

West Sussex County Council Public Rights of Way Service Annual Report 2017/18

1. Major Works

1.1 The County Council has many assets, mainly surfaces and structures, to maintain around its Public Rights of Way (PROW) network. A summary of the larger projects delivered in 2017/18 are listed in paragraphs 1.2 and 1.3.

1.2 Surfacing Programme and Associated Works

PARISH	PATH	COST	DESCRIPTION OF WORKS
Crawley/Worth	FP89W & FP90W	£8,934	Surfacing works along a 290m length of the footpath.
Donnington	FP184	£18,099	Surfacing works along an 840m length of the footpath that runs alongside the Chichester Canal.
Graffham (SDNP)	BW981	£12,656	Surfacing and drainage works along a 425m length of bridleway.
Hassocks	BW3K	£33,507	Surfacing and drainage works along a 725m length of bridleway.
Kirdford	RB633	£35,521	Surfacing and drainage works along a 640m length of Restricted Byway.
Pulborough	BW3421	£13,457	Surfacing and ditching works along a 280m length of bridleway.
Worth	FP58W	£16,500	Surfacing along a 655m length of footpath.
TOTAL:		£138,674	

1.3 Bridge Programme and Associated Works

PARISH	PATH	COST	DESCRIPTION OF WORKS
Rudgwick / Slinfold	BW3569	£65,126	Repair to 'Double Bridge' across River Arun on Downs Link bridleway (£108k spent 2017).
TOTAL:		£65,126	

1.4 For a number of reasons, including design specifications needing to be amended, a contractor ceasing trading, and inappropriate ground conditions, various projects were designed and awarded but not delivered. Funding has been carried forward to deliver these during 2018/19.

2. Other Works

2.1 WSCC PROW service continued to support a number of smaller scale projects to aid public access, safety and convenience. For example, repairs to a byway surface in Rogate and infilling an arising hole in a bridleway in Heyshott.

2.2 Volunteer Rangers – between 1 April 2017 and 31 March 2018 volunteer rangers supported 64 practical task days and donated over 4100 hours of their time. Projects included:

- vegetation clearance (over 7km)
- installation of bridges (3 x 6m bridges and 62m of boardwalk)
- installation of new steps (250) and repair of a further 195
- installation of kissing gates (6), and;
- removal of fallen or falling trees (51).

The WSCC PROW service remains grateful for the continued support of all volunteers plus other groups and individuals who delivered these works; without their help the service would not have achieved as much.

2.3 Gaps and Gates for Stiles – the long-standing programme to support increased accessibility by replacing stiles with gates continued; PROW service provided 39 gates to landowners and managers.

2.4 Summer Vegetation Clearance – a programme of summer vegetation clearance ran from mid-June to mid-August 2017. Paths were identified from historic problem reports and with input from Access Rangers (ARs). Excluding clearance undertaken through the cyclical parish maintenance visit, 336km of clearance was undertaken and cost nearly £30,000.

3. Inspection and Maintenance Programme

3.1 The County Council continued to deliver its 15-month cyclical parish inspection and maintenance programme. The support of volunteer Parish Path Inspectors (PPI) remained invaluable to enable this programme to continue and deliver benefits for path users. Throughout the year, the programme kept largely to schedule.

3.2 A new maintenance contract commenced on 1 May 2017. Following a competitive tendering process the contract was awarded to County Tree Surgeons (CTS), of Crawley Down, which, due to them being the incumbent contractor, ensured a smooth transition with no disruption to the service. The new contract delivers the same type of works as with previous years. Last year CTS, amongst other works, cleared over 45km of vegetation, repaired or replaced 1607 signs and 147 bridges and boardwalks. One of these bridges was particularly rewarding: the service had a request from a care home to widen a plank bridge for a couple of its service users, and on completion it was pleasing to receive very positive feedback.

4. Changes to the PROW network

4.1 The PROW Committee met twice in 2017/18. Most proposals to divert or extinguish paths were considered by officers using delegated authority powers, which were generally local diversions and had received no objections during the consultation period. The Committee considered several Definitive Map Modification Order proposals.

4.2 In addition to proposals referred to PROW Committee for determination, the County Council is consulted by Borough and District Councils on various path diversion and extinguishment proposals arising from planned development. Decisions were taken by officers using delegated authority powers.

5. Problem Reports and General Enquiries

- 5.1 During 2017/18 problem reports continued to be received and considered by PROW service – in the period, 4030 were logged into the service’s database, Countryside Access Management System (CAMS). Due to this continuing high volume it has remained necessary to prioritise reports, as WSLAF has previously been advised, with issues of Health and Safety to PROW users given early attention over issues such as minor maintenance, e.g. damaged signage. Please see: <https://www.westsussex.gov.uk/prowfeedback>

6. Planning

- 6.1 Site specific and strategic planning enquiries continued to be received in large numbers, with most responses made by ARs giving the benefit of their local knowledge. The service was consulted on a number of draft Neighbourhood Plans, when opportunity was taken to encourage parishes to recognise the value of an accessible and convenient PROW network to enhance the quality of life for their parishioners. Officers’ input was also sought to prepare lists of potential infrastructure improvements, which Borough and District Councils intend to consult on when allocating future Community Infrastructure Levy (known as CIL) receipts.
- 6.2 The County Council undertook its statutory review of its Rights of Way Improvement Plan. Following wide public consultation on the draft Plan during October – December 2017, the Plan was formally adopted by the Council following a decision by the Cabinet Member for Environment. The West Sussex Plan has been re-titled as the West Sussex Rights of Way Management Plan 2018-28 to bring more weight and focus to the management of the existing Public Rights of Way network. The Plan also outlines the ways in which improvements could be achieved.

7. Staffing

- 7.1 During the year the service remained stable in terms of staffing. The Countryside Services Manager, Charlotte Weller, began maternity leave and her role has been covered by Jo Dixon.

8. Looking Forward

- 8.1 For 2018/19 the PROW revenue budget has been largely unchanged at £453k. A programme of capital funded works, including projects slipped from 2017/18, is scheduled to for delivery in the coming year. When opportunity presents, bids will be made for further capital budget to support delivery of future improvement projects.
- 8.2 The 15 month inspection and maintenance cycle will continue to operate and CAMS populated.
- 8.3 The County Council will be looking to deliver against the Action Plan detailed in the Rights of Way Management Plan and will include an annual update on progress within the overall annual report for the service.
- 8.4 Various changes to PROW statutory processes will need to be implemented should regulations arising from the Deregulation Act 2015 come into force.

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