

FP Report to Trafford Ramblers 2023 AGM (Edgar Ernstbrunner)

As many of you will know, June Mabon stood down after many years as FP Secretary owing to external circumstances. At this point I volunteered to fill the post in an acting capacity (having attended RTG Footpath Team meetings for some time). A final decision will be made at the Group's upcoming AGM.

June, of course, had done splendid work systematically monitoring the entire Trafford network with the help of the Trafford FP team, inspecting some 250 Definitive Rights of Way based on a 1985 Definitive Map and Statement supplemented with DMMOs confirmed since then. In addition she ran the Path Maintenance Team (using power tools where necessary) providing valuable assistance to the Authority (see previous Annual Report). This will be a hard act to follow (see below)!

And there are two further major successes to note relating to June's outstanding claims for new PROWs in Trafford: An upgrade of footpath to bridleway on Carrington Moss, and a new footpath on the offside of the Bridgewater Canal. Both had long languished in the Secretary of State's backlog, having been referred to him by the council when objections were not withdrawn. In addition, a claim for a new bridleway along Brooks Drive in Hale, on which June worked in collaboration with the Peak and Northern Footpaths Society (PNFS) has also been confirmed.

But where do we go from here (assuming June is unable to return)? We have a complex set of issues:

1. The main purpose of the FP Team is to carry out regular surveys (normally biannually, i.e. summer and winter, to account for vegetation impact) of the network (about 70km in total), each inspector being allocated a set of paths, a co-ordinator (previously June) compiling inspectors' findings into an overall borough-wide report (the last one having been for Winter 21/22).
2. I circulated to the Team a query whether team meetings could be held online or at my house (Heaton Moor, Stockport). There was no enthusiasm for either. The Team, now working autonomously, have had, and wish to continue to have, regular meetings at the King's Ransom (the latest held on 25 October).
3. They are continuing their inspections of the paths originally allocated to them, but coverage is now incomplete, and - crucially - nobody has been compiling borough-wide reports since the Winter '21/'22 Survey. Following an e-mail exchange with team members I'm reassured, however, that problems found are still being reported to the Council, as they should be (and certainly were in the past). I've asked to be copied in on these.
4. I have now been provided with a list of currently active inspectors and their respective path allocations. This has revealed a number of gaps (paths not covered by anybody), not least, of course, as a result of June Mabon's retirement. We have had, however, a couple of potential new volunteers.
5. Thus the top priority task is to reorganise the biannual (or possibly just annual surveys, involving
 - a) Reallocating (if possible) the network to ensure complete coverage
 - b) Establishing a mechanism whereby reports can be collated into complete surveys (whether this will be possible for Summer '22, Winter '22/'23 or Summer '23 remains to be seen – most likely our best hope is for Winter '23'24, as earlier data are bound to be incomplete).
6. The FP Maintenance Team led by June (see above) and authorised by the Council, is currently in abeyance, primarily for the lack of a Team Leader (who has to be formally

authorised by the Council). So far we don't have a volunteer for that post, so currently this work will not be resuming.

7. At present I handle communications with the Council such as responding to consultations and path orders. I have contacted TMBC, requesting to deal with me as the Path Order Recipient (POR). This was agreed.
8. The Definitive Map & Statement (which are in a bit of a mess, dating back to 1985 and even then already out of date) do need to be sorted out. It is possible to look at the Map online using ROWmaps, based on data provided by the Authority – but that version also has errors, not matching the existing hard copy (the only official version of the Map). TMBC have never, unlike most GM Authorities, provided an online version. I am still trying to obtain a hard copy of the 1985 DM&S, and Martin Hampar (of Peak & Northern FPS) has sent me a list of path orders since 1985, as well as a list of paths gained and lost as a result of boundary changes. The project here, likely to take several months, will be to produce our own actual (unofficial, but more realistic) DM&S for future survey. It is worth stating that the current out-of-date map remains the only official version until TMBC do consolidate it (which is unlikely any time soon).
9. There has been no feedback on the “ploughing and cropping” problem mentioned on previous occasions (paths ploughed, but not reinstated). Nor can there be without systematic inspection and reporting

Thus we are very much in flux – inevitable when a key volunteer fulfilling several roles leaves the stage.