

WSLAF 28th April 2021 – Agenda Item 5
West Sussex County Council Public Rights of Way Service
Annual Report 2020

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This report contains an annual progress report for the Public Rights of Way team within Countryside Services setting out our achievements on the network and customer service data during the 2020 calendar year. With over 4,000km of Public Rights of Way (PROW) to maintain across West Sussex the PROW team provide an important service to the residents and visitors of West Sussex. Our responsibilities include maintaining the path surface, negotiating improvements with landowners and working closely with key stakeholders to help support key corporate objectives. The service is supported by considerable input from volunteers who both assist with path inspections and practical tasks across the network.
- 1.2 A re-structure in 2020 saw the Rights of Way service transfer to Local Highway Operations, and it now sits alongside Highways teams that include their Inspectors and Stewards.
- 1.3 2020 has been a challenging year for the service, both due to the COVID-19 pandemic, with staff adapting to working from home wherever possible, and a number of long-term staff leaving the service, including the Principal Rights of Way Officer, Rights of Way Officer and Access Ranger for Area 6. A new Principal Rights of Way Officer took up post in June, however at the end of 2020 new staff appointed to the other two posts had not yet started with the team.

2. Customer Service

- 2.1 A major element of our service is handling a high volume of enquiries from path users and other parties with 1,358 calls received through the Customer Service Centre in relation to PROW. This is an increase of approx. 18% from last year.
- 2.2 Along with other reports from the public and other stakeholders, as well as issues identified during routine inspections, this has generated 3,866 issues that were logged onto our database in 2020. 3,176 issues were resolved in the same period.

3. Routine Maintenance

- 3.1 We continued to deliver our 15-month inspection and maintenance programme as much as possible, but inspections were suspended between mid-March and July 2020 due to the pandemic. During 2020 our routine maintenance contractor, County Tree Surgeons, amongst other works, delivered:
 - 1,041 signs;
 - 159 bridges;
 - 12 boardwalks;
 - 32 flights of steps;
 - Just under 23km of surface vegetation clearance.

3.2 We also undertook our annual summer clearance programme, separately from the routine maintenance programme, where 350.5km of surface vegetation was cleared.

4. Volunteers

4.1 Our inspections continue to be greatly assisted by Parish Path Inspector volunteers working with our local Access Rangers and helping with issues arising.

4.2 Usually our volunteers also get their hands dirty with a variety of practical works to supplement our maintenance programme and add extra value across the county. Due to the pandemic, however, practical tasks with volunteers have been very limited. We will continue to work within government guidance and will resume volunteer tasks were safe to do so Below is a breakdown of practical tasks undertaken by volunteers in 2020:

- 1 bridge replacement;
- 6 signs replaced/repared;
- 3 flights of steps.

4.3 We are again grateful for the continued support of many individuals who give their time free of charge to the PROW service.

5. Gates for Stiles

5.1 The PROW team are continuing to improve access across the rights of way network by offering gates to replace existing stiles across the network, due to the restrictive nature of stiles for some users.

5.2 During 2020 we provided 76 gates to landowners, with the agreement that they install the structure and maintain it in the future as they would with other structures that exists on their land.

6. Capital Works Programme

6.1 As part of the annual capital programme during 2020/21 financial year we replaced 9 bridges and associated works including bank stabilisation and drainage improvements.

6.2 Further to this a capital surface programme was undertaken. Details are shown in the table below. Completion of this programme is credit to the efforts of the Officer leading on the programme and the support provided by both the PROW and Access Ranger teams during this very challenging year.

PARISH	PATH NO.	CAPITAL/ REVENUE £	DESCRIPTION OF WORKS
Fittleworth / Kirdford	FP3250	£10,000 (Capital)	Installation of culverts and bank revetment works.
Aldingbourne	FP299	£10,000 (s106)	Surface improvement works.

PARISH	PATH NO.	CAPITAL/ REVENUE £	DESCRIPTION OF WORKS
Hurstpierpoint & Sayers Common	Fps 63Hu, 64Hu & G53	£21,000 (s106)	Surface and drainage improvement works.
Haywards Heath	FP29Cu	£9,000 (s106 & Capital)	Surface improvement works.
Kirdford	BW614	£10,000 (Capital)	Drainage works completed surfacing to carry over to 2021/22..
Warnham	Fps 1577 & 1578	£50,000 (PC & Capital)	Surface improvement works to upgrade footpaths to bridleways.
Donnington	FP184	£42,000 (s106)	Surface improvement works.
Donnington	FP196/1	£20,000 (s106)	Surface improvement works.

6.3 The following table shows work to be carried over and delivered in 2021/22.

PARISH	PATH NO.	CAPITAL/ REVENUE £	DESCRIPTION OF WORKS
Shoreham	BW2048/1	£80,000 (Capital)	Anti-slip improvement works to bridge decking on Old Shoreham Tollbridge
Selsey	FP76	£60,000 (Capital)	Surface improvement works and replacement bridge works.

7. Downs Link

- 7.1 Works were completed on a new section of the Downs Link at Christs Hospital, South of Horsham TQ148292, in early July, which now means that anyone using the Downs Link between Mill Lane and Christs Hospital Station can do so safely off-road rather than having to use the local road network.
- 7.2 In addition, surfacing of a 3.5km section of BW3566, between FP1815 (TQ17744 23987) and Needs Bridge (TQ18338 20668) in West Grinstead parish, was completed. 11 mile-markers, showing the distance to either end of the Downs Link and the next village were also upgraded and installed along the multi-use route. This work was phase 2 of the EAFRD funded works on the Downs Link and was managed by WSCC Countryside Management team.

Nick Scott (Principal Rights of Way Officer) and Jane Noble (Senior Access Officer)
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