

HAMPSHIRE RAMBLERS' FPAWE BEST PRACTICE GUIDELINE NUMBER 5 - PATH CLEARING

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.

Path Clearing

2. This BPG is aimed at Footpath Secretaries and Path Clearing Team Leaders.

3. 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.*' Path clearing directly meets that objective.

4. There are two different types of path clearing. The first is where any walker comes across overgrown vegetation and clears it on the spot using tools that a walker could be expected to carry¹. The second is a specific path clearing exercise where a team returns to clear a known problem. This team is then working under a delegated authority from Hampshire County Council. This BPG is aimed at the second category.

5. This BPG concerns only the clearance of natural growth on or across the highway. It does not cover the clearance of crops from a path. Hampshire Ramblers should never clear crops except by walking an approved route. It also does not cover the clearance of a wilful obstructions to the path.

6. Generally speaking HCC are responsible for clearing growth that comes up through the path surface and the landowner is responsible for side growth and overhanging growth². Practically, Ramblers need not make a distinction between the two responsibilities. We are just concerned with ensuring the path is cleared. We rely on HCC to ensure the landowner is on-side.

Bridleways, Restricted Byways and Byways require greater width of clearance but as a walking group our priority is just to ensure the path is open to walkers and is at least 1 metre wide (1.5 metres for field edge paths)³; this is our minimum requirement.

7. Groups intending to undertake a reasonable amount of path clearing should consider purchasing power tools (e.g. hedge trimmers, brush cutters and strimmers but **NOT** chainsaws); they make the work much easier and are more efficient. If groups buy these tools they should appoint members to hold and look after them. They should also construct an official inventory.

HAMPSHIRE RAMBLERS' ACTIONS

Identifying a problem

8. There are three ways an obstruction to be cleared could be identified:

¹ Rights of Way Blue Book Page 318

² Rights of Way Blue Book Page 256

³ Rights of Way Blue Book Page 249

8.1. By the Ramblers Group, either through routine inspections (See BPG No 1) or through Ramblers walking the route and reporting the problem to the Footpath Secretary.

8.2. HCC could ask the Ramblers Group for assistance in clearing a specific path.

8.3. From the HCC CAMS system to which Footpath Secretaries and Footpath wardens have access.

Organising a Path Clearance Team and Preparatory Action

9. Major path clearing should not take place during the bird nesting season, e.g. we should not cut severely into a hedge row although light strimming would be acceptable. It is an offence to knowingly destroy a bird's nest. Ramblers' Central Office advise that this season is approximately between 1 March and 31 July, but a visual inspection for birds nests should be undertaken anytime in the spring and summer before clearances take place. HCC hire contractors to clear certain paths in the summer. These appear on the 'Cutting list' - see <http://documents.hants.gov.uk/PriorityCuttingList.pdf>. Ramblers should not cut paths that are on the cutting list immediately before the contractors are due to cut them, or we will do the work and they will still get paid.

10. Each Group should compose a list of volunteers who are prepared to undertake ad hoc rectification work including path clearing. This can include non-Ramblers' members but their personal details must be sent to Ramblers' Central Office. The names of members on the list should be sent to Rambler' Central Office for insurance purposes (see BPG No 2 Insurance). Each path clearing exercise should have an appointed Team Leader who will be responsible for:

10.1. Identifying the number of volunteers required from the list of volunteers and inviting individuals to participate. Communicating with the team over the requirements listed below. At least one person in the team (but preferably the Team Leader) should hold a personal delegated way-marking/path clearance licence from HCC.

10.2. Deciding when the path will be cleared and where the team will meet/park.

10.3. Informing HCC of the intention to clear the path and asking them to inform the local landowner if they deem it to be necessary; where Groups wish it, they can approach the landowner directly. HCC highway authority should be asked to confirm in writing that they are happy with the proposal to clear the path.

10.4. Informing the team of the expected duration and the refreshment requirements (so team members can bring adequate refreshment or money to visit a pub).

10.5. Ensuring the correct tools and safety gear are available (either Ramblers' own tools or those owned by individuals).

10.6. Ensuring that the members of the team are aware of the clothing requirements (e.g. protective gloves).

10.7. The Team Leader should make themselves fully aware of the contents of the Ramblers Central Office Toolkit available on the following website

<http://www.ramblers.org.uk/volunteer-zone/support-and-development/volunteer-toolkits-alphabetically-sorted/volunteer-path-team-toolkit.aspx>

11. Any joint working parties with HCC will have an HCC Team Leader, although the Ramblers will need a sub-coordinator to cover the above tasks.

Organising the Clearance on the Day

12. Before any clearance action takes place the Team Leader should ensure everyone present is on the approved list of volunteers and thus have insurance cover.

13. They should make sure the tools look in safe working order and, where necessary, safety equipment is worn. As appropriate they should give a health and safety briefing, especially where power tools are to be used. Always ensure safe working practices are followed.

14. They should complete the checklists required by the Ramblers' Toolkit.

15. They should ensure the clearance is taking place along the approved definitive route.

16. They should organise who does what and who operates which power tool, ensuring a rotation of duties so that all get a go at what jobs they want to do and avoid tiredness. Call for regular breaks.

17. They should ensure the debris is cleared away, usually into hedges or borders.

18. They should take before and after photos.

Post Clearance Activities

19. The Team Leader should inform the Group Footpath Secretary (with relevant toolkit paperwork) so they can inform HCC and Ramblers Central Office that the work has been completed with before and after photos.

20. To ensure the hours are recorded for submission to the FPAWE on the quarterly return, the Team Leader should also report the names and numbers of people taking part and the hours involved to the Group Footpath Secretary.

OTHER PARTICIPANTS AND THEIR ROLES

Ramblers' Central Office

21. They hold the list of our volunteers for insurance purposes and provide the necessary 1st and 3rd party insurance. They also record all volunteer activity that takes place. They provide an instruction toolkit for volunteers.

Hampshire County Council

22. They provide the authority that allows us to undertake path clearing exercises. All plans to clear a path and the results of the path clear should be referred to them.

REFERENCES AND CONTACTS

23. **CAMS**. For the CAMS website: <https://row.hants.gov.uk/login.aspx?ReturnUrl=%2fInfoMap.aspx>

24. Definitive Map. For access to the Definitive Map and Definitive Statements:
<http://www.hants.gov.uk/rh/row/maps/definitive-maps.pdf>
25. Contacting Ramblers 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. Path clearing is an important activity that not only meets one of the Ramblers' charitable objectives but also ensures the paths we walk along are usable by our members. Although walkers have an implied right to undertake light clearance when they come across a problem, major path clearance exercises are done under the authority of HCC. They must be informed of any path clearing plans and the results of the exercise. We must follow Ramblers Central Office requirements to ensure insurance cover is provided and the operation is carried out safely. The Team Leader has an important role to play in organising the day and ensuring safety is paramount. They must also report the success of the exercise to the Group Footpath Secretary so they, in turn, can inform HCC and Ramblers' Central Office.

David Clark
FPAWE Secretariat
Version 2
Approved by FPAWE Secretariat 1 Aug 2017