

Footpath Officer report for Rossendale Ramblers AGM 2025

This role provides a focal point for all issues linked to footpaths, or Public Rights of Way (PROWs), including problems and possible changes, within the Rossendale area.

There are 3,500 paths in Lancashire, and after a Ramblers survey a few years ago, we know that Rossendale has the largest number of footpaths in England within 800 metres of people's homes. This is great, but given the local landscape this also means a large number of stiles and other footpath issues. While RR agree with the national policy is to replace stiles with gates for increased accessibility, there are many stiles in Rossendale where this is not possible because of the landscape and existing structures, such as stone walls. The LCC visited 1 stile repaired and reported 'a kissing gate is not required at this time'. The information below relates to the year since the last AGM in October 2024.

Reporting of footpath problems.

This involves checking the problem raised and, if appropriate, reporting it with supporting evidence giving the precise location and footpath number. Thanks go to those who have raised issues, or helped check out problems. When the problem is an unsafe/dangerous stile, it is also reported to our Path Improvement Team. When the issue is a blocked path caused by overgrown vegetation, it is also reported to our Path Clearance Team.

While these are usually acknowledged by the LCC, a lack of resources mean that very little is actioned, and we are lucky that our Path Improvement Team are taking on additional challenges such as installing gates and now fingerposts supplied by the LCC. One very concerning issue is the number of outstanding blocked paths, which is outside our remit, beyond the reporting of them. Additionally a number of problems have been raised about signage, and while the LCC have requested we stop reporting these some years ago, they have now agreed to supply us with some fingerposts to install ourselves. We are exploring (via the lovely AB) the making of some RW signs to attach.

Reported to LCC in last 12 months

Unsafe/dangerous stiles - 16

Blocked paths - 13 (fences, barbed wire, locked gates with no other access, large fallen trees, piles or earth/rubble, farm machinery)

Collapsed bridge - 2. (erosion)

Unsafe path surface - 1

Intimidation - 3 (dogs, biting pony, aggressive resident denying access)

Path obstructed by vegetation - 4

Footpath Improvement Team

This team now has 22 members, but only 8 have actually been available to do hands on work in the last year. There is a lot of work and each person is a volunteer with limited availability, so new 'hands on' volunteers are welcome and especially anyone willing to take the lead on a job. We do have some equipment available to do the work. There are currently 39 stiles on the "to do" list.

In the last year 12 stiles have been improved. Of particular note is the successful installation of our first ladder stile, and first kissing gate, both quite challenging due to the terrain involved.

There have been 85 referrals from RR of stiles needing improvement since the team's establishment and there have also been some stiles improved referred from other sources. Special thanks to DA for his co-ordination and hard work.

Path Clearance Team

This team has 9 members with 4 doing the clearances in the last year. An additional 3 paths have been cleared in the last 12 months, making a total of 14 paths successfully cleared (since July 2023). Special thanks to MC for co-ordinating this.

General Public Enquiries

Enquiries have included :-

Footpath issues included in the above

Lack of signage and getting lost on the Rossendale Way

Enquiries related to accessible routes in Rossendale (wheelchairs, pushchairs)

Queries with regard to removal of paths (houses built over them)

A query about the process for applying for a path diversion.

Clarification over who's responsible for stile repairs (landowner)

Question about who enforces re-opening of blocked paths.

"Temporary diversion" - how long is this legal for (up to 25 years!)

How to get involved with path clearance team

A comment has been received acknowledging the RR signage on repaired stiles and appreciation for the work done.

Rossendale Wellbeing Walks Team

The Project Officer for Rossendale Leisure Trust has sought funding from Ramblers to support other work to make paths more accessible, which has led to an enquiry from Ramblers Wellbeing Walks Programme Lead. We will continue to support the local team and joint work where practical.

Lancashire County Council (LCC)

There are no figures available from the LCC about the number of outstanding footpath issues, as they claim these are meaningless as some events may be duplicated and repairs/gate replacements have not always been recorded.

The LCC now have a policy of replacing dangerous stiles with kissing gates rather than repairing them. There is no clarification on their implementation plan for Rossendale and there are clearly resource issues. Many sites in Rossendale are not suitable for kissing gates, because of stepped/uneven land, stiles within stone walls, too far from roads to get the materials there, or no landowner consent.

Recently we've had more positive support from the LCC, with agreement to provide materials (kissing gates and footpath signs) for our footpath improvement team to install.

The LCC are not supportive of issues outside their boundary or not on a PROW (there have been a few).

Receiving and responding to potential changes to PROWs

Path diversion, Bacup. No objections.

Additional path, Whitworth. No objections

Path diversion, Crawshawbooth. No objections

Housing development, Loveclough. Diversion requested.

Path Diversion - Goodshaw. No objections.

Path Closures - 4 no objections (all due to historical housing over the footpath)

Ongoing issue at Milne Street/Irongate Lane (Helmshore to Irwell Vale). RR objected to the retrospective planning application for vehicular access. Rossendale Borough Council instructed the landowner to return the path to its original state. The landowner's appeal to the Secretary of State was not successful. Drainage will be installed imminently by the LCC in the dug channel, as the path will become part of the East Lancashire Cycleway, before the landowner is required to return the area to its original state.

Scout Moor Wind Farm Consultation

Representation has been made at the Cubico consultation meetings for this proposed extension, and responses sent to include concerns about the protection of PROWs in the area, the proposed siting of one near Waugh's Well, the installation of gates not stiles, the path surface materials, the installation of clear signage, the curtailment of off road bikes and the wildlife impact.

Lancashire Footpath and Access meeting

These meetings are quarterly and mostly on Zoom due to lack of funds for room hire. Issues discussed include :-

Issues linked to replacement of footpath signs

Liaison with ramblers HQ and Councillors re apparent lack of LCC action on footpath issues.

ROW improvement plans and local transport planning

The Ribble Way

Pathwatch

Mario/fault reporting

Lost Ways

The National Coastal Path

Going Forward

Establishing a means of better feedback to LCC re completion of repairs and clearances by our teams.

Consideration to a Lottery Grant application.

Look to install some Footpath signage, initially on the Rossendale Way.

Judy Tumelty

Rossendale Ramblers Footpath Officer