

Footpath Officer report for Rossendale Ramblers AGM October 2026

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 information below relates to the year since the last AGM in October 2025.

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., and reporting it to Lancashire County Council (LCC). 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 so dedicated and effective. 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 by the public about signage, particularly on the Rossendale Way, and while the LCC have requested we stop reporting missing signs some years ago, and are planning to deal with this one Borough at a time, we still have no planned date for Rossendale, so are hoping to do some ourselves.

Reported to LCC in the last 12 months

- 11 unsafe/dangerous stiles
- 7 blocked paths by fencing, barbed wire, fallen tree/wall, stored machinery/skips, large stone, locked gate
- 1 intimidation by loose dogs going through farm

Footpath Improvement Team

Ramblers Headquarters state all members of the team must be registered as a volunteer to be covered by insurance. This and other commitments mean the number on our team has reduced and we are always looking for ready volunteers. Some practical DIY skills are helpful as is availability at weekends.

Other changes recently introduced are the need for First Aid training among volunteers and for those using some equipment with moving blades, training is now also required. Risk assessments are also now required for completion by the team leader for each task. This is intended for better health and safety for all concerned.

Despite all this, the team have done some great work and repaired 8 stiles since last October, with 44 reported still being outstanding. Many thanks to all involved, especially DA as team leader.

Path Clearance Team

3 paths have been cleared this year at Edgeside, Weir and Whitewell Bottom, with 3 team members being actively involved in each. Many thanks to all especially MC as co-ordinator.

General Public Enquiries

Some reports of stile problems which, if valid, are included in the above.

4 reports of access issues about paths that are not PROWs

Clarification about where footpaths go and concerns re lack of signage.

7 reports of stile problems outside Rossendale - each referred to the appropriate Ramblers group.

Concerns re housing developments and seeking support for objections

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.

The LCC are not supportive of issues outside their boundary or not on a PROW (including concessionary or custom and practice paths)

Changes to PROWs

4 New housing developments involving PROWs, with requests to keep paths open or diverted both during and after development as part of the planning consent.

Objections to extension of building blocking footpath with no alternative route.

Confirmation of 2 new footpaths opened in Haslingden and Stubbins Vale.

Confirmation of 3 path diversions, 2 around houses and one around a farm.

1 path closure - house built over path 30 years ago.

Lancashire Footpath and Access Meetings

These are held quarterly and cover variety of topics including

Liaison with LCC and fault reporting

Liaison with local Councillors

Footpath and Access Council

Lancashire Coastal Path

ROW improvement plans

Haweswater pipeline

Scout Moor Wind Farm Consultation

This is ongoing. 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.

Judy Tumelty