of the group. Dee Brockway's personal welcome calls to new members continue to receive exceptionally positive feedback and remain one of the defining strengths of our local group.

Social Walks and Long Distance Trails

Our social walks programme remains at the heart of BBN. The Rutland Round again proved highly popular, with many members completing all four stages. Planning and delivery of longer-distance projects including the Cross Bucks Way albeit aborted, North Chiltern Trail and other linear routes provided members with opportunities to enjoy new challenges and explore more of our local area. A particular highlight was the successful joint walk with the Norfolk & Suffolk Group, providing an opportunity to share ideas, experiences and friendship across local group boundaries.

Challenge Events

Challenge events continue to play a central role in the life of the group. The 6th Hannington Hike once again attracted an excellent field and positive feedback. The tenth anniversary Pick & Mix was a particular highlight and provided a fitting opportunity to thank Dave and Lynn Yorston for their many years of dedication to the event. Preparations also continued for the Steppingley Step and Chiltern Kanter. During the year the committee undertook a detailed review of event finances and approved measures aimed at ensuring long-term sustainability while continuing to invest in member benefits and volunteer support.

Hunnypot Hundred

One of the year's outstanding successes was BBN's involvement in staffing Checkpoint 3 at the Hunnypot Hundred led by Jim Blakelock. A large volunteer team came together to deliver a professional and welcoming checkpoint operation. The event demonstrated the depth of commitment within the group and helped strengthen friendships amongst volunteers. Lessons learned from this experience will help us prepare for future Hundred events, including forthcoming support for the Jurassic (2027) and Millstone Hundreds (2028).

Investment in the Group

The committee continued to invest thoughtfully in projects and initiatives that directly benefit members. This included support for volunteer expenses, new promotional banner flags, equipment improvements, and continued support for social walking activities. The Donate-a-Gate project on the Cross Bucks Way delivered a practical improvement to access on a route valued by many walkers. We also explored first-aid training opportunities and reviewed wider approaches to safety and emergency preparedness.

Group Holiday and Social Activities

Many thanks to Roy Carter for organising another successful group holiday, this year based in Weymouth. Places were quickly filled and members enjoyed an excellent programme of walks and social activities. These holidays remain a valued part of group life, creating opportunities for friendship, walking and shared experiences beyond our regular programme.

Looking Ahead

Our priorities remain clear: maintaining a strong and varied walks programme, recruiting and supporting volunteers, delivering high-quality challenge events, ensuring sound financial management and preserving the welcoming and inclusive culture that makes BBN such a successful local group. Membership growth, successful events and the willingness of members to volunteer all give me confidence that the group remains in a strong position for the future.

Thank you for your continued support, and I look forward to seeing many of you walking in the year ahead.

Sarah Feal
Chair
Beds, Bucks & Northants Long Distance Walkers Association