

HAMPSHIRE RAMBLERS FPAWE BEST PRACTICE GUIDELINE

NUMBER 1 - INSPECTING PATHS

BACKGROUND

Best Practice Guidelines

1. The Hampshire Ramblers FPAWE Committee has produced a series of Best Practice Guidelines that it encourages Groups to adopt. However, Groups are free to adapt the Guidelines in order to meet local circumstances and restrictions. If any Group has suggestions to improve the Guidelines they should send them to the FPAWE Secretariat.

Inspections

2. The Ramblers first charitable objective is: '*The provision and protection of foot paths and other ways over which the public have a right of way or access on foot, including the prevention of obstruction of public rights of way.*' The more high profile activities of path clearing and way-marking are dependant on the problem being identified in the first place. Hampshire County Council (HCC) is the governmental authority responsible for looking after footpaths. However they have limited resources and are very dependant on members of the public reporting problems as they walk the paths.

3. The Ramblers Groups have an important role to play in regularly inspecting all the paths in their area. Only by doing this can we be sure that the paths are clear or that problems are identified and resolved.

4. The Guideline will outline what FPAWE considers is the best practice for organising, carrying out and reporting inspections. It is aimed at Group Footpath Secretaries and Footpath Wardens.

HCC RAMBLERS' ACTIONS

Organising The Inspection System

5. The Group needs to organise how it will approach inspections. The following should be considered.

5.1. Appoint a Footpath Warden for each Parish who is responsible for carrying out regular inspections. Encourage the Footpath Warden to get an HCC way-marking license which will allow them to carry out way-marking and undertake light vegetation clearance on behalf of HCC. They should apply to the Community Engagement Officers; see Annex D for the application form and Para 28. for the contacts. They should also make themselves known to the local Parish Council.

5.2. Produce a map of the parish with the paths numbered in accordance with the HCC system but don't go down to link level, i.e. show only the path number not any subordinate link number.

5.3. Produce a Reporting Spreadsheet that can collect the results of the inspection and report them to the Footpath Secretary. An example is at Annex A which is available in Excel format [from the FPAWE Secretariat].

5.4. Decide how frequently the paths should be inspected; generic inspection periods are probably preferable, e.g. every 2 years for paths and bridleways every 3 years for byways.

5.5. Where problems are found consider increasing the frequency of the inspection.

5.6. Adopt the system of grading paths shown at Annex B.

5.7. Group Footpath Secretaries should monitor the activity and consider bringing in help if any Footpath Warden is struggling to meet the inspection due dates.

The Individual Inspections

6. Individual Footpath Wardens should consider adopting the following advice. Before going on the inspection:

6.1. Plan the route and car parking point. There may be a need to walk some paths 'there and back'.

6.2. They may consider taking with them the following: the parish map and the reporting spread sheet; a pen and paper; a pair of secateurs; a pair of thick gardening gloves; if available a camera and a GPS; way-markers and screws/nails plus screwdriver/hammer.

6.3. Check CAMS for existing problems.

6.4. Check the map to be used on the inspection against the Definitive Map.

7. Footpath Wardens should look for the following during the inspection. Unless it is done under BVPI terms we should only inspect the condition of paths with regard to use by walkers, i.e. concentrate on problems that affect walkers not horse riders or 4WD drivers etc.

7.1. The Route. Does the route follow the definitive map? Is it way-marked sufficiently so a walker with a map but no compass or GPS could find the way. Does it meet the legal requirement for a way-marker/fingerpost at the point where the path meets a public road? I.e. it must show the direction of the path and its type (footpath, bridleway etc).

7.2. Path Furniture (stiles etc). Are items of path furniture usable and safe?

7.3. Obstructions. Are there any obstructions, e.g. overgrown vegetation, fences, rivers/lakes, buildings, fallen trees/branches, intimidating or incorrect signs, angry farmers, dangerous animals, ploughed fields/crops etc?

7.4. Surface Conditions. We must expect some paths (particularly bridleways) to be muddy. There is also little point in reporting boggy conditions after a period of exceptionally high rainfall. However is the path normally impassable or very nearly so because of, for example: cow slurry, very deep mud, vehicle ruts, etc?

7.5. Changes to the Rights of Way Network. Are there any official notices (including planning applications) posted on or near the rights of way that concern the closure/diversion of a right of way either temporarily or permanently or impact on its recreational use? If there are the Footpath Warden should report the details

to the Group Footpath Secretary, preferably with a photo showing the detail. The Group Footpath Secretary should in turn report the position to the Area Footpath Secretary and the Group Walking Environment Secretary as appropriate to ensure the matter is investigated.

8. Any problems identified should be rectified on the spot where possible by the Footpath Warden; for example by pruning back minor overgrowth and (where the Footpath Warden has an HCC way-marking license) by way-marking.
9. They should make a note of the grid reference of any problem found and if possible photograph the problem.
10. Pay particular attention to problems already recorded on CAMS to see if they still exist.

Reporting and Recording the Findings

11. Using a form such as that at Annex A, the Footpath Warden should report their findings to the Group Footpath Secretary. Whatever form is used the basic information contained at Annex A should be covered.
12. The hours expended should include preparation and planning, travel, inspection, on-the-spot rectification, and reporting.
13. Footpath Secretaries should consolidate all reports so they have an up-to-date picture of the inspections in his Group.
14. Any problems that are identified that are not already on CAMS should be reported to HCC by the Footpath Warden using CAMS, attaching a photograph if possible.
15. If problems already shown on CAMS are found to have been resolved, this should be reported through CAMS.
16. The Footpath Secretary should include the inspection hours in the quarterly hours report sent to FPAWE (see Annex C for the report format).
17. The SCAR may be interested in periodic updates as to the state of all the footpaths. The Footpath Secretary should send them a copy of the consolidated returns. It is also an opportunity to identify to the SCAR the high priority problems that Groups cannot resolve.
18. Periodically the Footpath Warden should report the footpath states to the Parish Council.

OTHER PARTICIPANTS AND THEIR ROLES

19. Ramblers HQ

20. To date Ramblers HQ have taken little interest in path inspections other than through the Big Pathwatch scheme. They offer very little if any guidance on footpath inspections. They reportedly are looking into this and we may see more central interest and guidance in the future.

Hampshire County Council

21. HCC have responsibility for keeping the paths open but have no formal inspection system.

Parish Council

22. Parish Councils can have some responsibilities for footpaths. Some Parish Councils arrange for periodic inspections. It would be useful for the Footpath Warden to liaise with the Parish Councils to ensure there is not duplication of effort. Where we rely on each other to undertake inspections we should arrange for sharing of inspection information so the Footpath Secretary can be satisfied all is under control and reporting aspects to HCC and FPAWE are covered.

REFERENCES AND CONTACTS

23. CAMS. For the CAMS website: <http://www3.hants.gov.uk/row/problemreporting.htm>

24. Definitive Map. For access to the Definitive Map and Definitive Statements: <http://www3.hants.gov.uk/row/locating-row/definitive-map.htm>

25. Contacting Rambler's HQ. Ramblers email:
volunteersupport@ramblers.zendesk.com

26. Ramblers Charitable Objectives. To see the charitable objectives:
<http://www.ramblers.org.uk/about-us/what-we-do/charitable-objectives.aspx>

27. Basic Rights of Way Law: <http://www.ramblers.org.uk/advice/rights-of-way-law-in-england-and-wales/basics-of-rights-of-way-law.aspx>

28. Countryside Engagement Officers contacts:

- 28.1. Emma Broadbent (North): emma.broadbent@hants.gov.uk
- 28.2. Abby Sullivan (Central/East): abby.sullivan@hants.gov.uk
- 28.3. Natalie Hands (South/West): natalie.hands@hants.gov.uk

CONCLUSION

29. The above Best Practice Guide is part of a series that attempts to show agreed best practice within the Hampshire Ramblers Area. It is aimed at Group Footpath Secretaries and Parish Footpath Wardens. It shows how path inspections should be organised, carried out and reported. It is not intended to be prescriptive and can be amended for local circumstances.

30. If any Footpath Warden has any queries or observations on the guide they should raise them first with their Group Footpath Secretary. If Group Footpath Secretaries have any queries or observations they should forward them to the FPAWE Secretariat.

David Clark
FPAWE Secretariat
Version 2
Approved by FPAWE on 12 Aug 2016

ANNEX A TO

BEST PRACTICE GUIDELINE

NUMBER 2

REPORTING SPREADSHEET

ANNEX B TO
BEST PRACTICE GUIDELINE
NUMBER 1

GRADING SYSTEM FOR PATH INSPECTIONS

Category	Brief Description	Guide to Classification
1	No problems	No action considered necessary; path link is easy to find and follow without the need for detailed map-reading.
2	Passable	Action needed to make the path easy to find and follow is relatively minor mainly involving better signposting or way-marking and/or repairs to stiles, gates etc.
3	Difficult	It is possible to follow the path on its definitive line but only with difficulty; the ordinary family walking group would regard the path as impossible to use.
4	Impassable	The path cannot be followed on its definitive line because of obstruction. Note that this classification should be used even if an alternative non-definitive line can be used nearby.

ANNEX C TO
BEST PRACTICE GUIDELINE
NUMBER 1

Volunteer Rambler/ Hours

RAMBLERS GROUP : _____

<u>MONTH</u>	<u>Jan</u>	<u>Feb</u>	<u>Mar</u>
Vegetation Clearance			
Stiles to Gates			
Waymarking			
BVPI (survey and recording)			
Other			
TOTAL			

Please submit for each quarterly meeting to Stuart Shurlock, or bring to the meeting.

ANNEX D TO
BEST PRACTICE GUIDELINE
NUMBER 1

Volunteer Agreement Form – Way-marking

By signing this agreement you agree to abide by all of the conditions set out in the way-marking guidance.

Please fill in your details below and return this form to Hampshire County Council. Once received by Hampshire County Council we will complete the lower section and return a completed copy to you for your records. Thank you for your assistance in this initiative.

Volunteer details

Name

Address *Tel*
..... *Mobile*
..... *email*
..... *Date*

Post Code *Parish to be*

Signed *waymarked*

Hampshire County Council

Member of Ramblers Association

Hampshire County Council's Countryside Service is pleased to have the opportunity to work more closely with volunteers. Hampshire County Council agrees to offer support and guidance for the volunteer named above who adheres to the guidance. Hampshire County Council reserves the right to amend or change any of the guidance and also cancel or withdraw the agreement if it sees fit.

For and on behalf of Hampshire County Council:

Name
(Countryside Access Development Officer)

Signed *Date*

Send to Community Engagement Officers (See Para 28)