

**West Sussex County Council Public Rights of Way Service
Annual Report 2018/19**

1. Major Works

1.1 In managing the County Council’s many assets around the county Public Rights of Way (PROW) network, it delivers a programme of works to maintain and replace various structures and surfaces. During 2018/19, WSCC PROW service spent a total of £246,840 was spent on the larger projects; these are listed in paragraph 1.2.

1.2 Structures and Surfacing Programme and Associated Works

PARISH	PATH	BUDGET	DESCRIPTION OF WORKS
Broadbridge Heath	BW1630	£43,000	Bridge repair works involving installation of parapets, new gabion walls, repair of brickwork on wingwalls and arches
Burgess Hill	BW10BH	£18,000	Surfacing and drainage works along a 400m length of path
Bury	BW762	£10,000	Surfacing and drainage works along a 230m length of path
Crawley	BW1550	£17,558	Surfacing and ditching works along a 300m length of path
Felpham	FP153	£11,530	Surfacing works along a 100m length of path
Graffham	RB431 & RB997	£11,541 (£1,500 from SDNP)	Re-grading and drainage works along a 927m length of path
<i>Heyshott*</i>	<i>FP962/2</i>	<i>(est. £5,750)</i>	<i>Bridge replacement works – carried over to deliver in 2019/20</i>
Hurstpierpoint	BW47Hu	£10,207	Surfacing works along a 300m length of path
<i>Kirdford*</i>	<i>FP3250</i>	<i>£20,740</i>	<i>Bridge replacement and bank stabilisation works</i>
Rusper	FP1486	£19,370	Bridge replacement works
Southwater	BW1662	£4,563	Surfacing works along a 100m length of path
Steyning	BW2714 & BW2716	£29,061	Surfacing, re-grading and drainage works along a 550m length of path
Warnham	FP1432	£28,360	Bridge repair/replacement works
Worth	BW3727	£43,650	Surfacing and drainage works along a 670m length of path

* Works in *italics* to be carried over and delivered in 2019/20.

2. Other Works

2.1 WSCC PROW service continued to support a number of smaller scale projects to aid public access, safety and convenience, such as revetment of a riverbank in West Chiltington. Incidental costs were also incurred; for example, nearly £6,000 was spent providing a minibus to shuttle people whilst urgent repairs were made to the approach of Old Shoreham Toll Bridge.

2.2 In addition to its delivering its own works, PROW service has been advising on a number of schemes to enhance off-road access, such as re-routing the Downs Link at Christ's Hospital and a new walking and cycling route between Pagham Harbour and Medmerry.

2.3 Volunteers – between 1 April 2018 and 31 March 2019 volunteer rangers supported 67 practical task days and donated over 3700 hours of their time. Projects included:

- clearance of over 7km of vegetation
- installation of 5 no. 6m footbridges
- installation of more than 325 new steps and 194m of handrails
- installation of 13 kissing gates to replace stiles; and
- removal of 50 fallen or falling trees.

Additionally, volunteer Parish Path Inspectors gave tremendous support by ensuring the 15-month inspection programme kept to schedule.

The WSCC PROW service remains grateful for the continued support of all volunteers plus other groups and individuals who delivered works; without their help the service would not have achieved as much. To highlight the role of volunteers and in recognition of their value, plaques are now being installed on newly erected bridges and other structures.

2.4 Gaps and Gates for Stiles – the long-standing programme to support increased accessibility by replacing stiles with gates continued; PROW service provided landowners and managers with 63 gates. In addition, 9 handle latches were supplied to improve operation of bridlegates.

2.5 Summer Vegetation Clearance – a programme of summer vegetation clearance ran from mid-June to mid-August 2018. Paths were identified from historic problem reports and with input from Access Rangers (ARs) and parish councils. Excluding clearance undertaken through the cyclical parish maintenance visit, 330km of clearance was undertaken and cost just over £30,000.

3. Inspection and Maintenance Programme

3.1 The County Council continued to deliver its flagship 15-month cyclical parish inspection and maintenance programme. Maintenance issues were resolved through our term maintenance contract partner, County Tree Surgeons (CTS). During the year, and amongst other works, CTS cleared 34km of vegetation, repaired or replaced 1604 signs and 141 bridges and boardwalks.

4. Changes to the PROW network

4.1 The County Council's PROW Committee met twice in 2018/19. It considered three Definitive Map Modification Order proposals, also two proposals for diversions of PROW.

4.2 Many proposals to divert or extinguish paths were considered by officers using delegated authority powers. These included local diversions that had received no objections during the consultation period as well as consultations by Borough and District Councils on diversion and extinguishment proposals arising from planned development.

4.3 The County Council maintained its practice of not accepting new applications for diversion or extinguishment of PROW. This is enabling the long list of

outstanding applications to be addressed; presently 13 applications are awaiting determination. In expectation the Deregulation Act 2015 will soon bring into force the 'Right to Apply', officers are finalising a new procedure to enable the County Council to meet the expected legal requirement to determine applications within 4 months of acceptance.

5. Problem Reports and General Enquiries

- 5.1 During 2018/19 problem reports and other issues continued to be received and considered by PROW service – 4308 were recorded in that period, whether identified through the inspection programme or as reports from users. With this high volume we continue to prioritise health and safety issues over matters of minor maintenance, such as damaged signage. Please see: <https://www.westsussex.gov.uk/prowfeedback>

6. Planning

- 6.1 Development continues to proliferate across West Sussex, albeit less so within the South Downs National Park. It brings challenges and opportunities – the former to consider and respond within the deadlines to the many site specific consultations; the latter to encourage applicants and planning authorities to recognise the value of PROW to existing and future communities and to provide accordingly.
- 6.2 To assist the latter, PROW service has been supporting colleagues in developing wider WSCC policies and guidance, such as the soon-to-be-published West Sussex Cycling Design Guidance. It continues to comment on arising Strategic and Neighbourhood Plans.

7. Staffing

- 7.1 During the year the service remained stable in terms of staffing, with just a minor change of hours for some staff. As a consequence, the AR areas were remodeled slightly and this rolled out from 1 January 2019.

8. Looking Forward

- 8.1 For 2019/20 the PROW revenue budget has been reduced by £35k to £418k. A programme of capital funded works totaling £315k, including projects slipped from 2018/19, 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.
- 8.3 WSCC has submitted a bid to the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development for approximately £600,000 to improve the Downs Link surface in five sections. The outcome of the bid should be known in the next couple of months and the works, if successful, will be delivered over two years.
- 8.4 Various changes to PROW statutory processes will need to be implemented should regulations arising from the Deregulation Act 2015 come into force.

Jon Perks
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