

FOOTPATH COMMITTEE REPORT TO ECR AGM 2021

Despite the early threat of COVID disruptions, the work of the Footpath Committee has progressed smoothly through the year. The six members of the Committee have taken on the checking of various path faults as they have arisen, dealing with Cheshire East Public Rights of Way Unit (PROW) where necessary.

Our major work can be summarised in two areas. The regular Inspection of all 1295 footpaths across our 33 parishes has been 100% completed for the fifth successive year. Thanks to our 42 Footpath Inspectors and in particular to Tony Battilana for organising the inspectors in their duties and Roger Fielding for the ever improving Footpath Database functionality. Our records go back as far as 2004 and are increasingly useful as references when problems are found. The statistics show that a level of 13% of paths in the 'poor' categories in 2010 has halved to about 6.5% over the past 3 years. We also routinely discuss with PROW our list of 'Priority List of Faults'

An illustration of the Footpath Database recognition was that we gave a presentation of its key features to the other Cheshire East User Groups at a recent PROW Consultative Committee Meeting. I am confident that the extent in inspection is not matched by any other Group in Cheshire and probably by few, if any, other Groups across all of Ramblers. We were pleased that PROW has actually made more proactive use of its data to plan improvements this year – a direct benefit of our work. They are also asking us to modify it to record where improvement actions are taken by either PROW or our own volunteer teams.

Of the 30 paths our inspectors have reported as 'Obstructed', nine of these are legally closed by Cheshire East Council with 'Temporary Closure Orders' or Gating Orders, which may result in walkers having to make long detours. CEC has no obligation to consult us or to justify the Temporary Closures and, it seems, are in no hurry to re-open the paths. Of the remaining 21 paths about half are in locations where an easy and satisfactory alternative exists and no immediate action is required. One obstructed path has already been cleared of vegetation by our Projects Group.

The second main area is managed by Neil Collie – namely consultation with PROW on all formal path Orders (Diversions, Closures etc). We have been consulted on four diversions during the last year (less than usual). We also maintain pressure on PROW on some longstanding issues related to new road schemes.

Two members of the Footpath Committee are standing down. Thanks to Colin Finlayson who has combined 4 years with his ongoing role of Treasurer. I am standing down after 11 years – and hope to find more time for walking! We are fortunate to have a Committee of 6 members to allow delegation of tasks plus significant continuity in our work, compared with most Groups who rely on just one individual.

We are therefore looking for volunteers to fill the two Committee vacancies as well as offers to join the Footpath Inspectors team. Our existing structure means that these need not be arduous roles and there will be plenty of support available. We therefore very much hope that volunteers will come forward. Could any volunteers let any ECR Committee Officer know or e mail me on dave@thebarraclooughs.co.uk

Dave Barraclough

ECR Footpath Committee – November 2021