

**EAST CHESHIRE RAMBLERS**  
**– FOOTPATH COMMITTEE REPORT TO THE 2017 AGM**

The Committee is completing its 32<sup>nd</sup> year of work for East Cheshire Ramblers. It is clear by comparison with other Ramblers Groups that the delegated structure of a committee has enabled a more comprehensive and continuous effort to be carried out compared to most Ramblers Groups operating through a single 'Footpath Secretary' individual. At the start of the year Dave Barraclough agreed to be Chairman and Neil Collie to act as Minutes Secretary. This provided more continuity than the rotating roles that we had operated for the previous 3 years. The other members of the Committee are Tony Battilana, Alan Catherall and Graham Walker (with one vacancy). Members of the Committee take lead responsibility for a group of about 6 to 8 parishes.

**1. Footpath Inspections**

For the first time ever we have managed to inspect all 1276 paths in our Group's area of 33 parishes, classifying them and identifying any desirable rectification work. Many of our Footpath Inspectors are authorised to carry out simple maintenance tasks such as replacing broken waymarks or clearing overhanging branches. The results are systematically recorded on our online database that now has 14 years worth of results and virtually all our Inspectors are using it with few problems. The database has been developed by Roger Fielding and continuous improvements have made the system easier to use and able to provide a wide variety of analytical reports. Recent examples of improvements are the ability to attach a photo of a fault and the ability to pinpoint the exact grid reference of a fault along a path. We remain very grateful to Roger for his efforts with the database, Tony Battilana for managing the inspection process over several years and to all our Footpath Inspectors. There are very few Ramblers Groups that have achieved this sort of 100% inspection level.

A variety of reports can be generated to show summaries and trends. These results are passed to the Cheshire East Public Rights of Way Officers, who use them to help plan future maintenance work. We remain grateful to this group of local authority staff, who provide a level of service that is far better than many other local authorities and is why our footpaths are to a generally high standard.

**2. Consultation with Cheshire East Rights of Way Department**

We are a 'notifiable body' for all footpath related matters, such as new roads, diversions and new housing developments. We regularly are asked to comment on these matters and we attend the twice yearly Consultative Meetings.

In the year to July 2017 we have scrutinised, and commented on, nine proposed footpath diversions. In addition we have inspected a number of planning applications where public footpaths could be affected. We also investigate footpath problems raised by both Ramblers members and the public.

**3. Inspection Results**

The year on year summary is shown in the table below, where we see that we have the best results ever in terms of a low number of 'poor' paths – below 100 for the first time and an all time low of 7.6%. The steady reduction in the number of poor paths is primarily due to the efforts of Cheshire East PROW Department and its Enforcement Officers who look at complaints from the public. However, ECR can justifiably claim to have helped with the process through its Footpath Committee, Footpath Inspections and the work of the Projects Group. We have a list of the key problem paths that we keep under their attention and the number of serious problems on this list is steadily reducing..

**4. Footpath Committee Membership**

Alan Catherall is retiring from the Committee after 25 years on the Committee – an enviable record. The main ECR membership will know his lead role in establishing the Permissive 'Todd Brook Watershed' walk – a very notable legacy. Members of the Footpath Committee know him for his 'doggedness' in pursuing various problems in his parishes. Our very sincere thanks to him for all his efforts – we will miss his expertise. There are now two vacancies on the Footpath Committee and we would very much like to find volunteers who could step in. The work is valuable and the delegated structure of our Committee mean that the requirement is definitely manageable.

Dave Barraclough  
October 2017