

Rights of Way Committee

11 October 2022

Public Rights Of Way Annual Progress Report 2021

Report by Principal Rights of Way Officer

Electoral division/s: Countywide

Summary

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 2021 calendar year.

1. Introduction

1.1 With over 4000km 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.

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 1,301 calls received through the contact centre in relation to PROW.

2.2 Between reports from the public and other stakeholders this has generated 4,002 issues that were logged onto our database in 2021 (3,866 in 2020) with 3,824 issues were resolved in the same period (3,176 in 2020).

3. Routine Maintenance

3.1 We continued to deliver our 15-month inspection and maintenance programme as much as possible, but inspections were paused for a month in February to allow our routine maintenance contractor to catch up following COVID related delays. During 2021 our routine maintenance contractor, County Tree Surgeons, amongst other works, delivered:

- 1,356 signs;
- 139 bridges;

- 5 boardwalks;
- 51 flights of steps;
- Just under 28km of surface vegetation clearance.

3.2 2021 saw a significant increase in the amount of out of cycle maintenance works carried out by County Tree Surgeons. We are grateful to them for being flexible and accommodating to be able to respond swiftly, in particular carrying out bridge repairs and tree safety works where the landowner could not be traced.

3.3 We also undertook our annual summer clearance programme, separately from the routine maintenance programme, where 339km 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 to inspect every path at least every 15 months, on a parish-by-parish basis. 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. Volunteer tasks days resumed in April 2021 and the volunteers delivered:

- 4,185m of vegetation clearance
- 31 tonnes of Type 1 stone laid on surfaces of PROW
- 10 x 5+6m bridges installed and 1 x plank crossing
- 74m (over 5 sites) of boardwalk installed
- 140m of revetments installed
- 20 x fallen trees cleared
- 13 new or repaired signs

This totalled 3,033 volunteer hours over 57 task days.

4.2 In addition, we have an active volunteer group in Horsted Keynes working in partnership with WSCC. They carry out much PROW maintenance and improvement work within the parish, including sign installation and repair, vegetation clearance and replacing stiles with kissing gates.

4.3 We are again grateful for the continued support of many individuals who give their time free of charge to the PROW surface and the team who support the volunteers work from office staff through to the Access Rangers and Volunteer Coordinator.

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 2021 we provided 48 gates to landowners (the same number as 2020), 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 we replaced/repaired 5 bridges and any associated works including bank stabilisation and drainage improvements. This programme also included design of 3 further bridges to scheduled for replacement during the 2022/23 Capital Programme.
- 6.2 Further to this a capital surface programme was undertaken totalling over 3km of improvements on the network including drainage and revetment works in Rusper, resurfacing of a BOAT in Angmering and surface improvements in Ashurst, Fulking and Nuthurst amongst others.
- 6.3 Some works have been carried over to the 2022/23 Capital Programme due to them not being able to be completed for a number of reasons and these include surfacing works in Kirdford and drainage and surface works in Aldingbourne.
- 6.4 As part of the Capital Programme the PROW team have utilised over £60,000 of s.106 funding to support delivery in 2021.

7 Complaints and Compliments

- 7.1 The County Council's Customer Relations team did record 4 formal customer complaints (3 in 2020) in 2021 and 6 compliments (down from 19 in 2020). Of the complaints, 1 was upheld and related to a complaint about a failure to respond to a customer following reports of serial flooding on a PROW.
- 7.2 All other day to day compliments received by the PROW team are not specifically logged.

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Appendices

None