

# Norfolk Local Access Forum

<b>Report title:</b>	<b>Countryside Access arrangements update</b>
<b>Date of meeting:</b>	<b>30 January 2019</b>
<b>Responsible Officer:</b>	<b>Steve Miller, Assistant Director, Culture and Heritage</b>
<b>Strategic impact</b> To address the concerns raised by the Local Access Forum with regards to Public Rights of Way Management and delivering the service in an economic and cost-effective way.	

## Executive summary

At the July 2017 Local Access Forum (NLAF), it was agreed that at each future meeting, a summary of the work the Countryside Access Officers and Environment teams would be provided. At the October 2017 NLAF it was agreed that this report should be presented to the PROW sub-group prior to being brought to NLAF.

This paper highlights this work in terms of the volumes of customer queries received and responded to. The paper also highlights other key areas of work.

### Recommendations:

**That the Local Access Forum note the progress made to date since the Countryside Access Officer posts were introduced.**

## 1. Introduction

- 1.1. Since 1 April 2017, there is a single point of contact within each Highways Area office being responsible for their local rights of way issues. By having the officer within the Area office, they are more “on the ground” and better placed to deal with the operational reactive issues that occur when managing rights of way. They are supported by the wider Highways Area team staff. In addition, the Norfolk Trails team sits within the Environment Service at County Hall and carries out strategic and developmental aspects of developing the countryside access network.

## 2. Performance

- 2.1. The information below summarises the performance information available for the complete months since the last report in September 2018.

The new CRM defect reporting system went live 22<sup>nd</sup> Thursday March 2018. Defect notes are being made visible to the public in the automatic update emails sent when third party defects have been inspected & more status options available on tablets under the ‘No Defect’ category, as previously reported.

Minor updates continue to be made to CRM to enhance operation and feedback elements.

The provision of additional information appears to have led to a decrease in follow up requests.

A new report has been prepared to display the relevant PROW/Trails information and is attached below.

	Actual defect showing on systems as of 20/12/18	
Area	Mayrise defects Active	CRM's
North	107	10
South	201	13
West	1	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>233</b>	<b>35</b>

The majority of enquiries received continue to be regarding damaged or missing signs, non-reinstatement, obstructions, overgrown surface, overgrown hedges/ trees and surface condition.

The Norfolk Trails Team had at 20<sup>th</sup> December 2018, 284 open CRM issues

2.2. In addition to the numbers above, there have been a number of enforcement notices sent out to landowners since April 2018. The following have been issued:

- 147 number Section 131A, 134-137 Non-reinstatement Notices sent
- 47 Section 130's (obstructions) and s56 (out of repair) received and issued (enforcement against NCC).

It should be noted that processing these s130/56 legal notices is time consuming for NCC staff. As part of a legal process with set timescales, regardless of priority considerations it has an adverse effect on staff resources. Recent surveys of local authority PROW services indicate that across the country the *average* number of s130/56 notices served on any authority is only approximately 2 per yr.

These issues remain ongoing and being actively monitored and pursued with landowners.

2.3. In terms of other progress, key highlights include:

- Cutting contract has been updated and was sent out to the contractors in April (2018-19 financial year). The first (primary) cut was completed but there were some delays in completion, in part due to the density of the vegetation encountered. The issue was compounded in North and East as commencement relied on completion of the Trails first cut.
- Information on the budget including the lengths and frequency of grass cutting was asked to be included in the regular report. In 2017 820 km of PROW were cut in June and July with a second cut of some of the routes (490 km) completed in September and October. In 2018-19 the initial cut was for 840 km. and the second (partial) cut was just under 500km.
- CAO's will be reviewing feedback from contractors over the winter and making minor adjustments for 2019 season. Essentially the 2019 programme will run unchanged from 2018 but work will progress towards amalgamation of this and the Trails cutting contract for practical and efficiency purposes by 2020

- Landowner data from The Rural Payments Agency (RPA) regarding DEFRA grant aid and “cross compliance” requirements is still with the I.T department at the current time. This data is hoped to strengthen the enforcement process and will be updated annually. For data protection purposes this data can only be accessed by CAO’s and can only be used for PROW enforcement issues, not as a general landownership database
- Money for PROW capital improvement work schemes has been approved a total of £200,000 over 2 years. Schemes for 2018/19 totalling £120,000 have been largely completed. Improvement works have been carried out in Blakeney and Cromer on well used paths in village settings.  
The Hunstanton FP10 riverside scheme is progressing with a physical route now restored. The route will soon be fenced off from the golf course with protective netting to protect walkers. The footpath will remain closed until March/April to allow some vegetation regeneration but is hoped to be open for the summer.
- Bids for 2019/20 PROW capital improvements have been submitted for the remaining £80,000.
- CAO’s are also allocated £15,000 annually for small scale improvements, usually for urban paths, and a small number of surface improvement schemes have been carried out across the County as a result.

#### Norfolk Trails team Countryside Access arrangements update

Norfolk trails have procured a cutting contract which ensures the management of the long distance routes across Norfolk. These routes are cut three time annually with each cut totalling 393,794m. In addition to this additional works are carried out by the contractors as required which has added an additional 5,488m to the cutting contract. The additional cuts are in direct response to customer comments and feedback thereby ensuring the overall quality of our routes are improved or maintained. These additional cuts feed into modifications to the standard specification between years.

Highlights from the past 3 months include:

- New signage on the Angles Way installed between Beccles and Burgh Castle
- Design Work to improve signage and accessibility of linear Trails and circular routes in and around Great Yarmouth, including Angles Way, Wherryman’s Way, Weavers Way and Norfolk Coast Path.
- Access improvements to Weavers Way Circular Walk No10 (Acle), with 2 Stiles replaced with kissing gates, and signage planned as part of a HLF funded project.
- Reactive treework across the trails network including on circular walks and health walks.
- *Proactive* treework on *Chalara* and *Armillaria mellea* infected stands of *Fraxinus excelsior* on the Boudicca Way, Marriot’s Way, Weavers Way and Pingo Trail.
- All *Coastal Treasures* circular walks now installed: these 12 walks in West Norfolk include new signage throughout, as well as new structures such as bridges and kissing gates where appropriate. These
- Partnership work between National Trail team and Environment agency to resurface 1 mile of the Norfolk Coast Path between Cley and Cley Beach
- Partnership work between National Trail team and Norfolk Wildlife Trust to rebuild Pingo Trail boardwalks on Thompson Common.

The next three month work programme includes further development of signage and accessibility projects around Great Yarmouth, work on the National Trail circular walks that haven't fallen into the framework of projects such as *Coastal Treasures* and *Explore More Coast* over recent years, with a view to developing a definitive guidebook to these routes. Repairs to vehicle-damaged sections of Peddars Way and realignment/rollback of Coastal Access subject to coastal erosion will also feature in the coming months. The *Coastal Treasures* Project will see the official launch of its new walks at Easter, with an accompanying guidebook to highlight West Norfolk's history and heritage.

### **3. Financial Implications**

3.1. None arising from this report

### **4. Issues, risks and innovation**

4.1. None arising from this report

### **5. Background**

5.1. The background information to this paper is covered by the preceding paper on Public Rights of Way Maintenance, presented to this Committee.

### **Officer Contact**

If you have any questions about matters contained in this paper or want to see copies of any assessments, eg equality impact assessment, please get in touch with:

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