

IOW Ramblers Submission Paper to the Sept 2016 ROW Improvement Plan Consultation.

The current Island Rights of Way Improvement Plan is a comprehensive document and much of its content is still relevant to today's requirements. The IOW Ramblers are reviewing and updating Appendix G in this document which lists potential high value new footpath links around the Island. The County of Dorset has characteristics similar to the Isle of Wight, they updated their ROW Plan in 2011 which we believe provides a useful benchmark as the Isle of Wight carries out this project.

<https://www.dorsetforyou.gov.uk/article/386570/Rights-of-Way-Improvement-Plan>.

Path Survey Results

During 2015 the national Big Pathwatch survey was carried out by the Ramblers across England and Wales. As part of this survey 540 km (72%) of the Islands footpaths were surveyed by local volunteers. Charts summarising both the national results and the IOW results are appended to this paper. The ROW department already have detailed reports of Isle of Wight survey results. Highlights from the survey are -

- a) Overall an average of 1.1 path problems were recorded for each 1 km grid square surveyed on the Island that contained PROW.
- b) This is 25% fewer than the equivalent national average which was 1.46 faults per 1 km grid square surveyed that contain any PROW .
- c) Both nationally and locally on the Island the issue reported most often was a lack of signage along the route.
- d) The Island had less missing signs where footpaths join roads than the national average.
- e) The Islands incidence of problem stiles was higher than the national average.
- f) Significant reports of mud problems on Island paths reflected the fact that a high proportion of squares were surveyed in the late autumn.

(This data and analysis is available to include in the new ROWIP subject to authorisation by Ramblers Central Office)

The IOW Ramblers have identified the following key issues that we consider should be given priority within a new ROW improvement plan.

1) An Island Strategic Multiuser Path Network

A project should be undertaken to identify a potential strategic network of high value multiuser routes. The aims of this network would be-

- a) Provide interlinking stretches of high quality well sign posted and well maintained off road and quiet lane routes that meet the needs of a wide range of users.
- b) As far as practical they would be suitable for mixed use by 'family style' cyclists, walkers who wanted to avoid winter mud, pushchairs, horse riders and disabled users.
- c) They would support utility journeys around and between towns and villages as well as a range of recreational circuits of various lengths.
- d) Routes of old railway lines, paths to schools, links to tourist attractions, the Walk the Wight route and themed trails are all examples of components for this network.
- e) In some locations the natural ground condition will provide a serviceable path in other situations drainage, surfacing work, user separation and/or boardwalks will be required.
- f) Where there is no practical alternative, wide road verges can be adapted to provide useful multi user route links.
- g) Conservation and countryside protection issues would need to be fully catered for in developing the proposed network.

This project would be a joint effort between local government and community organisations working in partnership to proactively seek funding from a wide range of sources to progressively implement each element of the potential network. (An emphasis on this strategic network should in no way over shadow the need to safe guard and maintain the rest of the PROW network to a good standard).

BHS - Surfaces for Horses - suggestions pdf

<https://www.google.co.uk/#q=surfaces+for+horses+British+Horse+society>

2) Criteria for upgrading footpaths to bridleways or multiuser paths

Currently 38% (284 km) of Island PROW are designated as bridleways or byways. The IOW Ramblers consider that the re-designation of a footpath to bridleway or multiuser status should be pursued when all or most of the following parameters can be achieved.

- a) The route allows sufficient width for two horses to pass each other.
- b) The route can be maintained year round in a state suitable for all users due to good natural ground conditions, drainage and surface improvements and/or user separation measures.
- c) The route contributes value as part of the Islands strategic network plans.
- d) Conservation requirements and countryside protection issues are taken into account.

The links below provide useful back ground information.

Ramblers Central Office Policy Documents ref cycling and horse riding

<http://www.ramblers.org.uk/news/news/2016/july/british-cycling-calls-for-increased-access-for-cyclists.aspx>

<https://dub121.mail.live.com/?fid=fldrafts>

3) 2009 Marine and Coastal Access Act implementation around the IOW Coastline.

Between 2017 and 2020 a key project for Isle of Wight PROW will be the consultation, design, and implementation of an improved coastal route by Natural England. Better access to the coastline will provide significant benefits to the Island tourist economy as well as extending healthy recreation facilities to parts of the Island where these are largely absent.

During 2016 the IOW Ramblers are leading a team of volunteers representing a range of recreational groups; to gather information around the coastline for both the ROW Department and Natural England; and to recommend a route that takes into account the provisions of Natural England's Coastal Access scheme.

It is important that arrangements and resources are put in place to support the ongoing maintenance of what is part of a new national trail.

4) Establish a Suitable Scheme for Targeting and Monitoring PROW Standards.

We are an Island that relies heavily on the economic benefits of outdoor recreational Tourism and where a high proportion of the population are retirees seeking outdoor recreation facilities that can pay dividends in reduced health service costs. A high quality PROW network which demonstrably meets national standards is key to supporting these opportunities.

A suitable scheme for targeting and monitoring our PROW standards should be established. Other County Councils use annual random sample BVPI surveys to achieve this objective. Such targets should not be seen as the sole responsibility of the ROW department, all relevant stakeholders need to commit to help achieve agreed standards of performance

including county and parish levels of local government, landowner and business groups, plus recreational and community groups.

5) Rights and Responsibilities Publicity and Education

We can all cite examples of problems with the use and maintenance of PROW-

- a) A group of walkers spread across a path chatting to each other obstruct and inconvenience both other walkers as well as other types of user.
- b) Some cyclists ride in an inconsiderate or even reckless manner as they meet other path users and fail to provide warning of their presence.
- c) When the ground is soft and wet, horses tend to significantly churn up a path, making it very difficult for other users.
- d) Some farmers plough and crop fields with no attempt to reinstate a serviceable PROW that crosses it.
- e) At a recent presentation to 50 members of the general public, 80% said they enjoyed a country walk but less than 10% said they knew what green dashed lines meant on an OS map.
- f) Dogs are regularly permitted to range over cropping fields leaving their unhygienic packages behind.
- g) You need a 34 in inside leg to be able to negotiate a stile while the footboard rocks precariously.

We need a programme to clarify best practice standards, legal responsibilities and access rights that are applicable to various parties involved with PROW. The first line of action should then be to regularly deploy a range of measures to publicise information and educate people about the key issues. The use of articles in traditional media, the internet and social media can provide low cost channels to deliver these messages.

6) Way Marking Improvement Project

A relatively low proportion of walkers are confident using maps to navigate around the countryside. This is one reason for the popularity of group walks. Lack of way marking along paths was the highest reported issue identified in the Big Pathwatch survey. It is in the interest of landowners that clear signage is provided to help people keep to the PROW. The ROW department with assistance from Ramblers volunteers has already significantly improved the Islands compliance with the legal requirement to provide signs where PROW meet highways. We should now develop and implement a comprehensive plan to provide suitable waymarks/signage along all our PROW.

7) Build Partnerships to Progress PROW Initiatives

Over the last five years a range of PROW projects and initiatives have been successfully progressed by building broad partnerships between the IOW Council, parish councils,

conservation groups, the National Trust and volunteer groups to raise funds and pool resources. Examples are-

- The IOW Ramblers Donate a gate scheme - 150 gates over 6 years.
- West and East Wight Landscape Partnership Schemes - circa £200k of heritage lottery funding for PROW projects.
- Volunteers surveying and reporting on the condition of the path network
- Sustainable Transport funded projects.

We should build on this approach and make it an integral part of our the new ROW Improvement plan.

8) Council Planning, Highways and ROW Departmental Coordination

Several Island volunteer organisations involved in reviewing how developments affect PROW and the countryside are concerned about poor levels of communication and coordination between the different Council departments that need to get engaged with PROW issues. We consider that a review of these arrangements needs to be undertaken and improved systems implemented. We need to continue to review development proposals to ensure that PROW issues are catered for, this includes identifying opportunities to provide new PROW routes.

9) Open Digital Map based PROW Information System

We are currently working on getting the Isle of Wight definitive map established in a digital format and placed on the internet as a public resource. Other county councils around the country already deploy 'Open Digital Map based PROW information systems that that cover areas such as records of structures and other assets around the network, path closure information, map based problem reporting, map based status of problem resolution, etc. Links to this type of facility in Dorset and Somerset are-

<http://explorer.geowessex.com/>

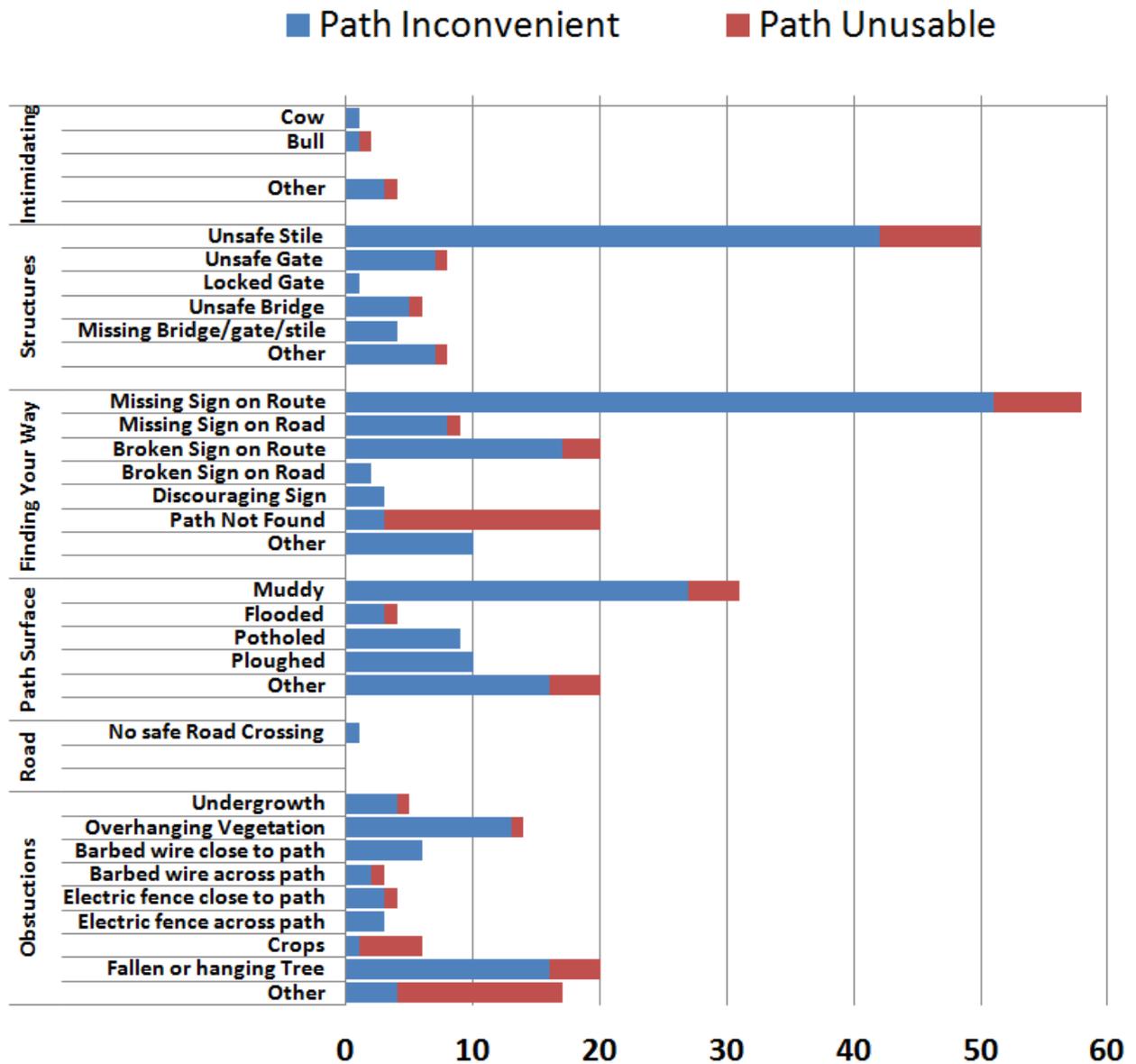
<http://roam.somerset.gov.uk/roam/map>

Sometime over the next ten years the IOW Council will need to develop this sort of approach for local government data and information in general. We need to ensure that PROW requirements are fully taken into account as this happens.

10) ROW Improvement Plan - Annual Review and Report

Needless to say the new plan should be subject to regular reviews and reports on progress.

IOW BPW Survey Negative Path Features

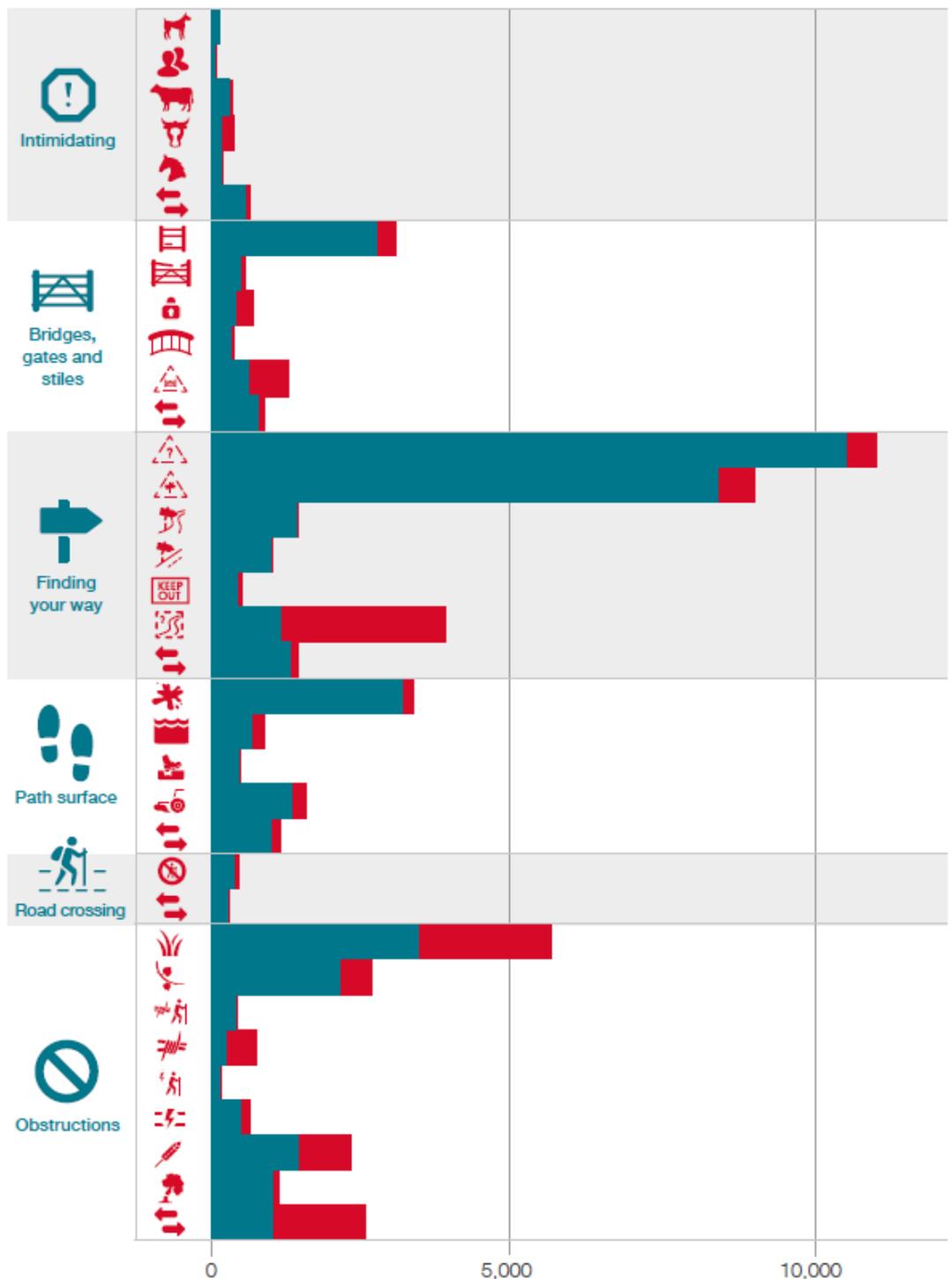


Total number of negative features recorded on IOW PROW	361
Number of 1 km grid squares surveyed containing PROW	328
IOW average number of negative features per 1 km grid square	1.10

Negative features and their effect

● Path inconvenient

● Path unusable



Total number of negative features recorded across England & Wales	60k
Number of 1km squares surveyed nationally containing PROW	41k
National average number of negative features per 1 km grid square	1.46