

East Cheshire Ramblers (ECR)

Don't Lose your Ways (DLYW) Report by Keith Anderson for the 2021 AGM

'Lost Ways' can be defined for this work as historically used public paths which were not included in the original Ordnance Survey maps (the 'Definitive Map') drawn up about 1940. The Government have passed legislation which means that after 1 January 2026, it will not be possible to have any "Lost Ways" re-instated. Early Government backed projects around 2005 included Cheshire for a pilot project, costing about £4.5M but by about 2008 they concluded the project was not viable. The Ramblers representative quoted "The whole thing was totally impractical and that impracticality has defeated them. If they allowed our volunteers to help with the work, far more could be achieved with less money." It is this work that has been developed into the Ramblers 'Don't Lose Your Way' project.

ECR became concerned that the project in some other area was allowing numerous applications to be made in Ramblers name without adequate consideration of their usefulness to the existing network or the significant potential cost of applications to local PROW footpath budgets and to Ramblers in terms of ongoing legal challenges to claims. In an attempt to control this, ECR proposed a Motion to the 2021 General Council that each new application should require the approval of the local Ramblers Group or Area Committee. Rather unusually, the Motion voting led to a dead heat and the rules mean that the Motion was unfortunately not carried. However, the DLYW Project has taken the principle on board and is now trying to grade proposed applications by priority grades.

Ramblers HO have been working on developing an interactive map and guidance to help local areas to claim lost paths and have them added to the Definitive map. The project has identified 49,000 miles of potential Lost Ways but it is moving slowly due to complexity and lack of resources and lack of volunteers to carry out lengthy procedures to research historic archives.

East Cheshire Ramblers (mainly Colin Park) was a valuable contributor to the original Pilot Project looking at lost ways in our area between 2005 and 2015. He has passed his research files to me which has suggested a reduced number of Lost Ways that might be usefully claimed. Nicola Swinnerton the Cheshire East PROW officer said in a presentation recently that our area is one of the most densely "footpathed" in England. This suggests that any new claims need to be selective.

I am acting as a co-ordinator for Cheshire East and have attended several zoom meetings with the Ramblers DLYW Project Team, where the central officers are communicating with co-ordinators from all over the country.

The process of trying to reclaim lost paths is complex and lengthy and involves desk based research and obtaining access to parish and other records. The DLYW project plans to provide detailed guidance on how to carry out this work.

If anyone in ECR is interested in doing this research I can give them access to Colin Park's files and provide them with information from the central project.

Keith Anderson 20.10.2021