

Parish Council Matters for October 2014

Clearance of vegetation on footpaths

Massive cuts in Government funding to Kent County Council's Public Rights of Way [PROW] teams over the past couple of years mean that KCC are no longer able to afford to keep all our footpaths clear. Their officials now have the unenviable task to decide how and where the money should be spent.

Shorne residents are fortunate in being able to enjoy more than 13 miles of footpaths and bridleways in this parish. However as a result of the cuts in KCC's resource allocations the Parish Council is receiving more and more calls from parishioners expressing concern about the deteriorating standard of footpaths in this area. In response to these complaints we invariably press KCC to tackle the problem raised as quickly as possible. They always act, but the delays are getting longer and longer.

With little or no prospect of the situation improving, KCC are now looking to recruit local volunteers to take matters into their own hands. To this end PROW officials have been setting up pilot schemes involving parishes and the Ramblers organisation to clear soft vegetation in their own areas. Half day training sessions are being held for this purpose. Shorne Parish Council was represented at a recent session. Those attending are briefed on health and safety and insurance matters and, as a result of the training they receive, are then authorised to recruit and manage teams of volunteers locally without the need for those individuals to attend any training elsewhere. A range of new hand tools plus high visibility clothing and gloves are being distributed to team members free of charge.

Shorne Parish Council is now able to organise local clearance of vegetation activities under the joint auspices of the Council and KCC and, where appropriate, in conjunction with Kent Ramblers [Dartford and Gravesham].

Our Council will select areas requiring clearance taking account of path surveys and individual concerns reported to us. We shall draw up a programme based on reports received and, having checked with KCC that our plans do not clash with their own clearance schedule, and having conferred with the Ramblers, we will proceed to implement.

Volunteers will be supervised at all times. For insurance purposes the names of team members attending each session will be given to the KCC. Only growth extending over the surface of footpaths, together with side growth, will be cleared. Material cut will be left on the site but moved away from the path. Vegetation up to a "thumb" in thickness will not be dealt with. Any work which is beyond the remit of the volunteers will be immediately reported to KCC.

The success of this programme will depend heavily on how much support there is from local residents to become volunteers. Each organised session will be prepared in advance with an estimate given to team members of the time required. However no individual will need to work longer than they wish. The aim will be to go out at least once a week to undertake a particular task, with a trained person always in attendance.

If you are interested in becoming a volunteer or would like more information please ring me, as Chairman of the Parish Council's Footpaths, Properties and Green Committee, on 01474 824006 [mobile 07773 787025] or contact me by email on roydinnis@aol.com.

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Shorne Parish Council