

How Norfolk County Council looks after our Public Rights of Way October 2012

This leaflet is produced to give you useful information about how Norfolk County Council looks after our Public Rights of Way (PRoWs).

We have always proactively maintained some of the footpaths in Norfolk and we are still doing this on hundreds of miles of them.

We have also always maintained the remainder of our countryside footpath network reactively.

In order to provide a better service we have changed the way we look after our footpaths and in May 2012 we moved the team responsible for this work into our Highways group. This gives us a much larger team and more capacity than ever before to deal with this work. The team is also now using consistent systems for dealing with all highways work, which is more efficient.

We have also stepped up our enforcement procedures to make sure that landowners, who also have responsibility for dealing with major parts of the network, do their bit – and that it gets done more quickly, freeing up more resource for dealing with maintenance that residents want to see us doing more of.

The team's focus will be to continue to maintain PRoWs in accordance with our statutory duty, to the reasonable standard of safety as set out in legislation, working with landowners, managers, local councils and voluntary groups.

The team will be very familiar to many Parish and Town Councils as it includes the highways inspectors, engineers and highway rangers who are locally based and have developed strong relationships with the communities they serve on a whole range of highways-related matters.

How to report a problem on a PRoW

All enquiries, or reports about PRoWs, can be made using the on-line reporting form (on the Norfolk County Council website – www.norfolk.gov.uk) or by calling the Customer Service Centre (CSC) on 0344 800 8020. Issues that cannot be addressed online or by the CSC will be passed to the Highways team in the same way as other highway issues.

All reports will be handled in line with our customer service standards. For further information about this please look on our website or contact our CSC on 0344 800 8020.

When reporting issues it would greatly help and speed up the process if the details of the relevant landowner could also be provided, as the issue may be the landowner's responsibility to put right.

Area office staff will respond to issues raised, carry out site visits if necessary, initiate work if that is appropriate and carry out enforcement action. If the report is about a matter affecting people's safety, an inspection will be carried out in a matter of days.

The highway rangers will be available to do work as part of their normal cycle of parish visits. The highways team will initiate proactive inspections of the PRoW network later this year.

Members and local council's representatives can also make contact with their local highway engineers who will be of assistance. Please refer to the map showing the highway engineers' respective areas which is available on the County Council's website or by contacting our CSC.

We are looking to develop our already strong links with Parish and Town Councils and are keen to hear from local councils and other groups who may be able to do more to help us maintain PRowS. Our local highway engineers will be happy to help in these discussions.

These changes do not affect the Norfolk Trails network which will continue to be managed by the Environment team. Reports about these paths will be passed to appropriate team.

Frequently asked questions about PRowS

Norfolk has 2,349 miles of PRowS made up of 1,671 miles of footpaths, 345 miles of Bridleways, 300 miles of Restricted Byways and 33 miles of Byways Open to all Traffic. Here are some of the most frequently asked questions about PRowS:

What is a PRow?

It's a highway (usually over private land) over which the public can pass.

- Public footpath - on foot
- Public bridleway - on foot, cycle or horse (cyclists must give way to other users)
- Restricted bridleway - on foot, cycle, horse, horse and car (but no motor vehicles)
- Public byway - all the above uses, plus motor vehicles

What responsibilities do the public have?

- Plan route, follow signs and only use a PRow for its proper purpose
- Keep to PRow and not trespass on other land
- Leave all property and gates as found
- Protect plants and animals
- Keep dogs under close control (at heel or on a lead) especially near farm animals
- Take litter home
- Show consideration, e.g. when parking

How do I know who is responsible for a blocked or obstructed path?

Check the problem against the lists below under landowner's responsibilities and the Council's responsibilities.

What responsibilities do landowners have?

- Make sure hedgerows don't obstruct the pathway
- Don't cultivate field-edge paths and all byways and restricted byways
- Prevent obstructions and other public deterrents, e.g. bulls in fields
- Reinstate any footpaths or bridleways which have to be disturbed for agriculture
- Obtain County Council consent for any gates or stiles in a PRow
- Remove barbed wire or electric fences blocking a public right of way
- The duty to maintain stiles, gates or other similar structures on rights of way
- Remove unauthorised signs or notices containing false or misleading information
- Contact the County Council before any works that might adversely affect a PRow
- Keep cross field paths clear of vegetation

What responsibilities does Norfolk County Council have?

- Protect the public's right to use PRow
- Maintain, and encourage others to maintain, PRow to a 'reasonable standard of safety'
- Signpost PRow where appropriate
- Authorise works by land owners and managers, e.g. gates and stiles
- Maintain the legal record of PRow on the Definitive Map and Statement
- The relevant legislation is the Highways Act 1980 and the Rights of Way Act 1990.

What kind of problems do we want the public to report?

PRoW blocked or unavailable for use because of:

- Structure
- Fence/electric fence/barbed wire
- Animals, e.g. dog/bulls, etc.
- Intimidation
- Deposited matter e.g. rocks / wood / animal matter, etc.
- Ploughing
- No visible path
- Overgrown crops
- Overgrown natural vegetation

PRoW route unclear because of:

- Damaged or missing signs
- Unauthorised signs
- Notices containing false or misleading information
- Ploughing
- No visible path
- Overgrown crops
- Overgrown natural vegetation

Other problem with PRoW:

- Damaged stile or bridge
- Tree overhanging path
- Collapse of path surface
- Unsafe structures adjacent to path

What if I think enforcement action is needed?

Please use the online web form to report the problem. We will investigate and if appropriate we will contact the land owner or manager. If the problem persists, we can serve a legal notice and prosecute if necessary (the decision to take legal action depends on the seriousness of the problem and the level of co-operation by the land owner).

Parish and town councils have a crucial role in this process because they can use their local knowledge to contact the landowner directly or tell Norfolk County Council who the landowner is and therefore save a lot of time and resource which could be better spent on doing other maintenance.

How can local councils or community groups get more involved in PROWs?

We are very keen to work with local councils who would like to help maintain and promote PRoWs in their area. Enquiries should be directed to their local Highway Engineer.