

Background – Public Rights of Way/Footpaths

1. The History

The govt. kicked this off by announcing that Public Rights of Way needed to be legally registered by 2026 or they would be “lost” for ever and the public would no longer be able to use them.

The Ramblers Association then undertook the massive task of comparing current OS maps with Victorian maps to identify which Public Rights of Way had disappeared over the past 100 years or so.

The Ramblers Association found that 49,000 miles of Public Rights of way have disappeared in England from current OS maps over the past century. The Association identified about 12 Public Rights of Way that have disappeared from our Parish.

2. The Issue before us

At the full Parish Council meeting on 6 January, we concluded that we should look at these lost rights of way and make a proper case for them to be re-registered. Its evident that some of the lost rights of way don't really serve any purpose because they don't lead to anywhere useful and we won't ask for them to be re-registered. We would take the others to the next Roads and Footpaths meeting. Volunteers would share out the footpaths and assess whether any of them are useful.

We would do this is in the full knowledge that:

- the Ramblers Association may choose not to act on our recommendations
- West Sussex CC may choose not to proceed with registering any of our recommended footpaths put forward by the Ramblers Association
- That landowners may use their rights to make a formal appeal to WSCC to stop a registration of a footpath that crosses their land
- That landowners may make a formal appeal to the Planning Inspectorate if WSCC decides to go ahead with a registration

Some landowners are very supportive of Public Rights of Way and see them as an opportunity to educate the public about farming and food production.

However, it is undoubtedly true that the public, particularly those with dogs they do not keep under proper control, can cause harm and sometimes even death to farm animals. This affects the farmers livelihood and causes fully justified complaints.

Because of this, the Parish Council will include in the February edition of The Link magazine, an article on walkers using Public Rights of Way responsibly and being mindful about our farmers' rights to carry out their work in peace.

3. The task

To receive a presentation by individual councillors who have researched each footpath and make a decision about whether or not to put it on a recommended list.

Note that councillors were asked to use some criteria, including if the footpath was now "useful" or merely a diversion for example, if it would permit a circular walk where none is possible at the moment, or if the "lost" footpath appears to stop and go nowhere. (Full list of criteria previously supplied)

Thanks go to each councillor who undertook this task on behalf of the full Parish Council.

Finally, it is relevant that the Parish Council actively promotes a healthy lifestyle via its published 10 circular walks in the Parish, its guided wildlife walks and free Sunday morning walks. And, as always, it needs to work in the interests of the majority of its residents.

Owen Hydes

13 January 2021