

MID LANCASHIRE AREA

NEWS – Oct 2016



WHAT IS AREA? – AND SHOULD YOU CARE?

Perhaps you know about “Area’s”, though if you’ve joined recently you may not be aware of it.

All groups are part of one of about 50 Areas. In our case Chorley, Fylde, Garstang, Preston, South Ribble, West Lancs, LWW and LYPWG form the Mid Lancs Area containing about 1200 members.

What’s The Point?

The boring bit of the answer is that Areas exist as an organisational intermediary between Central Office (CO) in London and the individual groups and funnel funds to groups, and reports back to CO.

Area’s other activities range from coordinated walk programmes, coach trips, or footpath activities, down to little more than the essential organisational functions with groups being largely independent. Like all groups, the activities depend on who has volunteered to be part of the committee.

What Does Mid Lancs Area Do?

The most visible outputs of Mid Lancs Area are the long running combination of group walks into an area wide walk programme with about 40 walks per month sent to, and for the use of, all members, and this newsletter usually with substantial information on the state of footpaths around the Area. This last year Area also organised a Walk Festival across the Area in June, and a successful “Members Day” involving taster training sessions.

Largely behind the scenes is a significant amount of activity on footpath issues with contacts and activities at Council level and wider Rambler areas.

What is Mid Lancs Area Going to Do?

Well that rather depends on you! Life moves on and so do committee members.

At our 5th Feb. 2017 AGM in Chorley Astley Coach House, our current chairman is moving on, and the treasurer is due to finish the following year. The, normally separate, walk coordinator role is currently handled by the treasurer.

Perhaps even more importantly, we have funds, organisation and a great willingness to progress ideas that benefit the members, whether on Walking or footpath activities. What we lack is your ideas, motivation and effort to utilise the Area’s resources.

What Specifically Are We Seeking?

Functionally:-

1. A **Chairman** – whether someone to provide just organisational needs, or someone with motivation to enhance Area outputs.
2. A **“Trainee Treasurer”** or actual **Treasurer** – an opportunity for someone interested in doing the Treasurer role to use the next year to find their feet before taking over, or the current Treasurer is open to filling another role if a new Treasurer is available.
3. **Walk Coordination** – As a minimum, some effort is needed 3 times a year to coordinate, print and distribute the walk programmes to groups. The IT element/activity is straightforward and can be handled by a separate person if need be.

Creatively:-

4. **Ideas to Progress** – If you have ideas to enhance what Area can do for it’s members, talk to us and see if they can be progressed.
5. **Newsletter** – We would be very pleased to have someone collect Area wide news and generate the newsletter.

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Reporting Footpath Faults

Previously I have written notes about methods of reporting faults to Lancashire County Council (LCC) which has included the option of using LCC's MARIO (Maps and Related Information Online).

Every four months I attend a meeting in County Hall along with representatives of other outdoor organisations. At the most recent meeting the British Horse Society (BHS) representative stated that the fault reporting option on MARIO was no longer working, which was the first I knew about this particular problem. After the meeting I have made a test report using the fault reporting option on MARIO and sure enough it failed, with an Oracle type data error message being received, which means it is an issue at the LCC end. I have sent an email to LCC about this, but so far I have not had a satisfactory reply.

It appears that staff at LCC are aware of the problem with MARIO but they do not appear to have a plan for fixing the fault. If for some reason the issue with MARIO cannot be easily fixed, then the option needs to be removed from the system and a notice added stating that this option is no longer available and details stated about other methods of reporting footpath problems. For users to attempt to use a system and then to get a data type error is annoying, which is something I intend to follow up.

MARIO still has good maps between the scales of 1:1,000 and 1:10,000 which includes the option to show details of public footpaths, which footpath secretaries like to use. On zooming out to scales of 1:15,000 and beyond the maps have a grey fuzziness about them, so they are of little use.

LCC public rights of way staff prefer fault reports to come by email to: prowareports@lancashire.gov.uk with a digital photograph, for a good photograph can save an initial visit to the site. Please make sure you include location details including the grid ref (8 figures are preferred but not essential), parish and ideally the footpath number, but do not worry if you do not know this. Presently it is the only method to allow for both text and a photograph to be sent to LCC. If the report goes via the group footpath secretary for the entering of a reference number then the RA will gain feedback as to what is happening or not as the case may be.

If you prefer not to use email, then the following options exist -

Pathwatch <http://www.ramblers.org.uk/get-involved/big-pathwatch.aspx>

Highways web site <http://www.lancashire.gov.uk/roads-parking-and-travel/fault-search.aspx>

Should you not be in to IT, then send a letter in the traditional post to County Hall.

Pathwatch has the advantages of being reasonably user friendly, plus allowing photographs to be uploaded and it also means that the RA has a record of the report. The system is presently being enhanced, with the updated version being scheduled for release in Nov, but at the present time it does not always allow for notes to be entered. For instance a photograph that is uploaded to Pathwatch of a wobbly stile can look like a perfectly normal stile, so why is the stile being reported ?

The Highways web site does allow for text to be entered, but not for photographs to be uploaded, but staff at LCC like to see digital photographs.

The situation regarding the state of public footpaths in Lancashire is one of a slow deterioration, as shown by the following table in respect of faults on public rights of way in Lancashire. Of particular concern is that if a fault report is classed as being a low priority then it seems to be 'parked'. In fairness to LCC if a report of a significant issue is made in a locality that is well walked, then it seems to get fixed.

Faults on public footpaths in Lancs	Jul-10	Jul-11	Jul-12	Jul-13	Jul-14	Jul-15	Jul-16
Outstanding	790	1014	1583	2440	2884	3269	3805
Clearances in previous 4 months	664	456	390	455	344	574	593
New reports in previous 4 months	667	512	662	634	543	586	615
Faults not cleared in 24 months	104	202	318	545	1015	1543	1915

Note - July 13 is an interpolation for no figures were provided because of the after effects of the County Council elections.

Any articles for inclusion in the next Area News need to be with David Kelly by the 31st Dec.