IOW Ramblers Access and Footpath Aims and Activities Annual Report Jan 2025

Aims

The Isle of Wight Council Rights of Way Department and relevant Landowners share legal responsibilities for managing and maintaining the Island's Public Rights of Way Network and Open Access areas.

IOW Ramblers Footpath Volunteers:

- Monitor the provision of these duties.
- Support the council through footpath survey, maintenance and improvement work.
- Lobby and campaign to resolve problems and extend access provisions.

During 2024 the ROW Department transferred from Environment and Planning to Transport and Highways sections of the IOW Council. An increased capital project allowance was also provided. New staff were appointed and trained to fill vacancies for England Coast Path Project Manager and Maintenance Supervisor.

Footpath Team Organisation

A team of Lead Footpath volunteers coordinate the following activities:

- They jointly review all Definitive Map Modification Orders raised by the IOW Council, and where appropriate raise objections or make alternative proposals.
- Mike Slater - IOW Ramblers Footpath Secretary- Gaps and links Project Coordinator.
- Adrian Tavill – Projects
- David Howarth - Donate a Gate Organiser
- David Howarth plus others – Project manage grant funded footpath improvement projects.
- David Yates / Helen Jones - Parish Path Rep. Coordinator
- John Hague – Planning Application Review Officer
- Tim Marshall / John Stewart Murray - Footpath Maintenance Organisers

Currently the Footpath Team meet four times a year, synchronised with the Area Committee meeting.

There are 40 plus IOW footpath volunteers active across the Island, they are welcome to attend the quarterly meetings to address issues that are relevant to them. Once or twice each year footpath volunteer events are also organised.

Liaison with Partners

Advice and support are provided by Ramblers Central Office staff and footpath volunteers from other parts of the country. This is mainly through Zoom Meetings and Discussion Forums.

A Ramblers / ROW Department liaison meeting takes place circa 3 times a year.

Mike Slater is a member of the IOW Local Access Forum.

David Howarth represents Ramblers at the IOW National Landscape (AONB) Advisory Group

We regularly work on PROW issues with the National Trust, Cyle Wight, BHS, Gift to Nature, Parish Councils, Walk the Wight, Visit Wight, some landowners and IOW Council Cabinet Members

Donate a Gate Scheme – David Howarth

This is a nationally recognised IOW Ramblers scheme to replace footpath stiles with gates each fitted with memorial plaques. Since 2010, 284 gates have been completed. Landowners and the ROW Dept. authorise locations, the general public donate funds, contractors install gates and make plaques, a social enterprise all organised by Ramblers volunteers.

During 2024 David Howarth has completed 11 gates and a further 7 gates are in progress. A special gate celebrating the 25th anniversary of the IOW Walking Festival was opened by Graham Biss High Sheriff.

Parish Path Representatives Scheme – David Yates / Helen Jones

We currently have 30 volunteers who between them monitor the PROW network and open access areas across all the Island's Parishes. This can involve walking all the paths several times a year, liaising with local walkers and the Parish Council, minor maintenance work and reporting problems to the ROW Department.

Storms and heavy rain in 2024 have resulted in land slips affecting several sections of the Coast Path. David Y, Helen J, and John SM have assisted the ROW Department by sign posting temporary diversions.

Path Reps and other volunteers have reviewed Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans that have been developed for several Towns and Villages across the Island.

We thank David Yates for coordinating this work since 2016, in December Helen Jones has taken on the challenge.

Footpath Maintenance Work - Tim Marshal l / John Stewart Murray

IOW Ramblers operate two volunteer maintenance schemes to support the ROW Department.

Minor Maintenance Tasks - The ROW Dept. identify suitable smaller jobs such as overgrown stiles and fingerposts or footpath issues that need to be investigated. These are notified to Tim Marshal who lists them online at www.mmiwp.co.uk . Individual footpath volunteers can then elect to deal with each problem and report back. Since its inception this scheme has dealt with over 75 issues.

Large Work Party Tasks - such as steps, groundwork, handrails, small bridges and stretches of path clearance. When a technically experienced lead volunteer is available, we agree with the ROW Department to set up a work party and carry out these larger maintenance jobs. John Stewart Murray is going to help co-ordinate this sort of work. A meeting has been set up with ROW to plan activities for 2025.

King Charles III England Coast Path Campaign – Mike S / David H

Time Line :
2010- 20213 IOW Ramblers campaigned for the Island to be included in the England Coast Path National Trail.
2016 IOW Footpath Volunteers surveyed all the Island's coastline and submitted a recommended route to Natural England (Part of DEFRA)
2017 - 2020 A Natural England Coastal Access Team consulted on, planned and submitted for DEFRA approval routes for sections 2 to 10.
2017 - 2024 Natural England have consulted on and explored alternative plans for section 1 East Cowes to Wootton through or around Norris Castle, Osborn House and Barton Manor Estates.
Early 2025 is the latest target for Natural England to consult on an Inland Diversion Route for section 1.
As of November 2024, Routes for Sections 3,4,5,6,8, & 9 have been approved by DEFRA.
An IOW Council Project Manager is leading work to confirm funding requirement and implement the route on the ground. However, several modifications are being processed due to recent stretches of coastal erosion.
As at December 2024 Sections 2, 7, and 10 have outstanding landowner objections that are awaiting a Planning Inspector review.

Online link to latest DEFRA Posting. King Charles III England Coast Path: Isle of Wight - GOV.UK

Ramblers Campaign for a Section 1. Truly Coastal Route
A major campaign has been pursued between Sept 2023 and Dec 2024 against Natural England's proposed inland diversion around the Osborne and Barton Estates. It has been targeted at Public Body and Landowner decision makers, plus local and national high-profile people that could influence decisions being made. We used networking, social media and mainstream publicity channels to engage with a wide range of people and organisations:

The walking public	Parish Councils and Councillors	Ramblers Central Office
Rambler's members	IOW Councillors	English Heritage
Island Visitors	Local MPs and Election candidates	Natural England
Local Residents	High Sherrif	DEFRA
Right to Roam support	Visit Isle of Wight	Crown Estate
Facebook	Landowners	King Charles III
WhatsApp	Local Access Forum	NUF
Websites	Conservation Groups	Regional Broadcasters
Ariel and site video	Local Papers	National Press

A highlight of the Campaign was our May 4th Bank Holiday Event with a Town Hall Meeting, a Picnic in the Park, and a Banner Rally Outside Osborne House.

Bonchurch Landslip Modification Order
In September Natural England consulted on a proposed inland coast path modification up to the top of Bonchurch Down and back down Nasen Hill. IOW Ramblers suggested two alternative routes.

Proposed shoreline housing development on top of the Coast Path next to Fort Victoria.

IOW Ramblers made Access representations to a Planning Inspector Enquiry on this proposal.
Evidence statements are being collected to support a 20-year usage claim to achieve PROW status and protections for the foreshore path between Fort Victoria and Norton Grange.

Planning Application Review – John Hague

John reviews all Isle of Wight Planning Applications submitted or updated each month. He identifies when existing PROW could be affected and where potential access improvements may be achieved as part of a development. Suitable comments or objections are then submitted to the Planning Department.
During 2024 representations have been made about 22 planning proposals including:

- Fort Victoria housing
- Harry Creek Gardens Northwood housing
- Pennyfeathers housing
- Palmers Farm Gravel Pit
- Exxon Mobil CO2 Pipeline
- Cheverton Mountain Bike Track

IOW Ramblers Gaps and Links Project – Mike Slater

This programme focuses on identifying additional high value footpaths and bridleways that could improve the Island's access network, it then seeks to progressively pursue options to establish them.

So far 35% of the Isle of Wight has been surveyed and analysed, this has identified 59 high value PROW network improvement opportunities. Work is underway to seek ways to achieve 10 of these changes:

- A footpath running south from Northwood Cemetery
- A north south route through Dodnor Creek Nature Reserve
- Thorness Coast Path flooding solution
- Whitehouse Road busy road stretch solution.
- Coast Path at Osborne and Barton
- Mount Road Access Claim
- Priory Woods Path
- Pondwell Path
- Bleak Down open access route
- Bierley busy road section

Potential National Landscapes Connected Landscape Project
Working with IOW AONB, we are seeking long term National Lottery Heritage funding to support some aspects of this Gaps and Links Project.

Mike Slater

IOW Ramblers Area Footpath Secretary