

# Review of the Cleaning and Maintenance Schedule for Hillingdon's Footpaths and Bridleways – **WITNESS SESSION**

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## 1. REASON FOR ITEM

To enable the committee to gather evidence as part of their review into the cleaning and maintenance schedule for Hillingdon's footpaths, bridleways, and alleyways.

## 2. OPTIONS AVAILABLE TO THE COMMITTEE

1. Question the witnesses
2. To make a note of possible recommendations for the review

## 3. WITNESSES

On 20<sup>th</sup> January 2015 Members agreed the scope of its review into the cleaning and maintenance of footpaths and bridleways. It was decided that the review would include alleyways in urban areas, as well as more recreational rights of way.

It is noted that only a limited amount of time is available for gathering evidence. Members were therefore asked at the previous meeting, and remain welcome, to send questions to Democratic Services in advance for circulation to witnesses. Witnesses for the session are as follows:

Name	Position
Malcolm Trudgeon/ Colin Acreman	Hillingdon Ramblers
Andrew Riley	Northwood Hills Residents' Association & Bridleway User
Paul Richards	Green Spaces, Sports, and Leisure Manager
John Fern	Service Manager - Street Scene and Traffic
Colin Russell	Waste Division Manager

Unfortunately officers could not establish a current point of contact for Tidy Harefield, who were proposed as witnesses in the scoping report, and so the group were not invited to give evidence.

## 4. KEY LINES OF ENQUIRY

4.1 Members may wish to enquire about:

- The Council's responsibilities with regard to rights of way, and how these are discharged.

- Whether users are generally satisfied with the cleanliness and state of repair of footpaths.
- The means by which the public and relevant user groups can report problems with rights of way, and their knowledge of these methods.
- How the Council responds to these reports, including how long it takes for problems to be resolved.
- What strategies are used to tackle areas where problems recur regularly.
- Other possible approaches to cleaning and maintenance which could be considered, and the cost of these alternatives.
- Whether working in partnership with other internal teams or outside organisations could support the Council in keeping routes clean and in a good state of repair.

## 5. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

### 5.1 Types of path

5.1.1 There are a number of different classifications of paths, depending on their legal status. This also affects the responsibilities the Council has, and the way that they are met. It is usually possible to determine how a path is classified, as follows:

#### 5.1.2 **Rights of Way (Footpaths, Bridleways, and Byways Open to All Traffic):**

These are signed where they leave roads, and the signs state which type of right of way they are, and also, in Hillingdon, give the route's reference number. They are in the main historical routes, and the Council publishes a definitive map and statement indicating the location of these routes here: <http://www.hillingdon.gov.uk/27285>. Some Rights of Way are also adopted footpaths.

5.1.3 **Adopted Footways:** These typically lead between other adopted roads, and provide shorter pedestrian routes than following roads. They are almost all surfaced, and are usually relatively short. All are shown on the Council's Highways register.

5.1.4 **Permissive (Leisure) Routes:** These routes are usually signed regularly along their length with the name of the route. There may also be interpretation boards, telling users about the local area. They can be either surfaced or unsurfaced, and the routes normally take users between interesting features. Examples are the Hillingdon Trail, the Celandine Route, and the Willow Tree Wander.

5.1.5 **Private Routes:** Other paths are generally not the responsibility of the Council, but of the property owners. This applies to most alleyways between houses, paths on private estates, routes in industrial estates and the like. These may often be gated, but are not always. There are paths of this type which exist on Council housing estates or school sites and these are managed as part of the facility they serve, for example by the Housing Caretaking Service, rather than as part of the highways network. Access can be restricted to residents, owners, and users of sites. These are outside of the scope of this review.

## **5.2 The Organisation of the Service**

5.2.1 Responsibility for cleaning and maintaining footpaths, bridleways, and other rights of way is split between various teams within Residents' Services:

- The Green Spaces team manage Bridleways and the Borough's Permissive Routes Network (The Celandine Walks, The Hillingdon Trail, The Willow Tree Wander, and Trails in the Ruislip Woods National Nature Reserve).
- The Street Environment and Traffic Management team manage other rights of way, and maintain the Definitive Map and Statement, which records all of the Borough's rights of way. They are also responsible for the maintenance of adopted local access footpaths such as urban alleyways, which are not formal rights of way.
- The Waste Division deals with litter on paved footpaths and most fly-tipping. Litter picking on more rural routes is undertaken by the other teams and by volunteers, on an occasional basis.

## **5.3 The Council's Responsibilities**

5.3.1 The Council has various responsibilities, which depend upon the designation of the route, and the ownership of the land.

### **5.3.2 Public Rights of Way**

Highway authorities must:

- keep the surface of a right of way in a safe state
- make sure that obstructions are removed
- make sure there are no notices that prevent or discourage the use of a right of way
- add signs where a right of way leaves metalled roads
- make sure the public's rights to use a right of way are protected
- make sure that landowners carry out their duties, and take action if they do not.

Landowners must

- avoid putting obstructions on or across the route
- make sure vegetation does not encroach onto the route from the sides or above, bearing in mind the different clearances needed for users of different types of route
- maintain and make clear the route of rights of way, when these have been disturbed by ploughing
- not keep certain types of bull or other dangerous animals in fields.

### **5.3.3 Permissive Routes**

The landowner is responsible for maintaining these paths, but do not have specific duties, as there is no right of access. There are general responsibilities regarding the safety of those using the route under the Occupiers Liability Act (1957). The landowner, which in Hillingdon is generally the Council, has *"a duty to take such care as in all the circumstances of the case is reasonable to see that the visitor will be reasonably safe in using the premises for the purposes for which he is invited or permitted by the occupier to be there"*.

### **5.3.4 Adopted Footpaths**

The Council is responsible for maintaining these, at the public expense, under the Highways Act (1980), in the same way as adopted roads. The authority needs to ensure that it has taken *"such care as is reasonably required in all the circumstances"* to ensure that the footpath is not dangerous to pedestrians.

## **5.4 Cleaning**

### **5.4.1 Litter**

Urban paved footpaths, both adopted footways and rights of way, are cleaned according to a schedule based on need. Those footpaths where litter accumulates quickly are cleaned on a weekly, or occasionally more regular, basis. Other footpaths are scheduled for cleaning once every month or so, although this cleaning depends on the availability of staff, and may not take place when high levels of gritting or leaf clearance activities are taking place. Remaining urban paved paths are cleaned in response to reports of litter by residents, as the litter build up is not thought to warrant scheduled cleaning.

Other rights of way are litter picked on an occasional basis by volunteers and Blue Sky Development and Regeneration, co-ordinated by either the Rights of Way Officer or a Countryside and Conservation Officer, depending on where the path is. When accumulations of waste are reported by the public, these are assessed by officers, and if possible cleared immediately. Where it is not possible for the officer to clear the waste, the issue is referred to either the Waste Service, Blue Sky (if they are working with the Council at the time), or where necessary to a specialist contractor.

### **5.4.2 Fly Tipping**

Fly tipping generally occurs in close proximity to the public highway. It is therefore usually dealt with by the Waste Division. On the rare occasions where vehicular access is not possible, other teams may clear the waste.

### **5.4.3 Preventative Weed Spraying**

Preventative spraying is undertaken on adopted paths up to four times a year. Spraying on unadopted urban rights of way has previously taken place, but at present these are not sprayed. A twice yearly spraying schedule has however been drawn up, and tenders are being sought, for implementation this year.

## **5.5 Maintenance**

### **5.5.1 Signposting and Way Marking**

In 2011/12 all signposts on the boroughs rights of way were replaced, including way markers where necessary. These signs are checked by the Street Environment and Traffic Management team as part of the annual inspection. Signage and interpretation boards on permissive routes are inspected annually by the Green Spaces section. Adopted footpaths are not generally signed, except when done as part of wider town centre signage schemes.

### **5.5.2 Footpath Surfaces**

Annual inspections designed to ensure that paths are not dangerous are carried out for footpaths with sealed surfaces such as tarmac. The remainder of the borough's rights of way, and permissive paths are inspected at least once a year to assess the condition of the paths, identify defects and to help plan improvements works. Reactive inspections also take place where users encountering problems contact the Council; the Hillingdon branch of the Ramblers Association pass on any problems they may encounter. The Green Spaces team also organise a considerable amount of improvement works on the borough's permissive network, using volunteers to assist as appropriate. The Rights of Way Officer organises similar works on rights of way. Many improvement works also take place as part of the Chrysalis funding scheme.

### **5.5.3 Vegetation Maintenance**

Where vegetation or trees overhang or encroach onto the highway the responsibility lies with the owner or occupier of the land to ensure that it does not cause a danger or obstruction to users of the highway. Where landowners allow vegetation to grow excessively, the officers will intervene. The Council has a responsibility for cutting surface vegetation other than crops on public rights of way. Management of vegetation on footpaths is undertaken by Blue Sky Development & Regeneration (who provide ex-offenders with employment to reduce re-offending crime in the community). Every year Blue Sky are contracted by both the Green Spaces team, and the Street Environment and Traffic Management team. In addition to cutting back vegetation Blue Sky also litter pick, remove fly tips and provide environmentally sensitive chemical control for dangerous plant species such as Giant Hogweed and Japanese Knotweed. The Council's Park Officers are also utilised to carry out tree works and vegetation clearance work within the Ruislip Woods National Nature Reserve.

### **5.5.4 Gates, Stiles and structures**

A highway authority has a duty to ensure furniture such as gates and stiles along public rights of way are of a certain standard. Furniture inspections are carried out each year on all types of path to identify faults and possible improvements. The Council is trying to make rights of way more accessible for those with disabilities when replacing furniture; however, this can make routes vulnerable to illegal use by motorcycles. Appropriate schemes are therefore designed for individual footpaths.

## **5.6 Performance**

### **5.6.1 Rights of Way Maintenance**

All public rights of way in the borough are assessed against a Best Value Performance indicator, which covers a range of maintenance issues. 98% of the Borough's footpaths met the requirements of this performance indicator in 2014. This has increased from 73% in 2008.

### **5.6.2 Permissive Routes**

Permissive routes are not measured on the same basis as rights of way. Their primary aim is to provide enjoyable walking routes, and so the performance can be judged by the number of people using the path. On tripadvisor, a popular site for rating attractions, the Hillingdon Trail was judged as excellent by two users, good by two others, and poor by a further two people; complaints related to dog accessibility and litter. Generally the reviews of the Celandine route from across the internet are good, but there is some concern about waymarking. Ruislip woods are a major visitor attraction, partly because of their juxtaposition with the Lido. There have been no negative comments about the paths since new signage was installed through the woods.

### **5.6.3 Adopted Paths**

Performance of the highways network is assessed through the Local Implementation Plan, which contains various performance indicators, including one for the proportion of walking trips originating in Hillingdon, as a proportion of all trips by residents. Also important is the number of trips and falls recorded, however, these are recorded generally, rather than only relating to footpaths and rights of way.

#### **5.6.4 Litter/Cleaning**

The performance of Waste Division is again assessed more generally, rather than focussing specifically on paths. Data relevant to this aspect of the review is therefore not available.

#### **5.7 Reporting**

Residents can report issues via the following methods:

Online at [www.hillingdon.gov.uk](http://www.hillingdon.gov.uk)

By telephone on 01895 556000

By letter to Residents Services, London Borough of Hillingdon, Civic Centre, High Street, Uxbridge UB8 1UW

For queries about Statutory Rights of Way, residents can also contact Richard Kane, the Rights of Way Officer by telephone on 01895 277528, or [rkane@hillingsdon.gov.uk](mailto:rkane@hillingsdon.gov.uk)

#### **5.8 Strategic Planning**

The Rights of Way Improvement Plan provides the strategic framework for improvements to, and maintenance of, Hillingdon's rights of way. It contains specific improvement schemes, as well as general principles for maintenance. The document was adopted in 2011 and is due for review in 2016. The Committee will be able to feed into this, should members wish to.

### **6. PAPERS WITH THE REPORT**

Review Terms of Reference

Review Scoping Report

### **7. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

Rights of Way & Permissive Routes Improvement Plan for Hillingdon 2011 – 2021

<http://www.hillingdon.gov.uk/media.jsp?mediaid=29326&filetype=pdf>

The Hillingdon Definitive Map and Statement

<http://www.hillingdon.gov.uk/article/27284/Public-Rights-of-Way>

Hillingdon Council Walking Website

<http://www.hillingdon.gov.uk/walking>

Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Rights of Way Circular 1/09

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/rights-of-way-circular-1-09>