

2021 AGM REPORTS



LONG DISTANCE

LDWA

WALKERS ASSOCIATION

Agenda Item 3 - Hon. Treasurer's Report **(to be read in conjunction with the 2019-2020 accounts)**

The 2019-2020 LDWA accounts cover the year from 1 October 2019 to 30 September 2020. They were prepared by the Hon. Treasurer, John Elrick, and finalised by the LDWA's accountants, RfM Chartered Accountants.

Broadly speaking, the LDWA was relatively unscathed by the financial impact of COVID-19 in the period from March 2020 (the first lockdown) to September 2020 (the end of the accounting period). Turnover remained stable and Administrative Expenses fell, leading to a Net Surplus of £45,510.

- Turnover – Down by £50,707 which can be explained by the previous year's turnover including a one-off £75,000 bequest (shown as a donation). The direct results of COVID-19 were mixed: Advertising Income fell by £1,400 due to regular clients like SatMap and Cicerone going into lockdown, but Membership Subscriptions held up well and Merchandising Sales rose from £1,582 to £4,981 due to interest from participants in the virtual events.
- Administrative Expenses – Down by £28,592. COVID-19 was one cause of this reduction with NEC expenses down by £8,532 by virtue of Zoom NEC meetings replacing our physical meetings in Nottingham. This saving cushioned the extra cost of cancelling the 2021 AGM hotel venue in favour of a Zoom AGM. As a result, we paid a cancellation fee to the hotel of £1,338 but the AGM booking at the hotel was rolled forward to 2022 when the £1,338 will be credited to our bill.
- An area of reduced costs nothing to do with COVID-19 was web site costs, down by £18,495 following the NEC decision in 2019 to limit IT work to routine maintenance. However, publicity costs increased by £2,588 (due to the NEC's decision to advertise the LDWA in outdoor magazines), insurance costs rose by £1,979 (due to increased cover) and Bank charges rose by £2,909 (reflecting an increase in the volume of transactions).
- IT Development Fund - In 2019 the NEC set up the fund to finance the redevelopment of the LDWA web site. At 1 October 2019 the Fund comprised £75,000 from a large legacy and at 30 September 2020 the Fund comprised £91,639. The money raised in 2019-2020 came from the following sources: donations from Local Groups/individual members/2020 Virtual Events and expenses saved by having virtual NEC meetings. As at 30 September 2020 no funds had been spent.

Agenda item 4 - National Executive Committee Reports

a) Chair's Report

When we left the Annual General Meeting in Easingwold in March 2020, whilst the likely impact of Covid-19 had been discussed, the enormity of what was about to happen worldwide had not yet been fully appreciated. Delegates elbow bumped and sanitised their hands whilst remaining in close proximity with each other and in hindsight, knowing what we know now, our naivety was palpable.

Consequently, on Monday March 16th, following the Prime Minister's address to the nation, the National Executive Committee (NEC) made the decision to suspend all official LDWA activities with immediate effect. As the NEC discovered in the intervening months, that was the easiest decision that the NEC had to make in relation to Covid-19. As the UK started to emerge from the first wave, the NEC met every Monday evening to discuss the different rules and guidelines that were being published in the three nations in which the LDWA operates. Frankly, keeping on top of the intricate details which were so different from the headlines that the media reported, was at times very time consuming and I wish to thank my NEC colleagues for their dedication throughout the last twelve months as we grappled with the detail and sought to find a balance that would enable our members to return to long distance walking of some variety safely and legally.

The NEC worked with the Ramblers, Sport England, Sport Scotland and the Wales Sports Association and I am particularly grateful for the work that Stuart Bain (NEC Risk and Environment volunteer) who, following discussions with NEC colleagues, then drafted the required paperwork that would enable our Groups to walk safely and legally. This meant that delivery plans had to be written and submitted to Sports Scotland and England (the situation in Wales is different) and it meant that our Local Groups had to comply with additional bureaucracy to simply go for a walk. The NEC recognised the impact that the additional bureaucracy was to have on some Local Groups, but it was either this approach or no official Local Group walks.

As the first wave of Covid-19 reduced, the NEC turned its attention to how Challenge Events might return safely. We engaged representatives from the Local Groups and drafted rules and guidelines that would see Challenge Events return, albeit, in a completely different format from that previously enjoyed. As the guidelines were shared with our members, the second wave of the pandemic really started to accelerate and understandably caused most Local Groups to pause any plans that they might have had.

One major casualty of the uncertainty of the future and the inability to plan was Y 100 Sir Fynwy. Sadly, the news was announced on the 15th December that the unanimous view of the organising committee was that it was impossible to plan for the event that would be due to be held in May 2021. Despite the prospect of the vaccine helping to reduce the instances of

infection, there were too many factors that prevented any planning to take place with confidence.

It was imperative that our members were sighted on the decisions that the NEC took and a variety of platforms were used to communicate with members. We communicated primarily through Facebook, the LDWA website, Twitter and via bulk email to the Local Groups for the Groups to then disseminate to their members. I'm sure we could have done better, but we worked with the tools available to us and continuously reviewed our performance.

But, overall, 2020 was a dreadful year. We lost Ann Sayer, our Vice President and the obituary in Strider outlined what a truly remarkable lady she was. I think it's fair to say that she will, in death, have inspired a new generation of walkers due to her walking feats.

What can we take positively from 2020? Well, the LDWA online community really blossomed and with the hard work of Julie Cribb (NEC Local Groups volunteer), Julian White (NEC Publicity & Communications volunteer) and Madeleine Watson (NEC General Secretary & Interim IT volunteer) many members took part in the virtual challenges that were dreamed up. Local Groups started to think about how they could create Anytime Events and the success of Norfolk & Suffolk's Flower of Suffolk was replicated by other Local Groups.

And, Hazel Bound became Hazel Bound B.E.M following the announcement in the Queen's Birthday Honours List for her services to long distance walking. Congratulations Hazel!

The NEC continued to work hard and during the first lockdown, a new five year Business Plan was written and shared with members. Julie Cribb, my successor was one of the authors, and as I leave my post as Chair after three years, I know that the future of the LDWA is in safe and secure hands. There are still some tricky decisions to make, and the funds required for the new IT system still need to be raised and decisions on what the new IT platform will contain still need to be made whilst reviews of the structure of the Executive and Local Groups need to take place. Unfortunately Covid-19 delayed this work but I know that as we emerge from 2020, the LDWA will get stronger and stronger.

Finally, Alan Warrington and I are leaving the NEC. I wish to thank Alan publicly for the work that he has undertaken on behalf of all of us who enjoy the annual event. After his cardiac arrest of last year, it would have been quite understandable if he'd stepped away from the NEC, but that he returned and continued to work so hard is indicative of his professionalism. Thank you all for your support and as I leave the NEC, I leave knowing that I did all I could to start the process of modernising the Association, to have reached out to the wider walking community and in doing so, raise the LDWA's profile.

David Morgan, Chair

b) General Secretary's Report

I have continued with my role of providing advice to the NEC Board/Committee and, when appropriate, individual members, on aspects of LDWA business and also providing administrative support for NEC Board/Committee meetings and the AGM.

As other members of the National Executive Committee have reported, this year has been dominated by the need to review COVID-19 guidance from across the UK in relation to LDWA activities. The obvious changes related to social walks and challenge events, but there was also a change needed to Local Group constitutions to cover their AGMs. I've also put in place arrangements to manage the National AGM in March which will be held via Zoom.

I have coordinated the 3rd year of Volunteer Awards for LDWA members, which has generated a large number of nominations, reflecting the huge base of volunteers within the membership. Huge thanks to everyone who has volunteered over the years, and especially those who have nominated others, and those who have been nominated, for these awards. I will review the process according to The Business Plan section 2c (To recognise the contribution and commitment of LDWA member volunteers and supporters) and report back via usual communication channels by August 2021.

Madeleine Watson, General Secretary

c) Membership Report

Further to last year's report and presentation at the AGM, a "Guide to Membership Page" was prepared and circulated with copies of the April 2020 Strider, enabling members to update their own details; change passwords etc. This has had the desired effect of reducing some of my workload in that members are updating their own details, however some members are still emailing me direct with new email addresses; new postal addresses etc so clearly we still have some work to do.

Throughout the year and especially towards the end of the year (renewals time) I have received a number of emails from members explaining that they were having issues logging on to the system and struggling to renew/update their details. This is obviously frustrating for everyone as we want the renewal process to be as streamlined as possible and also it should be much easier for members to update their own personal details.

The website is certainly "creaking" and this is apparent from the regular emails I receive from members expressing frustration at not being able to access the system or when they do access they are encountering major problems. As you are aware we are looking at updating our IT systems and a standalone membership website is on our radar so I hope those donations continue to come in so we can hopefully obtain a more sophisticated, more user friendly membership website. It will also be useful to have a system where members can easily see if they have direct debits set up so they can be rest assured they do not need to make payment of their subs or indeed send me another direct debit mandate with exactly the same information as is already on their account.

Membership at the beginning of 2020 set off at a great speed of knots but sadly once the pandemic set in numbers slowed down. However, we still received a steady flow of new members and in 2020 we gained 1148 new members. In comparison, in 2019 we attracted 1694 new members, but when taking into account the pandemic I consider that 1148 new members in such a difficult year to be very positive.

I will provide more up to date figures for membership at the AGM (once the renewal process has been completed).

Throughout the year I have been liaising with our Communication and Publicity Officer and Environment Officers (Julian White and Stuart Bain) looking at how to make our membership more inclusive¹ and ways in which we can track new membership applications to measure the effectiveness of this initiative. In addition, we are looking at assisting physical and mental health wellbeing² by encouraging participation in the range of activities that the LDWA provides. Of course, with the pandemic our range of activities has reduced, but our discussions and ideas are ready to put in place when we are back up and running. We have had some very constructive discussions with other members of the LDWA and will continue to monitor and push these initiatives.

Julia Warman, Membership Secretary

d) IT and Internet Report

Project Team

When I agreed to be the interim IT and Internet Officer, I didn't envisage that it would last all year! Adam Dawson was around at the beginning of the year, finishing off the projects that were close to completion and providing excellent handover support. I spent the beginning of the year building up a team offering more technical support, and more recently have introduced the concept of a "helpdesk" type role. Tim Bedwell provides a first port of call and directs queries to others in the team. The team now consists of:

Andrew Beck – membership

Tim Bedwell – PACER, initial in-box management

LDP – Andy Clark (plus team)

Paul Glynn – Permissions work

Michael Headley – general overall support and website maintenance

Richard Handford – email support and other technical support

¹ 1(e) of the Business Plan

² 1(h) of the Business Plan

Major Projects

Since the last AGM, two major projects have been successfully completed – the launch of the refreshed Local Groups websites, and the launch of the new Social Walks Database. The Local Groups websites are self contained and have continued to support the Local Groups throughout the UK. The infrastructure for the Social Walks Database has been released and lists all social walks since January 2008. Although some groups have uploaded GPX files, the number is rather limited and it would be great to see this increased so that the potential of the database can be realised.

Richard Handford has made some really good progress in reviewing email traffic and supporting members where emails are not getting through. We have adjusted the spam settings so that the overall rating of the LDWA is not negatively impacted.

Development Work

Other development work has been put on hold, as detailed in last year's report to the AGM, pending a new website. There has been some maintenance work carried out, and a few bugs fixed. The responsiveness of our supplier has been severely affected by COVID-19 this year. Thank you for the patience of those waiting for changes to be made. Plans to scope a new website, as detailed in the business plan, have also been heavily affected by COVID-19 and the lack of a permanent IT and Internet Officer. Increased workload within the NEC, my lack of IT skills and uncertainty of travel and inability to meet in person have meant that little progress has been made over the year in starting the process of defining the new system. This is hugely disappointing to me. In the meantime, the IT fund is now established and will provide Rhys Pippard with a great resource once he is in post as the new IT and Internet Officer.

Madeleine Watson, Interim IT and Internet Officer

e) Strider Report

August and December 2020 Striders

Because of Covid-19 driving a coach and horses through LDWA activities, producing these Striders was something of a challenge, as will be producing the April 2021 Strider. I took the view that producing magazines for our members which were as bright and newsy as possible, at a time when walking was so severely curtailed, would be good for members' morale. Most of the feedback I have had does seem to bear this out, with several members taking the trouble to thank me (and the NEC) to say how much they appreciated their Striders at this difficult time.

Before embarking on work for both those editions, I emailed all group secretaries asking for contributions, and had a good response, for which I was very grateful.

I found it very interesting – and actually, something a privilege - to be editing the LDWA's magazine during the most challenging time in the LDWA's history. Apart from anything else, Strider is the LDWA's journal of record. With Covid-19 stories, great care had to be taken to refer members to the main website for up-to-date information, as the situation was changing so rapidly (and continues to do so), and arrangements were different in England, Scotland and Wales. In all the years I was a newspaper editor, I used to love responding to events which produced big stories, so I guess I am just doing what I have done for so long.

Business Plan

One of the actions in the LDWA's Business Plan is 'To provide a coordinated approach to both external and internal communications, which will include Strider and all forms of electronic media'. A sub-group, comprising the NEC's Communications and Publicity Officer, the Local Groups Officer, the Membership Officer and the Strider Editor, has been set up to implement this, and I am quite excited about it as it should be very useful. Being slightly subjective, I am due to step down as editor in a year's time and I am hoping that the sub-group will be able to play an important role in getting a new editor – who, naturally, will edit Strider in his or her own way, as I have edited Strider in my way. I will certainly do whatever I can to ensure as smooth handover as possible, as Julie Welch did with me.

Strider 150/LDWA 50th birthday

There are two huge Striders coming up – Strider 150 in August this year, and the LDWA's 50th birthday. I am in contact with Ken Falconer about both these massively important projects (something which is easier now that I live in Scotland).

The actual 50th birthday is in January 2022, so the 50th birthday edition is planned to be either the December 2021 or the April 2022 one. This is not planned to be a separate, standalone publication, as the marvellous 40th anniversary one was in 2012 – there would be no point trying to repeat that, and in any case, it would not be inappropriate to incur significant additional printing costs at this time, as the association is in the process of raising funds to purchase a new website. The LDWA's half century will be reported – in a way that is as thorough, informative and attractive as possible – in one of the two editions mentioned above, and I will allocate several pages to the big birthday. Of course, any ideas or contributions from members will be gratefully received.

Strider production costs

As part of the drive to raise funds for the new website, I was asked to identify Strider cost savings. I have done this, and the cost savings are being implemented. These savings amount to more than £5,000 per annum, and include printing Strider on slightly lower quality paper (70gsm as opposed to 80gsm - and about which I have not yet received any complaints) and no longer printing the Hillwalkers' Register and the AGM as separate supplements, with both these features being brought into the magazine. Also, Neil Smy – who has arranged Strider make-up, printing and distribution for more than 20 years – has kindly agreed to drop his own charges.

In addition, John Elrick is looking at additional possible savings if we switch distribution from Royal Mail to a company called One Post.

Strider wrapping

From the August 2020 edition, we have not used polywrapping for Strider and are instead using paper wrapping which can be recycled.

Lastly

I say this with every AGM report I write, but it is worth repeating now – particularly when I have needed lots of copy and photos because of the effect of Covid-19 on our activities – but I am always very grateful to LDWA members for their contributions. Strider is the journal for LDWA members, reflecting the work and walks of our association, and if the editor did not get those contributions from our members, then there would not be a Strider.

So once again, and please take this message back to your groups - thank you so much for your help in filling the LDWA's magazine during the most difficult year in our association's history.

Graham Smith, Strider Editor

f) Local Groups Report

Curiously, looking back over the past year, I realised that the 2020 AGM was actually the last event I attended and almost the last time I left my local area. The following weekend the country went into lockdown due to the coronavirus pandemic and it was some time before I could even leave my home for more than an hour a day. This not only changed my life and that of all of our members, but completely changed the nature of my LDWA role, as much of what I do as Local Groups' Officer is checking and editing social walks for Strider and writing about what the local groups get up to in-between issues. As no LDWA walks were happening you might think that there would be a big gap in my life and I would have copious amounts of free time to fill. However, this was not to be the case. Almost immediately it was also known that the Y 100 Sir Fynwy would be cancelled and the tangible sense of disappointment echoing around the Association prompted me to turn to social media to try to bring members from across the country together in a virtual community providing mutual support and encouragement.

During May I organised the virtual Y 100 Sir Fynwy with the help and support of many of the marshals and volunteers who were due to be helping at the real event. I also ran a May 100-mile challenge for members who could only exercise for one hour a day, but if they got out every day would reach the 100-mile mark. Both events were very successful and generated a positive community spirit which encouraged me to put on several other 100-mile monthly challenges throughout the rest of 2020. One even had a photo competition associated with it as the quality and range of many of the photos coming through on the Facebook pages was outstanding. I'm afraid I might have created a sub-set of Trig Point nerds within LDWA too! Such was the interest in the virtual events that two souvenir buffs were created to mark the curious way that the Association had become more involved in internet-based activities.

Aside from these events the NEC began to meet weekly via Zoom videoconferencing to respond to the constantly changing situation with respect to the rules and restrictions

imposed by the UK governments due to the pandemic in order to keep groups and members up to date with what activities were possible.

The NEC were cognisant that the business of the LDWA needed to continue despite Covid and one of the key actions that was completed was the development and signing off of the 2020-2025 Business Plan. A number of the development objectives are within my remit as LGO and relate specifically to the support of Local Groups and action has started already in implementing these, as follows:

1a Sustainability. To monitor an increase in the social walks being added to the Local Group Walks database.

An email was sent following the NEC meeting to all Local Group Secretaries and Walks Secretaries with information on how to upload local walks to the LGW database. Monitoring will commence in 2021.

1c Sustainability. To increase the number of LDWA social walks nationally by promoting the existence of the Toolkit which includes guidelines for walk leaders and to monitor the numbers from 2021.

This has been completely put off track due to Covid restrictions during 2020.

1g Sustainability. To provide a coordinated approach to communications.

Established Dedicated Officer groups for VC and email discussions. About to set up WhatsApp groups with those interested. Already work closely with the Communications Officer to present a joined up approach to social media and Strider content.

2a To develop and implement a volunteer strategy.

Strategy Paper and volunteers for the working party in place. Next step to arrange a workshop and add actions to the Strategy for implementation in 2021.

2b To support and develop the effectiveness of local groups through development of the Toolkit and increasing the range and types of communications.

Toolkit contents have been added by a number of members of the NEC. The Local Groups' Weekend was held as a virtual event and communication and challenges were among the topics discussed. The responses were particularly skewed this year as a result of Covid, though the positive impact of the pandemic has been seen in the increased use of VC, online communications and social media within groups and between groups and LDWA in general. One of the objectives was to offer a virtual event each year to connect with the wider membership, rather than with single groups, and this proved very popular – to the extent that monthly virtual challenges were run throughout most of 2020 following the success of the May one and requested again following the lockdown in 2021. Discussions have taken place with the Communications Officer with respect to additional and alternative ways of connecting with members.

2c To recognise the contribution and commitment of LDWA member volunteers and supporters.

I hope to work with Secretary in 2021 to align the Volunteer Strategy with the current recognition awards process.

Currently all actions and milestones are on track.

My regular activity included Strider where the nature of the social walks pages in Strider changed too to reflect the situation. Groups were encouraged to put more information in their headings about themselves and their usual activities in the absence of the actual walks' listings. More groups used newsletters and social media to keep in touch with their members. The articles that used to be about group activities began to give more advice about how to use the internet and social media to keep in touch and support each other.

Having missed the 2019 Local Groups' Weekend through injury, the 2020 event was due to be something rather special as it was to be my last one as Local Groups' Officer. However, it turned out to be special in a way that none of us could have foreseen as we couldn't hold it in person at a venue. Rather it was held online through a combination of social media and Zoom videoconferencing. The format remained the same with table sessions, discussion groups, the Saturday walk-talk, even real Scottish shortbread to sustain the walkers, as well as the evening workshops and the formal Sunday morning meeting. Although missing the informal networking and chat that is usually a very positive aspect of the real event, delegates were supportive and there were still a number of good things that came out of it. It was also a good test of a possible way forward for other events in the absence of being able to meet face to face.

Which brings me neatly to one year on and the 2021 AGM where I will hand over the reins of the Local Groups' Office to Karen Pickersgill and try to fill the big boots of David Morgan, our outgoing Chair (in more ways than one). It has been a busy, challenging, but rewarding 5 years in this role and I plan to serve the Association to the best of my ability in the forthcoming years too.

Finally, thanks to all of my friends and colleagues on the NEC for their help, support and advice during my time in this role and to the very many friends and members across the Association who have supported me. I look forward to working with you all again into the future, whatever that may bring.

Julie Cribb, Local Groups Secretary

g) Challenge Events Report

The LDWA Business Plan indicates that LDWA organised challenge events will increase annually, where possible and practical, but unfortunately during the past, bewildering and wretched pandemic year of 2020 the possible and the practical have been sidelined in sorrowful favour of paralysis, only temporary, but nevertheless, bringing a full 12 months of stopped activity by the time the 2021 April Strider arrives. Regular and stuttering changes in government-led restrictions heightened the normal workload for the NEC considerably, with that of the Chair, General Secretary/IT and Environment/Risk/Data Officer especially so.

However, amidst the frustration and sea of red, as one cancellation notice after another appeared on the challenge event listings, there was a constant driving force from the NEC that always believed the next month might be the one when our beloved challenge events could and would be re-launched. This was echoed in each issue of Strider, where Graham Smith, the LDWA Editor, produced his very best work at a time when very best work was a crucial component in helping to keep the LDWA alive and kicking, if not walking.

The LDWA Business Plan also asks for the national website toolkit, introduced to assist local groups develop a challenge event, to be enhanced. Indirectly, through a 'Covid-19 safe' risk assessment and guidelines, painstakingly carved out by the LDWA Coronavirus sub-committee, this was achieved and will continue to be available after the pandemic subsides. Ken Falconer's revised Guidelines for Events were further revised to incorporate Covid-19.

Out of the pandemic many initiatives have materialised, one of them being the newly devised anytime challenge event, which has given members a taste of a challenge event route, at least, albeit without any of the normal, peopled accoutrements. The nearest the LDWA came to a challenge event between April and the end of 2020 was the rearranged Corvedale Cake Walk, in September, lyrically synchronised, by coincidence, with Covid, cleverly offering both actual and virtual participation. There is a feature by its organiser, Janet Pitt-Lewis, in the current Strider. The non-LDWA challenge event, Across Wales Walk, also in September, against all the odds, somehow managed to hold a 57th consecutive staging, whilst in August the midweek non-LDWA challenge event, Shipton Star, was also a success, attracting a small, but highly enthusiastic field. Please be assured that all of these challenge events were organised strictly in accordance with government Covid-19 regulations and requirements.

As the year progressed the NEC declared that all non-LDWA challenge events promoted on the LDWA website and in Strider would need to accompany their registration with a 'Covid-19 safe' risk assessment. All non-LDWA challenge events on our website and in the magazine have such a document on file and the same will apply in 2021, until further notice.

At the time of writing severe restrictions dominate the United Kingdom and nearly all LDWA walking activity is currently suspended. Regardless, we continue to promote our wares, do everything possible to be ready for a re-awakening of normality and hope that the newly created vaccines will reinstate the world of LDWA walking, as well as a free life in general, of course, sooner rather than later. Stay safe, stay sane, keep fit and active.

Tim Glenn, Challenge Events Secretary

h) Hundreds Co-ordinator Report

As I write my final AGM report the decision to cancel the Y 100 Sir Fynwy event in South Wales has been made. Undeniably extremely disappointing for both organisers, who've worked on the event for at least the past four years, volunteers and entrants alike. An opportunity lost to showcase another superb part of the Welsh countryside. However, all is

not lost for those members wishing to undertake the amazing challenge of completing at least one hundred miles within a maximum of 48 hours elapsed time.

My alternative plan B was approved by the NEC and the current organising committee agreed to develop and deliver this unique opportunity should the main event not go ahead. There's even an opportunity for those who complete at least 50 miles within 24 elapsed hours to qualify for 2022 Trans Pennine 100. It is very interesting to see how the enthusiasm is growing and how some members are supporting each other while creating potential routes. Never know it may trigger interest in creating and hosting future hundreds. It's even generated some new members.

So, there will be an official LDWA 100 in 2021. Radically different from anything formally arranged in the history of the LDWA and hopefully just this once. Details available on the website and entry via SiEntries.

Future Hundreds are covered up to and including 2024 (2022-Trans Pennine, 2023-EBB100, 2024- The Speyside 100). An application covering 2025 has yet to be formally approved. This application is planned to be considered at the April 2021 NEC meeting. There has been some interest shown for potentially 2026, however, nothing definite at this stage so if any group wishes to be considered then please feel free to contact the new 100s Coordinator who'll be able to assist with any questions you may have.

The use of modern technology, in particular GPS tracking devices, has become common place across many endurance events and many of us have had great fun 'dot watching' entrants covering vast distances over days on end. My successor will develop this opportunity much further so that it should be common place to see these simple and inexpensive devices used as standard across all future Hundreds irrespective of event location and terrain. The opportunity this will provide for future organisers, entrants and supporters should not be underestimated or ignored. Far safer with more realistic and accurate tracking of entrant whereabouts, fewer volunteers needed for sweeping duties and greater interest and involvement for family and friendly supporters anywhere in the world.

A number of groups have shown interest in hosting new qualifying events of 50 miles or further, and becoming part of new triple challenges in areas yet encountered. This is a real positive opportunity that needs developing and goes some way in our aspirations to make qualification only through LDWA organised events and the business plan sustainability idea of increasing the number of challenge events.

Finally, I'd like to take this opportunity to thank my fellow NEC members, all the groups and individuals that have made my experience a mostly pleasant one and wish my successor the very best in their tenure as 100s Coordinator.

Alan Warrington, Hundreds Co-ordinator

i) Publicity and Communications Report

The role of publicity and communications involves promoting the LDWA to potential new members as well as communicating our message internally to existing members. This has been a difficult year in trying to promote the benefits of the LDWA whilst walking has so often been suspended, as well as challenging to keep members updated with ever changing Government rules and regulations.

Publicising the LDWA

A series of adverts in magazines were already scheduled throughout the year and we received numerous features and editorial mentions in magazines and newspapers. We were ready to launch a new social media advertising campaign, the largest that we have ever undertaken, which would have started at the end of 2020. We have delayed this until the lockdown appears to be receding, but we want to get our message across that we offer challenge walks (which is a way of securing a personal achievement and an opportunity to tell friends about what they've done), social walks (which are a way of meeting new people) and a comprehensive LDPs database (which are a way of planning a walking expedition and adventure).

We have also been using social media in new ways, not least the monthly challenges which have been running throughout the year. Our Facebook group has now reached over 10,000 members and our Facebook page nearly 1,000 members, whilst the Twitter account has 3,750 followers. On average, 200 people join our Facebook group every month. Although many of these aren't LDWA members, it presents us with an opportunity to promote ourselves to potential new recruits and we know that some of these members do join the LDWA.

Unified Communications

Our business plan for the next few years refers to our communications approach being more unified. In the past, Strider has been the main way that we communicate with members and our web-site has been the main way that we can engage with potential new members. There will be absolutely no change to how important Strider is to us and we're committed to having an excellent web-site and our IT fund will help us achieve that.

Strider is such a useful resource to us that we want to ensure that we use some of the content in other areas, such as some articles appearing on social media or, when it's finished, our new web-site. Equally, we want to ensure that our key messages aren't just featured in Strider, but that they are also mentioned on social media, our web-site and on e-mails which we send.

We mention social media frequently as we are no different from other organisations in finding it a useful way of gaining new members and communicating with our existing ones. However, we are conscious that not everyone uses social media and so it's important that we ensure all of our key messages are also featured in Strider. We know that very many members not only find Strider useful, but that they also are excited and inspired by the articles and walk listings within it.

Trying New Things – National Themed Groups

This year we have launched two new national groups, one about history and the other about beer & pubs, which are part of our communications strategy. These don't replace the existing groups, but instead they are a way of members to get to know others who are interested in similar things.

The intention is that LDWA members can join our Meetup and Facebook groups to discuss the subjects of history and pubs, maybe making new friends. But, these aren't just on-line groups, there are plans to have a busy walks programme around the country organised by LDWA leaders. There are ten history walks listed already for 2021, with many more to come, and numerous walking trips and weekends planned for the groups.

I will report back in late 2021 on the progress of these groups and whether they have been successful so far. If they are, maybe in the future we can launch additional themed groups to allow members to meet new people within the LDWA with shared interests. The groups will remain in addition to, and not instead of, the existing groups structure.

Diversity and Inclusion

The communications role is also important in the NEC's work on diversity and inclusion, which is another key part of our business plan. It's important that we are welcoming to everyone who is interested in the LDWA and excited and engaged about long-distance walking. This is a complex matter which we are working on, but one simple aspect is ensuring that we are communicating with potential members in the appropriate manner. For example, if we want to get more younger members, then our marketing and publicity needs to be targeted appropriately.

Walking is great for physical health, but there is plenty of evidence to show that it's great for mental health as well. We know that there are people who have looked at our social and challenge walks, wanting to become involved. We were already working before Covid-19 on ways to make it easier for those who felt excluded, shy or nervous to connect with the LDWA and find friends and have experiences. The events of 2020 have made exclusion a very real problem for a growing number of people and so there will be projects and work undertaken for us to reach out as effectively as we can.

Julian White, Communications Officer

j) Long Distance Paths (LDPs) Report

This is my first year presenting the LDP Report to the AGM. The small team of volunteers who make up the LDP team are continuing to work towards maintaining the database to as high a standard as possible. I am very grateful to everyone in the LDP team who has given up their free time to help out in any way during the last twelve months.

We know that LDPs are often the first experience some people have with the LDWA. Looking for information on a specific footpath often throws up the LDWA link towards the top of the search listings. It is important to make this first point of contact as accurate and

inviting as possible. The more favourable the experience, the more likely we are to attract new members.

Last year's LDP report to the AGM suggested that there will be an opportunity for the LDP webpages to be refreshed, with exciting new ideas and formats to be added which appeal to a younger generation of users, whilst at the same time still offering the staples of our current offering. Although there has not been as much progress towards the new database and website as we may have hoped for, this is still a relevant issue and I do think we have taken some steps towards this.

The work of the team still involves checking links of suppliers/publications, updating wherever necessary, and adding any new information which we find. All of this is being done within the constraints of the current database/website.

During the course of the year we have added several other strands of work to our workload.

Many of the GPX files we hold are now over ten years old. During that time, there have been alterations to routes, in some cases major amendments. We have started to audit these files to try and ensure that these are as accurate as possible. This will be a massive task. Even those which are marked on OS Maps have to be checked in detail as we have already found several instances where the information supplied by OS is either inaccurate or has failed to be updated.

We have also been adding YouTube videos as a source of reference - some of these are excellent, of professional quality and wouldn't look out of place as a TV programme - others less so, but they all give a feel for what you might expect to see on that footpath. There are now links to around 250 videos on the database.

Exercises have been commenced to ensure that all the information we hold on the LDP database meets General Data Protection Requirements and also to audit the accommodation listings we hold.

Earlier in the summer, we inherited a Facebook Group which is now dedicated to LDPs - it was previously one of the groups that had been used for the summer virtual challenges. We are using this to post latest updates and matters of topical interest. Throughout December, we ran a feature on the 'A-Z Advent Calendar of LDPs you may not have ever heard of'. This generated over 1000 'clicks' to the links on the associated LDP walks page. Hopefully, this will give people some different ideas for walking in the future.

With the launch of the Local Groups Walks Database around the time of the 2020 AGM, the LDWA will be adding to an already fantastic resource thus developing a formidable selection of long distance walks throughout the country.

Now to the facts and figures; during the course of 2020 we have added 17 new LDPs to the database covering in excess of 2300 miles. By the end of the year there were 1250 LDPs routes of at least 15 miles listed on the online LDPs pages, covering in total over 85000 miles of described walks.

During the course of the year, the LDP portfolio has acquired overall responsibility for both the Hillwalkers and National Trails Registers. In accordance with the development objectives set out in the 2020-25 Business Plan, we will be carrying out a review of the current practices of both Registers and, where possible, will be aiming to increase awareness of the registers within the LDWA and other like-minded organisations and individuals.

Andy Clark, LDP Officer

k) Environment, Data Protection and Risk Report

Environment

In 2020, we finalised the **5-year LDWA business plan** that will shape the focus of the LDWA over the next 5 years and give the NEC more clarity and focus around the strategic direction of the LDWA.

Within my Environment portfolio I am responsible for building an environmentally sustainable association by ensuring environmental matters are critical considerations or organisational matters as well as the running of social and challenge walks.

To meet this objective, over the last 12 months the **Environment policy** has been refreshed and published within the Local Groups toolkit. In addition new **'factsheets'** have been written and published within the toolkit containing reference material on:

- Consulting with environmental groups;
- Foraging;
- Organising environmental events;
- Rights of ways issues;
- Wildlife crime and
- Wildlife walks.

With support from volunteers across the membership further plans are in place for 2021 to help drive the sustainability agenda looking at how we can measure our environmental footprint, reducing reliance on car use and reducing waste.

Data Protection (GDPR)

Although it is an incredibly dry subject, it is critical that the LDWA has the necessary policies and procedures in place to protect members personal data and ensure we comply with data protection legislation.

During the period of lockdown, localised lockdowns in South Wales and self-isolation I have had the opportunity to undertake a detailed audit of compliance with the DPA legislation and the LDWA data protection and privacy policy.

This has enabled the NEC to address potential non-compliance with the DPA and allowed me to re-write the **Data Protection Policy**. Alongside the policy is a detailed **Data Protection User Guide** that will provide clarity on some of the more complex issues around retention of

members data, security of members data and marketing to members. Both of these are available on the toolkit.

Risk

Another very dry subject, but good risk management and governance is critical for the LDWA to run effectively for its members.

During the year, the **risk register** have become integral to NEC meetings, has driven priorities and helped us focus on the important things that matter to the association.

As part of the regular risk assessments carried out by the NEC it was identified that inclusivity is a significant risk to the future sustainability of the LDWA in being able to attract and retain new members. This was also set out in the business plan to allow the LDWA to develop new strategies in promoting a sense of community across the range of activities we offer.

An **inclusivity strategy** has been published within the toolkit that is underpinned by our new **Equality and Diversity policy**. There is an NEC sub-committee to explore practical steps local groups may want to consider to attract new and retain existing members. We are also very aware that we need to understand more about why people leave us, join us and preferences for different types of activities. We aim to seek feedback during 2021 to help inform our thinking.

Another area that members must be aware of is our safeguarding responsibilities. Policies for **safeguarding vulnerable adults and safeguarding children** have been revised. All members, especially local group chairs must be cognisant of their responsibilities under safeguarding. The **reporting of safeguarding incidents** has also been revised and published within the toolkit.

Due to the pandemic, significant time has been invested into near-constantly changing **COVID-19 Rules, Risk Assessment and Delivery plans** for both social walks and challenge events. Members can be confident that by following published delivery plans and completing risk assessments where needed will keep all members and local communities safe from increased transmission of COVID-19; while enabling us to get back to what we love – long distance walking!

Stuart Bain, Environment, Data Protection and Risk Manager

Other reports:

Membership Discounts

After discovering that there was a vacancy for discount officer when I queried a code, I agreed to fill the post in September 2020. I have now undertaken a comprehensive review of existing member discounts. This has involved reconnecting with various individuals and organisations who have kindly offered LDWA members a benefit or discount. A large number of new organisations have recently been introduced and this has encompassed established national and/or online global names.

Details of all the discounts available to LDWA members can be found on the website <https://ldwa.org.uk/discounts/discounts.php>

Simon Gibbs, Discount Officer

Merchandise Report

The new LDWA logo, in spite of its rocky road to fruition, is now fully accepted, consistently growing in popularity and appearing on a whole manner of merchandise as members patronise our listings. In particular, the three different versions of the woven badge, all of quality, with a sharp, striking and satisfying definition, have been a regular purchase during 2020. Obviously, sales were exceptionally slow during the original lockdown, but since then interest has increased and the Christmas period, bolstered by the introduction of the Coronavirus Multi-wrap, was the best for years.

By now it was hoped that another new product, although at the same time an old timer, the back-Strider binder, would be on the listings, priced at £15.00 for a pair, revamped and incorporating the new logo, including delivery. However, despite sorting out all the necessary details and putting forward an order for 250 units nothing has appeared. I believe that the company has had its problems, but are still functioning and in having been around for about 90 years we live in hope for a positive result during 2021.

Another company who will have had a rough time during 2020, as so many have, is our Leeds based supplier. Nevertheless, they have proved themselves to be very resilient, whilst not only managing to keep going, but also continuing to give the same high level of quality and service. Our union is all the stronger for a potential loss of connection and 2021 will prove it in depth.

Tim Glenn, Merchandise Officer