



ESSEX AREA HUB

EAHN NO 8 [Essex Area Hub Newsletter]

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Whether it is a reliance on short term contracts with limited targets which somehow have to be expanded to fill the time available or a general resistance to the whole notion of summary, precis or editing, our staff members at head office seem devoted to the long and ambling rather than the short and targeted. We have had lots of examples in the past; one of the most recent was the guide for walk leaders. There is a danger that these long exhortations just overwhelm the reader so that they give up.

Two recent examples of these over-long publications are ***The Path Maintenance Handbook*** and ***The Tools & Equipment Guide***. Although both are lengthy, they are useful to active Hub members because they address the core reasons for our existence.

This guide is for anyone who is undertaking path maintenance work either as a Team Leader or Team Member. Over the 29 illustrated pages the guide is structured using 8 working principles:



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Dates of Future Meetings*

16 Nov EC

10 Dec RoW Hub

14 Jan 2027 EC

6 Feb AGM

Meetings in red are open to all

*A note about meetings.

Hub meetings at which we discuss Footpath/ ROW issues are held on Zoom on Thursdays and open to all. If you would like to attend, contact essexareahub@gmail.com for the current joining details.

The **Executive Committee meetings** are not open meetings but we would not exclude access to members wishing to raise or discuss important issues which cannot be discussed at the Hubs.

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The **Tools and Equipment Guide** is marginally shorter at 20 pages but rather more entertaining with a multitude of illustrations showing every type of tool you could use (and many you would never consider). The guide includes the recommendations for the safe use of appropriate tools



It is debatable whether Ramblers should have invested so much time and effort over publications which will strike many volunteers as common sense but, given that they do exist, it is to be hoped that ALL our footpath workers will be encouraged to read them. Both guides can be downloaded at:

https://ramblers.photoshelter.com/galleries/C0000C_uqsUGgk6k/G0000Dz2xthWZ94g/Path-Maintenance



Ann McLaren, the first woman to become President of the Essex Ramblers, died on 4 August aged 84. In 2023, when she retired as president and Membership Secretary, Ann was presented with an engraved bowl, recognising 48 years of service to Ramblers. And what service this was. Besides leading walks, inaugurating the Essex 100 (an annual hundred-mile, 2-week walk which ran for 20 years), forming groups across the County, she was responsible for many innovations. Recognising the need for gentler, shorter walks she set up three free-standing 'Friends' Groups for the purpose. Realising that some members could no longer walk at all with a group, she introduced monthly Reunion lunches. She collected local Ramblers memorabilia and records and became the go-to person for any historical material. With the approach of the Olympics, Ann instigated and managed work on the H2S, the Hadleigh to Stratford walk which commemorated the event and visited the sites. Her last notable activity was coordinating work on the King Charles III Coastal Path.



Hers was volunteering on a scale which is rarely seen today when it is difficult to recruit leaders for walks or people willing to fill committee posts or contribute to working parties. In addition to all the work she did for the Ramblers, Ann, along with her first husband, Norman, still found time to write 10 books of walks around Essex – these had an accumulative sale of over 60,000 copies and did much to introduce members of the public to the joys of strolling in the countryside.

She will be sorely missed by the walkers of Essex.

Lea Valley Friends

One of three Friends Groups formed by Ann McLaren



Uncompleted Defects Missing from Track It

301 uncompleted Public Rights of Way defects were removed from public view, including all Stile and Gate defects. This represents **12% of all defects recorded** and is a substantial loss of visibility for both Essex Ramblers and the public

Issue Identified

In late May, we discovered that Stile and Gate defects were no longer visible on PPA 25 or Track It. Further checks confirmed that **301 active defects had disappeared**. Given previous problems with lost or unprocessed reports, this raised immediate concern.

Initial Response from Essex Highways

Upon raising the issue, Essex Highways stated they were **not aware** of the problem but agreed to investigate. They later confirmed that the defects had been **removed from Track It**, but still existed within the internal Confirm system. We were asked to “bear with them.”

Our Assessment

The evidence strongly suggests an **IT or procedural error**, likely involving an incorrect input that removed defects from public view. Importantly, **no rewriting of 301 defects is required** — only a reversal of the incorrect procedure.

Lack of Timely Action

Despite three follow-up emails over two months, the only response received was that the matter would be reviewed **after the end of the summer**, when workloads were lower.

This delay was unacceptable. It would have left **unsafe stiles** and **illegally locked gates** unrecorded and unknown to walkers, undermining our duty of care and exposing the public to avoidable risk.

Escalation

Given the lack of progress and the need to prevent recurrence, we informed Essex Highways that we would be submitting a **Freedom of Information request** to ensure the issue is properly investigated and resolved.



Next Steps

We will provide updates as the situation develops and as Essex Highways responds to the FOI request.

Alan Goffe on behalf of the Essex Ramblers Executive Committee



South East Walker — given the current confusion about the publication of the magazine, remember that you can always view the latest copy by going to <https://www.essexarearamblers.co.uk/> and clicking SEW under **Quick Links** on the right of the page, near the top. Past issues are also available.



Introducing Mike Bawden, Malden and Dengie Ramblers.

Mike is a walk leader and Parish Footpath Adopter whose ambition is to make the Ramblers experience better for all. In the article which follows he describes how he set about recruiting and training new walk leaders.

Maldon and Dengie Hundred Ramblers Group **Walk Leader Group Training 5 August 2026**

Government data shows that 75% of the UK adult population prefer in-person training (with a little bit of online resource) rather than 100% online.

Indeed this has been our experience over the last couple of years with prospective new leaders resisting our approach because they simply do not want to sit in front of a laptop. We

would often hear them say things like:

"I had enough of that sort of thing at work, at least I was getting paid then" or

"No thanks, why can't we just learn on a walk?"

So we at Maldon and Dengie Hundred Ramblers Group decided to address the issue head-on and put together a group training session. Gemma Twitchen at the Ramblers Central Office was extremely helpful and supportive providing us with the appropriate resources (videos, slides, booklets).

We booked a conference room at one of our favourite local pubs, The Purleigh Bell, and invited 12 prospective walk leaders. 75% accepted our invitation, plus we had an existing leader who had transferred to us from Scotland and wanted a refresher. We opened the event to our good friends at neighbouring group, East Essex Friends Rambling Group who supplied two candidates.

Graham Rayner (Chairperson Maldon & Dengie) and Mike Bawden (Walk Leader Maldon & Dengie) conducted this first Walk Leader group training session on Saturday 5 September.



12 attendees thoroughly enjoyed the day that ran from 11am to 3pm. Some attendees got the day off to a 'frying' start with a pub cooked breakfast.



The approach we have taken at Maldon & Dengie is to recognise that not all leaders want to lead immediately and some would prefer to help out on walks. So we have created a Co-Leader role. The Co-Leader will do the recce with the Leader and help on the day by acting as greeter for new walkers and walk buddy on the route. The Co-Leader will also take over at the front on the simpler parts of the walk to enable the Leader to drop

back to engage with new walkers.

So from this training we have four new Walk Leaders who will make their walk debuts in October and November. *[concluded on next page]*

So from this training we have four new Walk Leaders who will make their walk debuts in October and November.

In addition we have six new Co-Leaders most of whom will go on to lead next year.

East Essex Friends have two new Walk Leaders.

We are on track to increase our active Walk Leaders this year by 50% from 20 to 30.



Defect Check Reports (DCR's) are part of PPA 25 and are used to provide updates on existing Defects that have deteriorated and become unsafe.



The bridge on the left, which must be in the top ten unsafe issues found, was reported by **Ian Jordan of the Rochford and Castle Point Group** via DCR to Essex Highways.

The response from Essex Highways was rapid with a same day reply and a statement they would be re-assessing the issue. I guess that means a repair is out.

Ian showed it works. Have a look at PPA 25 and see how DCR's works and give it a try. Alan Goffee

Maldon and Dengie Ramblers have a Footpath Working Group

(FWG) that meets every Friday from approx. 09:30 to 12:30. We undertake vegetation clearance, tree clearance, Waymarker Installation, and building bridges and steps. We also help in the creation and maintenance of the King Charles 3 Coastal Path in our area from Salcott to South Woodham Ferrers. The group is currently 12 strong and most weeks about 6 of us take part in some work. Within the group individuals have different skills with some trained in the use of brush cutters, some are excellent at building bridges, and some good at raking and tidying up. All skills are needed and welcome. Our work is allocated to us from our Essex Highways Footpath Officer (EHFO), and they often attend as well. They will ensure that correct clearances have been obtained for installing bridges and Waymarkers and identifying where we can park.



We use a WhatsApp group for communication and each week the FWG Coordinator will ask who is available for that Friday. The FWG Coordinator will work with the EHFO to identify the work and by late Wednesday or Thursday the work / location has been identified.

Any Tools, Safety Clothing or Training will be provided as required.

If you are interested in joining the group, then please contact the FWG Coordinator at aahudson22@yahoo.co.uk or a member of the Committee.

Over the last 2 weeks we have replaced the steps on Purleigh FP 25 over the old Railway line. This is part of St Peters Way. The pictures below tell the story from the original to removing the dangerous steps and repairing the handrail, the finished steps, and the team that did it.

Andy Hudson

