

Access Essex

The newsletter of the Public Rights of Way team

Inventory of PRow assets completed, thanks to our inspectors!

Last year our PRow inspectors worked on a massive project – they were tasked with assessing the condition of 20% of our PRow network (that's almost 1,300 km that needed to be walked). They had to come up with innovative solutions to enable the data to be captured in an efficient way. This required development and working closely with the Asset team to ensure that the data recorded could be processed effectively.

They then started on the surveys in September leaving them only six months to gather all the data. In spite of the tight deadline they collectively achieved their target, recording 5,554 assets. Their efforts resulted in a good statistical sample which allowed the Asset team to value the PRow network at a new build cost of approximately £9 million.

The hard work and dedication by our team of 12 inspectors and has given the PRow management team figures they needed to assist them in managing the budget through improved lifecycle planning.

The project now moves into the second year of data collection.



Jason Botelho, PRow Inspector

“Once again, our Public Rights of Way inspectors have risen to the challenge, demonstrating the highest degree of professionalism and commitment to ensure that this task was completed on time.”

Garry White, PRow and Records Manager

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Trees cleared from bridleway 19 Shire Hall Lane, Saffron Walden

Over the years this lane has become obstructed, and in some cases completely blocked by trees, PRow Inspector Rob Lee reports...



This was clearly in need of intervention and there was the risk that some of the large trees, or those in a state of advanced deterioration, may have posed a safety issue for path users. Although it is a bridleway this route is mainly used by residents of the nearby housing estate and as access from the town into the countryside. It gets a lot of pedestrian use and there is also an unofficial footpath within the land of the adjoining industrial estate that connects to it which is used by parents and children attending a nearby pre-school. As well as tree issues, it has also suffered from neglect and disrespect locally with some people using it to dump waste. In short, it needed a significant amount of work to ensure it was a safe and pleasant environment.

Annie Hooper, an arboriculturalist from Essex County Council conducted an assessment



of the tree issues along the lane, grading the issues in terms of urgency as well as locating them all. It was clear from Annie's survey that for reasons of safety and access, works would need to take place sooner rather than later. Contractors were then appointed to carry out the urgent works, under Annie's expert guidance.

Uttlesford District Council and Saffron Walden Town Council were kept in the loop. Also, residents and business whose properties abut the land were informed of the works as well as being advised of their own responsibilities regarding boundaries and encouraging them to report anti-social practices such as the dumping of garden waste and more serious fly-tipping to Uttlesford District Council. While not in the most rural or picturesque site, these works have achieved a marked improvement on accessibility for its users and give better access to equestrians particularly, on what is an important and well used if not spectacular PRow. What it lacks in river views, historic churches or ancient ruins it makes up for in its amenity value and usefulness.

Important link for pedestrians and cyclists restored in Great Dunmow



Bridleway 77 Great Dunmow is a path on the edge of the town that runs through a quiet green space and provides an off-road link between a large section of the town, the slightly out of town Tesco superstore and a primary school...



This important link sees a high frequency of use by pedestrians and cyclists along with pushchairs and mobility scooters. Some years ago a tarmac surface was laid along the length of the path to provide a good all weather route but it had begun to deteriorate. Noticing this, our Inspector for the area, Janet Hill, applied to the Local Highways Panel for funding to widen and improve the surface. The brilliant results can be seen below and this important link can now be enjoyed by all.



Major improvements at Paper Mill Lock

Joint effort brings massive improvements at Paper Mill Lock

Essex County Council, The Inland Waterways who own the land and their volunteer force, the Waterways Recovery Group joined forces to make surface improvements to over 800m of footpath along the Chelmer Navigation this spring.

The area is popular for locals as well as tourists, and summer attracts walkers and cyclists of all ages enjoying the river bank, but the surface had become muddy and boggy making it less attractive to the casual user.

Two years of high water levels and localised flooding caused the tow path to deteriorate and parts of the path were almost impassable without wellington boots.

The Waterways Recovery Group held a week long camp that attracted volunteers from across Europe to help spread and compact the road planings to make a better surface, more resistant to water and flooding.



Volunteers from the Waterways Recovery Group improving the tow path at Paper Mill Lock



The week long canal camp attracted volunteers from across Europe



The Essex Wildlife Trust had also made some environmental improvements to address water quality. By diverting the water run-off from the fields to a filtration pool near to the river they prevented the nitrates from entering into the watercourse. (If nitrate levels in water become excessive it can reduce the oxygen levels that fish and invertebrates require to survive.)

Whilst on site the Trust also carried out work on the river banks where the towpath had become eroded. They installed new banking made from Hazel poles which reclaimed some of the towpath from the river and will protect the bank from further erosion.



New steps for Horkesley Lock Bridge

Since October 2015, walkers have once again been able to enjoy Footpath 47 at Great Horkesley that crosses the River Stour into Suffolk at Nayland, which had been closed since early 2015, thanks to a team from Essex Highways who restored the steps on both sides.



The bridge is part of an important historic site. Following the Stour Navigation Act of 1705, locks were built at Nayland and Great Horkesley. Commercial barge traffic was a common sight until the First World War when most of the locks along the river disappeared. While Nayland Lock upstream was replaced by a weir in 1947, the lock keepers cottage survived but Horkesley Lock and cottage gradually fell into ruins and the lock bridge that once spanned the Stour disappeared. During the 1960s Nayland Parish Council tried to reinstate the lock bridge without success. Gradually the whole site of Horkesley Lock and its pool became overgrown with willow and the pool silted up until it was no more than a small pond.

In 1974, the newly formed Nayland with Wissington Conservation Society attempted to restore the Horkesley Lock site but lack of money and resources prevented it. However, in 1995 with the help of the Dedham Vale & Stour Valley Project, the then National Rivers Authority restored the site and built the bridge.

Although located close to Nayland village centre, the bridge itself is entirely in the county of Essex and because of its size is maintained by Essex County Council Structures team.

The installation of the new steps was the first structural work necessary at the site for twenty years, and these latest improvements will hopefully ensure that the bridge will remain an historic and greatly valued link in the Stour Valley footpath network, and that its name 'Horkesley Lock Bridge' will live on to remind walkers of the important part the site played in the Navigation of the River Stour.

Wendy Sparrow, Parish Recorder and founder member of the Nayland with Wissington Conservation Society

"Thank you for the wonderful new steps. They are very easy to use and it looks like they should last for a very long time. Your contractor has done a first rate job and the workmanship appears to be excellent. I'm sure local walkers will be delighted!"

**Sally Bartrum,
Nayland with Wissington Footpath
Warden**

Vegetation cutting online

As the growing season begins we have refreshed our Vegetation Cutting page on the website to reflect any changes that were made to the schedules from last year.

Follow this link to see if the paths near you are being cut:

[Vegetation cutting maps](#)



When and where is it needed?

Vegetation cutting of the natural seasonal upgrowth on our PROW network is undertaken between April and October. We deliver the service through maintenance schemes and community schemes. For more information about vegetation cutting, please refer to our website.

Bye-bye muddy byway!

Job well done!

"I wanted to say a massive thank you to the team who have made the bridleway from Black Notley to Dagnet's Farm near Great Leighs so wonderful to walk along. The chaps worked very hard on the job and the outcome is amazing. So thanks Essex for finding the money to do this piece of work. I wanted you to know how much I appreciate it and am now walking the length of it from Snakey Lane to Green Lane everyday with my dogs and now the work is finished will try it with my horse."

Thank You
Jenny



The byway at Dagnets Lane before



After the works were completed

News from Stebbing Parish Paths Partnership (P3)

Footpath No. 2, Stebbing



Footpath No. 2 Stebbing, through Holts Farm, officially ran through the moat! Some might have struggled along the headland and through the pheasant pens – because that was where the path seemed to go. During the last year or so, Legal Services at Essex County Council were grinding their way through an investigation and decision to change the route which would require clearing a path through a thicket of blackthorn and the erection of a new bridge. In the autumn the P3 volunteers set to work and the results are now clear for all to see.

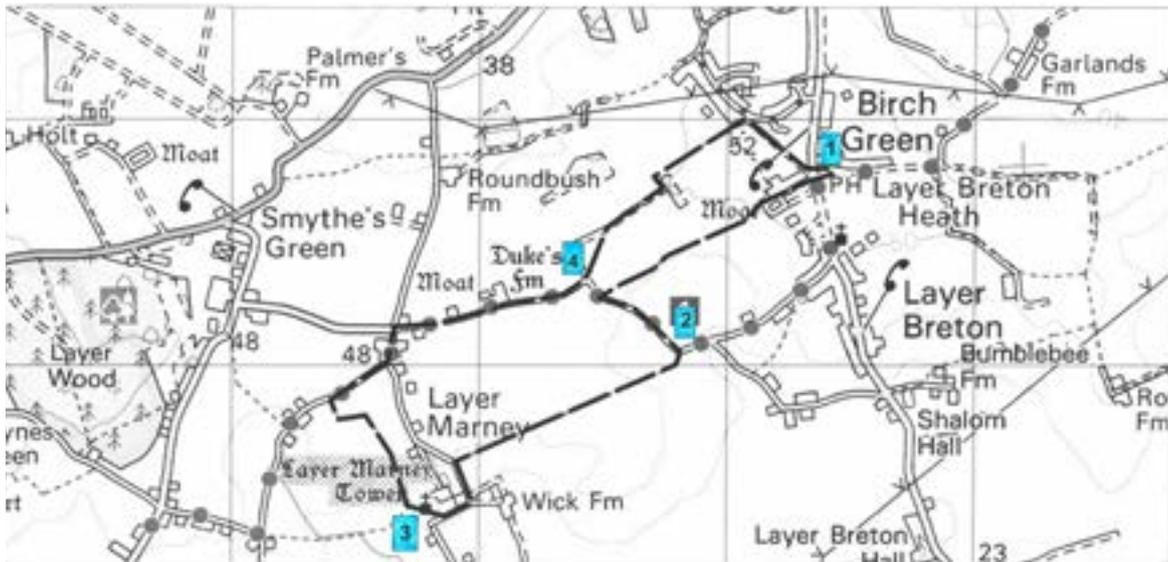
Footpath No. 45, Stebbing



Essex Legal Services have also been looking into the route of footpath No. 45 Stebbing. This short path through the wood north of Brick Kiln Farm seemed to have disappeared. Apparently nobody has been able to find it for many years in spite of which Legal Services decided that, like footpath No. 2, it was shown incorrectly on all the recent maps. Following publication of their decision, the PROW Inspector, Adam Jenkins, and I managed to identify the route and arranged for the P3 volunteers to open it up. The route has now been cleared, we installed a bridge and clearly marked the route.. We have some lovely walking routes within the Parish, they are a great asset to the village and I would encourage anybody to come out and visit them. Walking the footpaths helps to keep them clear and having many eyes out there helps to spot problems.

Brian Martin Stebbing P3

Summer walks in Essex



This is a walk through a quiet and serene area of the County from the village of Birch Green to the somewhat isolated Tudor Gatehouse at Layer Marney, which stands as a magnificent landmark in this part of the countryside

Distance: 3.75 miles

Starting Point: If you intend to visit the pub, you can park in the Hare and Hounds car park on the southern edge of the village. Otherwise you can park along Birch Street, towards the village.

How to get there: From the B1022 Maldon Road between Tiptree and Colchester, take the turning to the village of Birch. At the T-junction turn right into Birch Street and follow the road south for nearly a mile to Birch Green.

Map: Explorer 184 Colchester

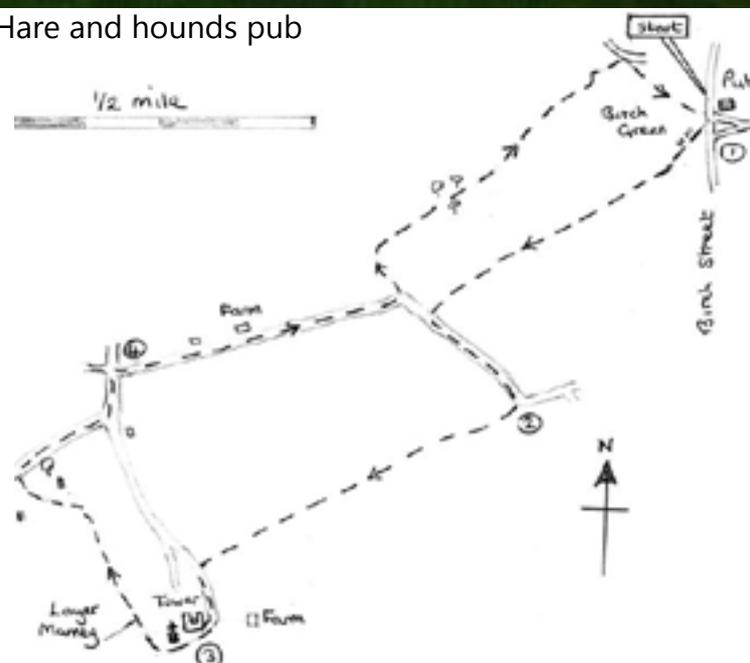
Refreshment: The pub where you start is the 16th century Hare and Hounds Pub at Birch Green. Layer Marney Towers has a Tearoom.

Place of interest nearby: Layer Marney Towers en route. The red brick Tudor gatehouse at Layer Marney is the tallest and one of the finest in the country. It stands eight storeys high and the visitor is allowed up to the top to witness some magnificent views across the Essex countryside and the Blackwater estuary. The church is worth a visit too, with very fine tombs inside of the Lords Marney who built and lived in the buildings.

It is open most afternoons from April to the end of September. There is an entrance fee to pay. (01206 330784).



Hare and hounds pub



Birch Green



Layer Marney tower



The Marney tombs



Layer Marney church

*Text and photographs courtesy of Laurie Page,
Public Rights of Way team at Essex County Council.*

The walk

(1) From the road junction at the Hare and Hounds pub, take the footpath off Birch Street opposite the pub, down a wide shingle track passing houses and then Stamps Farm. At the Breton Barn sign, take the footpath over the sign on the left of the stile. This takes you out into a cornfield, the path running along a hedgerow to your right. Follow this long footpath all the way, with open fields around. In the distance, the red brick building is the Gatehouse of Layer Marney Towers. When you reach the road turn left and walk down to where the road swings almost ninety degrees to the left. On the crown of this bend is a footpath on the right.

(2) Take this path across the fields. A hedgerow appears on the right and then a line of trees. As you reach the crown of the upper slope the imposing Tudor Gatehouse once again comes in sight and there are splendid views of the countryside to the left. Continue to the road. If you wish to visit the Tower then turn right up the road and the entrance is on the left. Otherwise, turn left down the private road. This swings round to the right, into an unmade track and you will pass the front gates of the Tudor building with a good view of the gatehouse. Further to the right is the church of St Mary. If you have visited the Tower you can leave by the church entrance.

(3) At the end of the track you will see a footpath that goes straight on into a wide grass track. This immediately bends right and at the footpath junction at the end, take the path on the right which points to Smyth's Green. Go straight up (ignoring the path on the right) through the gap in the hedge at the end and into an open field. The footpath takes you to an oak tree in the middle of the field and then it deviates slightly left between the telegraph wires and a post in the middle of the field. The footpath terminates at the road where you turn right. Then, proceed to the next road T-junction. Turn left and proceed to the crossroads.

(4) Turn right at the crossroads and continue along this lane for about half a mile, passing Old Dukes Farm. Where the road bends ninety degrees to the right take the footpath on the crown of the bend to your left. Follow this round the edge of the field with the hedgerow on the left. The path swings round to the right, still following the field boundary. Continue along this wide path all the way. You pass through a little wooded area into another field, still with the hedge to the left. At the end of this field bear slightly left and this will soon take you to the road. To the right you will see another footpath marked by a sign. This path becomes a wide track and takes you back to the road junction close to the Hare and Hounds pub.

Quiz: Where is this?



Answer: Footpath 39, Heybridge Basin

Tell us what you think!

Help us to serve you better by completing our [user satisfaction survey online](#)

If you would like more information on public rights of way in Essex, or volunteering opportunities, kindly contact us on:

0345 603 7631

or email

highway.enquiries@essex.gov.uk

Did you know you can report a problem online?

<http://www.essexhighways.org>

Access Essex is produced by the Public Rights of Way team twice a year.

We welcome your feedback and comments as well as any interesting articles and photographs for inclusion in future issues.

Please feel free to contact us.