

**North Yorkshire County Council**  
**North Yorkshire Local Access Forum**

**29 September 2021**

**Overview of the use of volunteers and third party volunteer groups within the Countryside Access Service**

<b>1.0 Purpose of the report</b>
1.1 To advise members of the LAF on the current use of volunteers and potential ideas for future development.

**2.0 Countryside Volunteers**

2.1 The Countryside Access Service (CAS) currently has almost 100 Countryside Volunteers across the county supported by a dedicated Volunteer Co-ordinator. They assist the delivery of the service covering a variety of activities include the following:

2.2 Inspecting reported issues

The CAS receives in excess of 2000 reported issues on the Public Right of Way (PROW) network per annum. Inspecting issues that have been reported by the public where not enough information has been provided is the primary role of the volunteer. The volunteers gather intelligence so that the PROW officers can make informed decisions on the most appropriate action to take.

2.3 Waymarking

Volunteers resolve waymarking issues directly, by adding new waymarks, refreshing old waymarks, and removing those not on the definitive line.

2.4 Erecting notices

Volunteers erect and remove notices for temporary closure of the PROW network associated with development and/or emergencies, together with notices relating to Orders undertaken by the Definitive Map Team.

2.5 Surveys

Volunteers assist with cross-county surveys for projects such as the Urban Path Project, and the bridge survey, which is currently in progress.

2.6 Practical maintenance

A number of reported issues can be resolved directly by volunteers with clearance of vegetation around stiles, gates, signposts or bridges. Volunteers are also encouraged to undertake proactive maintenance, to prevent issues being reported. This could be in the form of clearance of vegetation as described above; clearing drains/culverts from obstructions & debris so water can flow freely; or minor repairs to bridges or signposts.

**3.0 Path Keeper Scheme**

3.1 The scheme has been developed to allow member groups to carry out a range of tasks on the network proactively, without needing express permission from CAS. Some of the tasks

include minor repairs on bridges, straightening leaning signposts, clearing vegetation, and maintaining drainage ditches.

- 3.2 The Path Keeper Agreement also allows for and encourages groups to raise funds for larger projects such as resurfacing paths, or upgrading furniture. This is particularly relevant to Parish Councils, who have access to Locality Budgets, for example.
- 3.3 The aim of the scheme is that local Parishes and groups can actively contribute to the maintenance of their local paths, which will prevent issues from developing, and allow the Access Maintenance team to focus on the more complex cases in their areas.
- 3.4 There are presently 19 groups signed up to the scheme across the County. These include a mixture of Parish Councils, Ramblers Association and Walkers are Welcome groups, local interest groups, and other user groups such as horse riders, and the Trail Rider Fellowship (TRF) / Green Lane Association (GLASS). The Probation Service in the Scarborough area is also a member, utilising their Community Payback Service.
- 3.5 The TRF are a good example of a very active group - assisting on the Unclassified Unsurfaced Road (UUR) network cutting back dense vegetation and fallen trees, and clearing, repairing, and creating drainage ditches to prevent water damage and preserve the surface terrain.
- 3.6 The Probation Service were also very active pre-Covid, spending almost 1700 hours on Featherbed Lane near Whitby uncovering ancient trods that had become lost under built up earth/grass. This is a great example of a project that had a lot of local interest and importance, but that the CAS service did not have the resource or remit to carry out. The Path Keeper Scheme has in this and other cases provided positive links between NYCC and local communities to improve and preserve access to the countryside.
- 3.7 See Appendix 1 for examples of practical work the Countryside Volunteers and Path Keeper Groups have carried out.

#### **4.0 Facts and Figures**

- 4.1 In 2020/21, volunteers completed 1143 issue inspections, and directly resolved 106 issues. Along with some proactive work and hours undertaking the Urban Path surveys, they contributed a total of 1800 hours.
- 4.2 In the same year, Path Keeper groups contributed 190 hours – clearing vegetation, litter picking, adding dog gates to stiles, and installing waymark posts.
- 4.3 It should be noted that activities of the Countryside Volunteers and Path Keeper groups have been severely hampered due to imposed restrictions on meeting in groups due to Covid-19. For now though, activities are returning to 'normal'.

#### **5.0 Future Developments**

- 5.1 CAS is in the process of developing a customer on line reporting portal, which will allow the public to report issues with more accurate information. This may reduce the need for so many volunteer inspections. With more volunteer capacity available, it is envisaged that volunteers can be encouraged further to undertake more proactive work, and in particular, be more proactive in maintaining assets belonging to NYCC – namely bridges, steps and signposts.

- 5.2 There is possible scope to allow volunteers to undertake more practical work than currently undertaken, for example repairing gates or stiles as part of the Council's 25% contribution to repairs and maintenance of landowner assets.
- 5.3 Explore the use of volunteers to assist with archival research / validation of historical evidence as part of the Definitive Map Order making processes.
- 5.4 Seek to expand the scope of volunteers and 3rd party groups to assist with routine small scale maintenance works across the UUR network.
- 5.5 Work closely with the Nidderdale AONB to establish volunteer led surveys of the UUR network and expansion across the County to inform future work programmes.
- 5.6 Seek to expand the Path Keeper scheme to many more Parishes and other local groups through the development of a promotional campaign.
- 5.7 Subject to available funding, explore opportunities to allow groups to do more, by emulating previous schemes such as the Parish Paths Partnership, where funding was made available to groups wanting to carry out maintenance projects.

**6.0 Recommendation**

- 6.1 It is recommended that NYLAF Members take note of the content of this report.

IAN KELLY  
Countryside Access Manager, Transport Waste and Countryside Services

Author of report: Arrietty Heath, Volunteer Coordinator

**Appendix 1** – Examples of practical work carried out by Countryside Volunteers and Path Keeper Groups

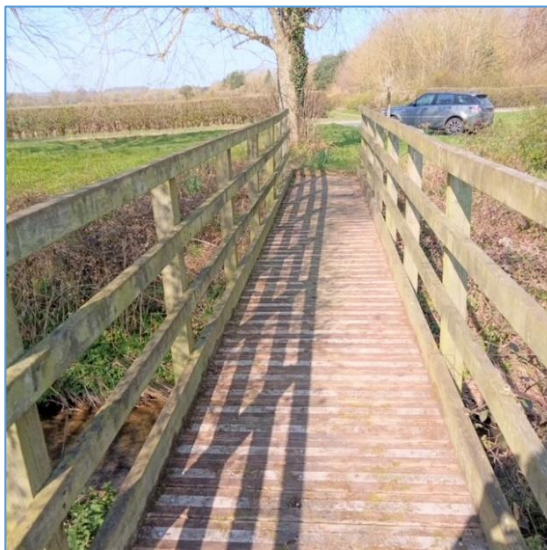
**Appendix 1** - examples of practical work carried out by Countryside Volunteers and Path Keeper Groups



steps cleared of vegetation by a volunteer



a signpost recovered from the hedgerow by volunteers



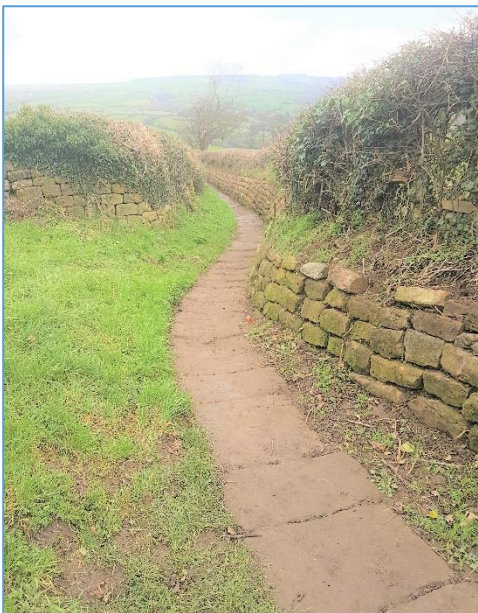
A bridge cleared by a volunteer as part of the bridge survey



A new waymark post installed by the Rydale Bridleways Path Keeper group



A blocked gate cleared of overgrowth by the TRF/GLASS Path Keeper group



Two photos showing examples of the work carried out by the Probation Service Community Payback Scheme on Featherbed Lane